MIMESIS
INTERNATIONAL

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THE VOICE OF NO ONE
Merleau-Ponty on Time and Nature

MIMESIS
INTERNATIONAL

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SECTION THREE
NATURE

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AD =   The Adventures of Dialectic
EM =   Eye and Mind
HT =   Humanism and Terror
IP =   Institution and Passivity
IPP =   In Praise of Philosophy
LN =   Nature. Course Notes from the Collège de France
LS =   Merleau-Ponty à la Sorbonne. Résumé de cours 1949-1952
MSME =   Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression
NC =   Notes des cours au Collège de France 1959 et 1961
P1 =   Parcours 1
P2 =   Parcours 2
PhP =   Phenomenology of Perception
PP =   The Primacy of Perception
PW =   The Prose of the World
S =   Signs
SB =   The Structure of Behaviour
SNS =   Sense and Non-Sense
UAC =   L'union de l'âme et du corps chez Malebranche, Biran et
         Bergson
UG =   Notes de cours sur "L'origine de la géométrie" de Husserl
VI =   The Visible and the Invisible

To Silvia, my true and only love

Not easy to state the change you made.
If I'm alive now, then I was dead,
Though, like a stone, unbothered by it,
Staying put according to habit.
You didn't just tow me an inch, no-
Nor leave me to set my small bald eye
Skyward again, without hope, of course,
Of apprehending blueness, or stars.

That wasn't it. I slept, say: a snake
Masked among black rocks as a black rock
In the white hiatus of winter-
Like my neighbors, taking no pleasure
In the million perfectly-chiseled
Cheeks alighting each moment to melt
My cheeks of basalt. They turned to tears,
Angels weeping over dull natures,

But didn't convince me. Those tears froze.
Each dead head had a visor of ice.
And I slept on like a bent finger.
The first thing I was was sheer air
And the locked drops rising in dew
Limpid as spirits. Many stones lay
Dense and expressionless round about.
I didn't know what to make of it.
I shone, mice-scaled, and unfolded
To pour myself out like a fluid
Among bird feet and the stems of plants.

I wasn't fooled. I knew you at once.
Tree and stone glittered, without shadows.
My finger-length grew lucent as glass.
I started to bud like a March twig:
An arm and a leg, and arm, a leg.
From stone to cloud, so I ascended.
Now I resemble a sort of god
Floating through the air in my soul-shift
Pure as a pane of ice. It's a gift.

Sylvia Plath

INTRODUCTION
READING MERLEAU-PONTY'S ONTOLOGY OF THE FLESH FROM A DIFFERENT STANDPOINT

Merleau-Ponty enjoys today a renewal of interest whose light is comparable to the eclipse that, at least in France, obscured his philosophy for decades. But in other countries, such as the United States and Italy for example, the darkness was never complete. His writings were continuously read and progressively translated. The publication of the lecture courses produced a surplus of scholarly work that is now showing concrete signs of becoming an important section in the international philosophical debate. English is about to become the main language of Merleau-Ponty's studies. The journal Chiasmi International, born in Italy and then expanded in the United States and France, is promoting an exchange between scholars coming from several countries, which is carried on in three (and soon four) languages at the same time (English, French, and Italian).

But the Italian tradition of philosophy was fecundated quite early by Merleau-Ponty's writings, thanks in particular to the receptivity these works found on the fertile soil of the "Milan School".[1] His founder, Antonio Banfi (1886-1957), a student of Husserl, was among the very first to introduce phenomenology in Italy, in the period between the two World Wars. His legacy was soon taken up by a number of pupils, some of which were then to become leading Italian philosophers. Among them, three names in particular ought to be remembered: Giulio Preti, Remo Cantoni and, most of all, Enzo Paci. Paci was Banfi's heir in developing a personal phenomenological perspective, an original approach which blended Husserl with Whitehead, Plato and Marx, and created a phenomenological relationism, in the wake of which the work I am presenting aims to proceed.

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1   On which it is very useful to read F. Papi, *Vita e filosofia*, Milano: Guerini e associati 1991.

The notion of relationism, as it is developed by Paci, deserves and requires some words of explanation. Set up at first in his reading of Plato's *Parmenides*,[2] this perspective received a further development and a significant widening in the encounter with Whitehead's philosophical cosmology.[3] Paci was greatly influenced by Whitehead's notion of the world as a process of events endowed with subjective value. According to Whitehead, reality is not made by simple "things", but any form whatsoever of entity can be said to exist insofar as it relates to the whole and "is", properly speaking, a network of relations. These relations are dynamical, that is, they transform themselves. They "become". Thus being is actually equivalent with becoming. And since these relational entities "are" insofar as they "perceive" each other, becoming is equivalent with experiencing. Thus Whitehead's account of reality is a metaphysical conception of experience based on the notions of perception, process, events, and relations.

Paci found in this philosophy a renewed version of Plato's dialectical vision that, according to Whitehead, was then concealed by Aristotle's logical and ontological substantialism. Thus Paci was able to substantiate his interpretation of Plato with a philosophical approach open to contemporary physics, and updated in order to face the challenges of modernity. But the reference to process, perception and relations convinced Paci that Whitehead's metaphysical cosmology was in need of further scrutiny, which he performed through Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. The result is a mutual contamination, which provides Husserl's transcendental subjectivity with natural features, and at the same time delineates a stronger philosophical structure for Whitehead's notions of time and subjectivity.

Paci's phenomenological relationism thus is a rich, complex and articulated philosophy, which also deals with ethical and aesthetical issues. Paci sees it as a way to overcome the narrowness of existentialism without losing track of the importance and philosophical meaning of themes such as choice, death, and anxiety. Relationism rather allows thinking to frame these themes within a broader picture, open to the issues of alienation, exploitation and ideology as well. Hence Paci's

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2   E. Paci, *Il significato del Parmenide nella filosofia di Platone*, Messina-Milano: Principato, 1938 (second edition Milano: Bompiani, 1988).

3   Paci's interpretation of Whitehead can be found in several works, the most important of which are: *Tempo e relazione*, Torino: Taylor, 1954; *Dall'esistenzialismo al relazionismo*, Messina-Firenze: D'Anna, 1957; *Relazioni e significati*, Milano: Lampugnani Nigri, 1965.

further reading of Marx in *The Function of the Sciences and the Meaning of Man* (*Funzione delle scienze e significato dell'uomo*), a phenomenological interpretation of Marx's philosophy that provides an open Marxist approach to phenomenology.[4]

It is scarcely surprising, then, that Paci was interested in French phenomenology, Sartre's and Merleau-Ponty's in particular, which is so closely resonating with his own. A good friend of both, Paci entertained regular exchanges with them. The attention Paci devoted to the two French phenomenologists deeply influenced his teaching. Some of Paci's most important pupils, and in particular Carlo Sini and Pier Aldo Rovatti, were then to write important essays on Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Paci's legacy was thus carried on, certainly not without revisions and differences, but also not without continuities and important developments.

This book aims to represent a continuation and a further inquiry into Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology from a perspective that is deeply influenced by Paci's philosophy and its further articulation. Yet it also hopes to present some new problems and some fresh ideas. The publication of Merleau-Ponty's lecture courses on nature, on passivity and institution, on Husserl's later philosophy, on the status of philosophy, require an update of the relationist approach to phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty's perspective can provide this update and at the same time can receive further light from such a reading. A dialogue between Merleau-Ponty and the legacy of Paci's philosophy is thus envisaged in the pages that follow. Some of its main tenets can be briefly sketched here.

It could be helpful to start with the most important term used by Merleau-Ponty in order to describe his ontological views: the flesh. This is done in the chapters of the first section. In my interpretation, the flesh is characterized by a non-substantial value which Paci's relationism helps understand. The flesh is an "element", as Merleau-Ponty says. But an element is something in between the universality of the idea and the particularity of a thing. Now, how to characterize this "in between"? In my view, it is necessary to preserve the literal meaning of this expression. It points to a nexus, something determined

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4   Cf. E. Paci, *Funzione delle scienze e significato dell'uomo*, Milano: il Saggiatore, 1963. This book was translated into English as *The Function of the Sciences and the Meaning of Man*, Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972.

by its provenance and its destination. Something that does not "stand" in and by itself, but only in connection with what, in turn, acquires its proper meaning only thanks to the connection itself. The flesh seems to name what does not possess an antecedent, stable status, but receives it only through its instantiations. Merleau-Ponty speaks of pivots and "frames" (*membrures*), which are the invisible "of" the visible, that is, of the things. The things emerge only through their invisible structures. The flesh is thus a structure of structures, a relation of relations, a network that "is" not, but takes place prior to each existent, for it is the possibility of existence, in the double sense of the genitive.

The relationship between things and their relations is then in need of a categorial framework. If the flesh is not an entity, a "being", then how to account for it? The notion of chiasm is deployed in order to perform this task. The chiasm is, in Merleau-Ponty's account, a processual relation between two terms, according to which each one exists only insofar as the other is also given, but precisely as that which the other is not. Each term is the difference of the other, and their relation is thus also an opposition. But this opposition in turn is not a sheer separation, for in this case there would be no structure, but only unrelated atoms. For Merleau-Ponty (in this following the two main phenomenological traditions of Western philosophy: Husserl's but also Hegel's) the world of experience cannot be accounted for in empiricist terms. Thus the chiasmic structure of manifestation is deeply dialectical: a dialectic that, however, does not get recomposed at a higher level, but remains open-ended and "ambiguous". The notion of reversibility is relevant in this connection.

Reversibility names the complex structure presiding over each single experience. Each act of touch or vision is also a passive endurance of being touched or seen. For Merleau-Ponty (following Husserl), perception is not the projection of a separated subject towards an object, but rather the intertwining of two instances of the same flesh, and the institution of a separation (the subjective side, the objective side) that is not an ontological gap, but the articulation of a difference within the general "elementality" of the flesh itself. The body that experiences is also experiencing its own being affected by what it places as "out there". More radically, the body is experiencing itself, folding upon itself in its touching-being touched, seeing-being seen, so that it is the flesh itself that folds upon itself and carves an interiority "within" exteriority. It is only insofar as the body is exposed to its being "perceivable" that it can perceive and (most importantly) can perceive itself, that is, can have an identity.

Thus this notion of the self is profoundly dialectical. Yet, at the same time, as Merleau-Ponty constantly stresses, by saying that reversibility is always incomplete, the fold of the flesh onto itself does not imply a closure (which would be the opposite of experience). The bodily subject remains open, and can turn and return to itself only through the mediation of the world. Flesh of the world and flesh of the subject are thus the two sides of the same phenomenon, just like the two sides of a mirror.

The mirror is truly the symbolic metaphor (but we need to come back to this notion of metaphor) of Merleau-Ponty's ontology. But it is a strange mirror indeed, for it is certainly not a static instrument that is simply reflecting something given in itself. This symbol rather evokes the idea of the double, and there are many reasons to say that Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh is an ontological conception of duality without dualism, or of the "two" prior to any "one" and any unity. These considerations are developed in the chapters of the third section, the section especially devoted to the philosophical discussion of some crucial aspects of Merleau-Ponty's later writings. But in order to set up an adequate framework for such a discussion, I have devoted a close attention to Merleau-Ponty's notion of nature, for this seems to me to be the field in which the greatest advance has been accomplished in the investigation of the presuppositions of *The Visible and the Invisible*. Accordingly, four chapters discuss the notion of nature itself, of the peculiar in which Merleau-Ponty understands passivity, of the role of latency in his notion of "raw Being", and finally of the problem of negativity within nature itself, as that which is neither "of" nature nor "outside" nature.

Nature is thus emerging as the level of Being that underlies subjectivity like its shadow. It cannot be retained as such, for the subject is always already separated from its "natural" roots, but it cannot be overcome either. The subject is at once rooted in and uprooted from nature. This ambivalence is not just an evocative expression, but receives a detailed articulation in the lecture courses devoted to the concept of nature. In those pages one can find the coherent development of Merleau-Ponty's project as it was sketched in Merleau-Ponty's first book, *The Structure of Behaviour*, while at the same time greatly enlarging the scope of that first work.

Nature thus appears to constitute, in some sense, the unconscious: something irretrievable in itself, through a direct access, but reachable only by means of a "psychoanalytical" investigation. At the same

time, the unconscious is reinterpreted in ontological terms, as that
which constitutes our "embodiment" in the fullest sense of this
word. This poses an urgent question: the peculiar temporality of the
relationship between consciousness and this "natural" unconscious.
Or, put it otherwise, Merleau-Ponty's notion of nature calls for an
investigation of the notion of subjectivity, when understood in terms
of self-manifestation. If the notion of self-manifestation is still,
following Husserl's (but also Heidegger's) position, understood in
terms of a temporal development, this temporality is certainly not a
linear one. Furthermore, it possesses several layers, for nature is at
once the field in which simpler organisms become more complex
ones (the phylogenesis of the human subject), the level at which the
subject "becomes" itself (the ontogenesis of subjectivity), and the
frame in which identity is structured (the emergence of an "I"). These
three processes are intertwined so as to form an intricate question in
itself. Merleau-Ponty never actually disentangles it, properly speaking,
leaving this task to his commentators.

The third section thus undertakes this task by focusing on the
question of temporality in itself, on the crucial notions of change
and metamorphosis, on the notions of process and of event, with a
comparison with Deleuze (and Whitehead), on the emergence of
subjectivity from nature and the related problem of the structuration
of meaning, and finally on the status of subjectivity as that which, at
once, is given "through" its multifarious temporal processes, and "lays
under" these processes. In order to characterize this form of latency,
a particular attention is devoted to the way in which Merleau-Ponty
understands the notion of metaphor. No longer seen as a simple figure
of speech or a rhetorical notion, the metaphor becomes the emblem
of the actualization of what exists only through its transformations,
or as Mauro Carbone puts it, a deformation without antecedents.[5] The
invisible, in other words, "is" in its visible instantiations without being
reducible to them. This perspective is adopted in order to characterize
Merleau-Ponty's last notion of subjectivity within his ontology of
nature and of the flesh. This poses a final problem: how to conceive
of a difference between subjects within a perspective that tends to find
their interrelation as the primordial condition. If it is true -- as I hope

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5   See M. Carbone, *Una deformazione senza precedenti*, Macerata: Quodlibet,
     2004. English translation *An unprecedented Deformation*, Albany (NY):
     SUNY Press, 2010.

to show -- that according to Merleau-Ponty the separation between subjects is not their original status, and that communication is the "stuff of which" each relation is made, thus reversing the usual way of conceiving of intersubjectivity, then the problem becomes how to make room for separation. The conclusion of this work tries to sketch a possible perspective that, while never having been outlined as such by Merleau-Ponty himself, nevertheless hopes to remain faithful to his insights.

SECTION ONE

THE METHOD OF THE FLESH

I

MERLEAU-PONTY'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD: THE RADICALIZATION OF THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL REDUCTION

Introduction

The approach to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy must start from a discussion of the methodological tenets characterizing his position. Merleau-Ponty starts his career as a phenomenologist, and remains a phenomenologist until his premature death. This means that his standpoint is constantly connected to Husserl, and his analyses are repeatedly worked out in reference to his interpretation of Husserl's phenomenology. In particular, as is well known, Merleau-Ponty conceives the phenomenological project in terms of a deepening of what Husserl himself only partially made clear (for himself and for the others). One among the very first to read Husserl's unpublished manuscripts at the University of Louvain in Belgium, Merleau-Ponty was convinced that Husserl could be interpreted in different, almost opposite ways, and the introduction to the Phenomenology of Perception clarifies his own way of interpreting the development of Husserl's philosophy.

A study of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy which hopes to bring to light his radical phenomenology of the flesh, understood as a meditation on time and nature, must accordingly discuss Merleau-Ponty's own interpretation of the methodological cornerstones characterizing Husserl's perspective. The notion of phenomenological reduction is probably the most important, for it deals with the question concerning the access to phenomena and the very notion of phenomenon, which make all the difference between a phenomenological and a pre-phenomenological account. Yet the question is still more complex, for the attention devoted by Merleau-Ponty to the problem of a definition of the phenomenological reduction is at the same time very restricted and yet very acute. We cannot hope to find, in Merleau-Ponty's

writings, anything comparable to the extension and the meticulousness with which Husserl carefully distinguishes and compares, defines and undoes the various ways to perform the reduction, and progressively clarifies its purpose and value. Yet in a certain sense Merleau-Ponty's whole conception of phenomenology is an answer to Husserl's position and its implications. This alone should suffice to reject the rather common conviction, according to which Merleau-Ponty criticizes the reduction in order to declare it unnecessary. We will have to dwell at a certain length on Merleau-Ponty's famous dictum, according to which "reduction can never be complete", but one thing is certain from the beginning: to say that reduction can never be completed means that, at the same time, reduction is always to be performed anew. Contrary to what is commonly held, then, Merleau-Ponty assigns a great importance to this notion.

As Merleau-Ponty's style of thought refrains from the care for the exact definition which characterizes Husserl, an investigation on his conception of reduction must face a further problem: how to extract, from his charming but often a-systematic analyses, a sufficiently clear-cut definition? A certain degree of arbitrariness will always be unavoidable when dealing with Merleau-Ponty's working concepts. At the same time, however, when digging deep enough into this rich terrain, a more regular profile can be ascertained, and the researcher is then gratified with important discoveries.

Thus, in order to bring to the fore the elusive notion of reduction worked out by Merleau-Ponty, I will in the first place schematically set out what he could consider Husserl's concept to consist in. We will see that Merleau-Ponty was aware that Husserl's position is more complex than what appears in the texts then published, as he was one of the very first to avail his acquaintance of Husserl's works with a fair knowledge of the unpublished manuscripts. Accordingly I will distinguish between different, although related, definitions of reduction in Husserl's writings. My main questions will be: what does Husserl mean by reduction; what are the reasons to perform it; what kind of subject is implied in it; what are the achievements of its performance; what concept of phenomenology emerges from Husserl's research? The very same questions will then be posed to Merleau-Ponty's works. But in this case it will be necessary to distinguish between two periods of his production, which also correspond to two different although related conceptions of reduction. The first is focused around his main work, the Phenomenology of Perception. The second

is what comes after the revision of this work, and culminates in the unfinished, posthumously published manuscript known as The Visible and the Invisible. Needless to say, my presentation of Husserl's very articulate conception of reduction will be quite sketchy but hopefully not incorrect, the attention of this chapter being devoted to Merleau-Ponty's position.

Husserl's conception of the reduction

In order to find a way to deal with this enormous topic that can be both effective and limited in extension, I will concentrate the investigation on what can help to better understand Merleau-Ponty's own position. Husserl declares in many places that reduction is a method that allows the phenomenologist to reach the domain of pure subjectivity, which represents the field proper to phenomenology as the fundamental science of philosophy.[1] It is then clear that reduction plays a crucial role for phenomenology. Given the plurality of treatments, both theoretical and historical, available in Husserl's texts, I will in the first place set up the meaning of reduction as the fundamental operation devised to open an access to the sphere proper to phenomenology.

The main shift, which determines the final definition of the field of reduction in terms of «the pure theme of subjectivity»,[2] occurs between the Logical Investigations and the later works. Without entering into detail, we can see that, in the early phase of his work, Husserl considers reduction as a means to delimit, in a methodologically pure way, the field of research concretely worked out in the LU. This means that reduction is meant to secure the pure givenness of the data pertaining to descriptive psychology, that is, phenomenology in its first formulation. The accent is on the concrete lived experiences of the flux of consciousness, but not yet on consciousness as a field in itself, accessible only through a peculiar apperception that, in turn, must be phenomenologically acceptable. In the fifth Logical investigation yet, according to his own subsequent self-criticism, Husserl is still trying to understand consciousness itself by means of an empirical-natural apperception.

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1   See for example Hua VIII (*Erste Philosophie*, vol. II), ed. by R. Boehn, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1959, pp. 78-80.
2   Hua XIII, ed. by I. Kern, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1973, p. 203.

As a matter of fact, the problem of the exact interpretation of the meaning of this criticism, and of the implications derivable from it, is not limited to the question of understanding Husserl's position, but invests the interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's own solution, and I would say it is of the utmost importance for phenomenology as a whole. For what does it mean to understand consciousness in a transcendental, rather than empirical, way? Where do we land when the reduction is properly performed? What we can say is that Husserl, once arrived at a clear definition of the outcome of the reduction as the field of pure subjectivity, conceives of this as something distinguished both from the object understood according to the natural attitude, and consciousness as it is conceptualized by empirical sciences such as psychology. It is this "third" nature of pure consciousness that is taken up by Merleau-Ponty and developed into a personal, original even if not completely orthodox, conception.

We have at any rate a first scheme of the function of the reduction. This is a methodological procedure that allows the phenomenologist to reach the field of science, the latter being defined in terms of evidence. The most important difficulty, seen by Husserl in performing this task, is that of remaining at the level of the unnatural reflection, free from contaminations coming from the empirical understanding of consciousness. I insist on this aspect for it is crucial in order to understand both the criticism and the positive solution offered by Merleau-Ponty. It is my suggestion that, the many differences notwithstanding, both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty have something common in sight when repeatedly insisting on the need to distinguish the field of pure consciousness, in Husserl's terminology, both from the world of objects and the universe of mental events, understood according to the worldly sciences such as psychology.

The question is, in fact, the following: once the reduction is performed, in what terms is the realm of pure subjectivity, that is then arrived at, to be accounted for? We will see that it is Husserl, and not Merleau-Ponty, the first to acknowledge a number of features whose detection is usually ascribed to the French phenomenologist, such as the relationship with the body and the intersubjective character of transcendental subjectivity. It is possible to state this now, when the three volumes devoted to the phenomenology of intersubjectivity are published, but then Merleau-Ponty must be regarded as having looked in the right direction at a time when only a very few manuscripts were available.

The nature of subjectivity that is reached once the reduction is performed, furthermore, interacts with the performance of reduction itself. It is not indifferent, in fact, to ascertain what kind of subject is to arrive at its own truth, and by what means. The interaction between reducing and reduced subject is a topic that Husserl has progressively recognized as crucial. In his endless fight against the naturalization or reification of consciousness, Husserl has often kept together something that Merleau-Ponty distinguishes: it is one thing to suspend the presuppositions coming from the natural attitude, and quite another thing to remain blind in front of phenomena which on the contrary pertain precisely to the very definition of that which is to be achieved by the reduction. In other words, if the co-implication between immanence and transcendence, the sphere of the proper and that of the extraneous, and similar phenomena, is what emerges from a correct actuation of the reduction, then there is no reason to reject such achievements. In the end, as it emerges from the manuscripts belonging especially to the last period, Husserl seems to have accepted this conclusion. A clear assessment of this situation comes from a consideration of the motivation and the paths to be taken in order to perform the reduction.[3]

As it is well known, the overall reason guiding Husserl's philosophical endeavour is that of gaining the ground of science. In a progressively clearer understanding of the meaning of this aim, Husserl constantly makes clear that the philosophical enterprise does not consist in competing with empirical sciences, which in their domain are fully valid, but rather in investigating and clarifying the essential possibilities pertaining to the constitution of science. Thus phenomenology has to do with the foundation of knowledge, and the motivation to perform the reduction, accordingly, is related to this project. In order to correctly grasp the meaning of this otherwise rather old-fashioned conception of philosophy, it must be kept in sight that the term of comparison and the antagonist is skepticism. Husserl's conception of truth -- and this is also very important in order to grasp Merleau-Ponty's contribution -- is not simply opposed to the skeptical claim that there is no truth, but consists in a constant effort to interiorize the reasons of skepticism. This is especially relevant in connection with the way Husserl understands the procedure of the epoché, or

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3   On this theme see S. Luft, *Phänomenologie der Phänomenologie*, Dordrecht/ Boston/London: Kluwer, 2002.

suspension, which is one of the most important aspects of reduction. While Husserl's epoché is not to be confused with the skeptical notion, at the same time it is fruitfully related to it. The real triumph of skepticism, in fact, would be the acceptance of the claim that the only truth is the empirical truth reached by empirical sciences, for in this case the very possibility of error would be ruled out, and this would render the researcher blind to the fact that truth is an infinite process. In other words, skepticism can be effectively contrasted only when its possibility is constantly confronted with, and not naively forgotten. In his Critical History of Ideas Husserl declares that the deepest although hidden meaning of modern philosophy consists in a constant effort to render the subjectivism proper to the skeptical tradition really true. This can be done only through a form of transcendental subjectivism founded on the reduction.[4]

The challenge of skepticism thus, both historically and theoretically, is the real motivation that led Husserl to his "transcendental turn". The meaning of this turn can be synthetically stated as follows: to set the conditions for understanding that objectivity is subjectively founded. To dismiss naïve objectivism cannot simply lead to sheer subjectivism. Husserl's perennial philosophical acquisition is the statement that the theme of phenomenology as transcendental philosophy is the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity. This relationship precedes both subjectivity and objectivity, and constitutes their common ground. If this is not so clear when performing the reduction according to the so-called "Cartesian" way, it is because, as Husserl recognized, there is a jump in that case.[5] The Cartesian way is the one that allows to posing the exact question, namely, how is it possible, for immanent knowledge, to grasp something that is not immanent.[6] The examination of this possibility does not consist, as in Descartes, in a deduction or a demonstration of the existence of transcendence, but in a pure clarification of the essential possibilities of consciousness, which brings the structures of pure consciousness itself to light. Thus the main acquisition of the Cartesian way is the production of the visibility of that which is usually invisible, and remains invisible to the

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4   Cf. Hua VII, ed. by R. Boehm, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1956, p. 61.
5   The term is employed by Husserl in the *Krisis*. Cf. Hua VI, ed. by W. Biemel, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1976, p. 158.
6   Cf. Hua II, ed. by W. Biemel, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1973, p. 7. See also Hua VII, p. 64.

empirical sciences of mind as well, for they reduce consciousness to a piece of the world, a "thing", although a different sort of thing.

This is another way to say that what characterizes transcendental consciousness is intentionality. And intentionality is the name for the relationship between noesis and noema, that is, something not reducible to either term. This alone, in itself, should suffice to see why the hypothesis of the annihilation of the world, contained in the famous § 49 of Ideas I, is only a mental experiment. The real problem of the Cartesian way depends on the fact that it concentrates on the actual structure of consciousness, and in this doing it fails to account for the subjective clarification of the world as an intersubjective unity, which entails the ability to account for the realm of possibility. According to the Cartesian way, at least in its earlier formulations, solipsism seems to be unavoidable. In the Cartesian Meditations, accordingly, Husserl shows how the constitution of an Alter Ego is possible, in order to produce the conditions of possibility of the transcendental community. But the question of the other egos brings with it the problem of the lower strata of intentional activity, and in particular the problem of passivity. Husserl devotes many efforts to a clarification of this problem. In particular, he sees the opportunity to adopt a genetic approach that can supplement the static or structural approach. This genetic approach opens the possibility for a different way to the reduction, the so-called ontological way. Despite its name, however, even in this case Husserl insists on the subjective side: against Kant, he defends the need to distinguish transcendental subjectivity from the constructive concept of a subject that, after all, is a piece of the world. Again, it is the naturalization of transcendental subjectivity that constitutes the real mortal risk for philosophy. Against this risk Husserl develops a third approach to the reduction, the so-called way through intentional psychology.

Thus we can see that the three ways to the reduction are in fact three different modes to reach the same result: the life of consciousness, understood in terms of intentionality. Intentionality is a complex concept: it means that the world is to be seen as "world-for-consciousness", the object of possible experience. But it also means that consciousness is nothing without its object, for the intentional definition of consciousness is in terms of consciousness-of. The achievement of the reduction is then the awareness that consciousness and world are to be seen as poles of a relation that, as such, becomes the real theme of phenomenology. To distinguish the sphere of

transcendental subjectivity from the empirical realms of matter and mind means therefore two things: to account for the peculiar sense of being of consciousness thus defined, and to explain the relations between the transcendental and the mundane spheres. In the Cartesian Meditations as well as in the Krisis, and in many of Eugen Fink's works as the assistant of Husserl in his last years, the theme of the mundanization of transcendental subjectivity becomes prominent, and it plays an important role in Merleau-Ponty's reflection too, in particular in the last phase.

In order to properly grasp Merleau-Ponty's own contribution to the conception of the reduction, one important difference must at this point be stressed. Husserl sees the correlation between subjectivity and objectivity as the transcendental theme of phenomenology. Yet he does not arrive, or at least not fully and undisputedly, at conceiving of this correlation as another mode of being. He does not pose the problem of the specific ontological condition of the correlation. He rather tends to distinguish consciousness and world even when he clearly states that their relationship is in a certain sense more original than the two poles. But with Merleau-Ponty we have an important shift, due to his interest for the "incarnation" of thought. Once one accepts that consciousness does not exist except as intimately connected to a body, then the correlation itself between body and mind becomes more stringent. Thus, as we will see in a moment, it becomes inevitable to inquire into the peculiar ontological status of this middle, or third, term between consciousness and world. This inquiry is done by Merleau-Ponty in his last writings in more details, but is originated by his investigations on the phenomenology of perception.

Merleau-Ponty's conception of reduction in the Phenomenology of Perception

His conception of the body proper or lived body is perhaps Merleau-Ponty's most renowned idea. We can provisionally say that the incarnated subject, the subject as body proper, is what appears after the performance of the reduction according to the perspective disclosed in the early works, the Phenomenology of Perception in particular. Yet there are many aspects of this conception that need to be clarified. I will schematically analyze them by following the order above indicated for Husserl's case.

I have already mentioned Merleau-Ponty's statement about the impossibility to bring the reduction to a close. But what exactly is the reduction according to the Phenomenology of Perception? In the Preface one can find perhaps the most accomplished analysis of it. There Merleau-Ponty wants to distinguish two Husserls: the one which can be found in the published works, and the other, which emerges from the unpublished texts. But most of all Merleau-Ponty wants to show that these two Husserls are in fact one, and accordingly that Husserl's phenomenology is a complex perspective, not reducible to transcendental idealism. The first lesson of this reading then teaches us that Merleau-Ponty's version of phenomenology is intended as a development of this complex perspective irreducible to the official Husserl that circulated then, but perhaps also later on.

In his effort to separate Husserl's phenomenology from a possible neo-Kantian reading, Merleau-Ponty states that «[t]he best formulation of the reduction is probably that given by Eugen Fink […], when he spoke of "wonder" in the face of the world.»[7] The uncompleted and interminable character of the reduction is thus depending on the fact that, precisely because it aims at an effective grasp of "what there is", which unnoticed conceptual masks usually cover up, the reduction produces the effect of an awakening which can be a shock. By suspending the usual attitudes with which one relates him- or herself to the world in general, the reduction in fact opens to the awareness of the perceptual world, which in itself is indeterminate, where this expressions possesses a positive connotation. Hence derives, Merleau-Ponty adds, the inseparability of essence and existence, which is one of Husserl's merits to have insisted upon; hence the peculiarity of perception in terms of a logos of the aesthetic world, different from the logos of non-contradictory rationality.

The effect produced by the reduction then cannot but be of wonder, for the perceptual world not only is based on a logic which is different than that of rationality, but is a world with respect to which the subject "belongs to", is not separated from, and is guided by, almost ruled by it. Here emerges the awareness of the fact that such a world, far from being the quiet product of a Sinngebung performed by a sovereign subjectivity, is what affects the subject from the inside. The subject is thus subjected to the world, which guides its sight and its touch, which

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7   Cf. *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith, London and New York: Routledge, 2002 (Routledge Classics), p. xv. Hereafter referred to as PhP.

imposes itself upon the subject and discloses itself as that which is unmotivated, groundless, endlessly elusive. Rationality then becomes a mean to give a structure to what is structureless and yet not chaotic. It is indeed very remarkable that many descriptions usually ascribed to the later writings are actually to be found already in PhP.

If Merleau-Ponty rejects the idea that the reduction leads to an absolute transparency, this is less in order to abandon Husserl's position than to bring it to its own truth. The whole strategy set up in PhP is to proceed along the lines already indicated by Husserl in his later works and in the unpublished texts. An effect of this reading is the awareness that the reduction poses a methodological problem: if the subject that is to perform it is accounted for in terms of incarnated subjectivity, that is, made of the same stuff of which the world is made, then it is difficult to see how this kind of subject can emerge and dominate this world through a disembodied gaze. It is rather as if the world itself is performing a reduction through that particular being which the human being is, according to a reversal of the usual perspective which, however, is not meant to negate experience, but certain particular philosophical accounts of it.

The clearest way to understand this analysis is to consider Merleau-Ponty's use of a case of illness, that of the patient Schneider. Schneider embodies in a certain sense the subject proper to rationalism and idealism, that is, the one which must bring everything to the clarity of reason in order to understand it and even to live it. Schneider suffers from a loss of those vital bonds that allow human beings to lead a normal life. And Schneider seems to be cut off from most of the experiences that characterize human existence, sexuality and affectivity included. Thus the analysis of this case is a true form of reduction, insofar as it brings to light what usually remains hidden, namely, the bodily attachments that link subjectivity and world. Clearly we are here quite far from Husserl's way of conceiving of the reduction. And yet Merleau-Ponty claims that this is Husserl's real intention of accounting for subjectivity. When he emphasizes the embodiment of the Cogito, Merleau-Ponty is not preaching a return to the empirical mind, but on the contrary is claiming that this is the only adequate way to account for a subject which is situated, affected by finitude, exposed to the other subject's gaze, in other words characterized by an exteriority which is not due to chance for it is not the contrary of interiority.

All this being said, it must also be remarked that the overwhelming power of the world and its structures does not prevent the subject from

playing a crucial role. The world is, in the PhP, the perceived world. As the subtitle of the second section of PhP, devoted to the perceived world, says, «the theory of the body is already a theory of perception»,[8] which means that the world is seen from the bodily subject's perspective. The reduction of the world of separated objects to the coherent systematic totality which is given in perception is possible thanks to the reduction of the soaring-over transcendental subjectivity down to the incarnated subject which is born, feels pain and sorrow, is sexually marked, and is bound to die.

It is then as if the notion of incarnated subjectivity is not deepened enough. Once the relationship between subjectivity and world is recognized, and once the world itself is acknowledged as consisting most of all in the relations instituted by subjects in their bodily exchanges, a possibility is thus open towards a different perspective, one which sees this middle realm between subjectivity and world as more primordial than the two poles. But to reach such a realm poses peculiar problems to phenomenology and in particular to the reduction. In order to understand their nature we must turn to The Visible and the Invisible.

The peculiarity of the phenomenological reduction according to The Visible and the Invisible

One could be tempted to say that in the later, unpublished work, Merleau-Ponty accomplishes a double or meta-reduction. If the body proper is the result of a reduction of the natural attitude, where this concept in Merleau-Ponty means the tendency to separate the body in the empirical sense from the soul in the idealist sense, then the result of the meta-reduction is the flesh. The flesh is this enigmatic concept that receives an ontological status in Merleau-Ponty's later writings. The expression "meta-reduction" can be used insofar as it is a further reduction of the subjectivity proper to the level of the body proper. And it is a further reduction insofar as it deepens that link or relationship between world and subject, which is delineated but still insufficiently thought of by means of the concept of body proper. But this is a suggestive way to describe Merleau-Ponty's ontological move, which,

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8   Cf. PhP vi and 235.

however, possesses no textual evidence. Yet there are some reasons to suggest such an interpretation, which I would like to put together.

The flesh is a concept meant to explain the power, characterizing the body proper, to explore the world without possessing a conceptual representation of it. Merleau-Ponty explicitly adopts this expression by borrowing it from Husserl's posthumously published works, Ideas II in particular.[9] How can the body possess such a power, asks Merleau-Ponty, if not because it is "of it", that is, is part of the world? Only by reason of the common belonging to an exteriority -- which however, in the case of the body, can fold onto itself, and carve out a sort of interiority --, can the bodily subject and the perceptual world be communicating. The term "flesh" thus is a common term, which is then distinguished into "flesh of the world" and bodily flesh. With respect to PhP, the adoption of this term marks the acquisition of the awareness that this realm is even more primordial than that of the incarnated subjectivity.

At the same time, the world that is in communication with this sort of subjectivity is what Merleau-Ponty calls the "vertical world", that is, something not yet subjected to the laws of the representative consciousness, which tends to institute plans, perspectives, and to separate things and individuals. The vertical world, on the contrary, is the world of co-implications, overlappings, mutual transgressions, absence of linear succession both in space and in time. The primordial subject represented by the flesh thus is part of this vertical world, but is also instituting a first form of difference, because it is able to feel and be felt at the same time, that is, it possesses two sides, as Husserl shows with the famous example of the two hands. For Merleau-Ponty this example in fact holds for every sense, not only for touch but also for vision and for hearing, and in general it marks the inter-sensory structure of subjectivity and produces a primordial form of communication between subjects, which is called intercorporeity. Borrowing another Husserlian expression, Merleau-Ponty speaks of the space itself that "becomes flesh": «Es wird Leib».[10] It accomplishes an "Erinnerung", a Hegelian expression which is here used in the almost literal sense of "going inside", er-innern. The flesh is then not subjectivity if this means a form of identity, an ego. There is no "I" at work here, the I is a later accomplishment, the outcome of a process of institutions and

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9   See for example Merleau-Ponty's exemplary reading of Husserl in his "The philosopher and its shadow", later published in *Signs*.
10   Cf. Hua V, ed. by M. Biemel, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971, p. 145.

sedimentations, which Merleau-Ponty tends to see as not teleologically pre-ordinated, but exposed to chance and discontinuities.

This interrelation and this reciprocal mirroring between things and bodies is, according to Merleau-Ponty, a specific kind of Being, one which was not previously recognized by ontology, but which possesses a crucial role, for it is, as it were, the matrix of any other being, the irrelative of every relation, as he writes in "The philosopher and its shadow". To speak of relations means to stick to the idea that the vertical world is a phenomenal world, to be accounted for in terms of intentionality; at the same time intentionality itself is deeply revised along the lines suggested by Husserl's conception of working latent intentionality (*fungierende Intentionalität*). The intentional relationships occurring between lived bodies do not express a possession of the world but rather a being dispossessed by the world on the part of the subject. The world is made up of egoless bodily subjectivities that interact with one another anonymously.

Merleau-Ponty thus accomplishes a reversal of the Heideggerian perspective concerning the reduction: for Heidegger the reduction is what unexpectedly occurs to Dasein when its own being-for-the-death imposes itself upon him, and thus singularizes him. For Merleau-Ponty, on the contrary, the loss of naïve identity corresponds to the awareness of the carnal roots of subjectivity, to the subject's belonging to a community of bodies which is not yet intersubjectivity, but intercorporeity.[11] As he writes, «reduction to "egology", or to the "sphere of belonging" is, like all reduction, only a test of primordial bonds, a way of following them into their final prolongations.»[12] The reduction thus is a process of de-singularization.

This last consideration entails a challenge for phenomenology: when exceeding the limits of egology, phenomenology must become able to bring into its realm that which escapes it, what Merleau-Ponty calls, with an expression coming from Schelling, the "barbaric principle", the "shadow" of philosophy. In other words, phenomenology must reinvent itself in order to overcome the traditional limits of rationality. Many commentators have seen in this position an implicit rejection

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11   See for example the working note dated February, 1959. Cf. *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. by A. Lingis, Evanston (Ill.): Northwestern University Press, 1968, pp. 171-172. Hereafter referred to as VI.

12   Cf. "Le philosophe et son ombre", *Signes*, Paris: Gallimard, 1960, p. 221; English translation: "The Philosopher and its Shadow", *Signs*, Evanston (Ill.): Northwestern University Press, 1964, p. 175.

of phenomenology. I rather tend to see, in this attempt, the effort to deepen the very inspiring motives of the phenomenological inquiry, and to remain faithful to its will to go the "the things themselves" even when these things are no longer things at all, when they become oneiric entities. In a certain sense, Merleau-Ponty's version of phenomenology should be seen as an opening to psychoanalysis. One of the last teachings of the ontology of VI is the effort to reach the world of simultaneity,[13] the world of the *omou en panta*, where everything communicates with everything else, and this very structure of relations is the ultimate irrelative, raw Being.

Merleau-Ponty can thus be seen as a phenomenologist interested in pursuing the project of phenomenology to its very end, no matter how paradoxical this task might prove to be. Among the questions thus opened by his radicalization of the phenomenological project, one is particularly compelling: the question concerning the presuppositions involved in the performance of the reduction. Is the reduction a direct, straightforward operation or does it imply a different, more dialectical structure of thought? This is the problem discussed in the following chapter.

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13   Cf. many of the last working notes of VI. For example the one dated April, 1960, and entitled «"Indestructible past, and intentional analytic — and ontology».

II
DIALECTIC AND HYPERDIALECTIC

Phenomenology and dialectic

Having discussed Merleau-Ponty's peculiar appropriation of the method of phenomenological reduction, another methodological aspect must be analyzed: the relationship between the phenomenology of the flesh and dialectic. There is little doubt about the fact that Merleau-Ponty is the phenomenologist who is most deeply influenced by dialectic and Hegel's philosophy, even more than Sartre. Be it a simple mention of dialectic, or a more engaged confrontation with it, from The Structure of behaviour until The Visible and the Invisible, and passing through The Phenomenology of Perception, Marxism and Terror, Signs, and The Adventures of Dialectic, or even in the lecture courses, eminently in those dedicated to the concept of nature, Merleau-Ponty never fails to take dialectic into account. His familiarity with Hegel, as well as with commentators such as Kojève, is clear, and so is the weight of dialectical thinking over his appropriation of phenomenology. However, he never tried to simply translate phenomenology into a dialectical philosophy, but, on the contrary, always underlined that a fruitful relationship between the two was to be conceived as twofold, thus drawing a chiasmic movement of mutual correction and corroboration. Yet Merleau-Ponty felt the need, at that crucial moment in his philosophical career in which he started the project of VI, to take a sharper distance with respect to what was now called the embalmed dialectic; a need so strong to require the hyperbolic name of hyperdialectic. Such a radicalization of dialectic — for it is, indeed, not in the least a rejection, but a deepening — calls for attention, especially as it goes together with a number of relevant issues in the movement that brings Merleau-Ponty himself from phenomenology to ontology. I want to analyze this movement in its meaning for Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, by stressing in particular

the crucial role played by negation in the analysis of VI, and Merleau-Ponty's attempt at renewing this concept, which shows both the need for its preservation and yet the need for its reform.

The dialectic of dialectic

The discussion of the concept of dialectic undertaken by Merleau-Ponty in VI is mainly focused on Sartre and Hegel and takes place in the chapter Interrogation and Dialectic. There, Merleau-Ponty criticizes Hegel by rejecting the idea that the dialectical movement can lead to a true overcoming of contradictions into a superior composition. Thus Merleau-Ponty accepts the dialectical concept of contradiction, but wants to sharpen this contradiction by rendering it insuperable. Hegel maintains that the recognition of the conflict is already in itself its overcoming. Merleau-Ponty, on the contrary, wants to show that recognition is not sufficient, in the sense that it does not change the structure of the real, which is intrinsically ambiguous. The recognition of the ambiguity of the real, in other words, does not lead to the negation of ambiguity, but to its elevation as a symbolic cipher of experience. It is still possible, according to Merleau-Ponty, to reach the intelligibility of the real, but only at the price of accepting ambiguity as such instead of attempting to solve it. The very acceptance of ambiguity is indeed the mark of the true dialectical process. Therefore, in Merleau-Ponty's thought, the element of conservation prevails over that of overcoming. The accent is put on permanence. Permanence is actually progressively deepened in its character of latency.

Thus Merleau-Ponty criticizes the excessive optimism and tendency towards harmony implicit in the Hegelian conception of dialectic, but does not renounce the possibility of a dialectical comprehension of reality: on the contrary, with his notion of hyperdialectic, he stresses the importance of it. It is for this reason that what probably represents the sharpest criticism of Merleau-Ponty's thought, namely Lyotard's analysis in Discourse Figure,[1] aims exactly at showing that the Merleau-Pontyan concept of reality is too dialectical, that is, still too subsumable under a law, and too reconcilable in a structure that, for being the very law of ambiguity itself, does not cease for this reason to

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1   J.-F. Lyotard, *Discours, figure*, Paris: Klincksieck, 1971. English translation *Discourse, Figure*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

lead to a meaning, no matter how renovated. Lyotard, on the contrary, affirms the necessity to understand the real by staring from non-sense, from its non dialectical silence.

Lyotard acknowledges the value of Merleau-Ponty's position, in its stressing that not only reflective philosophy and Husserlian phenomenology, but also Sartre's philosophy, in their too rigidly opposing subject and object, consciousness and being, miss the possibility of understanding the necessity of thinking their relation in its promiscuity. However, once one acknowledges this with Merleau-Ponty, one cannot stop there yet: there is another form of opposition that is not reducible to Merleau-Ponty's, but rather deals with the fact that the subject cannot enter into contact with being, unless in the form of a separation. This separation, in Lyotard's analysis, is not that proper to depth in Merleau-Ponty's sense, because the latter is still too compromised with Being. Being, on the contrary, is what gives itself in the mode of a not acceptable silence, that is, in terms of de-structuration, and the subject constitutes itself exactly in its progressive separation, although never definitive, from such a scene. Lyotard thus performs a polar inversion of the very terms with which Merleau-Ponty describes the situation of philosophy as reflection over the relationship with Being: he accepts Merleau-Ponty's terms only to invert them and thus show that Merleau-Ponty's, too, is a philosophy that does not grasp the meaning of the question of the openness to Being, and therefore of what Being is.

One should wonder, however, whether this reading of Merleau-Ponty's position is correct. This criticism clearly seems plausible insofar as it plays abusively on the "positive" connotation given to Being that is imputed to Merleau-Ponty, whereas the Merleau-Pontyan conception of the openness to Being cannot be reduced to this. And this for an essential reason: Merleau-Ponty includes in his conception of perception precisely the departure and dismissal from Being that Lyotard pretends to oppose to him. But at the same time Merleau-Ponty shows that a thinking of the separation from Being as advent of the subject cannot prove to be not unilateral either. The Merleau-Pontyan notion of field of experience, already worked out in PhP and further developed in VI, consists in the full acceptance of the ambiguity that is constitutive of the relationship between subject and Being, which is neither only separation as suppression and bar, nor only communion, and is not a schizoid mixture of the two either, but rather is ambiguous precisely in its being the co-presence of both.

Thus the two poles of the problematic can be summarized as follows: on the one hand there is Hegel's optimism, which acknowledges the silence of the sensible world only to show its intrinsic instability, which produces by itself its own dialectical overcoming towards a different and higher meaning. On the other hand there is Lyotard's pessimism, which maintains the impossibility of assimilating the realm of the sensible, since this is the field of the primary process and of de-structuration. In other words, Lyotard thinks that the world of the flesh, described in VI, is not the originary Merleau-Ponty was looking for, precisely because every structure, ambiguous as it may be, is already a structuration of what, by itself, is not structurable. Merleau-Ponty, thus, once again, finds himself in the middle between two diametrically opposed positions.

But are they actually so opposed? By adopting *après coup* Merleau-Ponty's point of view to the case in point, one could remark that in fact both Hegel and Lyotard reject the possibility to find a meaning of the sensible world that is inherent to it and is not, in some way or another, imposed from outside. Negation is the founding moment in both perspectives: dialectical negation in Hegel, where the aspect of the higher recomposition prevails; non dialectical negation in Lyotard, where, following the Freudian *Verneinung*, the element of rejection is preeminent. It is all the more important, then, to try to grasp the Merleau-Pontyan sense of the concept of negation. Negation is still strategic in Merleau-Ponty, since it is programmatically designed to allow understanding the sensible per se and not through an opposed principle. Merleau-Ponty aims at drawing a concept of negation intrinsic in and of the sensible itself, able at once to avoid closing the sensible in upon itself, and rendering it too fertile. I will try to show this point by studying Hegel's position in the light of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy.

Hegel's dialectic of sense-certainty

Hegel accepts the fact that there is an irreducibility proper to sensible experience. The moment of receptivity cannot be reduced to mere semblance. Its resistance must be taken into account, since it is the unavoidable starting point of all philosophical reflection. Thus, similarly to Merleau-Ponty, Hegel distinguishes the sensible moment and the conceptual one. Sense-certainty cannot be simply translated into concepts. There is a moment of fracture, of "silence", between the

two realms. It is for this reason that Hegel calls sense-certainty (which is still a form of certainty) the non-rational, the ineffable.[2]

Thus, Hegel plays on the ambiguity of sense-certainty to accept both, as it were, the claim made by empiricism that the moment of perception must have the priority, and at the same time Leibniz's and Kant's objection, according to which logos, the system of concepts and judgments, cannot be reduced to sensible certainty or derived from it. He seems to accept this claim, only to show from within its inconsistency. In fact, the very condition of irreducibility of sense-certainty is what, according to Hegel, leads it to its dialectical reversal. If empiricism makes the claim that sense-certainty possesses a sense of its own, then sense-certainty must show an element of signification. It must signify something: but what? Sense-certainty is the realm of the "this". One cannot, according to Hegel — in this following the Empiricists — simply translate the meaning of sense-certainty into words, because its meaning depends on the situation, i.e. the very fact that there is an indication, a "monstration", of the "this". Every word that would simply translate the ostensive movement into concepts would precisely lose the movement itself. It is a moment of exteriority, when the word depends on its circumstance in order to mean, to be significant, when sense and meaning, *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, coincide. The word "this" is meaningful only if I accompany it, as it were, with a gesture. The meaning (*Sinn*) of the word "this" resides in its reference (*Bedeutung*).

Thus sense-certainty shows indeed to have a sense. Its being an exteriority, that is, the apparent absence of the concept, in fact proves to be its own signification, its interiority. But this is precisely the moment where the claim for the irreducibility of sense-certainty collapses, that is, changes into its opposite, which is the very definition of the dialectical movement. The concept, in other words, does not supervene to baptise an ineffable state of affairs. It is the "state of affairs" itself that proves to be "meaningful" in its own way, and proves to be "more than what it was". The structure of sense-certainty is the indication of a "this", the gesture that points to a presence. This gesture is non-linguistic; thus it must be called "non-rational". Yet although silent, this gesture is the opening of a space where relations are given. The gesture is therefore the institution of a field. It is a process of "spatiation", the very opening

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2   The reference is to the Phenomenology of Spirit. See G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, in particular the section devoted to sense-certainty, pp. 58-66.

of a space. The indication is the position of a centre (the "this") with its periphery (the "non-this", the "that"). It is therefore the institution of a network of relations, oppositions, negations, which, although non-linguistic, is yet the realization of a "meaningful" network.

Thus what seemed to be the absence of the concept, to be the close-in-upon-itself exteriority of a "this", shows to have an inner movement, which is the very Hegelian definition of the Concept: its having a life. It is therefore by inner conflict and contradiction that the "this" of sense-certainty becomes meaningful in the Hegelian sense. What seemed to be a sheer in-itself, now is a for-itself: through its inner contradiction it overcomes itself and thus becomes true; what seemed to be self-enclosed immediacy had in itself the very mediation that is the life of the Concept. Once again, this mediation is neither the superimposition of an external form (some sort of Kantian judgment, or maybe a *Sinngebung*) onto meaningless matter, nor is it the presence of meaning as such within sense-perception. Sense-certainty does not signify by itself, but because it is unstable, as it were. Its exteriority and absence of meaning "is" (in the dialectical sense of the term 'being') its meaning. Its immediacy "is" its mediation. Thanks to this movement, the supposed immediacy of sensible certainty shows to possess an articulation that, although "unaware" of itself, nevertheless arrives at its own truth due to the interior dialectical movement we have seen.

Thus Hegel can show that sense is intimately linguistic, even though this linguistic nature of sense is not visible at first. As everyone knows, according to Hegel, to start from the simple determinations of a concept leads to their negation. Every determination is, in itself, intrinsically contradictory, and reverts into its opposite. The true, concrete life of the Concept, therefore, cannot start from simple determinations (which was the error of the Aristotelian logic and is repeated by Kant) but must be seen in its dialectical movement. This means, with respect to the problem of sense, that simply stating that sense is linguistic would lead to a contradiction. In order to show the linguistic nature of sense, Hegel thus begins by the opposite thesis. Yet the "truth" of sense-certainty is not sensible. There is no truth outside the logos, even if it is necessary that, at first, a form of sensible, non-conceptual, meaning, be given. Sensible certainty thus shows to be animated by a telos, a finality that necessarily brings it outside of itself, in order to "become true" in the concept. Hegel wants to show, not simply that the "truth" of sensible certainty resides in language (which would still be a dualist position, similar to Kant's), but that sensible certainty already contains its truth,

but in the form of alienation. The truth of sensible certainty appears as external to it. Thus the dialectical movement, which this appearance generates, can lead to the recognition of the presence of truth within sensible perception itself. Opposition and exteriority thus prove to be necessary for the movement of truth itself.

This seems to be the triumph of dialectic and the victory of meaningfulness over against meaninglessness. But there is a problem. Hegel's overcoming of the apparent aporia of sense-certainty is performed through the dialectical reversal of immediacy into mediation. However, in this way, the apparent exteriority of sense-certainty and the concept becomes only apparent. Meaningfulness is the realm of mediation, mediation is universal, and precedes immediacy, although this precedence can shine forth only *après coup*. But, as Jean Hyppolite once pointed out, where there is only mediation, there is no mediation. If sense-certainty already contains its own dialectical reversal into the concept, then there is no real difference between sensibility and intellect. The problem of sense-certainty is indeed solved, but at the price of dissolving (although in a very seducing manner) the issue. Let us first verify this claim and then go back to Merleau-Ponty's own position.

Hegel's overcoming of sensible certainty is indeed the intrinsic reversal of exteriority into interiority. What remains outside this argument, however, is its necessity. I do not want to enter into the *mare magnum* of Hegelian scholarship, and therefore will omit a discussion of the Hegelian concept of necessity. I will therefore only summarize this point, since I am interested in its philosophical significance. I will thus simply try to show why Hegel's analysis of sense-certainty fails to succeed.

The claim that the dialectical reversal of exteriority into interiority suppresses exteriority, leads to the suppression of the very need for such a reversal. Either exteriority is maintained (which is Hegel's declared intention), or the exigency of a dialectical reversal falls. What is the necessity for exteriority, in this case? It is simply the fact that there is something, that this something must be designated, that it stubbornly refuses to abandon its resistance, its opacity. In other words, the identification of sensibility and concept, which is performed through the dialectical movement above described, fails to account for the fact that sensibility is not only a representational relationship, but also an affective attachment. The resistance that this affective attachment opposes to its purely linguistic translation impedes the resolution of sensibility into the concept. We can say that we are related to the world, but this relation does not change in its nature because of the fact that it is said. Affection

does not change into the representation (*Vorstellung*) of affection. The symbol does not suppress the thing. Sense-percepta keep their opacity in the very fact that they are there and that there is a need to designate them, to indicate them, to "make sign" about them, to speak of them, since they "appeal" to us, as it were. Hegel's reversal takes everything into account, except the reversal itself. This is a non-dialectical exteriority that casts a shadow on the splendor of the life of the Concept.

Thus mediation is the law of the movement of the concept, but it cannot mediate itself. This impossibility is just another name for the fact that some form of mediation (this time not the Hegelian one) becomes necessary. This mediation is between two effectively different realms: sensibility and intellect. The problem of mediation, that is, the problem of the schematism, or the union of body and soul, to use Merleau-Ponty's expression in SB, is meaningful only within a philosophy that does not suppress the difference. Only within this philosophical framework can the claim that perception is an original place be meaningful. This means that perception does not lend itself to be "elevated", hence dissolved, into the truth of the concept. Does this also mean that perception possesses a "truth" of its own? If Hegel's position is rejected, is this rejection performed on the ground that perception is not only irreducible to the concept, but also meaningful in itself and must be grasped in this significance? And what exactly does it mean for perception to be irreducible to the concept: perhaps that it is the concept that has to be reduced to perception? Finally, if we acknowledge that the Hegelian attempt fails to reduce perception to the concept, then how is the concept, that is, the logos, to be conceived?

The preceding analysis is focused on the dialectic of sense-certainty because this is the theme that brings Merleau-Ponty the closest to Hegel, so that to see the differences allows us to grasp Merleau-Ponty's own position. But similar considerations could have been made for the master/slave dialectic and the desire for recognition. We will come back on this issue. For the moment it is helpful to turn to the question of the peculiar structure involved in perceptual faith as it is worked out in VI.

Reversibility and simultaneity

Merleau-Ponty's discussion of Hegel's dialectic in VI is placed after a long analysis of Sartre's own position, and this is not by chance. Without entering here in a close examination, I will simply stress the

fact that the aim of such analysis is to show that Merleau-Ponty wants to arrive at what Sartre himself is looking for. It is precisely for this reason that Merleau-Ponty submits Sartre's position to his criticism: the goal is good, but the means employed by Sartre will not lead to it. What is at stake in this discussion is the role of subjectivity. Thus the problem Merleau-Ponty faces here is the following: he intends to weaken the notion of subjectivity and make room for a role of passivity. Sartre's concept of subjectivity, as the *pour soi* that is "nothingness", is paradoxically too strong, its fracture from Being reverts itself, dialectically, into a diaphanous co-extensiveness with it, and thus shows no latency in itself. But this cannot mean to accept Hegel's solution. Not only Merleau-Ponty rejects an epiphenomenal notion of Being as that which produces by itself its own significance, which entails to leave no room for subjectivity. He also rejects Hegel's dialectic of sense-certainty for similar reasons. Hegel's notion of the dialectical process, in fact, as we have seen, in its overcoming the moment of silence, fails to do justice to the role of subjectivity. Thus Merleau-Ponty connects negativity, passivity and subjectivity. The true possibility to grasp Merleau-Ponty's concept of subjectivity lies entirely in the correct understanding of his notion of negativity and of passivity in activity.

This, in turn, must be conceived against the background of what Merleau-Ponty calls reversibility. Reversibility is the name for the dialectical relationship between the subject, which is a bodily one, and Being. Being is given in perceptual faith, but is given as that which needs to be instituted in order to be what it is. There is thus a lack of final ground that characterizes Being, which Merleau-Ponty calls its *Ungrund*, in contrast with *Abgrund*. The silence of Being, in other words, is not different from its voices, but rather is "the same". By the very fact that something appears, nothingness must be rejected, but at the same time this appearance has nothing behind itself to grant it. Being, Merleau-Ponty writes, is «*what requires creation of us for us* to experience it.»[3]

It is this creation that marks the place of the subject according to VI. It is a paradoxical form of creation, in a sense, because at the same time it is correspondence, *adaequatio*. Creation means taking a distance while addressing that which is to be created. Every act of creation is thus an act of segregation, which is performed along the lines of what Merleau-Ponty calls *la membrure* of Being. Merleau-Ponty also calls it

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3   VI 197. Merleau-Ponty's italics.

institution. The institution is the process by which the element, which
Being is, takes a form, each time different, crystallizing itself always
anew. The peculiarity of this "crystallization" is that the subject itself
is shaped in this process. The subject is the reverse of Being, its other
face, its double; certainly, therefore, not a constituting transcendental
subjectivity, but rather a transcendental field. We will discuss the
particular notion of passivity involved in this concept of transcendental
field in the chapter devoted to it.

The institution of a level, in which subject and object are
differentiated, is thus always for a time, always bound to dissolve itself.
But what will not change is the fact that there has been an institution.
This endurance is the work of sedimentation. The subject thus is every
time resurrecting from its ashes, as it were. It is a kind of spontaneity,
which is not however the opposite of passivity. This spontaneity is on
the contrary possible only because it has its correlate of passivity. If
there can be no Being without subjectivity, there can be no subject
without Being either. The subject is "of" it. It is this correlation then
that becomes the ontological prius to be investigated.

The situation Merleau-Ponty is sketching is thus rather paradoxical.
Each one of the two elements of the relation appears to be determined by
the other. No one can exist without the other; no one can be reduced to
the other. Instead of trying to solve or reduce this paradox, for example
by means of a dialectical transition, Merleau-Ponty invites his reader to
learn how to accept it. This means to adopt a dialectical form of thought
that no longer seeks a higher synthesis, but rather situates itself in the
middle of the contradiction: hence a hyper-dialectic. This also means
the abandonment of any sort of archaeological thinking, — the search
for the origins —, as well as any kind of teleology, in favor of a thinking
of the "middleness", or moiety, *medietas*, in the sense explained by a
famous Kafkian sentence, which Merleau-Ponty liked to quote.[4]

The notion of hyper-dialectic we have now reached require further
discussion. In the first place, it calls for an investigation of the correlative
notion of chiasm, which will be done in the next chapter. But it also
requires an evaluation of its ontological implications, which will be
discussed in the chapter devoted to Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of
Schelling.

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4   I am referring here to Claude Lefort's remark contained in his Editor's
     Foreword to VI, p. xxvi.

III

CHIASMS

The revision of Hegel's dialectic does not lead Merleau-Ponty to abandon dialectic itself, but to deeply reconsider its status. The notion of chiasm, which progressively emerges in his meditation, represents the way Merleau-Ponty inserts dialectical thinking into phenomenology, and at once shows the intrinsic dialectical nature of phenomenology itself.

Merleau-Ponty's prolonged meditation over the body proper as double or dual, both *Leib* and *Körper*, subjective-objective, led him in his later writings to recognize that these concepts escape the limits of traditional ontology.[1] Merleau-Ponty openly acknowledged this fact when turning his phenomenology of perception into an ontological investigation of what he called "the flesh".[2] In order to adequately express the peculiarity of what he was uncovering, Merleau-Ponty coined a number of terms and expressions, all of them related to the concept of flesh, which are meant to convey the idea that the world, and the subjects involved in it, are characterized by an ontological condition which differs from that proper to ordinary experience. Among these terms, all well known, we need to take into particular consideration that of chiasm. In analyzing this concept, we will discuss the possibility that the ontology of the flesh sketched by Merleau-Ponty be considered as representing the phenomenological setting out of an ontological conception which Merleau-Ponty did not clearly recognize as such, but which can nevertheless be found in the work of a number of authors, and in particular in the speculative philosophy of A. N. Whitehead. Merleau-Ponty, as the publication of his lectures on the concept of Nature has shown, was aware of Whitehead's philosophy,[3] but did

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1   Cf. VI 139, 147-49.
2   Cf. VI 136-37.
3   Cf. LN 113-122. As a matter of fact, Merleau-Ponty was introduced very early on into Whitehead's work by the books written by J. Wahl, which Merleau-Ponty lists in SB, and of which there is already a hint in his *Projet de*

not fully exploit its potentialities. This different ontology is based on the primacy of the concept of relation over against that of substance. Thus my main intention in this chapter is to test the hypothesis that the ontology of the flesh be indeed a relationist ontology. If this suggestion proves to be tenable, then some questions immediately arise. Two of them especially will be taken into consideration here: 1) why does ordinary experience seem to witness a substantialist ontology rather than a relationist one; and 2) what does the status of subjectivity become within such a relationist framework?

The chiasm as relation

The notion of chiasm is adopted by Merleau-Ponty in order to describe a wide range of phenomena. Yet, in the first place, it serves the methodological purpose of disentangling the ontological comprehension of Being from the limits, still present in Husserl's approach, of an analysis based on the distinction between consciousness and the world. Merleau-Ponty rather emphasizes their mixture, their co-implication, which no clear-cut distinction between immanence and transcendence can adequately grasp. As we read in a well-known working note,[4]

> The very pulp of the sensible, what is indefinable in it, is nothing else than the union in it of the "inside" with the "outside", the contact in thickness of self with self — The absolute of the "sensible" is this stabilized explosion i.e. involving return
>
> The relation between the circularities (my body-the sensible) does not present the difficulties that the relation between "layers" or linear orders presents (nor the immanence-transcendent alternative)
>
> In Ideen II, Husserl, "disentangle" "unravel" what is entangled
>
> The idea of chiasm and Ineinander is on the contrary the idea that every analysis that disentangles renders unintelligible — This bound to the very meaning of questioning which is not to call for a response in the indicative —

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travail sur la nature de la perception, dated 1933 (cf. M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le primat de la perception*, Verdier: Lagrasse, 1996, p. 13). Most interestingly for the purpose of the present essay, Wahl, whose book *Vers le concret* (Paris 1932) is mainly dealing with Whitehead, draws the attention of the reader on Whitehead's relationism, at the same time insisting on the role of an irrelative in any relationism. Merleau-Ponty quotes it in SB 142 and note 37, thus showing to be aware of the issue at stake. I will come back on this question in the final section of this essay.

4   VI 268.

> It is a question of creating a new type of intelligibility (intelligibility through the world and Being as they are — "vertical" and not horizontal)

What is Merleau-Ponty exactly saying in passages like the above? I do not want in the least to contrast Merleau-Ponty's and Husserl's phenomenology in the ordinary way, namely, by saying that while Husserl sticks to the primacy of the Cogito and of the Ego, Merleau-Ponty overcomes this perspective by emphasizing passivity, operative intentionality, and the body. As Dan Zahavi eloquently showed,[5] Merleau-Ponty was never in fact forgetful that these themes were precisely drawn from Husserl's edited but most of all unpublished works. Far from distancing himself, in this connection, from Husserl's enterprise, Merleau-Ponty always insists on the need to actually read Husserl and recognize that the primacy of consciousness is there constantly undermined by the admission of the role of incarnated subjectivity, temporality, alterity, and the world. Yet a difference must still be acknowledged and accounted for. I suggest that this difference resides in Merleau-Ponty's understanding that Husserl's phenomenology of the body requires a different ontology. I therefore surmise that Merleau-Ponty's efforts, in the last phase of his reflection, are precisely devoted to work out such a different ontology. It has to be an ontology that takes seriously into account the fact that the body "is of" the world, and therefore calls for concepts which, rather than emphasizing the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity, try to uncover a more primordial realm in which such a distinction is not (yet) operative. This is the reason why Merleau-Ponty always links the analysis of raw Being and of the flesh with a meta-reflection on phenomenology itself, and pleads for a phenomenology of phenomenology itself which be able to become "hyper-reflection" [*surréflexion*].[6]

Merleau-Ponty thus displays a clear awareness of the fact that this different approach to Being requires different concepts. The concepts adopted are not neutral with respect to the phenomena they are meant to describe. On the contrary, they are heavily laden with an ontological perspective, which is all the more effective the more it goes unnoticed.

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5   Cf. D. Zahavi, "Merleau-Ponty on Husserl: A Reappraisal", in T. Toadvine and L. Embree (eds.), *Merleau-Ponty's Reading of Husserl*, Kluwer, Dordrecht/Boston/London, 2002, pp. 3-29.

6   Cf. the famous passage from VI 38. Cf. also VI 100-101, 103, 106-107, 119-20, 127-29.

At a certain point in his research, Merleau-Ponty even arrives at suggesting to get rid of the whole "bric-à-brac" of notions inherited from the philosophical tradition.[7] However, a philosophical position, no matter how new and radical, must be communicated, and the sirens of constructivism must be kept silent. This struggle between the need to adequately express his vision, and the need to be understood, explains Merleau-Ponty's adoption of the peculiar language of VI, often called poetical, but in fact guided by a strong philosophical commitment, which inevitably clashes with a vocabulary totally subjected to an ontology he no longer accepts.

In order to understand the crucial aspect of Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh and its key-words it is crucial to remind ourselves that the traditional vocabulary of philosophy structurally forbids to adequately characterize the intuition, proper to Merleau-Ponty's approach, that relations are more primordial than substances. Yet this is, quite surprisingly, the aspect that appears to be less worked out in VI and coeval works. It is for this reason that a coherent relationist approach may prove helpful in order to re-frame Merleau-Ponty's analyses. In other words, a greater degree of formalization is in this case appropriate. I will provide, in the section devoted to Whitehead, a sketchy portrait of what a relationist type of ontology actually looks like. Before doing this, however, we must gain, from a discussion of the concept of chiasm, a clear picture of the questions at stake.

Modes of the chiasm

The very notion of chiasm is that of a relation. As is well known, this notion derives from the realm of rhetoric. There it is a figure meant to express the inversion, in the second of two parallel phrases, of the order followed in the first.[8] In turn, this figure etymologically derives from the Greek χιασμα, meaning a cross-shaped mark. Its essence is that of cross-connecting two elements in a repetition, so that if, in the first instance, the relationship is, say, from A to B, then, in the second instance, this relationship is inverted. It is essential for the definition of

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7   Cf. VI 235-36, 269-70.
8   The Oxford English Reference Dictionary (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 253) reports the following example: "to stop too fearful and too faint to go".

the chiasm that this cross-connection be simultaneous, in the sense that the chiasm receives its real meaning from the co-presence of the two relations, intersecting themselves while defining reciprocally opposite orders. In a way, therefore, the chiasm is a relation of relations: it is the intersection that is the most important aspect of this figure. Thus it is no doubt well chosen by Merleau-Ponty, for the notion of chiasm does not refer only to a certain particular phenomenon, but rather constitutes the structural symbol of the way Merleau-Ponty conceives of reality. Yet another aspect of the notion of chiasm should not be overlooked: the simultaneity of the two relations crossing one another does not prevent them from being processes and not, so to speak, states. This remark will prove essential in order to fully appreciate Merleau-Ponty's point of view.

To emphasize this relational concept as fundamental for the new ontology means to strongly stress the need to avoid hypostasizing any particular concept deriving from a philosophical tradition that, for the sake of brevity, will here be called substantialism. The intricate connections between notions such as that of substance, individual, subjectivity and objectivity will be evaluated below. Merleau-Ponty never openly addresses this problem, but it is nevertheless possible to show that the meaning of his phenomenological analyses goes in this direction. At any rate, we must understand why the relational notion of chiasm provides with a structure with which to understand reality.

Let us therefore begin with Merleau-Ponty's "definition" of chiasm. There is a working note, among the latter ones, which can be considered the place where he comes the closest to something like that. It is entitled "Chiasm—Reversibility",[9] and we read, among other things, the following:

> Chiasm   I—the world
>   I—the other — —
> chiasm my body—the things, realized by the doubling up of my body into inside and outside—and the doubling up of the things (their inside and their outside)
> It is because there are these 2 doublings-up that are possible: the insertion of the world between the two leaves of my body
> the insertion of my body between the 2 leaves of each thing and of the world

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9   See VI 263-64.

This is not anthropologism: by studying the 2 leaves we ought to find the structure of being — —

Start from this: there is not identity, nor non-identity, or non-coincidence, there is inside and outside turning about one another— —

My "central" nothingness is like the point of the stroboscopic spiral, which is who knows where, which is "nobody"

The I—my body chiasm: I know this, that a body (finalized?) is Wahrnehmungsbereit, offers itself to…, opens upon…, an imminent spectator, is a charged field — —[10]

In this text Merleau-Ponty states that the chiasmic structure, instantiated in many different ways but nevertheless unique in itself, is more primordial than each of the elements or termini which are chiasmically related to one another. Each term or element is rather to be seen as "the other of its other". The body is in connection with the world and in turn the world is given as such only to a perceiving body. Thus no one of the two would exist in separation from the other. The same can be said of the relationship between the I and the Other. They can exist as such only when their chiasmic relationship instantiates them as its poles. It would be obvious to remark that the chiasm cannot be seen as a sort of logical genus of which the various examples would be the species. If the termini of the chiasmic relationship are not ontologically more primordial than the chiasm, at the same time the chiasm itself is each time realized in a peculiar, determined way. In a way, therefore, the very relationship between the chiasm and its poles is chiasmic: the chiasm takes place as the mutual, cross-connected relationship between its poles, which in turn are what they are only insofar as they are chiasmically connected.

This is a profound teaching of Merleau-Ponty's "relationism". If the relational notion of chiasm were simply substituted to the more traditional, "substantialist" notions of body, world, I and Other, then the chiasm itself would become a substance, "a" thing or individual. The chiasm cannot be chiasm unless it is preserved in its "dynamical" nature. In a way, therefore, the mode or meaning of being (Husserl would call it its *Seinssinn*) proper to the chiasm is not static but processual, not "nominal" but "verbal", which explains Merleau-Ponty's interest for Heidegger's notion of verbal *wesen*.[11]

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10   VI 317-18/264
11   Cf. for example VI 202-203: «I, my *view,* are caught up in the same carnal world with it; i.e.: my view and my body themselves emerge from the *same* being which is, among other things, a *cube* — The reflection that qualifies

This processuality proper to the chiasmic relationship has nothing to do with an empiric process: it is rather a logico-ontological process, whose reason will be clarified when discussing it in connection with Whitehead's ontology.

Note however that, in the passage above quoted, Merleau-Ponty does indeed make an exception: within the framework of chiasms which realize the relationship between body and world, or between me and my body, or again between me and the other, there is a certain void, a central nothingness, which is not separated from the chiasms, and yet does not coincide with them. Merleau-Ponty calls it here the "point of the stroboscopic spiral", with an image clearly related to that of the eye of the cyclone, which Merleau-Ponty finds in Claude Simon's novels.[12] This zone of tranquility right in the middle of the storm is a metaphorical image which announces the crucial theme of the irrelative of or within the relations, the peculiar "nobody" which is one of Merleau-Ponty's meanings of the invisible, and which I would like to call the singularity, as will be said below.

However, before dealing with a question that can be approached appropriately only when understood within this relationist, chiasmic framework, it is necessary to develop the notion of chiasm in its full extension. As a matter of fact, the chiasm is the structure with which basically all the relevant articulations of reality can be accounted for. The Visible and the Invisible can be seen as a meditation over and an answer to Husserl's Cartesian Meditations, insofar as the whole Husserlian project pursued in that work is at once redoubled and subverted by the reduction of the world of the natural attitude not to the

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them as subjects of vision is the same dense reflection that makes me touch myself touching, i.e. that *the same* in me be seen and seer: I do not even see myself seeing, but *by encroachment* I complete my visible body, I prolong my being-seen beyond my being-visible for myself. And it is for my flesh, my body of vision, that there can be the cube itself which closes the circuit and completes my own being-seen. It is hence finally the massive unity of Being as the encompassing of myself and of the cube, it is the wild, non-refined, "vertical" Being that makes there be a cube. With this example grasp the upsurge of the pure "signification" — the "signification" cube (such as the geometer defines it), the essence, the Platonic idea, the object are the con-cretion of the *there is*, are *Wesen*, in the verbal sense, i.e., *ester* — Every *that* involves a *what* because the *that* is not nothing, hence is *etwas*, hence *west*». But most of all cf. the fundamental working note of VI 254-57.

12   For this reference cf. NC 210.

Ego and its sphere of belonging [*Eigenheitssphäre*],[13] but to the flesh and raw Being. Thus, instead of a transcendental Ego we find, in Merleau-Ponty's analysis, a flesh that is neither subjective nor objective, and which is double, for it can be flesh of the body and flesh of the world.[14] Flesh of the body and flesh of the world are not in a relationship of founding and founded, as is the case in Husserl's analysis, for Merleau-Ponty call them simultaneous, while preserving a difference between themselves. The two sides of the flesh are rather interrelated by a circularity of determination, which according to Merleau-Ponty is the meaning of the notion of *Fundierung*,[15] which thus seems to anticipate the notion of chiasm and provide a phenomenological ancestor to it.

The relationship between flesh of the body and flesh of the world is thus a most remarkable example of chiasmic relationship. Neither one is the ground for the other. Only their interrelation is primordial. The subjective side of this relationship, the flesh of the body, cannot be accounted for in terms of pure immanence, because at the heart of such immanence there is openness to the world due to the belonging of the body to the same Being which characterizes the things. The body

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13   Cf. E. Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen*, Husserliana I, M. Nijhoff, Den Haag, 1950. See in particular the Fifth Cartesian Meditation, §§ 44-47. Obviously this is not to say that VI refers only to that work. But Merleau-Ponty takes the *Cartesian Meditations* as exemplary of a certain Husserl, the "egocentric" one, while other works, such as *Ideas* II or the *Crisis*, are rather exploited as testifying the presence of a different perspective, based on embodied subjectivity.

14   For this distinction and its discussion see for example VI 248-51.

15   Merleau-Ponty was interested in this notion already at the time of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, in which he suggests that the *Fundierung* allows Husserl to overcome the traditional distinction between matter and form, still present in Husserl's distinction between *Auffassung* and *Auffassungsinhalt*, and thus to open phenomenology to an examination of meaning in its incarnation and its rootedness in the body. Cf. PhP 127-28. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the circularity proper to the notion of *Fundierung*, precisely with the intention of overcoming any strict separation between founding and founded. Thus in PhP 394 he writes: «The relation of reason to fact, or eternity to time, like that of reflection to the unreflective, of thought to language or of thought to perception, is this two-way relationship that phenomenology has called *Fundierung*: the founding term,— time, the unreflective, the fact, language, perception, is primary in the sense that the founded gives itself as a determination or explication of the founding, which is what prevents the founded from ever reabsorbing the founding, and yet the founding is not primary in an empiricist sense, and the founded is not simply derived, for it is through the founded that the founding manifests itself.» [English translation modified].

is first and foremost exteriority, and only in virtue of its being double can it carve out a "hollow", a "certain negativity", an interiority which therefore could by no means be considered primordial. Merleau-Ponty even says that the *percipere* must be understood through the *percipi*, and not the other way around.[16] It is Being itself which possesses its own negativity, and not the subject which brings it into the night of a meaningless "*en soi*". But in turn, the objective side of the flesh, the flesh of the world, is not accounted for in terms of panpsychism. To characterize it in this way would precisely mean to miss the meaning of the flesh. Only when a double being, that is, a perceiving body, can turn onto itself and have "two different sides" of the same phenomenon, can the flesh of the world reveal its pregnancy, thus showing its peculiar temporal structure, according to which what is "always already" there can truly "become itself" only *après coup*, after the realization of a perception, of a *Gestaltung*.[17]

What it then primary is the chiasmic relationship, which shows why each one of the terms involved in the relation can be "itself" only by reference to "its other". Yet, as we have already said, this relationship cannot be reified into a new positive being. This is the whole difficulty for thought: to grasp the "essence" of the chiasm without fixing it into a motionless picture. This is a difficulty proper to any dialectical concept. Dialectic, as we have seen, is meant to express the work of thought, its movement beyond and beneath its products, its *energeia* never exhausted by any *ergon*. In this case, however, before being the work of thought, this process is already present at the level of perception. It is the life of the perceptive bodily subject, and as such it subtracts itself from a dialectical overcoming into consciousness, Reason, Concept.

As was discussed in the previous chapter, Merleau-Ponty works with a concept of dialectic according to which the dialectical movement does not obtain a higher positivity, but remains "*sur place*":[18] hence Merleau-Ponty's concept of the Absolute in terms of

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16   Cf. VI 250-51.
17   Cf. VI 189-90, 190-91, 192, 193-97, 204-206, 206-207. I cannot dwell here on this theme, on which I must refer the reader to my work *Modi del tempo*, Mimesis, Milano 2001, in particular chapter three. For a fruitful reading of the revision of the concept of time worked out by Merleau-Ponty in VI, cf. M. Carbone, "The Time of Half-Sleep: Merleau-Ponty between Husserl and Proust", in T. Toadvine and L. Embree (eds.), Merleau-Ponty's Reading of Husserl, cit., pp. 149-72.
18   Cf. VI 92-93 and 94-95.

unsurpassable ambiguity. As Merleau-Ponty explains in NC, in the context of his reflection on the Hegelian concept of phenomenology within a Husserlian and Heideggerian framework, consciousness arrives at understanding this very self-mystification of itself as a necessary one. With this, the mystification is at once confirmed and dissolved: the knowledge able to understand the mystification negates it as unsurpassable while confirming its unavoidable presence, thus operating a dialectical overcoming (preservation, negation, becoming true).[19] However this overcoming is not performed, as it is in Hegel, through the position of ambiguity as a both necessary and transient moment of the self-mystification of consciousness, seen as the fundamental passage towards reaching the truth of self-consciousness, but on the contrary is accomplished through the position of ambiguity itself as the general condition of Being. In other words, the ambiguity that originates consciousness as necessary mystification is not removed by its recognition, but on the contrary confirmed as the "origin" and reason of consciousness itself, which thus does not "return on itself" but understands itself as separation and effect with respect to the promiscuity of Being.[20]

The chiasm is thus the secret of the "logos of the aesthetic world". Merleau-Ponty's "cosmology of the visible"[21] can be spelled out in terms of the conception of a totality (cosmos) not composed by beings, entities, "res", but of relations, for what is visible is by definition neither only seen, since it requires a seer, nor only seer, since the seer itself must be visible in order to see.[22] If a single term can express this chiasmic condition, whose non-numerical duplicity is the essential feature, then the term is certainly "*voyance*". This term does not appear in VI, but can be found in Merleau-Ponty's last lecture course, devoted on "Descartes' ontology and contemporary ontology".[23] It seems to

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19 Cf. NC 286.
20 Cf. NC 305, in which Merleau-Ponty shows that ambiguity is the heart of experience, and most of all NC 319, in which it is stated that ambiguity is the absolute, that is, it is the very dialectic of experience, constantly renovated, and not its transcendence (that is, to use a Hegelian image, there is no passage from the phenomenology to the logic).
21 Cf. VI 265.
22 Cf. the crucial, penultimate working note in VI 273-74. We will come back at length on this fundamental thesis put forward by Merleau-Ponty in his later works.
23 The term appears in NC 182-3, where Merleau-Ponty discusses Descartes' notion of painting and in particular his idea that painting should reproduce

me that this term bears a peculiar assonance with J. Lacan's "*voyure*". Lacan coined this term, "*voyure*", in order to express a middle voice that characterizes neither the act of seeing in itself, nor the condition of being seen as implying someone else's act, but only, and in the first place, the being exposed to a general and diffused visibility that "produces", as its own reverse (which is what evokes, if I understand it correctly, the topologic image of a Möbius strip), the seeing.[24]

Yet Merleau-Ponty's conception of the flesh is not reducible to the sensorial register of vision. In fact each one of the five senses is a field, both enclosed within itself and communicating with the others. And each one of these sensorial fields is constituted through a chiasmic relationship, for each sensible datum is in itself a chiasmic relation,[25] both intra- and inter-sensorially conceived.[26] Generally speaking, the five senses form a system of total parts, mutually separated and complete in themselves, and yet communicating between themselves.[27] The flesh of the body is therefore in the first place a plurality,[28] somewhat similar to the notion of fragmented body, except that the different fragments, while remaining fragments, communicate with each other laterally, so to speak, so as to compose a unity that is neither pre-ordinated nor teleologically accomplished.[29]

Furthermore, this "intracorporeal" plurality cannot, by itself, account for the institution of a unity of the body without its "extracorporeal" counterpart. The flesh of the body is thus plural in (at least) two senses: it is plural internally speaking, for each sense is realized through chiasms, and communicates with the others through chiasms; and it is plural externally speaking, for each sense needs its circular path through the "world" in order to realize itself.[30] We are already

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reality, whereas according to Merleau-Ponty it entertains a "much deeper" relationship with what exists.

24 Cf. J. Lacan, Le Séminaire, XI (Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse), Seuil, Paris, 1973; English translation The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, trans. by A. Sheridan, London and New York: W.W. Norton and co., 1977. Cf. in particular the second section, chapters VI-IX.
25 Cf. VI 133-34.
26 Cf. 135-36, 143, 144-45.
27 Cf. VI 217-19.
28 Cf. VI 140-41.
29 On Merleau-Ponty's refusal of teleology cf. VI 264-65.
30 For this notion of circular path, in particular with respect to vision, cf. R. Bernet, "The Phenomenon of the Gaze in Merleau-Ponty and Lacan", in *Chiasmi International*, 1, Vrin/Mimesis/University of Memphis, 1999, pp. 105-118.

witnessing a multiplication of the chiasms involved in the flesh. And
yet there are others. Insofar as the body is already in itself a plurality
that must unify itself, and not a unity pre-existing with respect to its
parts, this very plurality accounts for the relationship between different
subjective bodies. In a truly remarkable articulation, which is at the
same time a reversal, of Husserl's description of the constitution of
the Alter Ego in the Fifth Cartesian Meditation, Merleau-Ponty
shows that each subjective body institutes itself through its bodily
communication with other subjective bodies. This relationship is
not yet intersubjectivity, for intersubjectivity can exist only between
already fully constituted subjectivities. Merleau-Ponty rather speaks,
in this case, of intercorporeity,[31] that is, a relationship between bodies
according to which there is yet no distinction between "my" body and
the body "of the other". In fact, the distinction between "my" body and
the body "of the other(s)" is the effect of an institution (*Stiftung*), which
works out a separation and an isolation of that which therefore is not
primordially separated.

One ought to remark in this connection that Merleau-Ponty develops
and deepens what Husserl says about the Ego as it is obtained through
the particular reduction to its sphere of propriety (*Eigenheitssphäre*).
For Husserl, too, the Ego reached at this level "coincides with the
world". And for Husserl, too, this peculiar Ego is in the last analysis
no personal Ego, but an anonymous Self. It is indeed remarkable that
Husserl identifies this anonymous self with its flesh (*Leib*).[32] Yet for
Husserl it is precisely only through this reduction to the sphere of
belonging that the Alter Ego can then emerge, through the analogical
grasping of an alter Ego in the objective body (Körper) which appears
in the sphere of belonging as object-for-the-Ego, and yet transgresses
such sphere by appresenting another flesh.[33] In Merleau-Ponty we
find a similar and yet different analysis. The reduction to the sphere
of belonging does indeed lead to what, with Piaget, can (wrongly,
adds Merleau-Ponty) be called "egocentrism",[34] but this self is not
an Ego in Husserl's sense, for it is rather "no one".[35] While according
to Husserl the Ego of the sphere of belonging coincides with its flesh

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31 Cf. VI 214-15, where Merleau-Ponty shows that the chiasm is the "law" of
     intercorporeity.
32 Cf. E. Husserl, op. cit., § 44.
33 Cf. E. Husserl, op. cit., §§ 48-54.
34 Cf. VI 243.
35 Cf. VI 246.

and has no otherness (hence the possibility of a distinction between the "proper" and the "extraneous"), for Merleau-Ponty it is the very qualification of this sphere in terms of "property" which is misleading, since it is rather the primal extraneousness, the primordial exteriority which produces an interiority only through its "emergence" in terms of segregation and separation. Thus Merleau-Ponty does not challenge Husserl's conception of flesh (*Leib*), but the way Husserl conceives of it in terms of a primordial "identity" although sui generis. In a certain sense, Merleau-Ponty only deepens Husserl's conception of the sphere of belonging in terms of an anonymous flesh, but in another sense Merleau-Ponty challenges the ontological (in a sense to be explained) identification of this anonymous flesh with an individual. This individual is on the contrary "divisible", or dividual, since the flesh is but another name for plurality and multiplicity, and if the reduction is carried on to the end, it discloses no proper whatsoever, but an exteriority prior to the very distinction between proper and extraneous. Thus it is this couple of concepts which a radical phenomenology of the flesh should interrogate anew.

At this point it seems to me possible to state that Merleau-Ponty's conception of the flesh is based on a relational ontology. Before discussing what this means for the problem of subjectivity, it might be helpful to try to give a formal structure to the notion of relation and its ontological effects. For this sake we turn now to A. N. Whitehead's philosophy.

Whitehead's conception of relations

The logical and ontological status of the relations has been discussed since the beginning of philosophy. While Plato's position is still under debate, Aristotle's conception of relation is traditionally considered the theory *par excellence* of the secondariness of relations with respect to substances. As a matter of fact, Aristotle is not so clear in this respect. His definition characterizes a relation in terms of that whose being consists in comporting itself in a certain way with respect to something.[36] Yet this definition does not clarify two questions, which nevertheless immediately arise from it. To use Aristotle's own lexicon, they can be stated as follows: 1) are the substantial determinations to

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36   Cf. *Cat*. 7, 8 a 33.

be included or not in the concept of relation? 2) Are the relations only mental or conceptual beings, or also real beings? Three answers are generally adopted with respect to these two interconnected questions. There are those who admit both reality and objectivity of relations; those who on the contrary deny both reality and objectivity; and finally those who deny reality but admit objectivity. Aristotle himself is not always consistent. There is a passage of the Metaphysics,[37] in which Aristotle seems to admit that, in certain cases, a relation possesses a real existence. This position is confirmed in the Topics,[38] in which he says that some relations are by necessity to be found within or around the things to which they are referred. Such is the case of disposition, possess, and symmetry. Yet in the Categories Aristotle discusses at length the question whether there can be substances within the realm of relations, his answer being essentially, although not categorically, negative. Certainly there are no first substances among the relations, and even for the case of second substances, Aristotle states it can hardly be said that they are relations.[39] Furthermore, one of the arguments used by Aristotle in order to deny Plato's theory of ideas is that this theory should lead to admit the reality of relations, whereas a relation is a determination of quantity (which explains why it comes after both quality and quantity), but not matter.[40]

As a matter of fact, this latter determination is ambiguous, and in fact the subsequent philosophical discussion on the nature of relations has interpreted this passage either by emphasizing its negative, or on the contrary its positive, determination of the reality of relations. While Plotinus refers to Aristotle's Metaphysics in order to basically deny reality to relations,[41] Thomas Aquinas, essentially for theological reasons, bases on Aristotle his admission of the reality of relations.[42] In modern times, F. Bradley argues against relations,[43] and this position is particularly relevant with respect to Whitehead, for Whitehead's magnum opus, Process and Reality, is most of all a reaction against Bradley's theory.

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37   Cf. *Met*. V, 15, 1020 b 25.
38   Cf. *Top*. IV, 4, 125 a 33.
39   Cf. *Cat*. 7, 8 b 15.
40   Cf. *Met*. XIV, 1, 1088 a 21.
41   Cf. *Enneads,* VI, 1, 6.
42   Cf. *Summa Theol*., I, q. 13, a. 7.
43   Cf. *Appearance and Reality,* II edition, 1902, pp. 21 ff.

Whitehead's own position emerges from decades of studies into mathematics, logic, and epistemology. His starting point is particularly relevant, for it takes place in a work which is entitled A Treatise on Universal Algebra,[44] and which represents a mighty effort to unify many mathematical and logical realms, which had received a powerful development in the XIX Century, but which were at that point in need of a more generalized overview. Whitehead publishes his work in 1898, first of a projected two-volume work whose second volume never appeared. The concept of universal algebra, strongly emphasized already in the title, expresses Whitehead's conviction that the (at the times) recent developments in that field promise to transform the concept itself of mathematical enterprise, bringing many traditionally separated fields, such as algebra and geometry, but also logic, into a new, universal and unifying perspective. Whitehead's approach, therefore, without explicitly addressing the problem, in fact aims at suggesting a different, original solution to the then much debated issue of the foundations of mathematics.

The algebra of logic was one of the mathematical fields that had received a sudden, great improvement in the second half of the XIX Century. Through the pioneering work of George Boole, who first saw the possibility to treat Aristotle's logic with a mathematical calculus, two other logicians had worked out a generalization of this idea, which conceives of relations as functions whose structure is applicable to different realms, when these realms are abstractly conceived regardless of their contents. This development can be found in two almost contemporary works, E. Schröder's Algebra der Logik (1895), and Ch. S. Peirce's Logic of Relatives (1897). These works define a relation in terms of a function [f (x, y) or xRy] between two or more elements (in the first case the function is said dyadic, in the second polyadic and is written f $(x, y, z…)$). Then the properties of such a function can be studied, in abstraction from the elements to which they are applied. Thus a relation can be symmetrical ($xRy = yRx$); transitive (if xRy and yRz, then xRz) or intransitive (an example of the first case is the relation of minority among natural numbers, an example of the second case is that of paternity); and so on. Generally speaking, this algebra can be seen both as a calculus of classes and as a calculus of propositions. Its importance resides precisely in its not being determined in advance

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44   A.N. Whitehead, *A Treatise on Universal Algebra*, *with Applications*, London: Hafner Publishing Company, 1898. Hereafter referred to as UA.

with respect to its interpretation. Accordingly, this new perspective opened the path to mathematical logic, as it is known today.

Yet, with respect to this first formalization of the notion of relation, which would eventually lead to conceiving of the whole range of mathematics and logic to consist in the science of relations, Whitehead was already adding at the time of UA some relevant aspects that led him, later on, to a metaphysical generalization of relations. I will synthetically sketch this development here, with the purpose of bringing to light the possibility to see relations as ontologically more primordial than substances. In this doing, I want to stress that Whitehead has explicitly challenged Aristotle's structural link between logic and ontology, showing that the logic of relations produces far-reaching effects on ontology itself.

After his mathematical and logical investigations, which among other achievements led Whitehead to establish the possibility to treat geometry, both Euclidean and non-Euclidean, as a field of algebra, and then to consider each different geometry as an instantiation of a more encompassing discipline which was later called topology, the next relevant step was to bring this approach into the sphere of physics and of epistemology. In a paper dating 1905, On Mathematical Concepts of the Material World,[45] Whitehead shows that the basic concepts with which to build up a picture of the physical world need not necessarily be those proper to classical Newtonian physics. These Whitehead lists to be three: spatial points, temporal instants, and bits of matter. In his paper Whitehead shows that it is equally possible to use a smaller number of primitive, undefined concepts, and in particular he points out that matter and space can be treated together through a unified concept called vector. The basic feature of this concept is that of being a dynamical rather than a static concept. Thus, the very same year in which Einstein's first memoir on Relativity theory appears, but independently from one another, Whitehead suggests that, at least from a formal point of view, matter and space are not separated but can be seen as related. No mention of time as also possibly treatable in this way is made yet. But Whitehead's openly stated intention is to

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45   Cf. F. Northrop and M. Gross (eds.), *A.N. Whitehead, An Anthology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968, pp. 11-82. In order to adequately appreciate the importance of this paper it is still of invaluable help the paper by W. Mays, "The Relevance of MC to Whitehead's Philosophy", in I. Leclerc (ed.), *The Relevance of Whitehead*, G. Allen & Unwin, London, 1961, pp. 235-259.

overcome the fragmentation of reality into abstract concepts whose status is only formal, but whose wrong interpretation has led many a philosopher and a scientist to take them for real. This is the birth of what Whitehead later called the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness".[46]

But the most important consequence of showing that nature displays, from the point of view of formal concepts, no intrinsic pre-eminent structure — for Whitehead lists five equally possible models — is that the path to take in order to account for nature cannot be that of a purely formal calculus. Thus Whitehead departs from the later predominant position in epistemology, the so-called "received view", by stressing that an adequate comprehension of reality cannot be limited to the calculus-interpretation structure. In his eyes, this is too conventionalist a solution.[47] Yet, once geometry has lost its direct connection with space, and physics has become an epistemological battlefield between conventionalists and realists, where to look for a different solution? Whitehead's answer is his relationism. Starting with a paper presented at the Paris' international congress of mathematics of 1914, and significantly entitled La théorie relationniste de l'espace,[48] Whitehead engages himself in a progressive deepening of the notion of relation and its possible primacy over other logical concepts. The most important steps in this investigation are the paper "The Anatomy of Some Scientific Ideas",[49] the already mentioned book Concept of Nature, and then the speculative cosmology of Process and Reality and the other connected books.[50] This is not the place for even trying

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46   This is the idea that there is an error, both epistemological and ontological, in conceiving of points of space or instants of time as really existing, while they are only operative notions adopted for the sake of simplifying the calculus. On this fallacy, on which I cannot dwell here, cf., by Whitehead, *Concept of Nature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920 [hereafter referred to as CN], and *Science and the Modern World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925 [hereafter referred to as SMW].

47   For a discussion of what was becoming, already at Whitehead's times, a widespread position, cf. CN, cit., in particular chapters I and II.

48   Cf. "La théorie relationniste de l'espace", *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 23, 1916, pp. 423-454.

49   Cf. "The Anatomy of Some Scientific Ideas" (1917), in *The Aims of Education and other Essays*, London: Williams & Norgate, 1929, pp. 180-231.

50   Cf. *Process and Reality*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1929 (corrected edition edited by D. R. Griffin and D. W. Sherburne, New York: Free Press, 1978) [hereafter referred to as PR]; *Adventures of Ideas*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932 [hereafter referred to as AI]; *Modes of Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938 [hereafter referred to as MT].

to summarize Whitehead's philosophy. I will only indicate some fundamental features of his ontological relationism, drawing both from the works devoted to natural philosophy and those devoted to the speculative cosmology, without distinguishing further among them.

The first, and most important, aspect of Whitehead's conception of relations is that every relation is an act of experience.[51] In this respect, the act of experience is conceived of as a relational event from which both subject and object emerge. Thus the relation can be regarded as more primordial than the relata. One could say that Whitehead's world is made up of experiences, and since these experiences are first and foremost perceptive ones,[52] Whitehead's is a cosmology of perception, something Merleau-Ponty must have been aware of when speaking, as above seen, of a *cosmologie du visible*. From this definition of a relation, Whitehead derives the consequence that each relation is an event, temporally articulated and not instantaneous.[53] Time, relations and perceptual experience are thus interrelated. The world is the totality of these relational experiences, their general structure. It is a complex structure in which each experience contributes to the whole by articulating the whole from a particular perspective, similarly to Leibniz's monads, so that the whole does not exist by itself, but only through each and every singular process of experience.[54]

Each experiential instance is accounted for in terms of a process realizing a "concrescence" from "publicity" to "privacy".[55] At the same time, this process is also the realization of a transition from the realized privacy into the novelty of new experiences. It is not that there is first a concrescence and then a transition: the two stages are rather one

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51   Cf. CN, chapters II and III; SMW, chapters III, IV, V; AI, especially chapters XI and XIV. PR as a whole is basically a long meditation over this idea.

52   For this notion of perceptual experience and its primacy over conceptual experience, cf. CN, chapters III and V; PR, chapter VI, VII and IX of Part II, and the whole Part III.

53   Cf. CN, chapter III; PR, Part I, chapter I, Part II, chapters V and VII; AI, chapters XII, XIII, XV; MT, chapters IV and V.

54   This thesis is expressed in PR through the so-called Category of the Ultimate, which states that Creativity is the all-encompassing feature of reality. Creativity itself is represented by the processual dialectic of the Many (the experiential instances) and the One (their interrelation). There are no Many without the One, and no One without the Many. Thus there is a relationship between Many and One which could be accounted for in terms of a chiasm. Cf. PR 21.

55   Cf. PR 151.

the other side of the other, and they occur together.[56] Thus publicity and privacy, transcendence and immanence, are not opposed to one another, but on the contrary interrelated as the two faces of the same phenomenon, which cannot be one of the two without being the other as well. The notion of creativity as characterizing the "ongoingness" of Being must be seen as this double-faced process.

It must be remarked, in this connection, that for Whitehead there is not immanence in the first place, which then transcends itself towards the transcendent world. On the contrary, each experiential instance, called by Whitehead "actual entity" in order to convey the idea that the essence of an entity is its acting, its being a process and not a state, is at first the whole Being which, in the course of its experiential process, "crystallizes", so to speak, into a private experience. Thus there is no Ego prior to experience, but on the contrary there is an emergence of the Ego itself through the process of experience. The process is, then, also the production of a segregation of Being into a subject and an object.

This conception of the experiential act as realizing its own subject in the course of its realization is called by Whitehead, with explicit polemical reference to Kant's transcendentalism,[57] the reformed subjectivist principle.[58] The reason to reform the subjectivist principle resides, according to Whitehead, in the need to abandon the primacy of the notion of substance, both in its logical, epistemological, and ontological values. Whitehead's conception of reality is based on the idea that Being is the general complex structure of experiences, experiences that precede subjectivity and institute it. The subjects "emerge" from these processes that are not a subject's property, but on the contrary are responsible for the existence of subjects themselves. The subjects are rather "subjected" to these experiences. Whitehead accounts very clearly for this reformed conception of subjectivity by speaking of a subject/superject.[59] As Whitehead writes:

> The term 'subject' has been retained because in this sense it is familiar in philosophy. But it is misleading. The term 'superject' would be better. The subject-superject is the purpose of the process originating the feelings. The feelings are inseparable from the end at which they aim; and this end is the feeler. The feelings aim at the feeler, as their final cause. The

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56   Cf. PR 50-51 and 165.
57   Cf. PR 88-89 and 173.
58   Cf. PR 157, 160, 166-67.
59   Cf. PR 29, 32, 44-45, 84, 88, 151, 155, 166, 222, 232, 245, 255.

feelings are what they are in order that their subject may be what it is. Then transcendently, since the subject is what it is in virtue of its feelings, it is only by means of its feelings that the subject objectively conditions the creativity transcendent beyond itself. […] If the subject-predicate form of statement be taken to be metaphysically ultimate, it is then impossible to express this doctrine of feelings and their superject. It is better to say that the feelings aim at their subject, than to say that they are aimed at their subject. For the latter mode of expression removes the subject from the scope of the feeling and assigns it to an external agency. Thus the feeling would be wrongly abstracted from its own final cause. This final cause is an inherent element in the feeling, constituting the unity of that feeling. An actual entity feels as it does feel in order to be the actual entity which it is. In this way an actual entity satisfies Spinoza's notion of substance: it is causa sui. The creativity is not an external agency with its own ulterior purposes.[60]

What is the meaning of this reform? In the last analysis, it resides in the strong, repeated plea for a revision of the logical categories that preside over the ontological approach to reality as it manifests itself. If reality is investigated as it gives itself, and not according to a normative conception based on a historically conditioned logico-ontological perspective, then the investigation must pose the question of the implicit ontology underlying the operative concepts adopted. In stressing the primacy of experience, Whitehead makes a strong phenomenological claim. But he is also aware that a phenomenological investigation, which be coherently carried on to its end, should not stop before any paradox that might emerge in the course of the inquiry. Therefore the fact cannot be overlooked that this different ontological perspective poses a problem to Husserl's reductive-constitutive method, which in its effort to build up a rigorous science of manifestation, able to show the structure of phenomena in themselves, as they actually are, seems precisely to avoid inquiring into the meaning of the "being" of phenomena, for this "being" takes on radically different meanings if it is conceived of in terms of an ontology of relations. It is my suggestion that Merleau-Ponty was actually able to see this problem, when intending to abandon the ontology of perspective Being in favour of an ontology of vertical Being.[61]

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60   PR 222.
61   Cf. VI 322/268: «It is a question of creating a new type of intelligibility (intelligibility through the world and Being as they are — "vertical" and not *horizontal*)».

Vertical Being and the question of the Irrelative

The adoption of a relationist type of ontology cannot be accomplished without posing at least two questions to it. The first question concerns the status of subjectivity. The second question regards the legitimate doubt that such ontology does not really account for reality as it is given in experience. In other words, why do we perceive things, if in fact what is primary is the network of relations? The two questions are clearly related to one another. Both Whitehead and Merleau-Ponty have raised these questions. I will address Merleau-Ponty's answer, which will provide us with at least some elements in order to discuss the status of subjectivity within the ontology of the flesh and of Vertical Being. In this doing, a brief mention to Whitehead's own position will also be made.

Vertical Being surrounds the subject instead of being in front of it. This means that the subject is not separated from Being, but is part "of it". Yet "normal" perceptive experience tends to witness quite a different situation: according to it, the world is precisely what is given "in front" of a subject, in itself clearly distinguished from what it perceives. Why is this so? Why does the subject ignore its ties with the vertical world, and perceives it in terms of an ordered structure of separated things, in turn separated from the perceiving subject? Merleau-Ponty says that perception itself undergoes a process of learning, of education. One of the clearest examples of this education is the process by which, during the Renaissance, the artists have "normalized", according to precise rules, the mode of representation of the visual field. As a matter of fact, according to Merleau-Ponty perception is in itself always in need of a certain structure, because perception is not simply cognition, but a mode of being, perhaps the most important mode of being of the subject, when the subject itself is understood in terms of existence.[62]

Yet in this sense perception receives each time a certain, determined, historically and culturally conditioned structure, which other cultures and other epochs might ignore. Each particular "education" of perception, therefore, does not express "the" perceived world, because there is not "one" perceptual world. Each "world" is only one possibility amongst many others. Each historically or culturally given "educated" form of perception is thus a "taming" of wild perception, as the primordial relationship between flesh of the body and flesh of the world. This does not mean to say that perception is a form of convention.

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62   Cf. VI 212-13.

It is by its own "ontogenetic" force that perception tends to establish a structure and to withdraw itself from its own polymorphism.[63] But precisely this passage is what is covered by the work of perception itself, which masks its own masking the wild, vertical Being, and provides the subject with a well-ordered, "polite" world. Why does this happen?

It happens, as Merleau-Ponty says already in PhP,[64] because perception must hide its ontological functioning, which does not only consist in giving objects, but also in instituting a "level", a "background" within which the objects can emerge. Thus perception is not only the gestaltic emergence of a figure against a background (which could be called the ontic function of perception), but also the institution of the ground itself (its ontological function). This is why the perceptive body is said by Merleau-Ponty to exercise a work of norm-giving,[65] The body institutes, through perception, not only a system of objects, but most of all the presence of the system itself. Through perception, the body can thus "live" in a (relatively) ordered world. But this order is not the mirroring of an actually existing order, for the notion of "Vertical Being" names precisely the absence of any order. Thus perception must hide its function of instituting the order, as a condition for the subject to believe in an ordered world, which is to say, in the last analysis, as a condition for the subject to be. This explains why the access to Raw or Vertical Being cannot be accomplished through simple reflection, but must be worked out through a "psychoanalytic" interrogation,[66] for perception constitutively conceals its own work and breaks with Raw Being,[67] negating its own negation with respect to the primal "there is".

This conception of "wild" perception as the one proper to a subject which is not identified in itself, but on the contrary is in constant, unsurpassable intercorporeal interconnection with other subjects and the world, explains why we, separated and independent subjects, do not usually perceive in this way: institution of an ordered world, and institution of subjectivity itself as individuated, are the two sides of the same process. The subject who says "I" is the subject emerged from this state of indivision.

But why does the subject emerge at all? Although there is no final answer, in Merleau-Ponty's texts, to this question, nevertheless it is a

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63   Cf. *ibidem*.
64   Cf. PhP 247-48, 249-50, 253-54.
65   Cf. VI 103.
66   Cf. VI 189-90, 269-70.
67   Cf. VI 248.

legitimate question, and in raising it one can see that Merleau-Ponty is not performing a celebration of the mystical union of subjects in the "glorious Flesh", which at times some readers have found in his works. My suggestion is that Merleau-Ponty accounts for the emergence of subjectivity, properly understood, within the framework of a double process. On the one hand, each subject is "subjected" to a progressive series of dialectical disequilibria, which are due to the fact that some form of alterity is present already from the start in each subject. Otherness, be it in the form of the plurality of the body itself, in that of the relationship between the body and the objects, or in that — crucial, according Merleau-Ponty, as the lectures on psychology witness — proper to the presence of other subjects as "always already there" when a new subjective history begins, is a constitutive part of the "belonging" of the subject itself. The relationist account of the structure of subjectivity is precisely meant to account for this chiasmic interconnection.[68] Alterity is the mark showing that the subject is open from the beginning, and can never close this openness. Far from being its "becoming true", to close this openness would lead to the disappearance of subjectivity.[69]

But, on the other hand, Merleau-Ponty never abandons the will to "define" this form of subjectivity, which is not understandable unless it is grasped in its "relationality". It is then relationality itself that is in need of new categories. The "identity" of the subject is itself a relation, or better a structure of relations. Yet this very structure is what constitutes the subject's "singularity". In each relation, in each chiasm, there is something that manifests itself only as "the other side", both of each single relation, and of their temporal, genetic structure. Merleau-Ponty seems to say that the "ipseity" of a subject is not opposed to the subject's being made of relations, and relations of relations. And yet, precisely in this multiplication of relations, something manifests itself, although in an enigmatic, reverted way, as that which "is not" each of these relations, although not being "different than", or "elsewhere with respect to", these relations. It cannot be given unless through the relations, but precisely as that which is not reducible to the relations. I take this to be one of the meanings of Merleau-Ponty's concept of invisible.[70]

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68 Cf. VI 238-39.
69 Cf. VI 147-49, in particular where Merleau-Ponty shows that it is precisely the failure in closing upon itself that allows the flesh to remain open.
70 Cf. VI 246 and, most of all, 254-57.

There is a passage in Adventures of Ideas in which Whitehead states something which can be compared with Merleau-Ponty's own position. After having acknowledged that any relationist ontology poses a problem for the possibility to account for subjective identity, Whitehead does not renounce his ontology, but on the contrary finds a way to characterize it without substantializing it: he evokes the enigmatic Platonic concept of χωρα.[71] This is precisely the idea that there is something formless, yet receptive of each form, which is not given unless in relation to each form but can be reduced to none of them. Merleau-Ponty maintains the same thesis when acknowledging that negativity, if properly understood, that is, if not turned into a new positivity, can be grasped only in terms of "the untouchable of the touch, the invisible of vision, the unconscious of consciousness", which means that negativity is such only if seen as the "other side or the reverse (or the other dimensionality) of sensible Being; one cannot say that it is there, although there would assuredly be points where it is not".[72] This invisible, untouchable subject, given as the "central punctum caecum", as the "blindness that makes it consciousness i.e. an indirect and inverted grasp of all things",[73] can be understood only within the whole framework of its relations, of its chiasms, but as the irrelative which translucently appears, in its "double-bottomed" presence,[74] through the chiasms themselves.

We have reached at this point a conclusion that, although provisional, allows us to see in what sense Merleau-Ponty envisions a reform of phenomenology that can become a renovated ontology. The radicalization of the method of the phenomenological reduction leads to investigating its dialectical presuppositions, in turn bringing up the issue of the relationist framework in which to situate the overcoming of the pacified or "embalmed" notion of dialectic that according to Merleau-Ponty still encumbers Sartre's version of it. Before turning to the problem of the natural or cosmological roots of subjectivity, which permit to grasp the real meaning of Merleau-Ponty's reversion of subjectivity, a final step is yet to be taken. We need to discuss the chiasmic relationship between subjects and its meaning for the ontology of the flesh. This will be done in the next chapter.

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71   Cf. AI 187.
72   VI 255.
73   Cf. *ibidem*.
74   Cf. *ibidem*.

IV
TOGETHERNESS AND SEPARATION[1]

Introduction

From a phenomenological point of view, the question concerning intersubjectivity is the question *par excellence*. Merleau-Ponty repeatedly and emphatically reminds us that, according to Husserl, the true transcendental subject is intersubjectivity.[2] But what does it mean to say that transcendental subjectivity should be understood as intersubjectivity? Merleau-Ponty relies, in fact, especially on what Husserl writes in his last major work, The Crisis of European Sciences. Yet it could be shown (as it has been done by Alexander Schnell), that the notion of intersubjectivity deployed by Husserl in the Cartesian Meditations is already describing it in terms of a relationship. A relationship between a "me" and an "other" which can be ascertained in its structure by means of an egological description that, however, does not confine me in my solipsism, but on the contrary is the only way I can really come to understand what it means to be in a relation with others.

One could therefore happily conclude that Merleau-Ponty was right and that he simply did not acknowledge the presence, already in the Cartesian Meditations, of what he was looking for only in the very last period of Husserl's work. Yet, the situation seems more complicated. On the one hand, Merleau-Ponty's analysis in PhP is not his last word. On the other, and in connection with Merleau-Ponty's own development, it seems necessary to take Sartre's criticism of Husserl into account, for it constitutes a relevant step towards Merleau-Ponty's ontological

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1   In this text the quotations from Sartre's work are given directly in English. I have used the following English translations (followed by the abbreviations): J.-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (BN), translated by H. Barnes, New York: Citadel Press, 2001.

2   Cf. PhP xiv evoking Husserl's *Crisis*.

generalization of intersubjectivity into his endo-ontology of the flesh, which in turn should represent a radicalization of Husserl's claim that the true transcendental subject is intersubjectivity. Accordingly, I intend to devote some analyses to Sartre's own description of the I-Other relationship. It is my contention that only through this path does it become possible to fully appreciate Merleau-Ponty's approach to the whole issue in The Visible and the Invisible and coeval writings. In what follows, I will therefore briefly sketch, in the first place, Sartre's criticism of Husserl's account, and then move on to Merleau-Ponty's own two-step argument. I hope to show that Merleau-Ponty develops Husserl's own perspective while fully acknowledging the importance of Sartre's criticism. In this movement it seems possible and indeed appropriate to read a development of the issue about intersubjectivity towards its ontological status.

Sartre and the look

In his Being and Nothingness, as is well known, Sartre introduces the theme of intersubjectivity in terms of the Being-for-Others relationship. Consciousness, understood in quasi-Hegelian terms as the For-Itself, is not only the pure light cast upon the realm of Being (the In-Itself), but also an encounter with other individuals, endowed with consciousness as well. The whole issue consists in adequately describing this encounter, which according to Sartre, who follows Hegel in this aspect as well, is a clash. It is important, however, to grasp the meaning of this clash within the properly Sartrean context, for it differs from Hegel's struggle of consciousnesses in several relevant aspects. In the chapter devoted to "the existence of other", the term "existence" is the most relevant, and should not be overlooked. It explains the order adopted by Sartre in discussing the issue: Husserl precedes Hegel who in turn is followed by Heidegger. The reason for this temporal incongruity is the issue we are discussing: according to Sartre, Husserl did not recognize the existential, hence ontological, relevance of the I-Others relationship, limiting his approach to an analysis of intentional consciousness and therefore posing the problem in terms of knowledge. But knowing others is possible only if they appear and manifest themselves in their full existential weight. This is the reason why Heidegger is the only one who, according to Sartre, rightly understands the ontological relevance of the connection

between human beings, in his describing the "being-with" of Dasein, the Mit-Sein, as a structural feature of its being, and not as a property of its mind or reason.

Between Husserl and Heidegger, however, Sartre places Hegel's discussion of self-consciousness and the Master-Slave dialectic. This seems to be incongruous within Sartre's argument, for in Hegel the problem is to account in what terms consciousness can become self-consciousness. Sartre is writing, however, after the famous lectures held by Kojève on Hegel's Phenomenology, and is clearly influenced by this peculiar interpretation, which basically ontologizes Hegel's consciousness, understanding it in terms of Heidegger's Dasein. But the true relevant aspect of Sartre's discussion of Hegel is to be seen in the means it provides in order to criticize Husserl's account. Sartre is basically correct in rendering Husserl's main argument, as it is developed in the fifth Cartesian Meditation (and in Formal and Transcendental Logic as well). He remarks that «for Husserl the world as it is revealed to consciousness is inter-monadic» (BN 209), and that Husserl is willing to refute solipsism, by showing that «a referral to the Other is the indispensible condition for the constitution of a world». Obviously, the other is present in the world «not only as a particular concrete and empirical appearance but as a permanent condition of its unity and of its richness». The hint at the empirical appearance should not be underestimated, for it is in this respect that Sartre will also criticize Heidegger's account, charged with being too transcendental, or ontological, and not empirical or ontic enough as well. Sartre, in other words, is willing to prove that the real encounter with the Other must be placed in the proper ontological framework, which is ontico-ontological and therefore both empirical and transcendental, that is, truly concrete. Heidegger is then charged with a relative inadequacy as well as the others, although he fares better than them.

Yet what is the main accusation moved by Sartre to Husserl? Husserl is certainly making progresses with respect to the classical (which in Sartre's language means Kantian) description of the other as an object constituted by the transcendental Ego. Yet, «in spite of these undeniable advantages, Husserl's theory does not seem to us perceptibly different from Kant's. This is due to the fact that while my empirical Ego is not any more sure than the Other's, Husserl has retained the transcendental subject, which is radically distinct from the Ego and which strongly resembles the Kantian subject» (BN 210). The sin, in other words, consists in referring the discussion to the level of transcendental

subjectivity. Why is it a sin? Several reasons are adduced by Sartre. In the first place, the Other is then reduced to «a kind of supplementary category, which would allow a world to be constituted, not a real being existing beyond this world. Of course, the "category" of the Other implies in its very meaning a reference from the other side of the world to a subject, but this reference could be only hypothetical. It has the pure value of the content of a unifying concept; it is valid in and for the world» (ibidem). This hint at the Other as being outside the world of the knowing transcendental subject is the most important aspect of this discussion. But Sartre also adds another consideration. If the Other is acquired through a knowing consciousness, then it will never be a real other, for it will always depend on my knowing it. This is the truly Hegelian teaching that Sartre introduces in the debate.

Thus the main pitfalls that Sartre criticizes in Husserl's account are: its understanding the other as being enclosed within a transcendental, that is, epistemological and not ontological, realm, and its being inevitably dependent on the knowing subject. True, as Sartre remarks further on, Husserl has indeed seen that the Other is, within the sphere of the proper Ego, only an absence. This notion of absence is praised by Sartre, for it is certainly something different than a property or attribute of an object. Husserl's theory of knowledge is clearly more complex than the classical, i.e. basically Aristotelian, model. But this absence merely reflects the fact that I must know the other as he knows himself, which is impossible. And after all, how to account, at least within Husserl's philosophy, for a full intuition of an absence? «The only reality which remains is therefore that of my intention; the Other is the empty noema which corresponds to my directing toward the Other, to the extent that he appears concretely in my experience. He is an ensemble of operations of unification and of the constitution of my experience so that he appears as a transcendental concept» (BN 211). One could here remark, in passing, that this notion of absence might be much better exploited than the way Sartre does. There could be, in other words, an ontological understanding of this absence, which in turn should be deepened, and this might be done along at least three lines: Eugen Fink's me-ontology, Levinas' trace, and Derrida's difference. All of them are indebted with Husserl, whose work, therefore, seems to possess other virtues, and not only the vices Sartre is accusing it of. Yet we are interested, in this chapter, in grasping Merleau-Ponty's appropriation of Sartre's criticism, and hence I will try to show in what sense this notion of absence receives an ontological interpretation in his endo-ontology of the flesh.

In order to do this, the main theme that must be discussed is the aspect of total irretrievable otherness, inassimilable by the subject, that is represented by the ontological interpretation of the Other put forward by Sartre. This emerges in its full force through the analysis of the peculiar "phenomenon" of the look. What, or better, who is, in fact, the other? According to Sartre, it essentially is «the one who looks at me» (BN 233). The importance of this statement cannot be underestimated, for, as we will see, it is crucial for Merleau-Ponty's ontology of visibility as well. What is important to grasp is in fact the ontological role granted by Sartre to the look. Let us therefore analyze the phenomenon of the look. In the first place, Sartre shows that the look is what reduces my transcendence to its being transcended. This means, in Sartrean language, that the look of the other is what produces an objectivation of the freedom proper to my consciousness or "for itself". It is not the same thing to look at the other and to be looked at by it. In the first case, I am free and the other remains a phenomenon for me. But in the second case, I become a phenomenon for the look of the other, and this radically transforms my ontological condition. While I can see the other looking at me, I cannot see, properly speaking, its look. For the basic, fundamental feature the look of the other is endowed with, is that of not being a phenomenon-for-me, but precisely something I cannot turn into a phenomenon for and of my intentional consciousness.

If that were the case, then it would still consist in a relation of consciousness and knowledge, and thus something deriving its nature from me. Hence it would not be something other properly speaking. Therefore what is really other is that which escapes me, and thus transcends my transcendence. Obviously, I can say that I see others, but my vision is grounded on my exposition, my activity relies on a fundamental passivity. My seeing the other takes place only insofar as it is disclosed by a "being-seen-by-the-other" which is its truth.

This look that brings me to my truth of being-seen is not necessarily something present or actual. It is not necessarily an eye either. It is present without being there. It is the exposition I am without having been the origin of it. And it manifests the other precisely in this never having been originated in and by me. The other, thus, is other properly speaking only in its being a look which imposes itself over my own. If I try to grasp it, I will always fail. I will always see eyes, that is, something "in-itself", objects. I structurally cannot see the other's look. But this is not mere negativity, it is no mere lack. On

the contrary, it is something that, precisely in its "unassimilability", weighs on me in an unbearable way. Its mark is, as is well known, shame. I feel ashamed when I am looked at. The look, therefore, is present without being an object that could be intentionally constituted by me. Its presence is of another kind, and discloses another realm of being.

The aspect of this description that seems most important to underline is that it does not lend itself to being re-integrated within Husserl's analysis of the experience of the other, no matter what other means the latter can afford. And yet it is extremely relevant for a phenomenological ontology of experience. Merleau-Ponty, in fact, far from trying to simply reject Sartre's analysis, following many other attempts at discrediting Sartre for not being an orthodox phenomenologist, in his turn takes up and radicalizes the ontological relevance of the look. In this doing, he is also able to show the weakness of the still partial description provided by Sartre. We will consider now at least some of the features Merleau-Ponty endows the look with, by discussing in particular his later works.

Merleau-Ponty and the ontology of visibility

One very important achievement of Sartre's discussion is that the look, not being reducible to the physical function of an organ, nor to the action of spirit, is thus freed from any dependence, and cannot be explained, except by assuming its radical originality. The look does not depend on the activity of a body or of a mind. It is there. It precedes the eye-I. One could even say that it is the eye that depends on the look, for the eye appears as eye insofar as it plays the role of something looking at something. This statement might sound strange, but follows from what can be shown by analyzing the natural phenomenon of the ocelli, that is, those eye-like spots that several animals display on their body, either to attract or to frighten other animals. In fact, both Sartre's description and Merleau-Ponty's further development of this theme show that 1) the look in itself is independent from the actual presence of a person, for I can feel I am watched even by a house or a bush; 2) on the contrary, the simulation of the eye by the ocellus displays an ontological feature of the look: what matters here is clearly not that a particular organ be simulated, with such and such physical properties, but its functional capacity to look.

In other words, it is vision that is simulated, and not the organ as a piece of flesh. The look therefore is there, it is present, even when the eye is not an eye but a simulacrum. This is already true in the natural realm, which is something that prevents this phenomenon from being understood only as pertaining to the human realm. The notion of mimesis is here reverted.

This consideration is of the utmost importance in order to correctly appreciate the meaning of Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh as visibility. Vision, in other words, is incarnated, but is not a function of the body. It precedes the body and even allows the body to be what it is. Once again, a reversion of the usual way of understanding the relation between body and mind, either perceiving or thinking, is here at work. Merleau-Ponty, as we now know thanks to the publication of the lectures on nature held at the Collège de France for three years, spent much effort and time studying the work of theoretical biologists such as J. von Uexküll, Konrad Lorenz, Raymond Ruyer, Viktor von Weizsäcker, Adolf Portmann and many others. His aim was to check whether this notion of visibility can be found at work already in the pre-human world of living organisms. A whole different conception of living nature thus emerges, although a concept of nature which is not philosophical and hence opposed to the scientific one, but on the contrary, a notion that is required by scientific research itself. We will come back on this issue in the next chapter.

It is this nature, in which visibility is not a secondary aspect, but its central structural core, which can provide Merleau-Ponty with the means to generalize the function of the look that Sartre limits to human beings, and at the same time to revise and radicalize his own concept of incarnated subjectivity, which in the Phenomenology of Perception was already conceived of in terms of intercorporeality, but which lacked a satisfactory examination of the ontological implications of such notion. In his first major work, Merleau-Ponty already described the subject in terms of an anonymous field of experience, in which the others are already there without being individuals. Against Sartre, freedom is seen, accordingly, not as an absolute fact that the irruption of the Other can only destroy, but as an interplay that takes place in the uncertain and fleeting field of the present: as Merleau-Ponty writes, «what is given, is not one fragment of time followed by another, one individual flux, then another; it is the taking up of each subjectivity by itself, and of other subjectivities by each other in the generality of a single nature, the cohesion of an intersubjective life and a world.

The present mediates between the For Oneself and the For Others, between individuality and generality. True reflection presents me to myself not as an idle and inaccessible subjectivity, but as identical with my presence in the world and to others, as I am now realizing it: I am all that I see, I am an intersubjective field, not despite my body and historical situation, but, on the contrary, by being this body and this situation, and through them, all the rest». (PhP 525).

Yet, how to account for this intersubjective field, and, most of all, how to account for the extraneousness of the look of the other, if this anonymous field is somehow blurring all distinctions? How to take difference into account, both avoiding its absolutization like in Sartre, but at the same time acknowledging its presence? Being a good Hegelian, Sartre actually is right in remarking that Husserl's failure relies precisely in the fact that the absence Husserl is bringing to the fore in his phenomenological description of the constitution of the Alter Ego, despite all its merits, is not really producing the event of the Other, for the egological constitution performed by the Ego, in going out of itself towards this absence, is still remaining in itself. In Husserlian terms, it is transcendence within immanence, but never a true transcendence. The dialectical truth of Sartre's notion of the look resides precisely in his conviction that the only way a radical extraneousness can be described in phenomenological terms, is to understand it as something that is never prepared by the Ego, something, in other words, that irrupts in the sphere of the Ego as a trauma, that is, something which at once cannot be ignored but cannot be coped with.

We are thus presented with the issue Merleau-Ponty is facing in his attempt to generalize the function of the look in his indirect ontology of the flesh as generalized visibility: this notion must grant a role to negativity and absence, while at the same time avoiding Sartre's excessive opposition between the I and the Other, which ends up reverting negativity into a different positivity. The issue of intercorporeality then becomes the problem of adequately understanding negativity and separation in a world of generalized visibility, in which there is no pre-established distinction between subjects. In what follows, I wish to put forward, at the very least, the main tenets of this problem and sketch a plausible outline of Merleau-Ponty's solution.

Following the general perspective proper to the phenomenological approach to experience, Merleau-Ponty states, throughout his whole work, and in particular in the last writings, that there is a paradox

concerning subjectivity. On the one hand, the subject is "in" the world, but is irreducible to being a component of the world; on the other, the subject is "the" consciousness of the world, not despite, but precisely thanks to its being part of it. Accordingly, the subject is characterized in terms of its being "of" [*en-être*] Being itself.[3] In this sense, its place is a "between", placed as a surface of connection and separation of my body and the world. It is what Merleau-Ponty calls the "flesh", which is always at once flesh of my body and flesh of the world, and is neither only one of the two. In classical terms, it is a dyad preceding the One. It is the movement that at the same time connects and separates my body and the world, for the body is reflected by the world in which it is placed and acts, and the world in turn is reflected on the body upon which it effects its force. Merleau-Ponty calls this mutual interconnection a chiasm insofar as it is a double and crossed relation, according to which each term is the reverse of the other, it is the reversed mirror of the other.

The bodily subject, which was the cornerstone of the analysis offered in PhP, is now seen as a variation (although an eminent one) of Being as flesh. While the notion of incarnated subjectivity represented a significant weakening of any idealist interpretation of the phenomenological transcendental subject, now this effort to decenter the primacy of the Ego is carried on much further. The body precedes its identification and individuation, for it is seen as a fold in and of Being, a fold produced by the reversibility which characterizes Being itself. Being thus is seen as pure exteriority, which however folds back on itself through its experiencing parts, which are sensible bodies. It is this radical exposure to being perceived that produces the folds, which are constituted by the subjects. Subjectivity is a fleeting process in the general anonymous flux of Being. There is a strong Leibnizian modeling at work in Merleau-Ponty's last work, which should deserve a study in itself.

This description, however, would remain a simple metaphor, if the question concerning the look and the relationship between subjects were not be dealt with. Merleau-Ponty's indirect ontology, in fact, is motivated precisely by the need to generalize the role of the look and to appreciate its ontological value. One crucial path to follow in order to clarify this claim is to consider Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body as an "organ to be seen". Merleau-Ponty here follows A. Portmann's

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3   Cf. VI 123.

work on Animal Forms and Patterns: A Study on the Appearance of Animals. In a working note,[4] he writes:

> My body as an organ to be seen – i.e.: to perceive a part of my body is also to perceive it as visible, i.e. for the other. And to be sure it assumes this character because in fact someone does look at it – But this fact of the other's presence would not itself be possible if antecedently the part of the body in question were not visible, if there were not, around each part of the body, a halo of visibility – But this visible not actually seen is not the Sartrean imaginary: presence to the absent or of the absent. It is a presence of the immanent, the latent, or the hidden.

The body thus is not simply an empirical thing to be seen. It is something that carries in itself a visibility *de jure*.[5] And this visibility is made "in us" without us, without we knowing it. This vision that surrounds my body does not depend on my consciousness in order to take place, but on the contrary it precedes my awareness and grounds it. But this foundation of my awareness on the generality of visibility is not to be understood in terms of the deployment of an archè, the execution of a principle, for in fact, on the contrary, my awareness of myself is always a distance taken with respect to this anonymous look cast upon me. I become aware of myself as an individual precisely in separating my body from the surrounding world. Consciousness consists in breaking with this "Being of indivision" in which vision circulates without belonging to any particular individuated seer. Consciousness consists precisely in giving an identity to the look, in assigning a name to the anonymous look that permeates my body and which cannot be understood in terms of my intentional act. Intentionality, in Merleau-Ponty's ontology, belongs to Being. I am seen by Being before seeing it.

Consciousness is thus the fracture that produces a separation between me and the others. This means that the others are, in principle, always already there before I can become aware of this presence. Intercorporeality is precisely this "being caught" in the circulation of the looks, and in this sense is not the origin of intersubjectivity, but its shadow. Intersubjectivity can be established precisely when the intercorporeal bond is interrupted, and the anonymous look becomes the benign or malevolent gaze cast upon me, something which I can

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4   Cf. VI 244-245.
5   Cf. VI 137.

recognize as good or bad, but in any case as provided with a form. The look proper to generalized visibility, in which I am originally caught, is, on the contrary, something formless, something invisible not because of a lack, but in a certain sense because of an excess of visibility over vision. The identification of the identity of the one who looks at me is a process of reduction of the anonymous look into a recognizable face.

This process, however, is always transient and never accomplished. The face of the other emerges as the face of "someone", and of "someone else", only insofar as I am able to identify myself. In this doing, I emerge as "the other of the other". But this identification is clearly quite different from the access to my truth. Or rather, my truth is not what I imagined it should be. For the truth of this notion of Being as anonymous circulation of the look is that, as Merleau-Ponty aptly puts it, "I is no one". In a note dated September, 1959,[6] 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 (*écart*) 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 […] Anonymity and generality. That means: not a *nichtiges Nichts*, but a "lake of non-being", a certain nothingness sunken into a local and temporal openness.

The reference to Ulysses is further explained in another, striking note,[7] in which Merleau-Ponty compares "Ego" and "Outis", and which is worth quoting extensively:

> The I, really, is nobody, is the anonymous; it must be so, prior to all objectification, denomination, in order to be the Operator, or the one to whom all this occurs. The named I, the I named, is an object. The primary I, of which this one is the objectification, is the unknown to whom all is given to see or to think, to whom everything appeals, before whom… there is something. It is therefore negativity – ungraspable in person, of course, since it is nothing.

This note is striking in many respects. In the first place, it reminds us of Sartre's analysis of the I in his first work, The Transcendence of the Ego, where Sartre says that the Ego is a thing. Consciousness is

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6   Cf. VI 201.
7   Cf. VI 246.

the absolute light with no property, no identity, with respect to which the I is already an objectification, hence an "in itself", an intentional object «out there, in the dust», as he vividly puts it. Merleau-Ponty here seems to say almost the same. And yet there is a crucial difference: this negativity is not the ineffable, but univocally conceived, For-Itself Sartre talks about in BN. It is not a singularity, but a singularized generality. This is probably the most difficult aspect of Merleau-Ponty's ontology: and it constitutes the question that retains the interpreter in his quest for an understanding of Merleau-Ponty's concept of alterity. This "nothing", this "nobody", cannot be thought of in terms of a body. This would give it a form, an identity. But Merleau-Ponty explicitly excludes this possibility. Of course, as he writes, «I am always on the same side of my body» (VI 148). But I am not my body. I do not just coincide with it. I am rather in the openings that my body as touching-touched, seeing-seen, surface of reversibility and doubling, always opens anew and never definitively closes upon itself. This primordial I, this primary faceless I which is not an I as opposed to a You or to Others, is generality. It is visibility which folds back on itself. It is, as Merleau-Ponty also writes, a secondary and deeper Narcissistic circle that comes from Being rather than from me. In fact, Merleau-Ponty writes in VI 139 that

> There is vision, touch, when a certain visible, a certain tangible, turns back upon the whole of the visible, the whole of the tangible, of which it is a part, or when suddenly it finds itself surrounded by them, or when between it and them, and through their commerce, is formed a Visibility, a Tangible in itself, which belong properly neither to the body qua fact nor to the world qua fact – as upon two mirrors facing one another where two indefinite series of images set in front of one another arise which belong really to neither of the two surfaces, since each is only the rejoinder of the other, and which therefore form a couple, a couple more real than either of them. Thus since the seer is caught up in what he sees, it is still himself he sees: there is a fundamental narcissism of all vision. And thus, for the same reason, the vision he exercises, he also undergoes from the things, such that, as many painters have said, I feel myself looked at by the things, my activity is equally passivity – which is the second and more profound sense of the narcissism: not to see in the outside, as the others see it, the contour of a body one inhabits, but especially to be seen by the outside, to exist within it, to emigrate into it, to be seduced, captivated, alienated by the phantom, so that the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen. It is this Visibility, this generality of the Sensible in itself, this anonymity innate to Myself that we

have previously called flesh, and one knows there is no name in traditional philosophy to designate it.

The reference to this double narcissistic movement should be retained in its literality. It is not a metaphor, it is the attempt at describing this structure, which, as Merleau-Ponty writes, has no name in traditional philosophy, by which a subject is at once self-manifesting itself through its own perceiving the world, and bringing the world itself to its self-manifestation through that particular sensible which the subject is. This is the truth of the chiasm. If, earlier on, the name of Leibniz has been evoked, now clearly another German philosopher resonates in these words: Schelling. It is well known that Merleau-Ponty was influenced, in the last phase of his work, by Schelling's philosophy at least to the same extent than by Hegel's. But this is not a mere question of tracing textual influences, no matter how relevant this issue can be in itself. It is the question of an ontological account of visibility, that is, not a psychological, neurological, or even spiritualistic account of the act of seeing, but the attempt to understand the very stuff of which we are made, the element (in the pre-Socratic sense by which Merleau-Ponty understands this term) from which we, as individuated subjects, emerge.

Thus, the last word that it seems possible to extract from Merleau-Ponty's highly metaphorical ontology (but we will come back on the question of metaphors), is a word concerning the relationship between incarnated subjects as folds of a general visibility. Each subject is the product of an incessant process of crystallization (whose temporality is complex and certainly not linear, a question dealt with in the third section of this book) which at once produces its own, fleeting and transient, identity and that of the world. Thus the identity of the subject, far from being destroyed by the encounter with the other's look, as in Sartre's model, is brought to its emergence. But at the same time it is entrusted to a form that is but the reverse of a formless, invisible and circulating visibility, which is there before the subject can see. This anonymous visibility does not depend on specific acts of vision. On the contrary, each act is possible only insofar as it consist of a single crystallization of a constant endless process. The I emerges as the pole "to which" vision is given, and "from which" acts of vision depart, only thanks to this crystallization. Each emergence is therefore only for a time. But this means that vision is already in me before I know it. It is always already "me" before I can name the others and, correspondingly, myself.

Thus the truth of my identity is a general anonymity, which I cannot plainly assume without immediately losing my personal identity. Before the otherness of the look of the other, there is a deeper, darker otherness that is the absence of individuals, the impossibility of ontologically distinguishing what is separated by consciousness. Within the intra-ontology of the flesh there is no room for a metaphysical or juridical notion of personality. Yet this ontology, far from negating any value to the notion of personality, is what explains its reason and motivation. A person, as the Latin etymon explains, is a fiction, a mask. Yet, it is a necessary one, not a joke. It is the attempt to give a shape to what is shapeless, for it is just the reverse side of the general togetherness that is the flesh. We are thus always already together, but this togetherness is very different from the Heideggerian Mit-Sein, which looks, at this point, quite reassuring. The primordial togetherness of the flesh is something inassimilable, something from which we must emerge, even though it remains our hidden truth.

It would be possible to argue that a philosopher apparently opposite to Merleau-Ponty in this respect, such as Levinas, is saying something strangely similar in his second great book, Otherwise than Being, when discussing the notion of primordial "there being-ness", the "il y a". This is an ontological notion that can be found both in Levinas and in Merleau-Ponty, although with apparently opposite meanings. But this opposition is, in the last analysis, more apparent than real. Levinas opposes the "il y a", seen as the realm of Being and anonymous existence, to the hypostasis of the singular existent, in order to show that the human being is something different than the mere physiological (in the Greek sense of *physis*) being-there. Yet this condition cannot be ignored, and even less negated. In this respect, Merleau-Ponty's ontology is an attempt at describing this primordial attachment to Being, without evaluating it. Clearly, the conclusion Levinas derives from his version of the notion of "il y a" is notoriously an "apology" of the otherness of the other human being, a Humanism of the other human being, as he entitles one of his books. There is no such perspective in Merleau-Ponty's last writings. But in this respect we cannot exclude that, had Merleau-Ponty survived his mortal stroke, the two philosophers might have brought forward a confrontation that was already on its way before the otherness of death would abruptly put an end to it.

Provisional conclusions

We have thus reached the end of this section. The section has been devoted to a discussion of the methodological questions raised by Merleau-Ponty's radicalization of phenomenology and its implications. As we have seen, the relationist perspective adopted by Merleau-Ponty produces important effects in view of a development of Husserl's phenomenological approach that, at once, prolongs and subverts the ontological perspective implicit in the Husserlian version. It is meant to prolong it insofar as it develops the aspects concerning the incarnation of subjectivity that, as we have seen, Merleau-Ponty finds at work in Husserl's own standpoint. But the ontological implications of the incarnation of subjectivity lead Merleau-Ponty to question the very possibility that the transcendental subject be the origin of meaning. Without denying the role of subjectivity (and we will see in the third section in what sense this role is still present in Merleau-Ponty's approach), it becomes necessary to root it in that realm from which it emerges and to which it remains attached, while progressively distancing itself from. It is this process of emersion, distancing and attachment that must now be evaluated. This means to investigate the particular notion of nature worked out by Merleau-Ponty, a notion of nature seen as the soil (Husserl's *Boden*, which is not a *Grund*) on which any subject can stand and which provides the very possibility that subjectivity can manifest itself. It is the very relationist approach to ontology adopted by Merleau-Ponty that requires such an investigation. We need now to find out the reasons for such a claim.

SECTION TWO

TIME

V

TEMPORALITY OF THE FLESH
AND TEMPORALITY OF THE SUBJECT

Introduction

The investigation of the relationship between temporality and subjectivity in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy poses a number of problems, not only theoretically, but also practically speaking. Temporality is related to subjectivity and its manifestation. This approach is set up in the PhP and its outcome is a synthesis and an overcoming of Husserl's and Heidegger's models. In his first major work Merleau-Ponty reaches a determination of temporality in terms of self-manifestation of subjectivity that is, at once, its self-dispossession. Time is both the condition to reach an identity and the limit of it. There is a subject only insofar as there is a temporal field, which is open but also bound to end as it is marked by finitude.

And yet this first synthesis is not the last word in Merleau-Ponty's investigation. As will be shown in more details in chapter 8, his deepening of the relationship between perception and expression brings the importance of the notion of change to the fore. Change is a complex notion in Merleau-Ponty's approach, for it entails a phenomenological and an ontological level, each of which in turn are articulated in various layers. Change is a primal term insofar as it permits to understand reality differently than in terms of substances, things, permanence. But if this is true then the whole phenomenological project inherited from Husserl and developed in the PhP requires a deep revision. In methodological terms, this means a revision on the phenomenological reduction, as we have seen in the first chapter. This revision leads Merleau-Ponty to develop a peculiar, dialectical understanding of manifestation, which is seen as a manifestation "of" Being in the double genitive (hence the notion of chiasm as the peculiar structure of double determination that has been investigated in the third chapter). Being manifests itself (and is not the outcome of a merely subjective *Sinngebung*) but it manifests

itself to a subject that is "of" it. The subject thus emerges within the manifestation of Being itself. On the one hand, Being is the figure of which a subject is the ground, but on the other it is the subject itself to be the "figure" that is emerging out of a ground, which as such is invisible.

This peculiar structure of double determination and the complex path of manifestation that is connected to it, clearly imply that temporality can no longer be only the structure of manifestation of subjectivity, for it must be seen in its relation to Being as well. This co-implication indicates the possibility that temporality possesses a structure more complicated than the one discussed in PhP. It is this complex interconnection that will be studied in this section. The first step to take is an investigation of the temporality proper to the emergence of subjectivity. In order to accomplish this task, it is necessary to adopt a twofold approach: on the one hand we will investigate the need to overcome the model of temporal process understood in terms of self-manifestation of the subject; on the other, the problem of the intrinsic plurality proper to the subject, which in turn is connected with its primordial anonymity. It is in VI that the intrinsic relationship between the question of subjectivity and that of its temporality is clarified in connection with the twofold themes just mentioned. In this work the cornerstones of Merleau-Ponty's later theoretical position are established, although not always developed to the end: the distinction between the anonymous, carnal, sensible subject and the conscious subject; the nature of this anonymous subject; its structural characteristics; the temporality peculiar to the anonymous subjectivity as distinct from time in the usual sense; and finally the crucial question concerning how to understand subjective identity, to which is connected the problem of a phenomenological distinction between the sphere of belonging and the sphere of the extraneous.

According to Merleau-Ponty the process of progressive reductions leads to what he calls the vertical world of the flesh, that is, to raw Being as the Being of indivision and promiscuity. With respect to this, philosophy cannot simply act as if approaching a phenomenon supposedly "given", but must also discuss its own way of approaching it (VI 103). Philosophy as interrogation, therefore, is not so much the attempt to give an answer to the question of an originary event (VI 119-120), but rather the iteration and multiplication of the question itself, the questioning of the question. For this reason it is legitimate to maintain not only that Merleau-Ponty's concept of phenomenology

as interrogation represents a transcendental approach, but also that the concept of the transcendental is deeply transformed by this formulation (VI 128-129). The circularity of interrogation is put in the foreground in VI (166 and 177-178).

If nevertheless it is necessary to proceed with a linear analysis, this cannot mean the denial of the circularity. This calls for a clarification of the structure of the analytical articulation given by Merleau-Ponty to his investigation. The concept of vertical Being is, in the first place, the expression of the need to redefine "that which is there", the "il y a", by abandoning the concepts of traditional philosophy, since they are not neutral, but laden with a metaphysical pre-comprehension that, by remaining uninvestigated, would smuggle a hidden presupposition into the description (VI 38). To say this, however, does not mean to abandon all reflexive operations in favour of a return to the mirage of a direct intuition. On the contrary, it means to continue the reflexive inquiry in order to apply it to reflection itself. This in turn means to perform, as Merleau-Ponty says, a hyper-reflection (*surréflexion*) that does not end with the task of thematizing things, but furthermore puts into question this very thematization, and thus recognizes that it is the very concept of manifestation that is still to be understood. These considerations require a revision of the phenomenological method, if understood as based on the hypothesis of the possibility of reaching a founding and originary place of experience (VI 268). Merleau-Ponty sharply rejects this fundamental presupposition of Husserl's phenomenology: the necessity of arriving, through the procedure of progressive reductions, at an unshaken standpoint from which to build up the edifice of constitutive phenomenology (VI 179). This not only holds, as it is generally recognized, for Merleau-Ponty's criticism of the Husserlian analysis of subjectivity and of Husserl's concepts of the absolute flux of lived experiences (*Erlebnisse*) and of the originary impression. Merleau-Ponty also applies his criticism to that which could seem to be Husserl's answer to this criticism (an answer which, in fact, is at least partially derived from the need to reject Heidegger's criticism, dealing exactly with the Husserlian concepts of subjectivity and temporality), that is, the concept of life-world (*Lebenswelt*).

The complex of themes composing the Merleau-Pontyan reflection resulting in the ontology of VI is thus not easy to disentangle. This research on the temporality of the subject has found, in VI and in the coeval works, two fundamental themes, which are intertwined without, however, being completely unified: on the one hand, a deepening of the

concept of temporality in relation to the radicalization of the concept of subjectivity; on the other, the question of the genesis of subjectivity as a process of progressive individuation. These two themes constitute the two analytical directions followed by Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach. In the first place there is the operation of progressive reduction of experience, in the direction, however, not of a transcendental subject, and also not of intersubjectivity as it is understood by Husserl in his *Krisis*, but in direction of what is called the flesh. In the second place, there is the aspect that in Husserl's phenomenology consists in the progressive constitution of subjectivity, but which in VI takes the form of the process of subjectivation as progressive individuation and separation, as will be shown in what follows. This second aspect is less worked out, and less easily extractable from the working notes, one reason being the difficulty encountered by Merleau-Ponty in opening a path through completely unknown ground.

The primordial past

> [T]he presence of my whole past sedimented into existentials» (VI 192).

The past is present; in a certain way the past does not pass. For this reason, time as totality is the co-presence of incompossibles. However, the past is not "present" in the way the present is. The past sediments itself. The sedimentation of the past means its presence as latency, which in turn means that the past is neither fully present nor is it nothing: its being is the one proper to the invisible and not to the *nihil privativum*. Merleau-Ponty thus suggests a model that contrasts with Husserl's: the past is not to be "re-presentified" by an act of the subject that somehow makes the past resurrect (VI 243). On the contrary, the past is in any case present, but in the mode of the de-structuration. Something can be forgotten, not because it is physically or mentally exhausted, like a flame which is extinguished, but insofar as the subject has lost its vital relationship with it, which characterizes the present (VI 194-195). Therefore, if from a "subjective" point of view the past no longer exists, from the point of view of the vertical world the past still exists, even though its existence is "incompossible" with respect to that of the present. But precisely this is what defines the vertical world as a temporal magma, as Merleau-Ponty says in his lectures borrowing Claude Simon's expression. This fact, as Merleau-Ponty remarks,

forces us to reconsider the present itself and its condition with respect to perception. Present perception is not the reception of a given world, its representation or portrait, but the institution of a symbolic structure that "makes the structured world exist".[1] The present world is therefore the effect of a structuration performed by the subject; this does not mean, however, that the subject is the external author of the world. The subject is on the contrary so little an external constituting subject, that the past can involuntarily re-emerge.[2] The past here operates in such a way as to render the subject passive, so that the subject undergoes the return of the memory or its indelibility, rather than organizing its re-presentation by way of an expressed act.[3]

Before being a relationship of disappearance and recalling through remembrance, the relation of past and present is a relationship of sedimentation and reactivation.[4] Reactivation is thus not the outcome of a decision, performed by a conscious subject, but the result of an anonymous form of intentionality that acts below consciousness itself, and to which the subject is "subjected". The same is true for sedimentation. In general, perception is not a property "of" the subject, its "faculty", but an anonymous activity, a form of passivity of — or within — activity (VI 189). Perception, Merleau-Ponty states in VI, is "the unconscious". This means, in Merleau-Pontyan terms, that perception is in the first place a form of dialectic between the bodily subject and the environment, between the flesh of the subject and the flesh of the world. That is, a process by which the subject (which, as a transcendental field, is open once and for all to the world, is exposed to the events and cannot cease to be it, unless when it dies; in other words it cannot cease to perceive), takes a position with respect to Being much before being aware of it.

However, this processual dialectic of the bodily subject does not cease developing itself throughout the whole span of the subject's life, and therefore does not constitute so much its past and its prehistory, as its present. This entails a revision of the concept of the genesis of subjectivity, with which we will deal below. In order to adequately

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1   This is Merleau-Ponty's thesis from *The Structure of Behaviour* onwards, and is expressed in VI by speaking of creation as the sole mode of adequation.
2   Cf. the reference to Proust in the opening of the note of VI 193-197.
3   Obviously, Merleau-Ponty does not deny the possibility of the act of ri-memoration as presentification. However, this is a secondary possibility with respect to the nature of the bodily subject. Cf. VI 190-1.
4   This thesis is repeated until the end: cf. the note in VI 258-259.

confront this problem it is necessary to analyze the dialectic of the present in relation to the concept of linear development and of the absolute position of the moments of time.

Presence of the past and presence of the present

The institution of the new present, as we have seen, cannot be understood in terms of the sheer irruption of a new trait — be it extended or not — corresponding to the disappearance of the one which precedes it. The novelty of the new present consists in the re-structuration it produces with respect to the system subject-world. It is not therefore a portion of a uniform process, but a discontinuity. Certainly, common sense is so used to thinking of time in terms of a continuous unfolding, that what Merleau-Ponty states here is quite counterintuitive. However, we must reflect on the fact that the subject does not experience the flow of time as if it were external to it, and therefore were consubstantial with the totality of the flux. The image of time as a homogeneous and continuous line is but a metaphorical generalization, grounded, in the last analysis, on certain natural processes, which cannot exhaust the definition of temporality. Human life, for example, can be conceived of as the unfolding of a linear process only at the price of abstracting it from all the concrete events it encounters. In reality, however, the concrete development of existence is made of conflicts, regressions, progressions: it is constantly pushed forwards and constantly turned backwards.

The idea of life as a homogeneous flux carries with it the false presupposition that what passes accumulates itself somewhere in a physical sense, and exists like the present, but somehow concealed to vision. According to Merleau-Ponty, this metaphor is still at work even in Husserl's analysis (VI 193-197). But the real question is that of understanding how the present is structured in relation to the past (and the future), while being all that there is (which is why Merleau-Ponty characterizes the present, in PhP, in terms of what is there, whereas past and future are non-beings because not there). At this point a change takes place in Merleau-Ponty's position, although this change is less a rejection of his previous position than its articulation and development.

PhP states that the subject is always in the present mode, it is the very place of presence. This present is certainly "extended" in the Merleau-Pontyan sense, insofar as it is edged with protentions and retentions

as affective presences. Past and future, however, are not, that is, their mode of being is that of non-being, as having-been or as having-to-be. It has been shown that this Merleau-Pontyan analysis follows Heidegger, while deepening the concept of the corporeity of the subject, and thus the concept of the relationship between temporality and perception.[5]

In VI, by contrast, the status of the past and the future is understood in terms of "mythical" temporality (VI 24). This does not in the least mean a jump into irrationalism on Merleau-Ponty's part. On the contrary, it derives from the coherent performance of a phenomenology of phenomenology itself: the comprehension of the past and the future in terms of non-being shows itself, through the scrutiny of a phenomenological description, to be influenced by a presupposition of a metaphysical sort (VI 243-244). Such a presupposition still underlies the analysis contained in PhP, insofar as the analysis of the past the and future is subordinated to the primacy that the present still enjoys, even though weakened by the way Merleau-Ponty conceives of subjectivity as bodily subjectivity. Thus it is not necessary for Merleau-Ponty to abandon the theoretical horizon set forth in PhP, but only to deepen it.

The images of time in terms of encasing and cycle, which come to the surface in the later writings and lectures, must be seen in this light. Merleau-Ponty never abandons the reference to the present as the place of presence, but re-comprehends presence itself through the presence of the past as sedimentation and monumental past, and of time as magma (VI 229-230). The present is no longer the place of the manifestation of the past as past, and of the future as future, but is the effect of a structuration and something like the crystallization of a temporal magma, in which the subject appears more as the effect than as the origin of the crystallization. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty is simply continuing his work of weakening the notion of subjectivity, already initiated in his earlier works, without this meaning the total disappearance of subjectivity. The subject must be understood as emergence and not as the origin of the emergence.

The cycle of the present is thus not a physical process, but is not a wound inflicted on an external contemplating subject either. It is a structuration that happens in the vertical world, and realizes a rearrangement of the

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5   Cf. P. Ricoeur, "Par-delà Husserl et Heidegger", in M. Richir et E. Tassin (éds.), *Actualités de Merleau-Ponty*, Les cahiers de philosophie, 7, 1989, pp. 17-24. English translation "Merleau-Ponty Beyond Husserl and Heidegger", in B. Flynn, W.J. Froman and R. Vallier (eds.), *Merleau-Ponty and the Possibilities of Philosophy*, Albany: SUNY Press, 2009, pp. 25-32.

temporalizing vortex. It is a pulsation that produces sedimentations and reactivations, brings to light or relegates to the background, transforms the subject and correlatively its world, emphasizes consciousness or on the contrary dissolves it into Being (VI 196-197, VI 238-239). The modalities with which each pulsation of the present structures itself are yet to be further investigated. We must clarify the meaning of the concept of sedimentation, and of the corresponding one of reactivation, in relation to the abandonment of the linear notion of time and the re-comprehension of the past in terms of monumental past.

Non linearity, retrograde movement, sedimentation

There are only a few places in which Merleau-Ponty analyzes this theme. But there are two notes, both inspired by a confrontation with Bergson and Freud, which pose the issue in terms that are clear enough to offer at least a basis for analysis. In a rather old note, already partially quoted above, which has the title «Perception – unconscious – One - retrograde movement of the true – sedimentation (of which the retrograde movement of the true is a part)» (VI 189-190), Merleau-Ponty poses the problem of understanding what is the temporal structure of perception. This text examines the question of understanding the way in which a perception can both be "prepared" by what precedes it, and yet happen suddenly, as it were. That which, before the advent of the actual perception, is but an unrelated manifold of elements, suddenly is put together so as to show that each single element is in fact a part and a sign of the total structure. An obvious example of this phenomenon is that of the recognition of a physiognomy in the gestaltic illustrations. That which at first is just a chaos of spots, abruptly precipitates in what now appears to be for example the face of a woman. Merleau-Ponty generalizes this model, by extending it to the phenomenon of the comprehension of the meaning of a discourse (in a foreign language, that is in a case in which the sounds at first seem meaningless precisely because there is not the habit one has with one's own language, of "immediately" grasping the linguistic meaning). In reality this example shows that there is no immediate apprehension of the sound signs in the mother tongue either. The same applies to perception as well.

The question that this example, and every perception, poses, is that of clarifying how it structures an unrelated manifold of data into an ordered structure, without either simply copying the external world,

or conferring an external meaning on the world, as in the *Sinngebung* model. This problem is clearly the one already faced by Merleau-Ponty in PhP. In this concise note, and in the one dealt with below, Merleau-Ponty at once repeats and deepens the earlier analysis.

The movement of *Gestaltung* and *Rückgestaltung*, structuration and re-structuration, with which the note deals, can be seen as the explicative articulation of the concept of the cycle of the present. Without Merleau-Ponty mentioning it here explicitly,[6] the problem is that of the structure of the dimensional present, that is, of the system of articulation of the retentions and protentions. The example here chosen is significant because it clearly brings to light that which generally remains concealed and yet operates in every perception. Clearly, the meaning of the single perception cannot be given all at once at the beginning, and nevertheless must be analyzable. The process of perception is thus a structure in which what is before and what is after cannot be distinguished as so many discrete points on a line: that which comes earlier anticipates that which comes later and prepares it, and in turn that which follows has a retroactive effect on that which precedes, transforming it, not by making it what it was not, but paradoxically making it what it was.

What is the implication of this analysis? It entails the revision of the meaning with which past and future "are", and consequently also the re-comprehension of the sense of being (*Seinssinn*) of the present. I would like to stress, however, that what Merleau-Ponty performs here is not a rejection of his earlier position, but the development of a thesis that was already, at least implicitly, present in that work.

The "sensible data" of perception "are" and "are not" a structure. They are structured only in virtue of their perceptive "precipitation". Thus that particular manifold of spots of ink, which then reveals itself to consist in a human shape, can be said to be "from the beginning" a human shape only through the very process of perception, which is a process of transformation (presentation) and not of representation, as Merleau-Ponty repeatedly remarks. The ontological status of the shape "before" the effective perception is thus ambiguous. It cannot be described in terms of the ordered structure that the perceived shape effectively is, without however being totally extraneous to it. It can only be explained by using the phenomenological concept of horizon, in the sense of something that is given in itself in an ambiguous and

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6   Which yet is what Merleau-Ponty does in the following note, discussed below.

slippery, undefined mode. Obviously there are things, like perceptual objects, which can be reduced by the process of perception from their status of horizon to that of object, whereas there are others, such as the world, which can never pass to the condition of object. This does not prevent the perceptual object from being the outcome of a crystallization that momentarily extracts it from its horizontal status, to put it back a moment later. This raises the question: what are the things when they are not perceived?

Before discussing this problem it is necessary to go further into the investigation of the temporality of perception. The co-implication of the temporal dimensions is at once intrinsic to the phenomenon, and yet analytically decomposable into its constitutive elements. If the initial data of a perception allow what Merleau-Ponty calls here "germination", the latter is however not distinguishable from its return-effect, that is, a germination is not a germination unless it produces the effect of appearing as the germination of the perceptive meaning that is realized in the process of perception. In other words, the manifold of the initial data is not always already the potential for germination, but it becomes so only if an effective perception takes place. Which is what produces the effect, paradoxical as it may be for common sense, according to which the past (of this very perception) produces itself as past only in its own future. It can appear as past if, and only if, there is a perceptive act that performs the transformation, an act which however is made possible by the initial datum as possibility for germination. But if this perceptive act accomplishes itself, then the initial datum "becomes" effectively the initial datum, that is, it becomes the past that produced the effective perception, it "becomes" what it "was". This is the meaning of the concept of retrograde movement of the true: the true appears "later" as that which "was" and "has always been". This fact has a direct connection with the concept of creation as the unique mode of adequation. Perception is the creative act that does not produce anything "new", but makes being the perceived as such. For this reason, perception is not a representation (a re-presentation), i.e. a reproduction, but a presentation.

It is evident that such an analysis has an effect on the common notion of present as that which is here and now: such a present, says Merleau-Ponty, in reality does not exist. It exists only as an abstraction and a simplification, and thus also a falsification, of what experience actually teaches (VI 184 and VI 190-191). It must also be underlined that the "true" present consists in this movement of crystallization that

can be reduced neither to a dimensionless point, nor to a succession of such separated points, without being however identifiable with an undifferentiated flux, since on the one hand it is a process of effective realization, and on the other the temporal dimensions are put in a relationship between themselves that can be described as chiasmic. This means: the past is not past unless given in reference to a future, and reciprocally for the future. However, these two relations are not identical, but on the contrary intersect each other, reciprocally determining one another according to the figure of the chiasm. It is not by chance, however, that common sense completely misconceives the nature of the dimensional present, nature which must then be brought to light with a procedure of reduction which is of a "psychoanalytical" kind: this process is in fact unconscious, and actually, as Merleau-Ponty underlines, is "the" unconscious itself.

The problem is then to clarify what, of the past, is put into being as past by the perceptive act. It cannot simply be erased as if it never was. And yet it is no longer present either. Merleau-Ponty provides an answer in the title of the note: the retrograde movement of the true is a particular instance of sedimentation. How to understand sedimentation? Elsewhere Merleau-Ponty maintains that the "In-Flowing" (*Einströmen*) is a particular case of sedimentation, that is, «of secondary passivity, that is, of latent intentionality — It is Péguy's historical inscription — — It is the fundamental structure of *Zeitigung*: *Urstiftung* of a point of time» (VI 173). The *Zeitigung*, temporalization, is therefore the (cyclical) process by which a certain present manifests itself in passing from an "atmospheric" or fluid condition, to one of crystallization. In perceptual terms, a thing appears, and in its appearing, as we have seen, transforms the perceptive world (as well as the perceiving subject, as we will see) by performing a symbolic re-structuration. The subject that has perceived will not be able not to have perceived, and its world is enriched by this perception that adds an element to its landscape (VI 258-259, VI 195). An institution (*Stiftung*) in fact is not simply an event, but an event that produces a difference.

The perceptive event thus inscribes itself into the history of the subject as a grain of dust, so that the history of a man almost resembles a mineral process of sedimentation of a layer on other layers. The difference is that a layer of rock, once deposited, remains where it is, whereas a subjective event can be forgotten. The sedimentation of the past thus not only is not separated from the phenomenon of forgetfulness, but serves to illustrate it and reciprocally is clarified by it.

The problem Merleau-Ponty must in fact face at this point is that of clarifying how the past can be conceived of in terms of sedimentation — that is, as something that somehow deposits itself somewhere, and remains there, until a reactivation supervenes, — and yet its presence is different from the presence of the present, for forgetfulness is not a physical erasure of the mnemonic trace: the essence of oblivion is that of an irrecoverable lack or loss.[7] A conception of the "monumental" past, that is, the past that is sedimented, which would not take into account this theme, would risk returning to a Bergsonian conception of time as accumulation, thus losing sight of the real nature of time as dialectic of presence and absence, i.e., in the last analysis, obliterating the place of temporal subjectivity, as we shall see. How, then, are memory and oblivion to be conceived within a perspective that ascribes these phenomena, not to the subjective conditions of a mind, or to the activity of the subject in general (VI 243), but to a processuality of an ontological kind that yet still makes room for the subject? The answer to this question must be found in the interpretation of the important note devoted to Bergson, transcendence and time (VI 193-197).

In between presence and absence

In this long and extremely dense note, Merleau-Ponty states that to conceive of the vertical world as the place in which the present produces sedimentations should not be dissociated from the fact that these sedimentations can be lost. One phenomenon is therefore to be seen as the reverse of the other. It is necessary to understand how «memory can be and can involve forgetting». Bergson's conception of the soul is in this respect insufficient, insofar as it does not articulate the phenomenon of oblivion, of loss. Correlatively, therefore, memory too cannot be conceived of in terms of the impression of a mnemonic trace (which is after all the old Platonic and Cartesian image of the wax on which the images are impressed).[8]

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7   On this theme, cf. the important essay by R. Duval, *Temps et vigilance*, Paris: Vrin 1990, pp. 37-86 in particular. Cf. also the analysis by R. Bernet on the problem posed for Husserl by his conception of the past, contained in *La vie du sujet* ("La presence du passé", in particular p. 217), Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1994.

8   In relation to this problem, it is also to be noticed that Merleau-Ponty is quick, right after having suggested that the solution of the problem is to be

An explanation of the trace must then be looked for in the structure of vision itself, understood not as a "subjective" phenomenon, but in terms of the "winding" [*serpentement*], i.e. the "modulation" of the "*être au monde*" which is neither (only) subjectivity nor (only) world, but their interrelation (VI 194). This interrelation is the primordial or originary element (not in a chronological sense), on the basis of which it is possible to understand the past in its double quality, as that which has been and cannot not have been, and as that which is lost, gone, past in the verbal sense of the term, and as such can no longer be present.

The interrelation is that third term to be introduced between subject and object, and which constitutes the perceptive sense as "separation" (*écart*) (VI 197). This gap can be more or less neat, more or less articulated. If the separation is reduced, then memory is "erased", and falls into oblivion, without this entailing an ontological disappearance, either in the physical or psychical sense. The past thus is sedimented and yet absent.

From this derives a conception of the vertical world, whose implications are numerous and rather paradoxical. The vertical world appears as a universe in which any event whatsoever inscribes itself in the "world" without being distinguished as subjective or objective event yet (VI 196). Events within this vertical world are related to one another not in a serially ordered relationship, but only in a topological relationship.[9] It is not therefore possible to state, within the vertical world, that an event precedes or follows another strictly speaking.

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found in the concept of vertical Being beyond the distinction subject/object, to ask himself what is the place for subjectivity («Mais alors comment comprendre la subjectivité?») In other words, Merleau-Ponty never intended to substitute the phenomenological conception of bodily subjectivity defended in *Phenomenology of Perception* with an ontology of the "world" or of Being asubjectively understood, — which would entail a falling back into a pre-phenomenological naturalism hardly believable on Merleau-Ponty's part — but rather to deepen the ontological condition of the bodily subjectivity itself.

9   In mathematics, a topological space is precisely the space in which there are no relations of order, which means for ex. that no angular measurement can be conducted. In such a space it is possible to define only relations of vicinity, togetherness, appurtenance, and so on. But such a space is not irrational, since the field of topological relations is treated by a mathematical discipline, topology, which is rigorous and axiomatic. Yet it is a space in which there are no privileged relations. It is in fact not an Euclidean (nor non-Euclidean) space, since these are metric systems. Furthermore it is a space in which each different metric is in itself possible without being implicit, so that the metric structuration of it belongs to the initiative of a *subject*.

This implies that the act of memory does not consist in the reproduction of the whole temporal scale, which would allow it to exactly localize a determinate point in time. To remember does not mean here to reproduce the scansion (linear or not) that exists between a certain past event and the present moment (VI 194). To remember means to make a connection between one point and another, and therefore it does not imply that certain memories will always precede others. There are memories that still persist at great temporal distance, and others that soon disappear. This conception of memory forces us to understand that the subject that remembers is not placed on a particular point of the time line (nor is it external to time). The fact that memory is a subjective process is not to be seen as belonging to the subject's faculties, but as an event that "produces" the subject in the form of the emergence of a relationship between a past and a present state. In its turn, the present state is not to be hypostasized as an absolute locus, as a point fixed in an eternal and independent space. The present "is" not, but "produces" itself (VI 195-196). It is therefore less the outcome of an act, than the effect of the process itself of the vertical world. It is in other words the effect of latent working intentionality.

In virtue of this process the vertical world articulates itself, precisely like a gestaltic structure appears through the passage of certain elements on the background, while others emerge on the foreground; and it realizes itself as a structure that has two faces: on the one side the ordered world with its perspectives, and on the other the subject placed "in front" to it. The world thus ordered, and the subject as separated from it, are thus the effect of a gestaltic crystallization (VI 197, VI 191). Such crystallization produces the segregation of the parts of the world into an ordered structure, in front of which the subject can take a position different from them (VI 136, VI 117).

Memory is thus not the reproduction of an anterior state, but a specific arrangement of the relationship between the bodily subject and the world. This implies that memories can erupt in the subject in a non-intentional way, and that the past is never remembered "exactly as it was". Most of all, it implies that events can get lost in oblivion or can persist as sedimentations that produce a re-structuration of the subject's history, without the subject being aware of this. It is this persistence, which Merleau-Ponty calls monumental, that makes of temporality

an anonymous processuality, in which the subject could not recognize itself. Memory is in fact not so much the imperturbable and disinterested reproduction of a clear and distinct registration, as a whole process of re-adaptation of its history performed by the subject. Memory is therefore dictated by interest, and finds its origin in the present. Thus past and present (and this is all the more true of the future) are not separated and unrelated moments, waiting for the synthetic activity of an external (that is, *Uninteressiert*) subject, but are related together in a chiasmic relationship of reciprocal co-determination. If the present is not what it is insofar as it proceeds from a past that is that determined past, in its turn the past is in relation to the present and depends on it (VI 268).

Yet we are here confronted with a problem: that of the possibility of rendering the objective past indistinguishable from the subjective one. To make the past dependent on the present's exigencies seems to entail that the essence of the past is completely equated with what can be remembered, whether memory be conceived in terms of a private affair or an intersubjective procedure. Does this mean that, to quote Nietzsche, there are no longer facts but only interpretations? In order to answer this question, further analysis is required. It is necessary in the first place to draw some conclusions concerning the philosophical meaning of Merleau-Ponty's conception of temporality. If we remember the starting point of the present inquiry, our question becomes that of understanding what concept of subjectivity emerges from this ontology of time. We have seen that Merleau-Ponty never gives up the problem of the status of subjectivity, which is indeed behind the scenes of the whole analysis. We must take at this point a most important step, and begin to consider the thesis according to which the vertical world is not a place in which the subject is situated like a flower in a garden, but is to be seen as the reverse of the subject. This thesis is advanced by Merleau-Ponty in a progressively more explicit way throughout VI, although it usually takes the reversed form, according to which it is the subject that is said to be the other side of Being. The analysis of temporality constitutes the basis on which to situate the meaning of this thesis. In order to fully explicate it, we must in the first place discuss Merleau-Ponty's concept of simultaneity, which affords a concrete study of the phenomena analyzed by Merleau-Ponty in terms of chiasm and reversibility. The task of a structural analysis of the concept of subjectivity in its relation to temporality must begin here.

Genesis of the carnal subjectivity

One of the most conspicuous riddles of VI is that which concerns the notion of the flesh: why, when ready to drop the distinction between subject and object, does Merleau-Ponty nevertheless distinguish between the flesh of the world and the flesh of the subject? The answer is to be found in the temporal structure we are progressively disentangling. The question presents itself in terms of the following dilemma: how to understand both that (1) the subject is not the origin of meaning, but also that (2) meaning is not given except to something or someone that "is of it" (*en est*), while at the same time not coinciding with the world. It is the dilemma with which Merleau-Ponty opened his philosophical career, as we have seen in the first chapter, and which conclude it. The solution presented in VI is so original to require a great imaginative effort, and the capacity to suspend our common perception of the things.

The solution consists in understanding that world and subject are not two separate substances, but the two sides, the recto and the verso, the convex and the concave, of the "same". This Merleau-Pontyan thesis has often been accepted and repeated, yet it seems to me that it is necessary to go back to it in order to consider it anew, for what at first seemed a paradox, has been quickly accepted, metabolized and forgotten, without producing a real effect. Its paradox must strike us and make us reflect once again.

The phenomenological analysis by which Merleau-Ponty shows that the bodily subject can perceive only insofar as it belongs to the very same world that it constructs by perceiving, is well known. It is the body, as a duplicity of feeling/being felt, which works out this folding back of space onto itself and introduces in it a dimensionality that does not specifically pertain to the subject, but to the subject as body, that is, the flesh. The flesh in turn is flesh of the world: it reflects back on itself thanks to a peculiar sensible being, a sensible sui generis, which is not only sensed, but also sensing. Whereas the things of the world exist only in the mode (and in the corresponding sense of being) of the *percipi*, the bodily subject is also in the mode of the *percipere*. This, not in virtue of an originary and absolute difference, as is the case with the Sartrian *pour soi*, but precisely insofar as the body is eminently *percipi*, that is, sensibility, exposition, exteriority. With this analysis Merleau-Ponty is simply repeating and further developing what is established in PhP through his re-reading of *Ideas* II.

Nevertheless, the task still remains of answering the question of the self-manifestation of bodily subjectivity, which in PhP is more a theoretical presupposition than a phenomenological outcome. The investigation of the dimensional temporality provides us not only with the elements, but also the key to access Merleau-Ponty's position in VI. It is the concept of self-manifestation that must be abandoned.[10] We should however render explicit the effects of this turn: if the subject is no longer understood in terms of self-manifestation, this does not mean that it does not have a structure, that there is no more a subject whatsoever. On the contrary, this structure presides over the process with which the subject manifests itself and leads its own life. The turn consists in no longer conceiving of subjectivity as existing in itself but at the same time concealed to itself, and hence in need to reveal itself to itself, thus becoming an "in and for itself". Merleau-Ponty's prolonged discussion of both Sartre's position and Hegel's dialectic concludes that, if there is a dialectical processuality of subjectivity, this nevertheless does not lead to a superior synthesis but — insofar as it is the repeated dynamic of *Gestaltung* and *Rückgestaltung* that constantly achieves its crystallizations only to undo them — marks the existence of subjectivity as unsurpassable dimensional temporality.

If therefore the temporality of the subject does not consist in a process of unveiling of its own truth as the source of manifestation, but rather in a process of emergence of its nature of incarnated subject, co-implied with the world, then the subject loses its condition of origin of meaning. Correlatively, on account of the chiasmic relationship between subject and world, the reference to an origin to be found in the world itself as the homeland of subjectivity falls as well. In place of this antithesis Merleau-Ponty substitutes his concept of the reversibility between world and subject as cyclical dialectic without origin or teleology. It is within this framework that we must understand the way in which Merleau-Ponty elaborates his notion of the genesis of subjectivity in terms of intercorporeity and segregation.

A subject that is not the source of its own manifestation is a subject that develops itself in a non-finalist way. The temporal process of sedimentation, discussed above, is the background against which Merleau-Ponty performs

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10   Cf. the note in VI 190-191, already mentioned several times, which analyzes this question from the standpoint of Husserl's analysis of temporality and of time consciousness. The clearest formulation of the abandonment of the concept of self-manifestation is to be found in VI 248-251.

his revision of the concept of the genesis of subjectivity. The empirical grounds for such a revision have been brought to light in the lecture courses on psychology for the ontogenetic level, and in the courses on nature for the phylogenetic one. As we have seen, Merleau-Ponty shows, under the first topic, that the subject develops itself according to a non-linear process. Each successive phase is not the attainment of a prefixed scope, in itself autonomously existing apart from the concrete modalities by which it is attained. On the contrary, it is the outcome of a dialectic of anticipations and regressions in which the subject is constantly turned towards that which other subjects (the adults, older children) show it [the subject] to be its own having to be. At the same time, it is constantly retarded by the possibility of responding with a regression to the anxiety which this tension generates. The condition of primordial intercorporeity and transitivism is thus never completely transcended, but constitute the very basis on which the child realizes its achievements, as well as the true incentive that pushes towards differentiation. Similar considerations are made, as we will better see in the chapters on nature, on the level of nature, where the "subjects" are the organisms considered in their development and in their interconnection with an environment which is developing itself as well.

Unity and multiplicity of subjectivity

The carnal subject is not an individual in the sense in which this term is generally understood: its unity is not opposed to its multiplicity, but realizes itself through and thanks to the latter. The unity of carnal subjectivity is the one proper to the concept of field (VI 259-260). Therefore this is not a unity achieved by the synthetic activity proper of the transcendental subject (VI 261-262). Rather, it is a unity realized through the incompossible unity of its parts. (VI 261) This incompossibility is that proper to the total parts, which are each one a totality closed on itself, and therefore with no "relations" with the others, yet realizes a sort of common structure with them (VI 217-218). The realization of this structure is not the construction of a plan, but a structuration, i.e. it is in principle always exposed to de-structuration. It is a togetherness that does not unfold from a principle, but precedes and founds it (VI 265). Merleau-Ponty thus conceives of this togetherness as producing itself, that is, in a way, as *causa sui*.

Yet another, different objection can be raised at this point. If this unity, which realizes itself only as a multiplicity of superimpositions and transgressions, is nevertheless a unity, should then one not find

the condition of possibility, for the order thus realized, in the order that reigns in Being itself? If the subject as effect is nevertheless a structured effect, should then one not explain this structure through a condition of structurability that would be inherent to Being? In other words, is Merleau-Ponty not here operating through the (still philosophical) presupposition that Being lends itself to be structured, thus ignoring the possibility that Being only withdraws from the light?

That the answer is necessarily negative for Merleau-Ponty is due in the first place to the fact that this description of Being would correspond to a conception based on notions such as potency, principle and foundation, which the whole phenomenological analysis of VI — and also the research carried out in his earlier works— denies.

Such a thesis is further rendered untenable by the concept of Being worked out in VI. Being is not the origin, but the "frame" (*membrure*), understood in terms of simultaneity, that is, the existential eternity. As such, it does not possess a structure unless insofar as there is an agent principle that realizes it. And reciprocally, this agent principle institutes an order that is not already existent in Being, but on the contrary is realized by its being effected by the subject. Each single structure, each single crystallization, is a cancellation of Being qua (raw) Being, and a relegation of Being into latency so that the object can emerge. The order of the world is the effect of the subject's institution (in the double genitive), and not the representation of an order intrinsic to Being itself. And yet such institution cannot happen unless the subject emerges from Being itself. It is this double bind that constitutes Merleau-Ponty's last word.

Each institution of an order is thus "for a time", it is transient, it does not survive unless it is confirmed anew by a further institution: which is but the other side of the fact that each perception is followed by another perception, that the former prepares thus accomplishing a cycle, and opening to the following cycle. The subject in its temporality is this cycle of cycles, an indeterminate and non-pre-arranged process.

The temporality of everyday experience then can be understood on the basis of the general model of perception: time as the series of distinct moments is the effect of a structuration that reduces the promiscuity of the temporal dimensions proper to Being, and in this sense it is not simply a degraded temporality with respect to the authentic one, but on the contrary a temporality that is deriving from a "vital" exigency. At the same time, however, this serial temporality does not suppress the promiscuity and the intentional superimposition

(*intentionale Überschreiten*) proper to the temporality of Being, of the monumental life, since the former derives from the latter, although in the form of its reduction.

The temporal processuality of Being thus consists, if seen through the peculiar model of phenomenological reduction performed by Merleau-Ponty through his conception of philosophy as interrogation, in the processuality of the eternal oscillation of each subject between a condition of transitivism and "participation", and a condition of separation. The separation of the subjects is never effective, and yet is always renewed. Its stabilization is worked out thanks to the work of sedimentation, which is then made possible by the peculiar structure of the cycle of the present. It is still an intentional stabilization, but effected through "latent working intentionality". It is thus always intentional and never "real". The separated subjects are not the truth of Being (as intercorporeity), that is, they do not pre-exist in themselves only to become, later on, conscious of themselves. Nevertheless their separation is not just an illusion, for on the contrary it allows the subject to subsist. The "conventional" nature of institutions does not imply that this convention is a fiction. Rather, it is that which Nietzsche calls the vital fiction, i.e. the structuration of stable structures with respect to which, and thanks to which, the condition of transitivism can be kept at a distance. The "truth" of Being, therefore, consists neither in the fusion of the subject with it, nor in the separation from it, but in the (indeed dialectical) realization of the unsurpassability of that which Merleau-Ponty calls the ambiguity of Being: an ambiguity that does not cease to subsist even if reflexively acknowledged. The truth of ambiguity is a dialectical truth: the ambiguity is negated in its immediate cogency, but also grasped as such and therefore overcome in its original condition, but at the same time retained as a non-transcendible condition. This truth begins to come to light in the very work of perception, which as such is not separated from language and preceding it, but is consubstantial to language because language itself is but one expressive modality of that which the Merleau-Pontyan concept of "perception" represents.[11] Language is but a more articulated form of the sedimentation that is at work in perception itself, and which is further articulated through writing.

The relationship between Being and the subject, thus, takes in VI a peculiar form, which Merleau-Ponty has tried to express by recurring

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11   On this point cf. the notes of VI devoted to the revision of the notion of silent Cogito.

to concepts characterized by the idea of double "bind", such as chiasm, reversibility, circularity, simultaneity. Any analysis that neglects the importance of these concepts, and sees, in the relationship between Being as intercorporeity and intersubjectivity, a linear process, persists in the theoretical error, repeatedly denounced by Merleau-Ponty, of believing in something like a dialectic that would realize a definitive or "absolute" positivity. The absolute of VI is the absolute of ambiguity. Ambiguity means that Being is the condition in which each subject lives, without either being able to coincide with it, or to abandon it. Being is at once lack and excess of meaning. The subject "derives" from it, insofar as it finds in it the very same forces that it employs to subtract itself from it. Each work of differentiation from Being is in fact part of Being, and does not happen "elsewhere". And this because Being is not a place, but the frame (*membrure*) of the interrelation between the subjects themselves. Hence the necessity to actualize what Merleau-Ponty calls endo-ontology: Being is never reachable otherwise than by avoiding making "something" of it, making it a thing, a substance (even if, as in Hegel, coinciding with the Subject in its own process of historical absolute becoming true). It is to be understood as that which lies "between": between the relations among subjects, the relations between the subject and its world, and the relations among the things themselves. Being, in other words, is the texture that is woven in the concrete existence of men and of beings.

The subject in Being is the final concept of subjectivity worked out by Merleau-Ponty. But in exactly understanding what this "in" means, this inclusion, it has been necessary to insist on the metaphors of duality strewn throughout VI. Metaphors are never innocent. Being is not the locus in which the subjects are, but the "locus" of their being, and in this sense Being coincides with the community of subjects: but as the recto of which they are the verso, as the visibility of which the subjects are the invisible actors. It is in this light, therefore, that the later Merleau-Ponty attributes a temporality to Being itself, and no longer identifies time with the subject. Everywhere there are only visible things: and the subject that searches for itself can never find itself, but can only find other visible things. Yet this incessant search, which can be called desire, and which is the soul of perception, is the secret heart that makes Being itself moving, changing, transforming itself, and renders it different from itself at the moment in which it confirms it in itself. In this sense, we can say that Being is structurally synonymous with temporality: in both cases their identity consists in their difference.

VI
PASSIVITY

Introduction

In the previous chapter we have seen that Merleau-Ponty's conception of Time relies on a peculiar understanding of institution that is related to an emphasis on the role of passivity: something which is there without being present; something, furthermore, which is both lost forever and forever present without passing. The particularity of this temporal account of passivity deserves therefore a further deepening, for it points to a crucial aspect of the notion of nature that Merleau-Ponty is developing. A discussion of this theme is what is attempted in this chapter.

The theme of this chapter is accordingly characterized by a double direction, or double relationship, between the two proper objects, or elements, of its inquiry: temporality and passivity. Indeed, the proper subject-matter of this chapter might be duality itself. A duality, however, which is neither ambivalence nor ambiguity: that is, it is neither a sharp distinction or opposition, nor the more familiar notion of non-exclusion, or confusion. I rather would like to say that the duality implicit in the relationship between temporality and passivity points to a different, more elaborate form of duplicity, a form that Merleau-Ponty was probably – this is indeed my fundamental guess – trying to uncover when working on The Visible and the Invisible. The lecture course on passivity constitutes a decisive step in this project.

It might also be convenient to declare, right at the outset, that this duplicity reflects the relationship between the two sides or folds of the flesh, that is, the flesh of the world and the flesh of the incarnated subject. In this respect, while it is common and absolutely right to follow Merleau-Ponty's reiterated attempt at weakening the weight of subjectivity in the direction of a renovated interrogation of Being, I must make clear from the very beginning that here I will rather follow

a different path. I will, in other words, try to investigate what place, or status, or even meaning, can the notion of subjectivity still have in Merleau-Ponty's later thinking, and what light can this lecture course shed on this problem. I will thus investigate the peculiar temporality involved in the process of self-manifestation of subjectivity, such as it can be ascertained in this new form, different from the one worked out in the Phenomenology of Perception, but still present as a problem and as a task in Merleau-Ponty's mind.

The role of temporality

In the first place, I will analyze the several reasons to read passivity in its temporal structure. Throughout the whole bulk of notes taken for his course, Merleau-Ponty describes the various phenomena related to passivity in terms that can be articulated in a temporal fashion. He often mentions the need to avoid interpreting passivity as the presence of a hidden subject behind the conscious one, by introducing the role of the past as sedimentation, as promiscuity and generality. The present, too, is de-structured in its traditional understanding of a dimensionless point, and is shown to be built upon lacerations (*déchirures*) that provide it with a temporal dimensionality without this being due to the action of consciousness. The future in turn is investigated in particular in its complex articulation with the past and the present, and described in terms that remind the reader of Freud's notion of *Nachträglichkeit*.

This temporal understanding of passivity is all the more interesting since it is not openly programmed, but seems to emerge, as it were, in the course of the analysis, and as such shows Merleau-Ponty's deepening of his notion of temporality with respect to what is to be found in the Phenomenology of perception. Already at work in his Sorbonne courses on the psychological development of children, this process of revision can be traced with further clarity in these lectures, and grasped in all its relevance for the picture drawn in The visible and the invisible. What's more, this lecture course precedes the wider picture sketched in the three courses on nature, and prepares them. Thus the role of temporal metaphors in Merleau-Ponty's understanding of passivity brings to light his way of conceiving of temporality in general, but more particularly his peculiar way of relating temporalization and self-manifestation of the subject, seen in a way in terms of a hetero-

manifestation that reaches itself only through the circulation enacted by nature itself, of which the subject is but an emergence and a fold.

This deepening and radicalization of this relationship constitutes one of the most interesting outcomes of these lectures. In the Phenomenology of perception Merleau-Ponty reads Husserl's notion of self-temporalization of consciousness in the light of Heidegger's existential analytic of Dasein, thus putting forward a conception of subjectivity as coincident with temporality, that is, neither "within" nor "outside" of time. Already in this early understanding of temporality, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the aspect of self-constitution of time as the structure that brings subjectivity to emerge. Yet this account seems somewhat flawed by its residual description in terms of something that possesses an identity to be realized through its outcomes. It is as if a "not yet passive enough" conception of subjectivity undermines the perspective that nevertheless is put forward as the goal of the whole work.

Thus it is not by chance that passivity receives a temporal metaphorization in the lectures under scrutiny. Here Merleau-Ponty acknowledges that it is temporality itself that possesses the aspect of passivity that must be regarded as the essence of subjectivity. Hence his repeated efforts to use his conception of perception as a model to describe this "passive consciousness", or better, this passivity of consciousness, which seems to lead to a substantial integration of Freud's primary process into the phenomenological category of the flesh. While this integration fully takes place in the later writings, in these lectures we can witness one of the most relevant passages leading to such an achievement. In this respect, the lectures allow the reader to integrate a whole lot of working notes of The visible and the invisible with the "subplot" that was in Merleau-Ponty's mind when writing them. Accordingly, let us begin with the temporal metaphors of passivity.

Already in the introduction of the twin course on institution, to which Merleau-Ponty refers the audience in his lectures on passivity as well, we can find an important indication concerning temporality in its functioning as a model or metaphor. As Claude Lefort remarks in his preface, this introduction must be regarded as common to both courses. There, we find a precious statement concerning temporality as the model for the relationship between activity and passivity. Merleau-Ponty writes (IP 37) that «Time is the very model of institution: passivity-activity, it continues, because it has been instituted, it fuses, it cannot stop being, it is total because it is partial, it is a field.» Here we find a number of elements that deserve all our attention, and will

be discussed in due course. But in the first place I would like to draw our attention on the notion of model. Time here is playing a modeling function that should not be underestimated. Time, in other words, is used as a means to "make passivity become visible", to be seen. This means, perhaps, that passivity in itself might be invisible.

The statement regarding time as a model, with which the lectures on institution begin, is echoed by a statement at the end of the course on passivity, in which Merleau-Ponty, reflecting on Freud's unconscious, says that his spatial model should be replaced by a dynamical one. Dynamism, most likely, here means that the unconscious, or passivity, has to do, not so much with "being" - as that which always is and never changes -, as rather with "becoming", that which changes, but in the first place that which happens, occurs. Merleau-Ponty writes (IP 217):

> Passivity can be understood only on the basis of event-based thought. What is constitutive of it is that the signification is here, not by Sinngebung, [...] but welcoming to an event in a situation, situation and event themselves not known, but grasped through commitment, perceptually, as configuration, proof of reality, relief on… i.e., by existentialia and not categories.

The intersection of these two passages gives us some clues as to the issue Merleau-Ponty seems to be confronting: passivity needs to be brought to light, for it is not visible as such. And this opaqueness of passivity is related to the wrong assumption that consciousness consists in casting a light on the object as something that, in itself, is inert and dark. Thus if we are able to abandon such model (the *Sinngebung*) we will become aware of the fact that activity is never without its own passivity, the two are never actually separated. In order to "see", we need to substitute an understanding based on spatial models (the unconscious as the bottom layer that is never attainable and yet is there), with one based on the notion of event, that is, time. The event itself, furthermore, is not simply that which happens, empirically and casually, to the subject, but is rather the index of a structure that is being instituted (*gestiftet*), thus actualizing a dimension, an existential difference, a certain step in the subject's history. The "evenementiality" of the event is thus the proper problem to be evaluated, for it is also, and perhaps most of all, a way of conceiving of the notion of transcendental itself in terms of time. A transcendental that becomes is, in fact, actually what phenomenology (already with Husserl) discovers and thus what makes the whole difference with respect to Kant.

Time, thus, clearly plays a truly fundamental role. Once more implicitly referring to Kant, we might say that time is a scheme, the scheme being a hybrid being that shares with sensibility as well as with forms and thus permits the two to enter into contact, sharing what they cannot in themselves never share. Already in Kant, it is this impossibility that must itself be made possible, and time is the means to bring together what cannot have a connection with its "other". For this reason time is at once the form of every event, the mediating element that composes a subject split into two irreconcilable sides, and thus the "secret" of subjectivity itself, its model.

The difference between Kant and phenomenology, at least in Merleau-Ponty's version, seems to me, in this respect, to reside in the structure of time itself. While in Kant time is basically thought of according to the image of the line, Merleau-Ponty's account of time is right from the start (in the Structure of Behaviour) related with an absence that is more present than presence, for it is the very heart of time, understood as that which passes and moves on. This means that Merleau-Ponty suggest a dialectical conception of time. In the Phenomenology of Perception time becomes the emblem of subjectivity itself, and this for several reasons.

In the first place, time is subjectivity itself. Caught in the usual dilemma between an empiricist-realist conception of time as something existing in itself, and an idealist conception of time as that which the subject possesses without being possessed by it, Merleau-Ponty brings together Husserl and Heidegger and thus, as Ricoeur once said,[1] overcomes them by identifying temporality and subjectivity.

This solution however would not suffice, were Merleau-Ponty not able to show in details what its true meaning is. Developing Heidegger's conception of the ek-static nature of time as that which temporalizes itself in each ekstasis, (Merleau-Ponty goes as far as to say, unlike Heidegger, that time is one ekstasis), and translating this conception into Husserl's notion of temporality as the unfolding of consciousness that affects itself, Merleau-Ponty then can say that temporality is the process by which the (incarnated) subject can become itself, that is, temporality is the process of self-manifestation of subjectivity.

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1   See P. Ricoeur, "Merleau-Ponty Beyond Husserl and Heidegger", in B. Fly-
nn, W.J. Froman and R. Vallier (eds.), *Merleau-Ponty and the Possibilities of
Philosophy*, Albany: SUNY Press, 2009, pp. 25-32.

This process of self-manifestation therefore is at once a model and yet not simply a formal tool, for in the process of temporalizing itself, the subject is rather subjected to time than being its author, and this allows Merleau-Ponty to say that this is the reason why the subject is temporally finite: the emergence of subjectivity from its own temporal process makes indeed the fecundity of time, but is not something opposite to the basic mortality that is the mark of (human) time. It is for this reason that time truly affects the subject, and is not just a formal feature, no matter how important this might be. The subject finds itself only by confronting itself with its constitutive otherness, for time is always the being-different of the self with itself. But this extraneousness is also at once the subject's secret life, for only in this way can a subject properly be, and be what it is, namely, a subject, and not a thing. A subject is a subject insofar as it recollects itself in a personal history that, no matter how coherent it can become, will always have been exposed to dispersion, and in the last analysis, to a looming end that comes nearer by the day. There is no way to subtract the subject from this situation and make it become "true". Subjectivity is this passage that is always trying to recollect itself with no hope to ever really succeed. There is clearly no room for the robust Subject (capital S) of Idealism here!

It is important to stress that this picture is never contested by Merleau-Ponty in his successive writings. Yet it is deepened. A deepening here means that we must go below what is being displayed by this model, under this process that, despite being a constant subtraction of the subject's self-coincidence, and its constant postponement, nevertheless, in this very self-spacing realizes the subject, that is, succeeds, is successful. Fecundity in the last analysis wins over opacity and deafness, although only for a while. Absence is still productive, negativity does not negate itself in a synthesis unless it is, Merleau-Ponty says, a transitional synthesis: but this also means that a transition is realized, something changes into something else; in other words, there is no stasis, no arrest.

Before trying to see in what sense and to what extent is Merleau-Ponty able to deepen this question, which is clearly related to a "darker" notion of passivity, another feature of time must however be briefly investigated: its non-linearity. Even in this respect some interesting differences should emerge between the earlier and the later picture.

Already within the analysis of time that can be found in the PhP there are several reasons to say, according to Merleau-Ponty, that time is not a linear process. Without entering into details, I will just mention two

crucial aspects. One proceeds from Merleau-Ponty's own appropriation of Heidegger's conception of temporality. If the three dimensions of time are not three places mutually separated, and indeed if one should not even talk of past, present and future, but rather of a unique process of temporalization that constantly "explodes" in the three directions (Heidegger says that the past is not preceding the present, and this in turn is not prior to the future, but they are one unique configuration that articulates itself, and can do it only by being constantly and reciprocally co-determining the three ek-stases themselves) it makes no sense to say that one moment "is" before or after another. This conception of time is rather a derivative one with respect to the existential temporality of Dasein, which in Merleau-Ponty becomes the openness of the incarnated subject with respect to its past, its present, and its future.

This first aspect of the non-linearity of time is basically repeated in the lectures on institution and on passivity when Merleau-Ponty remarks that it is strictly not possible to say that one event causes another, for the caused is in a way bringing to light its cause as cause, so that we can determine the cause only if the effect is in a way in turn "causing" it by taking place. And conversely, the effect is just one possible outcome of a whole array of possibilities, most of which might remain never actualized, so that to be an effect is not to be the necessary outcome of a metaphysical cause, and is not its final end either. *Après coup* and indetermination are thus two features that Merleau-Ponty assigns to time already in PhP (and in SC) and can be found in these lectures as well.

The second aspect pertains to the peculiar temporal structure of perception. When it occurs, a perception is neither mere copy nor pure creation, but always something that re-arranges the scene, a "vibration" of the whole perceptual field. What is perceived then is prepared but not univocally determined, and while it expresses something, there can be no way to talk of an original already there that the perception simply reproduces. The typical example is the picture used in the perceptive experiments in order to make the Gestalt-switch appear, about which we have already discussed in the previous chapter. But Merleau-Ponty generalizes this structure in order to say that the perceptum is, in a sense, a copy without original, a present realization of something that appears "now" as having been "before". This means that this something is a past that was never present. Even in this case, which constitutes a true paradigm for the relationship with raw being as it is described in VI, we cannot say that the process under description is

the linear unfolding from a before to an after, from the object there to be perceived to the perception. Perception does more than perceiving the object: it re-arranges the whole field so as to make it appear as organized in a certain way; which is one important feature of the notion of institution. Needless to say, if perception is the model adopted to understand the temporal field of experience, and thus if the gestaltic model functions as a general metaphor for consciousness, there is no room for any atomistic conception of time as a series of unrelated moments.

We see therefore that perception plays, as it was easily imaginable, the role of the general structure of (bodily) intentionality which characterizes Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. There is no real difference, in this respect, between PhP and the lecture courses. Perception, as we know, is contact-at-a-distance, it is not the performance of a disembodied Cogito, but rather the carnal bond between the body and the world. As such it takes place before and even despite conscious intentions, and thus, in a way, it dispossesses the subject from its Cartesian role of form- and norm-giver of the world. The subject rather emerges from its network of contacts with the world, and its "self" consists in a process of never accomplished and always recommencing contacts with itself through the world (and the other subjects). But is this form of passivity, or rather this form of the passivity of activity (for Merleau-Ponty says that we are no stones) passive enough?

One reason to doubt about it is represented by an important though rather subtle shift that occurs in the mutual relationship between perception and the unconscious. To put it quickly, while in PhP Merleau-Ponty reads the unconscious in terms of perceptive consciousness, here in the lectures he moves towards an inversion of the terms: as one working note in VI will state bluntly, now it appears that it is perception that must be seen in terms of the unconscious. Or better said, in these lectures Merleau-Ponty is re-articulating the relations and connections between perceptive and "oneiric" consciousness, often explaining each one with the other, but never indicating univocally which one is the model and the other is the copy. We can read for example the following passage (IP 160):

> The unconscious as perceptual consciousness is the solution sought by Freud, for it is necessary that the truth is there for us, and that it is not possessed. Perceptual consciousness, while offering a seed of truth, an "idea of the truth" (Pascal), offers it only on the horizon, and hides the truth because it shows it. In the perceived, there can be duality of signification

which is not the positing of a duality (ambiguous figures, Leonardo's vulture), which is impossible in the pure signified. The perceived saves and it alone saves our duality, the duality to which Freud holds and which he thinks is saved by the idea of the unconscious.

While, on the one hand, here Merleau-Ponty repeats his well-known notion of perception, just evoked, on the other he also uses a term that deserves to be retained: duality. Duality is not (simply) ambiguity, as it is usually understood in relation to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. It seems to contain a grain of novelty. In a passage to be found some pages earlier (IP 151-152) in the notes for the lectures, Merleau-Ponty says that there is an originary symbolism in dreams that is neither identical with, nor however totally different from, the perceptive one. Thus we have a first indication connecting, but not identifying, the dreaming and the perceiving subject. In order to grasp the "unconventional" meaning of dreams, Merleau-Ponty here introduces the very happy expression "hermeneutical reverie" (IP 154). This implies that dreams have to do with the imaginary, not so much in terms of what Husserl calls *Bildbewusstsein*, as rather in the terms of *Phantasie*.

Merleau-Ponty credits Freud with this important discovery: as he writes (IP 152),

> Freud discovered this positive symbolism: this meaning beyond the meaning has a double sense. One usually retains only the two separate meanings from it: manifest meaning and latent meaning. The latter [would be] reinstitution of an original meaning which was then repressed, buried in memory, by censorship. […] However, that is not his discovery. If the latent content were truly buried, dreams would not provide any relief from the desire. It is necessary that the latent content be accessible to him in some manner; that the one who dreams and the one who sees to the bottom of the dream are the same, and that there are not truly two persons (the unconscious and the censor, the id and the ego) but communication between them. The censor presupposes a pre-notion of what is censored. But this pre-notion is not a notion.

Merleau-Ponty then goes on to say that, in this doing, Freud touches upon the structure of "oneiric thought" (IP 153), which is symbolism. This symbolism is neither coming from repression as such (even though it retains an important connection with repression), nor does it explain repression, for these two errors suppose the priority of conventional thinking, based on the identity principle, which characterizes Sartre and Politzer.

The problem is, however, how to understand, in Merleau-Ponty's own terms, this primordial symbolism, whose analysis Freud had initiated, but which must be brought forward. One clue is provided by a remark in which Merleau-Ponty says that the «problem of the imaginary and the real» is to find out how to, at once, avoid distinguishing them absolutely, and identifying them. Waking life and oneiric life, as he also defines the two registers, are not one the foundation of the other. Neither one should be subordinated to the other. Then Merleau-Ponty writes that what can link them together is desire. Desire is a relation, and what is more, it is what presides over waking life as well as over dreams, although perhaps not in the same way. It seems possible to say, for the moment, that the two registers run parallel to one other, which means not excluding their possible, indeed their constant exchange. But if consciousness and what can still be provisionally called the unconscious do parallel each other, and even communicate without being either confused or coincident, and if on the other hand neither one explains the other, then the conception concerning the process of self-manifestation which is dealt with in PhP should be revised, to say the least. For it does not seem to be able to account for this duplicity. On the contrary, it seems to imply that one layer, the anonymous unfolding of the corporeal life, brings about the other, the conscious life of the ego, while undermining the latter's traditional claim to constitute the truth of subjectivity. In these lectures, instead, Merleau-Ponty seems to be suggesting that there is not so much emergence of subjectivity, the self-manifestation, as rather another kind of relationship.

What kind of relationship? In order to account for it, Merleau-Ponty must solve the problem of negation. Negation might mean separation, but in this case one would either fall back into Sartre's dualism or into that bad reading of Freud which ascribes to the founder of psychoanalysis the notion of a subject below the subject, both subjects being however fully determined. Negation, furthermore, might serve a dialectical purpose, and already in these lectures Merleau-Ponty clearly wants to avoid such solution as delusional. As is well known, he then devoted the lectures of the subsequent academic year to the notion of dialectic and in particular to the problem of overcoming Hegel's version of it. But then, where to look at? It seems useful to develop a suggestion articulated into three layers (IP 154), according to which the distinction between the imaginary and the real is:

First, to think the imaginary in terms of an absence of the "real" (between brackets in the text);

Second, to think of the dream in terms of a regression to "mythical consciousness";

And Third, the idea that symbolism is the imaginary, that the unconscious, now equated to mythical consciousness, consists in a relationship to the world and the others not in terms of objects (this term seemingly meaning the outcomes of "normal" consciousness), but as "instances". The rule, adds then Merleau-Ponty (IP 155), is in this case the indistinction, and differentiation is the exception.

We know that in VI there is a similar assertion. If we put the three layers together, we can suggest the possibility that the unconscious as imaginary (what in Husserlian terms is *Phantasia*, not *Bildbewusstsein*) consists in the absence of a relationship with the real, which then provokes a "regression" (which is a temporal expression) into mythical consciousness, in turn understood in terms of greater indistinction.[2] Distinctions are the outcome of progressive institutions. The institutions are in their turn the effect of events that inscribe themselves on the subject's process and thus generate existential dimensionalities. The regression taking place in (for example) sleep, then, seems to undo what the encounter with the world has produced on the subject, the world loses its grip over the subject, and thus another subject, maybe still to be called anonymous, but for different reasons, becomes free, at least for a while, to run its life based on "unconventional thinking".

The problem is that this unconventional subject, so to speak, permeates conscious life as well. It is and at the same time it is not there. In turn, conscious life, as Merleau-Ponty explains at a certain length, permeates the world of the unconscious as well, for dreams are never pure fantasies deprived of any relation whatsoever with reality. Freud himself gives a great number of examples illustrating this point.

Thus the relationship between the two registers is neither total separation nor total communication. They can communicate, although they speak different, but then again not totally different, languages. One seems to be a parody of the other. One resembles the other without coinciding with it, but certainly also without being truly different. They

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2   A similar account of a progressive disarticulation of acquired structures, which can be called dis-evolutive, can be found in Freud's study *On aphasia* (English translation Madison: International Universities Press, 1953; the essay was originally published in 1891). According to this essay, in case of aphasia the linguistic structures that are lost at first are the most complex and therefore most recently acquired ones, which shows that the mind has different layers and a history.

seem to entertain that kind of relationship that one has with one's own mirror double.

At this stage of Merleau-Ponty's meditation, therefore, one can no longer say that he explains the unconscious with perceptive consciousness, although a number of examples and reflections still go in that direction. Nor, however, is one entitled to state that it is perceptive consciousness to be seen in terms of the unconscious. Perception still presides over the process of progressive (in a neutral and not teleological meaning of the term) institutions that build up a subject's life-history. It is important to stress that this process has to do with the real, that is, it is not illusory. Life is no dream, according to Merleau-Ponty, and this has important, not only ontological, but also ethical and political implications. At the same time, however, perception can never totally overcome this oneiric aura that surrounds it because it resembles it, because it seems to work in a similar way, adopting similar means, at times cooperating, other times conflicting. This is perhaps what Merleau-Ponty actually means when speaking of the productivity of the unconscious. This position in my opinion is still in progress at this stage. It can be found in later analyses as well, and here I would like to mention at least the very important, detailed reading of Claude Simon's work given by Merleau-Ponty in the lectures on Cartesian and contemporary ontology.

What is, then, the temporality proper to this double, mythical and imaginary life that is not present without being absent? The answer to this question can perhaps be attained by reflecting on a very important passage (IP 158-159), where Merleau-Ponty writes:

> The description of the oneiric structure (impossibility of expressing, dictatorship of figuration, condensation as sole means of expression) would attribute the disguise of latent thoughts as much to the condition of the dream as to [the] censor-repressed struggle – Consequently, latent content not to be represented as thought in the depth of ourselves in the mode of conventional thought, as an absolute observer would represent it. The unconsciousness of the unconscious [is the] unknown; but not known by someone in the depth of ourselves. The unconscious [is the] abandonment of the norms of wakeful expression, i.e., of the symbolic as symbolic of self, direct language, which presupposes distance and participation in the category. But this unconscious is not distant, it is quite near, as ambivalence. The "affective content" is not even unconscious or repressed, i.e., the unconscious as pulsation of desire is not behind our back – […] [The] unconscious [is] the implex, [the] animal, not only of words, but of events, of symbolic emblems. [The] unconscious [is]

unknown acting and organizing dream and life, principle of crystallization
[…] not behind us, [but] fully within our field, but pre-objective, like the
principle of segregation of "things".

To which Merleau-Ponty adds in a note:[3]

This makes truth transcendent to the I think (desiring, seeing is not
the thought of desiring [or] of seeing) without our being transformed into
objects of an absolute thinker.

To avoid assuming the place of the absolute spectator is clearly
crucial in order to grasp the specificity of this analysis. Merleau-
Ponty is charging Freud, in his more official position regarding the
relationship between consciousness and the unconscious, with adopting
such a standpoint. This means that the split between the two sides of
the mind can be maintained only as long as one adopts a "static" rather
than a dynamic perspective. The adoption of a point of view in which
temporality (in its broadest sense, from the process of development of
the Ego to phylogenesis) plays its true role, shows that this split is not
the contrary of communication. In passing, I mention the fact that this
means that Freud's *Spaltung* comes closer to Husserl's *Zwiespältigkeit*
than one might think at first sight. At any rate, the question remains
of understanding Merleau-Ponty's own proposal. Obviously, this
problem has far wider implications than those present, implicitly or
explicitly, in these lectures. Let us just evoke the problem of nature and
of animality, which can only be glimpsed at in these dense lines, but
which are clearly in Merleau-Ponty's mind, as the following chapters
will show.

A possible step to take is to develop the indications given by
Merleau-Ponty just before writing the notes reported above. Some
pages later (IP 158-159), he poses the problem of the temporality of
the dream. The dream is ubiquitous, we read, thanks to the symbolic
matrices. Thus the dream is also trans-temporal. The oneiric mode of
consciousness is at all times at once, since it does not imply a splitting
(*clivage*). The dream begins in wakeful consciousness, and is present
in filigree throughout it. As such it is called a "shadow", a germinative

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3   IP 241. I slightly changed the English translation in order to accord it with
the original French, which reads as follows: «Ceci fait vérité transcendante
au je pense (désirer, voir n'est pas pensée de désirer [ou de] voir) sans nous
transformer en objets d'un penseur absolu».

production, active sedimentation of the acts of consciousness, and represents the unconscious itself in its triple aspect: 1 the underlying implication of psychical life, not entirely engaged in the present act, 2 the imaginary foyer, and 3 the lyrical knot of humanity (Merleau-Ponty here quotes Henri Ey). Thus, there is an "I dream", which cannot be seen as the origin of the "I live" and the "I think", for the latter is produced by segregation and even rupture, but at the same time must be accounted for.

With the expression "I dream" and its correlative "oneiric intentionality" we touch, I believe, the real core of passivity. Clearly, this is not a total passivity, for we already know that Merleau-Ponty explicitly excludes this hypothesis as meaningless in relation to living, not to mention thinking, beings. But at the same time, this kind of intentionality is not under the control of consciousness, for it hollows out consciousness itself, it interacts with it, both in the sense of nourishing it and interfering with it (to the point of hallucination). There is no possibility to fully integrate this kind of passivity in the process of self-manifestation of subjectivity adopted in the PhP. For at least two reasons: oneiric intentionality "blurs" conscious intentionality (*bougé*), and its process is not progressive. On the contrary, the temporality of the unconscious, if it is omnipervasive, at the same time is stubborn. The monumental past mentioned several times in VI is one example. The most relevant one, however, is the time of the repressed, which brings about the problem of memory and oblivion.

Merleau-Ponty states in the passage quoted above that, in dreams, there is no splitting. Whence, then, does the splitting derive? And how to conceive of it? I believe that this is the question Merleau-Ponty does not really answer. But there are reasons for this lack. One is his refusal of Hegel's dialectic and (which is crucial) his parallel search for a different form of dialectical thinking, a hyper-dialectical perspective. In other words, Merleau-Ponty is afraid of adopting a notion of negation that then imposes itself and distorts the whole picture.

The alternative can be found in a term that, despite its Hegelian halo, in my opinion possesses a different meaning in Merleau-Ponty's view: *Erinnerung*. This term appears once in the lectures on passivity (IP 195), but it is crucial. There we can read, in relation to Proust's novel:

> The reference of the surroundings to the body which inhabits them and of the past body to the present: they are variations of one another and the surroundings are an explication of each. But of course, the body is substituted here for consciousness only as the place of our eruption into the world. As empirical body, it is no less determined than determining (it "turns" in the

course of the search) – We consider it as a vinculum of the temporal and spatial distance, and transformer of space into time: *Erinnerung*.

As Merleau-Ponty shows in another text, and as it is clear from this one, here *Erinnerung* means, literally, not memory, as it usually means in German, but interiorization. That is, it means that something external and exterior turns itself into interiority. We can thus suppose that the body, the flesh, is an exteriority that is able to interiorize itself, folding back onto itself without becoming other than what it constantly is and remains. This exteriority remaining such, while at the same time interiorizing itself, is something that entails that neither is exteriority dialectically overcome and thus cancelled, nor however can it be thought of as a mere opacity. The two sides remain separated while entering into contact with each other. The form of negativity that exteriority represents with respect to interiority (but the reciprocal holds as well, we might add), then, is neither pure opposition nor direct passage. It rather seems a form of communication, but distorted and reversed. Once again it is the mirror image that comes to mind: *per speculum et in aenigmate*. Indeed, the enigma is the symbol of symbolism. A symbol means something, but it is not clear what. It conceals but shows this concealment. It alludes without either remaining silent or speaking clearly enough. Which is why this symbolism has to do with desire.

Desire clearly points to the relationship between subjects. According to Merleau-Ponty, the system I-the others is a network, a structure where the relations are in a certain sense prior to the relata. It is within this "field", which can also be called intercorporeity, that the unconscious must be properly placed in order to be correctly accounted for. In this perspective, it becomes possible to understand the psychological phenomenon of projection. This means that negation can be explained as a form of position: the position of the other, as a translation of the self into a mask. This masked self perceives itself as "other" thus enacting the censorship which apparently is directed to otherness but in fact it is still related to itself. In this way Merleau-Ponty thinks it possible to explain the unconscious; as he writes (IP 161),

> See in these cases what the unconscious consists of, if our notion is enough – and [the] passive-active relationship. Here we will truly see that oneirism is not non-being of the imagining consciousness, but just beneath the surface of perceptual consciousness; that is it is not lie, but truly a struggle of oneself against oneself, repression, censorship consisting in the refusal of our passivity and its great supplier: sexuality. The body as metaphysical being.

From these lines it seems possible to draw the, obviously provisional, conclusion, according to which passivity characterizes the structure of intercorporeity in which each bodily subject is always already placed. Consciousness is in this sense the refusal of this passivity and the reversion of it into an independent subject that, however, cannot really undo the knots that tie it to the intercorporeal world from which it emerges. The emergence of consciousness has to do with a break which consists, not so much in a cancellation of what precedes it, and even less in a process of becoming-true of the subject, as rather in a process of institution of dimensions which is at the same time a process of "reduction" of the ambivalence proper to intercorporeity. Differentiation is in Merleau-Ponty's perspective the realization of a coherent story which, however, can never really overcome the incoherence of that fecund excess which characterizes the perceptive life of intercorporeity. An excess that can return in various forms, some of which are more disturbing and unexpected than others.

This passivity that underlies active consciousness is thus affecting the temporal process of self-manifestation itself. Be it the return of the repressed, the presence of the others in the form of negative hallucination, or the projection of one self's fears and desires into other selves, this process does not lend itself to be peacefully accounted for in the model suggested in the PhP. It displays a deeper form of passivity, affecting temporality itself, which points to the substitution of a splitting subject with a plurality of poles never totally controllable.

The separation (which is never an unsurpassable wall but always something more porous) between consciousness and Merleau-Ponty's version of the unconscious seems then to be granted by perceptive consciousness, which shares something with both. But what is important to notice is that the fracture between the two comes from below and not from above. It is not consciousness that represses something and then pushes it down, but it is rather the very carnal self that works out the transformation. This poses perhaps a final problem to Merleau-Ponty's model? Why does this happen, and how to explain it within this framework? There is no final answer, it seems to me, to this problem, but a possible solution should be found in the direction of the question of the network of relationships instituted in the realm of intercorporeity, along the lines of a conflict suggested by Merleau-Ponty himself, but not fully developed, neither in these lectures, nor actually anywhere else.

VII
NEGATIVITY

Introduction

The analysis of passivity brings to light, once more, the importance that the notion of negativity possesses for Merleau-Ponty's philosophy as a whole and for the question concerning nature in particular. Negativity is the key to access the meaning of what Merleau-Ponty calls the invisible of the visible. Negativity thus must be present within nature itself, as a constitutive part of its being. As such, the presence of the problem of negativity can be ascertained throughout Merleau-Ponty's philosophical work. It is delineated in his first book, SB, where the question takes the double form of an account of the emergence of more complex forms of behaviour from simpler ones, and of the relationship between the organisms and their environment.

The first aspect has to do with Merleau-Ponty's reiterated statement that the appearance of new, higher forms is not prepared, necessitated or foreseen by the conditions pertaining to the lower ones. A new form, therefore, represents a transformation of the whole preceding world, imposing new structures upon older systems. In the case of the appearance of the human form, and this is the second aspect, it is the very distinction between the individual organism and its environment that is given as such. The organism is now a human subject, and the environment has become a world. The subject is given to itself, and correspondingly the world is given as a world, that is, as a structure of relations which holds in and by itself and is "the same" throughout the ever changing experience that each subject has of it. Its general feature thus is permanence, at least in terms of meanings, and on the other hand its stable difference from the subject. For the monkey, the stick is glued to its pragmatic, every time different conditions of usage. For man, the stick is a stick, and does not change overnight. The stick is given "as such". Thus the emergence of the human form of life is

eminently characterized by its ability to institute a system of meanings that can be, at once, recognizable and distinguishable from the subject that relates to the system itself. In the end, it is the institution of the subject-object relationship that marks the difference between human beings and the other living forms.

Thus Merleau-Ponty begins from the end of the story. For what he then tries to do, in his first book and in the works to come, is to develop an archaeology of the institution of this relationship. The path that Merleau-Ponty was to follow in his further research is set out at the very beginning of SB: to inquire into the relationship between nature and consciousness. Clearly, neither the notion of nature nor of consciousness are completely worked out in this book. This is what makes the lecture courses on nature all the more interesting, for in those lectures Merleau-Ponty states that nature possesses an ontological value. Throughout the whole lectures Merleau-Ponty seeks to devise a notion of negativity that is neither the outcome of causal determinations (for in this case there would be, strictly speaking, no negation at all), nor however the product of a mind or spirit descending into nature in order to produce its negation, for in this case negativity would indeed be present, but outside nature. Merleau-Ponty is on the contrary convinced that if negativity is to be found, it has to be traced within nature itself. Nature is characterized by an inner cavity, a hollow that is carved onto nature itself. This is a "lateral" negativity, as Merleau-Ponty calls it, and one that takes place, happens, comes to the fore or emerges, which is to say that it was not always already there. This negativity, therefore, has the quality of an event. It takes place, but not once and for all. Rather, it keeps on happening. Furthermore, it differentiates itself. It gets articulated into different forms or aspects of negations. Thus the evenementiality of negativity is in turn related to events. The three notions, namely, nature, events and negativity, thus appear to be strictly interrelated in Merleau-Ponty's account of nature.

But nature could be seen as just a sector, no matter how important, of Being. Merleau-Ponty does indeed insist on the propaedeutic role of the investigation on nature for ontology itself. Nevertheless he also devotes more classical philosophical discussions to authors that may help in framing the perspective he is looking for. In particular, in the very final years of his life in which Merleau-Ponty delves so deeply into the investigation of nature, he also discusses three philosophers, whose help he seeks in order to come to terms with this elusive theme. One of them is the constant source of inspiration of Merleau-Ponty's

approach: Edmund Husserl. The other two are important and present as well within Merleau-Ponty's books, but less frequently directly discussed: Hegel and Heidegger. It is all the more important, therefore, to reflect on what Merleau-Ponty says about them in two lecture courses devoted, respectively, to the evolution of Heidegger's thought after *Sein und Zeit* and to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, for in these two dense confrontations Merleau-Ponty — this is my thesis — finds further means to work out his own conception of negativity, and in particular to institute the much sought after relationship between negativity and event.

The reason why nature plays such a relevant ontological role is, this is my suggestion, Merleau-Ponty's persuasion that nature shows the contingency of Being. Within nature Merleau-Ponty finds processes that create themselves and their own meaning without being causally determined. Process and contingency, openness and indetermination, temporality and facticity are therefore aspects that do not distinguish natural from human beings, but rather link them together. As Merleau-Ponty says, human beings and animals are "laterally related to one another", that is, they are linked by an Ineinander relationship.

This conception of nature is thus meant by Merleau-Ponty to help overcoming a metaphysical understanding of the human condition that is, according to him, still present in Heidegger's notion of *Dasein*. The criticism of this perspective is then related to the negative evaluation of the notion of nothingness in Heidegger's early philosophy, for with this notion Heidegger is still conceiving Being from the perspective of the human being, and is isolating one kind of being from the others, when the very issue of overcoming the metaphysical approach to Being should have led Heidegger, according to Merleau-Ponty, to accomplish what is achieved by Husserl in the *Krisis*, namely, to envisage Being in terms of a universal interconnection, an "*intentionales Ineinander*" which is an *omou en panta*, and therefore the element in which beings (man included) are given In this respect then Merleau-Ponty thinks that Husserl goes farther than the early Heidegger in approaching Being outside and beyond the anthropological and anthropocentric standpoint.

The investigation of nature has shown that this whole is composed by dynamical processes, characterized by disequilibria that produce transformations. These transformations are not necessitated by deterministic causes, nor are they finalistically oriented by some form of telos. They are, in other words, not determined. They represent

several forms of passage and transformation (Merleau-Ponty also uses the term metamorphosis) which characterize all levels of existence: they are relevant, in fact, at the level of the self-determination of the single individual and its relations with the world; at the level of the determination of the form of the type of individuals, that is, ontogenesis; and at the level of the determination of the emergence of new forms, that is, phylogenesis.

The emergence of humanity is thus an event within nature, something not prepared and not necessitated, improbable and yet happening. The difference represented by the human form of existence with respect to the other living beings is thus not total, but is not nothing either. It is a lateral difference, that is, a lateral form of negativity. It is something new, and in this respect it represents a new dimension of Being. But it is not an event caused by an outer dimension. It is not spirit descending into nature. It is nature providing itself with another dimension, another fold. It is a complication of nature: a further one, for already the living forms represent progressively complex articulations of Being and progressively growing forms of negativity. The main issue raised by this approach is thus how to account for the difference between life, in particular animal life, and human existence, when the general perspective, of a nature becoming increasingly complex, is accepted. In what sense can still be said that the human form of existence is a natural one? And in what sense, on the other hand, can humanity represent a different form of structure?

Negations

In *Signs* Merleau-Ponty writes that the difference between man and the animals is given by man's absolute contingency, which is then equated to contingency known, aware of itself, expressed. This awareness must therefore be evaluated, for in general Merleau-Ponty recognizes that there is scarce, if any, consciousness of it. As he writes in "Man and Adversity" (S 240):

> Man is absolutely distinct from animal species, but precisely in this respect that he has no original equipment and is the place of contingency, which sometimes takes the form of a kind of miracle (in the sense in which men have spoken of the miracle of Greece), and sometimes the form of an unintentional adversity.

Thus, as he adds, no causal or finalistic explanation can truly explain this contingency, because both would amount to giving way to a retrospective illusion, realizing in advance what in fact it means to realize itself in a non-necessitated process. To explain in causal or finalistic ways the contingency of the process would mean, as Merleau-Ponty says:

> Misunderstanding the human moment par excellence in which a life woven out of chance events turns back upon, regrasps, and expresses itself. […] [M]ind and man never are; they show through in the movement by which the body becomes gesture, language an oeuvre, and coexistence truth.

We are thus confronted with the following picture: the progressive openness of the relationship between living beings and their environment becomes in man something different, not because it differs qualitatively or otherwise, but because it constitutes the becoming aware of this very openness and this very process. This openness is another name for contingency, that is, the indetermination of the relations between humans and their world. It is an indetermination that now is known in itself, and not only enacted through the animal behaviour. Yet this contingency is not given, at least generally speaking, to consciousness. The opposite is rather the case: consciousness is a means to conceal this radical openness and this exposure to chance and to the evenementiality of Being. Merleau-Ponty, then, must at once explain in what way is openness attaining this new level, and why is this attainment at the same time hidden, perhaps hidden by itself, or maybe by its very taking place. There are thus two aspects of negativity: one has to do with the relationship between man and Being; the other with the relationship between man and this very same relationship.

In other words, Merleau-Ponty is at once trying to show that man is rooted in nature, being the outcome of a process which was started already in animal life (and perhaps even before that, for Merleau-Ponty is attracted by Whitehead's conception of a process within material nature itself); and that man is uprooted from nature; in Merleau-Ponty's view, as we have just seen, man becomes aware of this very rootedness in nature which coincides with its uprootedness, its being contingent. Or maybe one should rather say that man is this becoming aware of contingency itself. Man is the place of contingency, the field within which contingency manifests itself.

But the becoming aware of contingency does not change contingency itself, it does not render it necessary, or overcome. It

rather gives it another dimension, a depth that leaves it unchanged and yet transformed. It becomes contingency in itself. It manifests itself, and this clearly cannot be done otherwise than in contingent ways. The uprootedness from contingency is in its turn contingent, for the ways in which contingency is manifested are never definitive, are always to be recommenced anew, and in the end are nothing other than contingency in its transcendental state.

To properly account for this transcendental conception of contingency therefore requires providing an interpretation of man as the place in which contingency self-manifests itself. No wonder, therefore, that Merleau-Ponty resorts to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the work in which the question of manifestation is perhaps best worked out. The problem is clearly that of an absolute that needs its own partial manifestations in order to be absolute. In Merleau-Ponty the absolute takes the form of contingent Being, or the contingency of Being, and this explains why, as it was shown in the chapter on dialectic, Merleau-Ponty rejects Hegel's idea of a final reconciliation of the process of manifestations in the attainment of the Absolute, seen as the totalization of the different, conflicting moments in which the Absolute is every time manifesting itself under opposite modes.

Merleau-Ponty does neither reject the notion itself of an opposition among manifestations (for he writes that it is through conflict that the structure of interconnection between subjects appears), nor the idea that, through the conflict, the opposition is overcome and transformed. He rather disagrees with Hegel about two, but indeed decisive, issues: one is related to the nature of the conflict, the other to the meaning of conflict. The conflict is confined by Hegel, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, to the modes of consciousness, which for Hegel is always human consciousness. But the whole investigation on nature led Merleau-Ponty to find conflict already at work in nature.

Merleau-Ponty therefore conceives of nature as already provided with the ontological requirements that according to Hegel pertain to Spirit. This is the reason why for Merleau-Ponty nature comes before, and is always already there. Merleau-Ponty's conception of nature is by no means an empiricist one. It is rather the notion of a primordial exteriority, which turns upon itself and "secretes" an interiority that was not already there from the beginning. In other words, Merleau-Ponty could never agree with Hegel in posing logic as prior to nature. Nature is not the alienation of Spirit, but its birthplace.

The emergence of negation

In order to show this point, I think it particularly relevant to investigate the way in which Merleau-Ponty reads J. von Uexküll's work. In the lectures on nature, Merleau-Ponty devotes some very important analyses to the work of this theoretical biologist, already known to Heidegger.[1] The most relevant of Merleau-Ponty's remarks is the one about the transformation of the natural environment, *Umwelt*, into a *Gegenwelt*. This process takes place at the level of higher animal forms, thus already in the realm of life. The institution of the *Gegenwelt* is a feature that distinguishes the higher from the lower animal forms. The *Gegenwelt* can be described in terms of the realization of a form of duplicity. The animals acquire an internal organization that is seen as a reproduction of the external world. This reproduction obviously is not a copy. It is rather a structural system of correspondences that functions as a principle of organization of actions and reactions. With the institution of the *Gegenwelt*, therefore, a double structure "comes to the world": we have at once the distinction between interiority and exteriority, and their communication. What kind of interiority is this?

The lower animals in a certain sense are more "open" than the higher organisms, for they are more plastic, more able to adjust to the situation. But this plasticity is possible only by reason of the simplicity of their organization. Most of all, this plasticity is like a universe in its own right. The simple forms have no "outside": they are, as Uexküll says, in an ecstatic condition and enclosed within themselves; in an certain sense they are neither inside nor outside, since there is no distinction between inner and outer world at this level.

With the institution of the *Gegenwelt*, on the other hand, what happens is precisely the insertion of a difference within the natural world itself. The relationship between the organism and its environment acquires a further dimension, a depth that produces an inside and an outside. It is something like a fold within Being itself, according to the more known image adopted by Merleau-Ponty in VI.

This kind of "event" has many implications. Since it happens within Being itself, it is a complication of Being, a multiplication of its dimensions. But since this is an event produced by those parts of

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1   Cf. M. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, English translation Evanston: Indiana University Press, 1995.

the whole that are the organisms, it is also possible to say that Being is the creator of its creators, the creatures. The creatures, that is, the organisms, enact the multiplication of dimensions, and the institution of a difference, which are structures of Being. Thus Being depends on the beings at least to the same extent than the beings depend on Being. This is an aspect that Merleau-Ponty also discusses in more philosophical terms through an investigation of Heidegger's verbal *Wesen*, to which I come back later.

In terms of the evolution of the animals, Merleau-Ponty underlines that the structuration of the *Gegenwelt* is an event because it is an institution that does not depend on necessary conditions or on a telos. It is thus the insertion of a novelty, which in turn brings about new events, each of which describable in terms of disequilibria. The development of a nervous system, in particular, allows the animals to acquire a postural space. The body is thus able to create a postural system which functions in terms of signs and not of causes. Maybe here there is room to talk about a biological intentionality. At any rate, the relationship between body and world becomes more complex because each sign presented by the world induces a reaction in the animal body, which at once changes the world. The animal perceives and moves itself, thus instituting two further structures: the *Merkwelt*, that is, the world of awareness, and the *Wirkwelt*, which is the world of action. The two are clearly correlated, which is what probably explains the meaning of Merleau-Ponty's synthetic expression in the working notes of VI, according to which *wahrnehmen* and *sichbewegen* are the same.[2] Note that in these lectures Merleau-Ponty does not only speak of a world, that is, spatiality, but also of *Merk-* and *Wirkzeit*, temporality.

The interrelation between *Merkwelt* and *Wirkwelt* is not linear, but reciprocal. There are thus two series of events reciprocally influencing each other. It is very important to remark that in this connection Merleau-Ponty compares these findings with two possible philosophical interpretations, rejecting both: Kant's account of nature according to the Third Critique and Schelling's philosophy of nature. Both accounts still remain outside of their proper object, both consider the process from above, or at the end of it, not being able to grasp its very taking place, its actualizing itself, its being in process. Both try to objectify it and give it a form or shape, and thus both miss it. This

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2   A more detailed analysis of this theme is offered in the next chapter.

explains why here Merleau-Ponty speaks of the process in terms of what is "un-figurable", without figure, *Unanschaulich*.

Ontological implications

Being as a whole is thus a process, that is, something which cannot be accounted for in the traditional terms of substance and essence. This is why Merleau-Ponty adopts Heidegger's notion of verbal *Wesen* as a better candidate. Since it is not figurable, it is concealed. But since we human beings are part of it, in the sense, above described, according to which Being "is" insofar as it is created by its creatures, the concealment of Being is somehow unconcealed. This raises two problems: how to bring this "unconcealedness" of the concealment of Being to its concept; and how to account for its relationship with consciousness. The answer to the second question might provide a clue in order to answering to the first one as well.

It is through Hegel and Heidegger that Merleau-Ponty works out this problem. Any attempt at explaining consciousness as different from the world would amount to losing it. But at the same time consciousness cannot simply be equated to the world, which would mean to resort to a misplaced pan-psychism. Between the world and consciousness there is, therefore, a more complex relationship, one that could be characterized in terms of "neither nor": consciousness is neither identical nor different with respect to Being. It is rather this very priority of the relationship between the two, which is properly to be accounted for. If one starts with one of the two terms, then the task of relating it to the other one becomes an impossible feature. But if the relationship is adequately conceived as more primordial than the two relata, then a wholly different ontology comes to the fore. For if each term is related to the other in order to be itself, then neither one stands alone, neither one is a substance, but each one is a relation to, a tension toward, the other.

And since the character of being a "relation to" is the definition of intentionality, Merleau-Ponty can say that this double structure, that is, the being a "relation-to" proper to each one of the two sides, is an intentional *Ineinander*. Needless to say, this form of intentionality is not the one proper to a "*Sinngebend Ich*", but is a (anonymously) functioning intentionality (*fungierende Intentionalität*). A form of intentionality which has two sides, but not in the sense of being two

subjects in front of one another. It is rather to be seen in terms of the relationship between activity and passivity. Each intentional relation is at once passive and active, thus instituting two circles: one being the relating-at, the other the being-related-by. Here the Husserlian notion of intentionality displays its true dialectical character, and it is coherently with this insight that Merleau-Ponty reads Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* in terms of Husserl's phenomenology, and vice versa.

Thus the *Verborgenheit* of being explains, according to Merleau-Ponty, the peculiar condition of consciousness, which following Hegel, but also Husserl (if one thinks of what Husserl says of the natural attitude), is characterized in terms of "invertedness" (*Verkehrtheit*). As Merleau-Ponty states in the lectures on philosophy and non-philosophy since Hegel,[3]

> There is a natural consciousness that is naturally unconsciousness (cf. Marx; cf. Freud), naturally mystified: it is the consciousness of the exterior, *Bewusstsein*. Truth is called by it, but cannot supervene unless through its tearing and negation of it [scil.: consciousness].

Consciousness in the natural sense is each time a relation to a single being, thus concealing the relation to the horizon which conditions and permits this very reference to a single entity. This however is not a mistake which could be corrected by a better usage of consciousness, for it is necessary that consciousness be reverted in order for the single being to emerge from Being. Merleau-Ponty states this in his commentary of Heidegger's philosophical development, when he says[4] that

> Each unveiling of a being is oblivion of that which is not unveiled, *Verbergung* which is *das erstlich Verborgene*. In this, the *Unwahrheit* is not human neglect (any more than the *Wahrheit* is human production, outcome of an act, of a representation).

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3   NC 286. My translation. The original French reads as follows: « Il y a une conscience naturelle qui est naturellement inconscience (cf. Marx; cf. Freud) naturellement mystifiée: c'est la conscience de l'extérieur, *Bewusstsein*. La vérité est appelée par elle, mais ne peut survenir que par déchirement et néga-tion d'elle».

4   NC 100. My translation. Cf. the French original: « Tout dévoilement d'un étant *est* oubli de ce qui n'est pas dévoilé, *Verbergung* qui est *das erstlich Verborgene*. En cela, l'*Unwahrheit* n'est pas negligence humaine (pas plus que la *Wahrheit* n'est production humaine, résultat d'un acte, d'une représen-tation)».

These words are referred to and drawn from Heidegger, but in a way that seems to hold true for Merleau-Ponty's himself, as many places of VI bear witness.

Being thus is concealed because it is not a being, a thing. How then to account for Being? If compared to the notion of entity proper to the sciences and to metaphysics, Being must clearly be called a non-being (*Nicht-Seiende*). But this term is not to be understood, in Merleau-Ponty's appropriation of Heidegger, as pure nothingness, for this would precisely mean to remain within the horizon of metaphysics. Merleau-Ponty sees in Heidegger's later thought the indication for another approach. What Heidegger calls *Seyn*, or barred *Sein*, is what is not nothing, that is, the *Es gibt*, the *il y a* (there is), which Merleau-Ponty does not hesitate to compare to the *Etwas* (something) as that to which man is open, and in the truth of which we are (cf. NC 102). This *Etwas* cannot be accounted for in terms of the notion of essence, because this notion is precisely interpreting what becomes in terms of what has become, of its completion. To understand the *Etwas* as having been (which is the way Merleau-Ponty renders the metaphysical notion of essence) amounts precisely to return to a full positivity, and no such notion of becoming can avoid this outcome. The *Etwas* therefore is what "makes itself" or "happens" and is never complete. It is *Wesen* in the verbal sense; in French, as Merleau-Ponty underlines, it has to be rendered by "*ester*" instead of "*être*" (cf. NC 107).

This incompleteness of the *Etwas* therefore entails an incorporation of nothingness into Being itself. The *Etwas* is never in act and always in the process of actualizing anew. Presence and absence, positivity and negativity are intertwined, one being necessary to the other. But to account for the Heideggerian "*Es gibt*" in these terms means to reintroduce the notion of experience. As he says,[5]

> Heidegger's enterprise has always been that of describing Dasein as an *Ueberstieg* which truly overcomes me and not as [an] «immediate presence to the world» in Sartre's sense; Being, therefore, as a double-floor

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5   NC 104. My translation. Cf. the French original: « L'entreprise de Heidegger a toujours été de décrire le *Dasein* comme un *Ueberstieg* qui me dépasse vraiment et non comme [une] «présence immédiate au monde» au sens de Sartre; l'être donc comme structure à deux étages […] De là, chez Sartre, le possible est «de la conscience», l'Etre est tout actuel — pas de distinction entre l'Etre et l'Etant — au lieu que chez Heidegger il y a un possible de l'Etre qui n'est pas simplement *das möglicherweise Seiende*, ce qui est possiblement actuel, qui est l'appartenance à l'Etre du *nichtiges Nichts* lui-même.»

structure [...] From there, in Sartre, the possible is «of consciousness», Being is totally actual – no distinction between Being and the entity – whereas in Heidegger there is a possible of Being which is not simply das *möglicherweise Seiende*, that which is possibily actual, which is the belonging to Being of the *nichtiges Nichts* itself.

Sartre's two levels of Being according to Merleau-Ponty negate the mutual correlation of each one with the other. But Being "is not" without the beings, and at the same time the beings are nothing in themselves, but are instantiations of the forever incomplete process of Being. Merleau-Ponty gives however a peculiar inflection to this Heideggerian notion. He underlines the Greek sense with which to understand it. He writes[6] that

> The *Wesen* insofar as it *west*, reigns as essence: that is the *Sein* (the possible as pretention the existence). Here and there, it should be said of this entity that it is not susceptible of explication, that it is not possible to give reason of it, that every *Grund* is interior to it. This springs out of the very explanation of *Sein* as $\phi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$: a presence that 1) manifests itself «von selbst» in Husserl's sense; 2) precisely for this reason, it is not *selbstverständlich*; an example: the rose, the *Rose-sein*.

This means that there is no why for the manifestation of beings. The rose is without reason. But there is indeed a difference between the other beings and the human being, for while the rose pays no attention to itself, what characterizes the human form of life is precisely its paying attention to itself. Man is open to the world, thus it is open to itself, and hence to its own being seen (cf. NC 108). A being such like the rose is a push (*poussée*) of Being — which is the way Merleau-Ponty renders Heidegger's use of the Greek $\phi\upsilon\varpi$ — that is, something which "is" in the sense of becoming, of taking place, which in turn means something that manifests itself. But for man it is this very manifestation that is in turn manifested. It is self-manifestation. This self, however, is not acquired through a negation, or a negation of negation. Or better, if a negation is implied, it is a lateral, relative negation: a latency.

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6   NC 101. My translation. Cf. the French original: « Le *Wesen* en tant qu'il *west*, règne comme essence, voilà le *Sein* (le possible comme prétention à l'existence). Ici et là, il faut dire de cet être qu'il n'est pas susceptible d'explication, qu'on ne peut en rendre raison, que tout *Grund* lui est intérieur. Cela ressort de l'explicitation même du *Sein* comme $\phi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$: une présence qui, 1) se manifeste «von selbst» au sens de Husserl; 2) justement pour cette raison, n'est pas *selbstverständlich*; exemple: la rose, la *Rose-sein*».

This latency is due to two reasons. One the one hand, the self-manifestation of man is acquired through its being exposed to the world. It is not self-possession, but rather, if I may coin an expression, self-dispossession. This way of accounting for man's self-manifestation clearly resonates with Hegel, but with an important difference, which is constituted by the second reason. Each manifestation is also self-manifestation, but not in the sense of an identity between the two. While in Sartre consciousness is at once self-consciousness, here there is a hiatus, which is due to the delay or gap that occurs between the being-seen and the seeing-one's-own-being-seen. To see one's own visibility is not a direct act, it is not an inspection of consciousness, but is possible only insofar as there has been a previous exposure. As Merleau-Ponty says in one of the last working notes (VI 273-274),

To say that the body is a seer is, curiously enough, not to say anything else than:

> it is visible. […] More exactly: when I say that my body is a seer, there is, in the experience I have of it, something that founds and announces the view that the other acquires of it or that the mirror gives of it. I. e. it is visible for me in principle or at least it counts in the Visible of which my visible is a fragment. […] It is through the world first that I am seen or thought.

Thus it is the very capacity of seeing that is made possible by the exposure to the being seen. This seems to me a reversion of Hegel's model, while, undeniably, Merleau-Ponty at the same time closely follows Hegel's analysis of experience in the Phenomenology of Spirit. For Hegel, the Absolute becomes itself through its manifesting itself and hence becoming other than itself. It accomplishes this becoming-itself through its progressive manifestations, figures (*Gestalten*) which, in being limited, at the same time are the only way the Absolute can really develop itself and thus reach itself. The manifestations thus are something in between subjectivity and objectivity. As Merleau-Ponty remarks,[7] according to Hegel

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7   NC297. My translation. The French original is « Le phénomène n'est pas objet et n'est pas sujet. Pas objet: il me concerne, en le présentant je me comprends. Pas sujet: il a encore à devenir pour soi. Il est la membrure cachée de «sujet» et «objet» - objet revenant à soi, sujet hors de lui. C'est la conquête de cet ordre du phénomène, la présentation de son enchainement qui est la seule justification de l'absolu. Justification qui n'est pas démonstration, mais auto-monstration du devenir-absolu du phénomène (devenir-phénomène de l'absolu) par son mouvement propre».

> The phenomenon is not object and is not subject. Not object: it concerns me, in presenting it I understand myself. Not subject: it has to become for itself yet. It is the hidden membrure of «subject» and «object» -- object coming back to itself, subject outside itself. It is the conquest of this order of the phenomenon, the presentation of its chaining that is the only justification of the absolute. Justification that is not demonstration, but self-monstration of the becoming-absolute of the phenomenon (becoming phenomenon of the absolute) through its own proper movement.

This structure seems to be fully consistent with Merleau-Ponty's own description. He even goes as far as to say that the Hegelian notion of phenomenon entails relativizing the opposition subject-object, the one being the other side of the other, and the two being for the same (*für Dasselbe*) (cf. NC 300). He equates this reversibility to what becomes, in his opinion, the Husserlian notion of intentionality (cf. NC 298).

The difference therefore does not lie so much in the structure here quickly evoked, as in the final meaning of the notion of Absolute. According to Merleau-Ponty, who follows Heidegger in this interpretation, the Absolute in Hegel is in the end once again only on the side of the subject (cf. NC 311 evoking Heidegger's essay on Hegel's concept of experience in *Holzwege*). Thus Hegel betrays his own insight concerning experience, which is the notion of a dual *Ineinander* by which each side is what it is only through its other. The final composition envisaged in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and even more the further conception of logic as the mind of God before Creation, are then signs of a regression of what was accomplished by Hegel in his account of experience, and a return to a conception of the whole in terms of something become, that is, no longer becoming.

How then to characterize this *Ineinander* always to be recommenced anew and always incomplete? Perhaps the answer can be found in a passage of Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of Heidegger's *Identität und Differenz*,[8] where he states that

> The sense, the *Als*, is the moving relationship Being-entity, relationship that cannot be fixed, which is encompassing in relation to the senses.

Thus the notion of sense is framed in terms of a relationship, which is not a being, a thing, an object, and as such cannot be fixed once and

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8   NC 120. My translation. French original as follows: « Le *sens*, le *Als*, c'est le rapport mouvant Être-étant, rapport qui ne peut pas être fixé, qui est englobant par rapport aux sens».

for all, for it is the very exchange which allows things to become things and subjects to become subjects. This relationship is furthermore a movement, that is, something that happens and never fully "is". An event. And an event that unfolds itself in figures (the *Seinsgeschichte*) that do not realize a final accomplishment, but an endless circle. As Merleau-Ponty puts it,[9]

> To think of the absolute, is not only to think of the absolute, but also the rest, and again the absolute starting from the rest, and so on. What is there, is the circle.

The solution is therefore not simply the identity of identity and non-identity, for this means in the end to subordinate difference itself, and this is inevitable, according to Merleau-Ponty, when experience becomes signification, that is, something said.[10]

> That is, when it ceases reconsidering itself, thinking itself as surrounded by an encompassing, the vertical world, present, and supposes having totalized, all understood, all overcome.

In the end therefore the circle is unsurpassable, the *Zweideutigkeit* of consciousness is not eliminated by a notion of experience as that which uncovers its *Verkehrtheit* and thus realizes its reveral (*Umkehrung*), for exteriority is ineliminable (cf. NC 319), and the absolute knowledge is still a figure of consciousness. But this ambiguity, Merleau-Ponty adds, is not bad. It is a defect only if seen from the perspective of consciousness itself. But if we succeed in grasping the absolute as a «light of truth which appears through the thickness of experience, and which embraces subject and object relativized»[11] then we understand that ambiguity is the mark of Being understood as radical contingency.

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9   NC 315. My translation. French original as follows: « Penser l'absolu, ce n'est pas seulement penser l'absolu, mais aussi le reste et de nouveau l'abso-lu à partir du reste, et ainsi de suite. Ce qu'il y a, c'est le cercle».

10   NC 317. My translation. French original as follows: « C'est-à dire dès qu'elle cesse de se reconsidérer, de se penser entourée par un englobant, le monde vertical, présent, et présume d'avoir totalisé, *tout* compris, *tout* dépassé ».

11   Cf. *ibdem*. French original as follows: « lumière de vérité qui paraît dans l'épaisseur de l'expérience, et qui embrasse sujet et objet relativisés ».

VIII
METAMORPHOSIS

Introduction

The previous chapters aimed to show that the conception of nature elaborated by Merleau-Ponty requires a new categorial framework. This new framework is not explicitly worked out in any of the published or posthumous works we can read at present, but is relatively often hinted at in a series of passages, some of which have already been discussed, and others which will receive further attention in the next section. Although many of Merleau-Ponty's writings have been published in the recent past, there is more than a suspect that other important findings are still awaiting for our interpretation. In particular, there could be a manuscript extracted from the lectures at the Collège in the mid-Fifties, dealing precisely with nature. While this is, at present, only a supposition, another text is certainly available and recently published, which is extremely interesting in view of the examination of the implicit categorial framework underlying the ontology of the flesh. It is the manuscript of the first lecture course, held by Merleau-Ponty at the Collège de France in the academic year 1952-53. The title is a little misleading, for it announces the treatment of the connection between perception and expression, while in fact its most important contribution is the focus on the notion of movement.

This notion is of the utmost importance in order to grasp the ontological meaning of more known terms such as chiasm, reversibility and the like. In these lectures Merleau-Ponty examines the notion of perception, as it emerges from his phenomenological investigation in the PhP, in the light of the problem of language. Movement emerges as a mediating notion, a sort of schema, in the Kantian sense of the term, which permits to see expression, in particular linguistic expression, as a refinement and a "sublimation" of perception, and perception as an already expressive realm. In

fact both perception and expression are investigated as forms
of transformation, metamorphosis, and "movement" generally
speaking, where the notion of movement shows to concern more
than a physical phenomenon. Movement then seems to acquire an
ontological value, similar in many respects to what can be found
in Aristotle. Yet this achievement is more implicitly present than
explicitly aimed at. In this chapter I intend to bring to light the
inner articulation of the lecture course in view of an investigation
of the ontological importance of such a notion. Let us first begin by
discussing the nexus between perception and movement.

   This relationship is clearly stated by Merleau-Ponty several times in
his later reflection. In VI, as is well known, there are many hints at the
problem. A famous passage of a long working note of May, 1960 (VI
254-57), entitled "Touching-touching oneself / seeing seeing-oneself
/ the body, the flesh as Self" is perhaps one of the clearest available:
Merleau-Ponty repeatedly mentions the problem in the course of
the note. Starting by posing the question of the relationship between
touching and touching oneself, which do not coincide in the body but
do not coincide in the "mind" or consciousness either, Merleau-Ponty
goes on to say that «something else is needed for the junction to be
made». This something else is called the untouchable.

   What is to be understood by this expression, clearly akin to the
invisible? Merleau-Ponty explains that it is something not touchable
in principle: «[t]hat of the other which I will never touch. But what
I will never touch, he does not touch either, no privilege of oneself
over the other here, it is therefore not the consciousness that is the
untouchable». This is a first relevant step, for here Merleau-Ponty (not
surprisingly) states that the untouchable, and hence the invisible, is not
something related to mind as opposed to the visible, touchable matter.
A very important remark, for we are here talking of touch, after all.
There is therefore an untouchable of touch that is not equivalent to
touch while not being separated from it either.

   Separation would amount to posing another positivity, simply
christened different from the more common one, usually related to
matter. «"The consciousness" would be something positive, and with
regard to it there would recommence, does recommence, the duality
of the reflecting and the reflected, like that of the touching and the
touched. The untouchable is not a touchable in fact inaccessible [...]
The negative here is not a positive that is elsewhere (a transcendent) —
— It is a true negative, i.e. an *Unverborgenheit* of the *Verborgenheit*,

an *Urpräsentation* of the *Nichturpräsentierbar*, in other words, an original of the elsewhere, a *Selbst* that is an Other, a Hollow».

Right after this long statement, Merleau-Ponty relates the untouchable of touch to the invisible of vision. What is remarkable, however, is that he connects this invisibility to movement. The invisible which is *de jure* and not *de facto* is that which precludes me from seeing «myself in movement, witness my own movement». This link seems a little surprising. What kind of nexus can one imagine, at this point, between vision and movement, and in particular between visual self-manifestation and self-motion?

Merleau-Ponty immediately adds:

> [b]ut this *de jure* invisible signifies in reality that *Wahrnehmen* and *Sich Bewegen* are synonymous: it is for this reason that the *Wahrnehmen* never rejoins the *Sich Bewegen* it wishes to apprehend: it is another of the same.» Hence here Merleau-Ponty says that perception and self-motion are variations of the same. They are synonyms. The attempt to see oneself in motion amounts necessarily to a failure which in fact proves to be a success: «[b]ut this failure, this invisible, precisely attests that *Wahrnehmen* is *Sich Bewegen*, there is here a success in the failure. *Wahrnehmen* fails to apprehend *Sich Bewegen* (and I am for myself a zero of movement even during movement, I do not move away from myself) precisely because they are homogeneous, and this failure is the proof of this homogeneity: *Wahrnehmen* and *Sich Bewegen* emerge from one another. A sort of reflection by Ec-stasy, they are the same tuft.

Admittedly, here we are not really provided with any real proof of this claim. At the time of the publication of VI, and until recently, a satisfactory explanation of claims such as this was scarcely available at all. The lecture courses on Nature give the reader a number of important clues, as we have seen. Yet, the programmatic lecture course on the sensible world and the world of expression provides us with an invaluable chance to see a little deeper into Merleau-Ponty's project, and in particular to take a glance in the direction of understanding this intriguing but mysterious connection between perception and movement. These lectures seem to constitute the deployment of a philosophical research program, many themes of which reappear in the later lectures and in the fragments of VI. In particular, the large number of remarks on movement contained in these lectures seems to give us a way to understand the meaning of this relationship. The conclusion, above seen, which Merleau-Ponty draws in VI from the position of the

nexus perception-movement is widely articulated in the lectures,[1] and the discussion of the remarks contained in MSME should allow us, this is my claim, to better understand the final lines of VI's working note, which state the following:

> To elucidate *Wahrnehmung* and *Sich Bewegen*, show that no *Wahrnehmen* perceives except on condition of being a Self of movement.
> One's own movement (*mouvement propre*), attestation of a thing-subject: a movement like that of the things, but movement that I make — —
> Start from there in order to understand language as the foundation of the I think: it is to the I think what movement is to perception. Show that the movement is carnal — — It is in the carnal that there is a relation between the Movement and its "self" (the Self of the movement described by Michotte) with the *Wahrnehmen*.

The importance of this conclusion cannot be underestimated, for here Merleau-Ponty says that the carnal Self is a Self of movement (and the meaning of this movement is to be evaluated in the light of its possible ontological value), and that this Self in movement, or the movement of the Self, is the ground on which to found the I think (through language), which seems to imply that there is a relationship between the two I or selves. What sort of relationship remains to be seen. In MSME Merleau-Ponty speaks of "sublimation", but this metaphor must be explained, and in this chapter I try to argue in favour of the relevance of a phenomenological and also ontological understanding of movement which might be able to give a meaning to this term.

The world of sensibility and the world of expression

The context within which Merleau-Ponty's analysis begins is a revision of his previous positions on perception and the perceptual world. Or to put it more precisely, Merleau-Ponty is afraid that what is said in PhP might be misunderstood by a commonsensical or otherwise conditioned understanding of his notions. The weight of traditional conceptions might have lead his readers to see, in Merleau-Ponty's work, either the affirmation of the primacy of perception understood in terms

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1   From now on, I will refer to these lectures as MSME (*Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression*) and will quote the text from the French text published in 2011 (Genève: Metis Presses).

of sensory data, of natural givenness, instead of an access to Being; or a mere introductory phenomenology which does not touch upon the question of ontology, whereas for Merleau-Ponty (who repeatedly insists on this point in the lectures) phenomenology and ontology coincide. Its insufficient elaboration runs therefore the risk of distorting the relationship to Being which is aimed at in the work. It is for this reason that Merleau-Ponty feels the need to clarify his own thought through the notion of expression.[2] Thus we see that perception and expression are closely linked, in the sense that perception is itself expression.

It is remarkable that Merleau-Ponty does not disavow his Phenomenology of perception, but rather tries to bring to the fore what he thinks his true notion of perception is and implies. Expression is a notion that in this context seems therefore better suited to convey Merleau-Ponty's central conception of perception as a relation to Being.

Expression therefore is meant to distinguish perception from consciousness (which is linked, further on, to an abstract attitude to be compared and contrasted with praxis).[3] Perception is expressive, and it is expressive of the world while expressing the human being in one and the same stroke. The reference to Heidegger is clear, but with a difference: for Merleau-Ponty Heidegger and the Heideggerians are still "too philosophical" and formalistic insofar as they intentionally ignore the achievements of science and claim that philosophy is independent from it.[4]

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2 MSME 3-4: [Nous avons essayé une analyse du monde perçu qui le dégage dans ce qu'il a d'original par opposition à l'univers de la science ou de la pensée objective. Mais cette analyse restait tout de même ordonnée à des concepts classiques tels que: perception (au sens de position d'un objet isolable, déterminé, considérée comme forme canonique de nos rapports avec le monde), conscience (en entendant par là pouvoir centrifuge de *Sinn-gebung* qui retrouve dans les choses ce qu'elle y a mis), synthèse (qui suppose éléments à réunir) (par exemple problème de l'unité des *Erlebnisse*), matière et forme de la connaissance. […] On évitera les équivoques en reprenant (et complétant) les résultats acquis à l'aide du concept d'expression].

3 MSME 4-5: [On entendra ici par expression ou expressivité la propriété qu'a un phénomène, par son agencement interne, d'en faire connaître un autre qui n'est pas ou même n'a jamais été donné. […] Or ceci nous oblige à concevoir la conscience perceptive tout autrement que l'exige la notion de conscience, d'y mettre une proximité de l'objet et une distance de l'objet qui sont également ignorées de la notion de conscience].

4 Merleau-Ponty explains this at a certain length in a footnote. He writes «à vrai dire, le désaccord avec les heideggeriens n'est pas seulement dû à cette insuffisante élaboration: sous leur refus des analyses psychologiques, il y

What we get from this clarification with respect to our general problem is that, according to Merleau-Ponty, perception as expression is not contemplation but action, or better still, praxis. The reference to Heidegger's "*Zuhandeneit*" seems to be directly related to the need to avoid adopting an outdated understanding of perception while retaining the notion itself. Accordingly, Merleau-Ponty underlines three aspects of his concept of perceptive consciousness that differ from consciousness as it is usually understood. To perceive, in this perspective, means to belong to what is perceived -- the perceptual world --, and not to impose values on it from outside; it means to institute differences and not to grasp essences; it means, finally, to be affected by the silent perceptual world and not to make statements about it. It is with respect to this third aspect in particular that Merleau-Ponty connects perception as expression with «quality, space-movement, world» (MSME 6-7).

Many themes contained in these initial pages should be discussed, but in this chapter I must necessarily refrain from entering into a detailed analysis of all of them. What seems to me utterly important to remark is that the connection between perception and expression is done in terms of an affective relationship between incarnated subject and perceptual world, which entails a number of dynamic elements. These elements are not all on the same level: some of them are referred to the act or event of perception, others to the percipient subject, and others still to the ontological implications of this different notion of

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a peut-être un formalisme philosophique, l'assurance que la philosophie a son domaine conçu comme un certain territoire au-delà du territoire ontique (Heidegger disait dans *Sein und Zeit* que la distinction philo-psycho est la suivante: les faits ne peuvent rien m'apprendre à moi philosophe, la généralité inductive présuppose les essences. Pour moi cela est formalisme: les faits préparés par présupposés ontologiques de la théorie ne peuvent que me rendre les présupposés, mais le fait même «scientifique» déborde toujours cette ontologie, la remet en question éventuellement. En tous cas la philo a à la penser comme une modalité de l'existant. Faute de quoi la philo risque à retomber dans l'ontique, en deçà de la science, p. ex. les étymologies de Heidegger ont à se justifier devant la critique des linguistes pour n'être pas linguistique imaginaire. Justement parce que la philosophie est radicale, et pour l'être, elle doit conquérir et justifier sa dimension en rendant tout le reste compréhensible, et non pas s'y établir d'un coup. Pas de distinction numérique entre philo et psycho ou sociologie parce que pas d'a priori formel dans herméneutique de la facticité ne peut être sans faits».

perception. I will try to distinguish these different senses and also reflect on their mutual connections.

In the first place, Merleau-Ponty takes into consideration the notion of structural (Gestalt) form. This is said «the simplest formation of perceptual meaning». In what sense? Merleau-Ponty stresses the importance of the background, insofar as this is in itself part of the definition of Being (MSME 8). The very fact that something is perceptually given is due to the simultaneous givenness of its background. The individuation of the "thing" is at the same time the position of a virtuality which is not present in the same way the thing is, but is not nothing either. This statement is in itself not really surprising in the light of what can be read in PhP. But in these lectures Merleau-Ponty emphasizes, more than what he had done in his book, the dynamical nature of the figure-background relationship. The usual notion of consciousness neglects and conceals precisely this interplay when is only defined in terms of consciousness-of something. And Merleau-Ponty relates this concealedness to Marx's and Freud's analyses of mystifying consciousness.[5]

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5 Cfr. MSME 8-9. Merleau-Ponty writes: «Perception et imperception Théorie de la conscience inversée: par définition, la conscience louche (Freud- et aussi Marx): le fait qu'on a conscience de ceci veut dire aussi qu'il y a cela qui n'est pas dit.

Et néanmoins elle n'est pas coupée du vrai puisque ce qu'elle ne dit pas est présent comme fond: téléologie de la vérité. […]L'expression ici ne nous détache pas de la situation corporelle puisqu'au contraire elle en assume tout le sens, elle assume à ce point ma propre situation qu'elle y trouve le moyen de penser les autres.* C'est tout le travail de la praxis, beaucoup plus étendu que je ne croyais, qu'il faut apprendre à connaître. Il investit objets non seulement de prédicats praxiques comme ceux de l'espace virtuel, mais encore de tous les prédicats culturels.

En partant ici de praxis, je ne veux pas supposer philosophie matérialiste: pour qu'il y ait perceptions, il faut qu'il y ait noyau «matériel» - mais je veux signaler rapport à l'objet qui n'est pas d'abord gnosique, approfondir la notion de la gnosie par celle de la praxis. Il s'agit de saisir l'esprit à l'état naissant. Cf. théories motrices de la perception, prolepses, que veulent-elles dire? Qu'il y a une ubiquité spatiale dans l'exploration manuelle de l'objet le geste qui va à son terme comme une ubiquité temporelle dans la conscience qui se donne le faire à travers la série des situations, qu'il y a une autre synthèse que la synthèse extérieure, qu'il y a une synthèse qui se fait dans la situation et par elle, par le fait que chaque perspective est les autres perspectives en tant que telles. Cela ne se comprend pas devant la pensée ou le savoir thétique. Cela se comprend devant la praxis. Praxis à distinguer de l'action au sens que lui donne par exemple Bergson».

This allows Merleau-Ponty to equate perception and praxis. Which does not mean, as he immediately adds, that his position is a materialistic one. It rather means that in order to grasp the spirit (*esprit*) in its nascent state (*état naissant*) it is necessary to understand perception itself in terms of praxis, which in turn is different from action.

Praxis is characterized by its being related to the human body, which in turn is expressive. As Merleau-Ponty writes, «the human body is expressive in this that it carries *Umweltintentionalität* in each of its gestures, it draws and deploys an "Umwelt" and even a "World". The identity of the thing is the equivalence of the different gestures which lead to it» (MSME 14). The human body, in other words, is the "subject" to which structural (Gestalt) forms, understood as dynamical expressions, can be given. The human body is the subject able to perform gestures. Already in this connection, between body and perception, a structurally "processual" system comes to the fore. To perceive is to "praxically" (as different from the practical) act with one's own body. The body is also the background of itself. The identity of the subject is a crystallisation which is possible only insofar as it is exposed to the gaze of others.[6]

Perceptual consciousness is thus defined in terms of a field which is made possible by a bodily subject (the "zero-point" of the field), characterized by its being "acting" or gesturing, that is, by its being a "praxical" subject always interconnected with other similar subjects. Perception is therefore expression at least for two reasons: it is the expression of the relationship between subjects and things or other subjects; and it is the "action" of the world itself on the bodily subject (as we have seen, Merleau-Ponty defines perceptual consciousness in terms of affections).

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6   Cf. MSME 17. Merleau-Ponty very clearly writes something that can be then found more cryptically stated in VI: « Donc théorie non de l'inconscient, mais de la conscience en tant que perceptive montrant le fond (comme figure) en tant qu'elle sait la figure comme figure, montrant la figure comme fond possible en tant qu'elle sait la figure comme figure. La conscience se cristallise comme conscience de quelque chose qu'en ayant non thématisés des aspects autres. Cela ne fait pas comme inconscient fatalité d'une vérité derrière notre dos qui se joue de nous (et par suite remettre la conscience de soi à autrui, le psychanalyste ou le pouvoir ou ceux qui savent), cela fait ouverture à vue autre sur nous (il faut un autre qui voie en figure ce fond que nous sommes pour nous-mêmes, il faut confrontation de nos vues avec d'autres, discussion), non déracinement de la vérité puisque nous sommes capables de percevoir un autre».

A deepening of the phenomenon of movement is undertaken at this point by Merleau-Ponty in order to further qualify this notion of perceptual consciousness as expression (MSME 26). Merleau-Ponty writes:

> Choisir phénomène du mouvement comme
> 1. appartenant au monde sensible et y révélant déjà rapport expressifs corps-monde naturel
> 2. par ailleurs support d'autres significations:
> peinture, cinéma | lui-même moyen d'une prégnance expressive de degré supérieur

The phenomenon of movement belongs to the sensible world, and reveals the expressive relations between body and natural world. Furthermore, this phenomenon is the support of other meanings, in particular painting and cinema, chosen as realms in which an expressive pervasiveness (prégnance) of higher order is displayed. The latter consideration is of the utmost importance in order to understand the ontological meaning of movement. I will accordingly analyze in the next section what Merleau-Ponty says of spatial movement, and in the following one his discussion the bodily schema, of painting and cinema, in order to reach some conclusions pertaining to movement in its relation to Being.

The phenomenon of movement

Merleau-Ponty begins this section of his analysis by stressing that there can be no question of chronological or transcendental priority between space and movement. He writes (MSME 26):

> Espace et mouvement: le mouvement implique un espace – ce qui ne veut pas dire priorité chronologique ou transcendantale. Ils vont ensemble.

As a matter of fact, when reading what Merleau-Ponty writes in the rest of the section, one is led to suspect that movement has, in fact, some priority over spatiality. Certainly he wants to avoid reducing movement to its spatial objective determinations, or to the mental representations of an imperturbable spectator. This is clearly stated and often repeated throughout the lectures. But there seems to be more than this concern in Merleau-Ponty's mind, and this "more" seems to be the ontological importance of movement.

The issue concerns, in the first place, the possibility to grasp movement in its own peculiarity, without reducing it either to empirically or conceptually determined features, which are either on this side or beyond the phenomenon of movement. Movement must be grasped in its own manifestation. In order to achieve this goal, movement must be described from the standpoint of the body and its place, understood as the zero-point and the absolute "here", which is already described in PhP. Here Merleau-Ponty writes that «there is a place because there is a here of myself who am not objective body, the place is relationship of me and the world through my body, not a relation between parts of the world. The place is in the first instance situation» (MSME 30). Obviously this absolute here is a relative absolute. Movement is in this respect a modality and a variation of this primordial spatiality (MSME 31). The issue is further discussed in the light of the notions of proximity and distance, of "here" and "there", understood not so much in connection with Heidegger's *Entfernung*, as one might suspect, but within the framework of a "transcendental logic", different from the formal logic of positivistic philosophy insofar as this wider logic must be able to take into account asymmetrical objects, like the two hands of Kant's analysis,[7] which are real differences and not logical differences (MSME 33). Spatiality thus is related to the body that, as we already know at this point, is moving itself. The absolute-in-the-relative of the here (and the now, which however is not discussed here), belonging to the body, is a dynamic place.

This is shown in what comes next. Place is itself a form of movement. Merleau-Ponty writes that «if the place is particular tension in the I-world dynamism, it is already movement, far from movement being a subordinated concept» (MSME 42). This becomes clear, in Merleau-Ponty's opinion, when movement is considered from the standpoint of the direct bodily intuition that each bodily subject can have. Thus spatiality is not the logical premise to the analysis of movement, but only its propaedeutic. The problem with movement derives from the two equally wrong alternative conceptions, realism and idealism, that the tradition of philosophy provides (MSME 43).

This in turn means that movement must be discussed in connection with the subject of movement, the subject moving itself but also the subject that is subjected to movement. According to Merleau-Ponty, Bergson has

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7   The reference to Kant is not explicit in these lectures, but clearly understand-
      able in the light of the reference made by Merleau-Ponty to it in VI. Cf. VI 261.

seen at least in part this problem. His solution, however, is incomplete.[8] Accordingly, movement must be conceived in a fourfold way:

1. the mobile object must be a moving object, identified within movement and not aside of it;

2. reciprocally, movement must be in the mobile and not only in its relations to the outside;

3. there must be, therefore, a mixture between inside and outside, before and after, here and there;

4. there must be, furthermore, a mixture between me and the things (MSME 44).

What is most important to clarify, now, is whether Merleau-Ponty is considering movement in terms of a phenomenon, or even the manifestation of a phenomenon, or also in terms of an ontological account. If the latter is the case, a clarification of the notion of ontology is in order. In my opinion it would certainly be a phenomenological

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8   Cf. MSME 43-44. Merleau-Ponty writes: « Seulement à quelles conditions mon corps peut-il remplir la fonction de médiation ? C'est en tant qu'il est à la fois mobile dans l'espace «réel» et perçu de l'intérieur dans l'indivision de son mouvement- Il faut donc qu'il y ait en lui conscience de l'unité de ces deux aspects- Or l'unité, l'indivision du mouvement n'appartient pas à mon corps en tant que chose, ce n'est pas là son mouvement en tant qu'il se produirait dans espace objectif qui est unifié: c'est son mouvement en tant que projeté par moi dans un acte unique qui réunit son point de départ et son point d'arrivée- Pour que la conscience de mon corps rende possible son mouvement comme corps objectif et celui des objets, il faut que cette indivision du point de départ et du point d'arrivée entraîne description d'un mouvement effectif- Si mon corps était pour moi un espace comme tous les autres, l'indivision du projet ne donnerait pas plus d'unité à ses mouvements qu'à ceux des choses- Il faut donc que mon corps s'étende dans l'espace d'une manière qui lui est propre et qu'il communique au monde entier en tant que prolongement de mon corps- Il faut que mon corps soit comme une «machine à vivre» le monde, le distributeur de l'indivision grâce à sa spatialité privilégiée- Théorie du corps percevant que B. n'a pas essayée; [partie manuscrite biffée] Donc B. a vu explicitement référence du mouvement à ma durée, et non directement à un temps d'univers implicitement référence du mouvement à mon corps comme machine à vivre le monde Mais ce second point n'étant pas thématisé chez lui, sa théorie du mouvement reste «conscientielle», il a passé de mouvement en soi à mouvement pour ma durée, il a relevé condition sans laquelle il n'y aurait pas de mouvement (participation à ma durée), donc relevé condition par laquelle il y a mouvement (« extension » de cette durée), il ne s'est pas installé dans l'ordre des phénomènes, i.e. des choses en tant qu'elles lui sont présentes comme telles ».

ontology, but its meaning is nevertheless new: it is a "moving" ontology, that is, an ontology according to which not only Being is Becoming, but also, and most of all, "Beingness" is a processual category. This is probably the most obscure claim, and it is only partially worked out in these lectures. Still, I would like to stress the presence of this concern throughout the whole lecture course, something that commands Merleau-Ponty's approach not only here, but also in many of the lectures and works to come, but without being clearly stated anywhere as such. In the first place, through another comparison with the structure of the gestaltic forms, Merleau-Ponty brings to the fore the symbolic value of movement. The very same notion of Gestalt becomes a mode of movement (MSME 47). But to say this implies to say that the articulation of background and foreground, in its bringing a form to visibility, and correspondingly the background to its sinking, is an expression of nature, of the perceptual world in itself. Not only there is movement "in" the world, but the world itself is made of movement. This means that movement is not only an ontic phenomenon, but also and most of all an ontological structure.

In fact, here Merleau-Ponty says that movement characterizes each kind of figure. Movement is said to be the becoming of a figure. It is a figural property. This is not to talk of the empirical movement of an empirical object, but rather of the structure of appearance of the perceptual world as such, since, as is well known, the Gestalt is for Merleau-Ponty a metaphor of perception. Therefore the notion of movement that emerges here must be further analyzed. In his discussion of the theme, Merleau-Ponty uses an important expression: "movement understood as revealing Being" (MSME 53). This is the title of a section devoted in particular to the question of causality. Merleau-Ponty stresses the need to adopt a notion of self-causality very different from what can be found in Hume's and Kant's classical analyses. In studying the phenomenon of self-locomotion of gestalt figures, it becomes clear that it is the continuous transformation of a form, and not some external cause, that generates the movement. It is something like an interior flux emerging from the figure itself. Movement is in this sense self-manifesting and self-causing itself. Movement is then «clearly other thing than change of place». Movement is «revelation of Being» MSME 54).

It is the discussion of Michotte's famous experiments that allows Merleau-Ponty to clarify this point. He draws, from this experiment, the possibility to describe the perceptual field in terms of a processual

structure that is capable of self-organization (MSME 57-58). A kind
of «perceptual miracle» (MSME 58), it is much more than what the
Gestalt-psychology theorists have seen. According to Merleau-Ponty
this is a discovery that requires an adequate generalization. The
perceptual field shows by itself to possess a meaningful structure,
which emerges by itself like a sort of pre-personal thinking MSME
60-61).

The "subject" implied in this global field is itself a self-moving
body. It must possess the "rules" of a "language" in order to move
itself. These rules are diacritical systems.[9] Thus movement, global
organization of the perceptual field, bodily subject as self-moving
body, and "meaning" of the field as a system of diacritical elements
are all parts of the same general phenomenon which is the perceptual
Being.

Movement is not the local translation of a thing. Considered from
the standpoint of a "perceptual logic", that is, a phenomenology of
perception, movement proves to be general. As Merleau-Ponty writes
in MSME 64,

> [Le mouvement n'est pas «essentiellement du visible»: c'est «eine
> dynamisch gerichtete Veränderung eines Gegenstands, die sich unter
> besonderen Umständen und Bedingungen in Form der optischen Bewegung
> entfaltet»- Le mouvement est événement et non d'un {Sinnendings} mais
> de tous. Donc le sujet percevant a unité événementielle du mouvement
> (dans un sens et d'un sens à l'autre) parce qu'il est en prise sur l'espace
> comme système des puissances de son corps.]

Movement is thus seen as an event, yet not of particular things, but
rather of "everything". The perceiving subject is what it is, because
it has the evenemential unity of a moving being, unity that in turn is
made possible by the body being on hold on space, seen as a system.

Meaning itself is related to movement (MSME 68). Meaning is
made possible by the distribution of movement and rest, the rhythm
of translations and transformations, acceleration and deceleration, that

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9 Cf. MSME 63: [le mouvement ne le peut qu'en tant qu'il possède les équi-
valences d'une sorte de langue naturelle: les <u>champs</u> sensoriels sont cela, des
systèmes diacritiques donnés avec des valeurs d'emploi, des équivalences ca-
ractéristiques. Mais entre ces champs il y a aussi des équivalences et comme
une langue commune de ces patois.] This section of the text has been barred by
Merleau-Ponty and therefore will not appear in the edition of the manuscript.

is, time. These are not simply mechanical phenomena. They rather convey their own meaning, including an affective tone.

The perceptual world, seen as a field of movement in its broadest possible meaning, is thus a field of signs, provided these signs are understood in De Saussure's terms.[10] These signs are "intelligible" only if a bodily subject, able to move itself, and "belonging to" this world, is drawn into the picture. Movement, in other words, is always "from a certain standpoint", and does not exist "in itself", objectively or otherwise understood.

Now Merleau-Ponty wants to generalize this picture. Up to this point the description has been focused on simple and abstract phenomena, but the situation is more complex. In particular, the question is how to introduce what Merleau-Ponty calls "perceptive thinking" (MSME 72). As a matter of fact, the relationship between perception and movement is already endowed with its own "logos". Which does not mean to reduce perception to motility, but on the contrary it means to root the "perceptive thinking" on the moving subject. Logical thinking is a further development that, however, takes place within this perceptual, "motional" field. Its development is dialectical and leads to a "sublimation" of the body into language, cultural expression.[11]

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10 Cf. MSME 70, where Mp writes: «Si loi veut signes, mais au sens que Saussure et la phonologie donnent aux signes = réalisations diverses d'une seule prégnance de variation, qui ont moins existence séparée qu'existence oppositive et diacritique – et par conséquent moins à significations qu'à différences de significations – et qui par suite sont moins coordonnés à significations qu'ils ne s'articulent à partie d'une totalité, de sorte que la signification est toute immanente à la chaîne verbale (comme sa structure) et toute transcendante (comme au delà des signes un à un). En ce sens là perception est lecture, et comparable à lecture d'une phrase où il y a *Deckung* des intentions portées par le début et par la fin, et éventuellement rectification rétroactive, le sens étant cause et effet de la lecture. Le mouvement stroboscopique est cela. Les champs sensoriels sont cela: des systèmes diacritiques avec des valeurs d'emploi, des systèmes d'équivalences est de substitution caractéristiques, qui ne reposent pas plus sur une logique explicite que l'usage de la langue sur une connaissance scientifique de la langue».

11 Cf. MSME 78. The word "sublimation" (of the body into language) must be retained. Merleau-Ponty writes: « Je ne déduis pas mouvement des objets de leur permanence sur mes yeux supposés mouvement objectif. Je constate même engrenage de mes yeux – mobiles su eux,- et cela est immédiatement leur mouvement. L'erreur de la désimplication est de quitter le point de vue du sujet percevant, incarné, situé, de détacher mouvement objectif de ma motricité comme référence de moi au monde – Donc le mouvement ≠ une des choses que nous percevons; ce mouvement objectif est projection de notre

Paintings and movies

In the pages that follow (MSME 96-131), Merleau-Ponty develops a long and extremely interesting analysis of Schilder's notion of "bodily schema". Through this analysis Merleau-Ponty wants to show the dialectical process that leads to linguistic expression. This section is very important both for what it adds with respect to the problem of movement and to the question of understanding Merleau-Ponty's way of reading Schilder's notion. Yet, I will rather discuss what Merleau-Ponty says about painting and cinema first, and then devote some final remarks to this problem.

The analysis of painting, which constitutes the basis for what can be read in *Eye and Mind*, further articulates the theme of movement in its relation to expression. The expression of movement is never a question of signs. It is a question of the presence of a language of transformations and processes that is inherent to the world itself. Paintings have been able, at times, to grasp and show this movement, which is therefore neither "local" nor "ontic".

In particular, one should remark Merleau-Ponty's attention to the ability of some paintings and painters to express alteration and metamorphosis. In Rodin's paintings, for example, movement is «the "wrapping up" (*enveloppement*) of becoming within an attitude, and not intellectual evocation of an absent movement, intuitive-perceptive realization of movement — not deciphering of signs by intelligence that

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motricité, d'une motricité qui relie sujet à espace où il est situé; et cette capacité motile est la lumière de la perception de là possibilité d'une expression du mouvement qui n'en est pas l'imitation ou la reproduction, p. ex. dans art immobile (peinture): on donne aux yeux un trait/une trace à lire, et, repris par ma motricité exploratrice, il veut dire: mouvement. d'une expression universelle, de tout, par ma motricité comme mon engrenage sur le monde ou mon ancrage en lui.

Ceci n'est nullement réduire perception à motricité au sens de synthèse biologique, puisqu'il s'agit du mouvement vécu. Ce n'est pas réduire perception à non-pensée. C'est enraciner pensée perceptive dans le sujet mobile. La pensée représentera ensuite un ordre supérieur, mais à comprendre à partir de là : il y a perception du mouvement parce qu'il y a entre moi (mon corps, mes champs) et le spectacle un rapport expressif, parce que chaque attitude est puissance d'une situation et chaque spectacle trace d'une attitude – Or l'expression ainsi inaugurée commence une dialectique, appelle des développements et transformations, des renversements: tentative de récupération de l'exprimé, expression linguistique, sublimations du corps dans le langage, expression culturelle. Précisons cette dialectique».

would interpret them as indicating change of place, but intentionality of the body of the horse, immanent meaning (*sens*) of the metamorphosis, gestural meaning for a body that knows the syntax of gestures, synthesis without analysis. That which we [Merleau-Ponty] have called trace of movement. Hence not signs, but emblems of movement, and movement founded on "alteration" (against Descartes)» (MSME 115).

Immediately after this passage, Merleau-Ponty suggests the possibility to generalize this notion of movement in painting (MSME 116-117). Movement there has nothing to do with change of place or even change in attitude. Even less is it related to activity. It is rather the energy that inhabits a drawing, like the movements of water inhabit a whirlwind. It is something living.

Through Wölfflin's analyses these same considerations can be further widened. Movement becomes the indirect presentation of that which is "beyond" forms and colours, it becomes presentation of the world through variations and modulations of our being in the world (*être au monde*) (MSME 118). Movement expresses the world. It is its expression, that is, its manifestation. In this analysis movement is no longer a spatial concept, no matter how conceived. Movement seems to become the interplay between a bodily, but most of all self-moving, subject, and its world. The world manifests itself, although obliquely, through movement, because the (bodily, self-moving) subject is always "in motion" even when it is at rest; rest being a mode of movement, as has been said above. Movement then becomes a phenomenological and ontological category.

Nor Merleau-Ponty stops here. His words about cinema, as short and elliptic as they are, constitute a truly astonishing break-through. Merleau-Ponty here transforms the question. He knows that movies were invented to reproduce movement as it is in itself, and not through static means like paintings. But soon cinema became something different. It discovered movement as *metamorphosis*. There is a rhythm of movement in movies. Movement is not something added to beings otherwise already qualified in themselves. And it is not sufficient to display an object (a man jumping, a bird flying) in order to represent movement. Movement is related to life.

This connection between movement and life, although only mentioned in passing and in relation to the correct expression of movement in movies, seems very important. However, it is not developed any further. Traces of this theme can be found in the lectures on Nature. In this course Merleau-Ponty, as anticipated, focuses rather

on the notion of bodily schema, whose discussion will end this study. But the idea underlying this very short analysis of movies seems quite relevant: if movement is an expression of Being, and movement is metamorphosis, then Being is (if this verb can still be used, which is doubtful) metamorphosis.

One could then be tempted to say that Being changes, metamorphosing itself. Merleau-Ponty's later discussion of Heidegger's verbal *wesen* - undertaken in various lectures -- might be seen in the light of this notion. We have discussed this issue in the previous chapter, and now its categorial meaning comes more clearly to the fore. It would also be possible to see, in his notion of metaphor, a further elaboration of this ontological question, on which we will dwell in the final chapter. It is not Being, understood in any ontic way, that changes, but in its ontological essence, its "Beingness". Movement then becomes a trace of Being in a stronger, more radical sense.

The body as meaningful praxis

The analysis of the bodily schema and its relation to movement is functional to the distinction between movement as it manifests itself through the body and a merely physical or mental phenomenon. Movement is expressive. It has to do with space, but in the sense that it constitutes the structuring of space itself. This implies that space in turn is connected to movement: it becomes mutation, metamorphosis. Movement thus understood therefore is no longer simply spatial dislocation, but rather ontological transformation.

However, Merleau-Ponty does not deepen here this fundamental perspective. The reason for this absence might reside in the approach of this lecture course, still focused on the problem of expression and not yet on its ontological background. A development of the latter can actually be found in particular in the lectures on Nature. At present Merleau-Ponty is focused on the question of the emergence of language. In this respect one might suggest another form of movement, this time semantic. Meaning is the effect of diacritical differences that, however, are not always already statically present, but are formed through the gestaltic movement of the form coming to the fore and the background sinking down. The background here is given by the structure of connections between forms. This structure is already present at the level of the world of moving forms and constitutes the basis for an

"evolution" of language that, as we have seen, is characterized in terms of sublimation.[12]

A very interesting remark can be found at the beginning of the section, when Merleau-Ponty seems to say that the bodily schema is the gestaltic background of movement. The body clearly is not (simply) an object in space. Its being characterized by possessing a bodily schema provides it with features that distinguish it from a material thing. In particular, the schema entails four decisive aspects:

1. it is an "absolute here" which constitutes a system of reference;
2. it provides a system of immediate inter-sensory equivalences;
3. it is a totality ascribing their meaning (*sens*) to its parts;
4. it entertains a relation with space which realizes a system with the body itself, a space that the body frequents (MSME 81).

Even more relevant is the remark made in a few pages later, where Merleau-Ponty mentions the role of the voice in connection with the bodily schema, for the voice is a fundamental way to interrelate with other subjects.[13] The bodily schema functions in a certain sense like Kant's transcendental scheme, insofar as it renders more "visible" and tangible a structure that is there without being visible.[14] This aspect

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12   Cf. the final lines of the section, MSME 114-115, where Merleau-Ponty writes: « Rapport langage – pensée/monde de l'expression = rapport schéma corporel-monde sensible

Conscience est toujours articulation, écart précis, et par là ouverture à … Non possession de représentation – Et sans cette articulation, cette prégnance de projeter et d'incarner, elle n'est que pouvoir d'écart en général, conscience de n'importe quoi, c'est-à-dire non conscience.

Double mouvement : des significations descendant dans le monde, qui le fait exister, le mouvement de métamorphose en expression,- qu'il était déjà.

L'homme se lève et l'homme parle.

Il faut pour comprendre définitivement ce double mouvement étudier le langage qui le manifeste mieux que toute expression – parce qu'il sublime davantage le mouvement humain.

Toutefois, justement pour cette raison et parce qu'il passe à un autre ordre, le langage cache sa propre étrangeté.

La conversion du mouvement en expression à étudier sur formes mi-linguistiques d'expression ».

13   Cf. MSME 84: « [Présence d'autrui et présence à autrui dans la parole, acte à deux faces: parler, c'est parler à… , pour être compris de… L'ensemble des faits de dépersonnalisation, à être mis en parallèle avec les faits de désintégration du schéma corporel, gagne un caractère concret-intuitif, en même temps qu'inversement notre notion de corps organique même est enrichie parce qu'il apparaît comme lieu de la personnalisation] »

14   Cf. MSME 85: « [1) Schéma= concret, visible comme un dessin, nous

becomes evident when compared to its pathological dysfunctions (which, as usual in Merleau-Ponty, are revelations of a structure in their showing its absence, and in this respect function as a phenomenological reduction).

This structural conception of the bodily schema allows Merleau-Ponty to show that consciousness emerges when a difference with respect to a norm shows itself. Consciousness is therefore the outcome of praxis and not of contemplation. This praxis is no scattered activity, but unity of a system that, however, does not owe its unity to a logical form. Its unity derives from praxis itself (MSME 92-93).

This means that the bodily schema is not something perceived or perceivable. It is the norm for perception, but a moving and changing norm.[15] A norm, furthermore, which is temporally articulated (MSME 94). This allows Merleau-Ponty to state that movement characterizes the body not in terms of an exterior feature or a category (with a possible implicit reference to Heidegger's distinction between categories and existentials), but a defining element of the bodily subject.[16] The unity of the body is given through this praxis, which is

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n'avons pas à le penser, le comprendre n'est pas difficile, il est comme plan aide-mémoire qui n'a même pas besoin d'interprétation

et cependant schéma ≠ individu opaque et fermé sur soi, notre corps est un système, le schéma indique l'essentiel, il domine les détails, il dégage le sens, il indique un ordre, un intérieur du processus.

C'est donc comme   une idée- naturelle
une pensée donnée à elle-même
une intellection implicite
un savoir que nous avons parce [*sic*] que nous sommes
2) Et comment cela est-il possible?
Parce que le schéma corporel est essentiellement   attitude envers…
ouverture à des buts…
fond d'une praxis
Précisons ces deux points: savoir sans concept, totalité sans idée
fond d'une praxis,
avant d'étudier rapport
schéma corporel monde extérieur(3)
schéma corporel langage, relation avec autrui, pensée(4)] »

15   Cf. MSME 95: « Donc le schéma corporel n'est pas perçu- Il est norme ou position privilégiée par opposition à laquelle se définit le corps perçu. Il est avant la perception explicite- Il exige refonte de notre notion de la conscience ».

16   Cf. MSME 101: « [Donc le mouvement n'est pas une catégorie (de la troisième personne) de rapports interobjectifs, qu'il faudrait, on ne sait comment, appliquer à une conscience sans localité— Il y a une notion originaire du mouvement comme mien qui est celle d'une situation mienne parmi les

allowed and supported by the bodily schema. The body knows itself through it. Obviously here movement does not mean empirical motion, but possibility of movement, which is there even when the body is at rest. The body "institutes" itself through its actions. For example, the skin becomes a surface as long as the body touches and explores itself. This is a particularly relevant example of the nexus between perceptive knowledge and praxical movement.[17]

Thus knowledge, understood in terms of *theoria*, is derivative with respect to praxis. Once more, Merleau-Ponty makes his point through the analysis of pathological cases (in particular but not only the case of apraxia), which bring to light the fact that expressed knowledge is necessary only when the bodily schema does not work. Otherwise, the body possesses a direct, perceptive knowledge that does not need to be expressed. The latter is a position already defended in PhP, but in these lectures it is strengthened and — I should like to say — founded on a new, wider awareness of the role of movement.

Merleau-Ponty then further develops his discussion of the crucial role of the bodily schema by taking into consideration its decisive function in the realm of the relations between a subject and other subjects. Here the affective and even libidinal aspects are highlighted. It is through this particular access that the problem of language is posed. This analysis therefore seems to be able to shed some light on the synthetic and elliptical passage of VI where Merleau-Ponty mentions the role of desire in the articulation of a relationship between subjects. It is important to remark that, in that passage, Merleau-Ponty speaks of movements: «[f]or the first time also, my movements no longer proceed unto the things to be seen, to be touched, or unto my own body occupied in seeing and touching them, but they address themselves to the body in general and for itself (whether it be my own or that of another) […] And henceforth movement, touch, vision, applying themselves to the other and to themselves, return toward their source and, in the patient and silent labor of desire, begin the paradox of expression.»[18]

The motility of the body is expressive in and by itself. But it finds its "meaning" in being always already exposed to other subjects, which

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choses, la situation renfermant non seulement un rapport déterminé, mais une infinité de rapports possibles, dans son aspect actuel.] »

17   Cf. MSME 107: « [la peau devient surface à mesure que le corps touche] ».
18   Cf. VI 143-44. My italics. This "they" seems to be related to "movements".

in turn are praxical, self-moving bodily subjects. The bodily schema mediates them, and therefore allows the "others" to be constitutive part of one's own bodily schema. The "otherness" of other bodily subjects is thus defining a part of each bodily schema. The "being seen" as a structural and constitutive aspect of each bodily schema explains why the movements of a body (a bodily subject) are expressive in themselves even when they are not addressed to anybody. The bodily schema acts as an installation in me of the relationship with the others.[19] One could say that here Merleau-Ponty outlines the dialectic of seeing and being seen that resurfaces in VI.

(Provisional) conclusions

At this point no real conclusion can be drawn from the reading of these lectures, both because of the nature of this text, which was meant to be a simple support for Merleau-Ponty's speech, and because of the fact that Merleau-Ponty would then develop many themes, which are only sketched and suggested in this opening lecture course. Yet it is what is outlined here, but not wholly developed in later texts and courses, which seems most relevant. Movement receives in this course a weight that does not appear so clearly in Merleau-Ponty's further production. And yet it seems there, it seems to be on the verge of becoming the ontological key to access the manifestation of Being.

This manifestation is not understandable if the subjective side is not adequately taken into consideration. The bodily subject and its bodily schema are the place of movement, almost its impersonation. Thus movement is considered under at least three aspects: its phenomenological objective side (the world), its phenomenological subjective side (the bodily subject), and the expressivity of movement itself, which is possible thanks and through the relationship between body and world.

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19   Cf. MSME 109: « [L'explicitation totale du schéma corporel donne non seulement rapport à soi du sujet, mais encore son rapport à autrui: déjà dans mon schéma corporel sont incluses des présentations de moi-même qui ne s'obtiennent que du point de vue d'autrui (mon visage de face): avènement d'une vision de soi est avènement d'autrui (stade du miroir). Il y a une accentuation affective du schéma corporel qui est en réalité installation en moi d'un rapport avec autrui] ».

This expressivity (which has been seen by some painters and intuited in several movies) is not so much the expression of some particular thing, of scattered beings, but rather of the interplay of the being-there of what is there, and its appearing. Appearance is itself a form of movement. In this respect, the phenomenological account of movement points to its ontological meaning. This is what can be at best suggested, interpreting some hints and remarking the presence of some words which Merleau-Ponty seems to spend almost in passing, while in fact quite clearly stressing their importance. These words are, as has been said, metamorphosis, alteration, trace, sublimation. Words that testify of a decisive role assigned to movement, which certainly cannot be reduced to a physical process, but not even to a question pertaining meaning either.

Started from the problem of relating the perceptual world and the linguistic world (and the world of thought), Merleau-Ponty seems to have found something more than a link (the schematic role assigned at first to movement). Movement is not only a figure, hence a mediating notion adopted to understand the way the perceptual world becomes meaningful. Of course, it is also that. But in the course of his analysis, Merleau-Ponty seems to uncover a deeper meaning of movement, which unveils a different, processual ontology. Movement manifests Being, but this notion of manifestation is in itself a processual, "kinetic" concept, if this expression can be accepted. Traces of this kinetic ontology can be found scattered through many other texts and lectures, but unfortunately an explicit treatment of this theoretical perspective is nowhere to be found as such. Yet the investigation of temporality might support this interpretation. This is therefore the topic that constitutes the field of investigation of the next section.

SECTION THREE

NATURE

IX
THE PROBLEM OF NATURE
BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE.
THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The questions discussed in this chapter deal with the sense that the concept of Nature acquires in the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty. This concept is crucial for the French philosopher for at least two reasons: in the first place, it allows him to clarify the meaning of his own theoretical proposal, known as phenomenology of perception, freeing it from misunderstandings that have marked its reception, but also from hesitations inherent in the same self-interpretation that Merleau-Ponty attempts to realize at the end of his major work, without fully succeeding.[1] Secondly, the concept of nature, developed especially in the three courses held on this subject at the Collège de France, but with respect to which Merleau-Ponty gives valuable information also in various other places that will be taken into account here, represents a significant contribution, important for the very philosophical and scientific research on the concept of nature. It is this second theme, in particular, that will be discussed in this chapter. We want to ascertain the importance that the discussions conducted by Merleau-Ponty on the philosophy of nature have for the theoretical development of his thought, and what value can have the philosophical conception of nature that he has developed – although not accomplished. Implicit in this question is the claim that the philosophical concept of nature elaborated by Merleau-Ponty possesses a value for scientific research, for its epistemological presuppositions and for the general perspective within which it is conducted.

The latter statement clearly is not generally shared by scientists who effectively work in the various fields of natural sciences, as the

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1   Cf. MSME 3-4.

approach that they tend to adopt can be defined as naturalistic, i.e. the rather widespread adherence - except for individual cases, however remarkable - to a more or less consciously materialistic and reductionist philosophy. This is the "spontaneous philosophy of scientists", as it can be defined, both in relation to the time when Merleau-Ponty held his courses, and, even more so, at present, at a time when any other theoretical position seems to have lost even the right to citizenship, and deterministic materialism has become common sense not only in fields such as physics or chemistry, but also for disciplines ideally closer to the specificity of the human experience, such as psychology and cognitive science.

That things might also not be exactly in these terms, and that therefore what Merleau-Ponty argued in his works might be of interest to scientists is what I would like to show in this chapter. What I will attempt to do, therefore, is to discuss, in the light of Merleau-Ponty's analysis, what is the concept of nature that grounds his approach, and to compare it with other perspectives, in order to grasp the epistemological problems that Merleau-Ponty must face, and the solutions that he offers.

Nature as a phenomenological question

Merleau-Ponty continuously reflected on the concept of nature, starting from his early works, and until the end of his days. To understand the reasons that led him to devote three courses to this problem at the Collège de France, it is inevitable to retrace the path that drove him to conceive of nature as an ontological question. The first of the two monographs published in the Forties, *The structure of behaviour*, is the most important document of the early interest in the theme of nature; it is in fact in this book that Merleau-Ponty outlines a problem that will prove crucial to the development of his own thought. If, in fact, in the opening lines, Merleau-Ponty states that the purpose is "to understand the relations of consciousness and nature - organic, psychological or even social" (SB 3), the fundamental element that grounds the whole analytical work is the idea that consciousness emerges from and within nature, through a dialectical process, teleologically not pre-oriented, that stretches from the simplest forms of life up to the complexity of human behaviour. In other words, the theme of the investigation conducted in SB is the delineation of the emergence of a peculiar form

of life, such as the human one, that is still largely a form of natural life, but on the other hand seems to exceed nature. The decisive issue that Merleau-Ponty thus faces in this work, and that will be constantly repeated and elaborated in subsequent writings, is to understand how human existence might constitute a form of discontinuity within the continuity of natural processuality of living forms.

Thus we see how, from the beginning, Merleau-Ponty puts together two issues that do not coincide immediately, but rather in some ways make it more complex the theoretical framework here outlined: on the one hand there is the task of studying human experience as a peculiar example, certainly very complex, but not essentially heterogeneous, of vital behaviour; on the other hand the issue consists in investigating how experience, and especially perceptual experience, bring to light the presence of a processuality intrinsic in nature, that human experience, however, not only implements, but also *reveals*. The human mode of perceptual experience, in other words, is not only a variation in a line of continuity (albeit with differences and characterized by an evolutionary trend whose meaning will be investigated) that permeates the entire living world; it also produces the truth of it. The human being is the particular living being that not only experiences, but also that *knows* its own experiencing. This is the crucial reason why Merleau-Ponty insists on the necessity of a phenomenological account of nature: the truth of the account itself is in any case something related to human reason, even though its object is not human. Hence the overcoming of any form of naïve realism and at the same time the meaninglessness of the accusations of residual idealism addressed to Merleau-Ponty.

The problem is to clarify how this knowledge, this dimension of the unveiling of the truth of reality, can properly happen, that is, at the same time be prepared but not conditioned by what precedes it. Although Merleau-Ponty does not openly state it, it is nevertheless clear that the problem investigated in this work consists in conceiving of a "teleology without purpose", which is implemented through the succession of natural forms of life in such a way as to produce, at some point, the event of a form of life that not only "is", but also knows what it is. In terms that Merleau-Ponty uses in this book, the issue is to understand the event that allows a given organism, the human being, not only to *be*, but also *to have* a body; that consequently can understand its own body as a unity; and that correspondingly may have a "world" understood as a global set of elements outside of the body, ever changing yet organized in a stable manner. This is accordingly

the establishment of a stable separation between an "internal" and "external" side. This distinction "comes to the world", as the different forms of life show a gradually increasing degree of implementation of this separation, which however does not exclude but rather implies exchanges and interrelations. The problem is then to understand what exactly permits and realizes this development.

The analysis conducted by Merleau-Ponty in this work focuses primarily on the notion of behaviour. As we will see, this perspective implies challenging theoretical choices that go far beyond a simple adherence to the behavioural approach, quite common at the time when the book was written. Through this notion Merleau-Ponty intends to actually clear the field from two apparently opposing, but in fact allied, theoretical options: realistic objectivism and idealist subjectivism. In both cases, according to Merleau-Ponty, the contact with the theme under investigation, the notion of behaviour, is lost, for in fact it is resolved in a concept inadequate to express its specificity. This thesis is not simply enunciated, nor is it only expressed as a legitimate defence through philosophical reflection, but is demonstrated through a very detailed discussion of the most relevant scientific research in the biological, physiological, neurological and psychiatric fields of his epoch. The problem common to realism and idealism, and their scientific variants, is the dualism that sustains them. A dualism that however is not openly understood, but rather remains latent beneath the surface of a scientific discourse that claims to be objective and devoid of prejudices. Merleau-Ponty therefore wants to show how science is not conceptually neutral, but rather always already conditioned by philosophical options, remaining however uninvestigated, and thus ending up jeopardizing the positive results achieved. Merleau-Ponty's discourse, in other words, is not meant to deny the value of scientific research, but rather pursues the opposite aim of establishing the basis for a different conception of science.

From this point of view, Merleau-Ponty does not make an extravagant gesture: he actually rediscovers a problem that Husserl had already outlined since the *Logical Investigations* and then reaffirmed at the end of his career, in the *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. The originality of Merleau-Ponty, if anything, lies in the conjunction of this theoretical need, already largely emerged in Husserl's philosophy, with the conceptual and methodological tools of the school of Gestalt psychology, which actually is akin both to Husserl himself as well as to other members of the so-called "School

of Brentano". In particular, the notion of Gestalt had been outlined by philosophers such as Carl Stumpf, Alexius Meinong, Christian von Ehrenfels, Ernst Mally, all students of Franz Brentano, and all convinced of the need to treat sensory and perceptual experience otherwise than as the union of unrelated and atomic extrinsic data. The Gestalt is in fact a complex notion, but basically meant to clarify the fact that the connections between the data of experience are parts of the phenomenon, and not later additions, due to external causes (as claimed by realism and empiricism) or to the operations of an autonomous subject (as claimed by the idealism). But if the structuring of a phenomenon is its intrinsic virtue, and if its basic elements are what they are because of the totality in which they are located (as Husserl had already shown in the third *Logical Investigation*), then it is possible, and indeed necessary, to take a step further, and wonder about the nature and peculiarities of this structuring nexus.

This is the essential move that Merleau-Ponty makes in *The Structure of Behaviour*, so that the very title shows its programmatic intentions. The modes of behaviour that the various living organisms, from amoeba to man, show to possess, are not extrinsic properties, but neither are they disembodied and purely conceptual essences, for the peculiarity of the structure of a behaviour is precisely to be a form that appears, manifests itself, as it is rooted in a body that acts, moves, perceives, lives: in a word, "behaves", and in so doing, it shows, that is, it externalizes, its internal properties. These properties are phenomena and not ineffable qualities: determinations that are given in a common world, in which the interaction with this very same world and with the other living bodies is a fundamental element of the very possibility that something like a behaviour be given. An unprejudiced (and, at least implicitly, phenomenological), theoretical outlook that can grasp and describe this reality, then will show that it is possible to understand nature, at least the living one, in a rational way, but differently than what either the atomistic, deterministic and objectivist psychology, or the psychology of the interiority of consciousness, can afford.

The strength of Merleau-Ponty's argument consists in his ability to bring to light from inside, working on the very basic concepts that found the doctrine, the limits but also the alternative possibilities of the scientific positions he criticizes. In other words, it is classical behaviourism itself that can go beyond its theoretical presuppositions, thanks to the discoveries it provides. It is not necessary to enclose the notion of behaviour within a narrow physiological scheme to

adequately grasp the importance and the potential of this concept. Behaviour is a structure that appears and shows outwardly a law of internal organization. It is possible, according to Merleau-Ponty, to understand this law otherwise, without having to appeal to some ineffable inner power. It is necessary, however, to know how to describe it, and therefore a proper conceptual toolbox is required. But this toolbox cannot be derived from a deterministic approach. That is, one cannot continue to support an implicit philosophy, which is in fact motivated by out-dated reasons and historical determinations, when one is bringing to light phenomena which in fact require a different form of thought. The discourse about living nature in terms of a linkage between external stimuli and responses of the body is wrong, because the structure of behaviour that even the simplest living beings possess is a correlation, in which it is impossible to isolate single events that be pure causes or pure effects.

Therefore, the mechanistic model of linear causality, which the physics of the time had already abandoned in favour of the notion of functional correlation, shows its metaphysical meaning as an unjustified residue, when repeated in biology and psychology without having been previously investigated and critically discussed. Behaviour is a unitary structure, which is not to be split into an inaccessible inner and a measurable outer side (SB 153). Behaviour is therefore a notion that requires new categories, for it is a system without being a totality solved or solvable under an essential concept. It is an intermediate region between mere matter and pure spirit. One could also say that it is animated matter or incarnated spirit, according to an image deriving from Schelling. Schelling's name is not openly mentioned in this work, but will later be carefully investigated by Merleau-Ponty when the theme of nature will be taken up in his courses at the Collège de France.

In the first place, then, an investigation of the empirical and objectivist side, represented in particular, on the one hand, by the physiology of the school of Pavlov, and on the other by Watson's behaviourism, is in order. Behaviourism is perhaps the most influential psychological doctrine at the time when Merleau-Ponty prepares his work. It is therefore crucial to show that it is thanks to an internal critique of this notion that behaviour can be understood in such a radically different way with respect to what is presented by this school. In reconstructing its theoretical tenets, Merleau-Ponty brings to light the problem inherent to the behaviouristic approach: in understanding behaviour as a mechanical response to a stimulus

constituted by a physical impulse, the way in which the body actually responds becomes incomprehensible. If, however, between stimulus and response there is not a causal linear and extrinsic relation, but a more complex, "circular" relationship (SB 15, 17, 46-47, 51, 130-131, 137, 144), according to which the body in some way predetermines, not the single stimulus, but the "field" of opportunity within which some specific stimulus can actually take place, then one can see how the structure of behaviour is not similar to a machine that processes the input according to established and rigid schemes, but works along a path of sense. This sense, however, is not conceptual, but natural. The relations between organism and environment are not ideas, but concrete activities; activities that outline a field of interrelations and references, of interactions and feedbacks. Brought to its consequences, behaviourism has to deny its own theoretical premises, or will be losing its descriptive ability (SB 16).

The unbiased observation of phenomena related to behaviours leads to the refusal of the atomistic and mechanistic paradigm, underpinning behaviourism. If behaviour were really a sum of individual reactions to extraneous stimuli, then it would amount to what can be observed in certain forms of pathology. Paradoxically, then, what is pathological for psychiatry should be the norm according to the behaviouristic conception. Evidently, however, the "normal" behaviour, that is the usual one, is more than what the narrow behaviourist theoretical framework suggests. The error consists, in Merleau-Ponty's view, in considering inevitably unscientific any approach that is not atomistic. Here lies the broader epistemological meaning of Merleau-Ponty's analysis, which then leads him to enlarge his investigation to natural science as a whole. It remains then to be seen if it is possible to understand behaviour as organized by a system (the CNS) that is conceived as a global field, in which each part finds its expression (SB 37-46). In order to show the plausibility of this hypothesis, Merleau-Ponty points out that the relationship between organism and environment is not purely static and fragmented, but is implemented in a continuous way, and above all it is a process. A complex process of mutual interactions and adjustments, in which imbalances are created that then induce forms of rebalancing, always partial and dynamic, at once prospective and retroflexed towards their original conditions. The study of the organic behaviour therefore poses the problem of the intrinsic temporality of living structures.

This criticism can be reiterated in the case of the Russian school of reflexology. Pavlov certainly had a merit, which consisted in showing

that there are organic reflexed reactions that are structured according to the conditioning scheme. However, the notion of conditioning is problematic. Only in the artificial situation of a laboratory is it possible to separate and isolate individual reflexed reactions. Animals subjected to this kind of conditioning in effect also show, after a certain period of time, to develop pathological reactions. The reason lies in the fact that they are removed from their environment and artificially placed in experimental conditions that are designed to bring to light a specific phenomenon, analytically separating it from the overall context. The scientific method therefore isolates what is only one aspect of the complexity of animal behaviour, and neglects to analyze the other effects that this operation produces, for they are arbitrarily considered irrelevant. Anything that does not fit in the stimulus-response scheme is considered insignificant and therefore expunged from research. However, this actually leads to a methodological impasse and the genesis of organic diseases. It should be noted that William James had already moved similar criticisms to the late-nineteenth-century notion of the reflex arc. James in particular had pointed out that the isolation of a single process of stimulus-reflex reaction consists in an arbitrary and drastic simplification of the structure of the nervous system, which normally has to decide between different stimuli, and thus already at this level operates not like a machine but rather as a structure of articulation of a sense, even if organic and not spiritual.[2]

Form as a process

A different conception of truth and science emerges from concrete research and the results actually achieved by the school of psychology of form, that Merleau-Ponty often cites in *The Structure of Behaviour* as well as in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Kurt Goldstein is the author to whom Merleau-Ponty feels most closely related. But this attachment is not without reservations, and indeed in the first book one can find particularly acute criticisms of the philosophical presuppositions proper to Gestalt psychology. The notion of Gestalt in fact lends itself to two possible, although opposite, misrepresentations: on the one hand it can be seen as an abstract concept, and then an explanation of how this abstract form takes part in the concrete life of the organism

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2   Cf. W. James, *The Principles of Psychology,* New York: H. Holt and co., 1890.

becomes necessary; on the other hand, on the contrary, it can be seen as a physical reality, thus reducing it to the very objectivist and causal reality that Gestalt psychology instead actually undermines.

The notion of Gestalt is primarily a theoretical tool that provides the best way to get out of mechanistic atomism without falling into some form of spiritualism or vitalism. The researchers who formulated this concept conceived it, through empirical research, from experiences proper to both healthy and ill subjects, that is, by investigating the concrete actual modalities with which such subjects perceive, without imposing preformed theoretical schemes on these observations. Through these investigations some fundamental characteristics are revealed: firstly a perceptual form is a global structure, in which each element is such because related to a totality, and would not exist "in itself" without such a totality. This totality serves as a global background against which a given figure stands out as a highlighted perceptual datum. For example, if one perceives a tree, the tree is always caught against the background of a field, with other trees surrounding it, in a spatial perspective. This background is essential to grasp the figure that stands out, in this case the tree, even if the background itself is not the object of perception, but its frame. But this background can also, in part, in turn be brought to the forefront, while leaving the perceptive element fade away, as if in a scene.

This complex structure of perception cannot be properly understood if one pretends to give it a causal explanation. It must be seized according to a different mode, a mode based on understanding (*verstehen*) rather than simple empirical observation (SB 64). This remark has a crucial methodological but also philosophical implication: not only that of Gestalt is an operational concept, irreducible to the paradigm based on atomic sense-data; but in bringing to light this mode as foundational for perception itself, it also requires the researchers to perform a revision of their own epistemological and categorial theoretical assumptions. But it is in this respect, according to Merleau-Ponty, that the Gestalt theorists failed to live up to the task. In fact, they mainly tended to understand the genesis of forms of perception in terms of measurable physical events, that is, in turn, something to be grounded in a homogeneous and indifferent space, understandable in terms of physical space. However, this notion is not derived from concrete research, but depends on an epistemological leap that proves to be arbitrary and harmful. Understanding perception in terms of Gestalten should instead permit to outline a new science of perception,

a science in which the observer is not ousted from the observational field, but caught as a part of it. However, that kind of science cannot operate with the canons of mechanistic physics. It must be constructed in a way homogeneous to its problem. This science must become phenomenology.

In turn, this implies that the understanding spoken of by Merleau-Ponty is not simply identical with the notion proposed by Wilhelm Dilthey[3] in opposition to "explain" (*erklären*). Understanding, as it is spoken of by Merleau-Ponty, is a mode that, with respect to the model of physical explanation, does neither vary only in relation to its content, nor only in relation to the conceptual form. For Dilthey, the mode of understanding of the psychological, social and historical facts differs from causal explanation of the physical facts because the former are by nature different from the latter. This implies a latent dualism. Merleau-Ponty does not think that perception be shaped by nature as different from physical events, as the spiritual object studied by the *Geisteswissenschaften* is different from the physical object studied by *Naturwissenschaften*. More boldly and more radically, Merleau-Ponty believes that the notion of Gestalt is such as to lead to a revision of the very notion of nature, and therefore also to a critique of the very distinction between nature and spirit, that supports the distinction proposed by Dilthey between natural sciences and humanities.

But this in turn does not mean that Merleau-Ponty is adhering to the neo-Kantian perspective, such as was outlined by Windelband,[4] meant to be critical of Dilthey's position. According to Windelband it is necessary to distinguish, not between the natural sciences and the sciences of spirit as differing in content, but between nomothetic and idiographic sciences, i.e. sciences which build up laws (universal or at least general), and sciences describing singular data irreducible to any generalizing subsumption. For Windelband, it is therefore not the content, but the structural form of the discipline, that grants the distinction. Windelband had criticized Dilthey's theoretical proposal in light of this distinction, denying that psychology could be, as his

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3   In particular, although not only, in his *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften*, Duncker & Humblot, Leipzig 1883, and in *Die geistige Welt: Einleitung in die Philosophie des Lebens. Erste Hälfte: Abhandlungen zur Grundlegung der Geisteswissenschaften*, G. Misch (her.), Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1924.

4   In his most famous work: "Geschichte und Naturwissenschaft", in *Präludien*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1907, pp. 355-379.

opponent would suggest, a science of spirit, because in reality it was to be nomothetic science, and therefore epistemologically similar to the natural sciences.

Merleau-Ponty believes instead that Windelband's theoretical hypothesis is not satisfactory. The "understanding" mentioned in SB is of a different nature: it is understandable through the phenomenological method that, first of all, puts into brackets any pre-established theoretical approach to phenomena, so that the phenomena can speak with their own voice; and, secondly, takes care of the fact that, in the study of perception, the one who investigates is also being investigated (a need emphasized by Dilthey); at the same time it should bring to light the structures that make up the general operating conditions of possibility of experience itself (a problem of Kantian ancestry but revised in the light of transcendental phenomenology).

All this adds to the fact that the Gestalt, understood as embodied form, points toward an implicit ontology of bodily meaning that Husserl had glimpsed, but that must be rendered explicit. In the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty aims precisely at showing that this is possible thanks to an investigation of perceptive *experience*, understood as both subject and object of inquiry. In this respect, the *relationship* between subject and object becomes the real field of investigation, and subject and object are seen as only derivative. Yet this correlation is discussed in *Phenomenology of Perception* from a standpoint that endangers the whole project, for the correlation that should in principle be responsible for the emergence of consciousness out of nature is also the outcome of an investigation performed by consciousness itself. Hence an unresolved circularity[5] that is theoretically unstable and that fails precisely to achieve what it was aiming at: namely, an understanding of experience *iuxta propria principia*, so to speak. This is the capital philosophical reason for Merleau-Ponty's own self-criticism (which now can be traced back to the opening lectures at the Collège de France). This is also the motivation that supports the ontologically oriented inquiry into nature performed chiefly but not only in the three courses mentioned above.

That of Gestalt is therefore, according to Merleau-Ponty, the decisive notion in order to outline a new conception of non-disembodied meaning. Perception, understood in the light of Gestalt psychology,

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5   Pointed out by T. Toadvine in his *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009.

shows to possess specificities irreducible to either a physiological perspective or a subjective-idealistic conception. But Merleau-Ponty also insists on the need to avoid the organicist approach proper to romantic philosophy of nature. If in fact perceptual sense is not pure mechanism, and is not transparent concept, it is also not fusion into a whole either. The single Gestalt is a transient structure, which can find a "good shape" but, on the contrary, can also diverge. The mode in which it appears is always uncertain, indeterminate, exposed to unpredictable changes. In addition, the organism-environment nexus is itself changeable depending on the type of organism. This means that the environment is not the same for all organisms. Implicit here one can find a critique of a certain dogmatic version of Darwinism, criticism that will also be further developed in the lectures on nature.

The first important work of Merleau-Ponty thus ends with the enunciation of an ambitious program: a conception of transcendental consciousness that, based on the fundamental directions provided by Husserl, be capable of integrating, more completely than what Husserl himself was able to do, all aspects of latency, opacity and resistance which are an integral part of consciousness, and not faults to be corrected (SB, pp. 220-224). The phenomenological philosophy that Merleau-Ponty envisages is an approach in which there is meaning, but not understood in the way that rational philosophy, until Sartre included, continued to regard as the mark of truth. As Merleau-Ponty writes at the end of the book,

> The natural «thing,» the organism, the behavior of others and my own behavior exist only by their meaning; but this meaning which springs forth in them is not yet a Kantian object; the intentional life which constitutes them is not yet a representation; and the «comprehension» which gives access to them is not yet an intellection (SB, p. 224).

It could be added that it is a dynamic, processual and evenemential structure, exposed to dissipation, but also able to self-organize. The issue set up to Merleau-Ponty therefore concerns the possibility to describe experience as dual, that is, as something that concerns its origin and its expression. Experience, in other words, must be accounted for in terms of something that produces meanings without being separated from that which it at once expresses and originates from. Experience ought to be conceived in such a way as to overcome the separation between subject and object. But what is more, experience must be grasped in its emergence from nature. It could be said, then, that for Merleau-Ponty

experience is always experience *of* nature in the double sense of this genitive: it is experienced nature, that is nature as object of experience; but it is also, and perhaps most of all, experiencing nature: that is, nature as subject of experience. It is this double bind, this subject/ object, neither only subject nor object, but not a mere mixture of the two either, that is therefore the problem Merleau-Ponty decides to investigate in the lectures on Nature.

Nature as a process of self-manifestation

The analysis of the question concerning nature is openly acknowledged by Merleau-Ponty, at the beginning of his first lecture course at the Collège de France on this theme, as apparently outdated, but he also immediately points out that any conception of spirit and history presupposes a notion of nature, and therefore if philosophy does not take nature into account then it is bound to confine itself within an uncritical immaterialism that endangers the very notion of history and culture. The analysis of the concept of nature must therefore, in his view, avoid any naive naturalism, but at the same time will have to face this issue as an ontological problem, in order to avoid constructing the very concept of man along a fantastic perspective. His criticism of neo-Kantianism thus is confirmed and deepened from the start (IPP, pp. 130-131).

Nature is indeed an enigma because it is not just an object in front of a constituent subject, but rather it is an object from which the subject was born, and this is true both at the individual and at the social and historical levels. The link and the testimony of this origin is perception, which although loaded with historical determinations, is still "at the first day." Nature shows this ambiguity: at the same time it is stratified and is presented as an original that was already here before any stratification. As such it disorients objective thought, as it constitutes the immemorial past that appears at each new moment, the "here and now" of a past that has never been present. It is an involuntary memory, even more radical than that of the body, because it is the memory of Being. If then one still wants to admit that nature exists and has existed apart from being known by a knowing subject, one must recognize a conceptual statute for this notion that is different from that of being-subject and of being-object, a third term which is pre-objective and pre-subjective. Nature is not merely a product, because it is at the

same time a producer, and thus, with Schelling, one can say that it has something in itself that is imposed even to God as independent of his work (LN, p. 4).

The most relevant conceptions of nature that history of philosophy has produced ought therefore to be discussed, following an approach that aims at bringing to the fore the peculiar diplopy (IPP, p. 158) that seems to be present throughout its development. On the one hand nature is the realm of the constituted meaning, of the objectified exteriority whose sense relies on the activity of a constituting subject – be it God or human action and knowledge. But on the other, nature is also something "within", whose status escapes the categories of constitution and fabrication. Implicit in this discussion is the question concerning ontology.

Merleau-Ponty's investigation begins with the analysis of some crucial philosophical conceptions of nature. After a quick delineation of some ancient conceptions (mostly dealing with Aristotle and the Stoics), it focuses on the Cartesian view, seen as still prominent in contemporary philosophy and science. Merleau-Ponty brings to light the ambiguity of Descartes' concept of nature, both with respect to the notion of God as cause of a world which then, once put into existence, functions by itself, and the notion of *causa sui*, which entails the theme of nothingness, that is averted officially but remains within the horizon of Cartesian thought. Merleau-Ponty also raises the issue of the concept of nothingness as related to the human being. In fact, this concept, on the one hand, is declared unthinkable for a thought "closed in its infinity", but on the other hand this same thought (i.e. the *res cogitans*) reaches itself as such only when it faces the hypothesis of its own nothingness, through the hyperbolic doubt. Similarly the notion of God as cause is found and grounded only thanks to the idea of the dependence of everything upon God, and therefore achieved only as resolution of the hesitation on the divine nature itself (IPP, pp. 135-137).

It is within this ontological framework that Descartes poses the problem of the notion of nature, which then is thought of as a unified whole with no latency, devoid of intrinsic possibilities, pure mechanism activated from the outside. Nature is totally "*natura naturata*" and God totally "*natura naturans*", according to a terminology older than Cartesian philosophy itself. Nature therefore shows to possess no autonomous power: it is, in Hegel's words, an empty shell. As a whole, interiority passes on the side of God. The idea of nature as a set of

objects thus derives from that of Being as "unrestricted". In the last analysis, that is, Descartes rediscovers, without knowing or willing it, the Parmenidean solution consisting in the opposition between Being and nothingness. This notion of nature survives in the spontaneous philosophy of scientists until present times, clashing with what emerges from their concrete research. Its genealogical retrieval, attempted by Merleau-Ponty in these lectures, helps therefore showing its relativity and delineates a possible different direction.

Yet, even remaining within the Cartesian perspective, it is possible to find a different concept of nature, more connected to what Descartes calls the "natural light" (*lumen naturale*), which Merleau-Ponty describes in terms of a facticity that is not pure absence of any determination, but on the contrary the possibility of sense albeit within its own limits, that is, conceived not starting from a normative ideal of meaning to be deployed as truth, but in terms of something that "makes itself". This different notion of nature is examined from the standpoint of the body, whose teachings may not coincide with those of pure intellect. It is "life that understands itself". The introduction of the consideration of the body proper in terms of living body renders the position of Descartes unstable, both as regards the human subject, but also the world and God. There remains an unsurpassed fracture between the concept of the world as the largest object or set of objects, and the world as event or set of events (IPP, pp. 137-139).

Kant's position is ambiguous because, on the one hand, he gives up the Cartesian hope to derive the being of nature from infinite being, but on the other hand he does not then recognize nature as raw being in order to study it as such. Rather, Kant reduces nature to the set of determinations performed by a sentient and knowing transcendental subject. From this point of view nature is still conceived in terms of a set of objects, with the only difference that these objects are totally subjective. But Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that Kant does not remain trapped in this position, for he poses the problem of the body as both cause and effect of itself, a totality that works on materials that are still its own; unlike, as it happens in Marx, understanding man as a transformer of otherness: hence the Marxist need to place man back into nature while avoiding naturalism (IPP, pp. 137-139).

Kant seems to discover an interiority of nature that is different from consciousness. The problem is how to construct a proper mode of understanding these natural totalities. The hypothesis, introduced in the *Critique of Judgement*, of keeping together the perspective based

on human representational causality and that based on the organic and teleological interpretation of the natural whole, while permitting to avoid the dogmatic absolutization of either side, does not seem to offer a satisfactory solution. The question in fact is how to keep these two perspectives together, how to find the *link* between them without reducing either one to the other, while at the same time not leaving them hanging together side by side either, in a sterile parallelism without relationships (which in the end is just a revival of Leibniz's position). The issue consists in finding a reconciliation between the thesis of nature as a human representation and the antithesis of nature as a whole of which man is a part, which sees man as the theater and not the agent of reconciliation itself.

Yet how to think this synthesis? Kant does not take a step in this direction, which is rather attempted by the romantic philosophy and especially by Schelling. Conversely, according to Merleau-Ponty the neo-Kantian philosophy reborn in the late nineteenth century marks the triumph of conceptual anthropocentrism against the conception of nature implied in the *Critique of Judgment* and developed by Schelling (IPP, pp. 141-142). Kant at least leaves open the theme of nature as an enigma. Neo-Kantianism, in trying to overcome this gap "*a parte subjecti*", provides a remedy worse than the disease. Merleau-Ponty in this connection evokes the resistance of nature that the Stoics had already glimpsed (IPP, p. 142) a resistance that is the expression of the rough unity of nature, of which the human intellect is much more an expression than a condition, and which is lost in the neo-Kantian approach.

Schelling takes up the Kantian critique in connection to the notion of necessary Being, but instead of leaving it open and determine it only negatively, he delves into the very idea of abyss as an ultimate reality, defining the absolute as that which exists for no reason. The absolute so is no longer thought of as the *causa sui*, absolute antithesis of nothingness, and correspondingly nature is no longer a positive absolute, but an ambiguous and "barbaric" principle, surmountable, but not cancellable, not even in the sense of a dialectical development in Hegel's sense (IPP, p. 143). Schelling, as Merleau-Ponty recalls, says he wants to be "living and experiencing what in Kant was at best a dream." According to Merleau-Ponty, Schelling's notion of intellectual intuition can be compared to perception before the latter is reduced to idea, that is, a conception of perception that puts in the presence of an original knowledge made of natural symbols, silent knowledge that

man can recover only because man "is" the becoming conscious of this natural productivity, a nature that by taking a distance from itself can then know itself through man (in this sense, thus, reversing the path of the Hegelian spirit).

Avoiding the gnostic excesses of Schelling's circle (and of Schelling himself at times), which would lead to a new objectification of nature, this different approach can then set the stage for a different perspective, which, however, also requires a revision of the categories implied by it. The effort to think about nature otherwise than as impotence (Hegel), or absence of the concept, is a merit that, as Merleau-Ponty underlines, Lukács ascribes to Schelling, while criticizing the irrational and mystical drift that according to Lukács burdens Schelling's philosophy (IPP, p. 144). Merleau-Ponty criticizes in turn the doctrine of reflection proposed by Lukács about Schelling, as it actually does not produce anything different than a new objectification, whereas the problem is to bring nature inside subjectivity itself. The "un-reflexive" (*irréfléchi*) which nature is, then, is not something ineffably given, to be reached only through direct communication, but rather something that requires a doubling of reflection, a sort of hyper-reflection, which is an intuition of intuition itself.

Yet how to achieve a more effective outlook on this new form of reflection reflecting itself and its own un-reflected, once Hegelian dialectic is no longer helpful? Bergson, Merleau-Ponty remarks, seems very far away from these problems, rather looking for a different way of thinking positivity. But he nevertheless rediscovers dialectic philosophy, being led by his own questioning, which is something preferable than sticking to dialectic as a universal formula. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes Bergson's idea of the body as a center of indeterminacy, which marks a change with respect to an ideal of coincidence between perception and pure thing, which is what Bergson argues at times and in principle (IPP, pp. 145-147). Virtuality and the notion of horizon, understood as the distance from an undivided primordial Being that is at once confirmed and articulated together by the movement of self-distention of the universe, thus re-appear within Bergson's own philosophy. The notion of the *élan vital* resumes in its own terms the problem of organic nature posed by the *Critique of Judgment*, and so it reconnects Bergson to Schelling. Nature is seen as a form of not predetermined processuality, hence marked by hesitation and setbacks. It is in this way that Bergson himself rediscovers the problem of negativity, of the nexus between

real and virtual being, beyond his official polemics against the notions of nothingness, disorder, and possibility. Ultimately, according to Merleau-Ponty, Bergson brings the negative back within natural Being, although having started his meditation with its programmatic exclusion. The problem of natural negativity is thus brought to the forefront in its full importance.[6]

The issue of natural negativity is however a very slippery one, for it calls into question the very phenomenological method. Husserl's philosophy must therefore be examined. The role of the body proper or lived body (the *Leib*) is central in order to call into question any ontology based on objective things. But in turn it is the lived body itself to be called into question, in order to avoid creating another positivity (IPP, pp. 147-151). The question of intercorporeity emerges in this context, as Merleau-Ponty finds in Husserl the issue of a subjectivity which is also incorporated, if not the very place of a link with other bodies in the first place. The solipsism proper to the transcendental Ego, often attributed to Husserl's conception of subjectivity, still depends on that very ontology implicit in the notion of objective things. But the living body is a body that can see and perceive thanks to its being seen and perceived. Therefore it possesses already in itself a nature, understood as a ground from which it emerges as a separation, and thus cannot be the source of the meaning of nature itself.

It is therefore necessary to raise the problem of the genesis of subjectivity, and in particular of how a separated and contemplating subject emerges from this general condition of plural anonymity. According to Merleau-Ponty, Husserl began to carry out such an investigation in the later writings, particularly those devoted to the reversal of the Copernican world, where nature is described as an original presence preceding nature as constituted through intentional acts. Husserl's philosophical journey thus accomplishes itself in reversing itself. Nature emerges precisely through a perspective that initially aimed at conceiving it as configured through the constitutive activity of thought. Yet thought itself in turn is then understood as an oriented but not necessitated productivity that on the other hand is not thinking and teleological spirit either. Husserl's last philosophy thus exceeds the artificialist ontological approach proper both to mechanism and organism. Natural production must be understood in a different way.

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6   This was more widely discussed in chapter 7 above.

In this connection Merleau-Ponty outlines an approach to physical science in order to bring to light what in twentieth-century physics seems to allow such a different approach (IPP, pp. 152-155; LN, pp. 83-122). After a discussion of classic epistemology, and the model of Laplace in particular, Merleau-Ponty outlines a different perspective, achieved thanks to Alfred N. Whitehead's writings. Of Whitehead, Merleau-Ponty values above all the idea of the passage of nature and of natural process, a theme that opens to the research of the subsequent year, devoted on living nature. Merleau-Ponty appreciates the Whiteheadian conception of nature as a non-psychic "memory", a structure in the making, that is, conceived according to an anti-Parmenidean ontological conception of Being. But this conception differs at the same time from that of Aristotle, founded on Being as the concept of the become (*devenu*). Whitehead's philosophy is able to describe Being in its happening, and the conception of nature, of which Whitehead suggested an outline, goes in that direction.

Man as the becoming conscious of nature: epistemological and ontological problems

In the second lecture course Merleau-Ponty openly raises the problem of moving from animality to the human body in order to achieve a possible understanding of what is cultural in man without denying its naturalness. The study of nature is conceived as an introduction to the definition of Being (IPP, pp. 156-157). From this point of view, says Merleau-Ponty, one could also start from man or from God, as the problem is in any case the same, that is, to figure out how to get out of Parmenides' (and Sartre's, after all) antinomy between Being, that cannot not be, and non-Being, that cannot be. From this point of view it can be said that Merleau-Ponty's problem consists in finding a different categorial framework for Being, which can overcome the Parmenidean determination and his canonization into Aristotelian substantialism. Merleau-Ponty's programmatic statement, concerning the necessity of always reaching Being only indirectly, through beings, ought to be understood in connection to this problem.

The analysis of nature, and in particular of living nature, shows in what ways the research performed by science achieves concrete results that directly challenge the naive ontology above sketched, and then shows in what sense does the notion of life possess a direct ontological

relevance. It is twentieth-century physics, in the first place, that shows how the enormous power acquired by technology requires a revision of its underlying ontology. The notions of space and time must be renewed in order to abandon the idea of absoluteness that pervades the spontaneous philosophy of scientists, despite its not being justified by the experimental results. Merleau-Ponty refers in particular to the work of Eddington and his conception of mathematical and physical entities as structural and not natural things. However, the ontological interpretation of this perspective differs: according to some physicists, in this way we are moving towards a "mentalism" (or idealism), more or less informed. Others, like Cassirer, claim that the proper interpretation of these structural entities is the neo-Kantian one, which warns against the risk of reifying the symbolism, and argues that the evolution of science dispenses from posing the ontological problem of nature, which thus essentially disappears.

Merleau-Ponty finds it important to stress Cassirer's analysis as a criticism directed against any form of naive realism (even idealistic), but remarks that this position is limited and one-sided, in not noticing that the resolution of the physical nature into a field of structures and relationships poses the problem of the very conceptual nature of these structures, which however cannot be included within a wider "formal ontology". Here the epistemological and formal side of Merleau-Ponty's investigation fully emerges, for he is extremely aware of the importance of this issue. Merleau-Ponty does not reproach Cassirer with a lack of analysis of the link between concepts and their content, because from a neo-Kantian standpoint such a link is resolved into the field of transcendental operations (in Cassirer performed by a scientific community rather than a transcendental subject). But the problem is only displaced, since the removal of the reference to a "nature" preceding thinking is not sufficient to exempt from the task of examining thought itself in its own pre-critical assumptions, which paradoxically remain uninvestigated in neo-Kantianism, since the link between ontology and experience remains unexamined.

This lesson is on the contrary perfectly clear in Whitehead's path towards ontology. Cassirer himself admits that modern science undermines the concept of object, moving in the direction of the notion of function, because the notion of field promoted in modern physics does not correspond to a system of objects in any sense of the term, but to a system of effects. But since critical philosophy is defined in terms of an analysis of the transcendental conditions for the constitution

of objects, then it necessarily follows that critical philosophy itself, especially in its ontological presuppositions, must be revised and renewed (IPP, pp. 159-162). In other words, philosophy must pose the problem of the conditions of possibility of relations and structures, and of that particular nexus of structures which is bodily subjectivity in its emergence from the broader field.

Merleau-Ponty then does not take the path of a neo-Kantian critical examination of the operating procedures of the sciences, which in the last analysis leaves their objectivistic assumptions intact instead of discussing them. He rather takes the path of discussing the ontological presuppositions of science, and therefore, on the one hand, of why concrete scientific research requires such a discussion, and, on the other, of what perspective is then possible to find. Ultimately, then, it is precisely the notion of object, and the need for its radical revision, to lead Merleau-Ponty's investigation in the direction of a dialectical ontology in which processes, relationships, imbalances, uncertainty and positive events are concepts to be considered as more fundamental.

Therefore the second lecture course sets to investigate nature, and in particular living nature, in order to understand what categories are required by an adequate conceptualization of these phenomena. The starting point is constituted by the facticity of nature, seen as a positive phenomenon and not as a lack of a more certain and more refined conceptuality. The aspects of lack, of contingency and of becoming are to be found in nature itself, and should not be seen as limitations of subjective knowledge. In this way it is then possible to agree with Bohr (IPP, p. 161) when he remarks that there is a harmony between psychology (Merleau-Ponty would like it to be replaced with phenomenology) and physics. The openness of perceptual universe is the model with which to understand the realm of living nature and even the physical one. As a matter of fact, the classical model of deterministic physical universe is integral with a mechanistic psycho-physiology which excludes indeterminacy, treating it as a subjective accident. So once again it becomes clear how it is an entire conceptual model that imposes its own constraints on the different scientific disciplines, in spite if not against the experimental results themselves.

It is from this perspective that Merleau-Ponty raises the question of the appearance of man within nature. What is to be understood is the phenomenon of man, that is, something that appears through man, but as the source of man itself. Something, therefore, not deductible as an effect of which human mind would be the cause, for here the effect is

the cause of the cause. This is therefore a circular and genealogical consideration, where the theme of self-manifestation is played in terms of an epistemological and ontological critical approach. It should be also kept in mind that life is not reducible to a phenomenon for consciousness, which is what makes the whole difference between phenomenology and idealism. Consciousness is in turn determined by life. Therefore it is not consciousness, but the human body as a living-lived recipient, that must be made the reference for investigation.

The human body is both the theater of the manifestation of nature and its inhabitant. This consideration then outlines the relationship of *ineinander* according to which the human body is not becoming alive thanks to a descent of conscience in it, but it is the *metamorphosis* of life, which brings the body itself to become the body of the spirit, as defined by Valéry (IPP, p. 196). This notion, says Merleau-Ponty, would require something like an "aesthesiology", that is, a study of the body as animal of perceptions (IPP, p. 197). There are therefore not two natures, but only one, which however is double, and hence requires new categories. The themes of the *Umwelt*, of the body schema, of perception as true mobility (*wahrnehmen und sich bewegen*) are rather expressions of corporeality as something two-faced or two-sided, both sensitive and sentient, with a public side accessible from the outside, and a private side accessible only by the owner (who is not interiority but the sentient side of the sensible). Merleau-Ponty concludes that all these considerations must be extracted from the still objectivist thought of psychology and neurophysiology, and re-configured in terms of a philosophy of the flesh, conceived as the visibility of the invisible. Merleau-Ponty explicitly states that the investigations on nature aim to "liberate nature from the categories of substance, accident, cause, purpose, potentiality, act, object, subject, in-itself, for-itself traditionally involved in ontology" (IPP, p.167, translation modified).[7] The aim of

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7   The English translation of this passage reads as follows: "what exactly are we looking for when we try to abstract from nature the categories of substance, accident, potentiality, act, object, subject, in-itself, for-itself, which are traditionally involved in ontology?" In this translation, in which rather astonishingly the terms "cause" and "purpose" are dropped, the notion of abstraction might be taken as rather traditionally meaning obtaining something abstract from its concrete basis, like in Aristotle's theory of abstraction. In this respect the abstractive process is the truth of the empirical basis. In the French original one however can read: "Que cherchons-nous au juste quand nous entreprenons de dégager la Nature des catégories de substance, accident, cause, fin, puissance, acte, objet, sujet, en soi, pour soi, traditionnellement impliquées dans l'ontolo-

this investigation is to find, in the human body, the place of a natural symbolism that leads to culture without cutting it off from nature (IPP, p. 199). The notion of truth is therefore the issue that Merleau-Ponty was after when his sudden death interrupted the quest. A notion of truth that can be understood in terms of the truth "of" Being in the double meaning of this genitive.

From here then philosophy must proceed to understand what relationship may exist between this new ontology and classical metaphysics. Science and technology have made revolutionary discoveries, yet not such as to reassure, but rather to frighten humanity, by re-discovering and renewing the old fear of total destruction. The old world, that for centuries seemed unchanging and immutable, suddenly finds itself marked by a radical impermanence. The world takes or finds a pre-human aspect. But moreover, this is something that comes from human action. Extreme naturalism and extreme artificialism are inextricably associated, not only in the myths of everyday life, but also in the refined myths of information theory or neo-Darwinism, for example. The different conception of nature Merleau-Ponty is after is thus meant to establish, on the contrary, an alliance between nature and man. This program, abruptly interrupted, is rediscovered at present by those ecology-oriented thinkers who look for a critical philosophical perspective able to avoid the naivetés of new age

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gie?" The verb "dégager" can be translated with "free", "unblock", "extricate", open", "liberate", "redeem". In the context of Merleau-Ponty's analysis it is clear in any case that the meaning of his analysis of traditional ontology leads him to seek a liberation from these categories and certainly not their validation.

X
RAW BEING AND
THE BARBARIC PRINCIPLE

Introduction

The discussion of the methodological standpoint according to which Merleau-Ponty develops his phenomenology of the flesh showed that nature becomes the focus of a perspective which aims at showing the "birth", so to speak, or the emergence, of subjectivity from "within". This within in turn proved to be an "outside", exteriority prior to the very distinction between interiority and exteriority themselves. Nature is a realm that exceeds the philosophical categories traditionally adopted in order to account for this field. Nature includes experience, which means that the usual phenomenological account of intentionality, based on its anti-naturalistic presuppositions, can no longer be accepted. But this form of experience is not that proper to consciousness. It is something "wild", as Merleau-Ponty at times expresses himself. It is in particular in connection with nature as this primordial realm of existence that possesses a sense of its own, irreducible to the sphere of meaning, that some metaphors coming from Schelling's philosophy are introduced by Merleau-Ponty. The study of nature can accordingly start from an evaluation of Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of Schelling and his appropriation of the perspective delineated by the German philosopher. Through this confrontation, the peculiarity of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology should emerge in its ontological relevance.

In the first place we must face a difficulty inherent in Merleau-Ponty's reading of Schelling. This difficulty is a major one, for it has to do with the problem of the passage from Nature to Logos, which, following the project sketched in VI, is the part that remained basically undeveloped. In other words, my question is the following: is it possible to explain the partiality of Merleau-Ponty's reading of Schelling in the light of a problem inherent in Merleau-Ponty's own analysis? In order to answer this question I will proceed as follows: in the first place I will

account for Merleau-Ponty's discussion of Schelling. Secondly, I will bring into the picture some themes belonging to Schelling's *Weltalter*, The Ages of the World. Thirdly, I want to show why in this unfinished work Schelling poses a problem to Merleau-Ponty himself, and in what sense it is possible to find an answer in Merleau-Ponty's own texts. Finally, I will draw some, necessarily provisional, conclusions. Provisional, for the problem thus raised is not a question belonging to the task of interpreting Merleau-Ponty or Schelling, but a much more troubling one: the problem of the genesis of meaning. In the following chapters we will delve deeper into this question.

Merleau-Ponty's reading of Schelling

In his approach to Schelling, Merleau-Ponty adopts a strategy that is reminiscent of his Phenomenology of Perception, where he draws a picture based on a conflict between two positions, usually called realism and idealism, in order to show their common mistake and thus overcome both of them in view of a third possibility, which in fact is the only good one. Accordingly, in Merleau-Ponty's lectures on Nature, Schelling's theories make their appearance after an evaluation of two perspectives, the ancient Greek finalistic approach and the modern mechanist outlook, that aims to show their hidden consensus beneath their apparent conflict. It is all the more important to underline this strategy, for it points to the persuasion that in the overcoming of their conflict resides the key of the solution, namely, the ascertainment of the very fact that they share in a wrong assumption, whose denunciation opens the gates for a deeper truth. In the case at issue here, that is, the concept of Nature, Merleau-Ponty compares the perspective common to many ancient thinkers, whose label is finalism, with the one developed in modern times, based on the role of efficient causation and of determinism.

Apparently, these two perspectives seem to be *toto coelo* opposite, for the finalism proper to ancient philosophy is precisely what the scientific revolution, and the philosophies derived from it, deny. And yet according to Merleau-Ponty this opposition conceals a deeper agreement, consisting in the common intention to subsume Nature under the laws of reason, in turn understood in terms of full determination of a principle determined once and for all. Thus, whether it be the notion of a final cause, as it is the case of Aristotle's perspective, or

the concept of scientific law, as it emerges from the Galilean and Newtonian works, philosophy proves to be convinced that Nature is a realm to be totalized through the power of Reason giving reasons, which is to say the power to ground truth. Nature thus is in need of a foundation, and at the same time ready to receive it from the human logos. The opposition between Nature and Reason is only apparent, for Nature can be brought to reveal its secrets and thus receive its meaning from the action of thought.

Schelling is, in Merleau-Ponty's view, the philosopher who negates the legitimacy of this very claim. Merleau-Ponty praises Schelling's term "barbaric principle" precisely insofar as it means a principle that subtracts itself from the light of the logos. Already Kant had seen something of the like when talking about nature in terms of a purposiveness without purpose (LN 25), for according to Merleau-Ponty this idea entails the intuition that nature is to be understood in its own terms, through notions that, although apparently self-contradictory, in fact prove to be appropriate inasmuch as they express the peculiarity of nature in its own right, and thus require a different form of rationality. Kant however overlooked his own discovery by negating the possibility of an intuitive intellect, and by relating nature to the human intellect, as nature known. The notion of purposiveness thus falls back into a more usual concept: nature is the preparation of man, and man is seen as the culmination of nature. In this doing, according to Merleau-Ponty, Kant essentially once again thinks nature in the traditional terms of matter (LN 26).

Schelling, on the contrary, in his taking up Kant's suggestions and bringing them to their consequences, was able to perform a real breakthrough. The results of Schelling's apparently wild speculation can be adequately evaluated only when placed within a phenomenological perspective, as Merleau-Ponty sees in his theories the presence of a true phenomenological attitude, which Hegel did not recognize, but which is nonetheless there to be remarked, provided one understands phenomenology along the lines of the later Husserl. This is the Husserl who emphasizes the role of the body, of passivity, of the rootedness of intentionality in the Lifeworld, that is, what Merleau-Ponty usually summarizes under the label of working intentionality (*fungierende Intentionalität*). If seen in this perspective, Schelling's approach becomes a phenomenological conception of experience. When Schelling says that he wants to live and feel what Kant limited himself to dream (LN 39), Merleau-Ponty underlines these terms as

they are in keeping with his own conception of the lived body. Nature can effectively be reached because it is already in us, provided we do not understand ourselves as outside of it, nor nature as something totally exterior to us.

These two attitudes are the two mistakes proper to idealism and to dogmatic materialism: either nature is something that must be resolved into thought, and in this case we have Fichte's idealism, which ignores the natural bonds that the subject retains; or nature is totally inhuman, and consists in an impenetrable in-itself, which represents the dogmatist alternative (LN 43). In both cases the philosophical premise is the separation between subject and object, thought and matter. Schelling, on the contrary, with his notion of the subjective-objective (LN 41-44), is precisely hinting at what Husserl will call the "wonder of all wonders", recalling an expression already present in Schopenhauer: the fact that, *within* the body, takes place the lived experience of the actual communication between matter and mind. Merleau-Ponty thus seems to be claiming that what could be called the "natural man", that is, the human subject as it feels, lives, enjoys, is affected and desires, is not essentially a spiritual being, but is not sheer matter either. This claim is not surprising, for it basically reproduces the main thesis put forward in The Structure of Behaviour and in The Phenomenology of Perception. But in fact this is not the whole picture, for this would not explain Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the barbaric aspect of nature. We know from some working notes published in The Visible and the Invisible that this expression is related to the hidden condition of nature itself, a concealment which cannot be simply dissolved by some kind of direct inspection, but must be brought to light obliquely, so to speak, or in other words with a sort of psychoanalytical approach. This latter claim then is pointing at what is really at stake.

Whenever Merleau-Ponty mentions the expression "barbaric principle", he does it in connection with, on the one hand, his conception of an ontology of the "flesh", and on the other with those aspects of the flesh that are most distant from the ordered world of everyday experience. And yet these aspects are there, for they compose the background against which everyday experience can arise. Thus the question is: in what sense are the elements, connected to the barbaric principle, to be understood as "present", and what is the meaning of their "concealment"? In what sense can we speak of two scenes, one of which is the double bottom, as it were, of the other? In other words, what is it exactly that is to be conceived as concealed? A quick mention

of the working note dated November 1960 (VI 267) is opportune in
order to evoke Merleau-Ponty's position. He writes

> Nature is at the first day [*au premier jour*]": it is here today [*elle y
> est aujourd'hui*] This does not mean: myth of the original indivision and
> coincidence as return.
>   The *Urtümlich*, the *Ursprünglich* is not of long ago [*autrefois*].
>   It is a question of finding, in the present, the flesh of the world (and
> not in the past), an "ever new" and "always the same" — A sort of time
> of sleep (which is Bergson's nascent duration, ever new and always the
> same). The sensible, Nature, transcend the past present distinction, realize
> from within a passage from one to the other. Existential eternity. The
> indestructible, the barbaric Principle. Do a psychoanalysis of Nature: it is
> the flesh, the mother.
>   A philosophy of the flesh is the condition without which psychoanalysis
> remains anthropology.
>   In what sense the visible landscape under my eyes is not exterior to,
> and bound synthetically to… other moments of time and the past, but has
> them really behind itself in simultaneity and not it and they side by side
> "in" time

In this text we find a number of elements that require some
discussion in order to understand what Merleau-Ponty actually
means with the expression "barbaric principle": in the first place
its peculiar temporality; then the characterization of the flesh, in
psychoanalytical terms, as the mother, which in turn points to the need
to separate psychoanalysis from anthropology; finally, the idea that the
"originarity" of nature, if this term can be used here, is not something
to be retrieved: there is no return to it, for it would be impossible, and
this impossibility is due to the fact that Nature is already here, in the
present, and yet it is invisible, which means to understand what is the
meaning of the notion of invisible.

Let us start by commenting Merleau-Ponty's statement, according
to which a philosophy of the flesh is the condition to subtract
psychoanalysis from anthropology. To understand this claim should
allow us to clarify the rest. Why is an anthropological understanding
of psychoanalysis to be rejected? What is wrong with it? In a working
note of December 1960, Merleau-Ponty comes back to the problem
of interpreting psychoanalysis, and there he opposes a "superficial
interpretation of Freudianism", as he calls it (VI 270-271), to his own.
The problem with this interpretation resides in its naïve causality. Some
events in the psychic life of the child are elevated to the condition of

causes, which will determine the further development of that human being. Thus the real issue is the determinism of this conception. But according to Merleau-Ponty this is not the true Freud, who on the contrary was a thinker of "overdetermination", which is but another name for chiasmic circularity. Thus Merleau-Ponty can add that

> What Freud wants to indicate are not chains of causality; it is, on the basis of a polymorphism or amorphism, what is contact with the Being in promiscuity, in transitivism, the fixation of a "character" by investment of the openness to Being in an Entity — which, henceforth, takes place through this Entity
> Hence the philosophy of Freud is not a philosophy of the body but of the flesh —
> The Id, the unconscious, — and the Ego (correlative) to be understood on the basis of the flesh

Elsewhere, in a note of March 1960 (VI 240-241), Merleau-Ponty says that Freud's analyses seem incredible when attributed to the unconscious as a thinking "below" the conscious thinker (he is referring to the Wolf-man case and the analysis of Grouscha), but become fully intelligible when inscribed in the world of the Flesh, understood as the world of overdetermination.

From these and other passages we get the impression that the unconscious is not something that "thinks" differently: it is rather, to use another Freudian expression, the "other scene", but of the world itself. This explains why Merleau-Ponty characterizes Freud's position as a philosophy of the flesh and not of the body. Thus we can implicitly infer that what is properly "unconscious" is the actual condition of the *world* (in a sense to be discussed) when understood in and for what it is, and not from the standpoint of consciousness. This interpretation is supported by an evaluation of what Merleau-Ponty says about consciousness. In many working notes Merleau-Ponty relates consciousness to the gestalt structure of the figure and the background. Thus consciousness is characterized as an articulation that brings the figure to the foreground, and in this doing it breaks with the background. In this sense, what is unconscious properly speaking is the background itself. Consciousness must break with Being in order to bring an object to the foreground. Far from being meaning-giving, thus, consciousness is the articulation of differences that are already there in Being. But in order for such an articulation to be produced,

something must sink into the darkness of latency. Merleau-Ponty explicitly states this when he talks in a note of May 1960 (VI 248) about the blindness of consciousness. He writes

> It is inevitable that the consciousness be mystified, inverted, indirect, in principle it disregards Being and prefers the object to it, that is, a Being with which it has broken, and which it posits beyond this negation, by negating this negation — In it it ignores the non-dissimulation of Being, the *Unverborgenheit*, the non-mediated presence which is not something positive, which is being of the far-offs [*des lointains*]

Here Merleau-Ponty brings about the crucial notion of negativity, negation, and negation of negation, and contrasts this way of dealing with Being, reduced to an object which is a *Gegenstand*, - namely, something that stays against, and therefore whose distance must be overcome, - with the non-positivity of Being in terms of the Flesh, which in principle is not to be reached and arrived at, since it has never been removed, but is not here, literally present, either. Being, the flesh, Nature, is thus something that is non-present without being absent. Its condition thus is not describable in terms of sheer negation (what "is not"), but is not describable in terms of sheer presence either, for this kind of presence belongs to the "ob-ject", what is thrown here against a subject that has previously broken with its own attachments with it, in order to have it in front of itself. This form of non-presence that is not an absence is to be related to the peculiar temporality that, as we have seen above, is related to Nature. Latency and simultaneity thus form a pair. And correspondingly, the movement with which consciousness works out the separation of the figure from the background is to be related to a non-linear structure of temporalization, which is usually accounted for with the German expression *Nachträglichkeit*. But here lies a possible difficulty for Merleau-Ponty's strategy, which I would like to illustrate by means of a short discussion of Schelling's *Weltalter*, where the German philosopher seems at once very close and very removed from the French one. As a matter of fact I am convinced that here lies a crucial theoretical problem whose discussion is of the utmost importance.

Schelling's Weltalter

Since it can clearly be no question of performing a detailed analysis of Schelling's position in this text, which furthermore is composed of

three different drafts, each of which examining its topic in a rather different way with respect to the others, I will try to interrogate it by discussing only the questions that are relevant for my problem. Accordingly I will dwell in particular on the second draft, which is the most problematic and which offers a very interesting perspective on the notion of barbaric principle.

In order to situate my interrogation, I think it useful to begin by sketching a synthetic picture of Schelling's analysis. What he is discussing is the relationship between God and the world. We are thus situated in a speculative approach, which could be described as an attempt to reflect on the notion of origin or genesis. This speculative attempt is precisely what Merleau-Ponty, as a modern phenomenologist, explicitly refrains from doing. But in Schelling's case what is really important is not so much this very anti-modern approach, as the theoretical experiments that are performed with it. These experiments, as much problematic as they are — for in fact Schelling will abandon this perspective when turning to his "positive" philosophy — might provide us with some important clues in order to deepen the issue of evaluating Merleau-Ponty's conception of the flesh.

The picture Schelling draws is of a primordial universe that is "preceding", in a sense to be explained, the beginning. The beginning, in a very traditional way, is seen in the Verb: *en arché ên ho logos*. What is not traditional at all is the idea that there "is" something before the beginning. Clearly this form of being before being is paradoxical and requires an explanation. Let us say for the moment that the beginning is accounted for in terms of a decision, in an etymological sense, an *Ent-scheidung* which institutes the difference between time, with its three dimensions, and something that is now, after the decision, placed outside of time, in a sort of eternity. The de-cision has the sense of a cutting off that institutes the realm of things by separating it from and bringing it out of a primordial chaos. Which sort of chaos is this? It is described in terms of a rotatory movement that goes "nowhere". Thus the de-cision is the act by which a direction is instituted, and with it also an articulation of the dimensions of time, which means that in the primordial chaos preceding the institution there is no difference between temporal dimensions. The question is: who is performing the de-ciding institution? How did this beginning happen at all?

Schelling's answer is: it is the Absolute that self-divided itself. This primordial act is what distinguishes the Absolute from itself, thus rendering what was there "before" the act of the decision something

that was never there. The primordial chaos is not the foundation of what comes after, for in this case there would be direct relation and thus time would be already there. But since this decision is the very institution of time, the primordial chaos is non-foundational. This does not mean that the primordial chaos is *nihil privativum*, for to say this would mean to miss the point. If this primordial chaos is not a *Grund* then it must be accounted for in terms of *Ungrund*, that is, not an abyss (*Abgrund*) but something indifferent to the logic of grounding. Merleau-Ponty takes up precisely this expression in order to account for the flesh,[1] but what he does not do is to try to account for why and how this happened at all. Schelling, on the contrary, is doing precisely this.

Schelling says that man is the only being that is in contact with this primordial situation, which is one of pure generalized freedom, also describable in terms of pure will without object, for man is the only truly free being among those that exist. Thus man is characterized by a form of co-consciousness (Mitwissenschaft) of creation. It is for this reason that man can try to understand this absolute freedom, and thus account for the fact that this freedom subjected itself to a system of causes. Schelling speaks in this respect of the contraction (with its ambiguous meaning) of Being on the part of the Absolute. To contract Being means at once to condensate, to harden, but also to be contaminated by, Being. Thus the Absolute precedes Being, and when it gives itself Being it receives positive qualifications which, at once, separate the Absolute from itself, for they separate that which "is", that which possesses Being, from that which does not. This seems to be the only way to preserve the absolute freedom of God while at the same time relating it to Being. In contracting Being, God becomes affected by the realm of necessity, in the sense that at this point it appears as a free subject, in contrast with the necessary mode of existence of the things. But in being a free subject, God "is", thus it is no longer pure, absolute freedom.

This description is, according to the Schelling of the end of the second draft, the only possible way to adequately describe what a real beginning is. God detaches itself from its pure freedom, which is equivalent to pure indifferent will, in order to pose reality. Thus God

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1   Cf. VI 248-251, in particular p. 250, where he refers these terms to Heidegger, but we now know that Heidegger himself devoted an important analysis on Schelling's *Treatise on Human Freedom*. See M. Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise: on the Essence of Human Freedom*, Athens: Ohio U.P., 1985.

reveals itself to itself, gives itself its eternal character, contracts Being. This act is precisely what must be erased, must be cancelled in order for the world to exist. Schelling writes:

> To the same extent that this act, once happened, immediately sinks to an unfathomable depth, and receives from this very fact the nature of permanence, so analogously this will, once posed as the beginning, and introduced into exteriority, must immediately sink into unconsciousness. It is only in this way that a beginning is possible — a beginning that does not cease to be anew a beginning, a truly eternal beginning. For, here as well, it must be said: the beginning cannot know itself. This act, once accomplished, is accomplished in all eternity. The resolution that, one way or the other, must institute a real beginning, must not be brought back to consciousness any longer, it must not be revocable.[2]

This description thus gives us an account of an immemorial past, a past that was never present, which is very similar to Merleau-Ponty's. Time in its articulation is constituted through this past. Time is at the beginning only because there "is" something before the beginning itself, which however cannot be "before" in the usual sense, since it grants the institution itself of the before and the after, and thus of the present as well. Time "is there" from the start, but before its being there, "something" withdraws itself and in its withdrawal allows the things to be. The primordial concealment that institutes time as a process is thus the "true" past, the qualitative past, the past that was never present.

What is properly not conscious, then, is not so much a content, a "thing" or a representation, but rather the very separation, cutting off, de-cision that institutes this difference. The separation between immemorial past and time in its articulation cannot be overcome, neither directly nor dialectically, for its overcoming would amount to the dissolution of time itself, and not to a recovery of its origin. Merleau-Ponty agrees with this rejection of the myth of the return to the originary. But Schelling's description of the decision means that the primordial act splits, divides the eternality of the primordial God from its work. What is properly unconscious is the *act* itself, the separation of the realm of Being from what, from all eternity, precedes it and will never be present. Can we say that Merleau-Ponty would totally agree with this statement? Can we, in other words, say that Merleau-Ponty's

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2   F. Schelling, *Die Weltalter*, bi-lingual (German and Italian) edition, Milano: Bompiani, 2013, Second Draft, p. 408 and 410 (my translation).

account of the barbaric principle is really equivalent to Schelling's? And what are the consequences of this determination of the unconscious for the ontology of the flesh?

Merleau-Ponty's version

At this point I have no (as yet) definitive answers, for this problems seems to me to exceed the boundaries of an in any case important comparison between two philosophical positions, and to allude to a truly theoretical question, which as such requires an investigation that is attempted in the following sections. Certainly what can be said is that in Merleau-Ponty's work there is no place in which he openly deals with something like Schelling's *Entscheidnug*. Yet if we compare the temporal implications of this notion with what Merleau-Ponty says is some places about the characteristics of time peculiar to the flesh, we might at least find some similarities. I would like to conclude this analysis by synthetically discussing them.

It is beyond doubt that what Schelling says about the contraction of Being does not mean that reality is just an illusion. Quite to the contrary, it is precisely what exists in the fullest way, for it possesses Being. The fact that what exists seems to require a cause is explained by the peculiar logic of the *Entscheidung*: the cause, what is "before", is the effect of the effect. In other words, there is no real causation, for every cause belongs to the realm of Being. There is no cause of Being itself. Schelling is here very far away from a conception of God as the creator of the world. Thus the Absolute must be posed as the cause of the chain of Being, as that which is outside of Being, precisely thanks to the very way in which this chain is conceived. The Absolute is then, at once, the irretrievable origin and the condition of possibility of Being. Its own anteriority lies in the future of itself, it "will have been" as that which precedes Being, and in this way can be what has to be past and was never present.

This structure is the peculiar relation that is called *Nachträglichkeit*. Its logic, defined in its essence, is the following: an event that takes place and in this taking place induces its presence as something that must have been already there before the event itself, as the cause of the event. The cause then is not there before its effect takes place, but once the event actually happens, then also the cause is instituted as that which was always already there. There is thus a mutual determination

between cause and effect, a retroactive effect of the effect on the cause, which however is not actually causing the cause, for in this case we would not have a retroactive process, but simply a progressive one. The cause is not posed as an effect, but as a real cause. The only "problem" is that this *position* is possible only when the effect takes place, which renders the status of this cause highly paradoxical.

But this structure is precisely what permits to describe a process without recurring to the linear relationship from the cause to the effect, which is common to finalism and mechanistic determinism. We have seen at the beginning of this chapter that this notion of linear causality is what associates these two conceptions of nature below their apparent opposition. Thus when Merleau-Ponty stresses the need to overcome this account of Nature in view of a different, chiasmic relationship, he has in sight, in fact, something that Schelling too was uncovering.

To prove this claim requires a long discussion of the peculiar temporal logic of perception, which is provided in further chapters. I am convinced that when Merleau-Ponty declares, in his lectures on Nature (LN 40-41), that perception discloses a peculiar ontology, he is going in this direction. To mention but one aspect of Merleau-Ponty's analysis of perception, he describes a perceptual act in terms of a process of crystallization, something that reduces the polymorphism of Being into the apparent unity of an Entity, as seen above. But in this process, the overdetermination of Being is not cancelled: on the contrary, it is that which renders the contraction possible. Yet this act of perception cannot be said to reproduce something that was already there. It rather presents the entity, thus constructing something that appears at that point — but only at that point — as that which was already there. Here is present the peculiar temporal relation described above.

In the last chapter of this work I will describe this conception of the perceptual act in terms of an absolute metaphor, for it possesses two crucial characteristics: in the first place it is metaphorical, that is, not a mirroring, a reproduction, a representation of the thing, but a translation, or perhaps better a catachresis, of the polymorphism of the flesh, into a structured pattern. In the second place it is absolute since it is not a re-production of something that would be the original, and with respect to which the act of perception would be a copy, but is precisely the institution of a structure which at once gives an order where there is no order, without this absence meaning pure chaos. We see an ordered world precisely because our perception institutes this

order. Thus what is not seen, and cannot be seen, is this very separation that articulates the peculiar disorder of the flesh into the order of the world. But the flesh is not simply retrievable, like something lost that must be "somewhere". The flesh is lost forever, being knowable only through its effects, the effective acts of perception.

XI
PROCESSES AND EVENTS

Introduction

This chapter is meant to discuss the problem of the conception of a processual ontology as it emerges from Merleau-Ponty's later philosophy, seen as a phenomenological account of reality in terms of a structural field of relations that are characterized by their dynamic character. In order to clarify this aspect of Merleau-Ponty's notion of the flesh, accordingly, an evaluation of his reading of Whitehead's philosophy of process, already evoked several times in the previous chapters, is now in order. This reading will be compared with another possible interpretation of Whitehead's philosophy, offered by Gilles Deleuze. This other interpretation should provide us with an important instrument in order to evaluate the theoretical perspective emerging from the work of the three authors.

Three different but at the same time related and similar approaches, whose investigation should bring this research to further clarify the relationship between nature and time. Both Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze have dealt, although in different manners, with Whitehead. A cross-confrontation of the two interpretations should permit a further deepening of Whitehead's intricate and at times obscure philosophy, which in turn will give us a chance to come back to Merleau-Ponty with some new tools for investigating his implicit processual ontology of the flesh.

In order to bring this complex network of questions to the fore, I will proceed in the following way: the first section is devoted to Merleau-Ponty's reading of Whitehead. The second section is symmetrically devoted to Deleuze's reading of the same author. The two sections aim to show the respective approaches adopted by the two French philosophers, and the questions they raise. I hope to show that there are connections in the diverse modes of reading adopted by Merleau-Ponty

and Deleuze. I also will draw some conclusions regarding the different notions of negation that emerge from their respective approaches. In the end, my aim is both reconstructive and constructive. I intend to discuss the interpretations of Whitehead given by Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze, not so much to challenge them, as rather to indicate in what way they can be further developed in the light of Whitehead's philosophy itself. In this sense my purpose is constructive: I think that the different perspectives from which the three thinkers have posed one problem can be fruitfully compared and organized into a path that promises to provide fecund clues for the reflection on relevant questions such as life, nature, meaning, and the relationship between man and world, thus paving the way for a wider understanding of the ontology of the flesh.

Merleau-Ponty's reading of Whitehead: process and relations

It may be helpful to quickly recall the framework, as well as the boundaries, within which Merleau-Ponty places his account of Whitehead's philosophy, which is by no means investigated in its full range, but nonetheless receives a deep and at times very penetrating scrutiny. The discussion devoted to Whitehead is taking place at the end of the first lecture course, of the three devoted by Merleau-Ponty to the concept of nature. This first course is fundamentally intended to bring to the fore the theoretical need to overcome the opposed perspectives, dominating the scene of the philosophical investigation of nature, that either depict nature as an "in itself", closed in upon itself and regulated by deterministic causal laws, or as the correlate of a mind or subject that is giving meaning to nature while being separated by nature itself. As Merleau-Ponty explains in the introduction (LN 3-4), nature should be investigated as an auto-production, and the purpose of this, as well as the other two courses, is precisely to find out in what way can this auto-production possibly be understood in its own specificity. The auto-productivity of nature requires a philosophical perspective that is not subsumable under either one of the two opposed views above synthetically sketched. But nature is not to be conceived in terms of finalism either. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

> There is nature wherever there is a life that has meaning, but where, however, there is not thought; hence the kinship with the vegetative.

> Nature is what has a meaning, without this meaning being posed by thought: it is the autoproduction of a meaning. Nature is thus different from a simple thing. It has an interior, is determined from within; hence the difference of «natural" to "accidental". Yet nature is different from man: it is not instituted by him and is opposed to custom, to discourse. Nature is the primordial – that is, the nonconstructed, the noninstituted; hence the idea of an eternity of nature (the eternal return), of a solidity. Nature is an enigmatic object, an object that is not an object at all; it is not really set out in front of us. It is our soil [*sol*] – not what is in front of us, facing us, but rather, that which carries us.

Thus the auto-production of nature which Merleau-Ponty is trying to describe is seen as the self-production of a form of meaning neither deriving from, nor comparable to, human meaning. Nature, as Merleau-Ponty adds, is an enigmatic object, an object not totally object, because it is not completely before us, but rather is our soil: that is, not what stays in front of us (the "gegen-stand"), but what supports and sustains us.

To talk about a support, in turn, means that nature is not the foundation of meaning either. The connection between the sense of nature (in the subjective of this genitive) and the meaning proper to man is thus not directly or linearly derivable. There is a kind of fracture between the two, and we human beings are placed somewhere after the fracture has taken place, not being able to recover it. Nature is not the primordial paradise to be somehow recovered. The recovery is not possible any more. Better still: to talk about a recovery would mean to betray the genuine thinking about nature, for nature is precisely that which "has taken place" and is constantly taking place, at every moment, accompanying human existence like its shadow: it is the barbaric principle discussed above.

These are but metaphorical expressions, but we will see in which terms Merleau-Ponty develops a theoretical approach corresponding to these images. It is in any case important to stress this question, concerning the relationship between nature and human subjects, because it has to do with the whole philosophical project carried on by Merleau-Ponty in his last years. The very same question re-emerges, in fact, in VI, when Merleau-Ponty sketches the problem of a dialectical thinking that be able to avoid the Hegelian solution, consisting in a higher composition of the dialectical fracture, as was shown in the chapter on dialectic. Nature is precisely that which cannot be dialectically re-composed. But this impossibility must in its turn be included in the reflective approach aiming at its comprehension. Philosophy must reflectively

account for the primordial indivision between nature and thought, the unreflective state of non-separation that surrounds thought itself. Reflexive thinking must therefore come back to what, however, cannot be retrieved, and what is more, it must take this very impossibility into account. Hence the peculiar status of thinking outlined in VI, where Merleau-Ponty speaks of hyper-dialectics and of hyper-reflection. To go back to the primordial indivision after the latter has been torn, without dreaming of overcoming it either by regression or by dialectical compositive overcoming, means rather to try to bring the very awareness of the fracture into reflection itself. Reflection must be aware of its "dark" origin, as was discussed in the chapter on Merleau-Ponty and Schelling, for it is this very origin that marks the nature of conscious thinking and makes it what it is. Consciousness is marked by an absence which is not a possible presence, an invisible that is "of" the very essence of visibility. These are well known expressions, evocative but also obscure and at times unnerving modes of saying that lend themselves to jargon. In the lectures on nature Merleau-Ponty shows on the contrary to what extent these expressions are necessary descriptions of what emerges from rigorous and rational examinations.

In the unfolding of the lectures, after a short analysis of some ancient positions (on which I will return when discussing Whitehead's conception), Merleau-Ponty takes into consideration the conceptions of nature that emerge in modern philosophy, in particular starting with that very turn in thinking constituted by Cartesian philosophy. I will not dwell here on these analyses, for they have already been discussed above, narrowing the focus on the notion of nature as a form of resistance to the totalization accomplished by thought, whether by reducing nature to law-regulated matter, or by resolving it into the outcome of reason. Merleau-Ponty stresses the presence, in Descartes as well as in Kant, of the awareness that nature retains an opacity which, however, is not equivalent to a deficiency, but should rather be seen as a testimony of the need to approach nature differently.

This awareness, which according to Merleau-Ponty remains in Kant only a sketch not fully worked out, -- or even worse something that is betrayed by the resolution of nature, via its immanent teleology, in the human being understood as its accomplishment -, is on the contrary fully developed in Schelling. The role of Schelling in Merleau-Ponty's notion of raw Being, of nature as the primordial opacity unsurpassable in thought, has been discussed in chapter ten. It is however necessary to insist on the peculiar notion of dialectics to be found in Schelling.

It is clearly a notion different than Hegel's, and we must underline Merleau-Ponty's intention to re-evaluate Schelling's position, since Merleau-Ponty is certainly aware of the traditional decree about the superiority of Hegel's over Schelling's dialectical thinking. Merleau-Ponty's remarks about the Absolute in Schelling ought to be seen in this light (LN 47):

> The dialectic of intuition and reflection is not a checkmate in relation to our knowledge of the Absolute. The circularity of knowing places us not in front of, but rather in the middle of the Absolute. The Absolute is not only the Absolute, but also the dialectical movement of finite and infinite. The Absolute is such that it only ever appears to an other. Just as our intuition is an ek-stasis, by which we try to situate ourselves in the Absolute, so too must the Absolute leave itself and make itself [into the] World. The Absolute is only this relation of the Absolute to ourselves.

The relevance of dialectical thinking in relation to the problem of conceptualizing nature is to be seen in connection with the status of negativity. Merleau-Ponty, as we have seen, is in search of an appropriate way of accounting for a form of negativity inherent in nature, not derived from any form of subjectivity external to nature itself. This natural negativity, accordingly, can explain in what way the natural process of the world is not just a form of amorphous passage, but is rather accomplishing the emergence of meaning. A meaning which, in turn, is not foreseen, is not the realization of a teleological progress. A meaning, then, which emerges as that which was not expected. In this perspective, it seems then possible to talk about an event of meaning. This is however, for the moment, only a provisional expression, to be inquired further and with other means. In particular, it has been necessary to clarify the categorical status of this natural negativity in relation to the nature and structure of thought itself, as was done in chapter seven. My suggestion in this respect is that what Merleau-Ponty found in Whitehead is only the tip of an iceberg. Many more resources could be found in Whitehead's philosophy than what appears in Merleau-Ponty's lectures. This consideration should be strengthened by evaluating Deleuze's appropriation of Whitehead's thought.

An indication of the peculiarity of Merleau-Ponty's approach to Whitehead is given by considering its place within the economy of the lectures: Whitehead is not examined in the section devoted to the philosophical concepts of nature, but in the (smaller) section devoted to the developments of physics. This does not mean that Merleau-

Ponty underestimates Whitehead's philosophical importance, but at the same time it signals the partiality of his reading. Another sign of this is Merleau-Ponty's choice of the works examined: he draws mostly from *The Concept of Nature*, from some parts of *Science and the Modern World*, and from *Nature and Life*, which is part of what is now better known as *Modes of Thought*, Whitehead's last work. But Merleau-Ponty takes into account neither *Process and Reality* nor *Adventures of Ideas*, which are Whitehead's two most important philosophical works, and also represent Whitehead's most relevant effort to draw the philosophical consequences of his research in logic, mathematics and the epistemology of physics. This is all the more surprising, given Merleau-Ponty's usual accuracy in considering the whole corpus of a philosopher, including the works that are generally more neglected. One possible explanation for this is Merleau-Ponty's dependence upon Jean Wahl's approach to Whitehead in *Vers le concret*, which is already mentioned in the bibliography of SB, and is quoted several times in the lectures. Another possible clue is given by the complexity of Whitehead's opus magnum, notoriously very difficult to read, but this consideration should be less plausible for *Adventures of Ideas*. Be it as it may, I will now evaluate Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of Whitehead and make some comments on it.[1]

Whitehead's position is investigated after an evaluation of Laplace's cosmology, followed by an important discussion of the philosophical meaning of quantum mechanics. Then Merleau-Ponty turns to an examination of the notions of space and time, an examination that takes Bergson into the picture, and shows in what measure and to what extent the discoveries of the scientists (Einstein included) are in need of a philosophical discussion that be able, not so much to correct and put in a proper way what is naively stated by the scientists themselves, as rather to correct their naïve philosophy, which is more often than not outdated by their discoveries (Einstein's case is the most instructive). Philosophy is neither the tutor nor the pupil of the sciences. It retains a specificity of its own, due to its own different approach to reality. The sciences in turn – says Merleau-Ponty – are, in themselves, philosophically relevant only negatively: that is, they

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1   I cannot even try to summarize here Whitehead's philosophy. I must therefore refer the reader to my two books: *Modi del tempo. Simultaneità, processualità e relazionalità tra Whitehead e Merleau-Ponty,* Milano: Mimesis, 2001; and *L'evento del tempo. Saggio sulla filosofia del processo di A.N. Whitehead*, Milano: Mimesis, 2005.

afford the means to exclude untenable philosophical positions, but cannot provide positive ones. A clear example of this is the problem that the discoveries of the Relativity Theory and quantum mechanics raise for the concept of time. Merleau-Ponty writes (LN 110) that

> Einsteinian theory must be followed by a critique of continuity in the measure of time. It is the conception of a "cellular space", of an atomic time, the "chronon", below which we cannot descend. We end up evidencing, as a milieu, a milieu of which we would know to say only that it is neither temporal nor spatial into evidence. In the eyes of [these] physicists, the critique of the dogmatism of unique time appears as a particular element within a general critique of these notions.

What is most important to stress for the purpose of the present investigation is Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on a "cellular" notion of space and on the atomicity of time, which are necessary consequences of the scientific discoveries and not philosophical speculations. Thus Merleau-Ponty shows that the criticism of the classical conception of the uniqueness of time (Laplace's doctrine) implies the exigency to devise a general critique of the operational concepts of physical science. What is crucial here, however, is that the notions of cellular space and time (the epochal theory of time) are precisely that which can be found in Whitehead's reflection. Once again, however, Merleau-Ponty makes no mention of this fact in the lectures. In fact, while it is true that Merleau-Ponty writes (LN 112) that «it remains to elaborate, starting from the critiques of the conception of causality, space, and time, a new vision of Nature. We will ask it of Whitehead», he does not discuss these questions in the so-called "speculative philosophy" which begins with *Science and the Modern World*. Let us then see what Merleau-Ponty actually says about Whitehead.

Merleau-Ponty starts with Whitehead's criticism of the instantaneousness and extensionlessness of time as it is conceived in classical physics (LN 113-114). Once again, Laplace's model is here the reference. He then connects this criticism to the other one, made by Whitehead, of the classical conception, namely, what Whitehead calls the "fallacy of simple location".[2] Merleau-Ponty seems to consider

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2   For this question in Whitehead see in particular *The Concept of Nature*, Cambridge U. P., Cambridge 1920, second chapter; and *Science and the Modern World*, Cambridge U. P., Cambridge 1926, fifth chapter. But the problem of a criticism of simple location is recurring throughout the whole epistemological and philosophical production of the Anglo-Saxon thinker, In *Process and*

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the two criticisms as equivalent. In fact Whitehead distinguishes the two arguments, but they are also related to one another, and perhaps it is this relatedness that Merleau-Ponty is aiming at, for he stresses the importance of conceiving of punctual spatiotemporal existence as something that does not exist in nature, but only in the well-polished notions of scientific procedures. What is important to stress in this case, is that for Whitehead this criticism derives from a strictly logical and epistemological discussion. In other words, it is physical science itself that is in need of different notions of time and space, or to put it more correctly, the development of science has shown that the notion of dimensionless points of time and of space is an abstraction that has no relation with physical reality. Merleau-Ponty, on his part, emphasizes Whitehead's notion (similar in this respect to Bergson's, James's, and Husserl's) of time as extended and without clear-cut boundaries. From this statement Merleau-Ponty concludes that nature, in this conception, is not a sum of unrelated elements, but a whole, which can legitimately be subdivided, for the sake of measurement and knowledge, into smaller parts (events), but is not in itself actually constituted by these parts. Whitehead shows the derivability of the extensionless points of space and instants of time from these wider whole through a mathematical procedure, which he calls the "method of abstractive extension".[3]

Merleau-Ponty also insists on the processuality and dynamicity of Whitehead's conception of nature. This consideration is directly opposed to Netwon's and Laplace's conceptions (and in this respects also Kant's). It is instructive to see that Leibniz (as Deleuze correctly remarks) moved the same criticism to Newton. It could be said that this static conception of nature is a consequence of Descartes's geometrical ontology. This means that what in Descartes, and then Newton and Kant, is attributed to a mind or a subject, must be rather found on the part of nature itself. The processuality of nature is lost because of an abusive fragmentation of its structure into extensionless parts which, inevitably, loose their dynamicity too. The process is a given (LN 114), and it is not the outcome of a synthesis (be it objective or

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Reality it is summarized by the so-called "principle of universal relativity".

3   For this method cf. *The Concept of Nature*, cit., chapter five. In *Process and Reality* the fourth section, entitled "The Theory of Extension", is meant to explain how to derive a geometrical and mathematical account of *reality* from the "metaphysical" genetic account of *process*. Nature is to be understood in the first place as a process, which can then be described in static terms as an extensional structure, but which is not such in the first instance.

subjective). Whitehead draws these conclusions from his interpretation of the physical notion of field of forces, which allows physical science to overcome the dilemma between causality through contact and action at a distance. This consideration has a scarcely negligible importance for the problem of the nature of subjectivity as well, as is seen in Whitehead's treatment of the problem.

The processual conception of nature is thus also, and at the same time, a structural concept. Nature is a whole, and it is a dynamical whole. The process of nature manifests itself, but gets lost in its (physical) mathematical treatment. This means that classical physics was founded on a fruitful (for its epoch) but ontologically not grounded abstraction. Only static extension was considered to pertain to objective reality, while movement, acceleration, and tendency (all the aspects that come back into the picture when adopting the field theory of vectors) were attributed to something external. Whitehead's approach thus is closer to everyday experience than Newton's physics. The new conception of nature also entails, as Merleau-Ponty remarks, a criticism of the classical concepts of matter and substance. Here again, Whitehead became aware of this implication very early in his career. But what Whitehead adds to this is the parallel recognition that the criticism of the notion of substance is twofold: both physics and logic, while being separated, concur in this overcoming.

Merleau-Ponty at this point remarks that Whitehead's conception of nature makes room for an "internal activity" (LN 114), which however remains a problem and does not consist in a passage from nature to mind or spirit (*esprit*). While it is true that for Whitehead the mind is not separated from nature, in his speculative philosophy he tries precisely to show in what way a mind can be seen to emerge from nature. This is the problem that is already present in Leibniz's criticism of Descartes (and, for different reasons, of Spinoza). Deleuze in turn poses this question especially with respect to Leibniz, while not ignoring Whitehead as well. This is precisely the whole problem, for the issue is how to account for the emergence of a mind, soul, interiority, or subjectivity, from that which seems deprived of it. Either one finds that spirit is already present from the beginning, but then misses the problem of the exteriority of nature turning upon itself, that is, the "fold", as was seen in the chapters of the second section, or must face the problem of accounting for something that, while not totally separated from nature, is no longer simply nature. In other words, this is the problem of a natural negativity.

This is Merleau-Ponty's problem, and the most important reason for him to investigate Whitehead's philosophy, as it can be seen from his account of Whitehead's notion of event. Merleau-Ponty stresses in particular Whitehead's awareness of the non-serial nature of time. Matter and substance are concepts closely related to the treatment of time and space in terms of uniformity. Once the latter are recognized as more complex structures, showing features that span from non-uniformity to non-linearity and mutual overlapping, an account of natural reality in terms of bits of matter substantially and univocally identified, and separated from one another, is no longer tenable. Merleau-Ponty once again refers this antiquated picture to Descartes, but Whitehead, already in *The Concept of Nature*, shows that Descartes' ontology is in this respect the evolution of Aristotle's substantialism translated into the new physics.

Thus the real problem is constituted by the relation between the ontology of substances and a logical account of reality in terms of subjects/substances that possess attributes. This aspect is recognized by Deleuze. We will see that in his account of Leibniz/Whitehead, Deleuze offers a new interpretation of the notion of event, based not only on the processuality or passage of nature, but of every component of nature as well, that is, every being. The nature proper to a being is that of becoming. We will see in what sense this statement is to be understood.

Merleau-Ponty however makes another, very relevant remark, when stressing the importance of a return to sensible experience, able to overcome the unnatural and unjustified division between primary and secondary qualities, as Whitehead too recommends doing (LN 117). There is an implicit, or hidden phenomenology of perception in Whitehead, which is decisive in order to understand Whitehead's notion of experience as "natural". Merleau-Ponty himself, however, quite surprisingly does not link this hint to the philosophical generalization accomplished by Whitehead in *Process and Reality* and in *Adventures of Ideas*. Merleau-Ponty remarks (N 117) that

> This process of Nature which assures the interiority of events in relation to one another, our inherence in the Whole, links observers together. It is what joins. The process of Nature is represented here as making progress, as being annexed to the body of subjects. In other words, the process of Nature, which corresponds to the unity of the sensing body, and since the body is itself an event, makes the unity of the body, [and] also makes the unity of different observers, it is also a Nature for many. There is a sort

> of reciprocity between Nature and me as a sensing being. I am a part of Nature and function as any event of Nature: I am by my body a part of Nature and the parts of Nature allow for them relations of the same type as those of my body with Nature.

He leaves this aspect at the level of Whitehead's philosophy of nature, which in this respect is quite unelaborated when compared to the philosophy of the latter period. As one can easily expect from the philosopher of the incarnated subject, Merleau-Ponty remarks that there is in Whitehead a form of reciprocity between nature and subjectivity, which is due to Whitehead's notion of bodily experience, while the overcoming of the fallacy of simple location shows, in Merleau-Ponty's opinion, the ontological relevance of perception. Merleau-Ponty thus fully grasps the meaning of Whitehead's concern to avoid interpreting nature in subjectivist terms. In fact, Whitehead goes at length in *The Concept of Nature* in stating that nature is what is given in perception as not depending upon perception. But this is only the beginning, for already in that work Whitehead mentions the quite obscure notion of percipient event, which is then to become the metaphysical (in Whitehead's sense) notion of actual occasion or actual entity.

Nature shows in any case to be characterized by an intrinsic activity which, however, is not understandable in terms of consciousness. Merleau-Ponty here states that Whitehead opposes his own conception to a long tradition, initiated by St. Augustine and ending with Bergson but also with Sartre, which opposes nature and spirit or mind. For Merleau-Ponty, Whitehead's conception of nature means that nature is the memory of the world (LN 120), a non-conscious form of permanence which affects the process of nature itself. The past then is not a cut operated by a subject on the otherwise indifferent tissue of nature, for the present event is what it is only insofar as it is somehow depending on nature's previous states. The very same future is implied in the present state of the passage of nature. These are but consequences of a dynamical notion of nature, but they entail enormous consequences for the problem of the relation between body and soul, matter and spirit, nature and culture, as well as for the problem of distinguishing between natural and human sciences, *Natur-* and *Geisteswissenschaften*. This latter distinction is of no use here, yet not because of a generalization of the notion of culture, but rather through a revision of the notion of nature.

Memory and expectation, past and future, are thus found in nature and are not only proper to an anti-natural spirit. This is new both with

respect to the Christian tradition and Greek philosophy. Only the Stoics, in a way, and within narrow boundaries, can be enrolled in this group, which would then include figures such as Nicholas Cues and Giordano Bruno. Time, in particular, is playing a decisive role, for it is neither serial and cyclical, as in the Greeks, nor linear and historical, as in the Christian tradition. Once again, it is the non-linearity of time that Merleau-Ponty emphasizes (LN 119), and this means the presence of a folding, the structural process of a relational and non-univocal bond which has been accounted for in terms of form (Gestalt) and which delineates the style of a chiasm.

It is at this point that Merleau-Ponty mentions (but it is a hapax) the Whiteheadian notion of concrescence (LN 119), which is a synonym of actual entity. Merleau-Ponty's hint at this term is connected more with Wahl's reading of Whitehead's philosophy than with Whitehead's texts themselves, but represents in any case a decisive passage, for to link the notion of concrescence to the complex of themes delineated thus far, and in particular, on the one hand, the non-linear nature of time, and on the other the processuality of nature, means to see that nature possesses a generativity of its own, capable of explaining the emergence of (at least) some form of subjectivity, while avoiding pan-psychism. Merleau-Ponty adds that Whitehead does not develop this perspective (LN 120), but Whitehead's texts allow us to refute this latter statement.

Before proceeding with the analysis of Merleau-Ponty's reading of Whitehead, it is worth halting here in order to evaluate the meaning of the attention devoted by Merleau-Ponty to the connection between the non-linear temporality of the natural events and the question of subjectivity. Merleau-Ponty, in relation to Whitehead's notion of concrescence, writes (LN 119) that

> Whitehead always supported the idea of a "concrescence" of Nature in itself which is taken up again by life. Time realizes the "joy of itself" in the organism. The movement by which a morsel of matter folds back on itself prolongs the "process of Nature".[4]

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4   The translation is not totally faithful to the French original. Merleau-Ponty, once again following Whitehead, says "enjoyment" [*jouissance*] and not joy; and he speaks of a *passage* [*passage*] of Nature. Cf. the French original: « Whitehead a toujours soutenu l'idée d'une "concrescence" de la Nature en soi qui est reprise par la vie. Le temps réalise "la jouissance de lui-même" dans l'organisme. Le mouvement par lequel un morceau de la matière se replie sur soi prolonge le "passage de la Nature" ».

This becoming of nature is understood in terms of *Aufhebung*, although this Hegelian term is then given a rather Schellingian taste, when Merleau-Ponty evokes Whitehead's own quotation from Schelling's concept of *Naturphilosophie* (LN 120). But what does it mean to say that the becoming of nature is a process of *Aufhebung* in this context? We have seen that the dialectical process Merleau-Ponty is looking for is not to be understood in terms of Hegel's final re-composition. This is the reason why Merleau-Ponty prefers Schelling's circular dialectics to Hegel's spiral-like ascending one. What is however most important to remark is the fact that here Merleau-Ponty is attributing a form of temporal becoming to nature itself. The notion of concrescence, regardless of its correctness with respect to Whitehead's own understanding of the term, is here used in order to convey the notion of nature as self-transcending itself. This brings time into the picture in two different, but interrelated, ways.

On the one hand, time has to do with the process of progressive increasing in complexity. One could here recall Merleau-Ponty's analysis in SB, as we have seen, where he speaks of forms of behaviour that are progressively more complex in relation to their progressively more articulated interconnections with the environment, and their increased capacity to maintain a stability, a form of identity, correlative to the identity of the world. The human form of behaviour is precisely that which is able to recognize the world and its objects as the same through time, and correlatively is able to have "one" body, its own body, as the same not despite, but through its continuous change. Thus in this respect the becoming of nature Merleau-Ponty is discussing in the lectures on nature goes back to the structure of progressive articulation of forms, described in SB, which, not by chance, is already then conceived in the dialectical but not Hegelian terms of a progressive supersession, from a strict determination of the environment over the simpler organisms, to the freedom that characterizes human organisms. This aspect has been discussed above, in the chapter devoted to negativity, and will more widely analyzed in the next chapter.

At the same time, on the other hand, time is here brought into the picture in connection with the question of the process that pertains to the single organism. This is not totally equivalent to what is deal with in the former account. It introduces another perspective, which has to do with what Whitehead calls "self-enjoyment" (a term that Merleau-Ponty aptly reports) and which might also be expressed in terms of self-manifestation, where, however, the character of

this manifestation is eminently affective, and not cognitive. It is remarkable that Merleau-Ponty refers to Whitehead's last work when evoking the notion of self-enjoyment. Whitehead revises in that work his efforts to produce a systematic account of nature in terms of a process of self-experience; he is then undoubtedly also trying to give a synthetic account of the complex structure worked out in *Process and Reality*, and to offer an interpretation of the general meaning of his philosophical perspective. The notion of self-enjoyment thus plays a very relevant role in the economy of Whitehead's notion of nature, which in his case means the whole reality (but in its processual aspect, as distinct from the outcome of the process itself: hence the title *Process and Reality*).

In Merleau-Ponty's case, this attention to the notion of the self-enjoyment of nature marks an important shift, although not a complete turn, in his own understanding of time. In PhP, as we have seen, Merleau-Ponty is actually speaking of time in terms of self-manifestation: a process of recovery, although always partial and bound to its final failure, which is equivalent to the personal history of a subject. But it is precisely the history of a *subject*, no matter how incarnated. Time seems to pertain only to human subjectivity, although this form of subjectivity is not the interiority of a self that is separated from its own body, which comes from the Christian, in particular Augustinian, tradition.

In the lectures, however, the account of temporality in terms of a self-contact, always partial and never totalizable, is applied to nature itself. In Whitehead Merleau-Ponty finds what in other philosophers is only sketched, at best: the notion of nature as that which communicates with itself, and in this doing it is neither pure object (the correlate of thought) nor pure subject (the transparent contact of the self with itself). The words that Merleau-Ponty uses in order to account for Whitehead's notion of nature are very instructive. Merleau-Ponty writes (LN 120):

> If Whitehead says that Nature is not accidental, he does not mean thereby that it is necessary: it does not have internal necessity. What he means in speaking of the "subject-object" is that Nature "communes with itself", without this self-communion allowing Nature to be conceived as a creative principle. It is this outside of which is nothing, that from which is taken all spatiality and temporality. It is what always appears as already containing all that appears. In it, creature and creator are inseparable. It is with this reservation in mind that we must call Nature an "operating presence".

Nature thus is the whole that exists only in its parts, always at the same time producer and product, and in this sense both exterior and interior to itself. Time, understood as passage and becoming, is in this respect essential to nature. Nature would not be nature, were it not this becoming, this passage. This explains the unsurpassable opacity that characterizes its comprehension: every attempt at understanding it and grasping it as a whole takes place from within nature itself, and is affected by passage, while it affects the passage itself as well. Nothing that happens is in this sense without some effect. Thought must be able to take this self-perturbation into account. This is one of the meanings of hyper-reflection (although Merleau-Ponty speaks of *surréflexion*, giving it a surrealistic overtone which the English translation inevitably misses). The shift operated by attributing those very temporal features to nature, that in PhP were assigned to the bodily subject, consists thus not in a denial of the earlier account, yet in a deepening that presents Merleau-Ponty with two questions: the ontological status of nature and the phenomenological/methodological status of the investigation itself of nature. On the one hand, what was, earlier on, assigned to the subject, although incarnated and in this sense already in contact with Being, now receives an attribution of existence which is undoubtedly more consistent. Merleau-Ponty is not reifying what in PhP was conceived in terms of phenomena: on the contrary he is now building up a coherent ontology of manifestation (whose counterpart can be found in Whitehead); but an ontology of manifestation entails the fuller immersion of the (incarnated) subject within nature.

On the other hand, the co-determination of nature and spirit, subject and object, or rather the overcoming of the opposition between these determinations in view of something "in between", implies that the very notion of manifestation is transformed, and therefore that the science of manifestation, phenomenology, must be erected "from within", in this peculiar sense of interiority: it is the science that must be able to account for that particular event which folds exteriority into its own interiority. Since the subject performing this scientific (phenomenological) investigation is in its turn the outcome of this fold, the access to the fold itself cannot take place in a direct way. The retrieval of the original event cannot be produced through a reduction that can truly imagine bracketing everything and going back to the things themselves, for in this case the "thing" is the reduction itself. Or better, it is that particular event which produces a "meaning", and which then originates the very question about meaning which the reduction is. Hence, on the one hand,

a hyper-reflection that reflects on its own opaque origin and the always already having taken place of this unsurpassable, unattainable origin; and on the other a phenomenology that sees phenomena not in terms of a direct, but rather an indirect emergence: one that resembles the emergence of symptoms. Phenomenology becomes the psychoanalysis of nature.

These are questions that must be left aside here, although they will be discussed in the last chapter, but they are certainly in the background of Merleau-Ponty's approach to nature. A confirmation of this hypothesis could easily be drawn from an analysis of the other two courses: the course devoted to the ontological status of life and living organisms, and the course devoted to the human body. We should wonder, however, whether Merleau-Ponty fully exploited all the potentialities contained in Whitehead's philosophy. An evaluation of Deleuze's reading of Whitehead will convince us that this is not the case.

Deleuze's reading of Whitehead: events and exteriority

Deleuze's reading of Whitehead takes place in quite a different framework. As is well known, Deleuze mentions Whitehead once in his *Difference and Repetition* (*Différence et repetition*), but just in passing. In *The Fold* (*Le pli. Leibniz et le baroque*), Deleuze adds a whole chapter on Whitehead. The context is thus that of an analysis of Leibniz, but one should not be mistaken. Deleuze is mostly not writing a book of history of philosophy, but of philosophy *tout court*. Leibniz is read in the light of Deleuze's general perspective. Michel Serres witnesses this when remarking that Deleuze is little concerned with the problem of historically reconstructing a way of thinking, for he is haunted «less [by] the apparent baroque or surrealism than, behind Bergson, whom he follows and understands better than anyone else, [by] a world à la Perrin and à la Poincaré, a world already fractal and chaotic.».[5] The lineage is thus delineated: Leibniz, Bergson, Whitehead, Deleuze himself. Given the (not-so-much) hidden presence of Leibniz's thought in Merleau-Ponty's own reflection, one could see a very remarkable

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5   M. Serres, *Éloge de la philosophie en langue française*, Paris: Fayard, 1995, p. 213. My translation. The French original runs as follows: « moins [par] le baroque ou le surréalisme apparents que, derrière Bergson, qu'il suit et comprend mieux que personne, [par] un monde à la Perrin et à la Poincaré, déjà fractal et chaotique ».

parallelism. There is a difference, however, which is constituted by phenomenology. Deleuze is fiercely against phenomenology, although he pays some tributes to Merleau-Ponty himself when, in *The Fold*, he recognizes the problem concerning the bodily status of the monad (TF 28). He also deals with Husserl's analysis of the phenomenon of otherness, contrasting Leibniz and Husserl in a way that, however, is very little convincing because of Deleuze's misreading of Husserl. I will come back on this later on.

For the moment it is important to stress that Deleuze's approach to Whitehead is performed in the light of his approach to Leibniz. This has two effects: on the one hand, Deleuze's effective rendering of Whitehead is small when compared to the space devoted to Leibniz. On the other hand, however, several hints at Whitehead are disseminated along the whole book, so that in a way Leibniz and Whitehead are two names for the same question, a question which is actually Deleuze's own question: to describe the whole of reality in terms of plurality and proliferation (which accounts for the ontological pluralism and goes against any form of monism whatsoever) avoiding at the same time the introduction of a notion of negativity. Deleuze's philosophy is basically against negation and negativity. This does not mean to say that he conceives of reality in terms of a total positivity. Serres's evocation of a fractal world (together with the mention of Poincaré) is suggestive: it suggests a world which is articulated into differences without these differences being, however, derived in any way from the agency of something "external" to this world. This is the notion of a field of immanence, where everything that exists takes place within it. Negativity would on the contrary break with this immanence, no matter how negativity is conceived. This philosophical perspective is already present in the early Deleuze, whose mark is the notion of difference and whose effect is the conception of the world as a structure of structures. With respect to this early picture, Deleuze then moves towards a more dynamical understanding of reality. Change takes over difference and repetition. Leibniz and Whitehead, together with Bergson, are the key figures to express this new approach that, however, does not differ in any relevant respect from the earlier one when it comes to the status of subjectivity.

The general problem Deleuze is (I would say: accordingly, given the premises) facing in this work is, then, how to conceive of freedom in a world that differentiates itself but does not make room for negation. It is in this light that Deleuze scrutinizes the notion of

event. This notion is already present in his earlier thought along the lines of Bergson's *élan vital*. The reality (the true one) is not static but dynamical, and it is constant invention. Being in fact is becoming, and this becoming is such only insofar as it is the creation of novelty. Each single event is a moment of self-differentiation of the whole, of the One. This perspective can be found with small variations in *Différence et répétition* and in *Logique du sens*, not to mention *Le bergsonisme*. The univocity of Being does not conflict with, but is rather expressed by its endless and multifarious tokens. Yet there are some differences between the earlier, more "bergsonist", Deleuze, and the later thinker. I cannot dwell here on this question. Suffice it to say that the problem of immanence, without being abandoned, is transformed (or turned inside out, like a glove) into that of exteriority. Deleuze's approach to Whitehead (Gottfried Wilhelm Whitehead, to comply with Deleuze's own joking attitude) is to be seen within this framework.

The notion of event Deleuze is after in the book on Leibniz is thus no longer (or not only) a Bergsonian one, without the question of freedom, however, being dropped altogether. The event is what makes a difference without this difference being the effect of a will. We will see how Deleuze tries to come to terms with Whitehead's conception of actual occasions along these lines. Apparently there is a contradiction, insofar as the taking place of the event as the mark of freedom seems to imply precisely that very will or choice, and thus that subjectivity, which Deleuze is intentioned to exclude. But in Whitehead Deleuze finds a concept that seems apt to solve the problem: the subject is not prior to the event, but happens in or within the event itself. It is Whitehead's notion of subject-superject that is here brought into the picture and appraised. Thus the coordinates of Deleuze's approach to Whitehead could be listed as follows: exteriority, fold, event, subject as the effect of the event (that is the fold of exteriority).

No doubt there is a sense of familiarity and at the same time of extraneousness, in this respect, with Merleau-Ponty's approach. The terms are the same and yet the picture seems reverted like a mirror image. Perhaps this is not by chance. In particular, the question concerning negativity seems to make the whole difference. The issue is in fact how to account for the presence of what is negated, but not overcome, if the problem is seen from Merleau-Ponty's standpoint. And in Deleuze's perspective the question is how to account for the distance from (chaotic) exteriority in a world (ours, that is, everyday common experience) that seems to ignore it, but which, Deleuze tells

us, in fact is made of it. At any rate, before evaluating this uncanny similarity, let us deepen Deleuze's reading of Whitehead.

A helpful way to introduce Deleuze's approach to Whitehead is in my opinion constituted by Deleuze's comments on the difference between predicates and attributes in Leibniz.[6] In the first place, Deleuze remarks that for Leibniz the predicates almost never correspond to attributes, excepted the cases of infinite forms and first quiddities (LP 59). This has a relevant meaning for logic as well as metaphysics: it means the rejection of Aristotle's perspective. This also entails a revision of Descartes' notion of subjectivity (LP 61), and the clear promotion of a conception based on universal relationality (LP 63). How to understand this? To put it in the simplest way, we can say that, while attributes are the properties assigned to a (logical) subject by the copula, the being-function (or the function of being), so that S is said to "be" P when it possesses such attribute, a predicate is a way in which that subject "behaves", or one could also say "is" in the predicative mode (Heidegger distinguishes, as we have seen, the *sein* from the *wesen*, and this distinction reappears in Merleau-Ponty).

The predicate, thus, «in all other cases is only a relation or an event» (LP 59). Relations are forms of the event, and events are forms of relation (LP 59). The events are relations to existence and to time (LP 59). That which is included in the notion as subject is always an event marked by a verb, or a relation marked by a preposition (examples: I am writing, I am going to Germany, and so on).[7] Let us then consider more closely the importance of asserting that the predicate is an event. What Deleuze delineates in the first place is the opposition of this to the notion of attribution (LP 60).[8] In this perspective, the predicate is not the property of the subject, its "attribute", but rather the way the subject appears or exists. Thus the predicate is the way we come to know something about a subject. The subject does not properly pre-exist this evenemential manifestation of itself, which the predicate brings to light. Thus Deleuze can write: «[t]hat the predicate is a verb, and that the verb is irreducible to the copula and to the attribute, mark the very basis of the Leibnizian conception of the event» (LP 60).

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6 Cf. LP 59 and ff. The whole analysis contained in the chapter on "sufficient reason" is very relevant to this question.

7 Translation modified.

8 Deleuze remarks that those who try to equate predicate and attribute in Leibniz are wrong. In fact, the attributive notion is precisely what Arnauld was objecting, for decisive reasons, to Leibniz's rendering of the predicate.

Obviously this is Leibniz and not Whitehead, but I will try to show in what follows that this analysis can be applicable to Whitehead too. Let us see now what implications this notion shows to possess.

Deleuze compares Leibniz's position to the Stoics' notion of predicate as the incorporeal condition of the subject: it is not correct to say 'the tree is green', but rather 'the tree greens' (LP 60). The predicate expresses the mode or manner of being of the subject. The conversion of this logic into one based on the structure subject-copula-attribute falsifies experience. Thus the logic of experience must be a logic in which the predicate is the (incorporeal) manifestation of the subject, the event of the subject. The event is nothing extraordinary. The event is the subject itself. Every subject is an event, in this sense. Is every event also the event of a subject, and if so, in what sense? We will consider this question later on. Here it is fitting to evaluate this first acquisition.

This is hardly underratable. It shows that, if there is a contrast between language and experience, this is because of a wrong conception of language. There could be a proper conception of language, but this would entail a different notion of concepts, relations, predicates, and thus of substances, matter, spirit, body, soul… It is a revolutionary notion of the relationship between language and being. However, contrary to Heidegger's quite similar position, this Leibnizian-Whiteheadian-Deleuzian perspective makes no room for mysticism, but rather is strictly logical: yet it is a logic of events and not of objects. Which is precisely what Leibniz, and then Whitehead, have tried to constitute (Deleuze apparently being less concerned with this particular question).

One crucial consequence of this notion of the predicate as an event (and reciprocally as the event as the incorporeal predicate of the subject) is that the event appears in the subject as a change in perception (LP 79). This consideration permits to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary events: the event is voluntary when it is possible to find a motive as the reason of the change in perception (LP 79). Deleuze here goes as far as to say that, in this doing, Leibniz lays the ground for the first phenomenology of motives. But what is most interesting for the purposes of the present investigation is the relationship instituted between perception, event, and predicate. In short, it seems possible to say that one perceives something when an event induces a change in the subject. Perception is the emergence of the event into the subject. The subject, however, does not pre-exist this change. Thus it seems more precise to say that the event is the emergence of the subject as

perceiving. The subject is emerging through its perceiving, which is an event.

This description could hold as a synthetic definition of Whitehead's notion of actual occasion, which is a drop of experience, thanks to which what was public (the data) becomes private (the satisfaction deriving from the self-enjoyment of a process of concrescence that operates prehensions, both positive and negative, of the world), so that the many become one, and in this doing it also produces the advancement of nature by increasing the many with a new "one". In the "state of affairs" (yet how problematic this expression sounds in this light…) 'the tree greens', what is expressed by this expression is a whole, in which there happens a change, which at once pertains to something perceived and to something perceiving. But the two "things" are not preceding the change. They are put in their respective position by change itself. They are therefore what they are only in relation to each other. This relation is nothing "objective", though. It is a perceptual relationship. Leibniz, as Deleuze remarks, warns the reader from the temptation to "objectify" the motives of change, trying to find a causal network to explain the change. Every change is subjective, in the sense that is to be attributed to the monad. The monad thus is the world given in perspective. The event is neither objective in the sense of being "there", in itself, nor is it subjective in the sense of mere semblance. Merleau-Ponty would say that there is no panoramic view soaring over the relationship between perceiver and perceived. According to Deleuze this is implicit in the immanent attitude proper to Leibniz's philosophy, which is such even if there are two levels, bodies and souls, matter and monads. But these two levels are the outcome of an "originary" fold, a fold that is nothing positive in itself, but only the perpetual folding of reality.

The question of perception is not, however, concluded with this re-affirmation of the perspectival conception of experience proper to Leibniz. The perspectival conception of experience is the contrary of relativism. It does not mean that each point of view is equivalent to every other. On the contrary it means that the whole of reality is constituted by the points of view. There is no epistemological relativism implied here. At most one should talk of an ontological relativism, in the sense that there is no *one* order, but many, in principle infinite, orders, in principle all legitimate. The problem is that Leibniz tries to avoid this conclusion, entailed by his own premises, with the notion of the best of all possible worlds. In other words, for Leibniz the incompossibles are eliminated and only the compossible co-exist. In Whitehead, Merleau-

Ponty and Deleuze this is no longer true. Perspectivism is maintained in its full form. While it is possible to trace with certainty a Nietzschean origin for this interpretation of perspectivism in Deleuze, and with some probability in Merleau-Ponty, it is almost certain that in Whitehead there is no such lineage. Whitehead's perspectivism is autonomous.

Deleuze adds (LP 86-87) that the sum of all possibles constitutes the "primordial" chaos (not to be understood in a chronological sense). A possible is here either, cosmologically and ontologically speaking, a monad, or psychologically speaking a perceptive standpoint. Thus chaos can be conceived either in cosmological or in a psychological terms. In the latter terms, it can be described as a universal giddiness, due to the co-presence of all possible perceptions. It is interesting to remark that, with this analysis, Deleuze is entering the realm of Whitehead's philosophy, although for the moment referring himself to Leibniz. The sum total of all possible standpoints is thus chaos. This chaos cannot be perceived, and cannot even be conceived, for it is only the other side of the "sifter" (*crible*) that brings an order to the world. There is properly no chaos unless there is also an order from which to talk about the chaos. The notion of chaos is therefore something available only after the fact, *après coup*, as that from which the order derives and as that which grants the very presence of a plurality. The very notion of order is actually related to the fact that there can be absence of order, and thus that there is change; if there were only one immutable principle there would be no real change, hence no real freedom, hence no events. There would be what can be seen as Spinoza's monism, as Whitehead correctly remarks in *Process and Reality*.

This retrospection of the primordial chaos is similar in Deleuze and in Merleau-Ponty. We have in fact seen that Merleau-Ponty discusses Schelling's notion of barbarian principle, and this notion might be considered as an original adaptation of Leibniz's argument with a more existentialist overtone. But the two conceptions of it differ in many respects. Both Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty agree in conceiving of this chaos not merely in a chronological, but rather in a structural way. The primordiality of this chaos is not in the past, but in the present. It accompanies every experience. According to Deleuze, however, the relationship between chaos and experience is deriving from the impossibility to assume the chaos. Chaos is then what is not assumable under any condition. But it is precisely this unacceptability of chaos that produces experience. Each experience is thus a reduction of chaos that does not yet negate the chaos. Here Deleuze is ambiguous, for it is

no longer clear whether he is referring to Leibniz or to Whitehead. One is tempted to say that Deleuze is not really concerned with this aspect of the question, for what matters to him is the very notion of chaos and of its "sifting" that produces an order. In Whitehead, the sifting is the common action of each single experiential perspective (each actual entity) and of God, which provides the actual entity with the means to produce an order. God is very interestingly called "the principle of limitation", that is, It does not impose one particular order, but rather "persuades", as one can read in *Religion in the Making*, to avoid certain paths, leaving however the final decision to each actual occasion. But the question remains that of how to explain Deleuze's understanding of the relationship between primordial chaos and experience.

The chaos is, by definition, pure exteriority, the "outside" that is not assumable by the experiencing being (the monad, the actual entity, the perceiver). But if chaos is not cognizable in itself, their "traces" or indices are. They are precisely the events. The change we have dealt with above is the sign of chaos. Each change is a mark that impresses itself in the form of a perception, hence of an event. Deleuze distinguishes the chaos as pure disjunctive multiplicity, as pure "many", following Plato's *Parmenides*, from the event as a singularity. This is the most accurate characterization of an event: a chance, something that takes place without being (fully) prepared in advance. It is true that, earlier on, we have seen that each perception is evenemential, that every predicate is an event. But it is also true that the fact that the tree greens, the "greening" of the tree, ceases quite quickly to represent an event. In phenomenological words one could say that this event "sediments", through its "institution" (*Stiftung*), in the past. But to use this vocabulary would raise questions that pertain to the duration of a subject's history (regardless of what kind of subject is here implied). In Deleuze's perspective this is not fundamental (although he does not neglect the question). What is most crucial is to understand that an event takes place as a chance, as a point of bifurcation (here Deleuze exploits René Thom's theory of catastrophes). This allows Deleuze to preserve freedom while assigning it neither to a subject's liberty nor to a metaphysical indetermination. The world (or, better, the chaosmos, for to speak of one world is still metaphysical in a bad sense) is fully determined while not been pre-determined. This is possible thanks to the fact that the events are points of bifurcation, fortuitous in their direction, but fully determined once the direction is taken.

This means that the exteriority of the primordial chaos is constantly folding itself into each monad without this meaning any performance of a negative activity on the part of the monad itself. In my opinion, Deleuze adopts this solution in order to avoid any substantialization whatsoever of the subject. Negativity would in fact, according to Deleuze, imply the pre-existence of a subject. The subject, on the contrary, is the outcome of the event; it is, to use Whitehead's own term, a superject. However, this solution presents Deleuze with two problems: how to account for memory, and how to account for otherness.

Memory is not explicitly dealt with, but it is possible to imagine that for Deleuze memory can be accounted for in terms of the public structure (the network of entities or monads in the "past" of the emerging one) from which an interiority or privacy emerges (LP 88-89 and LP 135). In this respect memory belongs to the "world", or nature (we have seen a similar position in Merleau-Ponty's lectures, although the two conceptions do not fully coincide). Each new perspective inherits from the environment its conditioning aspects. It does not have to perform any peculiar recollection. The data are already there. The difference the novel perspective makes will become, in turn, something "objective" (Whitehead speaks of immortal objectivity in almost equivalent terms). Yet there seems to be a problem in this account: the possible contrast between different possibilities. Deleuze mentions Whitehead's notion of appetition (Whitehead also speaks of a "lure for feeling"), of subjective aims, of satisfaction (another Whiteheadian technical term), even pleasure (LP 87-91). But Whitehead, and the difference is crucial, also speaks of contrasts and negative prehensions. In fact, Deleuze remarks that the notion of negative prehension allows Whitehead to conceive of bifurcations, divergences, incompossibilities and discords within one world; whereas for Leibniz the frontiers between monads constitute precisely the guarantee that the incompossibles will not co-exist. This is the main difference between Leibniz, who represents classical times at their twilight, and Whitehead, who is already fully into modern times (LP 92).

As a matter of fact, however, Whitehead is almost as elusive in this respect. There is yet one clue that he offers in order to understand the notion of negative prehension. And this clue derives from the true metaphysical difference between Leibniz and Whitehead himself: while for Leibniz monads have no windows because they do not communicate among themselves (only their "bodies" do it, but

this is not the same kind of communication, due to the duplicity of levels and the pre-established harmony connecting them), according to Whitehead each actual entity directly affects the others. In other words, an actual entity does not enter into another's horizon through representations, but through a peculiar form of direct connection, called causal efficacy. Whitehead's notion of causal efficacy has nothing to do with Hume's notion of causality, but represents its rejection. Whitehead stresses the affective nature of causality, which only an intellectualistic understanding of experience can miss: hence Hume's error. Whitehead's notion of causal efficacy is crucial for his system.

Whitehead is here reacting against that aspect of the empiricist doctrine that reduces the relationship between experience and world to the representations that the experiencing being can have of the external reality. According to Whitehead, for logical, epistemological and metaphysical reasons, this is a fallacy (called the bifurcation of nature) that is responsible of the idealistic drift expressed by Kant (Whitehead does not even mention Hegel) and on the other hand by contemporary (to him) physics. As a matter of fact, Leibniz too could accounts for a direct contact between entities (through his notion of appetite), but in order to acknowledge it, he should have dropped his peculiar dualism between monads and bodies which he never relinquished. Whitehead, on the other hand, shows that the most important meaning of the notion of negative prehension is that of taking a distance from the possible "invasion" accomplished by other actual entities on the concrescing one. In other words, the others are always already there, but this does not only mean peace and communion. On the contrary, the realization of the novel "subject/superject" of experience takes place only thanks to a "becoming private" which is not without relations with the question of identity. Thus negativity is re-introduced into the natural process itself, yet not as the action performed by a subject already constituted, but rather as the "action" that constitutes the subject itself; an action that has the aspect of a passion or passivity. Here again, it would be instructive to compare this position with Merleau-Ponty's own notion of passivity.

This brings us to the question of otherness. For Deleuze, Leibniz discovers alterity in the form of the problem concerning the way in which a monad can say to have "its own" body (LP 121-126). Deleuze says that Leibniz conceives of the monad's body as the monad's first otherness. In this sense, Leibniz would do better than Husserl, who, in his famous Fifth Cartesian Meditation, conceives of the subject's body

as still "proper to" the ego. This however is clearly not correct. The whole Husserlian argument deployed in the Fifth Meditation is based on the possibility to introduce a certain degree of alterity within the body itself, in terms of body touching/body touched, *Leib* and *Körper*. Only this first difference of the (bodily) self with itself can grant the ego the experience of another form of alterity. I insist on the aspect of an experience of alterity, which is not a coincidence with the other (otherwise there would be no real alterity, as Husserl clearly says), but nonetheless it is an alterity experienced. This is, in my opinion, the most crucial question. This form of negativity is, at once, external and internal to the subject. External, for the subject experiences itself as being touched (in Husserl) from an "outside" which, at the same time, is also an "inside". This is an ambiguity irreducible to the bimodal logic of ordinary thought. What is more, this external/internal alterity is not temporal, but structural. It is only for the sake of its phenomenological reconstruction/constitution that one can speak of the hand touching and the hand touched. In fact, the two sides must occur together.

This alterity therefore implies a form of negativity which is neither totally exterior (and which, in that case, could easily be turned into a positivity, as Merleau-Ponty shows in Sartre's case), nor, however, totally internal (otherwise it would not surprise, as it were, the subject entertaining it, and in the end there would be no subject at all). It is my suggestion that Merleau-Ponty has in mind precisely this form of negativity when discussing his notion of nature as self-manifesting itself. The self of the manifestation could not properly be called a self, were it not exposed to its own alterity and exteriority; which is not an alterity whatsoever, one which the subject could always ignore, but an alterity which affects the subject from the inside, although this inside is for that subject an outside. Thus the insistence Deleuze shows in correcting Husserl and phenomenology with an alleged inaccuracy in accounting for alterity seems inaccurate. It is not so much a question of correctness of the interpretation, as a question of correctly understanding experience. And this brings us back to the question of negativity. It may be suggested that Merleau-Ponty's notion of primordial chaos (if I may thus characterize Merleau-Ponty's notion of raw Being) as that which is present in the form of a shadow, has to do with his attempt to understand a form of negativity (as has been discussed in the preceding section) which is absent from Deleuze's universe. This latter question will be discussed in the next, last chapter.

XII
PRESENTING THE UNPRESENTABLE

Introduction

At this point of our journey through Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the flesh, which is an ontological conception of nature as it shows itself in us, but whose manifestation is indirect and reverted, the time has come to take a last step. A step that must directly interrogate this reverted manifestation, or in other words that must question the very notion of manifestation as it emerges from Merleau-Ponty's meditation. In several working notes published together with the manuscript known as The Visible and the Invisible, we find remarks concerning the manifestation of that which cannot manifest itself, or with a rather Heideggerian lexicon, the unconcealment of what is concealed, the presentation of the unpresentable. What is concealed is Being, which finds its mode of appearance only through beings. But this mode of appearance is not a direct givenness, accessible through a re-orientation of the gaze. Or better: this re-orientation must be more radical than what the Husserlian phenomenological reduction seems to grant.

Furthermore, the indirect manifestation of Being through beings is not given once and for all, but is taking place again and again (*immer wieder*) according to a temporal structure that is non-linear and complex. Its marks are contingency, evenementiality, finitude and irreversibility on the one hand, but also sedimentation, immemoriality, indestructibility and unintentional reenacting on the other. All aspects of a structure that is inaccessible through "normal" consciousness, and which therefore require a different access: an indirect, lateral, and most of all metaphorical access, in the etymological meaning of this term.

There is little doubt, in fact, that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, and in particular the last period of his production, is highly metaphorical in character. A quick glance at the key notions employed by the

philosopher easily confirms this statement: expressions such as "raw being" or "wild spirit", technical terms like "encroachment", "overlapping", "transgression", and most of all the meta-notions which pervade his whole reflection, that of chiasm in the first place, witness the style of thought of a philosophy that needs to recur to the power of metaphorical expressions in order to communicate what cannot otherwise be adequately expressed. Yet here I do not want to enter into a discussion of this aspect of Merleau-Ponty's way of thinking, which certainly deserves a careful study, but which belongs to another kind of interrogation of his thought. I rather aim at a short, and yet hopefully deep enough, investigation of Merleau-Ponty's conception of the metaphor as a peculiar mode of thought, one that possesses a dignity of its own, and perhaps even more than this.

My suggestion, in fact, is that the role of the metaphor is that of an effective door through which the access to a proper understanding of the ontology of the flesh is provided. In other words, it is my intention in this chapter to maintain that a comprehension of what Merleau-Ponty means by Being can be obtained only if the mode of functioning proper to the metaphor is seriously taken into consideration. Furthermore, this way of understanding the notion of metaphor should provide a clarification of what the concept of "sensible idea" means.

Thus, I will proceed as follows: after a brief recollection of the few textual places in which Merleau-Ponty mentions the concept of metaphor, meant to gather as much information as possible with respect to something which did never receive an actual analytical treatment on the part of the philosopher, I will compare some recent conceptions of the metaphor, and then will try to articulate what can be deduced from such a comparison into a reflection on the ontological function that the metaphor can perform, in particular with respect to the question of the meaning of what Merleau-Ponty calls the unpresentable. In doing this, it is the notion of sensible idea that is in particular called into question. But let me proceed by first quickly evoking what Merleau-Ponty says, in his unmistakable way, about this elusive concept.

Merleau-Ponty on the metaphor

There are a very few places, in VI, in which the concept or at least the term "metaphor" is mentioned. Merleau-Ponty unfortunately has apparently never felt the need to render his opinion about this topic

more explicit than a scanty mention. His spare prose on this particular topic is all the more surprising, given the importance that the meaning of the metaphor can be seen to receive in his speculation. I do not want to judge Merleau-Ponty by his intentions, and accordingly will simply offer a possible explanation, which springs from a reading of the most important of the passages in which the notion of metaphor is mentioned. In a working note dated November 26, 1959, Merleau-Ponty writes the following (VI 221-222):

> A "direction" of thought — This is not a metaphor — There is no metaphor between the visible and the invisible […]: metaphor is too much or too little: too much if the invisible is really invisible, too little if it lends itself to transposition

Here Merleau-Ponty is talking, as it becomes clear in the unfolding of the note, about the fact that thought is incarnated without being flesh, or at least without being reducible to the flesh peculiar of the material bodies. Thought is, as another working note notoriously states, a subtler flesh. In other words, the invisible is not the visible but it is not unrelated to the visible either. It is possible to describe this relationship between visible and invisible by saying that the invisible cannot be reduced to the visible but at the same time cannot be completely uprooted from it. It is as if the invisible cannot be rendered totally pure, as if it cannot lose its fleshy origin. Or, to put it differently, it is as if the invisible cannot be accounted for in its visible counterpart and yet it has somehow to be tied to it. Neither totally with nor totally without incarnation, the invisible leads therefore an amphibious life. This is, expressed in another form, what Merleau-Ponty says, in the note above mentioned, in what immediately follows the text quoted above. He speaks of objective space and of the quasi-localization of thought. This quasi-localization of thought cannot be accounted for in terms of objective space, and yet thought must be somehow localizable, at least in the form of the "not there": «one cannot say that a mind is here, but one can say that it is not there» (VI 222). This condition of the invisible of not coinciding with, and yet of not being separable from, its visible, is something of the utmost importance in order to understand the notion of sensible idea, and is what Merleau-Ponty's positive concept of the metaphor must account for. Thus let us take a step further in the analysis of this concept.

Merleau-Ponty states that it is inappropriate to call a metaphor the relationship between the visible and the invisible. What sort of meaning

does he attach to the term "metaphor" in this case? Without being in a position to state anything that can claim to be the ultimate truth on the topic, one can at least say that here Merleau-Ponty seems to adopt a traditional view about the metaphor. This is not the only view to be found in VI, however. In a passage of the chapter "Interrogation and intuition", to be more extensively examined below, Merleau-Ponty seems to adopt a different perspective. There he mentions «the occult trading of the metaphor» (VI 125) in order to describe the mode of language which functions autonomously, without being the simple tool of a thinker who is in direct connection with the things themselves and with his own thoughts. This occult trade of the metaphor is able to institute relations that the thinker can grasp only afterwards, "*après coup*", and in a certain sense despite himself. The power of metaphors is thus a capacity to put things into relations that escape the free initiative of the philosopher. As Merleau-Ponty says,

> [i]t would be a language of which he [i.e.: 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 […] 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.

The conclusion of this discourse is then extremely important for our purpose: «we have to recognize the consequence: if language is not necessarily deceptive, truth is not coincidence, nor mute» (VI 125). Language thus, if it is to be able to let the things themselves speak, must be understood in terms different than the one-to-one relationship of coincidence which is proper to what prescribes the traditional and still most widely accepted view of truth. Language is then understood by Merleau-Ponty in terms of productivity. This has a direct effect on the notion of metaphor to be held as the good one. Basically we are confronted with a duality in Merleau-Ponty's conception of the metaphor: there is a bad notion, which is related to a bad conception of language, and which holds that the things are there to be directly seen and directly accounted for with univocal words. And there is a good notion, connected with the idea that language is not simply an exercise in naming things that pre-exist this exercise, but is a way to let the things be.

The wrong account of the metaphor is thus the conception based on the assumption that there is a "proper" meaning of a word, which

consists in the object named by that word, and with respect to which any other term would be but a rhetorical "figure". But then what would the right account of the metaphor be, in this perspective? In order to properly answer to this question, at least in the form of a hypothesis, it will be useful to take a very quick look at some recent philosophical developments in the debate on the nature of metaphors.

Philosophical perspectives on the metaphor[1]

The traditional conception of the metaphor can be traced back to Aristotle. In his *Poetics*, for example, even though with some exceptions, Aristotle characterizes the metaphor as an "improper" name. This perspective has then been adopted by the rhetorical tradition, through Quintilian, up to the treaties published in the XVIII and XIX centuries (Du Marsais, Fontanier), so as to become a canonized common place. According to this conception, the metaphor is a rhetorical figure based on the mechanism of substitution, in which an extraneous name is transposed, on the basis of an analogy or similitude, on the common one, in order to name an object which usually cannot be named in that way. What matters here, therefore, is that there must already be a "normal" or proper way to name an object, and only on the basis of this normality can the extraneous name be perceived as a metaphor. The comparison based on a (striking, if the metaphor is to be functioning) analogy is what grants the success of the rhetorical figure. But the object, in itself, is given in advance and constitutes the ground on which to perceive the novelty represented by the improper, unexpected name, used in that circumstance. Thus the conception of language that underlies this theory of the metaphor is founded on the metaphysical, although quite commonsensical, conviction that words are names, and the role of language is that of giving names to objects which pre-exist in themselves. Thus there is a proper name, which is the one that gives the essence of the object, and there are improper names whose function can be aesthetical or rhetorical, but do not add any real knowledge.

It is well known that this is a peculiar strategy oriented toward the establishment of a theory of truth. The proper names can be linked

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1   For this account of the debate on the concept of metaphor I rely heavily on the work done by Silvana Borutti. Cf. in particular her "L'invenzione della metafora", aut-aut 220-221, La Nuova Italia, Firenze 1987, pp. 47-62.

to predicates in order to form judgments, which can give the truth about a given state of affairs. The pre-condition of this theory of truth is that the judgment is true if it puts together things that are actually together, and separates things that are actually separated, as Aristotle says in the *Analytics*. But the metaphysical horizon which constitutes the foundational ground for this whole theory is that of the substance as an individuated "this", liable of predications which reflect the attributes, or accidents, of it. Therefore the conception of the metaphor as an improper name is metaphysical as well, as it constitutes the counterpart of a linear theory of truth, which is based on the possibility to relate things and words in a direct way. Thus the metaphor becomes the rhetorical expedient, meant to embellish a discourse, but unable to uncover the truth. The realm of the metaphor, accordingly, is the realm of the arts, but not of science. This is what the mainstream of Western philosophy, up to Hegel and still Cassirer, constantly declares.

It is legitimate to say, I believe, that when Merleau-Ponty rejects the idea that the relationship between visible and invisible is a metaphor, he is referring to this classical concept of the metaphor as a figurative sense, as opposed to the proper sense. If this claim is acceptable, then it is also possible to suggest that Merleau-Ponty is, perhaps implicitly, supporting another conception of the metaphor, which no longer separates proper and figurative senses, and therefore which grants the metaphor a function of truth. This, in turn, means that truth is no longer related to the possibility to give proper, univocal names to pre-established objects, that is, truth is no longer coincidence. Clearly, it is a whole conception of Being and of meaning that is here called into question. In order to check whether Merleau-Ponty is actually suggesting this relation between metaphors and truth, it is necessary to schematically outline the main aspects of a different notion of metaphor.

It is not possible to enter here into details, but some elements must be brought to the fore. The most important of them is clearly the idea that a good metaphor is not good because it gives an object a new, unexpected name, but because it lets something different become visible. Metaphors, accordingly, are instruments of vision, in the sense that they allow to see differently. They institute new relations, bring to light what was concealed. This is not simply to embellish the expression of what can otherwise be said more ordinarily. This means that what is visible depends on the relations that are instituted, and this in turn means that the institution of a new relation corresponds

to the institution of a new entity. What is most striking of a good metaphor, in fact, is that it is new and yet always already known. If the power of a successful metaphor were only based on the capacity to surprise and astonish, then any unexpected comparison whatsoever could be a metaphor. But this is clearly not the case. A good metaphor is one that was never heard before, and yet, at the moment in which it is spoken, it becomes normal, it institutes a norm (which is why some metaphors can become so obvious that they are no longer felt as metaphors). A good metaphors, then, is a new vision, but also a vision about something that now, thanks to the metaphor, is visible for the first time, shines forth and gives itself "as such". It is usual to say, when hearing a metaphorical expression for the first time, "well, I have never seen it this way before!" The whole problem is to understand what this "before" can mean. In other words, it is the temporality of the metaphorical event that is here implied.

Some authors have developed this aspect of the metaphor. Max Black has shown that only when a scheme or model ceased to be considered as "metaphorical", in the old sense of this term, has a new scientific concept begun to be seen as true. It is the case of the notion of gene in biology, Black argues that biologists have seen the genes, in the literal sense of this term, only when they started to reason in terms of models, which are, according to Black's interpretation, metaphorical schemes of reasoning.[2] Black is in this case applying an intuition, to be found in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical investigations*, to the problem of scientific reasoning. Wittgenstein uses the expression "to see as", which possesses important elements of analogy with Merleau-Ponty's "*voir selon*", in order to stress the effect or a real reorganization of vision that takes place in certain cases, and not only of a different characterization of aspects which are in themselves already given. The same perspective can be found in P. Ricoeur's notion of the poietic power of constitution of the world pertaining to a metaphorical text, which then can be called a "mythos" in the ancient sense of this term. In his *The Rule of Metaphor* (*La métaphore vive*), Ricoeur shows that what he calls the living metaphor is alive precisely insofar as it produces a world: one could say that the metaphor in this case possesses an ontological force, inasmuch as it is not limited to a rearrangement of the aspects or properties to be ascribed to a certain object, but rather of the conditions of visibility of the object itself.

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2   See M. Black, *Models and Metaphors*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962.

We begin to see that there is a whole range of aspects that cannot be adequately accounted for in the traditional conception of the metaphor. A conception which, as Derrida shows in his *White Mythology* (*La mythologie blanche*),[3] depends on the conception of philosophy that underlies it and in turn is supported by it. The very opposition between proper and figurative sense is the philosophical effect of a strategy of demarcation and mutual separation between what is "in itself" and what is linguistically produced. Thus the very notion of an "in itself", prior to and independent of its linguistic account, is in turn the outcome of a linguistic, or textual to be more precise, account, and accordingly is undecidable. Yet Derrida's analysis is somewhat disappointing. It is true that the dimension of language is unsurpassable; it is true that the notion of the meaning of a metaphor independent of its linguistic expression is a myth that can take the form, as in Hegel's case, of the progressive release of the conceptual dimension from its sensible origin, or on the contrary, as in some French thinkers of the Enlightenment who influenced the young Nietzsche, can lead to the unmasking of the sensible origin of the concept as its original sin. In both cases, we are left with the impression that this is only the negative side of a phenomenon that is much deeper than that, and which possesses a great importance, for it seems to allude to an ontological question, or to be more precise and more radical, it seems to allude to a different ontology. This is precisely my thesis. Merleau-Ponty's renovated ontology has to do with this conception of the metaphor as something that does not simply represent previously given objects in a different way, but rather presents objects, brings them to the fore, uncovers them from a concealment which is not a veil but something that cannot be given as such, since is not a thing. This is what I would like to argue in the rest of this chapter. In order to do it, I will quickly mention Hans Blumenberg's ideas about the metaphor, which are the most innovative available on the topic.

Blumenberg's absolute metaphors and Merleau-Ponty's sensible ideas

Blumenberg offers a number of important analyses devoted to the theme of the metaphor. He works at two levels: on the one hand

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3   J. Derrida, "White Mythology, Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy" in*Margins of Philosophy*, trans. A. Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

by investigating the theoretical status of the metaphor, on the other by offering amazing readings of the history of particular metaphors, such as that of the "legibility" of the world. In his *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*,[4] Blumenberg speaks of absolute metaphors, a notion which is in my opinion precious in order to understand Merleau-Ponty's position. An absolute metaphor is one for which there is no "proper" meaning, as above defined. They work as a supplement for an absence. Thus there is no possible comparison between literal and figurative meaning of the metaphorical expression, since the latter is the only expression available. These metaphorical expressions then work in a very peculiar way: Blumenberg compares them to the rhetorical figure of the catachresis: the absence they stand for is not a determinate absence, something that would otherwise be present; this absence is something that was never present, and in itself cannot be present. There is, in other words, no "thing in itself" of which the metaphor would be the figurative counterpart. And yet the metaphor brings to light its visibility, it makes something visible which, once recognized, cannot be ignored, for its presence is indisputable, affirms itself with the power of truth. Blumenberg explains this effect performed by the absolute metaphors by recurring to an anthropological explanation: he sees in them the answer to a need proper to man, the need to give a face to what is faceless, the exigency to cope with man's inability to be fully integrated in the world, according to a conception of man in terms of a lacking animal which was already present in Nietzsche.

Whether the explanation given by Blumenberg of the causes for the attitude toward building up absolute metaphors is acceptable or not, what in any case seems to be absolutely decisive is the perspective that this notion opens up. An absolute metaphor is a "text", in a very broad sense of this term, which presents an absence, and this absence is in itself never present, but its unpresentability is in turn presentable. In other words, the absolute metaphor gives a form to, produces the visibility of, something that in itself cannot be visible, but whose invisibility is somehow more compelling than anything actually visible. This fact explains why a metaphor can never be totally exact. There always is a margin of indeterminacy, in the actual metaphorical expression, with respect to what is expressed. But this indeterminacy is not a lack that could be filled or corrected. It rather represents the

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4 Cf. Hans Blumenberg, *Paradigmen zur einer Metaphorologie*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1969. English trans. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010.

infinite, inexhaustible aspect of that which conceals itself below its metaphorical unconcealment.

What sort or relation can be established between this notion and Merleau-Ponty's implicit understanding of the metaphor? I think that there are a number of aspects in Merleau-Ponty's analyses that can be clarified if seen in this perspective. I would like to focus at least of some of them here. In the first place I would say that an absolute metaphor cannot be said to be true in the usual sense. Truth in terms of correspondence is ruled out for the simple reason that there is no element the metaphor would correspond to. This is what Merleau-Ponty seems to suggest in the passage quoted at the beginning. Yet, to say that there is no correspondence does not mean to say that "anything goes", that is, that any expression can function as an absolute metaphor, and this is the most intriguing aspect of this notion. An absolute metaphor is one that imposes itself with the force of a revelation. It is a metaphor that institutes a paradigm, so that nothing can be the same afterwards. When the metaphor is instituted, therefore, we see according to it, and this gives us the strange feeling that something that was not visible before the advent of the metaphor is now unmistakably visible. The question immediately arises: was this "something" ever present before, or not?

One could say that it was and it was not present. Let us take the example of a work of art. It would be possible to consider the true works of art in terms of absolute metaphors, and this holds for novels as well as for paintings. Following Merleau-Ponty's suggestion in *Eye and Mind*, we can say that a work of art contains more than what it is contained in it, in the sense that it is not possible to make the list of what is present in that work, since other spectators or readers might find something else, and in fact they will. Now if this can be granted to the work of art, since it is such precisely because it is artificially crafted so as to produce that effect, what about normal perception? And yet the parallel between perception and art is present in Merleau-Ponty's whole philosophy. Being is what requires from us creation in order to be. Strange conception of Being indeed! But it is what Merleau-Ponty repeatedly maintains, if we remind ourselves the content of working notes such as that in which Merleau-Ponty writes the following (VI 227-228):

> A certain relation between the visible and the invisible, where the invisible is not only non-visible […] but where its absence counts in

the world (it is "behind" the visible, imminent or eminent visibility, it is *Urpräsentiert* precisely as *Nichturpräsentierbar*, as another dimension […]). It is this negative that makes possible the vertical world

Here we have one of the clearest statements of a structure that the notion of absolute metaphor expresses perspicuously. The invisible is not only not visible de jure, but its invisibility is actually presented as unpresentable, and what counts the most, it makes possible the vertical world. It is a negativity that is not opposed to positivity, but represents its other dimension. If by positivity one understands the work of consciousness that poses what it sees, then this negativity is felt as negativity because it is not posed, but on the contrary imposes itself to consciousness, it passivizes consciousness, so to speak, in forcing it to see along lines which were not foreseen before, but whose inescapable force imposes itself on the spectator. But if we agree in considering perception in terms of a metaphorization of Being, two questions arise: 1 what are the "metaphorical" tools that allow perception to work in this way? 2 why is it that we usually are unaware of the metaphorical nature of perception?

As far as the first question is concerned, I would like to suggest that what I have called above the metaphorical tools of perception are represented by the so-called sensible ideas. These are contrasted by Merleau-Ponty to the full positivity of the concept. Literature, music, passions, but also the experience of the visible world, as a well-known passage of "The Intertwining-The Chiasm" tells us (VI 149),

> are — no less than is the science of Lavoisier and Ampère — the exploration of an invisible and the disclosure of a universe of ideas. The difference is simply that this invisible, these ideas, unlike those of that science, cannot be detached from the sensible appearance and be erected into a second positivity.

Sensible ideas accordingly can be grasped only in terms of the filigree, so to speak, of the visibles in which they appear, and at the same time cannot be detached from their incarnation, cannot become a full-fledged "other" positivity, like scientific ideas do. Sensible ideas thus are more "opaque" than concepts. But this opaqueness is not a defect; it is the only way they have to be what they are. They «owe their authority, their fascinating, indestructible power, precisely to the fact that they are in transparency behind the sensible, or in its heart» (VI 150). The manifestation of sensible ideas cannot be separated from

their retreat behind the sensible. They are "there", but as different from what appears. And yet this elusiveness is their mode of givenness. If we were to possess them completely, we would not really have them, we would rather lose them. Their power is "without concept", and they owe it to a strange, peculiar force of cohesion, which Merleau-Ponty compares to the cohesion of the parts of my body (VI 152).

What sort of cohesion is this? Merleau-Ponty says that these sensible ideas function as a form of "initiation", «the opening of a dimension that can never again be closed, the establishment of a level in terms of which every other experience will henceforth be situated» (VI 151). He then goes on by saying that

> [t]he idea is this level, this dimension. It is therefore not a de facto invisible, like an object hidden behind another, and not an absolute invisible, which would have nothing to do with the visible. Rather it is the invisible of this world, that which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible, its own and interior possibility, the Being of this being».

Merleau-Ponty uses here, almost literally, the words that were above employed in order to describe the mode of functioning of absolute metaphors. It is in particular remarkable that the cohesion proper to sensible ideas is subtracted from the logic of non-contradiction: like a metaphor, the sensible idea puts together what common sense tends to disjoin and separate. There is a passage in his Lectures of 1960-61, devoted to Descartes' Ontology and the ontology of the present, in which Merleau-Ponty writes that a sensible idea signifies in a peculiar way, insofar as it carries a meaning which is characterized as follows: « non signification qui soit "idée de l'intelligence", mais signification qui est *métaphore*, mise en relation de tout ce que nos habitudes et nos contrôles séparent. » (NC 202).

In this doing, the sensible idea performs the institution of a relationship which acts retrospectively, and makes what has just been related be felt as if the relation were there from the beginning, according to a movement which possesses the aspect of an *après coup*. The temporality proper to sensible ideas is neither the serial time of ordinary experience, nor the a-temporality proper to concepts, but it is a trans-temporality in which past, present and future are strangely linked together and turned upside down.

At this point the answer to the objection, above evoked, is in order: why are we never aware of the metaphorical condition, in the radical or absolute sense of the term, of sensible ideas? Perhaps the answer

resides in the notion, derived from Husserl, of sedimentation. Once a mode of perceiving is instituted, it is irreversible, it cannot be changed. This is true to the point that these "metaphorical perceptions", so to speak, become a habit, a second nature, which is precisely what the notion of sedimentation, to be found in the *Cartesian Meditations*, the *Krisis* and in a number of manuscripts, is meant to convey. We no longer perceive the metaphorical origin of a certain mode of perceiving. But this must be understood in more radical a way than simply by recurring to the sensible origin of the metaphors, for in this case it is sensibility itself that is metaphorical. In other words, and perhaps recovering Nietzsche's real radical intuition, metaphors do not have a proper meaning, a literal sense. Metaphors are the original, the literal meanings, and Being can be given only as a never present, and yet always present, unpresentable presence, whose absence is constantly metaphorized in perception.[5]

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5   This conception of perception and of the absolute function of the metaphor can be developed in order to show that Lyotard's criticism of Merleau-Ponty's notion of Being and its allegedly still too optimistic consideration does not hold. I hope to show this further in another essay. Cf. what M. Carbone says in his "Il sensibile e il desiderio. Merleau-Ponty, Lyotard e la pittura", aut-aut 232-233, La Nuova Italia, Firenze 1989, pp. 63-86.

CONCLUSIONS

Merleau-Ponty's radicalization of Western philosophy, as he was seeking to accomplish it in the years preceding his sudden death, is at once a radicalization of phenomenology and an inscription of phenomenology itself in the body of a wider philosophy of nature and of history. As I have tried to show in the chapters on nature, Merleau-Ponty found in this theme the framework in which to situate an ontological deconstruction of subjectivity, even Husserlian subjectivity, which would be able to find its roots while, at the same time, respect its peculiarities. In the chapters devoted to the notion of temporality I have sought to bring to the fore the intricacies that the notions of nature and of "natural" subjectivity entail. Generally speaking, it could be said that nature represents an alterity more original than the one constituted by the other subject. It is an alterity within the subject itself. This alterity is not manifested in itself (unless in some forms of pathology), but at the same time it is not completely concealed.

The subject thus is confronted with this extraneous guest who is the subject itself, given to itself, and yet not openly so. The subject therefore could be characterized as dual but not as dualistic. The natural subject is the "field" of the relations that its bodily constitution institutes with other bodily subjects. Merleau-Ponty can thus speak of intercorporeity. And yet, contrary to what can sometimes be read in this connection, in the realm of intercorporeity there is not only interrelation but also distinction, difference, gap. This gap, as I have tried to argue in the chapter devoted to Merleau-Ponty's notion of negativity, cannot be absolutized, for fear of losing it. But at the same time it must be grasped in its elusive nature. Merleau-Ponty adopts the term "latency" and I find it very appropriate. The relationship of the subject to itself is that of latency in the sense that the subject manifests itself to itself only thanks to a previous detour through the world, that is, the very field of intercorporeity. But this does neither mean coincidence nor separation. It rather gives itself in the form of a "spacing" which is not

material, is not a thing, for what "is there" is only a network of bodily relations. This spacing is, therefore, "nothing", but not in the sense of the *nihil privativum* either. The difficulty to render this elusive notion through the usual vocabulary is evident, and it is thus not surprising that the lexicon of Merleau-Ponty's last writings often resembles that of negative theology. The last chapter tried to suggest a possible reading of Merleau-Ponty's conception in the light of his account of metaphors and sensible ideas.

As a matter of fact, the problem of alterity seems to represent one of the most important themes of Merleau-Ponty's whole philosophical career. Already in the PhP, in the decisive chapter devoted to "the other and the human world", Merleau-Ponty sets up the question in the form of how to understand the other, that is, how to account for the existence of a subjective structure which is different that the I's. This is, in other words, the problem of the plurality of the egos. If the ego is defined, as it is traditionally done, in terms of self-consciousness, then all the well-known aporias spring forth: an extraneous consciousness must be given to my consciousness as not mine, and thus as inappropriable.

The answer provided in the PhP, in terms of the primacy of the embodiment of subjectivity, is at once crucial and not sufficient. It is true that, in this way, the Cartesian position of the ego as thought thinking itself, thus separated from matter, is overcome. It is also true that the body understood in terms of expressive gesturality, always already communicating with other bodily subjects, is able to understand the others without this entailing any reference to consciousness. This means that such a form of communication is "anonymous", so to speak, that is, it precedes the very difference between the I and the Others, and founds it. Yet one question remains somehow unanswered, which pertains to the role of language. In the PhP, language is basically grasped in its gestural nature. In this way Merleau-Ponty can rightly point out that language, too, leads its anonymous life with no need for conscious actions. On the contrary, it is thought that must rather conform to language. Mother tongue is the first foreign language, to which the subject must comply through learning. But how to account for this anonymous functioning of language? Is it sufficient to re-conduct it to its gestural life, and what role does alterity play in language?

In his further philosophical investigations, Merleau-Ponty deepens this question along two lines, which appear to be intertwined without overlapping completely. On the one hand, he further radicalizes his notion of anonymity in a direction that ends in the idea of the flesh.

But on the other Merleau-Ponty also investigates the circular and chiasmic interconnection between corporeity and consciousness, as it was shown in the preceding chapters. In this light, it becomes clear that to speak of "subjects" means, in the ontology of the flesh understood as primordial Being, to speak of processes of individuations, and not of pre-existing individuals. The subjects are, in fact, the results (always transient and precarious) of strategies of subjectivation. Quite similarly to what Foucault, later on, will say, according to Merleau-Ponty a subject is the outcome of an individuation that derives from the bodily/carnal anonymity. Alterity, at this level, cannot be conceived of in terms of separated egos. It is intercorporeity that represents the norm, and intercorporeity means indistinction, and indivision.

But indivision does not mean absence of differences. And even less one general Subject, uniquely determined. Intercorporeity, as Merleau-Ponty shows already in his lectures on psychology, is the field of conflicts, tensions, projections and introjections, something very close to the primary process of psychoanalysis. It is not by chance that in those lectures Merleau-Ponty insists on phenomena such as auditory hallucinations. These are possible insofar as there is no transcendental subject, always already constituted according to timeless laws. A subject that hallucinates is a subject for which something, in the process of subjectivation, "went wrong".

This also means, for Merleau-Ponty, to say that the so-called infantile subjectivity is not such. The polymorphous structure, with which it is endowed, can be educated but not suppressed. This polymorphous condition is the true mark of Merleau-Ponty's conception of intercorporeity. The subject is plural both within itself and in connection with the others. It is rather the very boundary between what is inner and what is outer that does not exist in itself, but is a task to be accomplished, ever again, for it is not substantial.

It is then necessary to distinguish between alterity and extraneousness. Alterity means that the distinction between interiority and exteriority already exists, it has already been "instituted". Extraneousness, on the contrary, pertains indifferently to the subject with respect to "itself" and to the "others". Language, in this sense, is an example of extraneousness that must become alterity. Language functions as something that is "outside" and yet appeals the subject. The clearest example is the voice of the mother: it speaks to the child and thus calls the child to answer, without the child knowing, at first, what this voice is saying. More radically than that, the voice is primordially both

inside and outside, and one of the most tragic failures that the subject can encounter in its process of subjectivation is precisely an inability to distinguish and separate the voices of the others from its own, as the hallucinations patently show.

Language, and in particular the voice, thus plays a crucial role, for on the one hand it detaches the subject from its most primordial condition and exposes it to an outside of a different kind. And on the other it is also connected with the archaic break with the purely animal condition and the advent of man. This break cannot be retrieved, it has always already happened, for man is the speaking animal and cannot go back to a condition previous to this one. The origins of language, as Merleau-Ponty says, are "mythical". They can be retrieved only après coup, as that which can be given after the fact, *nachträglich*. The emergence of the human structure is the outcome of an interruption in the previous organization of life. And nothing in Merleau-Ponty allows stating that this interruption is the accomplishment of a teleological process. It rather seems to represent a further step in the process of definitive distinction between the organism and the environment, which corresponds to the loss of the bonds that circularly connect the animal to its vital world, and the exposure of the human animal to this very lack of bonds. In this way the world appears in itself, as a mystery that can be blissful or threatening.

Consciousness represents in a way the symptom of this break. It is the trace of the missing link. It provides the human subject with the means to orient itself in a world that, however, consciousness gives in reverted terms. As Merleau-Ponty writes in VI, consciousness means not only a simple distance from, but a true rupture with and a reversion of the flesh. The world of indivision and of intercorporeity cannot be seen in itself. To see it would mean to lose consciousness. This has to do with the relationship of the bodily subject with itself as well. The conscious subject cannot coincide with its carnal "alter ego", but cannot get rid of it either. It is neither only characterized by this or that singular feature (the colour of the skin, the sex, etc.) but not a totally other either. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, the subject is always by its own body's side. How to characterize this paradoxical condition?

Merleau-Ponty never provided us with a final word, and the question must thus remain open. Perhaps a hint, which constitutes the indication to follow for another investigation, can be found in the idea that the subject "is" nothing. It is nothing in a positive way, and yet not in the same sense in which Sartre conceives it. In a world where there

were no differences but only "things", there would be no subjects. This holds for the body itself. The bodily subject is not different from its own body, for without this body there would be no subject. But it does not coincide with the body either. This "neither nor" is, in my interpretation, the structural condition of the subject in Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh. It is and is not present. It "is" the space between the bodies. As such it is not a body, and yet is "of" the body. This "neither nor" structural condition is the true mark of subjectivity, for the subject, in Merleau-Ponty's account, is precisely that which can neither coincide with, nor be totally different from, itself. It could even be described in terms of a splitting, or a divided subject. But in the peculiar sense, according to which the two "sides" or "scenes" are not coexisting, and are not totally opposed either, but are the compossibility of the incompossibles.

In this latter sense, Merleau-Ponty's last notion of subjectivity comes very close to Freud's later account of the splitting of the I. This splitting is no longer horizontal, as it is in the model distinguishing the unconscious (which lies "below") from consciousness (which is "above"), but vertical. Furthermore, in Freud's last model, it is the I itself that is divided, whereas Freud previously distinguished between I, Es and Superego. Merleau-Ponty's carnal subject can be compared to this Freudian suggestion. It is the co-presence of what cannot be together, that seems to mark the peculiar condition of consciousness with respect to the flesh. As I have tried to argue, this entails at once a revision of the sharp distinction between activity and passivity, a dialectical conception of the relationship between consciousness and world (or Being), and a revision of the model of self-manifestation of subjectivity in terms of temporality unfolding linearly from a beginning to an end. The notion of subjectivity Merleau-Ponty was looking for is at once staying and flowing, in a way that reminds us of Husserl's standing-flowing (*stehende-strömende*) consciousness, but in much more radical a way, for in Merleau-Ponty's case his approach is ontological and not only phenomenological.

Thus Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh designs a new conception of subjectivity which, although not completed and polished, seems today, after the publication of the lecture courses, to be better refined than what was previously possible to say. The co-presence of what cannot be present together, the space between the visible (the body) and the invisible (the soul, to adopt old concepts in a new way) is perhaps the true mark of Merleau-Ponty's notion of the subject. This space does

not exist without what it separates and at the same time relates. But in turn the two sides are not sides properly speaking without this space. A space which is nothing in itself, and yet which makes the whole difference: subjectivity thus is neither only natural nor only transcendental, and it is not a mere blend of the two either, which would be incomprehensible. Subjectivity, as it seems possible to state at the end of this enquiry, "is" the interplay of the two sides, both material and immaterial, both simultaneous and temporal. Merleau-Ponty's ontology thus appears to point toward a duality without dualism, whose meaning is perhaps his legacy bestowed upon us followers to think.