The Operative World:
Meaning and Understanding in Merleau-Ponty

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Abstract

This thesis seeks an elucidation of Merleau-Ponty's conception of 'operative' intentionality (*l'intentionnalité opérante*). This concept is central to Merleau-Ponty's discussions of meaning and understanding throughout his career. I argue that Merleau-Ponty's early work, in which he articulates the nature and place of operative intentionality in agency and perception, makes available a general thesis concerning meaning and understanding. Merleau-Ponty's central claim here is that meaning should not be conceived of as the outcome of acts of interpretation or judgement. I argue that this general thesis is unsatisfactorily represented in some of the most prominent secondary literature on Merleau-Ponty's work. Nonetheless, there is a tension at the heart of *Phenomenology of Perception* that compromises the clarity and coherence of Merleau-Ponty's conception of operative intentionality. The difficulty lies in the way Merleau-Ponty conceives the relationship between perception and language in the early work. It is this problematic that provides the key to appreciating the developments that Merleau-Ponty instigates through his attempts to formulate a phenomenology of language and expression in the 1950s. Tracing the developments of the middle period work on language in this way allows us to see how Merleau-Ponty's introduction of a new philosophical lexicon of 'the flesh' (*la chair*) in his final writings is motivated by the attempt to accommodate the general thesis concerning meaning and understanding that originally emerged with *Phenomenology of Perception*'s conception of operative intentionality.

Contents

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Author's Declaration

I declare that the work herein presented is my own, and that due credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

May 1959

Everything comes down to this: to form a theory of perception and of understanding that shows that to understand is not to constitute in intellectual immanence, that to understand is to grasp by coexistence

Tout revient à ceci: faire une théorie de la perception et de la compréhension qui montre que comprendre n'est pas constituer dans l'immanence intellectuelle, que comprendre est saisir par coexistence

(*VI*, 188/239)

Introduction

This thesis is concerned with Merleau-Ponty's deployment of the concept of 'operative intentionality' (*l'intentionnalité opérante*). This concept not only lies at the heart of the thinking at work in Merleau-Ponty's most celebrated work, *Phenomenology of Perception*, but also remains central throughout his philosophical development. As such, a thematic focus on this concept will allow us to better appreciate the continuity and trajectory of Merleau-Ponty's thought across his career.[1]

Despite the fact that operative intentionality is left undeveloped beyond 'meagre hints' (Mohanty, 2005: 15) in Husserl's writings, it is one of the concepts that Merleau-Ponty seizes upon most enthusiastically in his reading of Husserl. Merleau-Ponty makes his first explicit reference to it in the Preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*, defining operative intentionality as 'the intentionality that establishes the natural and pre-predicative unity of the world and of our life' (*PhP*, lxxxii/18). The concept is definitive of Merleau-Ponty's overarching philosophical endeavour to disclose the manner in which subjectivity does not stand apart from or outside of the world it experiences. As he puts it, consciousness must be recognized as 'a project of the world, as destined to a world that it neither encompasses nor possesses, but toward which it never ceases to be directed' (*PhP*, lxxxii/18). For Merleau-Ponty, subjectivity is to be understood as fundamentally *situated within* the world.

Crucially, this situatedness is neither the achievement nor the object of an act of interpretation or judgement on the part of consciousness. For this reason, it is not something that might be deconstructed or analysed. All that philosophy can hope to do, claims Merleau-Ponty, is to 'place it before our eyes and invite us to take notice' (*PhP*, lxxxii/18). In doing so, philosophy would be able to overcome the seemingly insuperable problems that have traditionally surrounded our relationship with and understanding of the world.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty hopes to achieve this via a phenomenological study of the body and its place in perceptual experience. Through this study, Merleau-Ponty is able to articulate the manner in which consciousness is caught up within the world it explores in perception by virtue of its corporeal embodiment. The meaning of perceptual phenomena is not imparted by an act of judgement or interpretation on the part of consciousness. There is here a decidedly *bodily* form of comprehension that is made possible by the manner in which the perceiving body is capable of communicating with the sensible world.

In this way, Merleau-Ponty's conception of operative intentionality should be understood as consisting in a theory of meaning and understanding. Crucially, I suggest that this theory has ramifications beyond any strictly delineated perceptual domain. Merleau-Ponty himself is clearly sensitive to the way in which his study of perception made available more general insights concerning

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[1] I follow (Edie, 1987), (Dillon, 1997), (Besmer, 2007), and (Hass, 2008) in dividing Merleau-Ponty's career into three distinct periods: the 'early' (upto and including *Phenomenology of Perception*, published in 1945), the 'middle' (1945 – ~1958, during which time he was working on *Introduction to the Prose of the World*), and the 'late' (~1958 – 1961, when he turned his attention to what would become *The Visible and the Invisible*).

meaning and understanding. In a 1952 lecture course he proclaims that the philosopher 'learns from his contact with perception an awareness of a relation to being which necessitates and makes possible a new analysis of the understanding' (*TJL*, 3/11-12). The epigraph I have chosen for this thesis clearly demonstrates just how important Merleau-Ponty took this 'new analysis' to be.

My task in what follows will therefore be to elucidate the account of meaning and understanding that is definitive of Merleau-Ponty's conception of operative intentionality, and to trace its development over the course of his career. My discussion comprises of five chapters. Chapters 1 and 2 seek to explicate Merleau-Ponty's conception of operative intentionality as it is initially developed in *Phenomenology of Perception*'s study of embodiment and perception. Each of these chapters centre around a critical engagement with recent literature in which Merleau-Ponty's thought is given application in contemporary philosophical debates.

Chapter 1 will explore the relationship Merleau-Ponty's study of the body bears to the philosophy of action. I will begin by problematizing a prevalent way of presenting Merleau-Ponty's thought in the contemporary literature on action and agency. On this kind of presentation, Merleau-Ponty appears to be offering a direct solution to a traditional problem that is central to the philosophy of action. This is the problem captured so concisely by Wittgenstein's question: 'what is *left over* if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm?' (*PI*, §621, my emphasis). The problem lies in the search for criteria by which intentional actions might be distinguished from unintentional happenings. To this day, it continues to motivate a search for some particular kind of entity or state that might serve as the criterion of intentional action. On the kind of presentation being considered, Merleau-Ponty appears to be offering a solution, albeit an idiosyncratic one, to this problem. I will argue that Merleau-Ponty offers no such solution. Instead, his thought is best understood as offering a means of eschewing the problem altogether.

In this respect, there is an important confluence between Merleau-Ponty's work and Elizabeth Anscombe's 1957 monograph, *Intention*. I will therefore seek to elucidate this aspect of Merleau-Ponty's thought by reading it through the lens of Anscombe's much more explicit refusal of the problem lying at the heart of the philosophy of action. I will articulate the central line of argumentation offered in *Intention*, which culminates with Anscombe's conception of 'practical knowledge'. I will then turn to Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the pathological case of Johann Schneider. It is in this analysis that Merleau-Ponty articulates some of the most important aspects of his phenomenology of embodied agency and with it, his conception of operative intentionality.

According to Merleau-Ponty, Schneider's case discloses a kind of pre-reflective comprehension of the world as the setting of one's projects and actions. The hinge of this kind of practical understanding of the world is the phenomenal or lived body, which Merleau-Ponty describes as 'a posture toward a certain task, actual or possible' (*PhP*, 102/129). It is this relationship with the world that Anscombe's argument is grounded in, and which her conception of practical knowledge also serves to disclose. Demonstrating the confluence of Anscombe and Merleau-Ponty on this point thus allows us to

appreciate the proper relationship Merleau-Ponty's thought bears to the philosophy of action. At one and the same time, it will explicate operative intentionality as it figures in Merleau-Ponty's study of embodied agency.

Chapter 2 continues to pursue an elucidation of the conception of operative intentionality developed in the *Phenomenology*. I will attend here to Merleau-Ponty's study of perceptual meaning, or perceptual *sens*. I will begin by enumerating the main characteristics of perceptual *sens*. Of significance is the manner in which Merleau-Ponty describes perceptual *sens* as constituted by the perceiving subject's *bodily 'hold' or 'grip'* (*prise*), and also how this grip is subject to a teleological *development*. It is here that we arrive at a fundamentally *normative* dimension of perceptual *sens*. I will bring this normative dimension out further by considering Merleau-Ponty's discussion of perceptual constancy, and his notion of perceptual 'norms'.

The place of the body in perception is most often understood in terms of the concept of 'motor intentionality', which Merleau-Ponty first introduces in his discussion of Schneider. The remainder of the chapter will focus on the place of this concept in Merleau-Ponty's overarching philosophical outlook. In particular, I will problematize the interpretation of motor intentionality popularized by the work of Hubert Dreyfus. Dreyfus incorporates Merleau-Ponty's concept of motor intentionality into his own account of what he calls 'absorbed-' or 'skilful coping'. Dreyfus describes absorbed coping as a mode of 'unthinking activity' (Dreyfus, 1993: 35) – a 'non-mental' (Dreyfus, 1991: 76) and 'non-rational' (Dreyfus, 2007a: 352) engagement with the world. Dreyfus portrays absorbed coping as a foundational stratum of our relationship with the world, and sharply distinguishes it from the 'mindedness' of thought. I will argue that Dreyfus' foundationalism misrepresents the overarching shape of Merleau-Ponty's thought. Rather than disclosing a self-sufficient layer of bodily 'coping', Merleau-Ponty's study of perceptual *sens* makes available much more general (and more philosophically profitable) insights into the nature of meaning and understanding.

I will first challenge the apparent textual basis of Dreyfus' presentation of Merleau-Ponty. I will then turn to Dreyfus' primary, non-textual, motivation for the view he ascribes to Merleau-Ponty. Dreyfus' idiosyncratic foundationalism is grounded in an argument derived from the famous 'rule-following considerations' of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. However, on an alternative reading of Wittgenstein's discussion, Dreyfus' argument is fundamentally misguided. I will argue that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological account of meaning and understanding in perception echoes the insights McDowell finds in Wittgenstein. Far from supporting Dreyfus' view, Merleau-Ponty actually enables us to resist the line of thought that motivates Dreyfus' position. What Merleau-Ponty's study of perception makes available is a general thesis concerning meaning and understanding that is not limited to a particular stratum of perceptual consciousness. The phenomenology of perception discloses to us the manner in which understanding a meaning is not the achievement of an act of interpretation or judgement. This is a thesis that runs 'all the way up', as it were, to Dreyfus' 'upper stories' of the mind and thought.

Chapter 3 highlights a problem that emerges in *Phenomenology of Perception*. This problem becomes most conspicuous with Merleau-Ponty's assertion of the existence of a 'tacit' or 'silent' *Cogito* that lies beneath the 'spoken' *Cogito* of Descartes. On inspection, we can see that this concept implicates a foundationalism of language and perception. Whilst it is ultimately not identical to Dreyfus' foundationalism, the presence of this foundationalist line of thought in *Phenomenology of Perception* is fundamentally problematic, not least due to the manner in which it stands in tension with the conception of operative intentionality developed here. I will show how the foundationalist line of thought that culminates in the assertion of the tacit *Cogito* is in fact rooted in the *Phenomenology's* discussion of speech and expression. Merleau-Ponty's early discussion of speech certainly makes positive and original advancements, and at least begins to extend his general thesis concerning meaning and understanding to language and thought. However, the 'gestural' account of speech offered in Part I of the *Phenomenology* ultimately leads to a disconnect between creative acts of expression – what Merleau-Ponty terms 'speaking speech' – and the acquired significations of constituted language. I will show that, due to the manner in which it defines speaking speech as continuous with silent bodily gestures, the gestural account of speech drives a wedge between perceptual *sens* and linguistic signification.

It is precisely this division between perception and language – and with it, the concept of the tacit *Cogito* – that Merleau-Ponty eventually came to criticize in the final few years of his life. Chapters 4 and 5 will pursue the developments of 'middle' and 'late' periods in order to better understand the way in which Merleau-Ponty sought to address the problems of *Phenomenology of Perception*. **Chapter 4** will focus on Merleau-Ponty's 'middle period' work on language and expression. At the heart of all the middle period developments is Merleau-Ponty's newfound enthusiasm for Saussurian linguistics. It is through Saussure that Merleau-Ponty is able to accommodate the cultural and historical conditioning of linguistic expression. Intriguingly, Merleau-Ponty's appropriation of Saussure prompts clear parallels with his earlier study of the body's place in the phenomenology of perception and agency. I will explicate the middle period developments by the light of these parallels. Ultimately we see that, for Merleau-Ponty, the possession and utilization of language must be understood as a form of embodiment. I will then proceed to show how the developments instigated in the middle period provide Merleau-Ponty with a means of overcoming the problems that beset his earlier discussions of language and expression. In this vein, I will end the chapter by considering how Merleau-Ponty is now able to successfully extend his conception of operative intentionality into the philosophy of language. This can be best appreciated when we attend to his talk, in the manuscript of *The Prose of the World*, of an operative *language*.

The middle period articulation of language as a species of embodiment is pivotal to the overt modifications Merleau-Ponty makes in his final writings. The late period work is distinguished by the introduction of a new and challenging lexicon of 'the flesh' (*la chair*). In **Chapter 5**, I will show how the new lexicon that emerges in Merleau-Ponty's final writings is tailored toward finding an adequate

expression of the continuity that holds between the world of perception and the 'intelligible' world reckoned with in thought via the 'body' of language. In this way, I seek to explicate how, towards the end of his life, Merleau-Ponty comes to explicitly renounce the foundationalist line of thought present in the *Phenomenology* as he readdresses the relationship between perception and language. I will begin by unpacking the lexicon of the flesh as Merleau-Ponty defines it with regard to the body and the sensible world. This will then facilitate an understanding of his subsequent, albeit underdeveloped, application of the new lexicon to the 'less heavy, more transparent body' of language (*VI*, 153/198). I will then explore how the application of 'the flesh' to language connects with Merleau-Ponty's important critical engagement with Husserl's late text, 'The Origin of Geometry'. What we discover here is a critique of Husserlian foundationalism that can be seen to apply directly to Merleau-Ponty's own earlier thought. Crucially, Merleau-Ponty effectively renounces the notion that phenomenology awakens 'a primordial experience *beneath* traditions' (*PhP*, 530n7/218n1, my emphasis). In doing so, Merleau-Ponty is able to explicitly articulate the mistakes of his earlier dichotomy of perception and language. By the end of his life, Merleau-Ponty was beginning to formulate a way of thinking that better realizes his definitive and fundamental philosophical aim: to adequately '[take] into consideration the operative world' (*VI*, 118/156).

1.
Elucidating Operative Intentionality:
Body, Agency, and Practical Knowledge

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty formulates his conception of operative intentionality by way of a phenomenological study of the body's place in our engagement with and grasp of the world. In attending to the body in Part One of *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the manner in which the subject's body is available to her as a power for intentional movement and action. In doing so, he is led to assert a fundamental interdependence between bodily agency and perceptual meaning. What emerges here is a kind of pre-reflective understanding of the sensible world as the setting of one's practical life. This understanding is not the outcome of any kind of act of consciousness or of a faculty of 'the understanding'. Instead, it is grounded in one's status as an embodied agent. Conversely, the subject is revealed as always already *situated* within the world she explores and acts within.

In light of this, Merleau-Ponty's thought bears an intriguing philosophical relationship to the discourse within modern, predominantly Anglophone, philosophy of action. This relationship has become a prevalent theme within recent literature on Merleau-Ponty.[2] Properly accounting for this relationship, as Jensen puts it, should prove to be 'exegetically fruitful' (Jensen, 2014: 44) for those interested in Merleau-Ponty's thought. As things stand, however, I do not believe that the extant literature on the philosophical relationship Merleau-Ponty's work bears to the philosophy of action is entirely satisfactory. It is for this reason that I intend to elucidate Merleau-Ponty's conception of operative intentionality by means of what I take to be the proper relationship his thought bears to the philosophy of action.

The structure of this discussion is as follows. In Section 1.1, I detail a basic worry in terms of what I shall refer to as 'Wittgenstein's problem'. This worry motivates the greatest part of the literature in the philosophy of action. It concerns the identification of adequate criteria with which we might discern whether a given event is or was an intentional action. On my interpretation, Merleau-Ponty offers us a means of ignoring or even *diffusing* this worry, and I shall outline, by means of a recent example, why this has not been adequately articulated in the secondary literature in this area. Understanding Merleau-Ponty in the way I propose places him in proximity to Elizabeth Anscombe's famous interjection in the philosophy of action found in her 1957 monograph, *Intention*. I will therefore seek to illuminate Merleau-Ponty's account of operative intentionality through the lens of Anscombe's thought. In Section 1.2, I will unpack Anscombe's argumentation and her conception of 'practical knowledge'.

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[2] See, for instance, (Wrathall, 2005), (Rietveld, 2008), (Romdenh-Romluc, 2011), (Romdenh-Romluc, 2014) & (Jensen, 2014). The relationship is also something of a recurrent theme in Hubert Dreyfus' use of Merleau-Ponty, e.g. (Dreyfus, 2002), (Dreyfus, 2005a) & (Dreyfus, 2005b). I will address Dreyfus' reading of Merleau-Ponty at length in chapter 2.

Section 1.3 returns to Merleau-Ponty, specifically his analysis of the case of Schneider, through which he initially establishes much of his claims concerning bodily agency and its place in the agent's intentional relationship with the world. One notion that I shall lay particular emphasis on here is what Merleau-Ponty calls the 'intentional arc'. It is through the intentional arc that the agent grasps her world as the proper context of the entire range of her projects and acts. It is the intentional arc that Merleau-Ponty cites as having 'gone limp' (*PhP*, 137/170) for Schneider. Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the intentional arc comprises a central aspect of his conception of operative intentionality. Section 1.4 will conclude by providing a more general articulation of this aspect of operative intentionality, and the relationship it bears to the philosophy of action.

1.1 *Merleau-Ponty and 'Wittgenstein's Problem'*

i. Wittgenstein's Problem

A worry that occupies a central place in the philosophy of action is that there appears to be nothing that might constitute objectively available, 'external' criteria on the basis of which one could discern whether a given event was an intentional action (i.e., the outcome or expression of a deliberate effort or intention), rather than a merely unintentional or 'mindless' happening. Wittgenstein illustrates what is at issue here in the following way:

> Let us not forget this: when 'I raise my arm', my arm goes up. And the problem arises: what is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm?
>
> (*PI*, §621)

In the case of arm raisings, the worry arises due to the fact that, to an impartial witness of my bodily behaviour, what I experience as an involuntary spasm in my arm will look just the same as if I had intentionally raised my arm. Yet*,* as the agent of this behaviour, *I* am immediately aware of a very definite difference between the two cases. Following Wittgenstein's proposed problem, we are tempted to look for some*thing* – a private mental entity, sensation or state – as what would be 'left over' if we were to subtract the physical arm movement from the intentional arm raise. In this way, our task of striking upon a criterion according to which we would be able to define, identify, and explain intentional actions becomes the search for some kind of 'inner' mental item or state of consciousness understood as either causing or qualifying a given action. As Arthur Danto puts it, an intentional action is 'a movement of the body plus x . . . and the problem . . . is to solve in some philosophically interesting way for x' (Danto, 1981: 5). Whilst I shall refer to this thought as 'Wittgenstein's problem', I recognize that Wittgenstein himself (*in propria persona*) took it to be deeply misguided.

It is this problem that has led to a proliferation of philosophical theories concerning the nature of 'what is left over', and which thereby supposedly serve to distinguish intentional actions from unintentional happenings. Turning to Merleau-Ponty certainly offers us a way of engaging with these kinds of theories that continue to make up the general run of work in the philosophy of action. This engagement is not entirely straightforward, however, and it must be properly understood. Merleau-Ponty should not be thought of as flatly opposed to particular theories that are offered in response to the worry Wittgenstein illustrates. It is in this respect that recent discussions of Merleau-Ponty's relevance to the philosophy of action are problematic: they appear to be advancing a Merleau-Pontian *solution* to Wittgenstein's problem, whereas Merleau-Ponty offers no such thing. Instead, the thinking that centres around his conception of operative intentionality – in particular his discussion of bodily agency, and of the 'intentional arc' – offers a means of resisting the apparent force of Wittgenstein's problem. Merleau-Ponty thus *undermines* the general run of theories in the philosophy of action by refusing to accept certain pre-assumptions on which they are (often implicitly) founded.

ii. Sketching a 'Merleau-Pontian solution'

Before I substantiate this claim, I should illustrate what I mean by a 'Merleau-Pontian solution' to Wittgenstein's problem by means of an example. In her 2011 paper, 'Agency and Embodied Cognition', Komarine Romdenh-Romluc presents Merleau-Ponty's account of agency as an alternative to what she refers to as 'the dominant account'. The dominant account is defined by the claim 'that actions are essentially brought about and guided by intentions that represent the agent's performance of the action' (Romdenh-Romluc, 2011: 80). The dominant account can thus be understood as an attempt to 'solve for x', as Danto puts it, by asserting the existence of a particular type of mental state: *intentions*, understood as having determinate representational content of the form 'I intend to Φ'. On this account, intentional actions are those that have been brought about (in the right kind of way) by intentions.

After motivating some discomfort with this account on the grounds that it over-intellectualizes agency, Romdenh-Romluc turns to Merleau-Ponty as an alternative. She asserts that the central claim of Merleau-Ponty's account of agency is that '[t]he agent's apprehension of her surroundings can bring about her actions without the need for any intervening thoughts – such as intentions – that represent the agent's performance of the action' (Romdenh-Romluc, 2011: 89). Since Merleau-Ponty conceives perception as involving a pre-reflective 'bodily' apprehension, or grip (*prise*), of one's surroundings, Romdenh-Romluc subsequently translates this central claim as 'the agent's perception of her environment can bring about her behaviour without any contribution from thought' (Romdenh-Romluc, 2011: 91). Thus, on Romdenh-Romluc's interpretation, Merleau-Ponty claims that, whilst

intentions are sufficient, they are not necessary for the bringing about of intentional actions. Instead, intentional actions can be brought about by perception.[3]

Presented in this way, it seems as if Merleau-Ponty is offering his own solution to Wittgenstein's problem, according to which 'what is left over' when the physical facts – i.e., the bodily movements constituting an action – are subtracted from intentional actions will be one of two things: either an 'intention', understood as a mental state that has representational content; or a perceptual experience of one's environment, understood as involving a kind of pre-reflective apprehension.

There are certainly elements of *Phenomenology of Perception* that lend credibility to such a presentation of Merleau-Ponty's account of agency. Firstly, there is an explicit anti-representationalist line of thought that does indeed place him at odds with the 'dominant account' Romdenh-Romluc discusses. Merleau-Ponty claims that the agent's relation with her body is such that she is capable of executing movements without having to represent either her present situation or the goal of the movement to herself in a reflective act of thought. There is no need for a mediating reflective act, since 'I move my body directly' (*PhP*, 96/123). In addition to this thought, Merleau-Ponty discusses a kind of malleability of the perceptual field, such that the subject's 'projects polarize the world, causing a thousand signs to appear there as if by magic, that guide action, as signs in a museum guide the visitor' (*PhP*, 115/143). This presence of action-guiding 'signs' in perception is what Romdenh-Romluc appears to be emphasizing in her presentation of Merleau-Ponty's account of agency.[4]

I want to suggest that, despite making use of these elements of *Phenomenology of Perception*, Romdenh-Romluc ultimately misrepresents the philosophical relationship Merleau-Ponty's thought bears to the philosophy of action. Presenting Merleau-Ponty's 'account' of agency in opposition to the 'dominant account' creates a false dichotomy between intention and perception that simply is not present in Merleau-Ponty's thought. On such a presentation, it looks as if Merleau-Ponty is offering a rival solution to Wittgenstein's problem. Yet what we find in Merleau-Ponty is a wholesale *rejection* of the very approach to the philosophy of action that the passage from *PI*, §621 encapsulates. Crucially, it is through his conception of operative intentionality that Merleau-Ponty makes this rejection available.

It is in this way that understanding the relationship Merleau-Ponty bears to the philosophy of action is a viable means of elucidating operative intentionality. The presence of a rejection of Wittgenstein's problem in his thought is somewhat obscured by the fact that Merleau-Ponty does not thematically develop such an engagement himself.[5] Someone who *does* thematically pursue such a rejection is Elizabeth Anscombe, in her 1954 monograph, *Intention*. For this reason, and despite obvious methodological differences, I consider Merleau-Ponty's thought to be deeply confluent with an

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[3] (Romdenh-Romluc, 2014) further details the Merleau-Pontian alternative to the 'dominant account' in terms of his discussion of bodily habits and attention.

[4] Hubert Dreyfus also seems to place emphasis on this thought when articulating his concept of 'absorbed' or 'skillful coping', e.g. (Dreyfus, 2002). It is a thought that is often taken to be synonymous with J.J. Gibson's discussion of perceived 'affordances' for action. Interestingly, the only direct quotation Romdenh-Romluc offers when discussing Merleau-Ponty in the paper cited is from Gibson's *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Gibson, 1979), which itself does not contain any references to Merleau-Ponty.

[5] (Jensen, 2014) does a thorough job of isolating the places where Merleau-Ponty most explicitly formulates a dissatisfaction with the general run of philosophical reflection concerning agency, especially in *The Structure of Behaviour*. I consider his discussion and my own to be complimentary to one another, although my own focus will be on *Phenomenology of Perception*, as it is only there that the concept of operative intentionality explicitly surfaces.

Anscombean approach to the philosophy of action. Reading Merleau-Ponty through the lens of Anscombe's discussion provides one way of properly accounting for the relationship his thought bears to the philosophy of action. In particular, Anscombe's emphasis on a kind of 'practical knowledge', and its contrast with the 'contemplative' conception of knowledge, provides a very helpful means by which to illuminate the more general philosophical significance of operative intentionality. I will unpack these aspects of Anscombe's work in the next section.

1.2 *Anscombe on Action, Intention, and Practical Knowledge*

i. Intention *and the 'Causal Theory of Action'*

For my purposes, I shall be focusing on just one of the stated goals of *Intention*, which is to understand the sense of the distinction between actions that are intentional and those that are not (*I,* §5).[6] Anscombe maintains that we must resist the temptation to think of the 'intentional' component of 'intentional action' as referring to a special kind of entity or mental state. As such, she is certainly opposed to the 'dominant account' presented by Romdenh-Romluc. There is, however, a second temptation that Anscombe is also keen to resist, since it goes hand in hand with the first. Indeed, it is really no more than the other side of Wittgenstein's problem: the assertion of the existence of a highest common factor between a token intentional action and a token unintentional happening (e.g. 'the fact that my arm goes up' as a common factor between intentional arm raises and involuntary arm spasms). It is once this idea of a *fundamental* description that is common to the two events is in play that the notion of intention (or at least, of whatever constitutes an action as intentional) as 'what is left over' once the shared element is subtracted comes to seem not only sensible, but somehow inescapable.

Anscombe's rejection of Wittgenstein's problem is sufficient for her own positive discussion being decidedly at odds with the general run of discourse in the philosophy of action, both before *Intention*'s publication and since. Crucially, Anscombe is not interested in accounting for intentional actions in terms of their causal antecedents. Such an enterprise trades on the (sometimes implicit) assertion of a highest common factor as outlined above. Since there are no objectively available criteria concerning the event itself (as we saw in Section 1.1, above), whether an event is an intentional action or an unintentional happening is supposed to reside in its causal history. Of course, there are many different possible conceptions of what this causal history involves, from Cartesian substance dualism to reductive kinds of physicalism. Nonetheless, they all share in the basic thesis that what mark intentional actions out from all other events are their *causes*, and that it is thus to these causes that we must appeal if we wish to explain the occurrence of intentional actions. This fundamental thesis, generally referred to under the banner of 'the causal theory of action', remains at the heart of

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[6] In line with the convention in the secondary literature on *Intention*, I shall provide references to section numbers rather than page numbers.

contemporary discourse in the philosophy of action.[7] On the reading I problematized in Section 1.1, Merleau-Ponty's discussions of agency might be thought commensurate to this thesis, with the possible causal antecedents being twofold: *either* intention *or* perception.[8] I seek to show that, as does Anscombe, Merleau-Ponty entirely rejects the causal theory of action.

ii. The Argument at §19

The rejection of the causal theory of action in *Intention* would appear to be largely implicit, since Anscombe makes no great pains to discuss such an approach directly. This is not to say that her rejection is unsupported. As we shall see, once Anscombe's own positive contribution is articulated the very impetus behind the causal theory is undermined. Before attending to this it is worth considering a point in the text at which there is a direct and highly condensed piece of argumentation that, whilst not aimed at the causal theory of action *per se*, is intended as a strike against the mode of thinking about intentional action that the causal theory of action typifies. At §19, Anscombe argues against the idea that we should suppose the presence of some 'additional feature'[9] to be what constitutes an agent's bodily movements as moments of an intentional act, rather than 'mere' muscle contractions and the like. Anscombe claims that it is thanks to this idea that we are led into 'inextricable confusions' when considering action.

I take her argument to run in the following way. Firstly, she notes that the bare presence of the additional feature is insufficient, since there is often an array of different descriptions under which one and the same event might be deemed an intentional act. This emphasis on the multitude of different possible descriptions of one and the same event is a defining feature of *Intention*. For instance, John's current action, which can be described as 'filling the kettle with water', might also be describable as 'leaking water into the kitchen cupboard', or as 'startling the dog'. Now, all that the bare presence of an additional feature can do here is confirm that *some* intentional action has taken place, rather than a merely unintentional happening. Yet it is highly unlikely that each of these descriptions of the event could be ascribable to John as the intentional action or actions that he took himself to be performing. The assertion of a bare presence of some additional feature in the case of intentional action is thus too coarse-grained to properly distinguish the intentional from the unintentional act. So the stipulated additional feature is in need of further characterization.

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[7] Its contemporary prominence is in no small part thanks to the work of Donald Davidson, and his famous rebuttal of the idea that reasons for action cannot be understood as causes of action (see 'Actions, Reasons, and Causes' in D. Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (Davidson, 2001)). The details of Davidson's argument certainly muddy the waters as far as the causal theory of action is concerned. Whilst I cannot pursue the specific details of the philosophical relationship between Anscombe and Davidson here, (Hornsby, 2011) provides a rich discussion of the (often underappreciated) distance between the two accounts to which I can find nothing to add.

[8] Whilst Romdenh-Romluc rightly emphasizes that the Merleau-Pontian account she offers is non-mechanistic (i.e., it does not present certain actions as the end result of a meaningless physical mechanism) (Romdenh-Romluc, 2014: 15), much more would need to be said to demonstrate that this account does not cohere with the overarching desire to delineate intentional actions by way of their causal history.

[9] Presumably, Anscombe intends 'additional feature' as a neutral term so that her argument might hold against the widest possible range of positions. The term could be replaced by something more specific depending on the position being considered (e.g. 'intention', 'volition', 'belief-desire pair', etc.).

Seemingly, then, what is required is a characterization of the additional feature as a particular description, or as intrinsically related to a particular description, of an action (e.g. 'filling the kettle with water'). So there will be a vast (potentially infinite) array of tokens of this type of feature. Furthermore, if we are to avoid the notion that the presence of a token additional feature in a given situation is merely accidental, we shall need to suppose some kind of mechanism that brings about an appropriate token additional feature thanks to the agent's awareness of his current situation. Perhaps John holds a belief that might be expressed by the proposition 'such-and-such bodily movements would result in the kettle being filled', and this brings about the presence of a suitable token additional feature alongside the given bodily movements. Yet this seems unlikely, since it is extremely rare even that one knows, in anything like a sufficiently precise sense, which physical movements are involved in one's actions. Furthermore, in supposing such a mechanism, we would effectively strip the additional feature itself of any efficacy in relation to what actually happens (i.e. the bodily movements), since it would now be the agent's belief that is doing the causal work. Perhaps, then, it is that the individual's awareness includes beliefs about how token additional features bring about the actions whose descriptions they involve. On the basis of such beliefs, the subject summons up the token additional feature that he believes will bring about the desired effect in the given situation. But to do this would be to appeal to a *second* intentional action: the act of summoning up the token additional feature, for which a second additional feature would be required, and we would be thereby committed to the absurdity of an infinite regress.

For Anscombe, these difficulties in making any sense of the role of a supposed additional feature constitute ample evidence in favour of rejecting the idea that such a notion can play any role in accounting for intentional action. She thus concludes §19 with her clearest rejection of the two sides of Wittgenstein's problem:

> …in describing intentional actions as such, it will be a mistake to look for *the* fundamental description of what occurs – such as the movements of muscles or molecules – and then think of intention as something, perhaps very complicated, which qualifies this. The only events to consider are intentional actions themselves, and to call an action intentional is to say it is intentional under some description that we give (or could give) of it.
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> (*I*, §19)

The argumentation of §19 is useful because it both trades upon and reinforces Anscombe's discussion, already initiated by this point in the text, of actions as intentional 'under some description'. As is clear in her conclusion to §19, this is an idea that Anscombe takes to be of great importance if we are to avoid the mode of thinking expressed by Wittgenstein's problem, and the idea thus generates a great deal of the positive claims made in *Intention*. Considered in isolation however, this idea would appear to concern the conventions of language. As such, it is not a particularly controversial claim, or one that an exponent of the type of view Anscombe is hoping to undermine necessarily must reject, since we might think that the conventions of language bear a wholly contingent relationship to our

philosophical concerns.[10] To understand the alternative view offered in *Intention* is therefore to understand the use that Anscombe makes of the idea that 'to call an action intentional is to say it is intentional under some description that we give (or could give) of it'.

iii. The Certain Sense of 'Why?' – Knowledge Without Observation

Early on in the text, Anscombe considers how it is that we distinguish an agent's intentional actions from their unintentional actions. It is here that she offers her well-known suggestion that intentional actions are those 'to which a certain sense of the question 'Why?' is given application' (*I*, §5). This sense of 'Why?' is given application when the answer serves as, or leads us to, the agent's *reasons* for acting. Such a characterization is insufficient however, since the sense of 'reasons for acting' invoked here itself needs to be defined without a circular appeal to the 'certain sense of the question 'Why?'.[11] It is for this reason that Anscombe considers the kinds of cases in which her sense of the question 'Why?' is *refused* application. These considerations are what lead Anscombe to conclude that it is the nature of the agent's *knowledge* of their own intentional actions that truly distinguishes them from those that are unintentional. At one and the same time, it is in her account of the agent's knowledge of her own actions that we find the true locus of the Anscombean rejection of the causal theory of action.

The sense of the question 'Why?' that Anscombe is pursuing will be refused application if the agent is completely unaware of his performing the action under the given description in relation to which the question is posed. Returning to our earlier case, if we were to ask John 'Why are you leaking water into the cupboard?' we might imagine him responding with something like 'I didn't realize that I was' or 'What? Oh no! What a mess!'. In this case, John did not know that he was performing the action so described, and as such he rejects application to the question 'Why?' in the sense Anscombe is interested in.

Yet knowledge of one's action *simpliciter* is insufficient for Anscombe's sense of 'Why?' to be granted application. Let us suppose John to have been idly watching his dog whilst filling up the kettle. He watches as the noise made by the pipes wakes the dog with a start. If we now were to ask John 'Why did you startle the dog?' he would be able to say of himself 'I knew I was doing that, but only because I observed it'.[12] Under the description 'startling the dog', John again refuses application to Anscombe's sense of 'Why?' because his knowledge of his action under this description was arrived at through observation. It is an instance of *observational knowledge*.

Against this kind of knowledge, Anscombe contrasts the class of things an agent knows to be true of himself *without* observation. According to Anscombe, an agent's intentional actions are one sub-class of

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[10] Indeed, this idea, thanks to Anscombe's influence, plays a central role in Davidson's work on action, which as I have already noted is deeply embedded in the causal theory of action.

[11] As Anscombe puts it, 'the questions "What is the relevant sense of the question 'Why?'" and "What is meant by 'reason for acting'?" are one and the same' (§5).

[12] This is perhaps not the most likely response John might actually give. More likely would be something like either (a) 'It was unintentional/accidental' or (b) 'I was filling up the kettle'. Since (a) appeals to a notion that Anscombe is seeking to elucidate, it is unhelpful to consider it here, whilst in (b) John redescribes his action in such a way that the question would no longer be refused application when asked of the action under *this* description (i.e., 'filling up the kettle').

the things of which he has this kind of knowledge. Whereas my knowledge that John is filling up the kettle comes from my witnessing him to be doing so, John's own knowledge that this is what he is doing requires no observational mediation, and is not based on any evidence. As she puts it in a later paper, this is 'knowledge without clues' (Anscombe, 1981: 71). John does not *discover* himself to be filling up the kettle. It is in this respect that Anscombe classes an agent's knowledge of their intentional actions as non-observational. An action's being known non-observationally is insufficient for Anscombe's sense of 'Why?' to be given application, however, since I am very often non-observationally aware of myself performing actions that are involuntary. One kind of case is exemplified by the kicking out I perform when my knee is tapped. This is something I do and of which I am immediately aware without observation. Yet to ask of me *why* I kick out as I do will only, if at all, issue in an appeal to certain facts about physiological mechanisms and the like. The facts thus cited in explaining my movement are only made available to me by observation. And this fact is sufficient to rule them out from being positive responses to Anscombe's sense of 'Why?'. According to Anscombe, such cases refuse application to this question because, whilst the bodily movement is known without observation, there is here 'no such thing as a *cause* known without observation' (*I*, §8).

This appeal to the agent's knowledge of the causes of their action is liable to being misunderstood. Anscombe does not want to claim that what distinguishes intentional actions from unintentional actions is that the agent knows the causes of their intentional actions without observation. Besides, I do know the causes of certain kinds of unintentional actions without observation, such as when someone's creeping up behind me causes me to drop all the books I'm carrying. Clearly, I must be sensitive to the person's presence in some way, and in this sense I surely do observe it, but its status as the *cause* of my action of dropping the books is not something I must discover or arrive at through inference, and so the cause *qua* cause is something I know without observation. Nor is there room here for laying on further qualifications regarding the causes involved in intentional actions by appealing to things such as volitions, desires, or indeed, intentions understood as mental entities or states that are the exclusive causes of intentional actions. Even if we ignore the risk of circularity here, we have already seen that Anscombe wants to reject such attempts to account for an action's being intentional by appeal to any kind of additional feature that is present over and above the fact of the action's occurrence.

iv. The Certain Sense of 'Why?' – Practical Knowledge

If we now turn our attention to cases in which the certain sense of 'Why?' *is* given application, we can begin to see more clearly what the defining characteristics of the agent's knowledge of her intentional actions are. When this question 'Why?' is given application, it is seen to issue in *teleological* explanations – i.e. explanations that ultimately appeal to some kind of aim (or aims) for the future; a goal (or goals). According to Anscombe, the teleological character of explanation that her sense of 'Why?' demands is

'essential to the existence of the concept of intention or voluntary action' (*I*, §20). This might initially appear to be strictly a claim about our language – i.e. that the concept of intention or voluntary action only finds an application or use, and thus a sense, insofar as it is internally related to our practice of demanding teleological explanations of one another's actions. If this were taken to be the extent of Anscombe's claim, one might be misled into attributing to her a kind of crude linguistic behaviourism, according to which *all* that is involved in intentional actions – in contrast to other events, including unintentional actions – is the linguistic practice or 'language game' surrounding her certain sense of the question 'Why?' As a species of behaviourism, not only would there be no private mental entities involved in intentional actions; there would not even be any kind of privileged perspective from which intentional actions are carried out and experienced. All of this would become reducible to our empirically observable linguistic behaviour.

Yet this attribution would be wrongheaded since Anscombe does not seek to reject the notion of a privileged perspective in regards to action. Indeed, her aim in attending to the linguistic conventions surrounding the certain sense of 'Why?' is to shed light upon the nature of this perspective in terms of the agent's knowledge of their actions. The central claim that Anscombe finally arrives at in this regard is that an agent's knowledge of his intentional actions must be understood as *practical* knowledge.[13] This concept first appears in the following passage, where it is contrasted with modern philosophy's 'incorrigibly contemplative conception of knowledge':

> Can it be that there is something that modern philosophy has blankly misunderstood: namely what the ancient and medieval philosophers meant by *practical knowledge*? Certainly in modern philosophy we have an incorrigibly contemplative conception of knowledge. Knowledge must be something that is judged as such by being in accordance with the facts. The facts, reality, are prior, and dictate what is to be said, if it is knowledge. And this is the explanation for the utter darkness in which we have found ourselves.
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> (*I*, §32)

According to the contemplative conception of knowledge, there is a certain gap that holds between a subject's possession of a piece of knowledge and the thing known. An upshot of this gap is that the thing known is completely independent of the subject's knowledge of it. For instance, the Eiffel Tower is and would remain in Paris independently of whether or not I know its location. In the other direction, as it might be said, however, there is a necessary dependency, since I cannot be said to know the location of the Eiffel Tower unless my belief that it is in Paris is in fact *true* (i.e., unless the Eiffel Tower *is* in Paris, independently of my belief). Hence, in cases of contemplative knowledge, it is the belief-independent facts that 'dictate what is to be said, if it is knowledge'.

We can see that this conception of knowledge is appropriate in respect to observational knowledge. Through observation the subject is able to discover certain facts that obtain independently of his knowledge of them. There is in this way an essential passivity to all observational knowledge: the

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[13] The concept of practical knowledge derives, via Aquinas, from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

knower does not play a role in the constitution of the object of knowledge. Yet contemplative knowledge is not to be identified with observational knowledge, for the contemplative conception often applies to knowledge that is non-observationally acquired. One example that Anscombe offers of non-observational knowledge is one's knowledge of the objective position of one's own limbs.[14] Despite being known without observation, it remains the case that the object of knowledge here is independent of whether or not the subject actually possesses any beliefs (true or false) regarding it. Again, the facts dictate what is to be said, and if my leg goes to sleep, I might conceivably form a belief regarding its position that will be directly contradicted by the facts.

Despite its legitimate applications, Anscombe argues that we would be mistaken in thinking that the contemplative conception of knowledge is the only one available (and herein lies her complaint with modern philosophy). Indeed, she appears to cite this thought as responsible for the errors of the mode of thinking epitomized by Wittgenstein's problem. In the case of an agent's knowledge of her intentional actions, if we stick to the contemplative conception of knowledge it appears necessary to distinguish between an action as an event – as 'what happens' – and the agent's knowledge of this event. As before, the thing known is conceived as completely independent of the agent's knowledge of it, and this can make the notion of a highest common factor between intentional and unintentional actions seem irresistible. In the case of an intentional arm raise, I know without observation 'that my arm goes up', but this fact is independent of whether I come to know it or not, and, indeed, of whether it was intended by me or not. Adhering to the contemplative conception of knowledge thus relegates the distinction between intentional and unintentional actions to a purely subjective or internal realm. It is in this way that it is felt necessary to posit the presence of some kind of private mental entity or state in the case of intentional action. The presence of this inner item might well mean that the agent's beliefs regarding her intentional actions are acquired in a very different manner from beliefs about her unintentional actions. Nonetheless, this knowledge is not itself the ground of the distinction between intentional actions and other events. It is the presence of the supposed mental entity or state that becomes the necessary and sufficient condition of an event's being an intentional action.[15] For Anscombe, this attempt to apply the contemplative conception of knowledge to the knowledge I have of my actions is mistaken.

We have already seen some of the ways in which Anscombe argues that this mode of thinking about action is confused. As the passage quoted above indicates, she considers the notion of practical knowledge to be essential if we are to avoid the 'utter darkness' of such philosophical confusion. But what does it mean to say that an agent's knowledge of his own intentional actions is practical knowledge? The pithiest definition of practical knowledge offered in *Intention* derives from Aquinas, for

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[14] Concerns have been expressed over the appropriateness of Anscombe's example as one of non-observational knowledge, e.g. (Pickard, 2004). Nevertheless, what I say here concerning this example holds for other cases of non-observational knowledge.

[15] It is worth noting that naturalist or physicalist positions in the philosophy of mind still implicitly trade upon the move made here by which the distinction between intentional and unintentional actions is deferred to a subjective or internal realm, despite their explicit rejection of the existence of such a realm or its supposed contents. They remain committed to the same form of enquiry: the attempt to fill an apparent 'gap' in the causal chain that terminates in an intentional action (Anscombe, 2005). The difference is that such positions attempt to reduce talk of an 'inner' realm to talk of physical or physiological facts and events.

whom practical knowledge is 'the cause of what it understands' (§48). Such a definition is clearly at odds with the contemplative conception of knowledge, since it implies that what is understood – the object of knowledge – is dependent upon the knowledge itself, insofar as it is 'caused' by it. The key question is what 'cause' can mean in this context if we are correct in claiming that *Intention* involves a wholesale rejection of the causal theory of action.

Neither Anscombe nor Aquinas want to say that John's knowledge that he is filling the kettle is the *efficient* cause of his action of filling up the kettle. John's knowledge does not make his action happen in the sense that we consider the motion of one billiard ball to bring about the motion of a second upon colliding. It is not a causal antecedent of his action. Rather, practical knowledge is to be understood as the *formal* cause of 'what it understands'.[16] John's knowledge causes his action *insofar as his action is intentional* – i.e., it determines which descriptions of what happens count as intentional actions. Here, knowledge and fact are *internally* related to one another. We can contrast this with the knowledge John has of his unintentional actions. In such cases, the action bears only an external relationship with John's knowledge of it (where he does have knowledge of it), and occurs independently of whether John knew of it or not. In this way, defining intentional actions in terms of practical knowledge is to reject the appeal to causal antecedents that is the essence of the causal theory of action.

Anscombe's appeal to the concept of practical knowledge clarifies the manner in which an agent's knowledge of his own actions is a subset of the set of things known without observation. Not all non-observational knowledge is practical knowledge, and it is not the non-observational character that has priority here. An agent's knowledge of his own actions is non-observational *because* it is practical knowledge; because it is 'the cause of what it understands'. This priority must be emphasized if it is to be clear just how knowledge of one's own actions differs from other species of non-observational knowledge. The agent's knowledge is not derived from the factual occurrence of their intentional actions; the facts *do not have priority here*. Unless this idea is made sufficiently clear, it can be impossible to make proper sense of Anscombe's claims regarding the non-observational character of an agent's knowledge of their intentional actions. Without it, it seems unavoidable that there must be some kind of limit to how far reaching non-observational knowledge can be; that non-observational knowledge falls somewhere short of the action itself[17], which can only be known via observation. Either that or Anscombe is positing something like 'a very queer and special sort of seeing eye in the middle of acting' (*I*, §32) that magically enables the agent to see events as they unfold without looking.

Anscombe is positing no such thing, but neither is she positing that there must be 'two objects of knowledge' involved in intentional action: the action itself and something short of it. We are only presented with such alternatives if we assume that the contemplative conception of knowledge is the only one available to us. To say that an agent has practical knowledge of his intentional actions is to say

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[16] The distinction between these different species of causation derives from Aristotle's *Physics* (II 3) and *The Metaphysics* (V 2). Anscombe does not make explicit reference to these sources, although given the avowedly Aristotelian roots of her thought, applying Aristotle on causation seems an apt way of making better sense of her discussion.
[17] This might be the 'intention', or – if we allow for non-observational knowledge of one's own body – the bodily movements involved in the executed action.

that he knows without observation what is happening beyond the limits of any supposed 'inner' realm *and* the limits of his physical body.[18]

v. Practical Knowledge and 'Knowing One's Way About'

The alternative to the causal theory of action offered in *Intention* hinges upon the emphasis on practical knowledge. Once the agent's knowledge of her own actions has been sufficiently elucidated, the mode of thinking that seeks to define intentional actions in terms of their causal antecedents can be seen to be fundamentally misguided. As Anscombe phrases it in a later paper, '[t]he mistake is to think that the relation of *being done in execution of a certain intention*, or *being done intentionally*, is a causal relation between act and intention' (Anscombe, 2005: 95).

Intentional actions occupy a certain place in the personal history of the individual. The explanations of action that are offered in response to the probing of Anscombe's sense of 'Why?' serve to show this. They unpack the intention with which the given action was executed insofar as they disclose the sense in which the agent understood the action to be contributing to the achievement of a certain aim, or as constituting part of a broader description of their activity. To explain an action in this way is to show in precisely what sense the agent understood it to be an *appropriate* thing to do. It takes us beyond the action itself as a bare physical event in order to situate it within its proper context. This thought is clearly anticipated in some of Wittgenstein's remarks on intention, such as the following:

> Why do you want to tell him about an intention too, as well as telling him what I did? Not because the intention was also something which was going on at that time. But because I want to tell him something about *myself*, which goes beyond what happened at that time.
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> (*PI*, 659)

Of course, in talking of 'myself' here, Wittgenstein is not referring to any kind of private, 'inner' realm or entity. I tell you about myself insofar as I reveal what kinds of things I take to be suitable reasons for acting. In asking 'Why?' we are hoping to discover precisely to what the given action is a response or, in Anscombe's own words, 'we are implicitly looking *away* from the individual and into his world' (Anscombe, 2005: 99-100).

An individual's practical knowledge of their intentional actions – knowledge that is explicitly articulated in responding to the certain sense of 'Why?' – comprises a moment within a larger whole. Practical knowledge is not entirely episodic or momentary; it does not only arise at the moment a given action is initiated and carried out. Rather, such instances refer us to a more general kind of relationship that the individual bears with the *world* insofar as he is an agent who is practically situated in the world. This is the world as the setting of the agent's practical life. Whilst Anscombe does not pursue this idea

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[18] An objection might seem to emerge here. I can discover an error in my execution of an intention via observation. This would suggest that my knowledge of my *successful* execution of an intention must be based on observation. I am unable to discuss this worry here, but I do not take it to be a genuine objection. (Haddock, 2011) comprehensively deals with it, demonstrating that Anscombe has all the resources to accommodate such 'hiccups', as Haddock calls them. Haddock's response hinges on the thought that practical knowledge can be *vulnerable* to observational evidence without itself being *grounded* in such evidence.

at any great length, it is certainly present in *Intention*. The following passage, for instance, illustrates this sense in which practical knowledge is constitutive of a general form of engagement with the world:

> Although the term 'practical knowledge' is most often used in connexion with specialized skills, there is no reason to think that this notion has application only in such contexts. 'Intentional action' always presupposes what might be called 'knowing one's way about' the matters described in the description under which an action can be called intentional, and this knowledge is exercised in action and is practical knowledge.
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> <div align="right">(I, §48)</div>

Now, I believe that Merleau-Ponty's conception of operative intentionality should be understood as deeply confluent with the thought Anscombe expresses here. Considering Merleau-Ponty against the background of Anscombe's discussion – particularly the account of practical knowledge that we have now unpacked – will thus allow us better to appreciate the relationship his thought bears to the philosophy of action. This will facilitate an elucidation of Merleau-Ponty's conception of operative intentionality, which is my primary goal in this chapter. I shall begin, in the next section, by reading Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the pathological case of Schneider in the light of the foregoing discussion of *Intention*. It is here that we will be able to detail the fundamental emphasis Merleau-Ponty gives to embodiment in his articulation of operative intentionality. This emphasis constitutes a clear difference between *Phenomenology of Perception* and *Intention*. It should be clear, however, that this difference is not a critical one, and that Merleau-Ponty's account of the body is confluent with the Anscombean line of thought detailed above. Section 1.4 will then look beyond Merleau-Ponty's analysis of Schneider in order to draw out the proper relationship Merleau-Ponty's conception of operative intentionality can be seen to bear to the philosophy of action.

1.3 *The Intentional Arc and the Body Schema in the Case of Schneider*

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty seeks to move beyond a traditional account of intentionality, and it is by means of a phenomenological account of one's own body (*le corps propre*) that he pursues this aim. What this turn to the body reveals is the manner in which an individual finds himself to be practically situated in the world, and it is Merleau-Ponty's description of this that sees him converge with Anscombe's critical engagement with the philosophy of action. According to Merleau-Ponty, this situatedness involves a fundamental reciprocity between subject and world such that neither can be considered in abstraction from the other. The subject cannot be separated from this practical 'hold' (*prise*) he has on the world; he is inextricably tied to the world through what Merleau-Ponty refers to as an 'intentional arc':

> The life of consciousness – epistemic life, the life of desire, or perceptual life – is underpinned by an "intentional arc" that projects around us our past, our future, our human milieu, our physical situation, our ideological situation, and our moral situation, or

rather, that ensures that we are situated within all of these relationships. This intentional arc creates the unity of the senses, the unity of the senses with intelligence, and the unity of sensitivity and motricity.

(*PhP*, 137/170)

Merleau-Ponty arrives at the notion of the intentional arc through a systematic juxtaposition of the normal subject's experience with a particular pathological subject called Johann Schneider. Merleau-Ponty makes use of pathological case studies throughout the *Phenomenology*. As Mooney expresses it, pathological cases provide Merleau-Ponty with 'a means of suspending the familiar so as to gain a distance from it and thereby explicate it' (Mooney, 2011: 361). The case of Schneider is perhaps the most well known of Merleau-Ponty's pathological examples. It is certainly the one that Merleau-Ponty discusses most extensively, articulating some of his most central concepts in the process.

Schneider received shrapnel injuries to the brain whilst serving in the German army during the First World War. These injuries resulted in various pathological impairments that led to Schneider becoming a major case study in several joint works by the psychologist Adhémar Gelb and the neurologist Kurt Goldstein.[19] In the present section, I will unpack Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the Schneider case. I will begin by outlining how the distinction drawn between 'abstract' and 'concrete' movements applies in relation to Schneider's pathology. I will then consider how this aspect of Schneider's illness illustrates Merleau-Ponty's conception of the 'body schema'. I will explore this concept in terms of the different species of knowledge discussed by Anscombe; first, I will demonstrate how it is the body schema that subtends our 'non-observational' knowledge of our body, and secondly I will consider how we might think of the body schema as a region of practical knowledge. I will end the section, with further reference to the Schneider case, by explaining how Merleau-Ponty understands the body schema to open out onto the more general situatedness in, and understanding of the world that is definitive of operative intentionality.

i. Schneider and 'Abstract' Vs. 'Concrete' Movements

The nature of Schneider's illness is most clearly demonstrated in his varying abilities to perform certain actions. Two actions that involve precisely the same bodily movements are not equally possible for him due to a difference between the contexts in which they are produced. Were a mosquito to land on Schneider's arm he would be able, like the normal subject, to perform the movement necessary to swat or bat the insect away without a problem and without the need of an observational awareness of the location of his arm. If he is requested to perform broadly the same movement in an act of pointing to his arm however, Schneider begins to struggle. In the case of pointing, Schneider is unable to locate his arm without recourse to visual observation or certain preparatory movements of other parts of his body in order to 'find' it (shaking his torso, for instance). The disjunction between Schneider's

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[19] It seems certain that Schneider suffered from a form of visual agnosia following his injury, although the precise nature of his illness remains unclear. (Jensen, 2009) catalogues the multitude of specific types of visual agnosia that have historically been imputed to the Schneider case.

competent performances and his incapacities motivates a distinction, made by Goldstein, between 'abstract' and 'concrete' movements (Goldstein, 1923). Schneider is able to perform *concrete* movements – i.e., common or habitual actions that relate to a well-defined and familiar situation – yet he is unable to perform actions that are abstracted from a familiar setting. For instance, he finds the task of tracing a circle in the air with his hand extremely difficult. As was the case with pointing to a part of his own body, he must first 'find' the limb in question, after which he makes several arbitrary and unsuccessful attempts until he finally happens upon a circular movement, recognizes it, and completes the task (*PhP*, 112/140).

It is worth noting that something of Schneider's problems in performing abstract movements is present even in his successful performances of actions that are related to a well-defined milieu. Merleau-Ponty recounts that Schneider, when asked to perform a concrete movement such as a military salute, must first repeat the order to himself before his body 'settles into the overall position required by the task' (*PhP*, 106/134). Schneider subsequently performs the task with what seems to be an odd kind of attention to detail in which every element of the situation in which the salute usually takes place finds expression. Whereas the normal subject would, if she wished, be able to perform a salute by means of an isolated movement of the arm, Schneider must make use of his entire body and perform the salute with the same kind of formal rigidity that the actual presence of a commanding officer would call for. While the normal subject is able to grasp their performance as decontextualized[20] and perform it in a correspondingly stripped down fashion, Schneider can only perform movements successfully if they are grasped as a response to a situation in which they find their context, and so he executes them in the very same way in which he originally became habituated to. In this respect, Merleau-Ponty suggests that Schneider displays an abnormal relation to the imaginary insofar as he is only able to entertain an imaginary situation if it somehow *ceases* to be imaginary for him and is instead treated as *real*. If this attitude is interrupted or unavailable, then the action becomes impossible for him (*PhP*, 107/135).

ii. Knowledge of One's Own Body: The 'Body Schema'

For Merleau-Ponty, the pathology of Schneider's behaviour displays an abnormal experience of his own body. The normal subject does not need to *find* his limbs in the way Schneider seems to do. In articulating this point, Merleau-Ponty echoes Anscombe's claim – which she makes more or less in passing, though it has often been disputed nonetheless – that one knows the position of one's limbs without observation. Anscombe makes this claim on the basis that there are no 'separately describable sensations' (*I*, §8) that serve as the criterion for stating what the position of one's limbs is. We are able

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[20] We might alternatively say that the normal subject is able to 're-contextualize' the performance in the context of an empirical psychological study. The idea remains the same: this context is not the one in which the given action was originally learned or most regularly performed. Tim Mooney suggests that such cases should be thought of as 'concrete-like' movements, given the absence of their original or proper context. He thus offers a three-part distinction between 'concrete', 'concrete-like', and 'abstract' movements (Mooney, 2011: 362). In what follows, I shall stick to the two-part distinction that Merleau-Ponty takes from Gelb and Goldstein's discussion of the Schneider case.

to make statements about such things immediately, without the need to perform any kind of inference. It is of course possible that such statements turn out to be false – such as when my leg 'goes to sleep' – but this does not debar them from being expressions of knowledge when they are true. These statements are not *guesses*, and the beliefs they express are *justified* although it seems that they are not based on any kind of evidence that stands apart from them.

As we saw in Section 1.2, insofar as Anscombe discusses non-observational knowledge of one's own body, it remains amenable to the 'contemplative' conception of knowledge. My left arm (or any other part of my body) occupies a certain spatial position independently of whether or not I know what this position is. As such, the facts are here 'prior, and dictate what is to be said, if it is knowledge' (*I*, §32). On Merleau-Ponty's terms, it looks as if the object of this knowledge is the body as a mere physical thing – what he refers to as the 'objective body' (*PhP*, 74/100) – and *not* the phenomenal body (*le corps propre*) – i.e., the body experienced as the seat of one's perceptual and agential powers. However, when Merleau-Ponty discusses the non-observational knowledge one has of one's own body, he does so in terms of its relation to the subject's experience of bodily motility and agency. As a result of this, he accounts for a type of knowledge that is *not* amenable to the contemplative conception. It is here that the concept of the 'body schema' (*le schéma corporel*) comes to the fore in *Phenomenology of Perception*.

For Merleau-Ponty, it is the body schema that properly distinguishes bodily spatiality from the spatiality of objects. The subject's spatial awareness of their body is *holistic*: the parts of the body bear what one might call 'internal' relationships to one another as moments of a systematic whole. These are *meaningful* relationships, in direct contrast to the relationships that hold between the parts of purely physical objects, which bear only external, contingent relations to one another. It is thus in virtue of a holistic awareness that the subject knows the position of his limbs: 'I know the position of each of my limbs through a *body schema* that envelops them all' (*PhP*, 100-1/127). Crucially, the body schema is not any kind of mental image or 'representation', or a product of associations.[21] It is instead to be understood as the very condition or 'law' that underpins and makes such associations possible. The body schema is 'an in principle unity' (*PhP*, 102/129).

According to Merleau-Ponty, it is the body schema that makes available the kind of non-observational knowledge Anscombe speaks of. This is only part of the story, however. Merleau-Ponty's main focus is the role played by the body schema in the experience of agency, to which there are two aspects.

First, through the body schema, I am pre-reflectively aware of and able to execute possible bodily movements. This awareness is operative without requiring any mediation in a deliberate act of consciousness. For instance, in raising my arm, I need not represent to myself or observe my arm's current position, nor the movement required of it if the action is to be executed, nor any of the positions lying between my current situation and my goal. I move my arm *directly*: there are no

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[21] Merleau-Ponty inherits the concept of 'body schema' from the work of psychologist Henry Head, who makes the same kind of distinction emphasized by Shaun Gallagher between body-schema and body-image (Gallagher, 2005). The body-*image* is primarily a representational awareness of one's body as an object – an amalgamation of perceptual, cognitive, and affective relations to one's body – whilst the body-schema is a pre-reflective awareness of one's body as the vehicle of one's agency.

mediators lying between the decision to move and the movement. This is what Merleau-Ponty means when he writes that, in movement, 'the relations between my decision and my body are magical ones' (*PhP*, 97/123).

The second aspect of the body schema's role in the experience of agency consists in its status as a *situational* awareness of my body. Merleau-Ponty places special emphasis on the way in which the body schema is geared into the subject's practical engagements with the world beyond the physical limits of his body. The parts of the body have a variable value or sense for the subject that is pre-reflectively determined at any given moment by the posture, movement, or task being engaged in. This is illustrated by the nice description Merleau-Ponty gives of himself leaning over his desk:

> If I stand in front of my desk and lean on it with both hands, only my hands are accentuated and my whole body trails behind them like a comet's tail. I am not unaware of the location of my shoulders or my waist; rather, this awareness is enveloped in my awareness of my hands and my entire stance is read, so to speak, in how my hands lean upon the desk.
>
> (*PhP*, 102/129)

The body schema is thus not purely reflexive, but rather it '*exists toward*' its various tasks (*PhP*, 103/130). In this way, the 'dynamic' system of the body schema provides an awareness of the body that is profoundly different to that of any kind of object. In the body schema, the parts of my body are internally related, not only to one another, but also to my surroundings as the setting of actual and possible tasks. Merleau-Ponty thus offers the following gloss on the body schema:

> Reduced to a precise sense, this term means that my body appears to me as a posture toward a certain task, actual or possible. And in fact my body's spatiality is not, like the spatiality of external objects or of "spatial sensations," a *positional spatiality*; rather, it is a *situational spatiality*.
>
> (*PhP*, 102/129)[22]

iii. The Body Schema as a Region of Practical Knowledge

Whilst the body schema constitutes a non-observational form of knowledge of the body, it would appear that this knowledge, unlike that discussed by Anscombe, *cannot* be accommodated by the contemplative conception of knowledge. Indeed, we might understand the body schema as constituting *practical* knowledge of one's own body. Such a claim might seem impossible given that, following Anscombe and Aquinas, the very definition of practical knowledge states it to be 'the cause of what it understands'. Clearly, a subject's knowledge of the position of his arm cannot be understood to cause the arm to be where it is – we have already clarified that such a fact holds independently of

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[22] It is here that the concept of the body schema is intimately connected with that of 'motor intentionality'. I will postpone a thematic discussion of motor intentionality until Chapter 2, where I seek to explicate its place in the constitution and development of perceptual meaning.

knowledge. What is important, however, is that according to Merleau-Ponty the subject's non-observational knowledge of such facts – facts of the 'objective' body – should be seen as grounded in the subject's knowledge of his body as the vehicle of his practical engagements with the world. This knowledge is an integral aspect of the subject's status as an agent, and in this sense must be conceived as 'the cause of what it understands' insofar as it is (at least partly) constitutive of the subject's bodily agency.

This point will perhaps become clearer if we return to Schneider. Outside of the immediately familiar contexts associated with his acquired habits or his trade as a leatherworker, it appears Schneider is only capable of relating to his body if he is allowed to 'find' it through some form of observation. Now, we might initially be tempted to say that Schneider simply lacks non-observational knowledge of his body in just the sense Anscombe discusses – i.e., knowledge whose object is the body as a physical thing. Abstract movements seem to require some kind of awareness of one's body as an object, and Schneider's difficulties in performing such decontextualized movements certainly have to do with the fact that he must replace missing non-observational knowledge with knowledge acquired by observation. This would explain, for instance, why Schneider is unable to point to the part of his body being touched if his eyes are closed. Conversely, Schneider's competent performance of concrete actions might then be thought to exhibit that Schneider's knowledge of his body as a vehicle of situated or context-driven action has been left intact. If these two kinds of knowledge – i.e. non-observational knowledge of one's body as a physical thing, and knowledge of one's body as a vehicle of context-driven action – can indeed come apart in this way, then it seems that they must be independent of one another. This is something that I am claiming Merleau-Ponty rejects insofar as he considers the non-observational knowledge of the position of one's limbs to be made available through the body schema.

In contrasting Schneider with the normal subject, Merleau-Ponty places a strong emphasis on the place of *possibility* in the experience of one's own body. Merleau-Ponty's own diagnosis of Schneider's pathology is focused around the idea that Schneider no longer 'has' his body as a vehicle of merely *possible* action. This claim is initially motivated by Schneider's abnormal relationship with imaginary situations and actions. As noted above, when requested to perform a familiar action outside of its proper context, Schneider must begin by engaging in a sort of intellectual ritual by means of which he is able to grasp the requested action as a response to a *real* situation. Schneider is no longer able to unproblematically entertain imaginary possibilities. Outside of the demands of a real situation, and without observation, Schneider's body is merely an 'amorphous mass' (*PhP*, 112/140), lacking the inner articulation by which the different parts of the body each have a place and relate to one another as moments of a systematic whole. In the normal subject this inner articulation involves a pre-reflective grasp of the body as the seat of motor possibilities. It is this grasp that makes available non-observational knowledge of the position of one's limbs. Each part of the body has its identity for the subject as a 'certain power for action' (*PhP*, 111/139). It is because Schneider's body is no longer

articulated in this way that he is wholly unable to locate the parts of his objective body without observation. We see here that the kind of knowledge of one's body that is discussed by Anscombe is itself grounded in the kind of practical knowledge of one's own body that Merleau-Ponty describes. The locus of Schneider's disabilities lies in his phenomenal body.

iv. A Bodily Understanding of the World

Schneider's illness is not limited to his motor functions, however. There are further aspects of his behaviour that reveal a deterioration of his experience and understanding of the world more generally. The motif that we find repeated here is Schneider's inability to grasp the merely possible, and to thereby understand the actual in relation to possibilities.

> The normal person *reckons with* the possible, which thus acquires a sort of actuality without leaving behind its place as a possibility; for the patient, however, the field of the actual is limited to what is encountered in real contact or linked to these givens through an explicit deduction.
>
> (*PhP*, 112/139-140) [23]

Exploring Schneider's illness further discloses, in non-pathological cases, a kind of understanding of the world that is not that of an abstract faculty of intellection or of 'the understanding', but of an embodied agency. It is in this sense that Merleau-Ponty speaks of the body as 'our anchorage in a world' (*PhP*, 146/180). This anchorage is not simply physical, and Merleau-Ponty is not – at least not primarily – advancing a kind of materialist thesis here. Indeed, he explicitly wants to reject the assumption that the body is primarily to be understood under a purely material, physical description. Rather, the body is the means by which I relate to the world as the setting in which my various intentional engagements find their context. There is *no* fundamental description of my body: it has a sense and is articulated for me insofar as it is the vehicle of my engagement with the world under the huge variety of different descriptions that together constitute my practical situation; my intentional *life*. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, the normal subject has 'several holds' upon his body insofar as it places him in touch with the world under various different descriptions (*PhP*, 111/138). In this way, practical knowledge of one's own body is the other side of a pre-reflective form of understanding of the world. The deterioration of Schneider's relationship with the world is no more than the other side of his pathological form of bodily motricity and agency.

This deterioration is perhaps most prominent in Schneider's perceptual experience. We find that Schneider is only able to grasp the properties of a perceived thing via the medium of language and the conceptual connections that hold between words. For instance, when Schneider attempts to draw a sketch of a perceived object, his perceptual exploration of the object is never translated immediately

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[23] It is this same 'capacity of orienting oneself in relation to the possible … and not in relation to a limited milieu' (*SB*, 176/190) that Merleau-Ponty had already stressed as 'the essence' of a decidedly human dialectic in his first work, *The Structure of Behaviour*.

into the movements of his pencil. Instead, Schneider must verbally articulate the particularities he is able to recognize (e.g. 'a right angle', 'a straight edge', etc.), and then construct his drawing freehand on the basis of his grasp of the meaning of the words. For Schneider, the perceived object lacks an immediate or pre-reflective sense that is present in normal perception. Whilst the normal subject enjoys a spontaneous communication with the world in perception, Schneider must engage in a laborious process of interpretation.

> For the normal person, the object is "speaking" and meaningful, the arrangement of colours immediately "means" something, whereas for the patient the signification must be brought in from elsewhere through a genuine act of interpretation.
>
> (*PhP*, 133/164)

Merleau-Ponty states that Schneider's perceptual deficiencies lie at 'the junction of sensitivity and signification' (*PhP*, 132/164). In order to understand the perceived object, Schneider must subsume what is sensibly given under conceptual categories in a reflective act. We can thus identify two distinct moments of Schneider's perceptual experience. There is, on the one hand, an entirely *passive* reception of sensible givens – a bare sensible 'impact' of the world – and, on the other hand, a categorial subsumption of these givens through an explicit *act* of intellectual reflection. In Schneider's case, perceptual sensitivity comes apart from the signification of the perceived.

The normal subject understands the perceived object in an entirely different way, which Merleau-Ponty, following Gestalt psychologists such as Werner and Köhler, refers to as 'physiognomic perception' (*PhP*, 134/165). In physiognomic perception, the sensible *has a sense* (*sens*) that is not bestowed upon it from an act of "the understanding". This is because the normal subject grasps the perceived thing as a pole of possible active engagements. The object exists 'for' his body (PhP, 140/174). He is not limited to bare sensible 'givens' because his own agential and motor possibilities are reflected in the organization of the perceptual field. The actual stands out against the background of a 'horizon of possibilities' (*PhP*, 523n87/169n1) that is no longer available for Schneider.[24]

We can see further aspects of this absence in the fact that the world no longer suggests opportunities for spontaneous or creative activity to Schneider. For instance, he appears to have lost the capacity to take any kind of sexual initiative. He is simply no longer sensitive to the world in this way, or as Merleau-Ponty puts it, '[p]erception has lost its erotic structure' (*PhP*, 158/193). He is unable to form intentions that would guide a sexual engagement with the world. Similarly, he finds himself unable to form political or religious opinions, despite expressing a desire to do so (*PhP*, 136/168). Schneider is no longer pre-reflectively *situated* in relation to such matters, and finds himself 'on the outside looking in', as it were.

Furthermore, Schneider barely speaks at all unless he is asked a direct question. When he does take the initiative of asking a question, he only ever asks those questions that have become habitual for him,

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[24] Once again, the concept of 'motor intentionality' is employed in articulating this reciprocity between the body schema and the perceived world. This shall be brought out in detail as the thematic focus of Chapter 2.

such as asking his children about their day when they return home from school. A conversation does not present Schneider with a meaningful situation that might give rise to new or spontaneous thoughts in him. Instead, he must plan what he is going to say in advance. As Merleau-Ponty describes it,

> Schneider never feels the need to speak, his experience never tends toward speech, it never raises a question, and it never ceases to have this sort of evidentness and self-sufficiency of the real that stifles all interrogation, all reference to the possible, all wonder, and all improvisation.
>
> (*PhP*, 202/238)

Schneider has not lost language altogether, just as he has not altogether lost the power of movement. He has retained a vocabulary and a conceptual understanding of words in much the same way as he has retained the habitual actions and practical skills acquired prior to his injury. Schneider's problem is that, beyond habitual contexts and constituted meanings, his body and his language are no longer available to him as vehicles of merely possible, as yet undetermined, uses, thereby leaving him '"bound" to the actual' (*PhP*, 137/169).

> All things considered, the world no longer suggests any significations to him and, reciprocally, the significations that he considers are no longer embodied in the given world.
>
> (*PhP*, 133/165)

The world is no longer immediately given to Schneider as the space in which his intentional engagements find their context and, thereby, their sense. To borrow Anscombe's phrase, Schneider no longer 'knows his way about' the world under various different descriptions, and this is found reflected in the peculiarities of his behaviour and loss of spontaneity. It is thus a form of understanding that has been compromised for Schneider. His illness reveals a reciprocal or dialectical relationship between a pre-reflective grasp (*prise*) of the world and one's capacities for spontaneous intentional behaviour. The 'intentional arc' is nothing more than the movement of this dialectic, and it is in this sense that Merleau-Ponty speaks of the intentional arc as having 'gone limp' for Schneider (*PhP*, 137/170).[25]

1.4 *Operative Intentionality*

It is in disclosing this dialectic between the pre-reflective, bodily grasp of the world and the capacity for spontaneous intentional behaviour that Merleau-Ponty articulates his conception of operative intentionality. This 'primordial' intentionality does not involve an intentional object held before a

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[25] This diagnosis is also formulated in terms of 'a certain leveling out of the "world"' for Schneider (*PhP*, 132/163). As the quotation marks indicate, 'world' is used here in a technical sense to refer to what Merleau-Ponty describes as the 'double moment of sedimentation and spontaneity' (*PhP*, 132/163). Once again, Merleau-Ponty is positing a dialectical relationship in virtue of which one's 'sedimented' acquisitions or constituted understanding is what makes available new possibilities for spontaneous acts, which in turn constitute a development of one's understanding; of one's situation. Schneider's acquisitions (motor, linguistic, conceptual) are no longer given to him in such a way that spontaneous and new usages are pre-reflectively possible, and as such the dialectic flounders and ossifies. We shall see (in Chapters 3-5) how this 'double moment' surfaces repeatedly throughout Merleau-Ponty's discussions of language, expression, and tradition.

subject, but an original directedness towards the world and towards things, through which the subject is situated *in* the world and cannot be considered outside or apart from it. It is here that Merleau-Ponty appropriates Heidegger's 'being-in-the-world' (*In-der-Welt-sein/être au monde*) as a concept that is to be juxtaposed with a dualism of, on the one hand, the self-transparent and reflexive existence of a Cartesian *ego* ('being-for-itself') and*, on the other, the impersonal and determinate existence of an objective world ('being-in-itself').[26] For Merleau-Ponty, the true insight of phenomenology lies in its potential to disclose a form of intentionality that involves neither a transparent subjectivity nor an opaque objectivity.

Despite how alien Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological lexicon might initially appear to Anscombe's approach, her account of 'practical knowledge' leads to a thought that lies at the heart of Merleau-Ponty's entire philosophy: that there is a form of understanding of the world in which the 'facts' – i.e., the world considered independently of the individual's grasp of it – do not have priority.[27] This understanding, which is precisely *not* the outcome of any kind of subjective act of judgement*, is constitutive of the subject's situatedness in the world, and thus 'the cause of what it understands', in the sense that Anscombe means these words. In at least this regard, we can see that there is a convergence between the two despite the fact that they arrive at this thought in very different ways. Anscombe pursues a grammatical investigation of the linguistic practices that surround our explanations of action, whilst Merleau-Ponty works through a phenomenological articulation of the body's place in agency and perception. The differences in the paths they each follow serve only to make their convergence more intriguing and more fruitful, both exegetically and philosophically.

It is the thinking behind the concept of operative intentionality that places Merleau-Ponty, like Anscombe, completely at odds with the mode of thinking that seeks a solution to Wittgenstein's problem. Such a solution appears necessary so long as we assume that priority must be given to an 'objective' description of events; a description in which the agent's understanding of his actions are by definition excluded. It is this assumption that motivates the idea that there must be a highest common factor between unintentional and intentional actions that involve the same physical movements, and which thereby pushes the 'intentional' component of intentional actions – Danto's 'x' – back into a purely subjective realm or sphere of the mind. This mode of thinking thus tacitly assumes and supports the dualism of mind and world that Merleau-Ponty is seeking to supplant. As Jensen expresses it, the problem here 'resides in the assumption that the subjective component (the intention or trying) and the objective component (the movement) of a bodily action can be made intelligible independently of one another, i.e. in a conceptual dualism' (Jensen, 2014: 54). Romdenh-Romluc's framing of Merleau-Ponty's thought in relation to Wittgenstein's problem prohibits her from adequately articulating the

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[26] A more or less explicit target here is Sartre, who, in *Being and Nothingness*, lays great emphasis on the ontological bifurcation of being-in-itself and being-for-itself (Sartre, trans. 1957).

[27] Of course, the subject's understanding may be contradicted or undermined in various ways by the realization of certain mind-independent facts. I take this to be the case in various forms of repression, such as the phantom limb patient who continues to relate to the world through a limb that no longer exists. In such a case, there is a friction between the facts and the subject's pre-reflective understanding. Merleau-Ponty offers an analysis of phantom limb cases along these lines that I am unable to pursue here (see *PhP* Part I, Chapter I *d-e*). Nonetheless, as in the case of the agent's knowledge of his own actions, this sensitivity to the observed facts does not necessitate that the subject's pre-reflective understanding of the world is originally arrived at on the basis of observational reasons.

fundamental challenge his conception of operative intentionality offers to the general run of work in the philosophy of action.

Like Anscombe, the Merleau-Pontian rejection of Wittgenstein's problem begins with a refusal to give the 'objective' description of events its assumed priority. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, this refusal is initially pursued through the phenomenology of one's own body. For Merleau-Ponty, the subject's relationship with his body cannot be adequately accounted for if a physical or physiological description of the body is given explanatory priority. What Merleau-Ponty offers is an account of the body in which the subject's grasp of his body must be understood as partly *constitutive* of the body insofar as it is the 'vehicle of being in the world' (*PhP*, 84/111). The subject's relationship with his own body is thus revealed as the 'other side' of his pre-reflective understanding of, or situatedness in, the world. The various uses the subject puts his body to in the performance of intentional actions are expressive of this relationship with the world. A description of the world in which this relationship does not figure is one in which the concept of 'intentional action' has no sense, since it is a description of the world in which actions are not considered in their proper *context(s)*. The intentional actions that a subject performs have their context, and thus their sense, insofar as they are responses to a given situation. Intentional actions are moments of a dialectical form of understanding of the world that is the focus of Merleau-Ponty's conception of operative intentionality.

Finally, then, we can begin to see how it is this conception of operative intentionality that underpins the aspects of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception that Romdenh-Romluc, amongst others, emphasizes in her own discussion of the relationship Merleau-Ponty's thought bears to the philosophy of action. As I noted in Section 1.1, Merleau-Ponty discusses what we might think of as a malleability of the perceptual field, such that that the normal subject finds her intentions and practical interests immediately reflected in her perceptual experience: 'they polarize it, put their stamp on it, or finally, effortlessly give birth there to a new wave of significations' (*PhP*, 133/165). Merleau-Ponty also discusses this 'polarization' in terms of the presence of what he calls 'lines of force' in perception, as in the following example from *The Structure of Behaviour*:

> For the player in action the football field is … pervaded with lines of force (the "yard lines"; those which demarcate the "penalty area") and articulated in sectors (for example, the "openings" between the adversaries) which call for a certain mode of action and which initiate and guide the action as if the player were unaware of it. The field itself is not given to him, but present as the immanent term of his practical intentions
>
> (*SB*, 168/182-3)

Romdenh-Romluc considers the significance of such cases to consist in the fact that they provide examples of actions that are brought about by perception without recourse to intentions (understood as reflective mental states with representational content). Insofar as Merleau-Ponty offers a psychological description of action, Romdenh-Romluc is surely right, for here we have cases of actions being

performed without recourse to any kind of explicit deliberation or representation.[28] Considered in isolation and without an eye for Merleau-Ponty's more general conception of operative intentionality, however, his descriptions of such cases begin to look like material for a solution to Wittgenstein's problem in which perceptions are conceived as sometimes, or even most of the time, taking the place of intentions as 'what is left over'. I suggest that the role of such examples in Merleau-Ponty's work is in fact to make perspicuous our pre-reflective understanding of the world as the setting or context of our multifarious practical projects and engagements.

Anscombe herself echoes the psychological point that is the focus of Romdenh-Romluc's discussion when Anscombe notes that a great deal of the time, the formulations we offer in response to her sense of 'Why?' are not explicitly entertained (*qua* representational state) in thought before or during the execution of the given action. Yet, as Anscombe argues, this does not disclose a different species of action – one that is brought about by perception rather than intentions. Instead, it illustrates the way in which reporting one's intention in performing a given action does not involve *remembering* the experience of a particular thought or *state* that brought the action about (Anscombe, 2005). In illustrating this, it lends support to thinking about intentional action in a way that does not look to *solve* Wittgenstein's problem, whether by appeal to an immanent sphere of mental states or items, or otherwise.

Indeed, for Merleau-Ponty, cases such as the football player described above serve to illustrate the nature of the operative intentionality by means of which consciousness or agency is always already 'in the world'. It is this situatedness that provides the meaningful context or background against which our actions have the sense that they do. Perception itself is shown to participate in this pre-reflective understanding of the world, and the *sense* of perceptual experience – like the sense of the subject's intentional actions – is shown to be incomprehensible if we begin from a 'fundamental' or 'objective' description of the world and the perceiving body. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, 'One's own body is in the world just as the heart is in the organism: it continuously breathes life into the visible spectacle, animates it and nourishes it from within, and forms a system with it' (*PhP*, 209/245). It is thus that the experience of one's own body as directed towards one's actual and possible tasks is constitutive of an experience of the world in perception as the setting of these engagements. The richness of one's perceptual experience is thereby found reflected in the richness of one's spontaneous intentional actions, as is evidenced by Schneider's behaviour. The pathological nature of Schneider's behaviour is not *caused* by his perceptual deficiencies, however. His impaired agential capacities and his perceptual deficiencies are each symptoms of his more general disassociation from the world – the deterioration of the pre-reflective form of understanding of the world that constitutes Merleau-Ponty's conception of operative intentionality.

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[28] Similar kinds of cases, gathered from Merleau-Ponty and elsewhere, are also central to Rietveld's account of what he calls 'unreflective action' (see (Rietveld, 2008)). Such cases are also definitive of Hubert Dreyfus' concept of 'absorbed coping', which I will engage with in the following chapter.

The next chapter will continue to pursue operative intentionality in *Phenomenology of Perception*, with a thematic focus on the perceptual, rather than agential, side of things. It is in Merleau-Ponty's study of perceptual meaning or sense that the details of a general thesis concerning meaning and understanding emerge.

2.
The Sense of Perception: Bodily Understanding and the Need for Foundations

Having established what I take to be the proper significance of Merleau-Ponty's concept of operative intentionality for the philosophy of action, the present chapter will consider how this concept plays out in Merleau-Ponty's study of perception. Of course, these two topics – embodied agency and perception – cannot truly be understood apart from one another in *Phenomenology of Perception*, and the thematic distinction between these first two chapters is somewhat artificial with regard to Merleau-Ponty's thought. We have already seen, in the discussion of Schneider, how Merleau-Ponty is keen to note the way in which a pathological experience of one's bodily agency is reflected in one's perceptual experience. Indeed, he goes on to explicitly state that the 'theory of the body schema is implicitly a theory of perception' (*PhP*, 213/249). Despite this intertwining of embodied agency and perceptual experience, however, it is certainly possible to attend thematically to each of these two sides or moments of Merleau-Ponty's discussion in turn. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty does this himself insofar as the first two parts of *Phenomenology of Perception* ostensibly cover 'The Body' and 'The Perceived World' respectively.

My overarching aim here is to bring out the broader philosophical significance of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological study of perception. Merleau-Ponty himself certainly considered his work on perception to bear critical and far-reaching consequences, beyond the strict remits of the philosophy of perception. This belief is concisely articulated in a lecture course he delivered at the Collège de France in 1952 titled 'The Sensible World and the World of Expression', where he offers the following synopsis of his earlier investigations:

> [T]he philosopher learns from his contact with perception an awareness of a relation to being which necessitates and makes possible a new analysis of the understanding.
>
> (*TfL*, 3/11-12)

This statement arises at an interesting point in Merleau-Ponty's philosophical career. By 1952, a study of expression and language is at the forefront of his investigations. It was at this time that he was working on the manuscript of what was intended to be a book-length monograph on this topic under the title of *The Prose of the World*. The above passage captures the way in which Merleau-Ponty took this study to be profoundly informed by his earlier work on perception. In the study of perception, we can gain generalizable insights concerning the nature of the understanding, and of meaning. His study of perception thus feeds into his overarching analysis of operative intentionality.

The following discussion, whilst lengthy, is fairly compartmentalized. In Section 2.1, I begin by drawing out what I take to be the four definitive characteristics of Merleau-Ponty's account of perceptual meaning, which fall out of his purposive play on the French word *sens*. In doing so, I arrive at a vital *normative* dimension of perceptual meaning. In Section 2.2, I offer further clarification of this normative dimension by means of Merleau-Ponty's account of perceptual constancy. This account discloses an essentially 'bodily' form of understanding in perception. This bodily understanding is generally interpreted in terms of a concept Merleau-Ponty first introduces in his analysis of Schneider: that of 'motor intentionality'.

The remainder of the chapter will focus on this concept of motor intentionality in relation to the broader significance Merleau-Ponty sees his study of perception as having. In Section 2.3, I raise some general concerns about Hubert Dreyfus' influential and resolutely foundationalist presentation of this aspect of Merleau-Ponty's thought. In Section 2.4, I consider and challenge what I take to be the primary textual motivations of Dreyfus' presentation. Section 2.5 then deals with Dreyfus' non-exegetical arguments for the need of a particular kind of foundationalism in the philosophy of mind, in which he appeals to Merleau-Ponty's thought as providing both a model and the conceptual framework for this foundationalism. I will suggest that Dreyfus' argument rests on an assumption about meaning and understanding that is not compulsory. Far from supporting Dreyfus' claims, I will argue that the features of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception explored in Sections 2.1 and 2.2 can help liberate us from the assumption under which Dreyfus labours. I will draw this out by appeal to one of Dreyfus' other primary sources: Wittgenstein's famous 'rule-following considerations' in *Philosophical Investigations*. It is thus by way of a critical engagement with Dreyfus' presentation that I shall develop a reading of Merleau-Ponty's study of perception that is better able to appreciate the philosophical insights it makes available concerning the nature of meaning and understanding beyond any strictly defined perceptual domain.[29] What we find is that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological study of perception elaborates the manner in which to understand a meaning, perceptual or otherwise, is not the achievement of an *act* of judgement or interpretation.

2.1 *The Characteristics of Perceptual Sense*

The term lying at the heart of Merleau-Ponty's discussions of meaning, both in perception and more generally, is the French word *sens*.[30] As with its closest English equivalent "sense", *sens* has a very rich meaning, finding use both as a noun (e.g., the sense of a word, the five senses, a sense of humour, to be 'making sense') and as a verb (e.g., to sense that something or someone is present, to sense a

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[29] Conversely, we might think of Merleau-Ponty as attempting to extend the domain of perceptual consciousness far beyond its traditional remit. This is certainly one way to make good sense of his claim that all consciousness is, 'in some measure, perceptual consciousness' (*PhP*, 416/455).

[30] Merleau-Ponty does occasionally also use the French word *signification* (translated as 'signification' by Landes) when discussing meaning. As far as I am aware, his use of this term does not disclose the idiosyncratic account of meaning that I believe we find in his use of *sens*. Donald Landes addresses the distinction in his 'Translator's Introduction' to *Phenomenology of Perception*.

temperature or colour). One meaning of *sens* that we might think "sense" fails to capture, however, and one that Merleau-Ponty often plays upon, is *direction* (e.g., *dans le bon sens* – in the right direction).[31] It is important to bear these various meanings of *sens* in mind when considering Merleau-Ponty's account of meaning in perception, as he is often found to be drawing implicitly on the relationships that hold between them.

There are four defining characteristics of perceptual *sens* that Merleau-Ponty tracks, and which I shall explore in turn in the present section. First, perceptual *sens* involves the *structure or organization* of the perceptual field. Secondly, there is an essential role for *indeterminacy* in the constitution of perceptual *sens*. Thirdly, Merleau-Ponty describes perceptual *sens* as *immanent*, as opposed to transcendent, in relation to perceptual phenomena. We shall see how this point is central to Merleau-Ponty's double rejection of both 'empiricist' and 'intellectualist' approaches to perception. Finally, Merleau-Ponty describes the manner in which perceptual *sens* is constituted by the perceiving subject's *bodily 'hold' or 'grip'* (*prise*), and also how this grip is subject to a teleological *development*. It is here that we arrive at a fundamentally *normative* dimension of perceptual *sens*. I shall offer further clarification of this dimension in Section 2.2.

i. The Structure of Sens

The account of perceptual *sens* that Merleau-Ponty develops in *Phenomenology of Perception* is animated throughout by the theories and principles of the 'Gestalt' school of psychology that flourished in Berlin in the early part of the 20th century through the work of figures such as Kurt Koffka, Max Wertheimer, and Wolfgang Köhler.[32] For Merleau-Ponty, Gestalt psychology makes a philosophical reappraisal of perception, and consciousness more generally, both possible and necessary. In particular, the notion of the perceptual *Gestalt,* or form, is fundamentally at odds with the traditional philosophical conception of sensation, and undermines this latter's claim to be the most basic constituent of perceptual experience. Indeed, the 'Introduction' to *Phenomenology of Perception* begins in no uncertain terms with Merleau-Ponty's renunciation of sensation as 'the most confused notion there is', and his accusation that the central role afforded to sensation in philosophy has had the consequence that philosophers 'have missed the phenomenon of perception' (*PhP*, 3/25).

In the words of Koffka, the notion of the *Gestalt* is to be understood in terms of the principle that 'the whole is other than the sum of its parts' (Koffka, 1935: 176). In perception, Gestalt phenomena are those that are irreducible to a mere collection of atomic sensations or parts. Instead, priority must be accorded to the overall configuration or structure of the phenomenon. Perhaps the clearest examples of

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[31] There is good reason to think that this failure is not a complete one. "Sense" can be used in the context of *rotation*, which is perhaps itself an instance of direction. For instance: 'in the solar system, almost everything rotates in an anti-clockwise sense'. Thanks to Bob Clark for raising this point.

[32] Both Adhémar Gelb and Kurt Goldstein, whose studies of the Schneider case provide both the source material and primary foil for Merleau-Ponty's own analysis, were also involved with the Gestalt movement. Merleau-Ponty's enthusiasm for Gestalt psychological theory can be traced at least as far back as his original doctoral proposal at the École Normale Supérieure, published in *Texts and Dialogues* as 'The Nature of Perception: Two Proposals' (1933).

Gestalt phenomena are found in famous cases of perceptual illusions, such as the Necker cube (fig. 1), or Kanizsa's triangle (fig. 2). In such cases, the particular configuration of lines or shapes results in an experience of something other than the component parts alone, such that we see something that is not, in a certain sense, actually given. Such phenomena are not to be thought of as mere curiosities or rare occurrences, however. According to Gestalt psychology, such cases instantiate principles or laws that can be found in *all* perceptual experience.
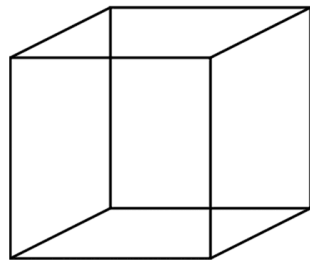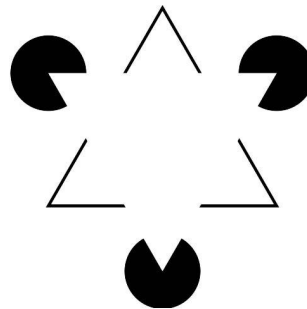
Figure 1   Figure 2

For Merleau-Ponty, the ubiquity of Gestalt phenomena in perception has two fundamental, albeit intimately related, consequences. First, as I have already mentioned, the philosophical adequacy of the notion of sensation is put in doubt, and I shall return to this consequence in more detail below. The second consequence, and one that will be of ultimate relevance to the concerns of this chapter, is the necessity to recognize in perceptual experience the presence of a kind of sense that cannot be accounted for as the product any kind of acts of interpretation or judgement, or, in the language of Kant or Husserl, of the constituting activity of a transcendental subject. Merleau-Ponty thus sees it to be the task of a phenomenological 'return' to perception to disclose and account for this fundamental or 'primordial' presence of 'a whole already pregnant with an irreducible sense' (*PhP*, 23/45). As such, the discussion of perceptual *sens* serves to strengthen the anti-Cartesian line of thought outlined in Chapter 1. Even the most elementary or simple of our perceptions – that of a plain figure against a homogenous background – can only be adequately described in terms of the meaning it offers to the perceiving subject:

> Consider a white patch against a homogeneous background. All points on the patch have a certain common "function" that makes them into a "figure". The figure's colour is denser and somehow more resistant than the background's colour. The borders of the white patch "belong" to the patch and, despite being contiguous with it, do not join with the background. The patch seems to be placed upon the background and does not interrupt it. Each part announces more than it contains, and thus this elementary perception is already charged with a *sense*.
>
> (*PhP*, 4/25-26)

It is worth dwelling for a moment on the last sentence of this passage, since it surely refers us to something crucial in Merleau-Ponty's account of perceptual *sens*. The parts of the perceptual *Gestalt* bear

what I described in Chapter 1 as *internal* relations to one another. These are *meaningful* relations, such that each part 'announces more than it contains'. Merleau-Ponty is here claiming that these relations are in some way constitutive of the *sense* of the phenomenon. The rich meaning of *sens* is certainly being traded upon here, and by equating sense with the organization of the *Gestalt*, Merleau-Ponty is drawing on the meaning of *sens* as "direction". We have here a configuration of points relative to one another, just as in plotting a route from York to Manchester we consider the two cities in terms of their relations to one another and their respective functions as the start and end points of our proposed journey. And as the route I plot *from* York *to* Manchester has a meaning that is different from the route I plot *from* Manchester *to* York, seeing the lower left face of the Necker cube as front-facing has a meaning that is different from seeing the upper right face as front-facing.[33] There is thus a making sense through organization in the grasping of a perceptual *Gestalt*. Furthermore, it is the organization that is accorded primacy, and through which we are able to grasp the meaning of the parts. The parts of the perceptual *Gestalt* are thus made available to the perceiving subject via, and according to, their interrelations.

This unity of the whole through its organization is to be contrasted with the supposed independence of individual sensations, understood as a kind of bare 'sense-datum' or Humean impression. If *Gestalt* phenomena are ubiquitous, there can be no room in a description of perceptual phenomena for the classical concept of sensation or for the supposition of a layer of 'pure sensing' devoid of the kind of holistic structures – and thus the kind of *sense* – found in normal perception. To maintain that the traditional notion of sensation has a place in a philosophical account of perception, argues Merleau-Ponty, is to overlook the nature of perceptual phenomena. The source of this error is continuous with the mechanistic conception of the body considered in Chapter 1. It arises out of the attempt – often implicit – to read the structure of the objective world – the world of objects 'in themselves' as they are apparently revealed and described by the natural sciences and 'objective knowledge' – into the very experience by which they are originally made available to be known or, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, it is to view perception 'through the lens of its results' (*PhP*, 17/40). Fundamentally, this involves the positing, within consciousness, of the exclusively *external* relations – of 'parts outside of parts' (*partes extra partes*) – that are taken to hold in objective being. A further consequence of this error consists in the attempt to read the sensible qualities of *objects* (i.e., colour, sound, temperature, etc.) into sensations, understood as mind-dependent entities. These qualities thus come to be defined as contents of consciousness, rather than as properties of objects themselves, as perception originally presents them as being.

ii. The Indeterminacy of Sens

It is in terms of this 'realist prejudice' (*PhP*, 10/33) that Merleau-Ponty defines and hence rejects a collection of philosophical and psychological theories that he brings under the general banner of 'empiricism'. A further symptom of the empiricist concept of sensation is that the content of

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[33] Such shifts in meaning are often described as involving a kind of 'seeing-as' or 'aspect perception'.

perception is assumed to be fully determinate, since the causation of sensations is explained in terms of the reception of stimuli via the physical mechanisms of the senses, and a constant relation is deemed to hold between stimulus and sensation as between cause and effect.[34] Yet, argues Merleau-Ponty, if we properly attend to perceptual experience, we find it to be permeated with *in*determinacy. Merleau-Ponty considers the clearest example of such indeterminacy to be the limit of the visual field. Were this limit rigorously determined by the sensory surface of the retina, he argues, we should expect vision to be contained within a clearly defined area, surrounded by a clear absence of vision. Yet this is simply not the case, and in reality 'the precise moment at which a previously seen stimulus ceases to be seen can never be identified' (*PhP*, 6/28). In other words, the limit of the visual field is *indeterminate*, and if we are to properly understand perception, 'we must recognize the indeterminate as a positive phenomenon' (*PhP*, 7/28). Crucially, this positive presence of indeterminacy in perception is an essential feature of perceptual *sens*. Before developing this point, we should already be in a position to glimpse something of the role played by indeterminacy for Merleau-Ponty's account of *sens*. Within the most elementary figure-ground Gestalt, in order for the figure to possess its function and, indeed, to *appear*, it must do so against a background that is not itself the thematic object of the experience. In comparison to the figure, the background is an indeterminate presence, yet one that is essential to the sense of the Gestalt.

Even if this question of indeterminacy can be overcome by the empiricist, an explanation is required of precisely how perceptual *sens* is possible if we begin from the concept of sensation. If we think of a perception as involving, at least at some fundamental level, the passive reception of punctual sensations, then we are left having to explain how such sensations receive a sense: how they are capable of being organized into the meaningful wholes emphasized by Gestalt psychology. The traditional approach sought by empiricist theories is to develop a picture of the psychological according to which it is governed by the operation of determinate causal laws, such as Lockean laws of association. Yet this approach, Merleau-Ponty argues, is unable to correct the error with which it began, and is rather a mere attenuation of it. Once the traditional notion of sensation is on the scene it becomes ubiquitous, and we cannot expect to *construct* the sense found in the perceptual Gestalt from these supposedly ultimate building blocks of consciousness, since they have their identity insofar as they are externally related to one another, whilst the Gestalt consists in a network of *internal* (i.e., meaningful) *relations*.[35]

Empiricism thus presupposes perceptual sense whilst at the same time rendering it impossible by casting perception purely in terms of external relations. As such, the subject of perception is seemingly excluded from the empiricist's account altogether, and 'there is *no one who sees* at the center of this mass of sensations and memories' (*PhP*, 23/45). The need to accommodate the subject's place in perception, contrary to empiricism, leads to an emphasis on the role played by *judgement* in perception. Yet this apparent remedy, argues Merleau-Ponty, is equally problematic, and in steering ourselves away from the Scylla of empiricism we are in danger of becoming sucked into the Charybdis of what Merleau-Ponty

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[34] Following Köhler, Merleau-Ponty refers to this empiricist tenet as the 'constancy hypothesis' (*PhP*, 8/30).

[35] At the very least such a construction cannot be achieved via a process of association since, as Merleau-Ponty claims, the very possibility of an association *presupposes* the subject's grasp of a sense of the present perceptual phenomena and is conditioned by it. Merleau-Ponty thus asserts that 'the signification of the perceived, far from resulting from an association, is in fact presupposed in all associations' (*PhP*, 16/39).

refs to as 'intellectualism'. According to intellectualism, it is judgement that adds what is missing from the empiricist's conception of sensation and gives rise to complete perceptions. For the intellectualist, it is the subject herself who organizes perceptual phenomena, thereby imbuing them with a sense. Directly citing French Neo-Kantians such as Alain and Lagneau, Merleau-Ponty articulates intellectualism in the following way:

> Perception becomes an "interpretation" of the signs that sensibility provides in accordance with bodily *stimuli*; it becomes a "hypothesis" made by the mind in order to "explain to itself its own impressions."
>
> (*PhP*, 35/58)

Although intellectualism appears to make room for the subject's understanding of perceptual phenomena, it remains fundamentally confused, and immediately faces a dilemma. Either the activity of the intellectualist subject is performed *on* sensations or wholly apart from them. On the first horn, we have not truly left empiricism behind, since the act of judgement is performed *on* sensations and would thus be caught up in the wholly external relations of a determinate causal mechanism, effectively reducible to 'a general function of connecting' (*PhP*, 34/56). On the second horn, we truly leave the notion of sensation out of perception, and thereby lose sight of the common sense distinction between sensing and judging. This distinction 'disappears in intellectualism because judgement is everywhere that pure sensation is not, which is to say that judgement is everywhere' (*PhP*, 36/59). Perception would thereby become *a form of judgement*.[36]

iii. The Immanence of Sens

As a result, according to Merleau-Ponty, just like empiricism intellectualism manages to miss the phenomenon of perception altogether. Perceptual experience, he insists, cannot be dissected into a sensible matter and an intelligible form, and the organization that is definitive of the Gestalt does not result from a deliberate imposition in an act of judgement. What we learn from Gestalt psychology, he claims, is that 'there is no matter without form; there are only organizations, more or less stable, more or less articulated' (*TD*, 79). Perceptual *sens* must therefore be understood as *immanent* to the phenomena.[37] This immanence or, in the language of the Gestaltists, this "pregnancy" (*prägnanz*) of the sensible is in stark contrast to the intellectualist's bestowal of meaning through acts of judging:

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[36] Kant seems to acknowledge a closely similar dilemma in *Critique of Pure Reason* with his famous phrase, 'Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind' (A 51/B 75). Like Kant, Merleau-Ponty seeks to *unify* understanding and intuition. However, he clearly does not want to advocate Kant's transcendental idealism, which he ultimately considers to be an intellectualist doctrine, albeit one that attempts to make room for the passivity of the empirical subject in the constitution of the sensible world.

[37] It would seem that the transcendental idealism of Kant's first Critique involves an *empirical* immanence of form in matter, but reverts to a necessary separation of the two at the transcendental level. Merleau-Ponty sums up what he considers the Kantian's mistake thusly: 'The intellectualist … does not reach the living cluster of perception because rather than unveiling the operation that makes it *actual* or by which it is constituted, it seeks the conditions that make it *possible* or without which it would not exist' (*PhP*, 40/64). Once again, the complaint here is that the intellectualist reconstrual of perception fundamentally *misses* the phenomenon it is seeking to explain. In the Kantian case, this would be due to the transcendental move, and the reintroduction of a form-matter distinction at the transcendental level.

> To perceive in the full sense of the word (as the antithesis of imagining) is not to judge, but rather to grasp, prior to all judgement, a sense immanent in the sensible. The phenomenon of true perception thus offers a signification that is inherent in the signs and of which the judgement is but the optional expression.
>
> (*PhP*, 36-7/60)

Whilst it is the locus of his respective rejections of empiricism and intellectualism, Merleau-Ponty's notion of *sens* as 'immanent in the sensible' remains obscure, and has so far been posed as little more than a philosophical *problem* arising from Gestalt psychology rather than a developed account of perceptual meaning in its own right.

One means by which we might illuminate Merleau-Ponty's more developed account of perceptual *sens* is by considering his use of the motif of perception as a kind of communication. Throughout *Phenomenology of Perception*, we regularly find perception described by means of metaphors of language and expression. We are told that perception is 'an original text' (*PhP*, 22/45); that it speaks to us a 'silent language' (*PhP*, 50/75) that 'teaches itself' (*PhP*, 333/375), and is expressive of 'a perceptual syntax that is articulated according to its own rules' (*PhP*, 38/61). Now, we must be clear on the partly metaphorical quality of such descriptions. It is certainly not the case that Merleau-Ponty is advocating the notion that perception involves the comprehension of a propositionally structured content. Nonetheless, these descriptions are not intended as wholly metaphorical either. When Merleau-Ponty declares that 'every perception is a communication or a communion' this is intended literally insofar as perception involves 'the taking up or the achievement by us of an alien intention' (*PhP*, 334/376), and in offering his own account of sensation, he says, in no uncertain terms, that 'sensation is, *literally*, a communion' (*PhP*, 219/257, my emphasis).[38]

This motif of communion is an important means by which Merleau-Ponty holds the intellectualist at a distance from himself, whilst at the same time providing a condensed articulation of his own, positive account of perceptual meaning. The 'sort of dialogue' (*PhP*, 334/376) that Merleau-Ponty considers to be definitive of perception cannot be satisfactorily recognized by the intellectualist, since he supposes the content of perception to be determined by the thinking subject in acts of predicative *judgement*. This supposition results in a picture of perception in which subject and object are explicitly *posited* and held apart from one another in an act of consciousness. The essential aspect of perceptual experience that this picture fails to acknowledge, and which the motif of communion serves to stress, is the kind of *passivity* involved in perception. As with the empiricism to which it considers itself the corrective, intellectualism is only able to make proper sense of the kind of causal passivity involved in the brute impact of sensation. Beyond the bare givens of sensation, the perceived thing is taken to be the product

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[38] I am here understanding 'communion' in the sense of a bringing together of individuals. Of course, we might also read certain theological connotations in the talk of 'communion' here. Merleau-Ponty was raised a Catholic, and we might therefore think that with the notion of 'communion', he is implicitly invoking the doctrine of transubstantiation. On such a reading, Merleau-Ponty would appear to be suggesting that, in the dialectical relations that hold between the sensible world and the body, there is literally a transformation of the one into the other. An intriguing kind of hylomorphic account of perception would thus emerge here. Merleau-Ponty doesn't develop such a thought at great length in *Phenomenology of Perception*. However, his 'late period' work, with its new lexicon of 'the flesh', does appear to somewhat justify a strong reading of his earlier talk of sensation as communion. For my present purposes, however, we need only to emphasize the dialectical or dialogical sense of 'communion'.

of the rational activity of a disembodied understanding or intelligence. As a result, the perceptual phenomena themselves are overlooked in favour of a reconstruction in which the sense of the perceived is taken to be the responsibility of the thinking subject, insofar as it is the product of mental *acts*. By defining itself in direct contrast to empiricism and the concept of sensation, intellectualism exposes a tacit commitment to a dualism of sensation and judgement in its account of perception. Intellectualism invokes judgement wherever the phenomena cannot be accommodated by the empiricist's conception of sensation, and hence becomes ubiquitous.

What intellectualism fails to make sense of is the proper manner in which the subject of perception must *discover* or *work towards* the sense of the perceived. It is this difficulty that Merleau-Ponty thinks we can find to be anticipated in Cartesian philosophy, particularly that of Malebranche, with the concept of a 'natural' or non-voluntary species of judgement (Malebranche, trans. 1997: Elucidation 6). Indeed, Merleau-Ponty goes so far as to claim that '"Natural judgement" is *nothing other* than the phenomenon of passivity' (*PhP*, 44/68, my emphasis). Equally, the Kantian or Husserlian turn to a transcendental ego as the synthesizing or constituting subject may also be considered as a way of accounting for the passive role played by the perceiving, empirical subject in the constitution of sense. Yet the Cartesian and the Kantian solutions are necessarily unsuccessful, and cannot undo the confusion they are founded on, argues Merleau-Ponty. Most pressing for our current concerns is the claim that even a nuanced intellectualism is unable to account for perceptual *sens* – i.e., a sense that is not completely constituted or perfectly determinate, but that instead involves indeterminacy, contingency, and is subject to development. According to Merleau-Ponty, intellectualism makes the same basic mistake as empiricism, which is to begin not with the perceived world, but with an objective description of the world arrived at through the representations of natural science. And like empiricism, he argues, intellectualism attempts to read this description back into perception itself, with the difference being that it is *thought* that is now posited as the ultimate ground of experience, rather than a transcendent reality 'in-itself'. With this shift 'we pass from an absolute objectivity to an absolute subjectivity' (*PhP*, 41/64).[39]

iv. The Bodily Teleology of Sens

The motif of communication, or dialogue, expresses the manner in which perceptual *sens* is not held before consciousness or known through the *a priori* categories of Kantian philosophy. Instead, Merleau-Ponty describes perceptual *sens* as unfolding and developing in a diachronic perceptual process. This process involves a reciprocity between the perceiving subject and the perceived things that is inconceivable for the intellectualist, since intellectualism drives a wedge between the acts of consciousness and their objects. Yet perception, states Merleau-Ponty, 'is not a science, it does not

[39] A further consequence of this, claims Merleau-Ponty, is that we lose touch with 'authentic' subjectivity – i.e., the embodied subject of perception and agency (*PhP*, 507n53/70n3). I will touch on this issue in Section 2.4, before taking it up again in Chapter 3.

posit the things upon which it bears, and it does not step back in order to observe them' (*PhP*, 336/378).

It is here that Merleau-Ponty sees it possible (and necessary), in his own words, to 'give the notion of "sense" a value that intellectualism refuses it' (*PhP*, 219/257). Essentially, he is seeking to unite "sense" with *the senses* (*les sens*). According to Merleau-Ponty, the senses are not instruments of a bare causal receptivity, but the means by which the subject is able to understand the sensible world through his own inherence within it. It is thus the body that holds the key to a proper understanding of perceptual *sens*, but only so long as we refuse to treat the body as a mechanism or instrument of causal receptivity, and instead learn to recognize it as a 'knowing-body' (*PhP*, 431/470, 548n23/363n2). It is the body that grasps a meaning that is immanent to the deliverances of the senses, without the contribution of acts of interpretation or judgement.

> When I say that I have senses and that they give me access to the world, I am not the victim of a confusion, nor do I mix up causal thought and reflection. I merely express the truth that forces itself upon a complete reflection, namely, that I am capable (through connaturality) of finding a sense in certain aspects of being, without myself having given them this sense through a constitutive operation.
>
> (*PhP*, 225/262)

For Merleau-Ponty, it is insofar as the subject of perception is a body-subject, and not a disembodied thought or intelligence, that the dialogical development of perception is possible, and that the subject is capable of grasping the sense of perceptual phenomena. The sense of perception is not the product of a conceptual subsumption of sensory givens in an act of judgement, but rather the attainment and development of what Merleau-Ponty describes as a bodily 'grip', 'hold', or 'take' (*prise*) on the present perceptual scene, and the sensible world more generally. This hold is not a representation or idea entertained in an act of consciousness, but what Merleau-Ponty refers to as the body's 'gearing into' (*PhP*, 260-3/298-300) the sensible environment as the setting of the subject's actual and possible behaviour. The perceived thing is not a signification posited by something like a Kantian faculty of the understanding, but rather it is 'a structure available for inspection by the body' (*PhP*, 334/376). Perceptual sense unfolds in the reciprocal relation that holds between the body as a 'system of possible actions' (*PhP*, 260/297), and the structure or 'horizon' of appearances of the perceived thing.[40] It is this reciprocity that Merleau-Ponty intends the motif of dialogue to capture: the intentional interlocking, in perception, of the perceived thing and the body-subject. In perception, one's own body figures as part of a broader *Gestalt* or, as Merleau-Ponty puts the point himself, 'external perception and perception of one's own body vary together because they are two sides of a single act' (*PhP*, 211/247).

An important aspect of this notion of bodily hold is that it invokes a *normative* dimension of perception that is not reducible to the kind of normativity involved in assessing the correspondence

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[40] Merleau-Ponty derives the concept of 'horizon' from Husserl. As (Moran & Cohen, 2012) notes, Husserl's talk of 'horizon' leans heavily on an analogy with the term's meaning in ordinary language. It serves to define the manner in which each meaningful experience or intentional object is caught up within a system of relationships, both actual and possible, that it bears to other experiences or objects. Merleau-Ponty, like Husserl, applies the term in a wide variety of contexts, including sense perception, language, temporality, culture, and history.

between an immanent or subjective realm of propositions, judgements, or ideas and a transcendent or objective reality. The normativity involved here is of a different order, involving what Merleau-Ponty describes as a 'bodily teleology' (*PhP*, 337/379). Once again, we find Merleau-Ponty playing on the meaning of *sens* as "direction," although this time it is intended in a temporal sense, rather than a spatial one.[41] My initial encounter with a thing or a scene solicits a perceptual process for which a more precise hold is the goal or end.[42] This process might involve one, some, or all of my sensory modalities, and may be constituted by a variety of different bodily behaviours, such as a focusing of the eyes, a turn of the head, or a modulation of the rhythm or force of palpation, until such a moment that I arrive at a more articulated hold on the quality, thing, or scene in question. According to Merleau-Ponty, to have a hold on a given object or scene is to tacitly anticipate how subsequent moments of a perceptual exploration will unfold and concord with the present appearances. It is 'to commit to an entire future of experiences in a present that never, strictly speaking, guarantees that future' (*PhP*, 311/350). My hold on a given object is thus capable of becoming ever more precise, whilst at the same time being liable to suffer mistakes and failures and to become confused. A nice example Merleau-Ponty offers is that of mistaking a distant patch of light on the ground for a stone:

> If I believe I see a large flat stone, which is in reality a patch of sunlight, far ahead on the ground in a sunken lane, I cannot say that I ever see the flat stone in the sense in which I will see the patch of sunlight while moving closer. The flat stone only appears, like everything that is far off, in a field whose structure is confused and where the connections are not yet clearly articulated. In this sense, the illusion … is not observable, that is, my body is not geared into it and I cannot spread it out before myself through some exploratory movements. … I see the illusory stone in the sense that my entire perceptual and motor field gives to the light patch the sense of a "stone on the lane." And I already prepare to sense this smooth and solid surface beneath my foot.
>
> (*PhP*, 310/349-50)

Thus, the sense of a given perceptual spectacle is arrived at in the hold that my body, as a system of sensory and motor 'fields', has upon it, and as such it is capable of a more or less precise articulation, and of being clear or confused. The normative dimension of perceptual experience thus consists in this *standard of precision* that is internal to the perceptual process, against which appearances will, whether retroactively or concurrently, be measured as veridical, confused, or illusory. According to Merleau-Ponty, it is this standard that serves as the driving force behind the 'bodily teleology' of perception – i.e., the movement towards a more precise hold on the spectacle. It is thus definitive of Merleau-Ponty's account of perceptual *sens* and the 'bodily' form of understanding that corresponds to it.

I will now proceed, in the next section, to attend to this normative dimension of perceptual *sens* in greater detail. In particular, I will consider how it is developed in Merleau-Ponty's discussion of

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[41] This temporal aspect of *sens* is developed further, and in several ways, in the 'Temporality' chapter of *Phenomenology of Perception*. The chapter has two revealing epigraphs from Claudel and Heidegger, each of which asserts an important relationship between sense and time or temporality (*PhP*, 432/471). Given limitations of space, I will not attend to this chapter in any detail here since it would distract from the central claims concerning meaning and understanding that I am seeking to draw out of Merleau-Ponty's study of perception.

[42] Crucially, this goal is *implicit*, rather than explicitly posited in an act of consciousness.

perceptual constancy in *Phenomenology of Perception*. I will articulate my own understanding of this discussion by way of a critical engagement with the reading offered by Sean Kelly. It is my contention that Kelly's discussion of perceptual constancy leads him to distort the details of Merleau-Ponty's account of perceptual *sens*. Appreciating this distortion for what it is will help elucidate Merleau-Ponty's claims about meaning and understanding in perception.

2.2 Bodily Hold, Norms, and Perceptual Constancy

i. Perceptual Constancy and Perceptual 'Norms'

Merleau-Ponty dedicates a great deal of *Phenomenology of Perception* – especially Part II, 'The Perceived World' – to exploring perceptual *sens* in terms of the normative dimension of perception outlined above. For my present purposes, I would like to focus on one species of phenomena that Merleau-Ponty discusses and which he brings under the broad rubric of 'perceptual constants'. The traditional problem of perceptual constants consists in the apparent friction involved in the manner in which we speak of objects as having stable or 'real' properties throughout the myriad of different perspectival or contextual appearances we are presented with in perception. For instance, I might say of a table that it is rectangular, yet when I attend to my experience it seems I am actually presented with a range of different shapes throughout the various perspectives I take up in relation to the table, the vast majority of which are not rectangular. It might then seem that our talk of the 'real shape' or the 'real size' is in fact nothing more than a conventional or even arbitrary selection of one appearance (i.e., a certain 'perspectival' shape or size) from amongst the many.[43]

Merleau-Ponty is clearly sceptical towards the traditional problem of perceptual constants. He gives short shrift to the conventionalist solution for the reason that it 'takes for granted what was to be explained, namely, a range of *determinate* sizes and forms from amongst which it would suffice to choose one, which would become the real size or the real form' (*PhP*, 313/353). Taking the apparent shapes and sizes of objects to be themselves determinate makes the very same mistake that Merleau-Ponty diagnosed above in relation to empiricism and intellectualism: the overlooking of perception in favour of the objective understanding of the world that perception itself makes possible. As before, what is overlooked here is the positive and fundamental presence of *indeterminacy* in perception. In this instance, Merleau-Ponty hopes to account for the perceiving subject's grasp of real or constant properties of objects by expanding on the normative dimension of perception, which he describes as having both an implicit and indeterminate presence in experience.

Whilst the passage at (*PhP*, 313/353), cited just above, rejects the idea that we can identify the 'real' shape or size of an object with an isolated perspectival appearance, Merleau-Ponty does acknowledge,

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[43] This response to the traditional worry about perceptual constants was particularly popular in the first half of the twentieth century. Its prevalence is evidenced by Bertrand Russell's matter of fact formulation of the view in the first chapter of his *The Problems of Philosophy*.

as a phenomenological fact, that there are certain 'privileged' perspectives that an object solicits the perceiving subject to take up in relation to it, and which facilitate his understanding of it. Merleau-Ponty puts this point in the following way:

> For each object, just as for each painting in an art gallery, there is an optimal distance from which it asks to be seen – an orientation through which it presents more of itself – beneath or beyond which we merely have a confused perception due to excess or lack.
>
> (*PhP*, 315-6/355)

Any given presentation of the object is experienced, not in terms of a determinate geometrical projection from myself to the object, but rather in terms of a deviation from a privileged 'norm' (*norme*). I am aware of this deviation insofar as my present hold on the object is deficient in some way, and there is a thus a felt 'tension' or 'disequilibrium' that I seek, or could seek, to resolve or overcome (*PhP*, 316/356). If this description is correct, it still remains to be seen precisely what role these perceptual norms play in the subject's grasp of the real or constant properties an object has throughout or in spite of its various appearances. At the very least, we can safely say that Merleau-Ponty considers the privileged presentations as those from which the perceiving subject is best able to grasp the properties of the given object. Yet it seems that we cannot say that the real or constant properties of an object are to be flatly *identified* with the qualitative appearances given in these privileged presentations. Instead, as Merleau-Ponty explains, we want to hold onto the idea that the real qualities of an object are present throughout their various presentations, rather than being given in one determinate set of perceptual contexts. This accommodates the sense in which qualities are experienced as constant *throughout appearances*: each appearance is an appearance *of* a real and constant quality, and so no single appearance can be exclusively isolated and identified as *the* real quality, since no single appearance is present across all perceptual contexts or perspectives.

Perceptual norms, then, cannot be thought of as the point at which we pass from the merely apparent to the real. Nonetheless, they play an essential role in the subject's grasp of an object's qualities, and of the object more generally. For Merleau-Ponty, a more precise grasp of a quality requires that the subject better understands how his relation with the object must be altered if the optimal presentation that constitutes the norm is to be realized. For instance, in the case of size, to arrive at a precise grasp or hold is to anticipate how a change in the distance between oneself and the object, either through a movement of one's own body or the object itself, would realize a presentation that better satisfies the felt norm. In this way, to perceive a real quality in perception is to grasp its appearances, and the relations they bear to one another, in terms of the norm. This is because it is in terms of this norm, and the teleological process that tends toward it, that appearances have their sense as appearances of a self-identical object with constant properties:

> I identify the object in all of its positions, at all of its distances, and through all of its appearances, insofar as the perspectives converge toward the perception that I obtain for

> a certain typical distance and orientation. This privileged perception assures the unity of
> the perceptual process and gathers all of the other appearances into itself
>
> <div align="right">(PhP, 315/355)</div>

Thus, whilst the norm is not to be exclusively identified with the real quality – i.e., at the expense of all other appearances, which would become, at best, 'mere' appearances and at worst illusory – it is in terms of it that all other appearances have their sense for me as appearances of a constant quality or object in general. In grasping the shape or size of an object, I understand the system of actual and possible appearances, and this understanding is coordinated in terms of the privileged norm, which thus serves as the keystone of the perceptual process. Of course, this process is susceptible to error, and I may, for example, in certain circumstances, perceive an object that I later learn to be large and far away to be small and nearby. What is important for Merleau-Ponty is that to perceive the object in this way is for the current appearance to have its sense (i.e., that of a small object nearby) insofar as one pre-reflectively anticipates how a certain change in one's relation to the object would make available the optimal perspective from which to perceive objects of such a size.[44] It is in this way that a grasp of a perceptual norm is constitutive of the subject's experience of constant properties throughout appearances.

ii. Kelly on Norms

An essential facet of the perceptual norms Merleau-Ponty appeals to is that they are *realizable* in perceptual experience. In this way, there is a *dual sense* of 'norm' that is in play here and that we should bear in mind. First, the norms involved in the perceptual process are experienced in term of a felt deviation between one's current experience and the anticipated norm(s) from which a given property, object, or scene will be optimally available. It is in this sense that perceptual norms are experienced *normatively*. Crucially, however, this involves a normative pull towards privileged moments of perception itself. The second sense of 'norm' therefore expresses the manner in which perceptual norms constitute a familiar, preferred, or even habitual perceptual *standard*. Perceptual norms are by their very nature realizable *in perception*.

This crucial aspect of Merleau-Ponty's talk of perceptual 'norms' is something that is almost entirely missed by Sean Kelly in his work on perceptual constancy ((Kelly, 2005) & (Kelly, 2007)). In presenting Merleau-Ponty's view, Kelly overlooks the fact that 'norms' must be familiar to the subject qua perceiver and, *a fortiori, achievable* within perception itself. Instead, Kelly lays the entire emphasis of his discussion on Merleau-Ponty's description of norms as those orientations from which a given object or quality 'presents more of itself' (*PhP*, 316/355) – i.e., the first sense of 'norm' given above. This emphasis has a distorting effect on Merleau-Ponty's actual position, as is evidenced by the fact, as we shall see below, that Kelly finds himself having to attribute a view to Merleau-Ponty that he openly

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[44] Indeed, it may even be that the current appearance is taken to be optimal – i.e., the deviation from the norm is zero, and there is no experience of tension or disequilibrium.

admits is not found explicitly stated anywhere in Merleau-Ponty's published work. Rather than motivating a reappraisal of his reading however, Kelly attributes this absence of textual support to Merleau-Ponty's own inability fully to articulate his own position (Kelly, 2005: 96). Properly appreciating the distortion this reading involves will help to expedite a full understanding of Merleau-Ponty's account of perceptual *sens* and bodily understanding.

I shall focus on the area of Kelly's discussion in which his error becomes most perspicuous. This happens as Kelly turns his attention away from the constancy of particular properties (shape, size, colour, etc.) in favour of considering the manner in which we perceive objects more generally as constant and real. Kelly extrapolates from Merleau-Ponty's description of perceptual norms as optimal presentations to the conclusion that the primary norm that must be involved in general object perception must be the object 'seen from everywhere all at once' (Kelly, 2005: 91). 'The view from *everywhere*' claims Kelly, 'is the optimum perspective from which to view the object, the perspective from which one grips it maximally' (Kelly, 2005: 91).

The problem with such a proposal, as Kelly notes, is that the view from everywhere 'is not itself achievable by me' (Kelly, 2005: 91). It is for this very reason that it *cannot* feature as a perceptual norm in the sense Merleau-Ponty describes. The view from everywhere cannot be a privileged perspective or orientation that my experiences tend towards since, by its very definition, it is not *any single* perspective or orientation, but *all* perspectives and orientations *at once*. To posit such an ideal is to leave behind perception itself, since it involves the overcoming of perception's facticity: its perspectival and bodily condition. This gives us further grounds upon which to object to Kelly's reading, since the perceptual norms Merleau-Ponty is seeking to describe are themselves aspects or expressions of this condition. These privileged distances, lighting contexts, or orientations are not the result of a judgement or laid down by a reflective act. They are the product or expression of our bodily facticity: of the kind of sensory and motor apparatus with which we are equipped. The view from everywhere, in transcending this facticity, is necessarily something other than what Merleau-Ponty means in his talk of perceptual norms.

Indeed, we find that this rejection of Kelly's proposal is offered by Merleau-Ponty himself, although somewhat indirectly. This rejection consists in the idea that the ideal of a 'view from everywhere' marks the transition *away* from perception and towards the idealizations and reconstructions of 'objective thinking' in relation to which phenomenology, according to Merleau-Ponty, provides a vital corrective. In the Introduction to Part One of *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty discusses the notion of a 'view from everywhere' as expressing a 'full realization' of the object in the following way:

> The fully realized object is translucent, it is shot through from all sides by an infinity of present gazes intersecting in its depth and leaving nothing there hidden.
>
> (*PhP*, 71/97)

Out of context, this passage might seem to support Kelly's proposal that the view from everywhere is the ideal or norm of object perception,[45] but reading it in this way would, I suggest, be a mistake. The key to avoiding this mistake lies in Merleau-Ponty's description of the 'fully realized' object as 'translucent', and of the view from everywhere as 'leaving nothing hidden'. Such descriptions are in direct conflict with Merleau-Ponty's own repeated descriptions of *perceived* things, and indeed the world of perception itself, as 'opaque'. This opacity consists in the fact that objects are never completely presented in experience and solicit further exploration or perspectives that 'pass into' each other (*PhP*, 344/386). As far as Merleau-Ponty is concerned, this opacity is essential to the *sense* of perceived things as transcendent of my experience of them and thereby as *real*:[46]

> The aseity of the thing – its irrecusable presence and the perpetual absence into which it withdraws – are two inseparable aspects of transcendence.
>
> (*PhP*, 242/280)

> The real lends itself to an infinite exploration, it is inexhaustible.
>
> (*PhP*, 338/380)

> [T]hings, which owe their sense to the world, are not significations presented to the intelligence, but are rather opaque structures, and … their final sense remains foggy. The thing and the world only exist as lived by me, or as lived by subjects like me, since they are the interlocking of our perspectives; but they also transcend all perspectives because this interlocking is temporal and incomplete. It seems to me that the world itself lives outside of me, just as absent landscapes continue to live beyond my visual field, and just as my past was previously lived prior to my present.
>
> (*PhP*, 349/390-391)

The view from everywhere, in overcoming this opacity and making objects 'translucent', cannot constitute a moment of perception for Merleau-Ponty, and instead is the product of a thinking that isolates and thematizes individual perspectives before building them into an objective system. In doing so, the 'pre-objective being' of the perceived world, and with it, perceptual *sens*, is bypassed. The ideal of a 'view from everywhere' is a paradigmatic expression of objective thought; a representation of a world 'in-itself' beyond the experience of any given subject. Whilst the above passage from (*PhP*, 349/390-391) suggests how this ideal develops out of genuine perception, the objectivist mistake lies in thinking that the ideal can be coherently read back into the phenomenology of perception.

The normative 'tension' that governs the grasp and development of perceptual *sens* is conditioned by the perceiving subject's status as an embodied agent. It reflects the subject's experience of his own body as a system of possible actions, and the norms towards which it pulls involve the realization of particular perceptual relationships between the body and a given object of perception. The normative dimension of perception that Merleau-Ponty describes thus invokes the meaning of *sens* as 'direction' in a quite literal way, since it involves the perceiving subject's implicit attraction towards particular

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[45] Indeed, Kelly himself appeals to this passage in developing his proposal.
[46] This claim is key to Merleau-Ponty's distinction between the real and the hallucinatory, see (*PhP*, 349-357/391-9).

perceptual relationships with objects, and thus motivates the performance of the requisite bodily movements in order to achieve them. The experience of such norms is a vital aspect of what it is to hold a 'bodily grip' on a perceived thing, a particular property, or a perceptual situation more generally. As such, these norms are themselves elements of the *facticity* of perceptual experience: its inherence in a given spatio-temporal situation through a body, and so they cannot transcend this facticity, which is precisely what a 'view from everywhere' would achieve.

iii. Norms and Bodily Understanding

It is with the concept of a bodily grip or hold that we arrive at Merleau-Ponty's own manner of accounting for the converse side, as it were, of perceptual meaning or *sens*: the *understanding* of perceptual phenomena on the part of the perceiving subject. The bare task of this account of perceptual understanding has already been set in and through the joint rejection of empiricism and intellectualism. For Merleau-Ponty, a rejection of empiricism is necessary if a philosophy of perception is to make room for the notion of perceptual meaning – and thus *understanding* – at all. Meanwhile, the intellectualist's effort to account for perceptual meaning as the outcome or product of an act of interpretation or judgement is unacceptable, argues Merleau-Ponty, since it wholly distorts the phenomenology of perception in misrepresenting the nature of the perceiving subject's means of understanding the perceived world and its contents.
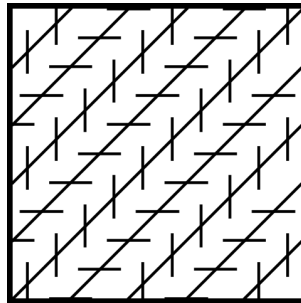
Figure 3

The various facets of perceptual *sens* that Merleau-Ponty emphasizes, and which I have set out above in Section 2.1, serve to disclose what we might call an irreducible unity of sign and signification – or indeed, sense and sensible – in perception. This unity is such that a perceptual sign[47] cannot be held apart from and experienced independently of the signification it is presently grasped as having without the sign itself thereby being fundamentally altered. It is this unity that Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the *immanence* of perceptual *sens* is intended to draw our attention to. For instance, the isolation of the principal lines from the auxiliary lines in Zöllner's illusion (fig. 3) causes them to have a sense that is different to the one that they have when in the presence of the auxiliary lines. The auxiliary lines

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[47] By 'sign' here I am referring to a wide array of different perceptual phenomena, from the parts of a present visual Gestalt to a present perspectival appearance or moment of intersensory perception within an extended horizon.

'import into the figure a new signification that henceforth clings to it and can no longer be detached from it', and with this the perceptual phenomenon is 'transformed' (*PhP*, 37/60), such that it is impossible to see the principal lines as parallel to one another, as they are in isolation. It is through their signification that the signs are made available in perception – i.e., that they are perceived at all – and we thus reach the sensible by grasping perceptual *sens*. In perception, there is an 'absolute simultaneity of matter and form' (*PhP*, 522n67/160n2); any thoroughgoing distinction between the two is made after the fact of perception itself, and cannot be read back into the phenomenology of perception, as it would have to be if the intellectualist explanation was correct.

* * *

We are now in a position to appreciate the more general task that Merleau-Ponty sets for himself in his study of perception. He wants to be able to speak positively of an understanding or grasping of perceptual *sens* without any kind of appeal to 'acts' of judgement on the part of the perceiving subject, or equally to the activity of a transcendental subject or faculty of 'the understanding' in Kant's sense (*der Verstand*). Intellectualism is unable to accommodate what Merleau-Ponty characterizes variously (and perhaps unhelpfully) as the 'pre-personal', 'impersonal', or 'anonymous' nature of perceptual consciousness. Such terms serve, at least in part, to refer to the fact that the grasp of perceptual *sens* is not the outcome of a deliberate or reflective 'bestowal' of meaning on the part of the subject, and that perception is thus 'not a personal act by which I myself would give a new sense to my life' (*PhP*, 249/287).[48] It is in place of the intellectualist's construal of the subject's understanding of perceptual *sens* that Merleau-Ponty develops the notion of a bodily grip, yet the details and wider ramifications of this 'originary comprehension of the world' (*PhP*, 342/383) facilitated by the body in perception are still in need of elucidation. Sections 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5 will continue to pursue this elucidation in terms of the concept of 'motor intentionality', which Merleau-Ponty first introduces in his analysis of Schneider. I will consider the proper role this concept plays within Merleau-Ponty's broader view concerning meaning and understanding. This will proceed by way of a critical engagement with Hubert Dreyfus' influential interpretation and application of Merleau-Ponty's work.

2.3 *The Philosophical Significance of Motor Intentionality*

i. *Motor Intentionality and Schneider*

The concept of 'motor intentionality' (*intentionnalité motrice*) has come to be synonymous with Merleau-Ponty's description of the body's role in the comprehension of perceptual *sens*, although the term itself appears only twice in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Merleau-Ponty first introduces the concept

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[48] This sense of anonymity is a recurrent motif by which Merleau-Ponty seeks to define operative intentionality in *Phenomenology of Perception*. I shall discuss it further in Sections 2.3 and 2.4, before considering the potential problems that arise from it in Chapter 3.

as a further means by which to describe Schneider's pathological relationship with his own body in executing movements. In Schneider's efforts to perform abstract movements on command, it is clear that he possesses a conceptual understanding of what is expected of him and the inadequacies of his failed attempts, yet he is unable to translate this understanding into a successful execution of the movement with the kind of ease and immediacy found in a normal subject. As Merleau-Ponty phrases it, 'even if the instructions have for him an *intellectual signification*, they do not have a *motor signification*, they do not speak to him as a motor subject' (*PhP*, 113/140). The deficient manner in which Schneider's body is available to him as a result of his injury – as 'an amorphous mass' (*PhP*, 112/140), rather than a richly articulated system of possibilities – has, at one and the same time, compromised his grasp of the full significance of abstract movements and the instructions that serve to refer to them. Schneider can represent the desired movement to himself in thought, and he can recognize a successful performance once it is achieved, yet 'he does not find the movement himself; rather, he agitates his body until the movement appears' (*PhP*, 112/140). What he lacks is an immediate and non-representational grasp of the movement as one of *his own* possibilities:

> He is missing neither motricity nor thought, and we must acknowledge, between movement as a third person process and thought as a representation of movement, an anticipation or a grasp of the result assured by the body itself as a motor power, a "motor project" (*Bewegungsentwurf*), or a "motor intentionality" without which the instructions would remain empty.
>
> (*PhP*, 113/141)

As I noted in Chapter 1, Merleau-Ponty cites this deficiency as carrying over to Schneider's perceptual grasp of objects, and as a consequence, Schneider's grasp of perceptual *sens* has been compromised. The immanence of a sense in the sensible – or as I put it above, the unity of sign and signified in perception – is lacking for Schneider, and his recognition of objects is mediated by a use of language and the intellectual connections that hold between words.[49] In contrast to the normal subject, perception is no longer 'spontaneous' for Schneider, and a signification of the perceived is only arrived at as the achievement of a deliberate act of consciousness. As such, the communication or dialogue in which perceptual *sens* is constituted and develops has been stifled:

> For Schneider, this familiarity, this communication with the object is interrupted. For the normal person, the object is "speaking" and meaningful, the arrangement of colours immediately "means" something, whereas for the patient the signification must be brought in from elsewhere through a genuine act of interpretation.
>
> (*PhP*, 133/164)

For Merleau-Ponty, Schneider's perceptual deficiencies lie 'at the junction of sensitivity and signification' (*PhP*, 132/164), which in the normal subject's experience is constituted by a motor

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[49] Merleau-Ponty references the example of Schneider's recognition of a fountain pen: 'the recognition clearly progresses by following the connections of language, from "oblong" to "the form of a stick," from "stick" to "instrument," then to "instrument for writing something down," and finally to "fountain pen."' (*PhP*, 133/164)

intentional grasp of the perceived quality, thing, or scene. The loss of his body as a system of possibilities – pre-reflectively and immediately available to the normal subject in the body schema – is reflected in the structure of Schneider's perceptual field. The normative dimension of perception – the normal subject's movement towards a more precise bodily grip on a perceived thing – founders in Schneider's case, since it is itself conditioned by the correlations that hold between the subject's horizon of motor possibilities and the perceived thing's possible appearances. As the motor possibilities have 'leveled out' for Schneider, so has his grasp of a given presentation in relation to the system of possible appearances. Schneider is thus unable to comprehend the perceived thing by means of his body, and he must compensate by making use of the conceptual connections of constituted language and the inferences they facilitate.

A degree of caution is necessary here, however, if we are to avoid misrepresenting how the concept of motor intentionality functions in Merleau-Ponty's thought. Perhaps the most important mistake to avoid involves casting Schneider's illness as involving a total absence or loss of a specific layer or discrete element of experience. We cannot say that Schneider no longer 'has' motor intentionality, since his competence in performing the familiar and habitual actions learnt prior to his injury displays precisely the kind of immediate and non-representational motor relation to objects that is lacking in his attempts to execute movements and to understand perceived objects outside of familiar or habitual tasks.

Equally, it would be folly to suppose the exact opposite revelation to be demonstrated in the analysis of Schneider – i.e., that the motor intentional engagement exhibited in Schneider's successful execution of 'concrete' movements discloses a 'pure' or original form of motor intentionality.[50] For one thing, if this were Merleau-Ponty's own conclusion he has gone about expressing it in a very odd manner, since the term 'motor intentionality' is only introduced in the passage at (*PhP*, 113/141) quoted above, where it is explicitly connected with Schneider's *deficiencies* in executing 'abstract' movements. More importantly, such a conclusion directly conflicts with Merleau-Ponty's reflections on the appropriate methodology when utilizing pathological case studies. Merleau-Ponty explicitly stresses that 'the normal cannot be *deduced* from the pathological' (*PhP*, 110/138, my emphasis); the differences between the two cannot be given a neat differential or causal explanation in terms of the total absence or presence of discrete variables.[51] In this case, he states that '[t]he distinction between abstract and concrete movement does not … merge with that between the body and consciousness' (*PhP*, 125/156). Schneider has neither preserved nor lost a 'pure' stratum of motor intentionality. It would therefore be a mistake to take Merleau-Ponty's discussion of Schneider to be disclosing a dichotomy of body and consciousness, or perception and intellect. What we must say is that Schneider exhibits a

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[50] Such an interpretation of the Schneider case is offered in (Kelly, 2000) and (Kelly, 2002). (Jensen, 2009) reads Merleau-Ponty as equivocating on this point, arguing that elements of his discussion of Schneider do commit him to something like the view Kelly advocates. This view seems ultimately to collapse into a crude kind of automatism, according to which concrete actions unfold with a mechanical kind of causality. Crucially, however, Jensen demonstrates how this aspect of Merleau-Ponty's discussion is the consequence of a misinterpretation of a passage from Gelb and Goldstein's original case documents. (Mooney, 2011) builds upon Jensen's discussion in order to show that Merleau-Ponty's fully developed position avoids any kind of automatism.

[51] Jensen illustrates this point adroitly and at greater length in (Jensen, 2009).

pathological form of motor intentionality; one that reflects the pathological experience he has of his own body, and the world more generally, as we explored in chapter 1.[52]

ii. The Place of Motor Intentionality: Dreyfus' Reading

How one interprets the place of motor intentionality in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology has direct repercussions for how one construes the relationship that holds between the body and consciousness in Merleau-Ponty's thought, as well as the nature and extent of Merleau-Ponty's critique of intellectualism. The more general and overarching issue that I believe gives these questions their pertinence is the thesis expressed in the passage quoted at the outset of this chapter, which we have yet to address directly:

> [T]he philosopher learns from his contact with perception an awareness of a relation to being which necessitates and makes possible a new analysis of the understanding.
>
> *(TfL*, 3/11-12)

If this thesis is truly expressive of the broader philosophical significance Merleau-Ponty sees his work on perception as having, it would surely be appropriate, in our efforts to elucidate that region of his thought, for us to ask ourselves quite how 'a new analysis of the understanding' might appear to be both facilitated and necessitated by it. As is to be expected this thesis will take on a decidedly different meaning depending on how we make sense of Merleau-Ponty's account of the subject's 'relation to being' in perception. As such, there is a lot riding on how we interpret Merleau-Ponty's use of the notions of motor intentionality and bodily grip, and the body's role in perception more generally.

Now, the greatest stumbling block lying in the way of this interpretative task is the often ambiguous and potentially problematic manner in which Merleau-Ponty expresses the relationship between, on the one hand, consciousness and intellection, and on the other, the body's movement towards a 'maximum grip' that is realized in and through a motor intentional engagement with the perceived world. It can seem as if he takes the two to be thoroughly distinct from one another, and that motor intentionality is somehow independent from or other than what is meant when we talk of a subject's 'understanding' the world and its contents. If this were indeed the case, then Merleau-Ponty's rejection of intellectualism would be only a partial or regional one, in the sense that the intellectualist's conception of the intellect would be left unchallenged. The significance of the phenomenology of perception would be that it discloses a self-sufficient 'layer' of meaning which the categorial activities appealed to by intellectualism do not constitute and cannot penetrate, but which leaves the intellectualist conception of the intellect itself, or of a faculty of 'the understanding', essentially as it was. On this reading, it looks like a potentially troubling schism emerges between the bodily 'motor'

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[52] It may indeed be necessary, as Jensen suggests, to think of the clearly defined distinction between 'abstract' and 'concrete' movements in the description Gelb and Goldstein give of Schneider's case as itself expressive of an aspect of his pathological form of motor intentionality, rather than as determining a distinction that can be properly thought of as common to the normal case.

intentionality of perception, and the intentionality of 'the understanding' in representational or propositionally structured acts of thought.[53] At bottom, what this amounts to is a kind of schism between the perceiving body and the thinking mind. In passages such as the following, it appears as though Merleau-Ponty might indeed be committed to such a schism:

> By saying that this intentionality [sc. motor intentionality] is not a thought, we mean that it is not accomplished in the transparency of a consciousness, and that it takes up as acquired all of the latent knowledge that my body has of itself.
>
> (*PhP*, 241/279)

> In perception, we do not think the object and we do not think the thinking, we are directed toward the object and we merge with this body that knows more than we do about the world
>
> (*PhP*, 248/286)

It is this reading of Merleau-Ponty's account of perception and motor intentionality that plays a significant role in the work of Hubert Dreyfus. Whilst Dreyfus has introduced his own philosophical concepts and argumentation, he considers his work to be continuous with that of both Merleau-Ponty and the early works of Martin Heidegger. Indeed, Dreyfus often presents himself to be simply articulating and applying their ideas. At the heart of Dreyfus' work is the concept of 'skillful-' or 'absorbed coping'. Dreyfus uses this concept to refer to the significant portion of our day-to-day lives – passed over in silence by traditional philosophy and psychology – in which we engage with the world in a mode of 'non-mental' (Dreyfus, 1991: 76), 'non-rational' (Dreyfus, 2007a: 352), 'unthinking activity' (Dreyfus, 1993: 35) which as such 'cannot be understood in subject/object terms' (Dreyfus, 1991: 5).[54]

Dreyfus casts perceptual receptivity as one aspect of this 'non-mental' engagement with the world, although he stresses that it cannot be thought of as properly distinguishable from the active, practical character of absorbed coping that consists in the enacting of specifically 'embodied' skills or expertise (Dreyfus, 2005a: 17). According to Dreyfus, the nature of these skills will vary to a certain degree depending on the individual, since we are able to acquire and develop new skills throughout our lives through coaching and practice.[55] Nonetheless, he argues, once acquired, embodied skills can be executed without any recourse to the 'detached attitude' (Dreyfus, 2005a: 18) of reflective thought,

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[53] It is precisely this way of reading *Phenomenology of Perception* that gives rise to the presentation of his relationship to the philosophy of action that I problematized in Chapter 1.

[54] In illustrating the concept of 'absorbed coping', Dreyfus leans heavily on examples such as the football player in *Structure of Behaviour* that I considered in Chapter 1. His emphasis on such examples when reading Merleau-Ponty has led Dreyfus, in his graduate school lectures, to say that a more apt title for *Phenomenology of Perception* would be 'Phenomenology of Sports' (ist-socrates.berekeley.edu/~hdreyfus/188_s05/html/Lectures.html). This is a slightly odd claim given the total lack of any sporting examples in the *Phenomenology*.

[55] A popular aspect of Dreyfus' work that I will not go into here has consisted in describing the process involved in acquiring an embodied skill, and the stages passed through in arriving at expertise and, in so doing, extending one's capacity for absorbed coping to different or niche situations. See, e.g., (Dreyfus, 2002). The acquisition and nature of bodily habits and skills is certainly something Merleau-Ponty stresses in his discussion of embodiment, such as the famous example of the organist at *PhP*, 146-7/180-182. I shall discuss this in greater detail in Chapter 4.

since they enable the agent to respond immediately to the salient aspects of a perceived situation.[56] Indeed, Dreyfus argues that the phenomenology of paradigmatic cases of absorbed coping such as playing sports shows that thought is in fact 'the enemy of expertise' (Dreyfus, 2007a: 354).

According to Dreyfus then, absorbed coping constitutes a mode of engagement in which the mind is simply not on the scene *at all*, and involves the body alone as it grasps and responds to the perceived environment. In attributing such a position to Merleau-Ponty, Dreyfus identifies the notion of motor intentionality introduced in *Phenomenology of Perception* with the embodied and 'non-rational' experience of absorbed coping. Thus, on Dreyfus' interpretation, motor intentionality constitutes a distinct and self-sufficient 'ground-floor level' (Dreyfus, 2007a: 363) on the basis of which the 'upper stories of the edifice of knowledge' – i.e., the conceptual, linguistic, and inferential capacities of the thinking and reflecting mind – must be constructed (Dreyfus, 2005: 19). This is also taken to account for Merleau-Ponty's appeal to Heidegger's concept of 'being-in-the-world' (*In-der-Welt-Sein*), which Dreyfus treats as the general term for the total 'background' of embodied skills possessed by the individual, ready to be enacted in specific cases. Being-in-the-world is the 'holistic background coping that makes possible appropriate dealings in particular circumstances' (Dreyfus, 1991: 104). For Dreyfus, then, the significance of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body and perception lies in disclosing the foundational stratum of absorbed coping, in which consciousness or the mind plays no part:[57]

> According to Merleau-Ponty, at the most basic level of being in the world, what does the grasping is not the mind but the body with its nonconceptual coping skills
>
> (Dreyfus, 2007a: 359)[58]

iii. Problematizing Dreyfus' Reading

The sharp distinction between consciousness and the body that Dreyfus insists upon is what ultimately renders his position problematic, both in its own right and, crucially, as an interpretation of Merleau-Ponty. The interpretative worries become more determinate at those moments where Dreyfus is seeking to relate absorbed coping to what he takes to be the traditional (i.e., pre- or non-Heideggerian) ontological categories of 'the brute physical world' and 'the intrinsic intentionality of

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[56] It is in this respect that Dreyfus' work incorporates the kind of 'Merleau-Pontian' approach to the philosophy of action we saw is articulated by Romdenh-Romluc in the preceding chapter (e.g., (Dreyfus, 2000a)).

[57] This interpretation thus coincides with Kelly's, insofar as Dreyfus takes it that motor intentionality is a distinct and self-sufficient level of experience. Unlike Kelly, however, Dreyfus does not seem to think that we can understand Schneider's case as disclosing an undistorted, non-pathological instantiation of this level. For his most recent discussion of the case of Schneider, see (Dreyfus, 2007b). Once again, (Jensen, 2009) provides a succinct analysis of this difference between Kelly and Dreyfus.

[58] It is with this claim that Dreyfus' reading has also led to the attempt to utilize Merleau-Ponty's work in the debate concerning the presence of nonconceptual content in perception. For my part, I believe that this issue is essentially orthogonal to Merleau-Ponty's own project. Furthermore, despite the claims of Dreyfus and others, it is far from clear that Merleau-Ponty's work supports the case of 'nonconceptualism'. Indeed, in places such as the following passage, Merleau-Ponty would appear to be making quite the opposite case:

> One of Kant's discoveries, whose consequences we have not yet fully grasped, is that all our experience of the world is throughout a tissue of concepts which lead to irreducible contradictions if we attempt to take them in an absolute sense or transfer them to pure being, and that they nevertheless found the structure of all our phenomena, of everything which *is* for us.
>
> (*PriP*, 18)

individual minds' (Dreyfus, 2000b: 336).[59] For Dreyfus, these categories are inadequate to characterize the motor intentional engagement in terms of which he defines absorbed coping, which is 'nonmental' without being simply 'mechanical' (Dreyfus, 1991: 68). The reason for this is that traditional philosophy has exclusively attended to the intentionality of mental acts, occupying only those 'upper stories of the edifice of knowledge'. This inevitably leads to either 'empiricist' ignorance, or 'intellectualist' distortion of perceptual experience of the kind Merleau-Ponty emphasizes. According to Dreyfus, faced with the phenomenology of absorbed coping, '[w]e may just have to grit our teeth and countenance body-intentionality [sc. motor intentionality] and being-in-the-world as *a third way of being*' (Dreyfus, 2000b: 336, my emphasis).[60] For Dreyfus, then, the work of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty calls for a three-way distinction between physical objects, minds, and the bodily being-in-the-world of absorbed coping. It is then a further question how, in the case of human beings at least, 'minds grow out of being-in-the-world' (Dreyfus, 2005: 19).

On the Dreyfusian interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's work on perception, 'a new analysis of the understanding' would be necessary only insofar as we are forced to acknowledge that the rational capacities definitive of the understanding are founded upon the kind of non-rational, bodily engagement with the world that Dreyfus reads Merleau-Ponty (along with Heidegger) as disclosing. This relationship, and the human capacity to shift freely between instances of absorbed coping and moments of reflective distancing, would be the subject matter of this new analysis. Whilst Dreyfus praises Merleau-Ponty for helping lay the foundation for a better understanding of the relationship between mindedness and coping, he laments the fact that it is never directly dealt with by Merleau-Ponty himself (Dreyfus, 2007a: 364). In this light, intellectualism is cast as ignorant – be it innocently or willfully – of the problem Dreyfus takes himself to be addressing by falsely taking intellectual rationality to be ubiquitous throughout our engagement with the world, ignoring the phenomenology of perception by 'in effect declaring that human experience is upper stories all the way down' (Dreyfus, 2005: 1).

My concerns regarding the viability of this interpretation feed into a line of criticism of Dreyfus' general philosophical outlook that has started to become familiar in the literature relating to his work.[61] The common objection here is that Dreyfus is committed – perhaps tacitly – to a traditional yet questionable conception of rationality and the mind, and it is this commitment that is at one time both responsible for and expressed in his sharp distinction between the perceiving body and the thinking mind.[62] In his reading of Merleau-Ponty, it seems that this commitment is reflected in Dreyfus' understanding of the critique of intellectualism, since he considers the intellectualist's conception of rationality, and the intentional structure of the understanding to have been left in place, with the cause

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[59] In Section 1.4, I referred to these categories, with Merleau-Ponty, as 'being in itself' and 'being for itself', respectively.

[60] See also (Dreyfus, 2000a: 302).

[61] Most notably, in Dreyfus' engagement with John McDowell (see (McDowell, 2007) & (McDowell, 2013)), although the critical work of a number of other authors focuses in on the same aspects of Dreyfus' thought (e.g., (Rouse, 2005), (Rouse, 2013), (McManus, 2007), (Berendzen, 2010), and (Siewert, 2013)).

[62] As McDowell puts it in articulating his version of this criticism, Dreyfus accepts a 'mythical' conception of the mind: 'The Myth of Mind as Detached' (McDowell, 2013: 41).

for concern being its intrusion into the *nonrational* motor intentional engagement with the world found in perception.[63] It is in this sense that I spoke above of the critique of intellectualism appearing to be a merely partial or regional one. I suggest this appearance cannot be the truth of the matter, however.

The Dreyfusian interpretation misses the mark in its construal of the philosophical significance of Merleau-Ponty's discussions of perception. Dreyfus' reading of the critique of intellectualism, and the supposition of being-in-the-world as 'a third way of being' are each expressive of a more general misrepresentation of Merleau-Ponty's thought. *Contra* Dreyfus, the significance of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception – at least, as Merleau-Ponty himself conceives it – consists in disclosing the manner in which the perceived world is itself rationally structured. In Merleau-Ponty's own words, it is the perceived world that is 'the homeland of all rationality' (*PhP* 454/493). At no point does Merleau-Ponty describe perception or motor intentionality as a 'nonmental' or 'nonrational' engagement with the world. Instead, he lauds phenomenology for its capacity to develop its own conception of rationality – one that is faithful to experience. It is in doing so that phenomenology will be capable of overcoming traditional philosophical antinomies (*PhP*, lxxxiv). In his own case this new conception is intertwined with a phenomenology of perception and the account of perceptual *sens* explored in Sections 2.1 and 2.2 above:

> Rationality fits precisely to the experiences in which it is revealed. There is rationality – that is, perspectives intersect, perceptions confirm each other, and a sense appears. But this sense must not be separated, transformed into an absolute Spirit, or transformed into a world in the realist sense.
>
> (*PhP*, lxxxiv/20)

This passage demonstrates how, according to Merleau-Ponty, perception *is* to be understood as rationally structured, albeit in a manner traditional forms of philosophical are unable sufficiently to recognize and accommodate. Shortly after its publication in 1945, Merleau-Ponty defended the thought at work in *Phenomenology of Perception* in an address to the Société française de philosophie. In this address, he is keen to stress that 'there is … no destruction of the absolute or of rationality here, only of the absolute and the rationality separated from experience' (*PriP*, 27). A phenomenological reflection on perception provides insight into the nature of rationality; it does not disclose a peculiar 'non-rational' order. Of especial importance here, as I have been stressing, is the phenomenological insight into the nature of *meaning and understanding*.

Seen in this light, a phenomenology of perception would necessitate and make possible 'a new analysis of the understanding' insofar as the manner in which the subject understands the world and its contents in perception cannot be accommodated by the 'old' analyses, and must be described on its own terms. For Merleau-Ponty, such a revelation has profound repercussions beyond the domain of perception itself. This is made clear in the 1945 address:

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[63] Hence in his critique of McDowell, who Dreyfus thinks fits the bill of Merleau-Ponty's 'intellectualist', Dreyfus speaks of 'The Myth of the Pervasiveness of the Mental' (Dreyfus, 2013).

What I mean to say is that we find in perception a mode of access to the object which is rediscovered at every level … the word "perception" includes the whole experience which gives the thing itself.

(*PriP*, 34)

This thought is central to Merleau-Ponty's broader philosophical outlook, especially after the publication of *Phenomenology of Perception*, as he began to give greater attention to language and communication. As I shall demonstrate in chapter 4, this 'middle period' work on language can be seen to bear a deep and vital continuity with the earlier discussions of perception. This continuity should not be surprising if the overarching moral that Merleau-Ponty sought to draw from a study of perception is that it discloses 'a mode of access to the object' that is 'rediscovered at every level' or, as before, that it makes available 'a new analysis of the understanding'. The continuity is much harder to appreciate if we go along with the Dreyfusian construal of the earlier work, however, since the self-sufficient layer of 'absorbed coping' that Dreyfus takes Merleau-Ponty to be disclosing is cast as fundamentally *non-*linguistic (Dreyfus, 2007a: 352), and as untouched by the acquisition of language. Dreyfus' reading identifies what Robert Brandom has labeled a specific kind of 'layer-cake' (Brandom, 2002: 324) foundationalism in Merleau-Ponty's approach to meaning and understanding, according to which the decidedly 'mental' or 'representational' activity that language use instantiates takes place against the motor intentional background of absorbed coping.

To be clear, I do not deny the presence of a particular foundationalist line of thought in *Phenomenology of Perception*. However, I suggest that Dreyfus' reading does not offer an accurate presentation of this foundationalism. Furthermore, and unlike Dreyfus, I suggest that the foundationalist strain of Merleau-Ponty's thought does not constitute the primary theme of his broader philosophical outlook. In fact, the foundationalist line of thought that emerges in *Phenomenology of Perception* stands in tension with the conception of operative intentionality formulated there, and that he continued to develop after 1945. I shall leave my own reading of the foundationalism present in *Phenomenology of Perception* until chapter 3. Until then, I want specifically to challenge Dreyfus' interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's account of perception and motor intentionality.

At bottom, Dreyfus' reading of Merleau-Ponty appears to be at odds with Merleau-Ponty's own assessment of the aims and achievements of his philosophical project. This is not to say that Dreyfus' reading is unsubstantiated or without support, however, and it is incumbent upon us to try to trace the path by which Dreyfus arrives at his construal of Merleau-Ponty's thought. As we have seen, the interpretation of motor intentionality and being-in-the-world in terms of Dreyfus' own notion of a non-rational and non-mental layer of 'absorbed coping' lies at the very heart of his presentation of Merleau-Ponty. Beyond Merleau-Ponty's own remarks concerning these concepts, there are seemingly two main sources from which Dreyfus feels he is able to draw justification. First, it appears that other areas of Merleau-Ponty's work corroborate Dreyfus' construal of motor intentionality and being-in-the-world. Of particular relevance here are Merleau-Ponty's critical relationships with certain concepts, such as

'reflection' and 'being-for-itself', and also his use of the Husserlian concept of *Fundierung*, or founding. Secondly, Dreyfus' engagement with (non-exegetical) issues in the philosophy of mind leads him to conclude that the position he finds in Merleau-Ponty is the only tenable one. It is for this reason that he feels Merleau-Ponty's work to be of great importance to contemporary philosophy. When we attend to each of these proposed sources of justification, however, we shall see that neither offers unproblematic support for Dreyfus' reading. In fact, what I suggest we find is that each of these avenues ultimately lead us away from Dreyfus' presentation of Merleau-Ponty's thought. I will deal with the textual support for Dreyfus' reading in the next section. Doing so will help clarify some specific ways in which Merleau-Ponty's work does not cohere with Dreyfus' view. I will then move on to consider Dreyfus' primary non-exegetical argument for his position in Section 2.5 with a view to showing how Merleau-Ponty's thought in fact undermines rather than supports this argument.

2.4 *The Textual Motivation of Dreyfus' View*

i. The Critique of 'Reflection'

One aspect of *Phenomenology of Perception* that Dreyfus appears to lean quite heavily on is Merleau-Ponty's critique of 'reflection'. For Dreyfus, this critique feeds into his own emphasis on the kinds of unreflective 'bodily' expertise that are exercised in absorbed coping, in contrast to the reflective activity of thought which, as we have already seen, is 'the enemy of expertise' (Dreyfus, 2007a: 354). We do indeed find Merleau-Ponty, throughout *Phenomenology of Perception*, lamenting the distorting power of reflection and stressing the importance of recognizing the 'prereflective fund of experience' (*PhP*, 252/289). Yet this critique is predominantly advanced at the level of *methodology* in the study of perception, and the task of philosophy more generally. For Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology represents a new and 'radical' form of reflection, in contrast to both what he refers to as the 'psychological' reflection of the empiricist and the 'analytical' or 'transcendental' reflection of the intellectualist. Fundamentally, the empiricist and intellectualist modes of reflection, each in their own way, manage to overlook, and thus distort, the phenomena for which they seek to account. It is the phenomenologist's sensitivity to the data of experience – her awareness of her enterprise as a '*reflection-upon-an-unreflected*' (*PhP*, 63/90) – that protects her from making the same mistakes. The 'prereflective fund of experience' is thus not Dreyfus' self-sufficient layer of unthinking and nonrational 'coping', but something far more general. For Merleau-Ponty, it is the experience of the world that is necessarily prior to philosophical reflection, that philosophical reflection seeks to elucidate and comprehend, but which it all too easily and all too often loses contact with. As the following passages express, the phenomenologist's task is to recognize and avoid such mistakes:

> Reflection does not withdraw from the world toward the unity of consciousness as the
> foundation of the world; rather, it steps back in order to see transcendences spring forth

and it loosens the intentional threads that connect us to the world in order to make them appear.

<div align="right">(PhP, lxxvii/14)</div>

The task of a radical reflection, the kind that aims at self-comprehension, consists, paradoxically enough, in recovering the unreflective experience of the world, and subsequently reassigning to it the verificatory attitude and reflective operations, and displaying reflection as one possibility of my being.

<div align="right">(PhP, 251/288)</div>

Of course, in pursuing a phenomenology of perception, Merleau-Ponty categorically rejects the intellectualist construal of perceptual *sens* as the outcome of acts of judgement; to Merleau-Ponty, the intellectualist's errors all seem to stem from an attempt to model perception on such 'reflective operations'. Perceptual *sens* is not the achievement of reflective acts, and is in this sense 'unreflective'. However, we should not let ourselves be misled by this claim. What Merleau-Ponty is rejecting here is the attempt, definitive of intellectualism, to unearth the activity of an autonomous and 'pure' subject as the transcendental condition of the perceived world.[64] The phenomenology of perception serves not only to reveal the impossibility of such a task, but also to question the very legitimacy of the conception of a self-sufficient, 'pure', or 'absolute' subjectivity that intellectualism invokes; a subjectivity that is at once 'everywhere and nowhere' (*PhP*, 63/89). Rejecting such a conception of subjectivity as mythological is very different from claiming, as Dreyfus does, that subjectivity is itself founded upon a layer of 'pre-subjective' coping behaviour. Where Dreyfus to a large extent *retains* the problematic conception of the subject and holds it apart from the motor intentionality of perception, I suggest Merleau-Ponty is seeking to dispose of the received categories altogether.

ii. Being-in-the-world as a 'Third Way of Being'

This of course feeds into Dreyfus' interpretation of being-in-the-world as 'a third way of being', to be contrasted with the 'being-in-itself' of the objective, natural world and the 'being-for-itself' of mind or consciousness. As we have seen, for Dreyfus, 'being-in-the-world' serves to refer to the wholly motor-intentional engagement with the world found in absorbed coping; an engagement that is 'nonmental' without thereby being 'mindless' or 'mechanical' (Dreyfus, 1991: 68). In appealing to the concept in *Phenomenology of Perception,* Merleau-Ponty does indeed directly contrast 'being-in-the-world' with the 'in-itself' and the 'for-itself', as I noted in Chapter 1. Once again, however, it seems that Dreyfus reads Merleau-Ponty's efforts to displace a certain conception of consciousness or subjectivity as a renunciation of subjectivity's involvement in being-in-the-world altogether. Being-in-the-world only takes on the appearance of 'a third way of being' if we accept that the two categories with which it is being contrasted are themselves both legitimate. It does not seem that Merleau-Ponty takes this to be

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[64] Merleau-Ponty seems to take this broad claim taken to be true of intellectualism of all stripes, be it Cartesian, Kantian, neo-Kantian, or Husserlian.

the case, however. Rather than accepting a conception of the mind as being-for-itself, and thereby considering the revelation of being-in-the-world as the disclosure of a 'nonmental' mode of intentionality, Merleau-Ponty deems it necessary to reassess the nature of mind and its relationship to the world. The unhappy dichotomy of two mutually exclusive categories of being is not to be overcome by the introduction of a third that would stand alongside them and thereby offer us a 'richer' means of carving up phenomena. Phenomenology does not supplant the dichotomy at the cost of introducing a *tri*chotomy. For Merleau-Ponty, phenomenological reflection, by disclosing the myriad ways in which 'we are through and through related to the world' (*PhP*, lxxvii/13), motivates the conclusion that consciousness 'could not be a pure for itself' (*PhP*, 535n18/260n2). Once more, it is the intellectualist's 'absolute' or 'pure' consciousness that Merleau-Ponty is putting out of play – rather than consciousness altogether – when he asserts that 'consciousness always finds *itself* already at work in the world' (*PhP*, 456/496, my emphasis).

Perhaps things are not altogether so clear as I am making them out to be, however. At certain places in *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty *does* seem to be saying that we should reject the idea that the mind or consciousness is on the scene in perception. For instance, in one footnote he explicitly states that, when it comes to the subject of perception, we must 'replace consciousness with existence, that is, with being in the world through a body' (*PhP*, 548n23/363n2). The context of this claim, however, shows that 'consciousness' is here conceived within the terms of the dichotomy of 'for-itself' and 'in-itself'. It refers to a conception of subjectivity from which the perceiving body, itself conceived as a wholly mechanical physical system (being-in-itself), is excluded from the outset. For Merleau-Ponty, the phenomenology of embodiment subverts both of these conceptions, revealing the subject as an impossible 'junction' of the two poles (*PhP*, 391/431). So long as this insight is cashed out against the background of the accepted dichotomy, it will appear that a third category, incommensurate to the others, is being disclosed. Yet it is this incommensurability that is the very downfall of the categorizations of 'being-for-itself' and 'being-in-itself'. Merleau-Ponty considers phenomenology to reveal such categories as expressive of the abstractions and misunderstandings of objective thought, and if they are appealed to in order to articulate being-in-the-world, this is, as it were, a ladder that, once climbed, can be swiftly thrown away.[65] This is clear enough in a passage where Merleau-Ponty does, like Dreyfus, speak of a 'third genre of being':

> At the same time that the body withdraws from the objective world and comes to form a third genre of being between the pure subject and the object, the subject loses his purity and his transparency.
>
> (*PhP*, 366/407)

At the very moment when it seems a new category is being called for by the phenomenology of perception, our categorizations collapse in on themselves. According to Merleau-Ponty, the ideal of a

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[65] This is also how the above passage from (*PhP*, 248/286) should be understood. Merleau-Ponty's talk of 'merging' here should not be read as a coming together of two distinct ways of being – consciousness and body – but rather as an articulation of the manner in which consciousness must be understood as inherently 'bodily'.

pure and 'transparent' subject – like that of the 'transparent' object 'seen from everywhere' we encountered earlier – is based upon a fundamental misunderstanding, even ignorance, of our perceptual experience of the world that it is the task of phenomenology to correct.[66]

In all fairness, one can perhaps find something like this more full-blooded subversion of the received categories of 'being' in Dreyfus' own rejection of the 'traditional interpretation of the mental' as 'pure' and 'detached' (Dreyfus, 1991: 74). At best, however, it seems that Dreyfus' presentation is pulling in contradictory directions, and the waters are severely muddied by his desire to draw a sharp distinction between the 'nonrational' motor intentionality of absorbed coping and the reflective 'stepping back' by which he identifies the rational subject or mind (Dreyfus, 2007a). That such 'stepping back' is seen as dependent upon the 'involved' activity of bodily coping – that 'minds grow out of being-in-the-world' (Dreyfus, 2005: 19) – should be enough for us to hear Dreyfus' talk of a 'third way of being' as sincere.[67]

iii. Fundierung

When discussing the nature of the relationship between perception and thought, or perception and the 'symbolic function', Merleau-Ponty does appeal to Husserl's concept of *Fundierung*, or founding. Merleau-Ponty understands the term to refer to a 'two-way relation' that he defines in the following passage:

> The founding term … is primary in the sense that the founded term is presented as a determination or a making explicit of the founding term, which prevents the founded term from ever fully absorbing the founding term; and yet the founding term is not primary in the empirical sense and the founded is not merely derived from it, since it is only through the founded that the founding appears.
>
> (*PhP*, 414/454)

For Merleau-Ponty, the relationship of founding is *reciprocal*, to the point of interdependence.[68] For the time being, I only wish to emphasize the stark contrast between Merleau-Ponty's explicit definition of founding as an essentially reciprocal relationship, and the one-way dependence that Dreyfus describes as holding between the 'upper stories' of thought and reflection and the self-sufficient 'ground floor' of absorbed coping. What the above passage seems to demonstrate is that the primacy Merleau-Ponty understands the motor intentionality of perception to have in relation to thought is one of *meaning*. Perception is primary insofar as thought involves the development or explicitation of perceptual *sens*. Nonetheless, Merleau-Ponty is careful to stress that this development proceeds

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[66] This also allows us to see how the passage from (*PhP*, 241), cited above on p.47, should be understood as referring us to a traditional and erroneous conception of thought and consciousness. This is indicated by Merleau-Ponty's talk of thought as involving 'constitution' in 'the transparency of a consciousness'. For Merleau-Ponty, consciousness (like the perceived thing) is never truly 'transparent'.

[67] Perhaps, as McManus puts it, saying that subjectivity is not 'pure', and that it is instead 'involved' with the world through the body should not be our final conclusion. Ultimately, 'we need to recognize that we are operating with confused notions of 'detachment' and 'involvement', 'purity' and 'impurity'' (McManus, 2007: 442).

[68] This is a slight, yet notable, divergence from Husserl's use of the concept. For Husserl, *Fundierung* can be reciprocal, yet it can also be one-sided (see (Moran & Cohen, 2012)).

dialectically (*PhP*, 128-129/159-160), and the founding term is not left unaltered by its relationship with the founded term, since it 'is only through the founded that the founding appears'. There is therefore not supposed to be any kind self-sufficient layer involved in the relation of *Fundierung*.

This line of thought can be traced back to Merleau-Ponty's first work, *The Structure of Behaviour*, where he distinguishes between three 'orders' of behaviour: the physical, the vital, and the human. In discussing the relations that hold between these orders, Merleau-Ponty is careful to avoid thinking of them as distinct layers, with each new order simply sitting on top of the previous one. The behaviour of human beings cannot be neatly divided into those aspects that are common to inanimate physical objects, those that are common to living organisms and other animals, and those that are unique to humanity. As he puts it, the 'higher' structures of behaviour that emerge in a properly human form of behaviour 'eliminate the autonomy of the lower orders and give a new signification to the steps which constitute them' (*SB*, 180/195). Man is not 'a new sort of being', and '[t]he appearance of reason and mind does not leave intact a sphere of self-enclosed instincts in man' (*SB*, 181/195). Rather, man is 'a new form of unity' (*SB*, 181/195). It is this kind of relationship of sublimation that Merleau-Ponty's appeal to the concept of *Fundierung* in *Phenomenology of Perception* would seem to be articulating.

As a consequence, it is difficult to see how the concept of *Fundierung*, at least as Merleau-Ponty explicitly defines it in *Phenomenology of Perception*, is unproblematically amenable to Dreyfus' foundationalism. In the next chapter, I shall problematize the details of the somewhat implicit foundationalist line of thought that does in fact emerge in the *Phenomenology*. This line of thought, culminating as it does with the concept of the 'tacit *Cogito*', appears to conflict with Merleau-Ponty's explicit statements regarding the relation of *Fundierung*. It thereby provides a more plausible motivation for the kind of foundationalist reading Dreyfus advocates.[69] As I shall argue, however, the source of such motivation is ultimately responsible for major internal problems within Merleau-Ponty's thought, and is therefore unsustainable. For now, I will turn to the primary line of argumentation that Dreyfus actually offers in favour of his foundationalism. This argument unfolds beyond the bounds of Merleau-Ponty's own work and is instead drawn from Dreyfus' broader engagement in the philosophy of mind.

2.5 *The Non-Textual Motivation of Dreyfus' View*

A signature characteristic of Dreyfus' work is that he consistently makes use of figures such as Merleau-Ponty or Heidegger against the background of other, non-exegetical concerns in the philosophy of mind. Perhaps, then, his presentation of Merleau-Ponty would be wholly legitimate if appreciated in the context of its application, and the worries I have been raising so far would amount to Dreyfus and myself talking past one another. The non-exegetical problematic in relation to which Dreyfus appeals to Merleau-Ponty certainly allows us to make much better sense of the motivation behind Dreyfus' own outlook. This is not enough to legitimate the attribution of this view to Merleau-

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[69] Even this much of a concession to Dreyfus is not uncontestable, however, as I will clarify along the way in the next chapter.

Ponty, however. On the contrary, I think the account of perception that I unpacked in Sections 2.1 and 2.2 in fact supports an engagement with Dreyfus' problematic that is quite different to that favoured by Dreyfus himself. Furthermore, this difference brings to a head the worry raised above concerning the apparent disconnect between Dreyfus' and Merleau-Ponty's respective takes on the philosophical significance of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception.

I will begin by clarifying the central problem in the philosophy of mind to which Dreyfus takes himself to be responding, and its apparent origin in Wittgenstein's 'rule-following considerations'. I will then appeal to one particular reading of the rule-following considerations that directly contradicts the use Dreyfus makes of them. Finally, I will argue that Merleau-Ponty's work can be read as commensurate with Wittgenstein, at least on the reading of the rule-following considerations that I favour here.

i. The Problem of Representationalism

The problem that Dreyfus brings Merleau-Ponty to bear on arises in relation to a position he terms 'representationalism'. Representationalism seeks to describe the mind and its engagement with the world solely in terms of representational states, by which we mean states possessing a propositionally structured content that represents the world as being a particular way. For representationalism, all knowledge and understanding of the world is found 'mirrored in the mind' by the presence of propositionally structured beliefs (Dreyfus, 1997: xvii). Understood in this way, representationalism could be thought of as a contemporary equivalent of intellectualism, and this is certainly how Dreyfus sees Merleau-Ponty's work to be relevant. As such, Dreyfus offers a phenomenologically informed argument against representationalism by appeal to examples of behaviour in which there would appear to be no kinds of representational states involved: the 'expert' coping behaviour of the sportsman, the chess master, the driver, or even the agent of mundane acts such as door-opening. As we have seen, for Dreyfus such cases instantiate the purely motor-intentional engagement with the world by which he defines 'being-in-the-world'. This form of engagement, argues Dreyfus, proceeds by means of the attainment and modulation of a bodily grip on the perceptual-practical situation, without the interruption of or need for any kind of propositionally structured thinking.[70] Indeed, such thinking has only a disruptive effect on this kind of behaviour. We therefore have clear and forceful counterexamples to the central claims of representationalism.

The presentation of counterexamples by no means constitutes the entirety of Dreyfus' argumentation against representationalism.[71] Dreyfus also argues that the representationalist account of the mind must itself assume – whether the representationalist is aware of it or not – a 'more fundamental' engagement with the world than is found in representational states. The reason for this is that representationalism

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[70] Once again, we see our strong overlap here with the concerns of the previous chapter, and how Dreyfus defends a version of the interpretation I rejected there in relation to Romdenh-Romluc.

[71] If it were, the representationalist would be able to respond by positing the *implicit* presence of representational states in such examples.

taken in isolation faces a potentially infinite regress of representations. The regress threatens because, in order for representational states to have any non-arbitrary and rational efficacy in relation to one another, or in relation to the subject's behaviour, the subject must be in possession of an understanding of representations themselves: of the significance of their representational content. If we are to remain within representationalism, this understanding would itself have to be accounted for in terms of further representational states, which would then require further understanding on the part of the subject… and so on, potentially *ad infinitum*. If such a regress does not surface in reality, this must be due to the fact that there is a *non*-representational foundation or 'background' against which representational states are made possible, or so Dreyfus argues. For Dreyfus, it is being-in-the-world as instantiated by his favoured examples of absorbed coping that is to be understood as providing this foundation (Dreyfus, 1991: 5).

The above is a generalized version of an argument Dreyfus most often advances in terms of 'rules' and 'rule-following'. In this regard, Dreyfus understands the phenomenology of absorbed coping as describing a mode of behaviour in which the agent is *not* guided by rules at all.[72] Echoing the above, he argues that such a mode of behaviour serves as a necessary condition or foundation on the basis of which instances of actual rule-following behaviour are made possible. As with the 'representational' engagement with the world more generally, without such a foundation, rule-guided behaviour would be made impossible by the requirement for an infinite regress. Dreyfus provides a concise expression of his thesis concerning rules in the following passage:

> …whenever human behaviour is analyzed in terms of rules, these rules must always contain a *ceteris paribus* condition, i.e., they apply "everything else being equal," and what "everything else" and "equal" means in any specific situation can never be fully spelled out without a regress. …the *ceteris paribus* condition points to a background of practices which are the condition of the possibility of all rulelike activity.
>
> (Dreyfus, 1997: 56-7)

ii. Wittgenstein's 'Rule-following Considerations'

Dreyfus takes inspiration for this thesis from the celebrated 'rule-following considerations' of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* §138-242. Central to these remarks is what appears to be a sceptical worry concerning the capacity to understand and be guided by rules, and an important aspect of this sceptical worry is the threat of a regress of the kind articulated by Dreyfus. In Wittgenstein's discussion, the problem stems from the fact that understanding the meaning of a rule commits one, beyond the present moment, to a potentially infinite set of situation-specific actions. By itself, however, a given rule seems insufficient to strictly determine future behaviour, since it is entirely possible for it to be misinterpreted. In a heretofore unfamiliar situation, it seems that any course of action I take can be

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[72] Mark Wrathall, a former student of Dreyfus, makes a similar claim in relation to social rules in (Wrathall, 2007).

made out to be in accordance with the given rule under some interpretation of it. Wittgenstein offers the example of the student who only applies the rule 'add 2' correctly to series of numbers below 1000, after which the student continues '1004, 1008, 1012, etc.'. Nothing about the rule itself, or the student's successful application of it in previous cases, is capable of determining what *should* be done in subsequent cases, or why his actions in these cases are not in accordance with the rule. The student understands the rule differently from his teacher and yet, on his understanding of it, his actions are in complete accordance with the rule. Thus, as Wittgenstein's imagined interlocutor concedes, "'Whatever I do is, on some interpretation, in accord with the rule.'" (*PI*, §198). With this thought, it seems as if the very idea that we are capable of being guided by rules at all is thrown into serious doubt. Wittgenstein famously expresses this doubt in the following way:

> This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here.
>
> (*PI*, §201)

If a rule is unable to determine which course of action is in accordance with it, it seems impossible that any action could be guided by the rule alone. We might then hope that the ability to apply the rule *correctly* can be salvaged by the introduction of a further rule: a rule for applying the original rule, one that dictates precisely which course of action is to count as correctly applying the original rule in any given situation. Such hope is clearly vain, however, since the same doubts surface once more in relation to the supplementary rule. As such, the invocation of rules seems to necessitate an infinite regress of rules or, as Dreyfus puts it, if a rule is to be capable of guiding situation-specific actions it must contain within itself a condition for its own application that could not be spelled out without invoking the regress. It seems, then, that rules alone are incapable of initiating or guiding action since rules 'must always contain a *ceteris paribus* condition'.

This sceptical argument, and the threat of regression in which it culminates, thus presents itself as a problem for our common sense intuitions about rules and rule-following behaviour, as well as meaning and understanding more generally. Wittgenstein's own response to the argument has been matter for extensive debate, at the center of which is the question of whether Wittgenstein actually endorses the sceptical worry and the reasoning that gives rise to it.[73] For his part, Dreyfus certainly accepts the sceptical argument as legitimate, and as thus in need of a solution. Understanding and being guided by rules, argues Dreyfus, could only be possible against the background of an engagement with the world in which rules are not involved *at all* – the 'background of practices' he mentions above. Only in this

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[73] Saul Kripke famously interprets Wittgenstein as advocating the sceptical argument, and as offering a 'sceptical solution' to the sceptical paradox of *PI* §201 (Kripke, 1982). On such an interpretation, Wittgenstein is seen as defending an 'anti-realist' thesis about meaning. John McDowell, amongst others, rejects this reading, arguing instead that Wittgenstein (rightly, on McDowell's view) seeks to show precisely how the sceptical worry is founded in a misunderstanding of our concepts of meaning and understanding (McDowell, 1984). I return to this reading below.

way could a crippling regress of rules be avoided. Incidentally, this is also the view that Dreyfus attributes to Wittgenstein himself.

In this way, Dreyfus sees the disclosure of absorbed coping, and the 'being-in-the-world' that it instantiates, as providing the requisite solution to the sceptical problem that we are led to in the paradox of *PI*, §201. In turn, this solution extends to the more general problem facing 'representationalism': in order to avoid an infinite regress of representations, there must be an engagement with the world that does not involve representational states. The purely motor or bodily intentionality of being-in-the-world therefore serves as the necessary (and ever-present) foundation or background upon which representational states are made possible. By drawing his conception of being-in-the-world and motor intentionality from Merleau-Ponty's work, Dreyfus sees the significance of this work as consisting in the disclosure of the non-representational and non-rule-governed foundation that the sceptical argument shows to be necessary. Merleau-Ponty is thereby presented as (rightly, as far as Dreyfus is concerned) offering a solution to the problem instantiated by the rule-following paradox of *PI* §201. This reading of Merleau-Ponty is reflected in Dreyfus' talk of making 'intentionality' – by which he means the full blown 'minded' intentionality of representational states – *possible*.

iii. Rejecting Dreyfus' Problem: Wittgenstein and the 'Master Thesis'

Dreyfus' invocation of Merleau-Ponty in relation to this problem, and with it his more general concern with representationalism, offers a useful means of seeing precisely how his reading misrepresents Merleau-Ponty's thought. Rather than taking Merleau-Ponty to be offering a means of directly *answering* the questions posed by the sceptical argument, I believe we should see his study of perception as showing how problems of this order arise from a mistaken way of thinking. The problem will therefore cease to have any traction if we disabuse ourselves of this way of thinking, and as such it requires no solution.

On my view then, the properly Merleau-Pontian engagement with the problem Dreyfus raises with regard to representationalism bears close parallels with a certain reading of Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations themselves. On this reading Wittgenstein does not at any point actually endorse the reasoning behind the sceptical worry that culminates in the paradox of *PI*, §201. Instead, he seeks to show how such worries arise only if we allow ourselves to fall into a mistaken way of thinking about meaning and understanding. Strong support for reading Wittgenstein along these lines is found in *PI*, §201 itself. Immediately after articulating the threat that the sceptical argument presents in relation to rule-following – that there is in fact 'neither accord nor conflict here' – Wittgenstein offers the following diagnosis:

> It can be seen that there is a misunderstanding here from the mere fact that in the course
> of our argument we give one interpretation after another; as if each one contented us at
> least for a moment, until we thought of yet another standing behind it. What this shews

is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*, but which is exhibited in what we call "obeying a rule" and "going against it" in actual cases.

<div align="right">(PI, §201)</div>

What this passage asserts is that the fact that scepticism about rules and rule-following seems to threaten serves only to show that we have fallen prey to a misunderstanding. Once this misunderstanding is recognized and corrected, the argument that gave rise to the sceptical doubts about rules will no longer have any force, since it is itself founded in the very same misunderstanding. The misunderstanding in question consists in the assumption that grasping or understanding a rule is constituted by an act of *interpretation*. For Wittgenstein, this assumption also underlies the misplaced hope that the capacity to apply a rule *correctly* might be salvaged by the introduction of an additional rule, one that would determine what course of action would be in accord with the original rule. All this amounts to, in Wittgenstein's words, is the introduction of 'one interpretation after another'. The new rule will itself need to be properly understood and applied by the subject, and so we arrive at the regress. Underlying this doomed maneuver is the tacit conviction that understanding the meaning of a rule consists in having placed the right interpretation on it. It then remains an open question precisely what placing the right interpretation on a rule itself consists in, and it seems as if the only thing that could provide an answer would be a further interpretation that serves to guide the first, and thus the regress would be the only possible outcome.

For Wittgenstein, at least on the reading that concerns me here, all that the threatened regress serves to show is that the tacit conviction that it originates from must be misguided, and that understanding the meaning of a rule is not in fact constituted by an act of interpretation. What is crucial here is the manner in which we appear contended, 'at least for a moment', with each new interpretation. It is precisely this momentary relief that reveals an understanding that is *not* an interpretation, yet we are blind to this fact due to our tacit pre-assumptions about what understanding a rule involves.[74] To follow a rule 'does not depend upon the formulation and selection of hypotheses about how the rule is to be applied' (McGinn, 1997: 105). As such, the sceptical paradox that looms at the beginning of *PI*, §201 is illusory insofar as it is founded in a misunderstanding. In this regard, Wittgenstein himself emphasizes an essential passivity involved in understanding the meaning of a rule and being guided by it when he speaks of obeying a rule 'blindly':

When I obey a rule, I do not choose.
I obey it *blindly*.

<div align="right">(PI, §219)</div>

This absence of choice refers us once more to the fact that understanding a rule is not the outcome of a voluntary 'act of understanding', or of a free interpretation on the part of the subject. To grasp and

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[74] It is therefore this temporary reprieve from the threat of regress that Wittgenstein's 'this' refers to in the final sentence of the above passage from *PI* §201. I thank Bob Clark for helping me to see this point.

follow a rule, simply as such, is for one's behaviour to be normatively shaped by the rule itself *and nothing else*.[75,76]

Crucially, for those who defend this reading of Wittgenstein's remarks on rules and rule-following, its conclusion facilitates a rejection of a way of thinking about meaning and understanding more generally. John McDowell 'crystallizes' this wrongheaded way of thinking in terms of what he calls the 'master thesis':

> [T]he thesis that whatever a person has in her mind, it is only by virtue of being interpreted in one of various possible ways that it can impose a sorting of extra-mental items into those that accord with it and those that do not.
>
> (McDowell, 1992: 45)[77]

At bottom, the 'master thesis' amounts to a particular construal of the normative dimension of meaning and understanding – as McDowell puts it: the 'sorting' of extra-mental items. In the case of rules, for instance, the master thesis casts the sorting of possible courses of action into those that accord with the rule and those that do not as the outcome of an interpretation of the rule. All the sceptical difficulties began here, with the assumption that the rule alone could not achieve this normative shaping of the agent's field of possible actions. The master thesis can also be seen to be at work in the 'representationalist' position that Dreyfus criticizes. The regress that threatens representationalism stems from the tacit assumption that a representation alone is incapable of 'sorting of extra-mental items into those that accord with it and those that do not'. It thus appears as if some further element is required in order for a representation to be *understood* in the full, normative sense of the word. As Dreyfus argues, representationalism itself is incapable of answering this requirement without falling into a regress, since all it has at its disposal is *further representations*. As we have seen, it is for this reason that Dreyfus cites a *non*-representational, non-mental 'background' as a necessary condition of representational states. According to Dreyfus, Merleau-Ponty's account of motor intentionality and being-in-the-world can be understood as disclosing precisely this requisite background.

If a large part of the force of Wittgenstein's own remarks can be taken to consist in exposing something like McDowell's 'master thesis' as the source of the sceptical worries surrounding meaning and understanding, Dreyfus' response to such worries comes into question. If the master thesis is definitive of a way of thinking that is non-compulsory, then the worries it generates will dissipate as soon as we renounce it. A regress of rules, or of representations, only threatens whilst something like the master thesis holds sway in our thinking about meaning and understanding. As such, there is no

[75] It is mportant that we understand this notion of 'blind' rule-following as indicating an essential *passivity*, rather than referring to the wholly 'unthinking' modes of behaviour that Dreyfus claims as the foundation of rule-guided behaviour. Rule-following is not blind in the sense of not being consciously aware of what one is doing, but rather in the sense of assenting to the authority of a rule, the meaning of which it contains within itself insofar as I am an in a position to understand it.

[76] A crucial aspect of Wittgenstein's discussion concerns the social dimension of such practices (as emphasized by (Stroud, 2002)). I think this social dimension constitutes a vital part of Merleau-Ponty's thought also, but I will not explore that further in the present context.

[77] A similar appeal to McDowell's interpretation of Wittgenstein is made by Denis McManus in relation to Dreyfus' construal of Heidegger (see (McManus, 2007)).

need to search around, as Dreyfus does, for a solid foundation or background in which the regress would eventually bottom out. To do so would be to acknowledge the regress as posing a genuine threat, and to remain in some sense committed to the mistaken way of thinking that gave rise to it.

Dreyfus essentially accepts the representationalist's conception of representations, and he raises the sceptical worries surrounding the regress solely in order to undermine the representationalist's claims regarding the *ubiquity* of representational states.[78] In doing so, it would appear that Dreyfus implicitly buys into something like the master thesis, and this explains why he explicitly presents his own view as offering a direct answer to the sceptical questions that the threat of regress motivates: namely, "how are rules/representations/intentional states/minds *possible*?" His answer consists in appealing to a mode of engagement with the world in which rules/representations/intentional states/minds are simply *not involved*, and which serves as the necessary condition of the possibility of such 'upper story' modes of engagement. He is thus left with his idiosyncratic foundationalist or 'layer-cake' picture of the subject's relationship with the world. By contrast, the insight of Wittgenstein's remarks, at least on the reading that concerns me here, lies in showing how the sceptical questions 'should simply fall away' (McDowell, 1992: 47).

iv. Merleau-Ponty and the 'Master Thesis'

On my view, we can better appreciate the significance of Merleau-Ponty's study of perception by seeing it as entirely confluent with the approach found in Wittgenstein. The phenomenology of perception 'necessitates and makes possible a new analysis of the understanding' insofar as it discloses the way in which the perceiving subject's grasp of perceived things does not depend upon an act of judgement or interpretation. Rather than presenting us with an exceptional or remarkable species of meaning and understanding, perception offers a vital insight into the nature of meaning and understanding far more generally, and in doing so enables us to avoid falling into mistaken ways of thinking about these concepts.

The species of meaning and understanding that Merleau-Ponty articulates in perception need not be held in opposition to the notion of representation, or the 'upper stories' of consciousness, as Dreyfus insists. Rather, it facilitates a critique of a particular conception of representation that is assumed in Dreyfus' work – namely, that representations must involve a subsumption of a given content of consciousness under a form in a discursive act of judgement or interpretation. For Merleau-Ponty, the fundamentally *non-discursive* immanence of perceptual *sens* makes available an alternative conception of meaning and understanding at every level.[79]

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[78] It is worth noting how this engagement with representationalism thus mirrors Dreyfus' reading, addressed earlier, of Merleau-Ponty's critique of intellectualism, which would appear to accept the intellectualist's conception of the intellect, rejecting only its claims to ubiquity.

[79] (Matherne, 2014) frames such a reading of Merleau-Ponty in terms of the pronounced influence exerted by Cassirer's conception of representation, which was developed in Cassirer's own analysis of pathological cases in the third volume of *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Whilst I cannot pursue the relationship between Cassirer and Merleau-Ponty here, Matherne's interpretation certainly resonates with the reading that I advocate, as well as my critique of Dreyfus' reading. Importantly, it allows us to appreciate how the critical points Merleau-Ponty does make

We might, as (McManus, 2012) suggests, think of Dreyfus' reading as having a kind of transitory character, since he fails to properly appreciate or develop the broader significance Merleau-Ponty finds in the phenomenology of perception. As a result, Dreyfus never completely jettisons the mistakes such a phenomenology exposes, and this is reflected in the sharp, even antagonistic relationship he describes between the motor intentional understanding of perceptual *sens*, and 'rule-governed' or representational form of intellectual understanding.

The concept of motor intentionality is distorted when read through the lens of Dreyfus' idiosyncratic kind of foundationalism. Indeed, I want to suggest, rather, that Merleau-Ponty's deployment of this concept allows us to see why such foundationalism is unnecessary. What Merleau-Ponty's descriptions of motor intentionality and the correlate notion of 'bodily grip' provide is a direct subversion of the way of thinking about meaning and understanding that McDowell hones in on in his discussion of the master thesis. Merleau-Ponty offers a description of how the perceiving subject's grasp of perceptual *sens* is immediately reflected in and developed via a normatively structured engagement with perceptual phenomena. The normative dimension of understanding is present in the perceived world without being put there by an act of judgement or interpretation. In the case of perceptual *sens*, this normative dimension is a motor one insofar as the organization of perceptual phenomena is synonymous with a certain organization of the perceiving subject's motor possibilities. It is in this sense that Merleau-Ponty describes the body as 'the general instrument of my "understanding"' (*PhP*, 244/282) in regards to the perceived world.[80] On the reading I favour, then, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological disclosure of meaning and understanding in perception, by being incommensurate with what he considers to be the traditional ways of thinking about these concepts, and about perception itself, allows us to make the initial steps towards breaking with such ways of thinking altogether (i.e., the inadequate forms of 'reflection' that Merleau-Ponty critiques).

The normative dimension of meaning and understanding will undoubtedly vary with the kind of meaning involved – i.e., perceptual, linguistic, aesthetic, religious, symbolic, etc. – and as such will not necessarily involve the structuring of strictly *motor* possibilities – in the sense of possibilities for spatially extended bodily movements – that Merleau-Ponty sees as synonymous with the grasp of perceptual *sens*. Nonetheless, there seems to be very good reason to suppose that the overtly *practical* character of this normativity – its shaping of the individual's possibilities – carries over to meaning and understanding more generally. These may be possibilities for action, expression, emotion, or even thought, but what is continuous between such cases is the teleological or directional structure of meaning that Merleau-Ponty initially draws out of his phenomenological reflections on perceptual *sens*, and which has to do with what are, in a broad sense, *practical* possibilities over time.[81] Indeed, I consider Merleau-Ponty's work in the philosophy of language, which I shall attend to in the following chapter, to involve an

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against the concept of representation are continuous with his enthusiasm for Cassirer's non-traditional account of representational consciousness.

[80] I suggest that we understand the scare quotes here as serving to differentiate Merleau-Ponty's account of understanding in perception from the activity of the Kantian faculty of 'the understanding', and to avoid casting the instrumentality of the body as equivalent to the body as a mere object.

[81] Depending upon how strict we are with our definition of 'motor', we may well happily define the first two as species of motor possibilities.

exploration of precisely this aspect of *linguistic* meaning and understanding.[82] Of course, a further issue – and one that certainly occupied Merleau-Ponty – concerns the relationships that hold between these different kinds of meaning. As we saw in the previous chapter, Merleau-Ponty lays great emphasis on a description of the sensible world as the setting of the subject's projects. Perception itself must be understood as outstripping the purely 'motor', and as incorporating within itself the affective, ethical, and intellectual life of the subject.

The rather constricted phenomenology of object perception outlined in Sections 2.1 and 2.2 is best thought of as constituting a specific, regional study within a broader reflection on the nature of meaning and understanding. Whilst the case of perception undoubtedly bears its own particularities, it makes available philosophical insights that we can see Merleau-Ponty continuing to develop even as he turns his attention away from the study of perception *per se*. As Paul Ricoeur expresses it, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, 'perception appeared as the model of all human operations, with its play of significations that refer one to the other, without ever halting in an object, seen from nowhere and thoroughly known' (Ricoeur, 2009: 19). Merleau-Ponty's talk of the 'primacy of perception' therefore has two main senses, the first of which concerns the reciprocal development of meaning that occurs between perception and other modes of consciousness, and the second of which is methodological, with the study of perception helping to both formulate vital insights and 'define a method' (*PriP*, 25) for future investigations. We can hear each of these senses resonating in Merleau-Ponty's famous assertion that 'all consciousness is perceptual' (*PriP*, 13).

This picture of Merleau-Ponty's thinking certainly becomes more explicit and, I argue, inescapable, after the publication of *Phenomenology of Perception*. In the next chapter, however, I will consider how the more general thesis concerning meaning and understanding that emerges from Merleau-Ponty's analyses of the body and of perception, and which I consider definitive of his conception of operative intentionality, stands in tension with certain other aspects of *Phenomenology of Perception*.

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[82] This is a point that coheres with Joseph Rouse's work on the fundamentally practical nature of 'conceptually articulated understanding', which he develops via an engagement with Dreyfus' view (esp. (Rouse, 2013). It is also confluent with the reading of Merleau-Ponty pursued by J.C. Berendzen especially with regards to Merleau-Ponty's work on speech and language (Berendzen, 2010). I am certainly sympathetic with the argument Berendzen offers, although I am a little reticent to retain the Dreyfusian language of 'coping' to the extent that he does, given what I take to be the ultimately problematic way it is defined by Dreyfus himself. I will discuss Merleau-Ponty's account of speech and language at length in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

3.
Silence and Speech in *Phenomenology of Perception*: The Problem of the Tacit *Cogito*

In the previous two chapters, I have focused on drawing out what I take to be the broader philosophical significance of Merleau-Ponty's conception of operative intentionality as it is articulated in *Phenomenology of Perception*. In doing so, I have identified a more or less cohesive line of thought about meaning and understanding that emerges from Merleau-Ponty's interdependent analyses of agency and perception respectively. Unfortunately, however, *Phenomenology of Perception* is not a wholly univocal piece of work. The line of thought that we have been concerned with so far can be seen to stand in a peculiar kind of tension with certain other aspects of Merleau-Ponty's expansive magnum opus. The purpose of the present chapter will be to identify the nature and proper source of this tension. Ultimately, I will show that the problem lies with Merleau-Ponty's underdeveloped thinking about speech and expression at this early stage of his career.

It is perhaps only in Part III of the *Phenomenology* that the work's internal problems become fully conspicuous. In particular the first chapter of this division, entitled 'The *Cogito*', sees Merleau-Ponty articulating a relationship between perception and language that is deeply problematic. The chapter culminates in Merleau-Ponty's assertion of a 'silent' or 'tacit *Cogito*' that is directly contrasted with the 'spoken *Cogito*' we encounter in Descartes:

> Beyond the spoken *Cogito*, the one that is converted into utterances and into essential truth, there is clearly a tacit *Cogito*, an experience of myself by myself. But this indeclinable subjectivity has but a fleeting hold upon itself and upon the world.
>
> (*PhP*, 426/465)

The tacit *Cogito* is intended to refer to the form of self-consciousness involved in the 'non-thetic' engagement with the world that Merleau-Ponty has spent the majority of the preceding two parts of the *Phenomenology* elucidating via a study of the body, and of perception. In other words, it is the self-consciousness of operative intentionality. The spoken *Cogito*, on the other hand, captures the explicit consciousness of oneself in the mode of the 'I think'. This kind of self-consciousness operates at the level of 'thetic consciousness', or 'act intentionality' – 'the intentionality of our judgements and of our voluntary decisions' (*PhP*, lxxxii//18).

Crucially, the terms in which Merleau-Ponty formulates the tacit *Cogito* – in particular the contrast between 'silent' and 'spoken' – shows that he considers the distinction to hinge on the use of language. Put simply, thetic consciousness (and the explicit form of self-consciousness it involves) is facilitated by the acquisition and utilization of language, whilst the non-thetic mode of self-consciousness that constitutes the tacit *Cogito* is not mediated by linguistic significations. In contrast to the explicit self-

consciousness of the 'I think', the tacit *Cogito* refers to a kind of implicit reflexivity that Merleau-Ponty believes is revealed by his phenomenology of perception. It is because it involves this tacit kind of self-relation that the non-thetic engagement with the world in perception has the potential to be expressed in terms of the explicit 'I think' without itself being the product of such an act. Thetic acts articulate the content of non-thetic experiences by making use of the conceptual significations of language. Merleau-Ponty is thus seeking, in the *Cogito* chapter, to understand the relationship between operative intentionality and act intentionality as profoundly intertwined with the relationship that holds between perception and language.

Indeed, we can see Merleau-Ponty drawing directly from the discussion of speech he had already offered in Part I of the book as he goes about articulating the distinction between the tacit and the spoken *Cogito*. This influence is vital, since it is in the *Phenomenology*'s discussions of speech and expression that the seeds of the difficulties surrounding the notion of the tacit *Cogito* are first sown. This is to say that the tension that is present in the work as a whole, and which culminates with the formulation of the tacit *Cogito*, can be traced back to the account of speech. The aim of the present chapter is to demonstrate this. In Section 3.1, I will unpack the arguments of the '*Cogito*' chapter and offer an assessment of precisely what the tacit *Cogito* is supposed to be, before attending to the problems this concept raises for Merleau-Ponty's thought. In Section 3.2, I consider how the assertion of the tacit *Cogito* ultimately emerges from the discussion of speech and expression offered in the first part of the *Phenomenology*. Section 3.3 will then conclude by determining what is problematic in the account of speech and expression offered in *Phenomenology of Perception*.

Before doing this, however, it is worth noting Merleau-Ponty's later critique of certain aspects of *Phenomenology of Perception*, since they would appear to coincide with worries I shall be raising in what follows. In a working note of January 1959, Merleau-Ponty summarizes the reasoning behind his earlier assertion of the tacit *Cogito*, before resolutely rejecting it as 'impossible':

> The Cogito of Descartes (reflection) is an operation on significations, a statement of relations between them (and the significations themselves sedimented in acts of expression). It therefore presupposes a prereflective contact of self with self (non-thetic consciousness [of] self, Sartre) or a tacit cogito (being close by oneself) – this is how I reasoned in *Ph.P.*
>
> Is this correct? What I call the tacit cogito is impossible. To have the idea of "thinking" (in the sense of "the thought of seeing and of feeling"), to make the "reduction", to return to immanence and the consciousness of… it is necessary to have words. It is by the combination of words … that I *form* the transcendental attitude, that I *constitute* the constitutive consciousness.
>
> (*VI*, 171/222-3)

What the second paragraph shows is that it is a concern about the place of language in experience – as well as in the very enterprise of phenomenology itself – that forms the ground of Merleau-Ponty's rejection of his earlier account of the tacit *Cogito*. I shall attend to the positive developments instigated

in the late period work in Chapter 5. What I am hoping to demonstrate in this chapter involves the other side, as it were, of this self-critique: the role played by the *Phenomenology*'s approach to language in motivating the assertion of the tacit *Cogito*.

3.1 *What is the Tacit Cogito?*

i. The Critique of the Cartesian Cogito

A great deal of the '*Cogito*' chapter is confluent with Merleau-Ponty's concerted critique of what he considers a bifurcation of being in traditional philosophy, which we have noted in the preceding chapters. From the outset of the chapter, Merleau-Ponty is seeking to ascertain the true significance of the *Cogito*, which he believes has not been properly appreciated, even by Descartes himself. In particular, Merleau-Ponty criticizes an interpretation of the *Cogito* according to which the *Cogito* reveals the self as 'a being that recognizes itself immediately, because it is nothing other than self-knowledge and knowledge of all things' (*PhP*, 390/430). On this interpretation – seemingly Descartes' own, and further represented here by the work of the neo-Kantian, Pierre Lachièze-Rey – self-consciousness consists in a direct, unmediated, and indubitable coincidence with oneself, for oneself in the activity of thought. This coincidence is then taken to be the very essence of consciousness. As a consequence, the directedness of consciousness towards its objects – i.e., intentionality – is only possible insofar as it is at one and the same time coincidence with oneself, since otherwise it would not be consciousness at all. Consciousness thus comes to be thought of as a wholly immanent sphere in which all experience is fundamentally constituted by the activity of thought, and the possibility of being directly acquainted with any kind of transcendent reality is undermined. Understood in this way, claims Merleau-Ponty, the *Cogito* invariably leads philosophers to a kind of subjective idealism, for which the self is understood as an autonomous, 'constituting consciousness' that 'contracts into itself everything that it intends, an "I think" that would be an "I am" by itself and without any addition' (*PhP*, 390/430, citing Lachièze-Rey).

For Merleau-Ponty, this interpretation of the *Cogito* leads to insuperable difficulties, not least the impossibility of other selves. If consciousness were nothing other than an absolute coincidence with itself in self-consciousness, experience of other consciousnesses would be ruled out, since consciousness could only be experienced by itself, for itself. Other bodies could not be grasped as incarnating other consciousnesses, since my own consciousness would ultimately bear a merely contingent, external relation to my body. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, 'if I have no outside, then others have no inside' (*PhP* 391/431). The idealist position motivated by the *Cogito* is, he argues, fundamentally solipsistic, since 'constituting consciousness is, in principle, singular and universal' (*PhP*, 392/432). This position rests, in its interpretation of the *Cogito*, on a basic mistake about self-consciousness that phenomenology is equipped to expose and overcome.

Merleau-Ponty thus offers a phenomenological account of self-consciousness by which he intends to demonstrate the mythological character of a purely immanent or private sphere of consciousness whose contents are immediately given and indubitably certain. This demonstration proceeds via a study of the place of self-consciousness in three different forms of intentionality: perception, emotion, and 'pure' or wholly conceptual thought.[83] Whilst each of these necessarily involves a reflexive relation to oneself, it is not 'the absolute transparence of a thought that entirely possesses itself' (*PhP*, 392/432). Instead, we see that consciousness is only related to itself through the mediation of its intentional engagement in and with the world. As such, self-consciousness and consciousness of the world are internally related, with neither serving as the indubitable ground of the other. Thus, the true insight of the *Cogito* does not consist in the revelation of an 'inner man': an absolute immanence at the source of all experience, but rather the manner in which consciousness is always already involved or engaged in the world.[84] Grasping the truth of the *Cogito* involves recognizing 'the profound movement of transcendence that is my very being, the simultaneous contact with my being and with the being of the world' (*PhP*, 396/436).

There are certainly echoes here of Hume's skepticism towards the notion of 'a self' in the *Treatise*, where Hume is forced to admit, 'I never catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception' (*Treatise*, Book 1, Part 4, §6). For Merleau-Ponty, this thought comes coupled with a rejection of another that is commonly motivated by the *Cogito*, namely that one's consciousness of perceiving is of a different epistemic standing to the thing perceived, such that one must make a strict distinction between phenomenal appearances (which are entirely immanent to consciousness) and real things (which are entirely transcendent of consciousness). This kind of separation between the act of perceiving and the thing perceived is impossible, he argues, for one cannot speak of 'perceiving' in cases where there is no perceived thing to refer to.[85] Perception is only accomplished in reaching the perceived thing, and anything that falls short of this is therefore something other than perception.[86] Merleau-Ponty expresses this claim in terms of an identical 'existential modality' of perception and the perceived:

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[83] In the present discussion, I shall address only the first two of these cases (perception and affective life). Merleau-Ponty's discussion of wholly conceptual or 'pure' thinking revolves around the case of geometrical demonstrations. His central claim is that the ambiguity found in perception necessarily infects geometrical thought as well, since geometry is ultimately concerned with the world encountered in perception. He therefore rejects the notion that geometrical or mathematical thought is ever truly 'pure' or capable of delivering apodictic knowledge. Whilst this argument does engage with the Cartesian line of thought, it is of more immediate and greater relevance to the philosophy of geometry and mathematics than to the issues surrounding self-consciousness, perception, and language.

[84] Cf. Merleau-Ponty's explicit differentiation of himself, in the 'Preface', from St. Augustine: 'Truth does not merely "dwell" in the "inner man"; or rather, there is no "inner man," man is in and toward the world, and it is in the world that he knows himself' (*PhP*, lxxiv/11). A further, implicit target here is surely Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*, which concludes with a citation of St. Augustine as an expression of Husserl's own views as to the significance of Phenomenology (Husserl, trans. 1950: 157).

[85] We can appreciate how this claim is continuous with Merleau-Ponty's discussion of perceptual constants, and his refusal there to make a thoroughgoing distinction between 'mere' appearances and 'real' properties within perception.

[86] In this respect at least, Merleau-Ponty's epistemology would seem to have much in common with contemporary disjunctivist approaches to perception. This commonality is explored, particularly with regards to John McDowell's disjunctivism, in (Berendzen, 2013) and (Jensen, 2013).

Perception and the perceived necessarily have the same existential modality, since perception is inseparable from the consciousness that it has or rather that it is of reaching the thing seen. If I see an ashtray *in the full sense of the word "see,"* then there must be an ashtray over there, and I cannot repress this affirmation. To see is to see something.

(*PhP*, 393/433)

Uncertainty regarding the perceived thing simultaneously bears upon the experience itself, and the revelation of an illusory experience forces me to conclude that I did not *really* perceive at all. There is no greater certainty in the 'thought of' perceiving than there is in the perceived thing, and Merleau-Ponty thus rejects the claim that the thought that one is seeing is indubitable whilst the possibility of error, and thus doubt, enters in only with the subject's *interpretation* of a perception as the visual acquaintance with transcendent object. As far as Merleau-Ponty is concerned, an epistemic distinction between the act of perception and the perceived thing is untenable, since the very appearance of 'thought that one is seeing' must in some way resemble 'actual' (i.e., successful) instances of vision, which would acquaint one with real, visible things. The thought that one perceives is therefore only certain if actual perception is certain, and so the two are indissoluble. Perception thus involves no 'private sphere of consciousness' (*PhP*, 395/435), since its very actualization lies in one's going beyond any supposed sphere in grasping perceived things. The self-relation involved in perception cannot, then, be that of an immanent sphere of consciousness:

Vision must surely grasp itself – for if it did not, it would not be a vision of anything at all – but it must grasp itself in a sort of ambiguity and a sort of obscurity, since it does not possess itself and rather escapes itself into the thing seen.

(*PhP*, 395-6/435-6)

According to Merleau-Ponty, this 'ambiguous' or 'obscure' form of self-consciousness should not be considered an idiosyncrasy of perception as the presentation of objects that transcend consciousness. The notion of self-consciousness as an immediate coincidence with oneself cannot simply be reasserted in some other region of our experience. Even the most intimate and personal aspects of our lives, upon inspection, evade such a transparent and incorrigible kind of self-knowledge. Instead, we find the same kind of 'ambiguous' relation to oneself that is present in perception. To illustrate this, Merleau-Ponty appeals to an intuitive distinction between 'true' and 'false or illusory' feelings. What is crucial about this distinction is that it is always possible for me to live in a kind of ignorance of the true nature of my own feelings. For instance, Merleau-Ponty describes a 'false' love that, whilst I am held in its sway, is indiscernible from true love, and which I only gradually come to recognize and repudiate. This repudiation does not *make* my feelings illusory; it is the very discovery of them as such. What I discover is 'the place of the feeling in my overall being in the world' (*PhP*, 398/438) – the manner in which it colours my engagement with the world and others. There is thus an essentially *active* component of affective life that is not transparently given to consciousness due to the fact that it plays itself out *in the world* through my behaviour. That I can *discover* that I am in love is to say that this love is not a discrete

entity or content contained in an immanent and immediately known realm, but a moment of an affective situation that is lived through rather than known.[87] Affective intentionality thus involves the same kind of 'ambiguous' relation to oneself that perception exhibits, and it is impossible 'to place in advance at my core a self-knowledge that contains everything that I will later know about myself' (*PhP*, 400/440).

The true insight of the *Cogito* – i.e., self-consciousness – does not consist in an immediate coincidence with oneself, and self-knowledge is not a transparent and indubitable given. On this basis, Merleau-Ponty claims to find in the *Cogito* itself an avowedly non-Cartesian conception of subjectivity as 'a movement in which it transcends itself'; my existence is 'an act or a doing' (*PhP*, 401/441). The kind of self-consciousness that Descartes is concerned with, and which I can realize in my own acts of self-reflection, cannot provide the incorrigible foundation of all knowledge, since it is only a secondary phenomenon in which I come to an explicit or discursive awareness of myself as a being situated in and engaged with the world. Thus, it is only in this engagement, or 'the "doing"' (*le "faire"*), that the existence referred to by the *Cogito* is actually accomplished, and doubt assuaged:

> I can actualize the *Cogito* and have the assurance of really desiring, loving, or believing, given that I first actually desire, love, or believe and given that I accomplish my own existence. If I do not do so, an unassailable doubt spreads across the world, and also across my own thoughts. I will endlessly wonder if my "tastes," my "desires," my "wishes," and my "adventures" are truly my own, and they will always seem artificial, unreal, and flawed. … Thus, it is not *because* I think being that I am certain of existing, but rather the certainty that I have of my thoughts derives from their actual existence.
>
> (*PhP*, 401-2/441-2)

iii. The Tacit Cogito and the Body

It is with this thesis that the impetus lying behind Merleau-Ponty's assertion of the 'tacit' *Cogito*, beyond or beneath the merely 'spoken' *Cogito* of Descartes, emerges. The thought here seems to be that the actualization and recognition of the Cartesian *Cogito* is possible and has a sense for me only insofar as it is an expression or explicitation of the relationship I bear to myself in my perceptual, practical, and affective engagements with the world. Whilst the sense of Descartes' *Cogito* lies in its status as a determinate expression of this self-relation, such an expression can never be adequate. As the object of an act of linguistic expression, Descartes' *Cogito* cannot fully coincide with what it is attempting to express:

> I would not find any sense in them [Descartes' words], not even a derived and inauthentic one, and I could not even read Descartes' text, were I not – *prior to every speech* – in contact with my own life and my own thought, nor if the spoken *Cogito* did not encounter a tacit

[87] All the same, Merleau-Ponty is careful to avoid positing something like a Freudian 'unconsciousness' in order to explain the movement from self-ignorance to self-knowledge, asserting that such a notion involves the same 'retrospective illusion' as the Cartesian position: 'everything that I will later learn about myself is introduced into me as an explicit object' (*PhP*, 400/440).

Cogito within me. In writing his *Méditations*, Descartes was aiming at this silent *Cogito*, which animates and directs all of the expressive operations that, by definition, fail to reach their goal, since they interpose – between Descartes's existence and the knowledge that he gains of this existence – the entire thickness of cultural acquisitions.

(*PhP*, 424/463)

Merleau-Ponty thus believes there to be a vital distance between this 'silent' *Cogito* and the spoken *Cogito*, which consists in the fact that, in having read Descartes' words, 'I have only grasped my thought and my existence through the medium of language' (*PhP*, 422/462). The 'true' *Cogito* (*PhP*, 311), the one Descartes was 'aiming at', would appear to be fundamentally *non*-linguistic.

This immediately raises the question of how a non-linguistic, 'silent' *Cogito* could be a *Cogito* – i.e., a thinking of oneself – *at all*. Merleau-Ponty does concede this worry, admitting, somewhat paradoxically, that the tacit *Cogito* 'is only a *Cogito* when it has expressed itself' (*PhP*, 426/466). He thus concedes to expressive acts a vital role in facilitating the subject's explicit grasp of his own existence in thought. Nonetheless, such a grasp is conditioned by an non-thematized kind of self-awareness, and there thus remains the silent, 'primordial I' (*PhP*, 427/466), aware of itself beyond, and in spite of, the sedimented weight of 'cultural acquisitions' such as language. This partitioning of a 'primordial' or original self in opposition to the edifice of language echoes Merleau-Ponty's description, offered earlier in the text, of the body as 'a natural myself (*un moi naturel*) and, as it were, the subject of perception' (*PhP*, 213/249).[88] The body's perceptual and practical relation with the world certainly seems key to grasping the significance of the tacit *Cogito*. It also appears to bring home precisely why the concept is inherently problematic for Merleau-Ponty's overarching thought in *Phenomenology of Perception*.

Perhaps the most straightforward reading of the relation between the tacit *Cogito* and the body involves a simple identification: the tacit *Cogito is* the perceiving body by another name. More specifically, M.C. Dillon takes it to refer to the reflexivity intrinsic to the body as both the *subject* of perception and a possible *object* of perception. Dillon thus understands the 'genuine tacit *Cogito*' (Dillon, 1997: 105) to be synonymous with what Merleau-Ponty will subsequently refer to, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, as the 'reversibility of the flesh'. My feeling is that Dillon here reads the *Phenomenology* a little too much through the lens of Merleau-Ponty's later work. For one thing, reading the later concept of 'reversibility' into the tacit *Cogito* has the effect of making the changes and self-critique found in Merleau-Ponty's late writings appear to consist in a mere terminological difference, which I think masks the development of Merleau-Ponty's thought between *Phenomenology of Perception* and *The Visible and the Invisible*. Furthermore, the phenomenon of 'double touch' (i.e., the experience of one hand touching the other) from which the concept of reversibility receives much of its significance in *The Visible and the Invisible* is mentioned only once in *Phenomenology of Perception* (*PhP*, 95/122), and here only as one phenomenon amongst many that motivates a rejection of classical psychology.

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[88] Indeed, throughout Part II perception itself is variously described as a 'primordial contact with being' (*PhP*, 229/266), as 'primordial experience' or 'field' (*PhP*, 251-2/289), and as constituting a 'primordial arrangement in relation to the world' (*PhP*, 366-7/408).

Nonetheless, Dillon undoubtedly identifies a central aspect of what is meant in the talk of the tacit *Cogito*.[89] As Merleau-Ponty brings the '*Cogito*' chapter to a close, he begins to speak more directly about the central place of the body in the 'experience of myself by myself' that constitutes the tacit *Cogito*. It is through my body that I 'inhere' in the world, not simply as a physical object, but as a 'knowing-body' (*PhP*, 431/470) at grips with and open to the world in perception. Of course, it is this embodied engagement with the world in perception that Merleau-Ponty has dedicated himself to articulating in the first two parts of the *Phenomenology*. Of particular relevance here is the account of the 'body schema' and its simultaneous roles as both a pre-reflective awareness of one's own body *and* as the means by which the subject grasps the sense of perceptual phenomena and engages with the world in perception. Crucially, these two roles are internally related: it is precisely insofar as it 'gears into' (*PhP*, 260-3/297-300) perceptual phenomena that my body is unreflectively grasped as a 'system open to the world' (*PhP*, 526n115/179n1). Merleau-Ponty describes the philosophical significance of the body schema in the following way: 'not only is the unity of the body described in a new way, but also, through this, the unity of the senses and of the object' (*PhP*, 244/282). The body schema constitutes an experience of myself by myself, yet this tacit or operative self-relation cannot be abstracted from the world, since it is *mediated by* 'the thickness of the world' (*PhP*, 311/351) in perception. Merleau-Ponty expresses this reciprocal relationship between self-consciousness and the sensible world in the following way:

> The consciousness of the world is not *established* upon self-consciousness, but they are strictly contemporaries: there is a world for me because I am not unaware of myself; I am not concealed from myself because I have a world.
>
> (*PhP*, 311/351)

It is *perception*, then, that literally embodies Merleau-Ponty's tacit *Cogito*. It is perception that constitutes my 'ultimate subjectivity'[90] as a bodily 'project of the world' (*projet du monde*) (*PhP*, 427/466). It is thus perception, properly understood, that provides the 'silent' ground upon which the explicit self-consciousness arrived at in the 'I think' is made possible, but with which it cannot coincide. By the very end of the chapter Merleau-Ponty begins to make this connection explicit:

> My first perception, along with the horizons that surrounded it, is an ever-present event, an unforgettable tradition; even as a thinking subject I am still this first perception, I am the continuation of the same life that it inaugurated.
>
> (*PhP*, 429-30/468-9)

> If the subject is in a situation, or even if the subject is nothing other than a possibility of situations, this is because he only achieves his ipseity by actually being a body and by entering into the world through this body. If I find, while reflecting upon the essence of the body, that it is tied to the essence of the world, this is because my existence as subjectivity is identical with my existence as a body and with the existence of the world,

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[89] Dillon is therefore on stronger grounds than a reading according to which Merleau-Ponty is introducing a full-blown Cartesian subject by another name, as Douglas Low appears to do in (Low, 1987).

[90] I.e., a *self-conscious* existence, rather than the existence of a mere 'thing' that would be unaware of itself.

and because, ultimately, the subject that I am, understood concretely, is inseparable from this particular body and from this particular world.

<div align="right">(PhP, 431/470)</div>

iv. The Problem of the Tacit Cogito

We have already seen that Merleau-Ponty eventually came to criticize the reasoning that lay behind his assertion of the tacit *Cogito* in *Phenomenology of Perception*. I have also claimed that the assertion of the tacit *Cogito* marks the culmination of a tension that runs through the *Phenomenology* as a whole. Ultimately, the problem of the tacit *Cogito* stems from the kind of relationship it asserts between perception and language, and to see this we need to attend again to the passage on Descartes (*PhP*, 424/463):

> I would not find any sense in them [Descartes' words], not even a derived and inauthentic one, and I could not even read Descartes' text, were I not – *prior to every speech* – in contact with my own life and my own thought, nor if the spoken *Cogito* did not encounter a tacit *Cogito* within me. In writing his *Méditations*, Descartes was aiming at this silent *Cogito*, which animates and directs all of the expressive operations that, by definition, fail to reach their goal, since they interpose – between Descartes's existence and the knowledge that he gains of this existence – the entire thickness of cultural acquisitions.

<div align="right">(PhP, 424/463)</div>

In this passage, Merleau-Ponty clearly asserts the tacit *Cogito*'s status as a foundational stratum upon which the explicit self-consciousness of thetic acts is made possible. Indeed, he describes the tacit *Cogito* as animating and directing *all* 'expressive operations'. Now, as I have outlined above, the tacit *Cogito* is arrived at via Merleau-Ponty's rejection of the Cartesian thought, according to which consciousness necessarily involves a wholly immanent self-coincidence; a sphere of subjectivity that is held apart from a transcendent reality 'in itself'. With the notion of the tacit *Cogito*, Merleau-Ponty is referring to a self-relation that is realized only via the mediation of the world. It becomes clear that it is the perceiving body that realizes this self-relation that is simultaneously a transcendence of self. In this way, we can understand the above passage to be asserting that it is perception, understood as essentially *embodied*, that 'animates and directs all of the expressive operations'. In isolation, this assertion is not immediately problematic, and Merleau-Ponty certainly seems to maintain something like it until the very end of his life, as we shall see in the following chapters. Yet its formulation here, in terms of the tacit or silent *Cogito*, appears to be fundamentally misguided once we attend to its wider ramifications, and the internal tension it introduces into his thought.

Insofar as it subsists 'prior to every speech', the tacit *Cogito* is held apart from language, and from any and all expressions of it in words, whilst it is simultaneously identified as animating and directing these very acts. Crucially, such expressions are described as interposing 'the entire thickness of cultural acquisitions', and it is for this reason that such acts 'fail to reach their goal' – i.e., the silent life and world of the tacit *Cogito* that they are attempting to signify. What emerges here is a picture according to

which the tacit *Cogito* remains untouched by expression and language, since it subsists *prior to* any acts of speech, and is in some sense beneath or beyond the linguistic significations, or 'cultural acquisitions' that such acts utilize. This picture becomes clearer as we connect the tacit *Cogito* up with certain aspects of the *Phenomenology*'s account of the body and its place in perception in the manner I have suggested.

Most notably, as mentioned in Chapter 2, in several places Merleau-Ponty describes the body as leading an 'anonymous life that underpins my personal life' (*PhP*, 168/203); 'the given, general, and pre-personal existence in me of my sensory functions' (*PhP*, 345/387). In their original contexts, these descriptions are intended to emphasize the passivity of perception insofar as it is not a deliberate act of an absolute subjectivity or the outcome of a personal choice, without this passivity devolving into the causal receptivity of mere mechanism. For the same reason, Merleau-Ponty states that perception 'is always in the impersonal mode of the "One"' (*PhP*, 249/287) and that, if we are to 'express perceptual experience with precision', we ought not say 'I perceive', but 'that *one* perceives in me' (*PhP*, 223/260). The tacit *Cogito* refers to the bodily self-relation that is realized in this 'pre-personal' perceptual intentionality. It underpins the explicit mode of self-consciousness that is mediated by the use of language, and in which 'personal life' is led. This claim is difficult to countenance since, as Baldwin puts it:

> It is one thing to show that our embodied being in the world is a condition of the possibility of the thetic intentionality that comes with the use of language. … It is quite another to hold that there is a special kind of pre-personal self-consciousness that remains active beneath the chatter of our ordinary consciousness and uninformed by it.
>
> (Baldwin, 2011 ms.)

At issue here is not only the 'secondary status of language' (Hung, 2005: 219 citing Taminiaux) in relation to the silence of the tacit *Cogito*, but the secondary status of the *'personal'* experience of the world of which language, and the explicit form of self-consciousness it mediates, are central moments. With the tacit *Cogito*, Merleau-Ponty appears to be maintaining that the pre-personal body, as a 'natural subject', and the 'natural' world of things it finds around itself in perception, are a permanent, 'primordial' fixture beneath the cultural and personal world.[91] In my view, such a picture runs counter to some of the most important and enduring insights of the *Phenomenology* itself, including the discussion of intersubjectivity and interpersonal relations, and the account of freedom in the final chapter of the text, which itself ends with a quotation from Saint-Exupéry's *Pilote de Guerre* which emphasizes the central place of interpersonal relationships in the life and identity of the individual: 'man is a knot of relations, relations alone count for man' (*PhP*, 483/521, citing Saint-Exupéry). From the context, it is

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[91] At this point, one might think that Dreyfus' presentation of Merleau-Ponty begins to get some traction. There is certainly an analogous structure to the perception-language/natural-cultural relationship that emerges here and the foundationalism that Dreyfus advocates. The presence of this line of thought in the *Phenomenology* is on the whole problematic, however, and should not be taken to be the central thesis of the work. Merleau-Ponty's subsequent self-criticisms offer further support to this claim. As we explore Merleau-Ponty's thinking on this topic in greater detail, and especially its grounding in the *Phenomenology*'s discussion of speech and expression in Section 3.2, we will also see how it is far from being flatly synonymous with Dreyfus' presentation.

clear that the kinds of relations being referred to here outstrip any kind of purely 'natural' engagement with the world.

Most importantly, the thought behind the assertion of the tacit *Cogito* conflicts with the elucidation of operative intentionality arrived at via Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the case of Schneider. In attending to this discussion, as I did in chapter 1, we see operative intentionality portrayed as encapsulating the subject's situatedness in the world not merely as a 'natural' world of things, but as the backdrop of a 'human milieu', and of 'ideological' and 'moral' situations (*PhP*, 137/170). The status of the world as the setting of my life under these various different descriptions is not the outcome of a personal choice or deliberate act, although it will undoubtedly develop as a result of the experiences I have, the people I meet, and the various judgements and choices I make on a daily basis. In this sense, my situatedness is 'pre-personal'; it is a feature of my facticity, and of my being-in the-world. Yet it is as a decidedly human and 'personal' subject – a subject of ideology and of morality, for example – that I am engaged with the world under such descriptions, and these facets of my life are inescapably intertwined with the consciousness I have of myself through language and in reflective or deliberative thought. Thus, operative intentionality itself must outstrip the 'primordial', non-linguistic self-consciousness that is intended by the assertion of the tacit *Cogito*, and 'cultural acquisitions' must be acknowledged as inaugurating a transformation or sublimation of not only the *subject* of experience, but also the world he perceives and acts within. This would not be identical to the 'thetic' consciousness of oneself as a discrete object of thought that the Cartesian *Cogito* instantiates, but it could not be abstracted from the possession of language and the capacity for explicit self-reflection that such an act requires.

Thinking along these lines, it looks as if the relationship between the anonymous, unreflective life of the perceiving body, and the personal life of self-reflective acts that is facilitated by the possession and use of language cannot be prized apart from one another, yet the notion of the tacit *Cogito* seems to institute just such a separation. In this way, two distinct lines of thought come to the surface in *Phenomenology of Perception*, pulling the work in contrary directions. On the one hand, Merleau-Ponty appears to allow for a dialectical relationship between perception and language insofar as the possession and development of cultural acquisitions such as language involves a transformation, or sublimation of a pre-linguistic engagement with the world and with others.[92] Yet on the other hand, he seems to assert a kind of constitutive foundationalism, according to which the perceiving subject and the perceived world remain uninformed by cultural acquisitions and the acts they facilitate. On this view perception 'appears as a distinct layer, correlative to a body that is the subject of behaviour' (Barbaras, trans. 2004: 47); a 'primordial' stratum upon which the significations of the cultural world are overlaid. The assertion of the tacit *Cogito* offers the clearest formulation of this line of thought, placing it at odds with some of the most central, and philosophically fruitful elements of the *Phenomenology* itself.

Ultimately, this line of thought supports a foundationalism of *meaning*, according to which perceptual *sens* is the fundamental and self-sufficient condition of all linguistic significations. Crucially, perceptual

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[92] This would involve the kind of Gestalt or structural transformation of sense we find within perception itself, such as in the introduction of the auxiliary lines in Zöllner's illusion (see p. 43-4, above). The introduction of new relations alters the meaning of every constituent part.

intentionality appears to unfold independently of the cultural acquisitions of language, and the silent self-relation of the tacit *Cogito* is unaltered by the 'expressive operations' it conditions. Merleau-Ponty thus avoids positing the certainty of a Cartesian *Cogito* as the immutable foundation of all knowledge at the cost of positing perceptual intentionality as the self-sufficient foundation of all expression, and of all language. With the assertion of the tacit *Cogito,* then, Merleau-Ponty dissociates a 'silent' world of perception from the 'spoken' world that is constituted by linguistic significations.

The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to demonstrating how this foundationalism in fact originates in the *Phenomenology*'s account of speech, contained in Part I, chapter 6: 'The Body as Expression, and Speech'. From the outset, we can see that this chapter shares a quite specific aim with the 'The *Cogito*' chapter insofar as it seeks to renounce the Cartesian conception of *thought* as the 'pure' activity of a wholly immanent subjectivity; a subjectivity that could be abstracted from the world and from the material instruments by which it relates to it. It is in this sense that Merleau-Ponty introduces chapter 6 with the bold assertion that an accurate description of speech will present 'the opportunity to leave behind, once and for all, the classical subject-object dichotomy' (*PhP*, 179/213). In attending to expression, Merleau-Ponty's ultimate goal is to disclose the way in which the activity of thought cannot be understood as subsisting independently from the performance of expressive acts, and in particular, the act of speech. Rather than simply translating and communicating pre-existing or 'ready-made' thoughts, speech plays a vital role in originally constituting, or 'accomplishing' thought, and 'the expressivity of the inner life is already that of language' (Hung, 2005: 219).

This thesis remains at the centre of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical outlook for the remainder of his life, although the manner in which it is accommodated in his work undergoes a good deal of development. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty attempts to accommodate it in terms of what I shall refer to as the 'gestural account' of speech. According to the gestural account, the sense of speech acts is fundamentally continuous with the sense of silent bodily gestures. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty goes so far as to assert that the spoken word itself '*is* a gesture' (*PhP*, 190/224, my emphasis). As a form of expressive gesture speech is an essentially bodily activity. Since it is through speech that thought is originally 'accomplished', the gestural account identifies the body and its unreflective engagement with the world as the fundamental condition of thought itself, and in doing so categorically renounces the possibility of holding the activity of thought apart from the body and from the world.

Merleau-Ponty thus formulates the gestural account of speech as the means by which he might 'leave behind, once and for all, the classical subject-object dichotomy'. However, it is his initial formulation of the gestural account in the *Phenomenology* that inaugurates the problematic kind of constitutive foundationalism that culminates in the assertion of the tacit *Cogito*. This is ultimately due to the manner in which the gestural account motivates a sharp, polarized distinction between, on the one hand, the sense of truly expressive or creative acts of speech and, on the other hand, the determinate conceptual significations of constituted language. It is this distinction that gives rise to a sharp division between perception and language.

3.2 *The Gestural Account of Speech in* Phenomenology of Perception

i. A 'Return to the Phenomenon of Speech'

As is the case throughout *Phenomenology of Perception*, 'The Body as Expression, and Speech' sees Merleau-Ponty attempt to steer a course between the equally undesirable poles of 'empiricism' and 'intellectualism'. In this instance, Merleau-Ponty's diagnosis is that the empiricist and the intellectualist in fact commit the same fundamental error in their theorizing about linguistic expression and understanding: the omission of the *speaking* subject. As Merleau-Ponty sees it, an empiricist account of speech is one that recognizes, rightly, that speech acts arise in the interaction between humans and their surroundings, although it seeks to account for this interaction in terms of efficient causation, either at the level of physiology or in terms of a causally determinate psychology. The perspective of a subject of speech who grasps a meaning in his words and those of others is therefore abstracted out of the empiricist picture from the outset, and in attempting to understand speech acts as the outcome of physiological or psychological laws, empiricism effectively divorces meaning from speech, since it describes speech as taking place 'in a circuit of third person phenomena' (*PhP*, 180/214). Speech is not, strictly speaking, any kind of *action*, since 'it does not manifest the inner possibilities of the subject' (*PhP,* 180/214). For empiricism, the utterance of a word is to be understood as 'merely an articulatory, sonorous phenomenon' (*PhP*, 182/216).

Prima facie, the intellectualist approach to speech presents itself as a remedy to the shortcomings of empiricism insofar as it seeks to return meaning to our use of words. An intellectualist account of speech, as Merleau-Ponty describes it, holds that meaning is bestowed or invested into words by the categorial operations of a subject who transcends language. Speech acts are therefore only an external and contingent clothing for the operations of a thinking activity that can continue without words or, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, for the intellectualist '[t]hought has a sense and the word remains an empty envelope' (*PhP*, 182/216). The intellectualist approach, whilst apparently remedying the empiricist's omission of the subject from speech, coincides with empiricism insofar as words are taken to be essentially devoid of sense when considered in themselves (i.e., apart from the self-sufficient thinking that invests words with sense in acts of speech). For Merleau-Ponty, this is due to the fact that the subject invoked by intellectualism is 'the thinking subject, not the speaking subject' (*PhP*, 182/216), which is to say that the intellectualist in actual fact repeats the folly of empiricism by omitting the proper subject of speech: the speaking subject. The mistake corresponds to the Cartesian interpretation of the *Cogito* in terms of a wholly subjective and self-sufficient sphere of consciousness that exists quite apart from the world or the body. In this sense, the 'thinking subject' of the

intellectualist is mythological as far as Merleau-Ponty is concerned, even as a conception of the agent of thought itself.

In order to demonstrate that the proper subject of speech is overlooked by empiricism and intellectualism alike, Merleau-Ponty proposes a 'return to the phenomenon of speech' (*PhP*, 185/218) – i.e., a *phenomenological* account of speech. Such a return will make possible two interdependent observations: i. that there is a meaning *immanent* to words, and ii. that thought is internally related to its expression in language. I will unpack each of these in turn.

The experience of communicating with and understanding the speech of others provides definitive support for 'the simple observation that *the word has a sense*' (*PhP*, 182/216). In acts of linguistic expression, others are capable of communicating meaning to me, and vice versa. For both empiricism and intellectualism, this experience of understanding others' words as meaningful would be illusory, since they each reject from the outset the idea that words carry any kind of sense or meaning in themselves. Empiricism reduces talk of meaning to talk of causally determined processes (effectively purging meaning from the experience of speech) whilst intellectualism, despite rejecting such a reduction, sees the meaning of words as externally bestowed upon them by the activity of a thinking subject. The word 'is again stripped of any efficacy of its own' (*PhP*, 182/216), and as a consequence, the intellectualist must maintain that in understanding another's words I only ever encounter a sense installed in them by my own interpretative act of thought. A genuine *transmission* or *communication* of meaning from one subject to another through words is thus impossible, as 'consciousness can only find in its experience what it had itself put there' (*PhP*, 184/218). Since such communication is a phenomenological fact, our account of speech, if it is to be phenomenologically plausible, must begin by acknowledging that words carry a sense that is not bestowed upon them from above, but is instead *woven in and by the use of words* in linguistic expression. The other's words have a sense for me that I did not give to them, but which is 'induced' by the way in which the other utilizes them in communicating with me (*PhP*, 184/219).

For Merleau-Ponty, this recognition of a sense that is *immanent* to words facilitates a further observation concerning speech, which is that there is a fundamental interdependence of thought and speech, idea and expression. Linguistic expression does not involve, as intellectualism maintains, the translation into words of a self-sufficient thinking that transcends language. Instead, we must acknowledge how the constitution of an immanent sense in acts of speech is *synonymous* with the activity of thought itself. In the experience of expression, he argues, we find that speech conditions not merely the external transmission of thought, but its very constitution:

> If speech presupposed thought … then we could not understand why thought tends toward expression as if toward its completion, why the most familiar object appears indeterminate so long as we have not remembered its name, and why the thinking subject himself is in a sort of ignorance of his thoughts so long as he has not formulated them for himself, or even spoken or written them down
>
> (*PhP*, 182-3/216)

It is in bringing it to expression that 'speech accomplishes thought' (*PhP*, 183/217), and my grasping of a sense in another's words enables me to 'receive' his thought 'from the speech itself' (*PhP*, 184/218). The experience of genuine communication is thus legitimated by the phenomenological recognition of 'a *thought in the speech* of which intellectualism is wholly unaware' (*PhP*, 185/219). Intellectualism fails to see that thought itself must be counted amongst 'the phenomena of expression' (*PhP*, 196/231) – it could not exist without its manifestation in words, just as painting cannot exist without colour, nor music without sound.

ii. Language and Expression

We can see here how the discussion of speech coincides in a significant way with Merleau-Ponty's rejection of the Cartesian conception of self-consciousness. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty revisits his discussion of speech in the 'The *Cogito*' chapter itself in order to definitively reject the idea that one's own thoughts constitute an incorrigible sphere of absolute self-knowledge. Such a view rests upon a conception of thought as in a certain sense 'pure' – i.e., as subsisting quite apart from its formulation and communication in acts of expression. Attending to our actual experience of expression and speech, however, we observe that thought is in fact originally realized in the expressive activity of speech. This fundamentally *creative* accomplishment makes my thought explicit as much *to myself* as to others who understand me, allowing Merleau-Ponty to declare once more that self-knowledge is achieved only through a kind of self-transcendence:

> the act of expression must allow even the subject himself to transcend what he had previously thought, and he must find in his own words more than he thought he had put there, otherwise we would never see thought, even when isolated, seek out expression with such perseverance
>
> (*PhP*, 408/449)

> speech itself *establishes* the concordance of myself with myself and of myself with others, upon which the attempt was made to ground speech.
>
> (*PhP*, 412/452)

Thus, for Merleau-Ponty, a 'return to the phenomenon of speech' makes available a resolute rejection of the idea of a 'transcendent thought behind language' (*PhP*, 412/452). Such an idea seems philosophically plausible only when we overlook the fundamentally creative dimension of speech as an act in which thought is first constituted, rather than merely translated. The failures of empiricist and intellectualist accounts of speech each derive from a kind of ignorance or forgetfulness of this creative role of speech in favour of its ultimate achievements – the already constituted language, thoughts, and ideal objects that make up a linguistic community's cultural and intellectual heritage: its 'cultural world'. For empiricism, the determination of natural languages as objects of science – the codification of

determinate lexicons in dictionaries and formal grammatical rules – helps provide a means of explaining speech acts as the output of a law-governed psycho-physiological process. On the other hand, intellectualism begins from the already constituted thoughts or ideas, which appear to come apart from any particular linguistic instantiations and to retreat into the 'inner' realm of the mind. Intellectualism thus arrives at the notion of a 'pure' 'thought without speech' (*PhP*, 196/231) that is responsible for, yet independent of, its external expression and the material instruments by which such expression is achieved. The activity of *thinking*, which is in fact accomplished in acts of expression, is overlooked in favour of the thoughts or ideas that were originally constituted by the creative activity of speaking subjects, and which subsequently became available as the contents of subsequent reflective or recollective acts. Merleau-Ponty highlights this mistake in the following passage:

> Thought is nothing "inner," nor does it exist outside the world and outside of words. What tricks us here, what makes us believe in a thought that could exist for itself prior to expression, are the already constituted and already expressed thoughts that we can silently recall to ourselves and by which we give ourselves the illusion of an inner life. But in fact, this supposed silence is buzzing with words – this inner life is an inner language.
>
> (*PhP*, 188-9/223)

Merleau-Ponty is thus led to draw an important distinction between *thought* or *thinking* as a fundamentally expressive activity and the 'constituted' and 'expressed' *thoughts* or *ideas* that are the ultimate achievement of this activity. This distinction certainly muddies the waters somewhat with respect to Dreyfus' presentation of Merleau-Ponty's thought. We can see how the line of thought that culminates with the assertion of the tacit *Cogito* cannot be equated with the brand of foundationalism in the philosophy of mind espoused by Dreyfus. For Dreyfus, the activity of thought is wholly distinct from the foundational stratum of 'coping', and instead unfolds at the 'upper stories' of consciousness. In his effort to identify thinking with the expressive activity of speech, Merleau-Ponty refuses to identify the distinction that Dreyfus wants to insist upon between nonrational bodily coping and the wholly intellectual capacity of thought. As I argued in Chapter 2, what we in fact find here is an attempt by Merleau-Ponty to make available a conception of thought and of Dreyfus' 'upper stories' that is not provided in the tradition.

Corresponding to the distinction between *thinking* and *thoughts*, Merleau-Ponty differentiates between the determinate 'conceptual significations' of constituted language, and the 'existential' or 'gestural signification' that is immanent to those acts of linguistic expression in which thought is accomplished. In the experience of expression and communication, in which I first formulate my thoughts for myself or 'receive' those of others, I do not relate to words as mere signs that I must reflectively interpret in terms of the determinate significations that they commonly stand for. Instead, I find that 'the sense of words must ultimately be induced by the words themselves, or more precisely their conceptual signification must be formed by drawing from a *gestural signification*, which itself is immanent in speech' (*PhP*, 184/219). The expressive activity in which thought is originally accomplished unfolds according

to a kind of meaning that is other than the determinate significations of constituted language, such as one might find them in a dictionary and which appear to stand apart from the particular words correlated with them. As Merleau-Ponty describes it:

> speech or words carry a primary layer of signification that adheres to them and that gives the thought as a style, as an affective value, or as an existential mimicry, rather than as a conceptual statement. We discover here, beneath the conceptual signification of words, an existential signification that is not simply translated by them, but that inhabits them and is inseparable from them.
>
> <div align="right">(PhP, 188/222)</div>

iii. Speech as Gesture

Merleau-Ponty christens this unreflective kind of signification 'gestural' because he considers it to be continuous with the manner in which silent gestures manage to express a sense that is immanent to a movement of the body. In perceiving the silent gestures of bodies like my own, it is not necessary that I reflectively constitute or discover a sense 'behind' their movements. It is not because I bring to bear, in an analogizing act, my own experiences of performing similar gestures, and the intentions that lay behind them, that the other's movement has meaning for me. Instead, I am capable of perceiving the sense of their gesture as immediately present before me. For example, the red face, the tensed brow, the clenched fist, 'does not *make me think* of anger, it is the anger itself' (*PhP*, 190/225). Vitally, it is as an incarnate being, or body-subject that I am capable of immediately grasping the sense of the other's gestures in this way, without recourse to an act of interpretation. The pre-reflective awareness I have of my body as a practical system of possible movements in the body schema is mirrored in the experience of another body like my own. My possibilities are reflected back to me by my perception of the other's movements, and in this reflection I grasp the sense in the other's gesture by 'taking it up' in my own body. In perceiving another's gestures, their movement is grasped as a correlate of my own body or, to put it another way, their actuality is recognized as my own possibility. This thought is most concisely expressed in the following passage:

> Communication or the understanding of gestures is achieved through the reciprocity between my intentions and the other person's gestures, and between my gestures and the intentions which can be read in the other person's behaviour. Everything happens as if the other person's intentions inhabited my body, or as if my intentions inhabited his body.
>
> <div align="right">(PhP, 190-1/225)</div>

This bodily grasping of a sense in the comprehension of another's gestures is clearly continuous with the more general account of perceptual *sens* that was my focus in chapter 2. Merleau-Ponty himself acknowledges this continuity by affirming that 'I understand the other person through my body, just as I perceive "things" through my body' (*PhP*, 191-2/226). He also notes how the understanding of

gestural sense, as with perceptual *sens* more generally, is not arrived at via a reflective interpretation of the spectacle, but in 'a sort of blind recognition that precedes the definition or intellectual elaboration of the sense' (*PhP*, 192/227).

With the assertion of a 'gestural signification' that is immanent to speech Merleau-Ponty seeks to account for linguistic expression and communication as thoroughly continuous with the comprehension of silent gestures. Beyond simply recognizing how speech, like the gesture, 'sketches out its own sense' (*PhP*, 192/226), Merleau-Ponty argues that linguistic expression itself *is* a gesture, and that it is therefore an essentially embodied act. It is the body, as a 'natural power of expression' (*PhP*, 187/221), that either grasps or accomplishes a 'thought in speech' by virtue of 'taking up' a sense that is immanent to words as they are utilized in speech acts. Just as the other's anger is not 'behind' its gestural expression, thought is not discovered 'behind' its expression in words, and the gestural signification grasped in speech is the very 'presence of this thought in the sensible world' (*PhP*, 187/222). Crucially, this process is presented as taking place 'beneath' the conceptual significations of constituted language. Indeed, such significations are themselves conditioned by the immanent sense of linguistic gestures, since they must be formed by 'drawing from' this primary, gestural signification. In this way, Merleau-Ponty takes himself to be providing a corrective to the intellectualist's original error by which the significations of language are taken to be abstractable from their material means of expression.[93]

iv. Speaking Speech and Spoken Speech

All of this leads Merleau-Ponty to place a strong emphasis on truly creative uses of language in which novel thought is originally formulated, in contrast to the repetition or reiteration of 'already constituted and already expressed thoughts', in which the received conceptual significations of words are given priority. By the end of the chapter, he captures this contrast in terms of a fundamental distinction between 'a *speaking speech* and a *spoken speech*' (*PhP*, 202/238). Speaking speech (*parole parlante*) is the act of an individual who brings an aspect of himself or his world to expression for the first time. It is an activity that is truly constitutive of thought. It is this that a return to the phenomenon of speech forces us to acknowledge, and to which the gestural account is intended to apply, since it is in speaking speech that thought is originally given as a 'style' rather than as a conceptual statement. On the other hand, to engage in spoken speech (*parole parlée*) is to stick to the already constituted, conventional significations of one's language. It is therefore not to 'think for oneself', as it were, in as much as thought is to be identified, for Merleau-Ponty, with the effort of creative linguistic expression. Rather, spoken speech evokes the 'already expressed thoughts' achieved by past acts of speaking speech. We are, claims

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[93] We can also appreciate how the gestural account begins to apply the general thesis concerning meaning and understanding that was arrived at in the study of perceptual *sens* in the philosophy of language. There is a meaning and understanding of words that is not the outcome of an act of interpretation or judgement. This is the most vital insight of the gestural account of speech, and one that we can see Merleau-Ponty seeking to accommodate as he develops his thinking about language and expression after *Phenomenology of Perception*.

Merleau-Ponty, often misled by this 'already instituted' speech, and as a result are blind to the original condition of its possibility:

> We live in a world where speech is already *instituted*. We possess in ourselves already formed significations for all of these banal words. They only give rise in us to second-order thoughts, which are in turn translated into other words that require no genuine effort of expression from us, and that will demand no effort of comprehension from our listeners. The linguistic and intersubjective world no longer causes us any wonder, we no longer distinguish it from the world itself, and we reflect within a world already spoken and speaking.
>
> (*PhP*, 189/224)

Merleau-Ponty often illustrates the distinction by way of some favoured examples of speaking speech. These include 'the child who learns to speak', 'the writer' or novelist (*PhP*, 189/224), 'the lover who discovers his emotion', '"the first man who spoke"' and 'the philosopher' who is described, in a particularly Husserlian tone, as awakening 'a primordial experience beneath traditions' (*PhP*, 530n7/218n1). The essential commonality between these otherwise heterogeneous cases is that they each involve the transformation of 'a certain silence into speech' (*PhP*, 189/224), in contrast to instances of spoken speech, which simply recycle already instituted acts of speech. On the gestural account, then, speaking speech is that bodily gesture – of which philosophers are too often ignorant – which brings a previously silent aspect of experience to expression for the first time. For Merleau-Ponty, the recognition of this expressive activity is vital:

> Our view of man will remain superficial so long as we do not return to this origin, so long as we do not rediscover the primordial silence beneath the noise of words, and so long as we do not describe the gesture that breaks this silence.
>
> (*PhP*, 190/224)

We can think, as Baldwin does, of the relationship between speaking speech and spoken speech in terms of dependency (Baldwin, 2007). There is an absolute dependency of spoken speech upon the creative endeavours of speaking speech. It is successful acts of speaking speech that originally institute the significations that are utilized in spoken speech – i.e. the determinate 'conceptual' significations of constituted language. Merleau-Ponty describes this relationship in terms of the Husserlian notion of 'sedimentation'. 'Authentic' acts of speech (i.e. speaking speech), in being understood and taken up by other members of a linguistic community, gradually come to shape the overarching system of language. The cultural edifice of language is thus nothing more than the historically formed and continually developing 'depository' of acts of speaking speech (*PhP*, 202/238):

> the act of expression constitutes a linguistic and cultural world, it makes that which stretched beyond fall back into being. This results in spoken speech, which enjoys the use of available significations like that of an acquired fortune. From these acquisitions,

other authentic acts of expression – those of the writer, the artist, and the philosopher – become possible.

<div align="right">(PhP, 203/239)</div>

3.3 *The Silent and the Spoken*

i. Speaking Speech and the Tacit Cogito

We are now in a position to connect up the *Phenomenology*'s account of speech with the assertion of the tacit *Cogito*, and with the difficulties discussed in Section 3.2. Firstly, we can see how the idea of the tacit *Cogito* is continuous with the identification of speaking speech as a bodily gesture. It is the body that actualizes every expressive intention, and in doing so accomplishes thought. The body is thus responsible for breaking the 'primordial silence' of its world and its life by bringing some aspect of it to expression for the first time. It is this silence that resurfaces in Merleau-Ponty's later description of the tacit *Cogito* as a 'silent *Cogito*' or 'primordial I'; an unreflective 'contact' with oneself that holds '*prior to every speech*'. In Section 3.1, I concluded that this self-relation is realized in the body's engagement with the world in perception, and we can now see how this coincides with the place Merleau-Ponty accords the body in speaking speech, since it is the silent *Cogito* 'which animates and directs all of the expressive operations'. Indeed, this point is explicitly reiterated in the 'The *Cogito*' chapter itself:

> Our body, insofar as it is inseparable from a perspective and is this very perspective brought into existence, is the condition of … all of the expressive operations and of all of the acquisitions that constitute the cultural world
>
> <div align="right">(PhP, 408/448)</div>

The concept of speaking speech, and its contrast with spoken speech, also sheds further light upon Merleau-Ponty's distinction between the tacit *Cogito* and the merely 'spoken' *Cogito* he finds in Descartes' *Meditations*. Merleau-Ponty argues that the thought encountered in reading Descartes is 'myself as an idea that is not, strictly speaking, my own', and this is because 'I have only grasped my existence through the medium of language' (*PhP*, 422/462). The Cartesian *Cogito* is 'spoken', then, since Descartes articulates it by means of already acquired significations of constituted language. For the same reason, it will always 'fail to reach its goal' insofar as it is the creative endeavor of *speaking speech* that is truly synonymous with the activity of thinking. Speaking speech is not determined by the conceptual significations of language, since it is the original condition of their very possibility. I cannot, therefore, by means of these already constituted significations, meet up with myself in the act of thinking, because to think is to engage in genuinely creative expression precisely by interrupting or destroying the established significations of language. Hence, in leading up to the assertion of the tacit *Cogito*, we find Merleau-Ponty explicitly reiterating his earlier account of a '*thought in speech*' that is accomplished in creative expression:

We are called to uncover beneath [the] thought which basks in its acquisitions and [which] is merely a stopping point in the indefinite process of expression, a thought that attempts to establish itself and that only does so by bending the resources of constituted language to a new usage.

<div align="right">(PhP, 409/450, edited translation)</div>

For Merleau-Ponty, the contrast between the tacit *Cogito* and Descartes' *Cogito* serves as an invitation to 'pass from the idea to the practice of the *Cogito*' (*PhP*, 423/463) – i.e., from the spoken to the *speaking Cogito*. It is this transition that is prefigured in his earlier emphasis on the activity of speaking speech as the ultimate ground of the constituted significations of language. This activity is precisely not that of a 'second-order' thought that is wholly governed by acquired significations. Despite Descartes' efforts, this original activity of thinking 'cannot be thought and must rather be revealed' (*PhP*, 426/466) – i.e., thinking cannot be identified with an *object* of thought. It is just such a revelation that Merleau-Ponty sees the phenomenological disclosure of speech and expression as having achieved. With the gestural account, Merleau-Ponty establishes that the body serves as a kind of hinge or pivot between the silent, 'primordial' world of perception and the acquired or spoken world reckoned with via constituted language, since 'it is the body that shows, that speaks' (*PhP*, 203/239). The body is thus the primary condition of thought and of the spoken *Cogito*, and the 'contact' with oneself that defines the tacit *Cogito* is realized in the body's practical-perceptual engagement with the world.

ii. The Proper Problem

We can see, then, how the assertion of the tacit *Cogito* is the culmination of a line of thought that is already operative in the gestural account of speech. Merleau-Ponty's overarching aim here coincides with the *Phenomenology* as a whole in its effort to liberate philosophy from 'the classical subject-object dichotomy'. The study of speech, expression, and self-consciousness constitutes a particularly significant region of this project, however, since it allows Merleau-Ponty to directly renounce the intellectualist, Cartesian conception of thought and the thinking subject. By placing the expressive dimension of the body at the center of this renunciation, Merleau-Ponty hopes to consolidate his study of speech and expression with his more general phenomenological elucidation of operative intentionality or 'being-in-the-world'. This is apparent in the following passage, in which Merleau-Ponty explicitly describes the subject of the tacit *Cogito*:

This subjectivity does not constitute the world, it catches a glimpse of the world around itself, like a field that it has not given to itself; it does not constitute the word, it speaks in the manner that one sings when one is joyful; nor does it constitute the sense of the word, for this sense springs forth for subjectivity in its commerce with the world and with the others who inhabit it

<div align="right">(PhP, 426/465)</div>

Yet it is with this disclosure of a 'consciousness that conditions language' (*PhP*, 426/465) which, as we have seen, originates with the gestural account of speech, that problems arise for Merleau-Ponty's thought. As I outlined in Section 3.1, this becomes most acute with the assertion of the tacit *Cogito*, although we are now in a position to appreciate how the *Phenomenology*'s account of speech and expression is the true source of these problems.

The crux of the matter here is the relationship Merleau-Ponty takes to hold between speaking speech and constituted language, which is constitutive of the already 'spoken' thoughts or ideas. One way to think of the problem here is offered by Thomas Baldwin. Baldwin suggests that, in claiming that language is nothing but the 'depository' of acts of speech, it looks as if Merleau-Ponty simply reintroduces a 'new version' (Baldwin, 2007: 93) of the subject-object dualism that he is explicitly attempting to overcome. As Baldwin explains, the dualism arises insofar as the expressive activity of the body in speaking speech is cast as the ultimate condition of linguistic significations. Conversely, this creative upsurge of speaking speech only appears to depend upon constituted language to the extent that it responds to a shortcoming or failure of the existing language to adequately capture some aspect of the world or of their life. The 'spoken', determinate significations of constituted language are presented 'either as the sediment formed from the transformation of a creative speaking gesture into an established rule or as material to be 'destroyed' in the course of some new creative transcendence' (Baldwin, 2007: 94). Thus, in one direction – from spoken to speaking – there is a relationship of total dependence that is not reciprocated in the other direction, and the contrast devolves into a sharp distinction between a wholly subjective act and the product it serves to constitute.

For reasons outlined in Section 3.1, this dualism bears profound consequences for the outlook of *Phenomenology of Perception* as a whole. The explicit, conceptual representation and understanding of the world and of oneself that proceeds via the mediation of constituted language – i.e., the 'spoken' world – is held at a distance from the perceived world, which originally motivates acts of 'authentic' expression and thus determines their sense. The latter is a 'silent' world insofar as it evades the conceptual significations of constituted language. As Renaud Barbaras puts the problem, the spoken world – the 'intelligible' world of ideality and of objective truth – takes on the appearance of 'a specific world being superimposed on the perceptual world' (Barbaras, trans. 2004: 44). As I noted above, with the gestural account, it is the body, as the agent of speaking speech, that is to act as the hinge between these two worlds. Yet the immanent, 'gestural' signification that Merleau-Ponty emphasizes here, in its continuity with silent gestures, is fundamentally of the perceptual order, beneath or beyond the conceptual significations of constituted language. Rather than bridging the gap between perception and language, speaking speech is effectively subsumed by perception or, as Barbaras puts it, expression is 'subordinated' (Barbaras, trans. 2004: 47) to perception in the *Phenomenology*.

The asymmetrical relation that Baldwin observes between the activity of speaking speech and the spoken significations of constituted language thus extends to the relationship between two 'worlds' or orders of meaning: perception and language. The 'new version' of dualism that this asymmetry

introduces culminates in the assertion of the tacit *Cogito*. With the tacit *Cogito*, Merleau-Ponty distances and holds apart the self-relation that is realized via the body's perceptual, practical and expressive engagement with the world from the explicit, acquired significations of constituted language. Since it necessarily involves the intentional mediation of the world, the tacit *Cogito* certainly does not inaugurate the wholly 'inner' life of the Cartesian thinking subject. Yet it seems Merleau-Ponty is left committed to a picture of perception, with its silent contact with self, as a self-sufficient layer that, whilst making explicit or thetic self-consciousness, and the conceptual significations that mediate it, possible, remains unaltered by them. Once they have been established, communication between the two worlds appears fundamentally mysterious. We can now see how this picture is already prefigured in the gestural account of speech.

iii. The Need for Interdependence

The problem faced by the gestural account, at least as it is initially formulated in *Phenomenology of Perception*, is that it appears incapable of properly accounting for the role played by constituted language in making novel expression possible. To do so would be to accommodate a full-blooded *interdependence* of speaking and spoken, and to leave behind the problematic asymmetry. Yet the sense of speaking speech is above all a 'bodily meaning' (Besmer, 2007: 38), with its primary condition being the 'signifying function' of the body, and it is for this reason that Merleau-Ponty sees the gestural signification of speaking speech as proceeding beneath the conceptual significations of constituted language. Merleau-Ponty does, albeit briefly, acknowledge the place of already available significations in facilitating acts of novel expression, and in doing so articulates a vital divergence from the silent gesture. Whilst the sense of the silent gesture unfolds and remains rooted in the immediately available perceptual scene, the 'verbal gesture' is different, since it

> intends a mental landscape that is not straightaway given to everyone, and it is precisely its function to communicate this landscape. But culture here offers what nature does not provide. Available significations, namely, previous acts of expression, establish a common world between speaking subjects to which current and new speech refers, just as the gesture refers to the sensible world. And the sense of speech is nothing other than the manner in which it handles this linguistic world, or in which it modulates upon this keyboard of acquired significations.
>
> (*PhP*, 192/227)

By intending a mental landscape, beyond the 'natural' landscape of perception, speech has a sense that transcends its sensible manifestation. In order to achieve this, speech must make use of the established concepts, conventions and rules that are shared by others in virtue of their possession of a common language. The difficulty with the *Phenomenology*'s discussion of speech, however, is that it is very difficult to see how the utilization of constituted language in this way does not simply fall into the class of derivative, 'second-hand' activity that defines *spoken* speech. This is because Merleau-Ponty

describes the gestural signification of *speaking* speech in direct contrast to the significations of constituted language. He needs to account for the way in which the sense of speaking speech is constituted and grasped *by means of* acquired significations, rather than in opposition to them.

The above passage certainly demonstrates that Merleau-Ponty is sensitive to this facet of speech, but the gestural account is not sufficiently developed to be able to make good sense of it. We can trace this failing back to Merleau-Ponty's introduction of the 'primordial' body as the proper subject of speech. Crucially, he identifies constituted language and the 'already expressed' thoughts it constitutes as the source of the intellectualist's error, since they mask the original, creative labour of speech. The subject of authentic speech is therefore held apart from constituted language, and Merleau-Ponty falls back on a description of the body as enjoying a 'natural' or 'primordial' life entirely beneath cultural traditions. Thus, in achieving its primary goal – i.e., to overcome intellectualism and, in so doing, leave behind the traditional subject-object dualism – the gestural account of speech has left Merleau-Ponty unable to coherently accommodate a vital aspect of *all* speech, including speaking speech.[94] The gestural account, at least as it is formulated in *Phenomenology of Perception*, is insufficiently capable of recognizing how the conceptual significations of constituted language introduce a *cultural and historical* conditioning of the act of speech itself. This is the weight of a linguistic and cultural *tradition*, which outstrips the 'natural' or 'primordial' dimension of the lived body that is the primary focus of the gestural account.[95]

Indeed, this 'primordial', embodied engagement with the world that remains untouched by the acquisition of language is called into question by Merleau-Ponty's recognition of a cultural and historical conditioning of speech acts in the passage at *PhP*, 192, above. If the significative intention exercised in speech is itself conditioned by one's language, then the silence that is 'transformed' in a new act of expression must itself have been made available by the heretofore 'acquired' significations and expressive practices of the subject's language. Hence this silence could not be held apart from the 'thickness' of cultural acquisitions that have been amassed across a continually developing historical tradition. A full account of the role of language in facilitating novel expression would therefore take Merleau-Ponty beyond the notion of a foundational 'primordial' engagement with the world that unfolds 'beneath' or 'beyond' the spoken world of constituted language. The consciousness that 'conditions' language – the 'silent' engagement with the world in which the tacit *Cogito* is realized – would not constitute a self-sufficient foundation of expression that subsists outside of constituted language, but would instead be involved in a dialectical relationship with it.

By the time of his death, such a renunciation of his earlier thinking seems to have become explicit in Merleau-Ponty's own work, as the working note cited at the beginning of this chapter demonstrates. In a subsequent working note dated February 1959, having criticized the *Phenomenology*'s account of the

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[94] Kirk Besmer also recognizes this point, noting that the discussion of speech offered in the *Phenomenology* 'is a fruitful way to highlight the shortcomings of intellectualist theories of language, but it is less successful as a complete theory of language on its own' (Besmer, 2007: 46).

[95] I consider the issue here to be a case of the Merleau-Ponty's thinking about expression, speech, and language requiring further consideration and development, rather than it being a categorical failure. This is evidenced by the notable heterogeneity of Merleau-Ponty's favoured examples of speaking speech, especially his interest in the expressive labour of 'the first man who spoke', and the anthropological *origins* of language. The fact of the matter is that such an originary act was fundamentally *different in kind* to a contemporary act of speech, which is conditioned by an already constituted system of language that has accumulated over the course an entire history of linguistic practices. At the time of *Phenomenology of Perception*, this kind of difference was inadequately accommodated in Merleau-Ponty's thinking.

tacit *Cogito*, he notes how 'the very description of silence rests entirely on the virtues of language' (*VI*, 179/230), and thus that:

> There would be needed a silence that envelops the speech anew, after one has come to recognize that speech enveloped the alleged silence of the psychological coincidence. What will this silence be? … [It] will *not be the contrary* of language.
>
> (*VI*, 179/230)

The remaining two chapters will trace the development of Merleau-Ponty's thinking about speech and language after the publication of *Phenomenology of Perception* in 1945. Ultimately, I seek to understand how Merleau-Ponty manages to move away from the line of thought that I have problematized here. Chapter 4 will attend to Merleau-Ponty's 'middle period', during which time he worked on the manuscript of *The Prose of the World*. It is during this time, in which Merleau-Ponty made extensive use of Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralist linguistics, that an interdependence between speaking speech and spoken speech is made feasible within his thinking. Chapter 5 will then turn to the final writings in order to appreciate how the kind of constitutive foundationalism found to be present in *Phenomenology of Perception* is explicitly renounced, and how Merleau-Ponty was beginning to move beyond this way of thinking at the time of his death in 1961.

4.
Language as the Body of Thought: Merleau-Ponty's Middle Period

Following the publication of *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty sought to continue and develop his thinking about 'the phenomenon of expression', language, and truth. In a letter to Martial Geuroult in 1952, Merleau-Ponty expressed his intention that this investigation was to culminate in the production of two volumes: *Introduction to the Prose of the World* and *The Origin of Truth* (*PriP*, 8-9). Sadly, Merleau-Ponty was unable to complete either of the proposed works, with the first seemingly set aside in the late 1950s in favour of the second, which would eventually mutate into *The Visible and the Invisible* before itself being cut short by Merleau-Ponty's death at the age of 53 in May 1961 (Lefort, trans. 1974).

As its title suggests, the nature of the relationship between perception and thought, along with cognate questions such as the relation of mind and body, the experience and understanding of others, and the relationship between real and ideal objects, is at the heart of Merleau-Ponty's thinking in *The Visible and the Invisible*. It is in returning to these issues that Merleau-Ponty famously introduces a new and intriguing lexicon of 'the flesh' (*la chair*) to his philosophy. It remains difficult, however, to find a comprehensive and complete articulation of what Merleau-Ponty takes to be the proper relationship between perception, language and thought in these final pages. Indeed, James Edie goes so far as to cite this issue as 'the primary, unresolved problem' (Edie, 1987: 37) of Merleau-Ponty's entire philosophy.

One claim that is clearly advocated in *The Visible and the Invisible* is that the 'pure ideality' reckoned with in thought (the 'invisible') should not be understood as somehow 'outside' or 'beyond' the visible, sensible world. Instead, Merleau-Ponty seeks to show that thought must be understood as implicated in a dialectical development of the perceptual meaning that we grasp through our embodied engagement with the world in perception. Crucially, it is language that makes such a development possible. Through language, thought continues and develops the disclosure of the world that begins with the 'mute' perception of the pre-linguistic child. Language, he writes, 'slips through ways it has not traced, transfigures horizons it did not open' (*VI*, 152/198). This is possible, claims Merleau-Ponty, because language shares a common nature with the perceiving body. It is this nature that the new concept of 'flesh' is intended to signify, and thus we find Merleau-Ponty offering the following, tentative statement of his position:

> It is as though the visibility that animates the sensible world were to emigrate, not outside of every body, but into another less heavy, more transparent body, as though it were to

change flesh, abandoning the flesh of the body for that of language, and thereby would be emancipated but not freed from every condition.

<div align="right">(VI, 153/198)</div>

Whilst this claim is certainly provocative, it is frustratingly vague in equal measure, having the appearance of a mere metaphor. Unfortunately, this vagueness is hardly alleviated in what was completed of *The Visible and the Invisible*, and the position is little developed beyond a bare statement. Nonetheless, I take there to be a great deal of philosophical labour lying behind Merleau-Ponty's talk of language as a species of embodiment, or 'flesh', much of which he undertook during his middle period work in the philosophy of language. My aim in what follows is to provide an elucidation of this work that should allow us both to trace the development of Merleau-Ponty's thinking about language after 1945 whilst in turn providing valuable insight into the approach Merleau-Ponty was beginning to take to the relationship between perception and thought in his late period work. I shall then turn, in the following chapter, to the position Merleau-Ponty was arriving at in his final writings.[96]

As I have already noted, the research Merleau-Ponty conducted between 1945 and the late 1950s did not culminate in the publication of a single book-length treatise to follow *Phenomenology of Perception*. For this reason, ascertaining the shape of Merleau-Ponty's thinking about language at this time requires the pulling together of various different materials from the period, including course outlines and notes from Merleau-Ponty's time at the Sorbonne and the Collège de France, the unfinished manuscript of *Introduction to the Prose of the World*, and several essays on language, expression, and aesthetics from this period that saw publication during Merleau-Ponty's lifetime. Despite requiring such a reconstruction, however, I suggest that Merleau-Ponty's work during the middle period of his career contains the articulation of a cohesive and original position in the philosophy of language; a position that I take to be at work as he was developing his later reflections on the relationship between perception and thought. In his middle period, Merleau-Ponty develops a philosophy of language that I believe is best understood as a continued development of the philosophy of embodiment he famously advanced in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Whilst *Phenomenology of Perception* sought to disclose the way in which the perceiving subject is an embodied subject, the middle period writings seek to disclose the way in which '[t]hought inhabits language and language is its body' (*CAL*, 102). This chapter thus attempts to elucidate the claim that we can understand one's own language as a form of embodiment as it is developed in Merleau-Ponty's middle period writings.

It is important to note how the application of embodiment to language was already initiated in *Phenomenology of Perception*. There is of course the obvious sense in which the gestural account of speech

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[96] A further quality of such an elucidation is that it supports the thesis that there is a strong continuity to the development of Merleau-Ponty's thought throughout his career, in contrast to the view that his final writings constitute any kind of significant break with his earlier work. (Schmidt, 1985: 9) briefly catalogues some of those who view Merleau-Ponty's final writings as constituting such a break with his earlier work. In taking what follows to count against such an interpretation, I see it as offering additional support to the readings offered by (Taminaux, 1972), (Low, 1992), (Low, 2009) and (Dillon, 1997) who cast Merleau-Ponty's thought as more of an organically developing whole. Whilst this issue hangs on more than just Merleau-Ponty's approach to language, its centrality to his research in the years after the publication of *Phenomenology of Perception* does make it of great significance when deciding on the nature of his philosophical development over the course of his career. Indeed, (Barbaras, trans. 2004) and (Lawlor, 2003) each appeal to developments in Merleau-Ponty's thinking about language as a crucial source of the 'rupture' between his early and late works.

introduces a corporeal dimension to linguistic expression by equating speech with bodily gestures, and we have seen how the execution of this claim in *Phenomenology of Perception* was ultimately problematic. Something that is much less often acknowledged, however, is that in *Phenomenology of Perception*'s discussion of speech Merleau-Ponty begins to extend his account of perceptual *sens* to the philosophy of language. It is here that we begin to discover a richer sense of embodiment with respect to language. The assertion of a dialectical interdependence between meaning and word, thought and expression, mirrors Merleau-Ponty's account of the very same kind of interdependence between perception and the phenomenal body. For Merleau-Ponty, thought is born and develops in speech just as perception is born and develops in the living mass of the body. The only commentator to have heretofore made this connection explicitly is Don Ihde, who on this basis asserts that 'Merleau-Ponty's whole theory of language is one of embodiment' (Ihde, 1973: 169). Whilst I certainly concur with Ihde's reading, I believe he fails to explore the true richness of his own interpretative thesis, since he offers it solely with respect to the arguments found in *Phenomenology of Perception* regarding the immanence of meaning to speech. As we shall see, in order to disclose the full significance of Ihde's interpretative thesis, one must attend to Merleau-Ponty's middle period work.

Section 4.1 begins by unpacking what I take to be the key changes instigated during Merleau-Ponty's middle period work on language. I shall explain how these developments arise in Merleau-Ponty's writing in light of his newfound enthusiasm for, and idiosyncratic appropriation of, Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*. I shall also attend to the ways in which these developments can be understood to parallel central features of the account of embodiment offered in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Section 4.2 will then consider how the developments of Section 4.1 facilitate a further significant parallel with the earlier account of embodiment as we turn to the place of language in intersubjective experience and the understanding of others. Finally, Section 4.3 will consider how the developments of the middle period can be understood as making positive advances in relation to the difficulties that the *Phenomenology*'s discussion of speech and expression engendered for the work as a whole. In particular, we begin to see how an *interdependence* of speaking speech and spoken speech is accommodated by the Saussurian developments of the middle period. I suggest that it is this interdependence that allows Merleau-Ponty to speak of an operative *language*, in a sense that connects immediately with the conception of operative intentionality developed in *Phenomenology of Perception*.

4.1 *The Influence of Saussure*

i. Merleau-Ponty's Enthusiasm for Saussure

Whilst the gestural account of speech paves the way for thinking about language in terms of embodiment, it is certainly not without its difficulties. For my purposes, I shall focus on a worry with the approach to language taken in *Phenomenology of Perception* that would appear to play a key role in

motivating the changes Merleau-Ponty brings about in his work on language after 1945. For the gestural account of speech, each and every act of creative or novel linguistic expression (speaking speech) is dependent upon a pre- or extra-linguistic gestural stratum. The body is therefore the fundamental condition of linguistic meaning or, as Besmer phrases it, 'the meaning that is developed in all speech … is primarily a bodily meaning' (Besmer, 2007: 38). We have already seen how this aspect of the gestural account puts it in tension with some of the claims Merleau-Ponty is understandably drawn to make concerning the cultural and historical conditioning of creative expression and the constitution of novel thought.[97] We can see one such claim already figuring in the description offered of the relationship that holds between speaking and spoken speech at *PhP*, 203, quoted in Chapter 3, above. Merleau-Ponty here proposes an interdependence of speaking and spoken speech: the creative act of speaking speech 'results' in spoken speech insofar as it is taken up as an acquisition, which in turn comes to make possible further instances of speaking speech. It is difficult to see how the gestural account of speech is able to accommodate such interdependence, however, due to the manner in which it sees speaking speech as fundamentally conditioned by the body. With the gestural account, the overriding picture is of speaking speech as the bringing to expression of a 'primordial experience beneath traditions' (*PhP*, 530n7/218n1) – i.e., the linguistic expression of a *sub-* or *pre-linguistic* meaning. This makes it difficult to conceive of a true interdependence between speaking and spoken speech, since speaking speech would seem to be dependent upon spoken speech only insofar as spoken speech is unable to capture our pre-linguistic or 'primordial' experience, or at least some aspect of it, and as such must be supplanted by a new act of expression. The root of this worry would appear to be the manner in which the gestural account effectively equates linguistic meaning with bodily meaning by attempting to understand speech as thoroughly continuous with silent bodily gestures. Thus, Merleau-Ponty effectively denies himself the proper resources with which to account for the cultural and historical conditioning of language and linguistic expression. I think we can see an attempt to deal with this difficulty as a main driving force behind the changes Merleau-Ponty makes in his thinking about language after *Phenomenology of Perception*.

The most significant difference in Merleau-Ponty's work on language after 1945 is the emergence of a resolute (albeit idiosyncratic) enthusiasm for Saussurian linguistics, which itself then serves as the catalyst for other developments. Whilst the famous Saussurian distinction between 'language' (*la langue* – i.e., a rule-governed objective system of signs) and 'speech' (*la parole* – i.e., the concrete instances of language-use by individual speech acts) is alluded to in *Phenomenology of Perception*, it is only afterwards that it comes to exert a pronounced influence on Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of language.[98] The earliest published expression of a deep enthusiasm for Saussure's work comes in a paper entitled 'The

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[97] It is also, as Besmer notes, at odds with claims Merleau-Ponty wants to make that would seem to ascribe language a privileged status, such as his assertion that 'speech installs in us the idea of truth as the presumptive limit of its effort' (*PhP*, 196/231).

[98] Merleau-Ponty's idiosyncratic understanding of Saussure's work is present even in this passing allusion (*PhP*, 202/238). Merleau-Ponty talks of a distinction between 'language' (*langage*) and 'speech' (*parole*). Saussure's own distinction is between *la langue* and *la parole*. For Saussure, *langage* is the overarching term for all aspects of language and linguistic communication, of which *langue* and *parole* are two distinct aspects. A more detailed discussion of the accuracy of Merleau-Ponty's reading of Saussure is pursued by (Schmidt, 1985), and (Hass, 2008).

Metaphysical in Man', which was first published in the 1948 collection *Sense and Non-sense*. Here, he states that

> …Saussure's linguistics legitimates, in the study of language – beyond the perspective of causal explanation which links each fact with a previous fact and thus spreads language out before the linguist like a natural object – the perspective of the speaking subject who lives in his language (and who may in some cases change it). From the first point of view, language is a mosaic of facts with no "interior"; from the second, in contrast, it is a totality.
>
> (*SNS*, 87/152)[99]

What is clear from this passage is that Merleau-Ponty considers Saussurian linguistics to be offering a theoretical framework that his own thinking about language can exploit. As we have seen, it was precisely the absence of 'the perspective of the speaking subject' that Merleau-Ponty diagnosed as the basic error of both empiricist and intellectualist approaches in *Phenomenology of Perception*. It was in seeking to correct this error that he arrived at the gestural account of speech. He now sees Saussure's linguistics as legitimating, and indeed facilitating, the effort to account for the speaking subject's perspective.[100]

Merleau-Ponty's appropriation of Saussurian principles is far from straightforward, however. Indeed, it is far from clear that Saussure would recognize such a legitimation in his own work. This is not least because Saussure introduces the distinction between language and speech in order to define the proper object of linguistics as *languages* – i.e., *impersonal* semiological systems. For Saussure, the utilization of such a system in individual speech acts is to be omitted from the investigations of the linguist, who defers a study of speech to the sciences proper to it: phonology, anatomy, and physiology (*CGL*, 18). How is it, then, that Merleau-Ponty views Saussure's work in such a positive light that he seeks to appropriate it in his own concern with the perspective of the speaking subject? In answering this question, I emphasize the two features of Saussurian linguistics that most clearly inform the development of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of language: i) its account of language as a holistic system, and ii) its conception of this system as in a certain sense dynamic. I shall also detail why Merleau-Ponty's appropriation of each of these features in his philosophy of language constitutes a significant parallel, within his thought, between one's own language and one's own body.

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[99] Shortly after the publication of *Sense and Non-sense*, Merleau-Ponty delivered a series of lecture courses on child psychology at the Sorbonne. These courses – especially those on language acquisition and communication – further exhibit Merleau-Ponty's enthusiasm for Saussurian linguistics at this point in his career. For reasons of space, I cannot discuss Merleau-Ponty's work on child psychology here, although (Silverman, 1979) and (Welsh, 2013) provide detailed discussions of the content of the Sorbonne lecture courses.

[100] An undoubted influence on Merleau-Ponty's appeal to the speaking subject that I do not discuss in the present chapter is Husserl. In 'Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man' (*PriP*, 43-95), Merleau-Ponty claims that Husserl moved away from his pursuit, first offered in the *Logical Investigations*, of a universal grammar or 'eidetic of language', as he began to acknowledge the importance of the individual speaking subject's experience of language. It is also in Husserl that we find a notion of a 'linguistic living body [*Sprachleib*]' of psychic structures (*OG*, 358). Chapter 5 offers a more thematic discussion of certain aspects of Merleau-Ponty's continued engagement with Husserl after *Phenomenology of Perception*.

ii. Language as a Holistic System

Saussurian linguistics pursues an analysis of language as a differential or diacritical system of signs. Saussure arrives at this by beginning with a conception of the linguistic sign as a unity of a *signified* (concept) and a *signifier* (sound image). The multiplicity of different languages leads Saussure to assert that the relationship between signified and signifier must be an entirely arbitrary one, since any number of distinct signifiers can be used, across a range of languages, to signify the same concept. Since the sign is nothing other than the signifying relationship, Saussure concludes that '*the linguistic sign is arbitrary*' (*CGL*, 67), which is to say that the constitution of signs is entirely a result of the conventions that a given linguistic community tacitly accepts.

Without further qualification, however, a definition of the sign as a unity of concept and sound-image is incomplete and, states Saussure, 'grossly misleading' (*CGL*, 113). Such a definition isolates the sign from the wider system of the language. This gets things backwards, since 'it is from the interdependent whole that one must start and through analysis obtain its elements' (*CGL*, 113). For Saussure, the *value* a given sign has for a linguistic community must be understood as implicated in the relations it holds with all the other terms of the language. As such, we cannot adequately analyze a sign in isolation from the wider system of language, since it would be impossible to ascertain its value. A well-known example Saussure himself offers is that the French word 'mouton' and the English word 'sheep', when considered in isolation from their respective systems of language, can each signify the same concept. The two words do not hold the same value in the respective languages, however, since 'mouton' continues to be used in French to speak of the kind of meat that in English is referred to by the word 'mutton'. For Saussure this difference in value between 'mouton' and 'sheep' is due to the different relations the two words hold with the other parts of their respective languages – i.e., 'the fact that *sheep* has beside it a second term while the French word does not' (*CGL*, 116). Saussure generalizes from such cases to the thesis that the value of all signs in a given language is derived from their oppositive relations with other signs. As Saussure puts it, 'whatever distinguishes one sign from the others constitutes it' (*CGL*, 121). A given language is therefore *nothing but* a systematic totality of such relations.

In 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence' (first published in 1952), Merleau-Ponty is unequivocal in his endorsement of this aspect of Saussure's analysis:

> What we have learned from Saussure is that, taken singly, signs do not signify anything, and that each one of them does not so much express a meaning as mark a divergence of meaning between itself and other signs. Since the same can be said for all other signs, we may conclude that language is made of differences without terms; or more exactly, that the terms of language are engendered only by the differences which appear among them.
>
> (*S*, 39/49)[101]

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[101] 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence' is a revised version of the third chapter of *The Prose of the World*. Whilst, as (Dillon, 1997) shows, there are some noteworthy differences between the two versions, the fact that Merleau-Ponty did see parts of *The Prose of the World* published lends support to its veracity as a reflection of his thought at this time.

This appropriation of Saussure's analysis of language as a holistic system of differential relations now allows Merleau-Ponty to develop one of the basic tenets of the *Phenomenology*'s gestural account of speech – i.e., 'the simple observation that *the word has a sense*' (PhP, 182/216). For Saussure, words carry a meaning insofar as they are implicated in a wealth of meaningful relations with other signs. Thus, whilst it is the case that 'taken singly, signs do not signify anything', this is not because their meaning depends upon an association with pre-existing thoughts or ideas, but because individual signs are to be understood first and foremost as moments within the wider whole of the systematic structure of language and linguistic practice.

It is surely of little surprise to find Merleau-Ponty expressing enthusiasm for the idea that language instantiates an 'immanence of the whole in the parts' (S, 41/51). As we saw in Chapter 2, throughout his earlier work on perception, Merleau-Ponty is profoundly influenced by Gestalt psychology's emphasis on the manner in which perceptual phenomena involve structured wholes that are not simply the sum of their parts, but which in fact give the parts their *sense* for the perceiving subject. It is the Gestaltist principle that 'the whole is other than the sum of its parts' (Koffka, 1935: 176) that plays a central role in the phenomenological account of perceptual meaning or *sens* offered in *Phenomenology of Perception*. In Saussure, Merleau-Ponty now sees how this principle can also be applied in the study of language. The meaning of words is now 'entirely involved in language' (S, 42/53), and linguistic meaning comes to fruition in the systematic use that speaking subjects make of their language. Insofar as this use exemplifies the immanence of meaning in acts of linguistic expression, the analogy between speech and gesture remains intact (and Merleau-Ponty continues to draw the comparison in this way). Crucially, however, the appeal to Saussure's analysis allows Merleau-Ponty to effectively jettison the idea that linguistic meaning is to be *flatly equated* with the meaning of silent bodily gestures.

The analysis of language as a unified system also offers a means with which to more fully articulate the speaking subject's relationship with his language. Whilst Saussure concerns himself solely with the objective study of language as an impersonal structure, for Merleau-Ponty this study calls for a corresponding investigation into the 'other side', as it were, of language. This is the 'interior' of language as it is lived through and utilized by individuals, and insofar as it 'must *surround* each speaking subject, like an instrument with its own inertia, its own demands, constraints, and internal logic' (SNS, 87/153). Whilst he is keen to credit the inauguration of this 'linguistics of *speech*' (PW, 23/33) to Saussure, one could certainly read Merleau-Ponty to in fact be offering a critical rejoinder to the objective study of language Saussure proposes. Saussure deliberately excludes the perspective of individual language users from this study as part of the process of defining the proper object of the science of linguistics. As Paul Ricoeur puts it (playing with one of Saussure's own analogies), the Saussurian study of language is equivalent to an account of 'the rules of chess, without the moves, the game and the players' (Ricoeur, 1967: 18). Crediting Saussure with the inauguration – *in spite of himself* – of the study of the 'interior' of language might thus be read as an overly deferential means of

expressing what Merleau-Ponty perceives to be absent from, and yet necessitated by, Saussure's own work.[102]

For Merleau-Ponty, Saussure's objective linguistics offers vital insights that a phenomenological disclosure of the speaking subject's perspective can utilize. Crucially, the implementation of signs in an expressive act does not require the reflective retrieval of words or phrases from a storehouse of memory. Merleau-Ponty takes Saussure to have demonstrated how the signification of signs considered in isolation is dependent upon their constitution as moments of the systematic whole of one's language. Each sign 'expresses only by reference to a certain mental equipment, to a certain arrangement of our cultural implements' (*S*, 88/110). It is thus as a whole – as a diacritical system – that my language must be present to me and available to be utilized in speech acts. It is in offering an articulation of this presence that Merleau-Ponty explicitly parallels language with his earlier account of embodiment.

We have already seen how, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, the relation to one's own body was explored in terms of the body schema. The body schema serves to refer to the manner in which one's own body is given not as an object or a set of objective facts, but as 'an open system of an infinity of equivalent positions in different orientations' (*PhP*, 102/129). Crucially, the body schema is not any kind of mental object or item,[103] or a product of associations. It is instead to be understood as the very condition or 'law' that underpins and makes such associations possible. It is this experience of the body schema that is central to the subject's pre-reflective experience of her own bodily agency. For instance, in raising my arm, I need not represent to myself my arm's current position, nor the movement required of it if the action is to be executed, nor any of the positions lying between my current situation and my goal. I move my arm in the same fashion that I know it – i.e., directly, with no mediators lying between the decision to move and the movement. Indeed, the body schema is defined by the manner in which one's own body is given as the seat of motor possibilities. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, 'my body appears to me as a posture toward a certain task, actual or possible' (*PhP*, 102/129). In sum, it is the body schema through which the body is experienced as first and foremost a systematic medium of *praxis*, rather than as a mere object.

In his effort to appropriate Saussure's analyses into a phenomenological account of the speaking subject, it is clear that Merleau-Ponty seeks to trade on his earlier account of the body schema. We have already seen that Merleau-Ponty considers Saussure to have effectively demonstrated that linguistic signs must be present to the subject as part of a holistic system if they are to be utilizable in expressive acts. In this respect, the experience of language parallels that of the body schema, since they are both given to the subject holistically. Moreover, the phenomenology of speech mirrors that of

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[102] Of course, one cannot rule out the possibility that Merleau-Ponty simply misinterpreted Saussure. This is certainly how James Schmidt sees things. Merleau-Ponty's reading of Saussure, argues Schmidt, 'was so idiosyncratic that it makes his notoriously loose readings of Husserl look like models of hermeneutic chastity' (Schmidt, 1985: 105). How deliberately or cynically Merleau-Ponty bent Saussure's work to his will perhaps forever remain an open question. Either way, it is in his deviations from the letter of Saussure's thought that Merleau-Ponty hits upon what he clearly considers to be essential aspects of a phenomenological study of language.

[103] As (Matherne, 2014) clarifies, it is in *this* sense that the subject's awareness of his body does not involve any 'representations' for Merleau-Ponty. It remains confluent with a conception of representation that avoids positing representations as mental contents or objects (i.e., that avoids something like McDowell's 'master thesis', discussed in Chapter 2, above).

bodily motricity and agency insofar as the organized system of linguistic signs is neither constituted nor maintained by an activity or faculty of judgement, but is pre-reflectively available to be called upon in the expression – or indeed, the accomplishment – of thought in speech. When I 'recall' words in speaking, there is no conscious act that is necessary to mediate between my significative intention and the speech act. Language, like the body, is given to the speaking subject in the mode of the "I am able to", rather than of the "I think" (*PhP*, 139/171, *S*, 88/111) – i.e. it is not primarily an object of thought, but the systematic medium of an expressive *praxis*.

It is in terms of this parallel that we can begin to appreciate what Merleau-Ponty speaks of as a 'quasi-corporeality of the signifying' (*S*, 88/110). In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty elaborated the way in which the experience of one's own body is itself a vital aspect of perception. At its core, perception involves what Merleau-Ponty refers to as the body's 'gearing into' (*PhP*, 260-3/297-301) the sensible world as the setting of actual and possible behaviour. The perceived thing is not explicitly posited in an act of thinking or judging, but instead appears as 'a structure available for inspection by the body' (*PhP*, 334/376). The disclosure of the manner in which 'external perception and perception of one's own body vary together because they are two sides of a single act' (*PhP*, 211/247) constitutes perhaps the defining feature of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, and his conception of operative intentionality such as it is applied there. In speaking of a 'quasi-corporeality of the signifying', Merleau-Ponty is proposing that the signifying relations involved in uses of language (both one's own and those of others) are grasped in a manner that mirrors perceptual understanding. It is the immediate givenness of the holistic system of the subject's body that at one and the same time puts her in touch with a sensible world that transcends her in perception. In the same manner, it is the immediate givenness of the holistic system of her language that at one and the same time puts her in touch with significations that transcend her in speech (both her own and that of others). We can see Merleau-Ponty explicitly drawing this comparison in the following passage:

> On the condition that I do not reflect expressly upon it, my consciousness of my body immediately signifies a certain landscape about me, that of my fingers a certain fibrous or grainy style of the object. It is in the same fashion that the spoken word (the one I utter or the one I hear) is pregnant with a meaning which can be read in the very texture of the linguistic gesture
>
> (*S*, 89/110)

iii. Language as a Dynamic System

We have seen how Saussure's linguistics offers Merleau-Ponty a means of understanding language as a systematic whole. This insight proves to be pivotal in the middle period work insofar as it allows Merleau-Ponty to apply some of the central features of his prior study of embodiment and perception to a phenomenological account of language. Saussure's influence does not stop here, however. In Saussure's work, Merleau-Ponty also discovers a means of appreciating the way in which language is a fundamentally *dynamic* system – i.e., a system that is susceptible to an active *development* through its use

by speaking subjects. As Merleau-Ponty develops this thought in his own, phenomenological account of language, I believe we can see him drawing still further from his earlier study of embodiment.

Saussure himself explicitly acknowledges the mutability of languages over time, observing that '[l]anguage is radically powerless to defend itself against the forces which from one moment to the next are shifting the relationship between the signified and the signifier' (*CGL*, 75). In order to overcome the complications that this might have for linguistics as an objective science, Saussure distinguishes two perspectives from which the linguist can pursue his investigations: the diachronic and the synchronic. From the diachronic perspective, the linguist is able to map out the changes a linguistic system has undergone between given synchronic language states, which are longitudinal 'slices' in the history of the system. Whilst Merleau-Ponty enthusiastically appropriates this distinction from Saussure, it is not without qualification. What intrigues Merleau-Ponty most is not the flat juxtaposition of the two perspectives that Saussure offers, but the question of their *relationship*. If it is possible to observe changes in the structure of a given language between particular synchronic moments in its history, then it must be the case, argues Merleau-Ponty, that there is never a fully fixed and determinate structure, or *Gestalt*, of language. Like the body, it is never 'completely constituted' (*PhP*, 94/121, citing Husserl). Instead, language is revealed as a '*Gestalt* in movement' (*CAL*, 100). What the viability of Saussure's two perspectives teaches us is that the synchronic system codified by the linguist 'never exists wholly in act but always involves latent or incubating changes' (*S*, 87/109).

In applying this revelation to a phenomenology of language, Merleau-Ponty argues that the speaking subject, through the expressive and communicative uses he makes of language, is able to actualize changes in the system of his language and thereby develop it.[104] In advancing this line of thought, Merleau-Ponty rearticulates the distinction between speaking speech and spoken speech. Changes in the speaking subject's system of language are instigated when the expression is successfully given to a novel or original thought – i.e., by *speaking* speech, be it his own or that of others.[105] The new signification that the act of speaking speech embodies will then undergo a process of 'sedimentation', becoming available to the speaking subject insofar as it informs his future uses of language – i.e., it becomes *spoken* speech. This new signification is 'acquired' because it has instituted a change, however slight, in the diacritical relations that constitute the structure of the subject's language. The speaking subject inherits a language whose structure he is not responsible for, but through the use he makes, both in expressing himself and understanding others, he is able to develop this system as his own.[106] Merleau-Ponty offers a concise expression of this thought in the following passage:

> I say that a signification is acquired and henceforth available when I have succeeded in making it dwell in a speech apparatus which was not originally destined for it. Of course

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[104]This claim appears to be in direct contradiction with Saussure himself. Saussure insists that, so far as the individual is concerned, the inherited linguistic system is *fixed*, and as such 'the masses have no voice in the matter' (*CGL*, 71).

[105] It is of course not only in such uses that the language might undergo changes. It remains susceptible to the kinds of impersonal or contingent historical alterations that arise out of wars, invasions, migrations, and the like.

[106]It is this aspect of Merleau-Ponty's engagement with structuralist linguistics that has earned him the title of 'post-structuralist'. We should be clear what this means, however. As Hass points out, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of language does not reject structuralism, but instead '"interrupts" the structure from within' (Hass, 2008: 192).

the elements of this expressive apparatus did not really contain it – the French language did not, from the moment it was established, contain French literature; I had to throw them off center and recenter them in order to make them signify what I intended.

(*S*, 91/114)

Thus, for Merleau-Ponty, language is susceptible to a process of development that is instigated by the activity of the subject in utilizing her language. This thought, and Merleau-Ponty's description of the process involved, provides another conspicuous parallel with his earlier account of embodiment. In particular, it evokes the discussion of bodily habits and skills offered in *Phenomenology of Perception*. In accounting for bodily habits and skills, Merleau-Ponty acknowledges the mutability of the individual's body schema, describing the process of habit acquisition as 'the reworking and renewal of the body schema' (*PhP*, 143/177). If we are to be faithful to the nature of this process, maintains Merleau-Ponty, we must avoid accounting for it in terms of a faculty of 'the understanding' or as the achievement of an activity of 'pure' thinking. Instead, he argues that habit acquisition is a development of one's own body through the very use one makes of it in practice. It is a more or less gradual appropriation of new motor possibilities: 'the motor grasping of a motor signification' (*PhP*, 144/178).

For instance, through the acquisition of particular habits or skills, the apprentice rockclimber becomes aware of possibilities for action that were not previously available to her. The parts of her body have not altered, but her lived body – her body as a system of actual and possible actions – is being actively developed and more richly articulated via being put to new uses. Each of us develops our own bodily style through the various skills and habits that we acquire (or indeed lose) throughout our lives. Merleau-Ponty can now be seen to be applying this thought to language. In both cases, he is claiming that the individual is capable of instigating a development in the system without having to add, remove or alter any parts of it.[107] Instead, the acquisition of new motor or linguistic significations can be achieved through the development of the relations that constitute the system. Crucially, this is not achieved by the activity of a 'pure' or 'transcendental' subjectivity that would be distinct from the body or language, but rather by the very utilization of the body and of language as media of motor and linguistic *praxis*.

It is perhaps unsurprising that we find appeals throughout the middle period to the experience of the novelist, for whom creative linguistic expression is a perennial task. The novelist pursues his craft within a language that he shares with the rest of his linguistic community. Yet through his idiosyncratic use of this language, the writer is able to give new life to its words. Appropriating a phrase from André Malraux's theory of painting, Merleau-Ponty describes the novelist as instigating a 'coherent deformation' (*S*, 78/97) of ordinary language insofar as he, perhaps only ever so slightly, alters the *Gestalt* of the system of his language, and in doing so deviates from the inherited meaning of words.[108] The novelist develops his style *through* his works by way of employing various literary devices, genres,

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[107] The subject could, of course, add completely new words to her vocabulary or coin new words herself, but this is not a necessary condition of any development of her system of language.

[108] An insightful discussion (perhaps the only one in English) of Merleau-Ponty's critical relationship with Malraux's work can be found in (Johnson, 1993).

themes, character tropes, and narrative structures. Through this 'apprenticeship to speech' (*T/L*, 17/28), he finds himself able to do new things with his language as new possibilities for linguistic expression gradually become available to him on the basis of his past successes. Through his expressive labour, the writer makes an impersonal language his own:

> If you wish, he destroys ordinary language, but by realizing it. The given language … is entirely *ready to* convert everything new he stands for as a writer into an acquisition. It is as if it had been made for him, and he for it; as if the task of speaking to which he has been devoted in learning the language were more deservedly he than his heart beat; and as if the established language called into existence, along with him, one of *his* possibilities.
>
> <div align="right">(<i>S</i>, 79/99)</div>

For Merleau-Ponty, the novelist's use of language, and his mastery of its expressive power, does not involve anything that is fundamentally alien to the case of any other speaking subject. To *have* a language at all is to acquire an already constituted and impersonal system of signs by way of utilizing it oneself in acts of speech. Through the expressive effort of speaking speech, any individual speaking subject is capable of instigating developments in the system of her language, and thus acquiring new significations. As such, the insight that Merleau-Ponty (perhaps subversively) finds in Saussure – that language is a dynamic system – is intended to apply to any and all speaking subjects.

4.2 *Language and Intersubjectivity*

One might think that a rather serious worry emerges with Merleau-Ponty's description of language as a dynamic system. If the speaking subject is capable of developing his language through the use he makes of it, does this not present an obstacle in the way of interpersonal understanding – i.e., *communication*? As a rule-governed social practice, conveying meaning through language requires that the individual abide by linguistic rules and conventions that are common to all members of her linguistic community. This fact would seem to be in tension with Merleau-Ponty's claim that the individual is capable of instigating idiosyncratic developments in her language. How is it that these developments are communicable to others and not merely attenuations of a private language?

In order to placate such a worry, it is necessary to appreciate Merleau-Ponty's account of the role played by language in relating the individual to others, and his conception of linguistic communication. In doing so, I will elucidate a final connection between Merleau-Ponty's middle period writings on language and his earlier account of embodiment as it relates to properly *intersubjective* experience. This will then allow us, in Section 4.3, to appreciate the positive advances his thinking about language has made since *Phenomenology of Perception*.

i. Perceiving Others

Merleau-Ponty first wrestles with the traditional sceptical problem of experiencing others in *Phenomenology of Perception*. He begins here by applying what he understands his phenomenological study of embodied perception to have revealed. As we saw in Chapters 1 and 2, Merleau-Ponty contends that the phenomenology of perception shows how the experience of one's own body in the body schema is itself 'one side' of perceptual experience. The body is to be understood as a 'system open to the world' (*PhP*, 526n115/179n1) insofar as perceptual experience involves the perceiving subject's 'gearing into' (*PhP*, 260-3/298-301) the sensible world as the setting of sensorimotor exploration. This account of the perceiving subject as an essentially incarnate being provides the material from which Merleau-Ponty is able to account for the possibility of perceptual experience of others. The subject of perception is no longer to be thought of as somehow hidden 'behind' or 'within' a mass of organs, beyond the reach of another's perception. Instead, the subject is himself present *in* the sensible world insofar as, to paraphrase Merleau-Ponty's own words, he *is his body* (*PhP*, 205/240). The perceiving subject is thus himself caught up in the sensible, rather than transcendent of it, and as such he is available to another in perception.

It is in the perceptual experience of the other's body, then, that I am placed in direct relation to another subject like myself. I grasp this presence of another subject in the appearance of a living body that is structured like my own – i.e., a sensorimotor system engaging with the sensible world. Another subject is given as 'a certain handling of things … taking place over there' (*PhP*, 369-70), and what appears is neither a 'pure', transcendent subject, nor a 'pure' object or physical thing, but rather another embodied *orientation* towards a common world. I thus grasp the other in terms of a carnal relation with the world that is common to each of us as perceiving subjects, which Merleau-Ponty describes in the following passage:

> [I]t is precisely my body that perceives the other's body and finds there something of a miraculous extension of its own intentions, a familiar manner of handling the world. Henceforth, just as the parts of my body together form a system, the other's body and my own are a single whole, two sides of a single phenomenon, and the anonymous existence, of which my body is continuously the trace, henceforth inhabits these two bodies simultaneously.
>
> (*PhP*, 370/411)

For Merleau-Ponty, we undercut the traditional sceptical worries surrounding our experience of others when we recognize the incarnate existence of the perceiving subject, which serves as a commonality that cuts across the individuality of subjects – that 'pre-personal' or 'anonymous' aspect of the subject that is expressive of their bodily facticity. Of course, our experience of others is much richer than the perception of a living and perceiving body, and Merleau-Ponty is quick to acknowledge that this bodily generality can only establish 'another living being, and not yet another man' (*PhP*, 370/411). In order for my experience to present me with another human being, the other who appears

before me must engage in decidedly human forms of behaviour, chief amongst which will be language. In *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty does not spend a great deal of time detailing the way in which language serves as a medium for experiencing others, although it is clear that it is the gestural account of speech offered earlier in the text that is intended to fill this gap. It is only in his middle period work, however, that we can gain a determinate idea of the way in which Merleau-Ponty understands the bare acquisition of a system of language to profoundly enrich the subject's relations with others. This is due to the way in which, as Section 4.1 examined, Merleau-Ponty manages to apply central insights from his study of embodiment to his middle period reflections on language and expression.

The developments instigated in the middle period provide the means with which Merleau-Ponty is able to parallel the functioning of language in facilitating intersubjective experience with that of the body. The system of language that the subject acquires is, of course, not one that she constituted herself; it is inherited from and shared with a community of other speaking subjects. The acquired system of language is thus both individual *and* impersonal; subjective *and* intersubjective. It is a common dimension of being between the members of a linguistic community. When I hear the other who appears before me speaking a common language, I am placed in an immediate relation with him that strongly echoes that found at the level of our common bodily being. The other's language and my own are a single whole, 'two sides of a single phenomenon': an anonymous *language* that inhabits us both.

Of course, this kind of default relation to others through a common language does not provide an answer to the worry raised at the outset of the present section. The language that the subject inherits is an already constituted and publically available institution. Its significations have been determined by the shared practice of the members of the given linguistic community. The implicit rules that guide this shared practice are available to be made explicit in syntactical and semantic codification by the linguist. It is not these objectively available and determinately rule-guided structures of a shared language that motivate the worry concerning the understanding of others through language. The worry arises because of the strong emphasis Merleau-Ponty places on a form of linguistic expression through which the system of language is 'altered', 'varied', 'transfigured' (*PW*, 13/20), or 'deformed' (*S*, 78/97) by the speaking subject – i.e., speaking speech. It remains unclear how speech acts that transcend established rules can be comprehensible to other members of the linguistic community.

It is important to note that such a worry never arises in Merleau-Ponty's own writings. It is clear that he considers speaking speech to present no obstacle to the subject's relations with others. In fact, he argues quite the opposite insofar as he casts speaking speech as playing an absolutely fundamental role in making individual persons present to one another. What is common between speaking subjects – their shared language – yields, for each of them, 'another only in general … a notion rather than a presence' (*PW*, 140/195). Whilst the experience of common language goes beyond or sublimates a merely bodily generality, establishing a properly 'human' or cultural connection with the other, this

connection alone does not put me in touch with the other as an individual. The other's individuality – his *personality* – is made present to me only in his speaking speech, rather than in the impersonal and conventional use he might make of the established significations of our common language (i.e., *spoken* speech). I truly reach the other by hearing him speak 'in his own voice', as it were, and it is only when I grasp the meaning of speaking speech that language functions 'like a magic machine for transporting the "I" into the other person's perspective' (*PW*, 19/29). Merleau-Ponty accounts for such experiences by describing an ambiguous kind of reciprocity that unfolds, via the medium of language, between myself and the other whom I encounter. What his account attempts to do is to blur the distinction, normally assumed to straightforwardly hold, between speaking and listening, expression and understanding, activity and passivity. The descriptions offered of this reciprocity are crucial because they serve to disclose the manner in which the comprehension of speaking speech by others is in fact *a condition of* its success. For this reason, I shall attend to two of Merleau-Ponty's favoured cases: the experience of the novel, and the experience of dialogue.

ii. The Novel

When I begin to read a novel for the first time, I bring to the table the entire sedimented weight of my system of language. This has been acquired through my learning of a publically available system of language and, if I have engaged with others in instances of speaking speech, further cultivated via the use I have put it to. As I begin to read, the author's words are grasped according to the significations that I have become habituated to giving them. Initially, the language of the novel is my own insofar as I understand its words in the manner to which I have become accustomed. To begin with, then, the author's words are my own, and it is he who 'has come to dwell [*installé*] in my world' (*PW*, 11/18). Over the course of my time with the novel, however, the use to which I have put these words until now begins to be subverted. The novel utilizes my familiar language in an unfamiliar way, instituting an ever so slight, yet *systematic*, shift in their meaning. Through this shift, I eventually come to dwell in the author's language and grasp the meaning of his words *from within* through the consistent uses he puts them to. For instance, Merleau-Ponty offers the following description of reading Stendhal's *The Charterhouse of Parma*:

> Before I read Stendhal, I know what a rogue is. Thus I can understand what he means when he says Rossi the revenue man is a rogue. But when Rossi the rogue begins to live, it is no longer he who is a rogue: it is a rogue who is the revenue man Rossi. I have access to Stendhal's outlook through the commonplace words he uses. But in his hands, these words are given a new twist. The cross references multiply. More and more arrows point in the direction of a thought I have never encountered before and perhaps never would have met without Stendhal. At the same time, the contexts in which Stendhal uses common words reveal even more majestically the new meaning with which he endows them. I get closer and closer to him, until in the end I read his words with the very same intention that he gave to them.

In reading the novel, I experience the imposition of a 'coherent deformation' of my language as the author's speech exploits the already present significations of my sedimented language in order to make them 'yield strange sounds' (*PW*, 13/21). It is in this way that a new thought comes to fruition in my language, and becomes an acquisition for me insofar as the 'infernal machine called the book' (*PW*, 12/20) has 'transformed me' (*PW*, 13/20). The author's talent lies in his ability to *make* me understand significations that were not 'already there' in my sedimented language. I understand the author because the novel presents me with his systematic use of signs, and thus 'brings me to dwell within him' (*PW*, 12/20). Crucially, the realization of this relationship with the author in grasping his expressive intentions proceeds *in and by means of* his use of a common, sedimented language (i.e., spoken speech), and would be impossible without it.

> The novel as a report of events and an announcement of ideas, theses, or conclusions – as manifest or prosaic signification [spoken speech] – and the novel as an expression of style – as oblique and latent signification [speaking speech] – are in a simple relation of homonymy.
>
> (*S*, 77/96)

In its turn, what is new in the novel, 'once it has been understood and added to the cultural heritage' (*PW*, 13/20), will be appropriated into the wider use of language by the members of a linguistic community, and in doing so it will become a part of the sedimented system of language that they share.

iii. Dialogue

Merleau-Ponty's description of the experience of literary uses of language provides an important insight concerning speaking speech more generally. The understanding of speaking speech is possible because of the manner in which my acquired language is never absolutely *fixed*, and because I am never strictly constrained by its sedimented structure. My sedimented language is susceptible to the expressive activity of others just as much as my own, and I 'accommodate to the other person through my language' (*PW*, 18/27) in communicating with him. Merleau-Ponty considers the experience of dialogue as offering a paradigmatic demonstration of this claim.[109]

Whilst the background of a shared language constitutes a bare 'community of *being*' (*PW*, 140/195), the reciprocal engagement of the interlocutors in a dialogue establishes a shared activity – 'a community of *doing*' (*PW*, 140/195) – from which the thoughts of each are drawn. In the dialogue, I find my own speech is 'intersected laterally by the other's speech' (*PW*, 142/197) and this makes available new expressive possibilities that neither of us could have arrived at alone. The dialogue

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[109] It should be noted that Merleau-Ponty's discussion of dialogue is concerned with cases in which individuals engage in an effort to express themselves or their situation to one another. These are interlocutors attempting to relate to one another through *speaking* speech, rather than exchanging the ready-made and impersonal significations of spoken speech, although, as we shall see in Section 4.3, this distinction comes to be somewhat blurred in comparison to its initial statement in *Phenomenology of Perception*.

involves a kind of 'depersonalization' (*PW*, 19/29) insofar as it brings subjects into one another's presence by constituting an immediate reciprocity that Merleau-Ponty likens to 'a struggle between two athletes in a tug-of-war' (*PW*, 19/28-9). The movements of the dialogue depend upon and feed off of one another in an active 'coproduction' (*TfL*, 119/166) of thought that blurs the distinction between activity and passivity:

> Between myself as speech and the other as speech, or more generally myself as expression and the other as expression, there is no longer that alternation which makes a rivalry of the relations between minds. I am not active only when speaking; rather, I precede my thought in the listener. I am not passive while I am listening; rather, I speak according to … what the other is saying. Speaking is not just my own initiative, listening is not submitting to the initiative of the other, because as speaking subjects we are *continuing*, we are resuming a common effort more ancient than we, upon which we are grafted to one another
>
> (*PW*, 143-4/200)

I understand the other's speech insofar as I am capable of developing the thought it expresses as my own, and my passivity is equally an activity. The other's speech is taken up into my own repertoire, and it becomes an acquisition *for me* just as much as it does for him. Thus, my own expressive activity equally involves my passivity inasmuch as my speech is a development of the other's, and I think '*according to*' him (*PhP*, 184/218). This understanding is reciprocated in the other's responses to my own speech, and the dialogue continues its movement.[110] What we see here is a consolidation of my expressive effort in the response of the other, and vice versa, in an ambiguous '*development of meaning* [*devenir du sens*]' (*PW*, 127/178). In this way, the understanding of one another in dialogue is a condition of the success of our expressive efforts; it secures them as *common acquisitions* from which further expressive acts are made possible. The 'accomplishment' of thought in speaking speech, along with the development this inaugurates in one's language, is an inescapably intersubjective procedure. The worry raised at the outset of this section is thus neutralized by the fact that language, even as I strive to utilize it in new ways, is nothing other than 'the reverberation of my relations with myself and others' (*PW*, 20/30). The individual's novel acts of expression are dependent upon others, and upon the common system of language they share:

> In the act of speaking, the subject, in his tone and in his style, bears witness to his autonomy, since nothing is more proper to him, and yet at the same moment, and without contradiction, he is turned towards the linguistic community and is dependent on his language. The will to speak is one and the same as the will to be understood.
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> (*IPP*, 54-5)

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[110] One recognizes the very same erosion of the distinction between activity and passivity is articulated in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception insofar as the experience of one's own body and the perceived world vary together. Cf. 'Every external perception is immediately synonymous with a certain perception of my body, just as every perception of my body is made explicit in the language of external perception.' (*PhP*, 212/248-9)

The system of my language is an open one, susceptible equally to the expressive efforts of others as it is to my own. It is in this sense that men 'borrow from one another so constantly' to the extent that 'it is impossible to have any more than a rough idea of what is due to each individual man' (*S*, 74/93).

Of course, failure to understand someone else's speech is always a possibility, and Merleau-Ponty is both willing and able to account for this. The 'presentation' of speaking subjects to one another that Merleau-Ponty describes is only possible if there is a suitable background of common or shared significations. One obvious extreme in which I will fail to understand another's speech is if they utilize a language that is foreign to me. In this case, it will be impossible for either of us to reach one another through speech since we lack even an 'anonymous' language as a common background against which our individuality might stand out. Yet even when I engage with someone with whom I share a common language, failure of understanding is possible. Although we might utilize the same signs, it is possible that there is an aspect of the other's use that escapes me. I cannot make sense of the other's speech because I fail to grasp it as a coherent utilization of our common signs. This happens when, for a variety of possible reasons, we have each developed systems of language that, in certain contexts, cannot find in one another a continuation of their own efforts. I might not, at a young age, take anything away from my experience of reading a certain novel; it literally does not speak to me. Perhaps if I return to it in later years, I will find that the author is now capable of reaching me and of making me 'come to dwell in him' through his use of language. This will be because, in the intervening years, my use of language has developed in such a way that the thought expressed by the novel has become a possibility for me (although I may have never actualized it of my own accord). The author's language is now capable of taking me beyond my acquired significations. I must be able to 'accommodate' to the author if I am to understand him and, indeed, this may never happen.

For the same reasons, I might fail to understand another individual in a dialogue (and here the dialogue itself may be forced to come to an end). I can only understand those who, despite presenting me with an unfamiliar use of my familiar signs, offer me a *coherent* development or 'deformation' of my system of language in doing so. The novelty of another's speech is therefore only graspable because we are already so close to one another through the acquired uses of language that we share. This proximity between individuals will be more or less great depending on the degree to which they have participated in common developments of their language through their efforts to make themselves be understood by one another.

Before considering how the middle period offers a way out of the problems that arose from the early discussion of speech and expression, it is worth noting a striking circularity within Merleau-Ponty's writing. As we saw in Chapter 2, throughout his discussions of perception Merleau-Ponty repeatedly appeals to the notion of communication as a suitable description of the subject's relationship with the perceived world and its contents. Prior to other people, claims Merleau-Ponty, it is in our experience of the perceptual *thing* that we encounter the 'miracle of expression', and nature is 'our interlocutor in a sort of dialogue' (*PhP*, 334/376). In perceptual exploration, I enter into a discourse with the world

through my corporeality. Through the systematic arrangement of my body, I understand and respond to the solicitations of perceptual appearances and the world is revealed to me. The description of perception as a communion or dialogue can thus be seen to foreshadow and inform Merleau-Ponty's subsequent turn to language and communication as the main focus of his study, and helps establish an overarching motif throughout his work.

4.3 *Operative Language*

We're now in a position to appreciate how Merleau-Ponty's middle period work begins to address the problems that ultimately emerged from the gestural account of speech offered in *Phenomenology of Perception*. I will now briefly unpack this before turning, in the next chapter, to consider Merleau-Ponty's broader understanding of the relationship between perception and language in his final writings.

i. Accommodating an Interdependence of Speaking Speech and Spoken Speech

The descriptions of intersubjective experience and communication that Merleau-Ponty offers in his middle period writings allow us to appreciate precisely how his thinking has progressed since *Phenomenology of Perception*. What we discover is that Merleau-Ponty has now begun to place a much greater emphasis on the intersubjective and historical conditioning of acts of linguistic expression than was present in the *Phenomenology*. This emphasis calls for a renewed conception of the relationship between speaking speech and spoken speech. The asymmetrical relationship that emerges in the *Phenomenology*, and which was problematized in Chapter 3, is now replaced with a new appreciation of the interdependence that holds between the two sides of Merleau-Ponty's distinction. The middle period appropriation of Saussurian linguistics provides the proper conceptual tools with which to accommodate this interdependence.

The individual's use of his language is constantly influenced and developed in cooperation with other speaking subjects, since it is in speech that he attempts to make himself understood by others. Through this cooperative development the system of diacritical relations between signs is gradually altered or 'deformed'. As a result, the conventions and rules of language are constantly renewed and developed by the communicative efforts of speaking subjects. Conversely, we see how the expressive activity of speaking speech is always conditioned by the extant system of language that a linguistic community shares. Speaking speech brings a meaning that was previously unavailable to expression, yet this involves an actualization of possibilities that were latent within the already established system of language. It is only as an immanent, 'coherent' deformation of the established meanings that speaking speech is possible, since it is a condition of its success as an expressive act that others are capable of grasping and appropriating its novel signification. It is as others understand, appropriate, and develop this meaning that it becomes established as part of a shared linguistic culture; it becomes

spoken speech. In its turn, this successful expressive act will make available further possibilities for future creative acts. It is in this continual process of renewal and sedimentation that a linguistic and cultural *tradition* comes to be constituted over time.

Crucially, the movement of a linguistic tradition involves a fully reciprocal relationship between speaking speech and spoken speech. These two poles are now properly understood as two moments of a continuous, diachronic '*development of meaning*' (*PW*, 127). In the previous chapter, we saw that Merleau-Ponty was clearly sensitive to the requirement of such a reciprocity or interdependence at the time of *Phenomenology of Perception*. Yet this interdependence was undermined by his formulation of the gestural account of speech at that time, according to which speaking speech, as a bodily gesture, was not reliant upon the established significations of constituted language. Instead, speaking speech was presented as emerging from the 'primordial' and 'silent' domain of embodied perception that lies 'beneath traditions' (*PhP*, 530n7/218n1). As a consequence, the relationship between speaking speech and spoken speech appeared almost antagonistic, with speaking speech serving to invalidate and overthrow the established significations deployed in spoken speech.

This antagonism is to be contrasted with the language Merleau-Ponty now employs in the middle period writings. He now clearly emphasizes the sense in which there is a vital *preservation* involved in new acts of expression:

> Our present expressive operations, instead of driving the preceding ones away – simply succeeding and annulling them – salvage, preserve, and (insofar as they contain some truth) take them up again; and the same phenomenon is produced in respect to others' expressive operations, whether they be past or contemporary. Our present keeps the promises of our past; we keep each others' promises. Each act of philosophical or literary expression contributes to fulfilling the vow to retrieve the world taken with the first appearance of a language, that is, with the first appearance of a finite system of signs which claimed to be capable in principle of winning by a sort of ruse any being which might present itself. Each act of expression realizes for its own part a portion of this project, and by opening a new field of truths, further extends the contract which has just expired.
>
> (*S*, 95)

This preservation of the past in the present is captured by the use Merleau-Ponty now makes of the Husserlian term *Stiftung*, which is commonly translated as 'institution'. For Merleau-Ponty, in the philosophy of language, the concept of institution refers to 'that fecundity of the products of a culture which continue to have value after their appearance and which open a field of investigations in which they perpetually come to life again' (*PW*, 59).[111] This is the fecundity of successful acts of expression, which come to be appropriated by a linguistic community and thereby make available new expressive possibilities in the shared system of language. By bringing this concept to the fore, the distinction between speaking speech and spoken speech is effectively reined in due to the manner in which

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[111] In a series of lectures on the concept, delivered at the Collège de France in 1954, Merleau-Ponty elaborates on the application of institution in contexts other than language and culture. One such example involves the maturation of the body in puberty. In puberty, one's body comes to acquire a new sense, and new possibilities become available. The concept of institution serves to capture this bringing to birth of a future by a present event. A detailed discussion of the 'Institution' course can be found in (Vallier, 2005).

speaking speech is now presented as emerging out of the established significations of constituted language. There are thus no 'pure' instances of speaking speech. Conversely, there is ultimately no 'pure' spoken speech either, since the acquired system of language always harbors latent, incubating changes and is thus susceptible to an historical development of meaning as it is taken up and utilized by speaking subjects.[112]

At bottom, it is the middle period appropriation of Saussure's structuralist linguistics that facilitates this interdependence of speaking speech and spoken speech. This is due to the fact that in Saussure Merleau-Ponty discovers a way of accounting for the immanence of meaning in words that diverges from the letter, if not the spirit, of the gestural account of speech offered in *Phenomenology of Perception*. With the conception of language as a diacritical system of signs the immanent meaning of linguistic expression no longer needs to be subordinated to a 'natural' order of embodied perception as it is in the *Phenomenology*. Instead, there is a meaning immanent to linguistic acts insofar as they draw upon the already acquired system of relations constitutive of the speaking subject's language.

ii. Operative Language

The movement towards a proper interdependence relation between speaking speech and spoken speech bears wider ramifications for the shape of Merleau-Ponty's thought. In particular, we can begin to see how the developments of the middle period work on language and expression pulls Merleau-Ponty away from the constitutive foundationalism whose presence in *Phenomenology of Perception* culminated with the assertion of the tacit *Cogito*. It is not until Merleau-Ponty's later work that this important departure from the *Phenomenology* begins to become fully explicit in his own writing. Before attending to the shape of Merleau-Ponty's thought in the late period, however, it is worth flagging a final concept that emerges in the middle period work that most clearly encapsulates the shift between the early and middle period works. At this time, Merleau-Ponty begins to speak of an 'operative *language*', offering a direct connection with the conception of operative intentionality advanced in *Phenomenology of Perception*.

Merleau-Ponty defines the goal of the middle period study of language as the revelation of 'an operant or speaking language whose words live a little-known life' (*S*, 75).[113] This operative language is to be contrasted with 'spoken' language, but we should be careful not to read this distinction in precisely the same manner as the speaking/spoken distinction is defined in *Phenomenology of Perception*. It is clear that by 'spoken language' Merleau-Ponty means language such as it becomes a circumscribed object of thought. This conception of language as an object is in play not only in the linguistic sciences, but also in traditional philosophical reflection on language. The shortcomings of traditional

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[112] This claim is elucidated in the chapter of *The Prose of the World* entitled 'The Algorithm and the Mystery of Language'. Here, Merleau-Ponty attends to the case of mathematical uses of language, which restrict themselves to 'designating nothing but what language has already possessed' (*PW*, 118). He argues that it is impossible for even this kind of practice to be immune to the diachronic development of meaning that is definitive of linguistic tradition.

[113] Merleau-Ponty refers to the concept again in his introduction to *Signs* (*S*, 18), published in 1960, as well as in several working notes from this time. This demonstrates that the concept continues to figure in his 'late period' thought.

philosophical reflection on language all stem from the failure to recognize that 'there always remains, behind our talk about language, more living language than can ever be taken in by our view of it' (*PW*, 117). Operative language – language as it is *lived through* by the speaking subject – involves 'a peculiar signification which is the more evident the more we surrender ourselves to it', and which 'resists any direct seizure' (*PW*, 116).

This critique of traditional philosophical reflection finds its roots in Merleau-Ponty's earlier discussions of speech and expression. The 'peculiar signification' of operative or living language was precisely what the gestural account of speech was intended to make sense of. The gestural account encountered intractable problems, however, since it effectively established, with the dichotomy of speaking speech and spoken speech, a dichotomy of perception and language. The idea of an operative *language* was ultimately unavailable to Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception*. It is with the recognition of an interdependence of speaking speech and spoken speech, facilitated by the appropriation of Saussure, that Merleau-Ponty begins to properly appreciate the place of language in our operative intentional engagement with, or situatedness in the world. The concept of operative language effectively encapsulates all of the middle period developments outlined above.

Operative language is the vehicle of the speaking subject's relations with the world and with others. It establishes an *open* situation around the subject that is susceptible to development through his ongoing expressive and communicative efforts. Language is now employed in a closely similar role to that of the body in *Phenomenology of Perception*'s conception of operative intentionality. It is the mediator of the subject's situatedness in a world that outstrips any purely 'natural' order of meaning. Operative language opens upon an intelligible, cultural world. We now see that phenomenological philosophy does not disclose a world beyond or beneath language itself, as Merleau-Ponty seemed to have suggested at certain points of the *Phenomenology*. As with the phenomenology of the body, the proper goal of the phenomenology of language is to set aside the 'objectivist' conception of its subject in order to disclose the 'intentional threads that unite it to its surroundings' (*PhP*, 74). As I noted above, it is only in his final writings that Merleau-Ponty begins to bring the broader significance of this shift to the fore of his thinking. The nature of the relationship between the sensible world of perception and the 'intelligible' world of ideality, and with it the relationship between the body and language, is at the very heart of the late writings. It is to this topic that I shall now turn.

5.

Flesh, Reversibility, and Ideality: The Place of Language in Merleau-Ponty's Late Period

By 1959, Merleau-Ponty had begun to shift his attention away from the thematic focus on expression and language that had occupied him since 1945. Leaving the manuscript of *The Prose of the World* unfinished, he began working in earnest on the project he had initially envisioned in 1952 as *The Origin of Truth* (*PriP*, 8), and which eventually became the manuscript for *The Visible and the Invisible*. In its turn, *The Visible and the Invisible* was interrupted by Merleau-Ponty's death in May 1961 at the age of just 52. Only four chapters were drafted of what was clearly a major undertaking, intended to culminate in a work of huge scope and ambition. Merleau-Ponty's death silenced a thought that was still only on the way to fruition, and which was yet to crystallize into a definitive expression. It hardly needs to be said that this brings with it significant interpretative difficulties. One cannot presume to offer a categorical presentation of what is essentially an incomplete thought.

Nonetheless, one can trace a clear direction of movement to Merleau-Ponty's work in the final years of his life. The aims, concepts, and arguments found in the posthumously published manuscript for *The Visible and the Invisible* are corroborated and illuminated by essays, lecture courses, and working notes Merleau-Ponty composed during this time. Furthermore, and despite the new philosophical lexicon Merleau-Ponty feels obliged to introduce in the final writings, one recognizes a continuity with the work produced in his early and middle periods such that the developments of the late writings are not wholly unanticipated. Whilst he certainly subjects his earlier work to critical scrutiny (as Chapter 3 noted, specifically with regard to the tacit *Cogito*) Merleau-Ponty explicitly envisioned *The Visible and the Invisible* as a return to the themes and 'results' of *Phenomenology of Perception* in order to bring them, as he puts it, 'to ontological explicitation' (*VI*, 183/234). The middle period developments considered in Chapter 4 play no small part in motivating and informing this endeavour, especially with regard to the place of language, which comprises the guiding concern of what follows in this chapter.[114]

More specifically, we are pursuing what Merleau-Ponty himself concedes is 'the most difficult point' (*VI*, 149/193): the relationship between the sensible order of perception and the 'intelligible' order of ideas or thought. This issue is undoubtedly central to the thought being developed in *The Visible and the Invisible*. Indeed, the very title of the manuscript encapsulates Merleau-Ponty's concern with the

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[114] The important role of the middle period writings in motivating Merleau-Ponty's final period is inadequately reflected in much of the secondary literature. To my mind, only (Besmer, 2007) lays sufficient emphasis on the significance of the middle period work on language. Much of the other literature, where it does discuss the middle period, presents it as either making little or no progress beyond the *Phenomenology*'s discussion of speech (e.g. (Dillon, 1997) & (Baldwin, 2007)) or as marking a foray into structuralism that, whilst intriguing, was subsequently abandoned in Merleau-Ponty's later work (e.g. (Edie, 1987)). Because of this, each of these readings makes Merleau-Ponty's already esoteric later writings much harder to understand.

relationship between real and ideal, fact and essence, perception and thought. Chapter 3, above, explored the way in which Merleau-Ponty's handling of the relationship between language and perception in the *Phenomenology* raised difficulties for the overall shape of his thought. In the previous chapter, we enumerated the ways in which Merleau-Ponty's thinking about language developed after 1945. As I have suggested, the changes instigated during the middle period can be seen informing Merleau-Ponty's project in his final writings. It is in the late period that we find Merleau-Ponty explicitly attempting to leave behind once and for all the kind of constitutive foundationalism with regard to the relationship between the perceived world and language whose presence in *Phenomenology of Perception* we found to be problematic in Chapter 3. The goal of the present chapter, therefore, will be to elucidate and explore a thesis emerging at the heart of Merleau-Ponty's late work: that, in the words of Claude Lefort, 'there is no frontier between language and the world' (Lefort, trans. 1968: *xxx*).

Only the germ of this thesis is to be found explicitly stated within what was completed of *The Visible and the Invisible*. The key to a more complete articulation is provided, however. As we noted at the outset of Chapter 4, Merleau-Ponty proposes that his new philosophical lexicon of 'the flesh' (*la chair*), which he initially defines in relation to the perceiving body and the sensible world, is equally applicable to language and to the 'intelligible world' of ideas. Section 5.2, below, will unpack this talk of a flesh of language. Section 5.3 will then explore how this relates to Merleau-Ponty's important critical engagement with Husserl's late text 'The Origin of Geometry', developed in a lecture course at the Collège de France in 1960 and later published as *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*. In this lecture course, we can find some of the clearest statements of Merleau-Ponty's late thinking about language and its relationship with the sensible world. These elements of the course can in turn be used to elucidate some of the more obscure claims made in *The Visible and the Invisible*. However, we must first begin by clarifying the new lexicon of 'the flesh' and 'reversibility' that is so characteristic of the late period work.

5.1 *The Body as Flesh and the Flesh of the Sensible World*

i. The New Lexicon

In *The Visible and the Invisible* itself, it is only in the last of the four completed chapters that Merleau-Ponty begins formally to introduce and determine his philosophical vocabulary of 'the flesh'.[115] By the time we reach 'The Intertwining – The Chiasm' Merleau-Ponty takes himself to have established the shortcomings of the philosophical methodologies of 'reflection', 'dialectic', and 'intuition'.[116] In light of this critical work, he begins the fourth chapter with the proposal that philosophy 'must recommence

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[115] He did live to see the publication of one essay, 1961's 'Eye and Mind', in which several of the new concepts were helpfully explored via the philosophy of painting.
[116] These methodologies can be understood as representative of specific targets. 'Reflection' = Descartes and Kant, 'Dialectic' = Sartre, 'Intuition' = Husserl and Bergson. I cannot pursue these critical dimensions of *The Visible and the Invisible* here, although they are certainly not entirely unfamiliar to the reader of *Phenomenology of Perception*.

everything' (*VI*, 130/170) in order that it might avoid the errors of the established concepts and procedures of the tradition. Such recommencement is certainly not unfamiliar in the context of Merleau-Ponty's thought, however. He claims that philosophy will be renewed if it 'installs itself' in 'experiences that have not yet been "worked over," that offer us all at once, pell-mell, both "subject" and "object," both existence and essence, and hence give philosophy the resources to redefine them' (*VI*, 130/170). He immediately cites three examples of the requisite kind: seeing, speaking and, to the extent that it can be distinguished from speech, thinking[117] – those same 'irrecusable and enigmatic' (*VI*, 130/170) experiences that his own work consistently gravitated around throughout his career.

Nonetheless, Merleau-Ponty now seeks a renewed engagement with these modes of experience, and considers it necessary to formulate 'new instruments' (*VI*, 130/170) with which to handle them. The notion of the flesh (*la chair*) is foremost amongst these. Indeed, in a working note of June, 1960, Merleau-Ponty describes the flesh as the 'essential notion' for his philosophy (*VI*, 259/307). He there proceeds to offer a definition of the flesh as 'the sensible in the twofold sense of what one senses and what senses' (*VI*, 259/307), which he elaborates in the following way:

> What one senses = the sensible thing, the sensible world = the correlate of my active body, what "responds" to it – – What senses = I cannot posit one sole sensible without positing it as torn from my flesh, lifted off my flesh, and my flesh itself is one of the sensibles in which an inscription of all the others is made, the sensible pivot in which all the others participate, the sensible-key, the dimensional sensible.
>
> (*VI*, 259-60/307-8)

In this definition, we can already recognize how the notion of the flesh is firmly grounded in *Phenomenology of Perception*'s study of the body's place in perceptual experience. The description of the sensible world as the 'correlate' of the active body refers to a thought that the *Phenomenology* had already explored at length in terms of the body schema and its role in the grasping and unfolding of perceptual *sens*. We have already explored, in chapter 2, Merleau-Ponty's articulation of the manner in which 'external perception and perception of one's own body vary together because they are two sides of a single act' (*PhP*, 211/247). Yet Merleau-Ponty now appears to be pushing this line of thought further, since the notion of the flesh is not simply synonymous with the lived or phenomenal body (*le corps propre*) of *Phenomenology of Perception*. The flesh is 'the sensible' *in toto*; it captures both the subject ('what senses') and object ('what one senses') poles of perceptual experience. In more Merleau-Pontian terms, the flesh encapsulates *both* moments of the perceptual dialogue: the sensing body and the sensible world. Merleau-Ponty thus speaks in turn of the flesh of the body *and* of a 'flesh of the world' (*VI*, 250/298) or 'of things' (*VI*, 133/173). Crucially, this commonality is not to be thought of as resulting from a unidirectional possession or determination of one by the other; Merleau-Ponty is keen to avoid the attribution of a primacy here. Thus, whilst every sensible thing is 'torn from my flesh', my own flesh

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[117] For the kinds of reasons we have already discussed in chapters 3 and 4, he is reticent to strongly distinguish between speech and thought. In this context, it is fairly clear that 'Thinking' also offers an implicit reference to Heidegger's work, which exerted a growing influence in Merleau-Ponty's later years.

is itself *of* the sensible world – it 'is one of the sensibles' – and its engagement with the things thus unfolds *from within* the flesh of the world. In this way, the notion of the flesh places a much heavier emphasis than was present in the *Phenomenology* on the body's place among 'the order of the things' (*VI*, 137/179).

Insofar as it offers an 'ontological explicitation' of the *Phenomenology*, the primary impetus of the notion of the flesh is to underscore the inadequacy of an ontological dualism. As the *Phenomenology* sought to demonstrate, the received categories of 'subject' and 'object', or 'being-for-itself' and 'being-in-itself' are problematized by the body-world relationship in perception, since the body is at one and the same time both seer and seen, sensing and sensible. These dual aspects or 'dimensions' of the body's being cannot be disentangled from one another, claims Merleau-Ponty, and for this reason the being that sees, touches, and hears cannot be of a wholly different ontological kind from the world of things it opens upon. Whilst Merleau-Ponty remains sensitive to the manifest grounds of a distinction between sensing and sensible, he seeks to avoid radicalizing, and thus distorting, this differentiation by defining it in terms of two distinct categories of being. This aim is articulated at the outset of 'The Intertwining – The Chiasm' in the following passage:

> It is as though our vision were formed in the heart of the visible, or as though there were between it and us an intimacy as close as between the sea and the strand. And yet it is not possible that we blend into it, nor that it passes into us, for then the vision would vanish at the moment of formation, by disappearance of the seer or of the visible. What there is then are not things first identical with themselves, which would then offer themselves to the seer, nor is there a seer who is first empty and who, afterward, would open himself to them – but something to which we could not be closer than by palpating it with our look, things we could not dream of seeing "all naked" because the gaze itself envelops them, clothes them with its own flesh.[118]
>
> (*VI*, 130-1/171)

Merleau-Ponty considers the notion of the flesh to be essential insofar as it provides a means of avoiding a distortion of the phenomena at the level of ontology, since it cuts across the received ontological categories.[119] Central here is the emphasis Merleau-Ponty now places on the dual dimensions of the body as both sensing[120] and sensible, and its quasi-paradoxical status as 'a *sensible for itself*' (*VI*, 135/176). It is in exploring the relationship between the two dimensions or aspects of the body's being that Merleau-Ponty introduces and develops the concept of 'reversibility' (*réversibilité*). It is reversibility that emerges as the defining characteristic of the flesh.

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[118] The '"all naked"' here is a reference to Descartes' Second Meditation, where Descartes speaks of the 'naked' wax beneath the 'garments' of its sensible properties (Descartes, trans. 1968: 111).

[119] The concept thus reinforces the argument given in Section 3.4 against Dreyfus' talk of being-in-the-world as 'a third way of being'. As we shall see, the flesh is a unitary category in which Merleau-Ponty intends to capture every facet of experience and of the world, from perception to thought and ideality.

[120] The French word in the text is *sentant*, which Lingis misleadingly translates as 'sentient' (*VI*, 136). *Sentant* is better caught by 'sensing' or 'feeling'.

The principal motif of reversibility is the image of one hand touching the other, in which the sense of touch is applied to the touching body itself as a tangible object. In the touching of the hand, we encounter a 'crisscrossing' (*recroisement*) of the touching and the tangible; an application of the body's two dimensions upon one another (*VI*, 133/174). This 'veritable touching of the touch' (*VI*, 133/174), which he later clarifies is 'always imminent and never realized in fact' (*VI*, 147/191),[121] is to be understood as emblematic of the reversible relations that hold more generally between the two dimensions or 'leaves' of the body. Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty maintains that this reversibility of the body is the crux of all perception. It is therefore worth unpacking precisely how it figures there.

This centrality of reversibility to perception is initially approached in terms of the correlation of active body and sensible thing in the case of touch. What we must acknowledge here, insists Merleau-Ponty, is a 'kinship' between the two poles that makes possible their reciprocal exchange. Their internal articulations are amenable to one another, such that the direction, cadence, and structure of the movements of my hand find their counterpart and reflection in the shifting horizon of the tangible thing, and its shape, size, and texture are thus disclosed to me. Such a disclosure is only possible because my touching hand is simultaneously 'accessible from without' (*VI*, 133/174) as a tangible object. Thus, the active movements of my hand 'incorporate themselves into the universe they interrogate' (*VI*, 133/174); my hand figures in the same landscape as the tangible things and is itself one of them. There is an essential inherence of touch in the tangible world insofar as to touch something is simultaneously to be touched by it. There is here 'a passive sentiment of the body' (*VI*, 133/174) that is internally related to its active tactile exploration and it is in this reciprocity of the active and the passive that the reversibility of the body's two sides as both touching and tangible is disclosed.

That the touching body must itself be tangible seems intuitively right, since the modality of touch always requires some kind of direct contact between the touching and the touched. Yet Merleau-Ponty asserts that the same principle is applicable across all sense modalities, and this claim might seem more difficult to countenance. The case of vision, for instance, which he now describes as a 'palpation of the eye'; a 'remarkable variant' of tactile palpation (*VI*, 133/173) manifestly does not involve a direct physical contact between the eye and the visible thing. Indeed, there is a necessary distance between seer and seen that is wholly absent in the case of touch. Furthermore, a reversibility of vision and the visible would not appear to have the same immediacy as the reversibility of touching and tangible it is supposed to mirror. Unlike the touching and tangible hand, I am not so readily able to turn my vision upon itself and to look upon my own eyes unaided, and the visibility of my eyes does not appear to be so intimately related to vision itself as does the tangibility of my hands in the case of touch.

In turning to the reversibility involved in vision, Merleau-Ponty does appear to shift his emphasis slightly. 'It is a marvel too little noticed', he declares, 'that every movement of my eyes – even more,

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[121] In other words, there is never a total coincidence of the touching with the touched. Instead, one finds that one hand will always pass into the rank of touched as an object for the other, touching, hand.

every displacement of my body – has its place in the same visible universe that I itemize and explore with them' (*VI*, 134/174). This suggests that it is in the correlation of bodily movement and the visible spectacle, already established in *Phenomenology of Perception*, that the reversibility of vision is instantiated. As in touch, the body's movement 'has its place' in the visible world it explores such that it is in principle included amongst the visible things. Yet Merleau-Ponty seems determined to push the analogy with touch to its fullest extent, claiming that all vision is necessarily 'doubled with a complementary vision or with another vision: myself seen from without, such as another would see me, installed in the midst of the visible, occupied in considering it from a certain spot' (*VI*, 134/175). And elsewhere, in 'Eye and Mind', he enthusiastically appeals to André Marchland and Paul Klee's experience, when painting, of feeling 'that things *look at them*' (*PriP*, 167, my emphasis). Merleau-Ponty insists on the literal status of such descriptions, asserting that 'it becomes impossible to distinguish between what sees and what is seen' (*PriP*, 167). Despite such insistence, however, one might worry that it remains difficult to entertain a full analogy between touch and vision here. The sense in which I find myself looked at by the visible things is surely at least in part metaphorical, since things *cannot see*, whereas in the case of touch I very much *am* touched by the things I touch. The worry is perhaps alleviated once we acknowledge that to speak of 'being touched' by a tangible object does not introduce any kind of troubling ascription of agency or experience to tangible things, there is no reason to think that Merleau-Ponty's talk of 'being seen' by things should involve the ascription of sight or perceptual consciousness to visible things. Rather, as David Morris puts it, the seer 'is inherently seen, in something like the way that a front inherently has a back' (Morris, 2010: 143).

Despite the potential ambiguity here, it does seem that a general principle of reversibility emerges from Merleau-Ponty's late discussion of perception. It is of the essence of all perception – as the dialogical unfolding of perceptual *sens* – that the perceiver is not foreign to the world he perceives, but rather '*is of it*' (*VI*, 135/175). The body's openness to the sensible world is effectively the reverse side of its own inherence within the world as a sensible thing, and the body's flesh constitutes an 'overlapping' or 'intertwining' (*entrelacs*) of sensing and sensible. The locus of this intertwining is to be found in the knitting together of the active body's motor horizon and the tactile, visual, auditory, etc. horizons of things and of the world, and this is certainly where Merleau-Ponty's desire to analogize the different sense modalities is on the firmest ground. That my movements find their response and reflection in the shifting appearances of the sensible things is a symptom of my own inherence in the sensible world. My movements take place within the sensible space, and it is this inherence that brings with it the imminent possibility of a reversal through which I am myself available as a tangible, visible, and audible thing.

It certainly appears to be in this sense that Merleau-Ponty goes on to emphasize what he calls a 'fundamental narcissism of all vision' (*VI*, 139/181). The body finds itself 'contained within the full spectacle' (*VI*, 138/180) it enjoys, and the narcissism thus consists in the fact that the sensible world is only reached through its intertwining with the active body. The self-experience involved here is fundamentally *not* of the body as a mere *object*. One does not see reflected, in the visible things, 'the

contour of a body one inhabits' (*VI*, 139/181). The narcissism is grounded in the body's sensible being, yet, unlike the case of one hand touching another, it is not an experience of its qualities as a mere sensible thing. The experience of being 'seen by the outside' (*VI*, 139/181) is not, then, an objectification by an alien gaze of inanimate objects that would compete with my own. Rather, it is a symptom of the fact that the system of the active body is itself mediated by and inheres within the sensible world it opens upon, whether this is in vision or any other sense modality. The indistinction between seer and seen that Merleau-Ponty insists on is therefore to be understood as an articulation of the fact that sensing cannot take place apart from its correlation and intertwining with the sensed, but must instead 'exist within it' (*VI*, 139/181). It is this existential belonging to the sensible world that ensures that I too am available as a sensible thing for others.

It is in this respect that Merleau-Ponty says of the flesh that it is *'a mirror phenomenon* and the mirror is an extension of my relation with my body' (*VI*, 255/303). We have already seen how a closely similar thought was explored in *Phenomenology of Perception*, and with the notion of reversibility, Merleau-Ponty appears to be offering a new formulation of the kind of pre-reflective or 'silent' reflexivity that he had previously addressed in terms of the tacit *Cogito*. In 'Eye and Mind', Merleau-Ponty describes the sensing body as 'a self', albeit 'through confusion, narcissism, through inherence of the one who sees in that which he sees, and through inherence of sensing in the sensed' (*PriP*, 163). As before, Merleau-Ponty describes this bodily self as fundamentally 'anonymous'. For instance, in a working note of September, 1959, the perceiving subject is 'the anonymous one [*l'anonyme*] buried in the world' (*VI*, 201/251).

An important shift from the discussion that led to the assertion the tacit *Cogito* in the *Phenomenology*, however, lies in the emphasis Merleau-Ponty now places on the body's status as a sensible being, amongst the things it explores. The self-relation that is realized in vision, for instance, is equally 'a relation of the visible with itself that traverses me and constitutes me as a seer' (*VI*, 140/183). What is discovered here is less a pre-reflective form of self-consciousness than a pre-reflective continuity or proximity that holds between the body's being and that of the sensible things, which the body discovers as 'an annex or prolongation of itself; they are incrusted into its flesh, they are a part of its full definition; the world is made of the same stuff as my body' (*PriP*, 163).

As we shall see, this solidarity between perceiver and the world in the reversibility of the flesh extends beyond strictly perceptual experience in order to include language and the intelligible or 'ideal' world it opens upon. It is in this way that Merleau-Ponty seeks to avoid the mistakes of *Phenomenology of Perception* of which the concept of the tacit *Cogito* is emblematic. Before turning to this, however, it remains for us to examine more closely Merleau-Ponty's application of 'flesh' to the world of sensible things.

iii. The Flesh of the World

Merleau-Ponty's talk of a 'flesh of things' or of the world should not to be read as a reduction of the perceiver to the perceived, or vice versa. What we might call Merleau-Ponty's 'monism of the flesh' is

intended as neither a materialist nor idealist doctrine. This is because the flesh is a category that cannot be accommodated by traditional ontological systems. Merleau-Ponty asserts that the flesh 'is not matter, is not mind, is not substance', but should instead be thought of as 'a *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being' (*VI*, 139/181). This 'style of being' is exhibited in the flesh of the body insofar as it is neither an ossified fragment of an objective being-in-itself nor a determinate 'content' of a delimited sphere of consciousness. The sensing body is a system of possibilities in the mode of the 'I can'; it is given 'in relief', as it were. Likewise, sensible things do not have the flattened out, spatiotemporal identity of circumscribed objects or matters of fact, but are always given within 'horizon structures' (*VI*, 153/198). A sensible thing or quality is not only grasped within spatial and temporal horizons; it simultaneously has its place within other 'dimensions' (*VI*, 224/273), or horizons of sense. To illustrate this, Merleau-Ponty appeals to the familiar case of colours, whose sense is always 'bound up' in various *Gestalt* structures. A given colour is always grasped through its participation in the *Gestalt* structures of its perceptual surroundings – the lighting-coloured things relationship; the overall 'constellation' of colours within the scene; the relations that hold between colours and other qualities such as textures – and its sense is seen to be altered should changes occur within these structures. It is not given as a fully determinate or positive entity of the order of *qualia*, since it is only grasped as one moment of a wider perceptual configuration. A given colour is 'a concretion of visibility, it is not an atom' (*VI*, 132/172).

Yet the sensible world also incorporates dimensions that transcend the immediate perceptual scene, and a given colour is implicated in relationships that are not themselves strictly or at least immediately visible. In virtue of its colour, a red dress bears relationships with all kinds of other 'red things' (e.g., 'the tiles of roof tops, the flags of gatekeepers and of the Revolution, certain terrains near Aix or Madagascar' (*VI*, 132/172)), and with other 'red garments' (e.g., 'robes of professors, bishops, and advocate generals' (*VI*, 132/172)). The differential relationships the coloured thing bears within fields such as these alter the sense of the colour itself, such that the red of a dress has a *different meaning* from the red of Saint George's Cross, or of the papal slippers. In this way, the eminently visible quality of colour is bound up in 'a fabric of invisible being' (*VI*, 132/172), in virtue of which it is much more than a self-sufficient perceptual datum. It is 'a certain differentiation, an ephemeral modulation of this world – less a colour or a thing, therefore, than a difference between things or colours, a momentary crystallization of coloured being or of visibility' (*VI*, 132/173).

The overtly Saussurian language Merleau-Ponty employs here will be significant when we come to consider the relationship between the sensible world and language. For the moment however, we are seeking to understand the concept of the flesh, and with the above articulation of an essential 'dimensionality' (*VI*, 227/276) of the sensible world, we reach the heart of the matter. Merleau-Ponty takes himself to be disclosing 'the tissue that lines' the sensible world and the things encountered within it: 'a possibility, a latency, and a *flesh* of things' (*VI*, 132-3/173). The flesh of the sensible world is

constituted by the mass of differential relationships that its members bear with one another. It is thus of the same order as *Gestalt* organization, which Merleau-Ponty now describes as 'a diacritical, oppositional, relative system' (*VI*, 206/256). It is in this diacritical system of relations that the *sense* or *meaning* of the sensible world is realized, and with the concept of the flesh Merleau-Ponty is proposing an ontological category in which there is an original and integral cohesion of sense and sensible; of the visible things and their 'invisible' meaning:

> Meaning is *invisible*, but the invisible is not the contradictory of the visible: the visible itself has an invisible inner framework (*membrure*),[122] and the in-visible is the secret counterpart of the visible, it appears only within it
>
> (*VI*, 215/265)

It might seem that this application of the concept of flesh to the sensible world is at a remove from our initial explication of the flesh in relation to the active and sensing body and its 'reversible' roles as both sensing and sensible. Crucially, the things of the sensible world are not sensitive as is my body, and are thus unable to enact the kind of 'self-sensing' (*se sentir*) that is definitive of the reversibility of the sensing and sensible dimensions of the body. This difference is acknowledged by Merleau-Ponty in a working note of May 1960, where he reiterates that to speak of 'the flesh of the world' is to describe the world as 'a *pregnancy* of possibles' (*VI*, 250/298) and finally to renounce the representation of the world as a fully determinate and surveyable object. The 'pregnant' dimensionality of the sensible world does not stand apart from the horizons of the active and sensing body, since there is an intertwining and correlation of each with the other. The body is open to the world only through its inherence within it as a '*sensible for itself*' (*VI*, 135/176), and it is in this sense that Merleau-Ponty spoke above of the sensible thing as 'torn from my flesh'.

With the lexicon of the flesh, Merleau-Ponty reinterprets the main themes of his earlier study of the body and perception. The body is neither a 'pure' thing nor a 'pure' idea, neither matter nor mind. The things it encounters in sense experience are neither contents of an immanent mental sphere nor 'mere things', fixed and determinate elements of a being-in-itself. Such categories capture only abstract moments of 'one sole and *massive* adhesion to Being which is the flesh' (*VI*, 270/318). Our task now is to understand how the new lexicon of the flesh is applied to language.

5.2 *The Flesh of Language*

i. Ideality and the Sensible

It is with the discussion of the meaning of the sensible world – a meaning that is literally *in*-visible, as he puts it – that we can perhaps already begin to see how Merleau-Ponty's conception of the flesh

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[122] It is perhaps no coincidence, given the role Merleau-Ponty ascribes to the body in the unfolding of perceptual *sens*, that *membrure* can also mean 'limb' (in sense of arm, leg).

opens out into a discussion of ideality, and of the relationship between the sensible and the intelligible. The dimensionality of the sensible world is what provides its inner articulations such that each moment of sensible experience is caught up within diacritical horizon structures of the kind sketched above. In this way, Merleau-Ponty describes the visibility of individual things and their qualities as intractably coupled with 'a second visibility, that of the lines of force and dimensions' (*VI*, 148/192). It is here that he enthusiastically cites the work of Marcel Proust as offering the most extensive descriptions of this kind of ideality 'that is not the contrary of the sensible, that is its lining and its depth' (*VI*, 149/193). As an example of Proust's insight, Merleau-Ponty refers to the rich description of the 'little phrase' of five notes from the fictitious composer Vinteuil's sonata that becomes, for Swann, the 'national anthem' of his love for Odette (Proust, trans. 1989: 238). In this example, the individual notes of the phrase each receive their sense from the relations they bear with one another as moments of a temporally unfolding *Gestalt* whole. This auditory *Gestalt* also takes its place within cultural, musical and auditory horizons, and even participates in the affective horizon of Swann's life, manifesting as it does for him 'the essence of love' (*VI*, 149/193). All of these participations, and the relationships that traverse the five notes of the musical phrase, are not themselves strictly audible phenomena, yet it is in terms of them all that the phrase has its identity and its sense.

Since we can recognize the very same musical phrase throughout a potentially infinite number of occurrences, we see that the phrase transcends any particular sensible manifestation, and it is in this regard that the phrase takes on a kind of ideal existence. Nonetheless, this idea cannot be divorced from the sensible world; it remains inescapably bound to the 'sonorous being' of the world, and we could not grasp it outside of an encounter with its sensible manifestation. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, such ideas 'could not be given to us *as ideas* except in a carnal experience' (*VI*, 150/194):

> It is not only that we would find in that carnal experience the *occasion* to think them; it is that 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,* 150/194)

Now, this kind of ideality – if, indeed, we can speak of ideality here as Merleau-Ponty insists – certainly appears to be of a quite different order to the ideal objects we reckon with in our reflective understanding and our propositionally structured *knowledge* of the world, or as Merleau-Ponty refers to it, "pure" ideality. For instance, we generally consider mathematical objects as subsisting quite apart from the sensible appearances via which we initially became acquainted with them and in relation to which we continue to make use of them. Unlike the musical phrase, the number 5 is not tied to the sensible appearances through which we become acquainted with it. Yet Merleau-Ponty is wary that we are invariably misled by such this kind of distinction. He warns against the temptation of a Platonist reification of these 'ideas of the intelligence', which would seek to erect them into 'a second positivity' (*VI*, 149/194) above or outside of the sensible world. In a manner similar to *Phenomenology of Perception*'s references to a 'pure consciousness', the notion of purity that Merleau-Ponty utilizes here is

representative of a mistaken way of thinking. A 'pure' ideality would be a meaning freed from the horizon structures of the sensible world, which Merleau-Ponty treats as a philosopher's chimera, involving the same errors of 'objective thought' that he has been explicitly seeking to eschew throughout his career. There is no rarefied ideal 'realm' that would be set apart from the world we see and touch and about which we speak; the ideal objects we formulate and utilize are not of a wholly different order to those sensible ideas 'veiled in shadow' that we grasp in our embodied engagement with the world *qua* flesh. As Jessica Wiskus notes, in his course notes on Proust at this time Merleau-Ponty explicitly asks whether we don't in fact find in Proust's writing 'a general conception of ideas' (cited in Wiskus, 2013: 92, Wiskus' trans.). That Merleau-Ponty seeks to develop an affirmative answer to this question is demonstrated by the following passage, in which he proposes a thorough continuity between the sensible and the 'pure' ideality:

> however we finally have to understand it, the "pure" ideality already streams forth along the articulations of the aesthesiological body, along the contours of the sensible things, and, however new it is, it slips through ways it has not traced, transfigures horizons it did not open, it derives from the fundamental mystery of those notions "without equivalent," as Proust calls them, that lead their shadowy life in the night of the mind only because they have been divined at the junctures of the visible world. … Let us only say that the pure ideality is itself not without flesh nor freed from horizon structures: it lives of them, though they be another flesh and other horizons.
>
> (*VI*, 152-3/197-8)

As we saw at the outset of the previous chapter the 'other flesh' that Merleau-Ponty is referring to here is that of *language*, that 'less heavy, more transparent body' into which the visibility of the sensible world 'emigrates' (*VI*, 153/198). We have already traced the manner in which Merleau-Ponty's study of language in the period preceding his turn to *The Visible and the Invisible* mirrored his phenomenological account of the lived body and its place in perception. We must now consider how the body-language analogy translates into the new language of the flesh that emerges in the late period.

ii. Language and Reversibility

Since it is reversibility that Merleau-Ponty considers definitive of the category of flesh, the identification of language as a species or mode of flesh obviously implies that here too one can discover reversible relations. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty expressly notes that it is 'too soon now to clarify' the 'pure' ideality and the flesh that is proper to it (*VI*, 153/198). Yet we can find some suggestive, albeit underdeveloped, articulations of the reversible relations that traverse language and expression in these final pages, each of which can be seen to develop from his earlier work on speech and language.[123]

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[123] We may have to resign ourselves to the fact that a determinate, univocal definition of reversibility, one that will consolidate and clarify its multifarious applications, will not be forthcoming in Merleau-Ponty's late writings. This is certainly how Dillon sees things. He goes so far as

First, we find Merleau-Ponty once more revisiting the thought with which the *Phenomenology*'s gestural account of speech began: speech is an inescapably embodied activity, conditioned such as it is by 'those strange movements of the throat and mouth that form the cry and the voice' (*VI*, 144/187). This corporeal character means that speech is caught up in a reversibility that traverses the body as a 'sonorous being', specifically one that holds between the voice and hearing. The vibrations of the vocal chords from which the voice issues are themselves heard 'from within' by the speaking subject; there is 'a reflexivity of the movements of phonation and of hearing; they have their sonorous inscription, the vociferations have in me their motor echo' (*VI*, 144/188). The voice and audition are the obverse and reverse sides of one another, and there is here a blurring of the active and the passive dimensions of the body of the kind that Merleau-Ponty considers essential to all perception. It is this that lies behind Merleau-Ponty's insistence that 'there is much more than a parallel or an analogy' between the body and language, but rather 'solidarity or intertwining' (*VI*, 118/156). In the corporeal rootedness of speech to the sensible world, the flesh of language is interwoven with that of the body, and Merleau-Ponty thus says of speech that it 'prolongs into the invisible, extends unto the semantic operations, the belongingness of the body to being' (*VI*, 118/156).

The acquisition of language constitutes a development and enrichening – phonologically, semantically, and syntactically – of the body as a sonorous being. Speech is much more than a mere vociferation; it is *articulate* insofar as it is the utilization of a signifying power that emerges in tandem with the systematic whole of a language. In speech, as in 'mute' or non-linguistic perception, we are able to grasp an 'invisible' – a *meaning* – that is the other side of a sensible, 'visible', phenomenon. For the speaking subject, 'sense and sound are in the same relationship as the "little phrase" and the five notes found in it afterwards' (*VI*, 153/198). For this reason, the flesh of language does not stand apart from the flesh of the sensing-sensible body and of the sensible world. Whilst Saussure is no longer explicitly appealed to, his continued influence is apparent in Merleau-Ponty's description of the meaning of the verbal phrase as 'the totality of what is said, the integral of all the differentiations of the verbal chain' (*VI*, 155/201). The meaning 'is given with the words for those who have ears to hear' (*VI*, 155/201) and what emerges from the reversibility of the voice and audition is a reversibility of speaking and understanding in the communicative life of speaking subjects. It is this reversibility that is prefigured in Merleau-Ponty's middle period descriptions of a blurring of the active and passive poles in linguistic communication and expression, which we explored in Section 4.2. The reversibility of speaking and understanding is effectively synonymous with a full-blooded openness to others that is enacted and unfolds in linguistic communication; the flesh of language is fundamentally *intersubjective*.

The intersubjective dimension of language once again demonstrates a solidarity and continuity with the sensing and sensible flesh of the body. The same reciprocity of active and passive that is operative in the experience of the sensible world is constitutive of the body's openness to others like itself. We have already seen, in the previous chapter, how this line of thought was articulated in *Phenomenology of*

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to argue that Merleau-Ponty's deployment of the concept of reversibility 'is deliberately … ambiguous' (Dillon, 1997: 222), and that the function of this ambiguity lies in highlighting the relationships that hold between the various dyads to which the concept is applied.

Perception, and Merleau-Ponty now formulates it in terms of an 'intercorporeal being' that opens before the sensing body, in which is founded 'a transitivity from one body to another' (*VI*, 143/186). The reversibility of the body in touch and vision – the 'adherence' of the sensing to the sensed and vice versa – allows it to find its own openness to the sensible things reiterated in other bodies that its sees and touches. I experience a concordance between my own body and another that I encounter in the sensible world, to the effect that 'what I see passes into him, this individual green of the meadow under my eyes invades his vision without quitting my own' (*VI*, 142/185). There is here an immediate recognition of a *shared* experience and a common world. The full-blooded intersubjective experience afforded by language is foreshadowed by this intercorporeal openness of the flesh, and in the closing passages of the manuscript the continuity between language and the sensing-sensible flesh of the body is explicitly asserted by Merleau-Ponty in the following way:

> In a sense, if we were to make completely explicit the architectonics of the human body, its ontological framework, and how it sees itself and hears itself, we would see that the structure of its mute world is such that all the possibilities of language are already given in it.
>
> (*VI*, 155/200)

Returning once more to the acquisition of language, and the transition from the 'mute' world of the pre-linguistic infant to the articulated, 'speaking' world of the mature language user, we can recognize the emergence of another type of reversibility that traverses the flesh of language and which Merleau-Ponty lays great stress upon. An integral aspect in the teaching and learning of language is the capacity to point out and correct errors in the student's efforts, and to introduce them, however informally, to the acontextual rules and norms that govern the signifying practices of the linguistic community. What manifests here is a kind of reflexivity of language, such that it is possible for speech acts, along with the system of language they utilize, to become the *objects* of further linguistic acts. In turn, it is this availability of language itself to be *spoken about* that would appear to ground the linguist's codification of language as an objective 'system of explicit relations between signs and signified, sounds and meaning' (*VI*, 153/198). Pushing his established body-language parallel into the new language of the late work, Merleau-Ponty now claims that the relationship between the two 'sides' of language – which we might describe respectively as language *qua* signifying and language *qua* signified[124] – is of the same kind as that which holds between the sensing and sensible moments of the body's flesh. There is a reversibility between language as a system of expressive *praxis* – as it is contextually utilized in acts of speech – and language such as it becomes an object for itself. Language is itself intelligible or 'thinkable', just as the body is included amongst the sensible things it discloses.[125]

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[124] In the terms of the middle period work, this would constitute a reversibility of 'operative' or 'speaking' language and 'spoken' language. We might, following Baldwin's suggestion, think of this as a reversibility of the language and the meta-language (Baldwin, 2014).
[125] This is something that Husserl notes in 'The Origin of Geometry'; from a certain perspective we see that language is itself 'thoroughly made up of ideal objects; for example, the word *Löwe* occurs only once in the German language' (*OG*, 357).

Extending the body-langage parallel to its full extent, Merleau-Ponty asserts that the reversibility of language is necessarily operative in its disclosure and expression of the intelligible world, just as the unfolding of perceptual *sens* is dependent upon the body's inherence in the sensible world. The signifying power of speech is 'sustained by the thousands of ideal relations' (*VI*, 118/155) that the objectifying or second-order perspective upon the language is explicitly directed towards. These relations are therefore reflected back to the speaking subject in her use and understanding of language, just as her bodily situation in the visible and tangible world is found reflected in vision and touch.[126] Merleau-Ponty thus writes that 'as the visible takes hold of the look which has unveiled it and which forms a part of it, the signification rebounds upon its own means, it annexes to itself the speech that becomes an object of science' (*VI*, 154/200). In this way, the reversibility that holds between the two sides of language involves, at one and the same time, 'a reversibility of speech and what it signifies' (*VI*, 154) that echoes the 'narcissistic' reversibility of the body and the sensible world in perception:

> Like the flesh of the visible, speech is a total part of the significations, like it, speech is a relation to Being through a being, and, like it, it is narcissistic, eroticized, endowed with a natural magic that attracts the other significations into its web, as the body feels the world in feeling itself.
>
> (*VI*, 118/155)

Merleau-Ponty's application of the concept of the flesh to language is undoubtedly expressive of the various interrelated kinds of reversible relations he believes to be involved in our possession, use, and understanding of language. Laying these various relations out as we have done makes clear the manner in which the 'other flesh' of language, and the intelligible world it makes available, cannot be held apart or divorced from that of the body and the sensible world. Involved here is an overarching effort to domesticate, as it were, the 'pure' ideality of the intelligible world by describing it as embedded in and embodied by linguistic practices which are themselves continuous with the sensing-sensible flesh of the body. Such an effort is certainly continuous with the spirit of the approach to the philosophy of language that Merleau-Ponty initiated with the *Phenomenology*'s gestural account of speech. However, it appears that Merleau-Ponty now seeks definitively to leave behind the problematic foundationalist conception of the relationship between perception and language that emerges in the *Phenomenology*. What Merleau-Ponty arrives at is an appreciation of an essential reciprocity between perceptual *sens* and the significations of language, such that they are each conditioned by one another within an overarching configuration or *Gestalt* that the category of flesh is intended to encompass. We can think of this development as an affirmation of James Edie's tentative suggestion, offered in response to the *Phenomenology*, that 'it may be that we have the articulated world of perception that we have precisely because of the potentialities that the linguistic expression of meaning introduces into experience' (Edie,

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[126] The continued influence of Saussure is apparent here, as the kind of relations Merleau-Ponty has in mind are those oppositive, diacritical relations identified by Saussure. It is only in the oppositive relations between signs that our uses of language go beyond themselves in order to signify the world. M.C. Dillon reiterates this thought in terms of a reversibility of extra- and infra-referentiality: 'the infra-referentiality of a chain of signifiers endows it with the power of extra-referentiality, the power to refer beyond itself' (Dillon, 1997: 217-8).

1987: 48). In this sense, language is to be understood as an essential dimension of our operative intentional engagement with or situatedness in the world of perception.

This key development of the late period is made perspicuous once we attend Merleau-Ponty's renewed engagement with Husserl's late works, and in particular the 1961 lecture course notes on 'The Origin of Geometry'. It is this engagement with Husserl that enables Merleau-Ponty to consider once again the role played by language in the genesis and development of thought and of ideal objects, and as such it is in turning to the course notes that language's status as the flesh of *ideas* can be further elucidated. Furthermore, it is here in Merleau-Ponty's often subtle, yet critical reading of the late Husserl that we find the clearest evidence of the definitive shift away from those features of his earlier thought that we found to be problematic back in Chapter 3.[127]

5.3 *Language, Ideality, and the 'True Husserlian Thought'*

i. Language and Ideality in 'The Origin of Geometry' (1936)

Husserl's primary concern in 'The Origin of Geometry' is a general problem of the origins of ideal objectivity, and in particular the origins of an ideal science such as geometry. Each moment of such a science – each new ideal acquisition or discovery – begins its life in the 'mental space' of the individual *inventor*, and so Husserl's problem is one of understanding how it is that 'geometrical ideality (just like that of all sciences) proceeds from its primary intrapersonal origin … to its ideal objectivity' (*OG*, 357-8). Immediately, Husserl acknowledges, 'we see that it occurs by means of language' (*OG*, 358). It is language that facilitates the expression, understanding, and subsequent sedimentation of ideas. This line of thought is of course already familiar to us insofar as it is taken up by Merleau-Ponty in his own thinking on speech and language.[128]

For Husserl, language facilitates the passage to ideal objectivity in two distinct ways, or stages. First, it is in acts of linguistic communication that an idea is capable of being transmitted from the mind of its progenitor and of being '*actively* understood by others' (*OG*, 360), such that it comes to be a common object of multiple consciousnesses. Yet such instances of actual communication between individual subjects, however numerous, are not sufficient for the constitution of an ideal *objectivity*, argues Husserl. Whilst actual communication facilitates the transmission of a common idea into the minds of multiple individuals, it cannot bring about 'the *persisting existence* of the "ideal objects"' (*OG*, 360), such that they

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[127] The course on 'The Origin of Language' is certainly not the only point in the late period that we find Husserl exerting an influence on Merleau-Ponty's thought. As is the case throughout his career, Merleau-Ponty's later work consistently utilizes and engages with Husserl, even if this is not always made explicit. As Dermot Moran argues, even the new lexicon of the flesh can be seen to have its roots in the Husserlian texts with which Merleau-Ponty was familiar (Moran, 2014).

[128] Albeit, for Merleau-Ponty, expression plays a constitutive or ontogenetic role in relation to ideal objects. This does not appear to be the case for Husserl. Husserl retains a sharp distinction between speech and its signification, word and idea, and as such considers the primary role of linguistic expression to be the transmission of ideal structures, rather than the means by which they are first 'accomplished'. We have seen how Merleau-Ponty, since *Phenomenology of Perception*, gives linguistic expression a fundamental ontogenetic role. The distinction that Husserl makes between speech and its signification is precisely what the 'reversibility' of the two terms is supposed to leave behind. Like Merleau-Ponty, Husserl does recognize the need for an original, *creative* act on the part of an inventor in the origin of ideal objects. Yet this act of creation is not itself essentially intertwined with linguistic expression, on Husserl's account.

transcend the activity of individuals, or any actual communication. 'What is lacking', he writes, 'is their continuing-to-be even when no one has realized them in self-evidence' (*OG*, 360), and it is here that language must be involved in a second respect. It is *written* language that is constitutive of the persisting existence of ideal objects, since writing is 'communication become virtual' (*OG*, 361) – i.e., without the need of further concrete communicative acts by individuals. The documentation of ideal structures gives them an existence independently of whether they are actually entertained or expressed by a particular individual or individuals, and their mode of expression here becomes wholly impersonal and a-contextual. As Merleau-Ponty puts it in his lecture course, this 'virtual' communication of meaning 'belongs in principle to everyone' (*TfL*, 119/166), and it is because of this that written language is the guarantor of ideal objectivity. Merleau-Ponty describes the shift to written expression as constituting a modification of the 'ontic mode' of the expressed sense. It is no longer ('even for the "I" who expresses it' (*HLP*, 25/29)) given as an original *production* (*Erzeugung*) – i.e., as the thematic object of a creative activity – but is instead 'available … for other productions' (*HLP*, 25/29), which is precisely what is meant by the Husserlian notion of institution. The written word takes on an objective existence and a permanence in the manner of physical things, and it is in this permanence that written expressions 'convey their sense as an activity which has fallen into obscurity but which is reawakened and which can again be transformed into activity' (*HLP*, 25/29).

Together, these two moments of Husserl's view on the role of language disclose the manner in which ideal objects are inescapably tied to their communication, understanding, and documentation via language, and Merleau-Ponty clearly takes much influence from this line of thought in his own work. An aspect of Merleau-Ponty's view that is brought out more explicitly in the course notes on Husserl is the manner in which language profoundly implicates the 'intelligible world' of ideas in an intersubjective dimension of experience. Since it is language that facilitates the passage to ideal objectivity, ideality is caught up within the intersubjective world, or as Husserl refers to it, the 'horizon of humanity' (*Mitmenscheit*) – i.e., the horizon of my relationships with other humans, both actual and possible, particular and general. For Merleau-Ponty, this relationship does not provide an *explanation* of ideality in terms of intersubjectivity (or vice versa); neither is to be understood as the *cause* of the other. Instead, it is the *simultaneity* of ideality and intersubjectivity that he regards Husserl's late discussion of language to be disclosing; ideality and intersubjectivity are each revealed as the 'reverse side' of the other:

> Ideality is at the hinge of the connection between me and others. It functions in this connection; it is operative, effective there. It is realized in and through this connection. That means: in the connection, there is not two positive terms, ideality and relation with others, for then it would have to be the case that the one explained the other. If you like, there is a positivity of the relation with others which is like a relief, and an ideality which is its reverse side, which oozes "at the edge of words," – or there is a positivity of the ideality and a relation with others which is its reverse side, which transforms the other into an *alter ego*, into a subject of the *Erzeugung* like me. These two versions of the phenomena are only one, for neither of the two terms is the positive or the negative of the other.
>
> (*HLP*, 24/27-8)

This articulation of Husserl's view is continuous with Merleau-Ponty's own account of the place of language in intersubjective experience that was discussed above, and also in the previous chapter. The language that is common to members of a linguistic community is constitutive of a common intelligible world of ideas. This common world then serves as the background against which new ideas are capable of being formulated, expressed, and understood via the kind of 'coherent deformations' discussed in the previous chapter. New ideas subsequently achieve permanence via the process of sedimentation that is afforded by written language. Merleau-Ponty thus follows Husserl in, as he puts it, 'placing openness to others and openness to ideality into the law of the praxical-perceptive' (*HLP*, 24/28) via a study of language.

With Husserl, Merleau-Ponty considers the three terms involved here – language, intersubjectivity, and the 'intelligible' order of ideal objects – to be inescapably intertwined with one another. As he puts it, '[l]anguage is borne by our relation to the world and to others, and language also bears and makes our relation to the world and to others' (*TfL*, 117-8/164). Thus, the 'flesh' of language cannot be abstracted from the world and the intersubjective horizon that it opens upon for the speaking subject. This thought is continuous with the concept of 'operative language' that emerged in Merleau-Ponty's middle period writings. We will now see how, through an often implicit critique, Merleau-Ponty distances himself from the details of Husserl's account of ideality. This critique provides an invaluable insight into the shape of Merleau-Ponty's own thought at the end of his life.

ii. The Question of Reactivation

The vast majority of Merleau-Ponty's course notes on Husserl centres on the place of language in 'The Origin of Geometry'. Yet within Merleau-Ponty's explicit enthusiasm for the essay, there emerges a quite distinct and significant critical engagement with the letter, if not the spirit, of Husserl's late reflections. A crucial element of Merleau-Ponty's professed methodology in his approach to Husserl here is to seek out what Heidegger had named the 'unthought' (*ungedachte*) within a philosopher's work: 'that which emerges in and through this work as having not yet been thought' (Heidegger, 1991: 71). For Merleau-Ponty, what this means is to draw out a 'latent articulation between things said' (*HLP*, 14/15), and as such he does not feel himself to be constrained by the presupposition of a single, 'objectively correct' interpretation of Husserl's writing. Instead, what he seeks to do is to see how Husserl's extant discussion might open out and develop in heretofore unanticipated directions, directions which might not necessarily sit comfortably with Husserl's own stated vision of his philosophical project. This results in certain aspects of Husserl's discussion being stressed at the expense of others, and in certain concepts being subjected to a kind of immanent critique. I suggest that it is in this working through Husserl that Merleau-Ponty definitively takes himself beyond his own earlier outlook.

The concept that is most explicitly and consistently problematized in the course notes is that of 'reactivation' (*wiedererinnerung*). For Husserl, we (necessarily) have the capacity to 'reactivate' our ideal acquisitions; a capacity to see them in the light of the original self-evidence they held in the productive activity of their inventors.[129] Reactivation is therefore sharply distinguished from the wholly passive understanding that is effected by the sedimentation of an ideal structure in language. Immediately after having drawn this distinction, Husserl warns of the dangers of the kind of activity that is grounded in the merely passive reception of sedimented meanings, and which proceeds without any reactivation of original self-evidences:

> There is a distinction, then, between passively understanding the expression and making it self-evident by reactivating its meaning. But there also exist possibilities of a kind of activity, a thinking in terms of things that have been taken up merely receptively, passively, which deals with significations only passively understood and taken over, without any of the self-evidence of original activity. … What often happens here is that a meaning arises which is apparently possible as a unity – i.e., can apparently be made self-evidence (sic) through a possible reactivation – whereas the attempt at actual reactivation can reactivate only the individual members of the combination, while the intention to unify them into a whole, instead of being fulfilled, comes to nothing
>
> (*OG*, 361)

Husserl does not offer any concrete examples, from the history of geometry or otherwise, to illustrate the kind of failure that he thinks this activity often ends in. What is crucial, however, is that this activity proceeds via the passive understanding of sedimented meanings made possible by language. And it is this '*seduction of language*' (*OG*, 362) that comes to serve as the antagonist of Husserl's essay as a whole, since the tendency of our thinking to proceed 'without any of the self-evidence of the original activity' invariably undermines our certainty in its validity, and thus threatens the rationality of subsequent ideal acquisitions:

> It is easy to see that even in human life, and first of all in every individual life from childhood to maturity, the originally intuitive life which creates its originally self-evident structures through activities on the basis of sense-experience very quickly and in increasing measure falls victim to the *seduction of language*. Greater and greater segments of this life lapse into a kind of talking and reading that is dominated purely by association; and often enough, in respect to the validities arrived at in this way, it is disappointed by subsequent experience.
>
> (*OG*, 362)

Our tendency to be 'seduced' by the sedimented meanings of language risks what Husserl describes as the 'emptying of sense' (*sinnentleerung*) of a tradition such as geometry. Husserl considers the fundamental malady of 'the whole modern age' (*OG*, 366) to consist in a succumbing to this seduction of language; a taking for granted of the ideal acquisitions that have come to constitute our scientific

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[129] As (Baldwin, 2014) notes, the concept of reactivation appears to be modeled on Platonic 'recollection' (*anamnesis*).

traditions. The capacity for reactivation has been jeopardized, and we have left ourselves vulnerable to making missteps in our thinking since the meaning of our ideal structures and traditions can no longer be "'cashed in'" (*OG*, 366) as genuine by grounding them in the original self-evidences of the pre-scientific 'originally intuitive life'. Husserl therefore understands modern man to be suffering from a profound epistemological crisis.

The solution Husserl offers to this crisis lies in the pursuit of a particular kind of 'regressive inquiry' (*Rückfrage*) by which we might trace the ideal edifice of a science like geometry 'back to the primal materials of the first formation of meaning, the primal premises, so to speak, which lie in the prescientific cultural world' (*OG*, 369). He is thus proposing a transcendental philosophical project, the ultimate aim of which is the disclosure of the *a priori* conditions of the possibility of a deductive science such as geometry. He is seeking to disclose the provenance of our ideal acquisitions by way of an historical inquiry into the origins of scientific traditions, but not one that would issue in an *empirical* history – a catalogue of the names, dates, and places to which what we now know as geometry owes its beginnings as a matter of fact. Husserl's investigations 'are historical in an unusual sense', since they concern themselves with 'depth-problems quite unknown to ordinary history' (*OG*, 354). He is proposing a transcendental or 'internal' history, one that will lay the foundations for a total reactivation of the immense chains of ideal acquisitions that have amassed through the historical formation of our scientific traditions. At bottom, what this calls for is a phenomenological disclosure of the original intuitive life, or the *Lebenswelt*, which is the ultimate soil from which our ideal objects inherit their genuine meaning (if indeed they have such a meaning). As Besmer puts it, Husserl's historical turn in his late writings 'is intended to establish the necessity and urgency of transcendental phenomenology itself' (Besmer, 2007: 115).

The project Husserl envisions is thus entirely dependent upon the in principle possibility of a total reactivation of our ideal acquisitions. In his course notes Merleau-Ponty repeatedly challenges this notion. The manner in which Merleau-Ponty handles this line of thought in the lecture course is arguably foreshadowed in a working note from November 1959. In this note, he complains that philosophy 'has never spoken – I do not say of *passivity*: we are not effects – but I would say of the passivity of our activity' (*VI*, 221/270). Now, whilst it is quite clear that Merleau-Ponty considers Husserl to have gone further than anyone else in elucidating this 'passivity of our activity', the implication here is that Merleau-Ponty's prospective work will seek to bring it to the fore *not* as the source of a nadir of modernity, as it is for Husserl, but as an essential feature of the human situation, and a necessary condition of the sense of our scientific, cultural, and linguistic practices and traditions. In the course notes, this view manifests itself in the sentiment that a total reactivation of original self-evidences is not only unnecessary but also, and for the same reasons, impossible.

Merleau-Ponty's skepticism stems from Husserl's own comments concerning the accomplishment of a total reactivation of a deductive science such as geometry. A total reactivation would proceed according to the following 'fundamental law': the entire edifice of a science such as geometry has

developed via a linear sequence of logical (i.e., *deductive*) inferences from first premises. As such, the ideal structures of geometry receive their meaning insofar as they can trace their provenance back through a chain of such logical inferences to the most original self-evidences. Husserl cashes this out in the following way:

> if the premises can actually be reactivated back to the most original self-evidence, then their self-evident consequences can be also. Accordingly it appears that, beginning with the primal self-evidences, the original genuineness must propagate itself through the chain of logical inference, no matter how long it is.
>
> (*OG*, 365)

Husserl immediately acknowledges that the task of a total reactivation would be prohibited by 'the obvious finitude of the individual and even the social capacity to transform the logical chains of centuries, truly in the unity of one accomplishment, into originally genuine chains of self-evidence' (*OG*, 365). In other words, a total reactivation would simply require an immense amount of time and superhuman levels of concentration. Nonetheless, Husserl is sure that such a reactivation must be *in principle* possible, albeit that to entertain such a possibility requires the hypothetical 'removal of limits from our capacity' (*OG*, 365). For Husserl, it is only the possibility of total reactivation that will guarantee the rationality of the entire geometrical tradition, and therein lies the motivation of the transcendental phenomenological enterprise.

In the following passage, Merleau-Ponty runs through Husserl's reasoning here before expressing his own reservations:

> the question that needs to be clarified: the crisis of European science is due to *Sinnentleerung* [emptying of sense]. The immediate remedy is historical *Besinnung* [reflection] in order to reawaken the *Urstiftung* [original institution/original ground] and all of its horizons. To unveil the *Lebenswelt* [life-world], the being of the horizon. To take up contact with what in us understands the *Urstiftung*, with the interior of history which bears the ideality – *but can we still do this? Isn't total reactivation in principle impossible?*
>
> (*HLP*, 32/37-8, my emphasis)

This is just one juncture at which Merleau-Ponty directly challenges Husserl's stated position concerning reactivation. Later on, he affirms that a total reactivation is indeed impossible, not only due to the 'lack of time', which Husserl acknowledges as a factual limit, but because 'there is a clarity which is proper to the acquired', a 'cohesion' of the sedimented meanings upon which new thinking relies (*HLP*, 58/70). Merleau-Ponty rejects the suggestion that we can expect, even in principle, to be capable of digging down beneath the entire sedimented weight of acquisitions in order to reactivate the 'primal self-evidences' upon which our traditions were originally instituted. This is due to the fact that such a process could only ever be pursued beginning from our present situatedness within these very traditions; our only means of access to the primal self-evidences is *through* the sedimentations that have been preserved in our linguistic practice (Besmer, 2007). As far as Merleau-Ponty is concerned, Husserl

fails fully to acknowledge the extent to which the propagation and development of a tradition over time by means of language instigates irreversible shifts in meaning that will inevitably colour, and hence undermine, any attempt at a total reactivation. *Contra* Husserl, there is not a direct transmission of sense through a chain of deductive inferences, but rather a diachronic *development of sense.*

This point in the lecture notes correlates with much of the discussion found in chapter 3 of *The Visible and the Invisible*, where Merleau-Ponty questions the capacity of philosophy – phenomenological or otherwise – to issue in a coincidence with its objects. As he puts it:

> If coincidence is lost, this is no accident; if Being is hidden, this is itself a characteristic of Being, and no disclosure will make us comprehend it. A lost immediate, arduous to restore, will, if we do restore it, *bear within itself the sediment of the critical procedures through which we have found it anew*; it will therefore not be the immediate.
>
> (*VI*, 122/160, my emphasis)

Through the historical institution and propagation of our scientific and cultural traditions, language itself is inextricably caught up in a diachronic development.[130] As such, there is no sense to the thought that we might – through the transcendental phenomenologist's own use of language – trace this development back to its origins in the 'originally intuitive life' that unfolds beneath or beyond the ideal acquisitions made available through language.

For Merleau-Ponty, the fact that total reactivation is in principle impossible should not be a cause for concern or the source of an epistemological crisis. He understands it to be a straightforward consequence of the manner in which intellectual traditions are inherited, sustained and developed over time. It is the thinking 'which deals with significations only passively understood and taken over' that is decisive here. As far as Merleau-Ponty is concerned, the passivity involved here, about which Husserl is so concerned, is an entirely necessary and even virtuous aspect of our living and developing intellectual traditions. This is the passivity involved in *operative intentionality*, and in particular in operative *language* and the process of *institution* (*Stiftung*), through which new expressive possibilities are opened up as the past activity, in successfully instituting a development of sense, recedes into the background. This thought is evidenced by the following passage, placed in square brackets following a reiteration of Husserl's worries about passivity. Merleau-Ponty deems it necessary to show, *pace* Husserl:

> that language *must* supplant the originally intuitive life, that otherwise thought would remain a captive – that at "higher" structures, thought does not go from the [originally intuitive life]… that there are shortcuts, that the universe of thought, like that of perception, is lacunary and baroque in itself, that there is a <u>lateral</u> evidence, <u>between</u> the acts, and not only a progressive and frontal evidence, and all of this follows because to think is not <u>having</u> but <u>not</u> <u>having</u>.
>
> (*HLP*, 26/30)

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[130] As we have seen, this thought comprises part of Merleau-Ponty's talk, in *The Visible and the Invisible,* of language as the flesh of ideality, since there is here a reversibility of language and the ideal structures that constitute our scientific and cultural traditions. Husserl's distinction between speech and idea (noted above in footnote 125) is decisive here, as it is this that prohibits him from properly recognizing the manner in which language itself is caught up in the development of ideal traditions. Husserl does acknowledge the general problem of the ideal existence of language, yet effectively offers nothing beyond a promissory note (*OG*, 358).

The speaking and thinking subject is not a constituting consciousness capable of spontaneous acts of sense bestowal, and thought is not the possession of a completely constituted object. Instead, active thought, intertwined as it is in its expression in words, draws passively upon the sedimented acquisitions that are preserved in language and its sense is therefore caught up in the network of diacritical relationships between signs that traverse the linguistic system. It is in these relationships that the 'shortcuts' and 'lateral evidence' Merleau-Ponty speaks of are realized. Since thought is caught up in language and draws passively from its resources, the sense of ideal significations cannot be strictly determined by a direct 'chain of evidence' beginning from an original, sub-linguistic ground. A given language is the total product of the expressive and communicative practices of an intersubjective and inter-generational community of speaking subjects. In order for this diachronic development to continue, the individual speaking subject does not begin again from the same position as his forebears, but instead relies upon their expressive achievements as the background of his present acts: 'Past insights remain operative in present speech' (Besmer, 2007: 125). As Merleau-Ponty puts the point: 'I do not need to reactivate in order to think along the thread of my thought of yesteryear or along the thread of the thought of someone else' (*HLP*, 65/78). In the historical development of a language, there is an entirely legitimate *forgetting of origins* that makes possible the continued genesis of sense, and the institution of new ideal structures. Nonetheless, the past activity remains present through its sedimentation as the institution or opening of a field of possibilities for future acts of thinking. Whilst the passive taking up of sedimented meanings does not proceed by a *reactivation* of the past activity, it does enable an engagement with and *renewal* of the past in the actualization of possibilities that those past acts made available. As Merleau-Ponty had earlier expressed the thought, the present act gives to the past 'not a survival, which is the hypocritical form of forgetfulness, but a new life, which is the noble form of memory' (*S*, 59/74).

iii. Beyond Foundationalism: The 'True Husserlian Thought'

Of course, Husserl himself recognizes this integral role of passivity in the 'lively, productively advancing formation of meaning' (*OG*, 365) through which a scientific tradition propagates itself. Geometry would not have proceeded beyond its first principles if the individual geometer was required to begin his activity from the ground up, as it were, and could not instead rely upon the acquired results of his predecessors. Yet the historical development facilitated here in no way ensures that a tradition is genuine, leaving it susceptible to a gradual 'emptying out' of sense. It is for this reason that Husserl postulates the necessity of a total reactivation that will be facilitated by transcendental phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty understands his own rejection of this enterprise to be continuous with what he considers Husserl's true insight: the disclosure of the intersubjective and intergenerational development of ideality that *requires* a forgetting of origins. It is in bringing this forgetfulness that 'makes tradition

fruitful [*féconde*]' (*HLP*, 20/23) to the fore that Merleau-Ponty believes Husserl to have profoundly elucidated the nature of ideality, even if this was inhibited by Husserl's own framing of the issue:

> There is therefore a truth which is the result of *Idealisierung* [idealization], forgetfulness of its genesis – and there a more profound truth which consists in rediscovering the instituting movement of the universe of ideas.
>
> (*HLP*, 66/80)

For Merleau-Ponty, the ultimate ground of ideality is to be found in this instituting movement itself, and not by tracing its development back to a self-sufficient 'pre-ideal' or foundation. He accepts, with Husserl, that this propagative movement leaves thought susceptible to making missteps, but crucially 'this possibility of error is also possibility of truth' (*HLP*, 58/70).[131] The validity of our ideal acquisitions – their possession of a 'genuine' meaning – is not to be vouchsafed by a phenomenological return to a self-sufficient and universal ground. In fact, Merleau-Ponty proposes a reversal of this foundationalist way of thinking: universality is the ultimate *telos* or limit of our expressive practices and the traditions that they propagate, rather than their original foundation or condition. Husserl provides an historical *a priori* by virtue of his elucidation of this propagative, 'fruitful' movement of living traditions:

> There is no opposition between this *a priori* and history itself, for it is nothing other than its structure <u>including</u> the element of forgetfulness, i.e., the element of nonreactivation, i.e., including the overcoming of relations to others and to the past.
>
> (*HLP*, 63/76)

The subtle yet significant shift in emphasis between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl provides vital insight into the shift that has taken place within Merleau-Ponty's own thinking between the publication of *Phenomenology of Perception* and his work on *The Visible and the Invisible*. The concept of reactivation is an integral feature of the fundamentally foundationalist enterprise Husserl is proposing in 'The Origin of Geometry', one that would seek to ground ideal structures in an original stratum of intuitive experience that is universal. By challenging the legitimacy of this concept, Merleau-Ponty is simultaneously staking a claim against the same kind of stratified or constitutive foundationalism that emerged out of the *Phenomenology*'s account of speech and expression. To be clear, the foundationalism of the *Phenomenology* is not identical to that offered in Husserl's late thought. Crucially, Husserl seemingly does not exclude constituted language from his foundational stratum of the life-world, whereas we have seen how it was a dichotomy of perception and language that surfaced in Merleau-Ponty's early work. This difference is immaterial, however, since Merleau-Ponty's critique of the concept of reactivation tells equally against his own earlier thought. As with Husserl, the source of the problem in *Phenomenology of Perception* lay with the notion that the phenomenologist is responsible for

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[131] The correction of such errors will be achieved by a continual progression and renewal of ideas rather than a regressive tracing back to a pre-ideal, 'intuitive' ground.

awakening 'a primordial experience beneath traditions' (*PhP*, 530n7/218n1). The fundamental corrective Merleau-Ponty is now offering in relation to his early thought involves jettisoning this notion.

This development is further evidenced by a working note from February 1960, where Merleau-Ponty asserts that 'sedimentation is the sole mode of being of ideality' (*VI*, 235/284), continuing: 'I would like to develop that in the sense: the invisible is a hollow in the visible, a fold in passivity, not pure production' (*VI*, 235/284). This proposal would seem to amount to a definitive articulation, in the language of *The Visible and the Invisible*, of the thinking that emerges out of Merleau-Ponty's engagement with the late Husserl in the 1960 lecture course. The 'invisible' world of ideal objects is caught up in the 'visible', sensible world insofar as it is embedded in and intertwined with language as a medium of expressive and communicative *praxis* – i.e., operative language. The passage to ideal objectivity is not instigated by an act of 'pure' production (an expressive activity of speech that would be unconditioned by acquired significations) but must instead occur against the background of the sedimented meanings that are operative in a linguistic community's grasp of their common language. The expressive activity must draw passively from these acquisitions in order to realize their latent expressive possibilities and thus bring novel meaning to birth. The latent dualism we find in the *Phenomenology*'s account of speech and expression, and the relationship between perception and thought that was implicated there, is no longer to be entertained.

It is this same shift that we find lying behind the self-criticism of the earlier work's conception of the tacit *Cogito*. We recall (Chapter 3) that in a working note of January 1959, Merleau-Ponty explicitly renounces his earlier thinking in the following way:

> What I call the tacit cogito is impossible. To have the idea of "thinking" … to make the "reduction," to return to the immanence and to the consciousness of… it is necessary to have words. It is by the combination of words (with their charge of sedimented significations, which are in principle capable of entering into other relations than the relations that have served to form them) that I *form* the transcendental attitude, that I *constitute* the constitutive consciousness. The words do not refer to positive significations and finally to the flux of *Erlebnisse* as *Selbstgegeben*. Mythology of a self-consciousness to which the word "consciousness" would refer – – There are only *differences* between significations.
>
> (*VI*, 171/222-3)

What we find in this renunciation of the tacit *Cogito* is a revision of what phenomenology itself is capable of achieving. The phenomenologist's endeavour to awaken a 'primordial experience beneath traditions' (*PhP*, 530n7/218n1), which Merleau-Ponty took as his own in *Phenomenology of Perception* – at least in its discussion of speech and expression – cannot be reconciled with the fact that it must proceed *via* the sedimented meanings that are preserved in language, and which in turn are constitutive

of our traditions.[132] The notion of the tacit *Cogito*, predicated as it is on the fecundity of this foundationalist enterprise, is a philosophical chimera. Its presence in *Phenomenology of Perception* was symptomatic of the early work's underdeveloped account of the place of language in experience. One cannot hope, through a renewed use of language, to pull back the veil and disclose a stratum of experience that serves as the ground of our linguistic significations. The intelligible or spoken world is not detachable from the perceived, and the speaking subject who is embodied in his language is not subtended by a primordial or tacit self-consciousness of the body that remains unaffected and unconditioned by the subject's inauguration and participation in the traditions that continue to develop in and through our linguistic practices.

This is not to deny that there is still a distinction to draw between language and the sensible world; there remain, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, 'mute' or 'non-language significations' (*VI*, 171/223) in our grasp of the sensible world. Yet Merleau-Ponty insists that this 'silence' should not be thought '*the contrary* of language' (*VI*, 179/230). Instead, what we find is that the acquisition of language and its deployment in speech instigates a dialectical relationship between the ideal significations of language and the sensible, such that the silence 'continues to envelop language' (*VI*, 176/227) and continues to motivate its diachronic development via renewed expressive efforts. As such, silence (in the sense Merleau-Ponty intends) and speech are inextricably intertwined with one another. The mute significations of the sensible world are no longer held apart from the ideal significations of language. Instead, they each bear an 'internal connection' (Baldwin, ms.) to one another, such that the sense of each is determined by their simultaneous participation in the overarching *Gestalt* of the lived world. Indeed, it is precisely this view that we find Merleau-Ponty referring to in the course notes as the 'True Husserlian thought':

> True Husserlian thought: man, world, language are interwoven, _verflochten_. What does that mean: man, language, world (lived world, and objectified, idealized world) given in one package – in *Beziehungsenheit* <"relational unity">: the references (*Beziehung*) relations which are in principle linear, form a unity, are "simultaneous" (*Ideen II*). That means: disorder cannot be overcome through a survey which is the source, one sees, of the priority given to the unidirectional. The most radical consciousness is that of an explosion or an emergence of ideality – of man and of the open, human horizon – in the thickness of *fungierende* [operative] language, which itself presupposes obviously a relation to a sensible *Lebenswelt* and to sensible, primordial consciousness, which also enter into the *Beziehungseinheit*.
>
> (*HLP*, 41-2/50)

By entering into a 'relational unity' with language and the 'objectified, idealized world' it mediates, the sensible, 'primordial' world is not left unaltered, but is sublimated by the emergence of new dialectical relations which come to traverse those of the sensible world. This sublimation of the pre-linguistic

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[132] We might still be able to cast Merleau-Ponty's late work as awakening an experience 'beneath tradition', but only insofar as it emphasizes the diachronic development of a living tradition, and the way in which this development is grounded in the expressive and communicative practices of a linguistic community. Yet this does not truly take us 'beneath' our traditions in the sense that we would thereby disclose an experience of the world that exists entirely apart from them.

world in the acquisition of language is gestured towards at the very end of the manuscript of *The Visible and the Invisible*. The expressive field that is opened up by language intertwines with the sensible world and is continuous with it, such that 'the whole landscape is overrun with words as with an invasion, it is henceforth but a variant of speech before our eyes' (*VI*, 155/201).[133]

> language is everything, since it is the voice of no one, since it is the voice of the things, the waves, and the forests. And what we have to understand is that there is no dialectical reversal from one of these views to the other; we do not have to reassemble them into a synthesis: they are two aspects of the reversibility which is the ultimate truth.
>
> (*VI*, 155/201)

It is no coincidence that Merleau-Ponty offers a description of the sensible world and of the sensing-sensible flesh that draws upon Saussurian language. The sensible horizons intertwine with those of language, and the sensible and 'mute' flesh of the world is thereby continuous with the flesh of ideas. The intelligible order of ideas that is preserved in language is to be understood as participating in the structures of the lived world and as operative there. It is continuous with the sensible, such that there is, indeed, 'no frontier between language and the world'. In this way, Merleau-Ponty's final, albeit lamentably incomplete, thought decisively leaves behind the troubling foundationalist construal of the relationship between perception and language that was present in *Phenomenology of Perception*. There is no longer the implicit methodological assumption that phenomenology is capable of pulling back the veil of cultural acquisitions in order to disclose a more original relationship with the world. Instead, Merleau-Ponty seeks to show how language is always already operative in the speaking and thinking subject's engagement with the world and with others. In doing so, the late period work remains continuous with the *Phenomenology*'s conception of operative intentionality that was the focus of Chapters 1 and 2, above.

At bottom, the significance of Merleau-Ponty's work, throughout his career, lies in the consistent pursuit of, as he puts it, 'a philosophy that takes into consideration the operative world' (*VI*, 118/156). This is not a system-building philosophy that seeks theory-laden explanations or solutions to traditional problems. It is a philosophy that, to invoke Wittgenstein once again, 'leaves everything as it is' (*PI*, §124). It discloses the manner in which subjectivity is irrevocably situated within the world, not only as the setting of its perceptual life, but as the setting of its practical projects and goals, its affective life and expressive efforts, and also its intellectual or symbolic comprehension of things and of others. As we have seen over the course of the preceding chapters, what this situatedness amounts to is an understanding of the world that is not the achievement of any kind of distinct, self-sufficient or transcendental activity. Meaning, *at every level*, is not imparted to the world in a deliberate act. For Merleau-Ponty, our comprehension of the world is revealed as neither wholly active nor wholly passive.

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[133] Merleau-Ponty's expression here is certainly reminiscent of Heidegger's discussion of the intimacy between the sensible world and linguistic signs. E.g.: 'if we go to the fountain, if we go through the woods, we are already going through the word 'fountain,' through the word 'woods,' even if we are not saying these words aloud or have any thoughts about language' (Heidegger, 2002: 232-33).

Instead, it is essentially caught up in a dialectical development with the world that it discloses and in which it inheres.

Abbreviations

Below is the list of abbreviations used in referring to works by Merleau-Ponty. English page references are followed by French page references, where available.

HLP   *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002), L. Lawlor & B. Bergo translation of *Notes de cours sur L'origine de la géométrie de Husserl* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998)

IPP   *In Praise of Philosophy* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1963), J. Wild & J.M. Edie translation of *Éloge de la Philosophie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1953)

PhP   *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2012), D. A. Landes translation of *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945)

PriP   *The Primacy of Perception*, edited by J.M. Edie (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964)

PW   *The Prose of the World* (London: Heinemann, 1974), J. O'Neill translation of *La Prose du monde*, edited by C. Lefort (Paris: Gallimard, 1969)

S   *Signs* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), R.C. McCleary translation of *Signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960)

SB   *The Structure of Behaviour* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1963), A.L. Fisher translation of *La Structure du Comportement* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1942)

SNS   *Sense and Non-sense* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964) H.L Dreyfus & P.A. Dreyfus translation of *Sens et non-sens* (Paris: Nagel, 1948)

TD   *Texts and Dialogues: On Philosophy, Politics, and Culture*, edited by H.J. Silverman & J. Barry, Jr. (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1992)

TfL   *Themes from the Lectures at the Collège de France 1952-1960* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970) J. O'Neill translation of *Résumés de cours, Collège de France 1952-1960* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968)

VI   *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), A. Lingis translation of *Le visible et l'invisible*, edited by C. Lefort (Paris: Gallimard, 1964)

Abbreviations used in referring to works by other authors:

CGL   Ferdinand de Saussure (1959) *Course in General Linguistics* edited by C. Bally & A. Sechehaye, W. Baskin translation of *Cours de linguistique générale* (New York, NY: Philosophical Library)

I   Elizabeth Anscombe (1957) *Intention* (Oxford: Blackwell)

OG   Edmund Husserl, 'The Origin of Geometry' in *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press), David Carr translation of *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1954)

PI   Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953) *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell), G.E.M. Anscombe translation of *Philosophische Untersuchungen*

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