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**Institution:
Of Nature, Life, and Meaning
in Merleau-Ponty and Schelling**

**A Dissertation
Presented in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

**By
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June, 2001**

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used in the body of the dissertation for the most commonly cited texts. Page numbers to texts in the original language have been given first; the numbers following the slash (/) correspond to English language translations.

1. Works by Maurice Merleau-Ponty

- N** *La Nature*, notes établies par D. Séglaud, (Paris: Seuil, 1995) / *Notes on Nature*, tr. R. Vallier (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000), translation forthcoming. Because the page proofs were not available at the time of the preparation of this dissertation, even though the translation was complete, I have used only the French pagination in the citations.
- NC1** *Notes de Cours, 1958-1961*, établies par S. Ménasé, avec une préface de C. Lefort (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).
- NC2** *Notes de Cours, 1959: Husserl aux limites de la phénoménologie*, établies par F. Robert, suivies des recherches actuelles sur la philosophie de Merleau-Ponty, sous la direction de R. Barbaras (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998).
- OE** *Oeil et Esprit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964); "Eye and Mind," tr. C. Dallery, in *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, Philosophy of Art, History, and Politics*, ed. J. Edie (Northwestern University Press, 1964),
- PhP** *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945) / *Phenomenology of Perception*, tr. C. Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962).
- R** *Résumés des cours au Collège de France, 1952-1960* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963) / *Themes from the Courses*, tr. J. O'Neill, in *In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970).
- RMM** "Un inédit de Maurice Merleau-Ponty," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 4 (1962), 401-409. / "An Unpublished Text by Maurice Merleau-Ponty: A Prospectus of His Work," tr. A. B. Dallery, in *The Primacy of Perception*, op. cit., 3-11.
- S** *Signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960) / *Signs*, tr. R. C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964).
- SC** *La structure du comportement* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1943) / *The Structure of Behavior*, tr. A. Fisher (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963).
- VI** *Le visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963) / *The Visible and the Invisible*, tr. A. Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

2. Works by F. W. J. Schelling

SW *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. K. F. A. Schelling, 14 volumes, (Stuttgart/Augsburg: J. G. Cotta'scher Verlag, 1856-1861). As is the standard practice, I have given the volume number in Roman numeral, followed by the page number in Arabic. The following texts have been cited the most often:

II: 1-344 / *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature (1797)*, tr. E. E. Harris and P. Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

III: 327-634 / *The System of Transcendental Idealism (1800)*, tr. P. Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978).

VII: 331-416 / *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom*, tr. J. Gutmann (LaSalle, IL: Open Court Pres, 1936).

VIII: 195-344 / *The Ages of the World*, tr. F. Bolman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942). This translation is now obsolete, transplanted by that of J. Wirth (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999). This new, superior translation was unavailable at the time of the final preparation of this dissertation.

3. Works by Other Authors

C Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, tr. D. Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970).

SZ Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1927) / *Being and Time*, tr. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).

Introduction: The Institution Has Taken Place

We had plans. Oh yes, big plans.

It is no longer very easy to recall what those plans might have been, but we can say what they were not. We never planned to get a Ph.D. in philosophy, and even after a series of apparently random events opened this future to us, a future at a small Catholic school never crossed our mind, though we are glad that it “just happened that way.” Moreover, that we shall have done a thesis on Merleau-Ponty was unimaginable when a time when we referred to him as Merleau-Who? Worse, to have written on Merleau-Ponty and Schelling? What twist of fate allowed us to bring these two thinkers together? How did we end up *here*?

Yes, we had plans. Something about being a lawyer, something about politics, but never a philosopher. At least, there was no conscious decision to commit ourselves to this particular path. Our parents will say that “we always knew you would do it,” and no doubt they always did know that *something* would be done. They may even claim that they knew it would be *this*, and bring forth several selective memories in order to prove and validate a necessary course of events that led us here. And of course, they were right: . . . it just happened that way. It seems suitable, then, that their institution of a future path that was always already prepared in their supportive declarations that they knew we would do it should be acknowledged with gratitude.

Yes, we had plans, very precise plans. Courses of study had been carefully laid out, courses in politics, in political philosophy, in international affairs. Somewhere, somehow, along

the way, contingency posing as necessity intervened. Some stupid requirement in philosophy proper. An obligation. A chance encounter. An accidental discovery. Our plans didn't include philosophy as such, and yet, the demands of the major required three courses in this dusty old discourse of dead white men. How did we end up in Garelick's class on Nineteenth Century German Philosophy? Or in Wilkinson's class on existentialism? Was it the desire for another student? The late afternoon time-slot? Oddly enough, we remember very clearly the day that Wilkinson mentioned French existentialists other than Sartre and Camus: "And then there is Merleau-Ponty," he said, "but no one really reads him anymore." At least, that's what we think he said; it might just be nostalgia, or a fiction constructed to justify our present. In any case, we couldn't spell Merleau-Ponty's name; we thought it might have had something to do with wine, or that he was related to that flute player. These classes were not part of the plan; contingency brought us to them. A year later, when we found a used copy of *The Visible and the Invisible* in a bookstore, we bought it for no particular reason, save that the puff on the back cover sounded interesting. Another chance encounter and a half-price sale: in any case, we had not gone looking for Merleau-Ponty; he found us. By accident. Contingency continued to operate in such a way that now, in retrospect, it seems *as if it were meant to be*.

A series of materials presented themselves to us, questions imposed themselves on us, and soon those best laid plans went to waste. One course in philosophy led to another, and soon, as if by accident, we were committed; we decided to go to graduate school. The decision could not have been taken, could not have overtaken us, if contingency had not led to certain questions and materials at a moment that retrospectively would be described as fateful. Some of those materials had to do with Nietzsche's physiology of art, with the raging discord between art and

truth, a question that we then had taken up in our senior thesis, resulting from a seminar on the *Symposium*; again by accident, we were introduced to continental philosophy. Those old plans—what were they again?—were no longer of any use; we needed contingency plans. Another chance meeting, another happenstance, and fatefully, conditions in a department in the midst of reconstructing itself—or in other words, blind luck—led us to DePaul University, where, purely out of curiosity, we enrolled in seminars on phenomenology and on Levinas. Oddly, and surely only by coincidence, that name “Merleau-Ponty” kept turning up in the margins of commentaries on Husserl and texts about phenomenology; strangely, there he was again in the footnotes of essays by Levinas. Who is this man? Why does he keep insinuating himself into our purview? What kind of name is SeaWater-BridgeHere? A paper was due for phenomenology, and a presentation required for Levinas; maybe it was finally time to read that book that was still on our shelf. Once again, we didn’t go looking for Merleau-Ponty; he found us, and quite by accident. We could tell a very similar story about our encounter with Schelling: if we had not come to DePaul, then we would not have taken a seminar on German Idealism and Romanticism, and had we not accidentally taken note of a single reference to Schelling in Merleau-Ponty, then we would not have posed a certain series of questions, and we would not be writing “this.” Coincidentally, Schelling too has a lot to say about contingency, noting that it is according to contingency, and not necessity, that there is something—*this* something—rather than nothing at all, and that it is contingency (no longer understood as mere accident) that lets beings stand forth, and thus discloses Being. As though he were Heidegger. Contingency. Happenstance. Luck.

We could multiply the accidents that have determined our path (our long sojourn in Paris, for example, was an opportunity that presented itself, it just happened). But already, we are

narrating the accidental events from the standpoint of where we are now, and they thus seem far less accidental and contingent, but rather, *as if they were meant to be*. And already, we saw that they will have determined our path, as if this place from which we are now writing were destined. This is the problem of the retrospective illusion: all accident, all happenstance, all contingency, is scooped up in a narrative that begins at the end, and that makes them appear as necessary events in a causal linearity, as if every event led us inexorably to this point, so that we could tell this story. The story of the beginning always begins at the end, and makes it seem as if were an *ens necessarium*, as if everything had always aimed at it, as if it were meant to be, from the very beginning. And so we find ourselves here through a series of chance encounters that now, *après-coup*, seems like a program or a destiny, as if the meaning of the events were always already there, and we've only just now become aware of it, as if we were *condemned to meaning*. But it is only because we *happened upon it*, only because of *tyche*, the good graces of fortune, that we find ourselves in a position to narrate this retrospective; the object was not there to be found at the beginning, but rather, only through this narration, *après-coup*, the object *will have been* there all along. This narration in the future anterior bestows upon those contingencies the air of necessity, *as if it could not have been otherwise*. While it may seem that fate has brought us to the point where we can narrate the beginning, we do not propose any determinism as *explanandum*; rather, we pose only questions: how is it that we are condemned to meaning? What status does this condemnation have? How do the events of our lives present themselves in such a way that they "have" a meaning, such that it seems *as if it were meant to be*? The institution has taken place.

* * *

We are born into a world of discourse that precedes our birth, that will survive after our death, that prepares our place in it, and that configures our possibilities long before we assume them. Long before a child is born, the parents speak of the child, try to select a name for it, express their hopes for it, imagine how their lives will change because of it. This language is itself inherited as part of the tradition shared by the parents, transmitted to them by their parents, and to be transmitted to their child. This impersonal linguistic universe, or what Lacan calls the Other of/as Language, condemns a child to meaning before the child even knows what meaning is. Because a child is thus born into a linguistically prepared place, it must learn a language that is not its own (it's a foreign tongue, the other tongue, the mother tongue) and that carries within it a long history and tradition. To an extent, we can say that "the unconscious" is an inherited language, overflowing with the desires of other people, sedimenting in us a whole history at the moment we acquire it. It establishes itself in us, begins to function independently of any subjective control, and sometimes comes out in funny ways, as those famous slips of the tongue and nervous twitches. One's existence is thus always already overwritten by language, and that is not such a bad situation to be in if one is a white Anglo-Saxon heterosexual protestant male, because language (at least, this particular, empirical language) would have been largely encoded by the history of this dominant group, in whose hands there has been a concentration of socio-political power, won through war and administered through violence.

This language, an institution to be sure, has marked out a space for the other of the white male, as so many know well. When, on a train, in First Class, from Paris to Lyon, Franz Fanon heard the bourgeois child say to its mother, "Look Mamma, a Negro. I'm afraid," he was no

longer Franz Fanon the man, the intellectual, the public figure, the professor, the activist; he was just a Negro, an object in the midst of objects, a mere signifier, and a frightening one. That signifier is, by virtue of the operations of cultural discourse, associated to other signifiers: a subhuman, a slave, a cannibal, black, evil. Reduced in this way to a general signifier, what possibility does the black man have? He can, on the one hand, be that signifier and satisfy the demand of discourse, he can assimilate to the Other's desire that expresses itself in language. But in doing so, he gives up his life to the Other and is neutralized; the fact of his blackness, of his lived experience, of his body, is denied. Or he can, on the other hand, pretend to reject that signifier, plunge into his facticity, and preach hatred for whites. But that is only a pretense, for in doing so, in attempting to cut himself off from the white man, to become the radical black power separatist, the black man once again serves the white man's desire; despite the attempt to reject the signifier, he becomes it in a more attenuated yet less malleable form. And it is a pretense also for the more fundamental reason that we cannot escape the Other, we cannot escape language, we cannot escape history, we cannot escape ourselves: *we are condemned to meaning*. This is why Fanon says that there is but one destiny for the black man, and it is white: it is a question of Language and Power. What then is to be done? Fanon says that the black man must engage in the struggle to rediscover the meaning of his black existence and identity, which has been forcibly distorted by the white man, by the white civilization, and by the white language to which black men are forced to submit and compelled to assimilate; this struggle is to take place in language itself. It is not a question of banning words or declaring them politically incorrect, but rather, of reclaiming them and making them sing, to sing in such a way as to disrupt the smooth functioning of white discourse; it is a matter of what Kristeva calls poetic revolution.

We live in a world where speech is an institution, Merleau-Ponty says, where the Other as Language has already worked-over and configured our possibilities, defined our emplacement, containing our past and opening us to a future. As the sedimentation of our history, speech or language contains within it configurations of power. Our history is one of struggle, the struggle for the meaning of our being, a struggle that has, for better or for worse, involved violence and strife, war and hate, pain and aggression. Hate sediments into our language and is unconsciously transmitted through tradition, guaranteeing its survival and a future of hate. And to the extent that we are born into that shared tradition, we are all guilty of hate; as soon as we take up language, it is instituted in us like a bad habit via the obscure byways of passive synthesis. Sometimes it manifests itself in very subtle forms, as expressed in those linguistic qualifications like “my black friend,” or else it is translated into more insidious, economic terms, drawn onto a map of Chicago as very clear lines of demarcation between Northside and Southside; at least in some corners of the American South they’re more obvious and wear it on their sheets.

Some of us know more visceral manifestations of this hate first hand, albeit not for the color of our skin. We know this hate when the Bishop of Strasbourg likens homosexuality to bestiality, and we know it more physically as well, from when we were beaten up in high school for being queer, before we even knew what that meant, before we even knew that we were. The Other knew better than we did what kind of threat and danger we were, what kind of sin and disease we had; what better cure than a good pummeling? “That’ll teach that sinful, stupid faggot.”

Pain is the best mnemonic, Nietzsche said, and the memory of this pain, linguistic or physical, functions effectively to keep people in their linguistically prescribed—and

proscribed—places, whether it be in a ghetto or the closet. At least the (white) homosexual can hide in the closet; the black man wears this invitation to objectification on his skin. Fanon calls it an epidermalization, whereas Merleau-Ponty says (with a nod to Bergson) that it is encrusted in the flesh. The black man is a slave of his own visibility; an infernal circle, a double bind: language *and* visibility. We think that this is what Merleau-Ponty had in mind when he responded to the Lacanians at Bonneval that the reduction of everything to the category of language was a great worry to him; the reduction is too simple, too naive, too forgetful of our lived corpo-reality. Indeed, in a very lived and visceral way, the black man's double bind may well summarize (from Merleau-Ponty's point of view) the differend between Merleau-Ponty and Lacan: in spite of everything we have written here, *there is something* other than language, that resists symbolization, that resists the Other, and that cannot be reduced to a mere linguistic category constructed from within the Symbolic, *something other* that serves as the ground of the Symbolic. What is this other of the Other, that we can see on Fanon's skin, and that presents itself as visibility? We see it epidermalized on Fanon's body, but Levinas might insist that we look Fanon in the face.

Animals, and the relation we have to them, also give us pause to wonder about this something other. A meditation on animality will provide the occasion to name this something other as nature or natural being. But we ought not move too quickly. At least for now, Merleau-Ponty and Lacan, and probably Fanon, would agree that Sartre was wrong when he said that hell was other people; other *people* don't really know what they're doing when they objectify others with the look, nor do they realize the extent to which they are acting out possibilities that are given to them by language, just as they don't fully understand the extent to which the visibility of

the other, that aspect that cannot be objectified or symbolized, disrupts their own self-identifications. Hell is not other people. Hell is the other of the Other, Hell is whatever it is that presents itself as an uncanny visibility, as a rupture or discontinuity in the field of visibility, thus articulating the field, differentiating it, installing in it reflections, levels, and shadows, giving it depth, and making it stand forth as significative and meaningful. Would it be the case, then, that the other of the Other, or what we perhaps too hastily called nature, operates in such a way as to make the Other, i.e., speech as an institution, possible? A real operation that precedes symbolic language? *There is something*, Merleau-Ponty maintains, and maybe, as in the case of contingency and the beginning, we can take hold of it only retrospectively. Nevertheless, *there is something* that shows itself “in the flesh,” that makes this retrospecularity possible, and that comes to be a meaning for us only through this retrospecularity. The institution has taken place.

* * *

We live in a world where speech is an institution, a world where we are condemned to meaning. Yet this is no fatalism. Meaning does indeed precede us, but let us be clear that meaning is no thing existing in-itself, waiting to be discovered. Meaning [*sens*] is an orientation to the world, a disposition in the world, and when we say that it precedes us, or that we are condemned to it, when we say that speech is an institution, we mean quite simply that it orients us or predisposes us to be in the world in a particular way. Those who came before us prepared the way: if there were a first word, if there were an originary institution, it has always already sedimented in the institution of speech, into which we are born, and to which we must assimilate ourselves. And precisely by assimilating ourselves to this institution, we passively take up that

sedimented meaning; we have no need to relive or reactivate that original moment, just as we have no need to rehearse the conjugation of the verb *être* every time we deploy it. Meaning sediments, and we are oriented by it when we take up and use this sediment; on the basis of this taking up, we are oriented to the future. We are not condemned merely to repeat the same words and forever to use the same speech; rather, the institution of speech functions a bit like the dreamwork. Speech as an institution contains our past, or as Husserl used to say, the present is intrinsically historical; elements of the institution are randomly recombined, and again, as if by accident, disparate bits and pieces meet up with other bits and pieces. Thus new meaning-formations emerge; institution thus allows for the new, for creativity, for the unexpected, for poetry. This random recombination is, in fact, not as random as it seems, but rather responds to the needs of the historical present, even if we do not recognize it as such at the very moment that it is happening. The possibilities of these new formations are contained in the institution itself; there is a surplus of meaning inherited from the past that makes possible the transcendence of the present towards the future. Consider the case of geometry:

the initial steps of geometry, as well as the subsequent advances, contain a surplus of meaning beyond their manifest or literal meaning such as it is lived each time by the individual geometer. Each stage opens a field, they install themes that their creator saw only as hints of what is to come (*Urstiftung*), but which, *transmitted* (*tradiert*) to succeeding generations with the first acquisitions, become useful by a sort of second creation (*Nachstiftung*), through which, moreover, new spaces of thought open, until the moment when (the development then underway having exhausted itself in a last recreation (*Endstiftung*)) a mutation in knowledge intervenes, often as a result of a return to the sources or to side paths neglected along the way, and there is a reinterpretation of the whole.” (R,161-62/183-84).

Pythagoras never knew when he leapt out of the bath that his discovery contained a surplus of meaning, never knew that someday, another thinker would reactivate it, and, in a secondary

creation, generate the quadratic formula, which is nothing more than the Pythagorean truth rearranged, re-stylized, and responding to the contingencies and exigencies of a particular historical situation that demanded it. Or consider the case of literature: many of us know English, and some of us may have the privilege of knowing another language or two, but no matter how well we may know these languages analytically, syntactically, and grammatically, we will never cease to be surprised by the poet or the writer, who, like weaver, works on the backside of his material and suddenly finds himself surrounded by new meaning, who takes the stuff of language and, transforming it, generates something unexpected and new (*S*, 56/45).

We are condemned to be oriented to/in/by a world that is already there, but this is no determinism. This is our situation, this is what it means to be in the world. What, then, are we to make of all those contingencies, accidents, and happenstances that brought us to this point? Predisposed to a local situation, or, as Merleau-Ponty would say, weighted by a co-efficient of facticity, we encounter thickets of sedimentation or kernels of meaning, *signs* according to which our corporeal situation is re-oriented, our perception re-stylized; a new field is opened, a new orientation effected, allowing us to disclose hitherto unknown possibilities, on the basis of which we uncover hidden meaning and are reoriented yet again. It is thus the promiscuous way that the body lends itself to what is encountered, and the promiscuity of the things themselves, that lets there be an event that we would want to call contingent, and that then reorganizes the field and opens a future which later, after the future, will have said that it was meant to be. The institution has taken place.

* * *

The dissertation that is here presented under the title “Institution: Of Nature, Life, and

Meaning in Merleau-Ponty and Schelling” seeks to disclose the problem that I have obliquely approached in these last few pages, the problem of why we are condemned to meaning, or more simply, the problem of institution, which, I assert, is a significant theme that runs throughout Merleau-Ponty’s work, a theme that he not only makes explicit but also performs. The title hardly does justice to the contents: as a translation of the Husserlian word *Stiftung*, institution also names the problem of ground (Derrida translates it as *fondation*, which perhaps lets the ground, *le fond*, be heard more clearly, even if the contrast with constitution is lost), and leads to the questions of ideality, of materiality, of the phenomenon of life, of tradition, of the forgetfulness of origins, of the body, of expression, and leads also to an interrogation of the concept of nature as a privileged expression of an ontology, and thus to the disclosure of Being. The problem of institution is thus an ontological problem.

The problem of institution is posed in Merleau-Ponty’s very first work, although he is not aware of it as such; he saw there only a hint of what was to come. It comes to occupy a central place in his second work, although he knew this only after the fact. When it finally emerges thematically in Merleau-Ponty’s work in the mid-1950s, after a meditation on the phenomenon of expression and a continued engagement with Husserl, it is linked explicitly to the concept of nature, and more precisely, to what I will claim is the privileged role that Schelling plays in the interrogation of the concept of nature. Through this thoughtful engagement, Merleau-Ponty begins to formulate those theses that would have been at the center of the project he was then preparing. Such is the aim of this dissertation.

The thesis unfolds across three chapters, each one of which was first undertaken under the direction of three different professors, each of whom exercised a degree of influence on the

formation of the whole thesis. One consequence of this threefold origin, however, is that the demonstration of the thesis unfolds according to three different tempos or rhythms, according to three different orientations to the materials, and sometimes, therefore, it is difficult to see the forest through the thickets of sedimented meaning that compose it. Each chapter thus represents a different approach to the same problem, and while each could be conceived as an independent part, the three are nevertheless presented together as parts of an organic whole. The first chapter, “The Indiscernible Joining,” is the result of my work with Renaud Barbaras, and is dedicated to a reading of *The Structure of Behavior*, and thus to a disclosure of the first construal of the problem of institution; this disclosure leads us to take up the studies on animality in the second course on the concept of nature, and indeed, it was because of my puzzlement concerning the significance of these studies that Renaud Barbaras urged me to return to the question of *Gestalt* in Merleau-Ponty’s first work. For that fateful hint, and for his careful guidance, I manifest my gratitude. The second chapter, “Phenomenology and Its Shadow,” is the result of several seminars with Françoise Dastur, and is dedicated to Merleau-Ponty’s transformative reading of phenomenology, through which he discloses not only the limits of phenomenology, but also the unthought in his own work, which he subsequently submits to an interrogation; special attention is given in this chapter to the phenomenon of expression, as it is disclosed in *Phenomenology of Perception*, for it is through this phenomenon, and the transcendence in/as inherence that it discloses, that Merleau-Ponty comes to recognize the problem of institution as such. This chapter also extends the focus of the first chapter, that is, it continues to examine how real materiality lends itself to a perceiving consciousness in such a way that it becomes idealized, that it attains ideality; as an ideal object, it circulates in a community, becomes part of our tradition, our

history, and our lifeworld. In other words, the Real transcends itself as the Symbolic, with which we then turn back on the world in order to signify it. I therefore try, in the second chapter, to unravel the thread of institution in Husserl, in Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl, and in Merleau-Ponty generally. Only with the careful and patient guidance of Françoise Dastur, with her thoughtful and rigorous reading the text(s) of phenomenology serving as a model, was I able to formulate the problem as it is explored in the second chapter; if I have at all succeeded, it is no small part due to her, while any failure is of course my own. The third chapter on Schelling began in David Krell's seminars on German Idealism and Romanticism, through which the original idea for the entire work first took on shape. The chapter is devoted to explicating Merleau-Ponty's reading of Schelling in the first course on the concept of nature, necessitating a somewhat detailed detour through Schelling's philosophical project; this detour, which aims to develop the reading of Schelling beyond what Merleau-Ponty explicitly said of him, also seeks to show in what ways Schelling's efforts can help us make sense of Merleau-Ponty's interrupted work, and does so in an attempt to interpret one single working note, dated November 1960, in which Merleau-Ponty declares that he must "do a psychoanalysis of Nature." David Krell's enthusiasm for Schelling first instituted in me the desire to undertake this project, while his unwavering support, despite my own doubts, has helped me reach an end. He may be embarrassed if here I offer my our gratitude for the philosophical example he has set, but his embarrassment pales with respect to that which I suffer as I offer my director this work.

Throughout the three chapters, I will try to discern a logic of institution, and determine how it comes to impose itself on Merleau-Ponty's thinking as he prepares his later philosophical project; in this attempt, I will be led to ask pose the question of how nature, through an operation

peculiar to it, transcends itself while maintaining its vital unity, and how, through this transcendence, it lends itself to us as a nascent intelligibility, or how it institutes itself as a network of ideality or as a field of signification, or of how it discloses itself in such a way as to let beings stand forth in a meaningful way. I will ask, in other words, how the Real operates in such a way as to give rise to the Symbolic. It will not be surprising, then, that throughout the three chapters, in addition to the thematic I have just indicated, there are also ongoing engagements with Lacan, Heidegger, Bergson, and Derrida, which do not receive a full development in the present text (and indeed, even those that occupy a central place, such as Husserl, need to be revisited again), but which constitute promissory notes for future development. In at least this regard, the thesis performs what it names. The institution has taken place.

* * *

In addition to David Krell, Françoise Dastur, and Renaud Barbaras, I would like to recognize my debt to a number of others whose assistance has been invaluable in the preparation of this work, and first among them are the other members of the committee that will judge it, Michael Naas, Peg Birmingham, and Bernard Flynn. Colleagues like Anna Vaughn-Clissold, Kelly Coble, and Dan Selcer have all listened patiently and responded to my babble, helping to shape it into discourse, as have colleagues in Paris. Among those, I can signal only a few: Allesandro Delco, with whom I gave a seminar on Merleau-Ponty at the Collège Internationale de Philosophie, Jenny Slatman, Anna Fredlund, Cecilia Sjöholm, Daniel Oskuy, Dominic Willsdon, Matteo Gonfiantini, Cristina Sartori, Olivia Custer, Mauro Carbone, Marc Richir, and

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* * *

Writing the beginning from the standpoint of the end, we know already where we are going and how we will get there, what we will have missed, and how we will have failed, what remains to be done, and what new projects are made possible. We know this now, after the fact, because the institution has taken place. Although every institution always leaves room for new surprises.

R. L.V.
Chicago and Paris
Summer - Fall, 2000

1 The Indiscernible Joining:

The Problem of *Gestalt* and the Phenomenon of Life in *The Structure of Behavior*

The beginning can be known only retrospectively, only through a reflection that itself begins at the end. And yet the beginning will have already been there, will have already inaugurated a future that realizes itself by understanding its own past, and will in this understanding “endow itself with durable dimensions in relation to which a whole series of other experiences will acquire meaning, . . . form an intelligible series or a history, . . . [and] sediment in me a meaning, not just as survivals or residues, but as the invitation to a sequel, the necessity of a future” (R, 108-109/130). One runs a risk, then, in reading Merleau-Ponty retrospectively, according to a theme that becomes thematic only late in his work. And yet this risk is necessary, even programmed by the work itself, precisely because this theme is there from the very beginning, precisely because this very beginning *institutes a sens*, a direction and a meaning, in Merleau-Ponty’s itinerary and in his reading of phenomenology. The necessity of this risk is justified again by the fact that Merleau-Ponty himself comes to grasp this theme of *institution* as an object of investigation; and so the risk of reading retrospectively is in fact a risk demanded by the thing itself. And to be clear, this theme that invites a thoughtful engagement with Merleau-Ponty in an investigation about the beginning, or more precisely, about how the beginning institutes a field of meaning or tradition in which we always already find ourselves “condemned

to meaning,” is Institution itself.

But one will have already committed a violence—and it shall not be the last—by calling it a “theme.” Despite its nominal form in both French (*institution*) and the German which it translates (*Stiftung*), it is nowise a mere theme. One can indeed speak of nominal institutions—e.g., The Art Institute of Chicago, The Von Humboldt Stiftung, DePaul University, Modern Philosophy—and the analyses that follow will certainly speak to this noun and the “historicity of death” that it implies; but the institution of which Merleau-Ponty speaks, like Husserl’s *Stiftung*, belong more to the verb than the noun. Institution does not sediment and condense into a mere object that would persist in time, but rather forms the temporal horizon of the present; rather than being reduced to a mere object, institution is that which makes objects be or lets them stand-forth in a meaningful way. But the instituted meaning-horizon of the present is not closed in on itself: it opens unto a future while carrying within itself its past, founding something like a tradition, and thus conferring an essentially temporal and historical dimension to all experience, linking us to the past and opening us to the future.

From the moment the field of meaning is instituted, it contains its past, present, and future within it, but this does not imply any fatalism or determinism. When Pythagoras set his theorem down on parchment and instituted analytical geometry, he in no way foresaw that Pascal would one day reorganize his theorem as the quadratic formula, nor could he conceive what use such a formula would serve. And yet, the formula was *there* for Pascal to “discover,” a discovery made possible by the adversity of his particular historical situation; the tradition of mathematical thinking originally made possible by Pythagoras and to which Pascal belonged was no longer equal to the scientific demands of the time, and so had to transcend itself. What is illustrated in

this anecdote is that the full meaning of an institution is not always manifest until later, remaining latent or unconscious until a factual and historical exigency calls for a reorganization of the field of meaning. Some of the elements of a logic on institution can already be discerned in this anecdote (and they will be made explicit later), but it also permits a further justification of the risk of reading Merleau-Ponty retrospectively. The theme of institution was present in Merleau-Ponty's work *from the very beginning*, even if he himself was not explicitly aware of it, and became thematic only when the exigencies of his own investigations demanded it; in this regard, Merleau-Ponty's work can be read not only as the *thought*, but also as a *performance*, of institution. The principal task of this first chapter will therefore be to trace the first, latent advent of the theme of institution in Merleau-Ponty's earliest work, or to examine the institution of the question of institution.

The reader might protest that it would seem strange to have to read things backwards, and the objection might take the form "are we not going to find exactly what we seek, since we have already decided that it is there?" The reader's suspicion is well-founded, for we find in texts only what we put into them: it would therefore be easy, even banal, to begin at the end, and then to search everywhere in Merleau-Ponty's work for the traces of a latent thought that over twenty five years struggles to grasp and express itself thematically as "the thought of institution." That kind of reductive reading, which is the aforementioned risk of reading retrospectively, is explicitly rejected by Merleau-Ponty, and indeed, his understanding of *Stiftung* works precisely against that mode of interpreting. Rather, the supposition of this first chapter is not that there is already a coherent thought of institution in *The Structure of Behavior*, but rather that the problem posed there, namely, the problem of *Gestalt*, inaugurates a series of investigations that eventually leads

Merleau-Ponty to a meditation on institution, and thus to a reorganization and deepening of his own work. At stake, then, is the genealogy of a problem and the modulation of Merleau-Ponty's thought as it seeks to pose this problem rigorously. There is perhaps only a nuanced difference between that risky, reductive reading and what is here proposed, but this nuance is hopefully sufficient to guard against the violent appropriation that one always risks when one interprets.

The itinerary will be simply to trace the way in which problem of the *Gestalt* is posed, and to show that this problem names the axis around which all of Merleau-Ponty's subsequent meditations turn. The first requirement of this demonstration is to identify the context in which Merleau-Ponty's first work was undertaken, as well as the stakes for which it was undertaken. The operative hypothesis is that the question of *Gestalt* is inextricably linked to the problem of the *phenomenality of life*, and that the attempt to think through this problem motivates Merleau-Ponty's passage through phenomenology to an interrogation of the concept of Nature and finally to the ontological perspective of his last, unfinished work. The primary focus, then, will be to examine the notion of *Gestalt*, which is both structure and signification, both idea and existence, indiscernibly bound together or intertwined. A second operative hypothesis is that Merleau-Ponty re-examines the problem of *Gestalt* in the second course on nature (1957-1958); this re-examination takes the form of an *approfondissement* of the problem that is disclosed in the first work. The secondary focus will therefore be a critical evaluation of the materials presented in the second course in order to explicate the way in which they inflect and deepen the problem of *Gestalt*. Posing the problem of *Gestalt* leads inevitably to a consideration of perceptual consciousness, and reveals the need for a phenomenology of perception; an examination of this necessity will be the tertiary focus of the first chapter. Diverse threads—Merleau-Ponty's relation

to idealism and realism, his reading of Hegel, his critique of causal externality and reflection, his appropriation of scientific insights, his discovery of phenomenology, and his general philosophical method—are woven into this first chapter in order to respect the richness and complexity of Merleau-Ponty’s own work; some of these threads receive greater attention than do others, but this is not meant to assign greater importance to one or another. Among those that receive greater attention will be the themes of phenomenality, life, and nature, for it is around these that Merleau-Ponty’s critical interrogation of *Gestalt*—and later his meditation on institution—turns.

The beginning will have already been there, even if Merleau-Ponty did not yet know what he had begun. We can date the beginning: 1938, the year in which Merleau-Ponty completed work on *The Structure of Behavior* (published in 1942), and the year in which he first expressed desire to visit the Husserl Archives in Leuven in order to consult “The Origin of Geometry” and other K- and D-group manuscripts written by Husserl around the time of, and thematically linked to, *The Crisis* (the actual visit to the Archives would occur in the spring of 1939).

Phenomenology, and Merleau-Ponty’s critical, transformative appropriation of it, will be the object of investigation in chapter two; the object of this first chapter is the work that introduces his future efforts, but before it can be considered in detail, its method and aim must be characterized.

1. Science and The Problem of the Crisis.

Anyone who has even the most remedial knowledge of the later Husserl knows that, for

Husserl, the sciences have lost their bearings, have become detached from their foundations, and tend to interrogate themselves instead of the lived experience that they are meant to explicate. We must return to the sources, says Husserl, to the things themselves, to that pre-predicative layer from which rationality is born, and we must do so in order to secure a stable ground for the sciences. Husserl blames this crisis in the sciences in large part on the *-isms*—psychologism, logicism, historicism—that is, on those attempts at explanation that see all action and opinion (especially those opinions that would pose as a truth-claim) as “the result of external psychological, social, and historical conditions working in combination.”¹ On a theoretical level, it is easy to see why this drift towards external, causal explanation in scientific research should provoke a “crisis”: if the principles that govern the scientific mind engaged in research are in fact only “the result of external causes which act upon it,” then the research itself is relativized and cannot make a claim to truth.² Indeed, under these conditions, could there ever be a claim to truth? Clearly not, and the irony, then, is that even the claim that all opinion, all truth, is an only expression of external forces is itself called into question and cannot justify itself. There is no secure reason, no ground, on which to stake a claim, because the ground itself is nothing more than a contingent product; the result is irrationalism, relativism, or in short, a crisis.

Today, after Foucault, after the New Historicism and Social Constructivism, it might be difficult to see why this crisis should really be a problem, because one might think that today we have given up the transcendental signifier. Why, after all, should we want to make a claim to “truth”? This is by no means a simple question; it is one that haunted Husserl and Merleau-Ponty (the original title of his unfinished manuscript was *The Origin of Truth*). To answer it of course requires the posing of another, preliminary question, namely, what is truth? Neither for

the later Husserl nor for Merleau-Ponty is the answer to this question the same as the object of post-modern critique; that is, truth is not a transcendental signifier existing in a *topos ouranous*. When Merleau-Ponty writes in 1951 that “truth is another name for sedimentation” (*S*, 121/96), he simultaneously echoes Husserl’s definition of the philosopher, and anticipates Foucault’s method of archaeology. For Husserl, the philosopher is “working in the service of humanity,” and the philosopher’s job is to “define and clarify the conditions that make humanity possible” (*C*, 13). Husserl’s choice of words here is telling: he is not concerned with the transcendental ego, or with a constituting consciousness, but with *humanity*. The word supposes an intersubjective, historical lifeworld, and it is this “common truth” in which all men participate that the philosopher must clarify. The decisive moment of the lifeworld is the advent of the documentation of meaning, through which the history of meaning becomes an archive, constituting a tradition in which we all participate. If phenomenology wishes to overcome this crisis and to ground the sciences in “the truth,” then it must install them firmly in the lifeworld, and more precisely, it must expose those structures of the lifeworld that make this truth valid. It thus may well be the case, as Foucault suggests, that truths (in the plural) are the products of historical power relationships, but unlike the historicists, psychologists, and logicians who preceded Husserl, Foucault is phenomenological enough to see that these relations are *in* the lifeworld, that they are complex and not simply causal, and that they arise (and eventually detach themselves) from the power play between men and institutions. The crisis is in part the result of the claims of external causality, the being of which is never interrogated and never located in the lifeworld. The old Husserl undertakes this investigation, and it is in the name of its object—the lifeworld—that he speaks of “the truth.” The “truth” of phenomenology is thus nowise a

transcendental signifier or realm of essence detached from existence; it is always grounded in the lived experience of the lifeworld as the “common experience” in which we participate.³

Husserl’s text *The Crisis* is thus a record of this interrogation, and its themes will be examined in greater detail in chapter two. What is noteworthy for the moment is that in the text, Husserl nowhere interrogates any of the empirical sciences in depth, preferring to remain at a rather abstract level by discussing the “formal” notion of crisis (and the “formal” notion of the lifeworld). In fact, the only place where he does indeed interrogate an empirical science is in the third appendix to this text, and this particularity lends “The Origin of Geometry” its singularity, according to Derrida. The crisis thus manifests itself in a twofold sense: first, in that all scientific truth is in fact the product of external forces, resulting in the impossibility of an apodictically certain ground on which to make a judgment or to stake a truth-claim; second, in that Being has been regionalized into the empirical sciences without a theoretical, unifying structure. In both cases, it is a question of form, and of formalization. It is as if the sciences have cut away from their ground, from the material existence they are meant to explain; this crisis, then, must be understood in the sense of *krinein*, as a fateful decision, a *coupure* between scientific discourse and its object (or equally the cutting-up of the object into specialized regions). But even if Husserl does not install himself on the inside of the sciences, preferring instead to describe the fateful omissions in science’s faulty attempt to grasp its inner-historical meaning, Merleau-Ponty’s first book is quite clearly located within scientific discourse. In this regard, *The Structure of Behavior* is both *already* and *not yet* a work of phenomenology: *already*, first, because it is articulated within the horizon of the crisis described by Husserl, and thus constitutes an attempt to demonstrate the crisis in the operative suppositions and methodologies

of the sciences themselves, and second, because, in it, the problem of the institution of ideal meaning (the ideal dimension of the common truth of the lifeworld) is already inscribed as the problem of phenomenality; but *not yet*, because through his demonstrations, Merleau-Ponty will show the *necessity* and *value* of phenomenology, and acquire the ground of certainty on which it will operate.⁴ The work is thus *not yet* phenomenological in its methodology, but insofar as it poses the question of phenomenality, it is *already* phenomenological in its aim.

2. The Stakes of *The Structure of Behavior*: The Natural Sciences and the Phenomenon of Life.

Before beginning to comment on *The Structure of Behavior*, it is worth taking note of the chronology concerning its preparation. The text was first written in 1938, when Merleau-Ponty was *agrégé-répétiteur* at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. During the 30's, Merleau-Ponty attended Kojève's seminars, and the Hegelian influence in this text is quite clear. In late 1938, Merleau-Ponty wrote to Père Van Breda requesting permission to do research in the Husserl Archives that had been recently established in Louvain.⁵ He would visit them in April, 1939. During his visit, Merleau-Ponty consulted several texts, including: Landgrebe's recently published edition of *Experience and Judgment*; "several paragraphs" of *Ideas II*, which had also been transcribed by Landgrebe but which would not appear as a published text until 1954; a transcript of *The Crisis* prepared by Eugen Fink; and most importantly, the manuscripts D 17 (May 1934) and D 18 (May 1934), bearing the titles "Foundational Investigations of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature" and "Notes on the Constitution of Space,"

respectively.⁶ These texts are particularly important, because like all D-manuscripts, they concern the theme of primordial constitution, which would become extremely important for Merleau-Ponty. Between 1939 and 1942, i.e., during the German Occupation, Merleau-Ponty was unable to visit the Archives again; instead the Archives visited him. Having made the acquaintance of Fink during his visit in 1939, the two corresponded regularly, and Fink sent Merleau-Ponty copies of his typed transcripts of these two D-manuscripts, as well as manuscript D 12 IV (1931),⁷ and excerpts from *The Crisis*, including “very probably” its third appendix on “The Origin of Geometry.” Van Breda visited Paris in early 1942, convinced of the value of establishing a second Archive there, and gave Merleau-Ponty copies (which had appeared as appendices in Van Breda’s thesis) of several other as yet unpublished manuscripts. Between the first preparation of *The Structure of Behavior* and its publication, Merleau-Ponty thus came into contact with manuscripts that would implicitly and explicitly inform his work; and, during this four-year span, not only did he begin the preparation of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, he also revised his first work. During the four-year delay between the preparation and publication of his first work, then, Merleau-Ponty became more and more convinced of the necessity and value of phenomenology, and this growing conviction accounts as much for the character of the text (and how it will be read) as for the delay in publication.

To maintain that the work is not yet a work of phenomenology is to say that it is not a description of experience as it is *lived*. Instead, *The Structure of Behavior* is a critical survey of interpretations of “behavior” proposed by the sciences. Merleau-Ponty’s intention is made clear in the opening lines of the introduction: “Our goal is to understand the relations of consciousness and nature—organic, psychological, or even social.” It is important to attend to this initial

definition of nature, and the way in which it is treated in this text; Merleau-Ponty continues: “We understand here by ‘nature’ a multiplicity of events *exterior* to each other and linked by relations of *causality*” (SC, 1/3). In other words, nature is taken in the sense that the sciences—particularly those sciences whose methodology is informed by Descartes, Laplace, and Comte—have defined it: as external causality.⁸ In effect, *The Structure of Behavior* is a critical intellectual exercise: if consciousness is confronted with nature understood as external causality, how can it ever know its object with certainty? What becomes of the nature of human being if this definition holds? If scientific knowledge is the work of external causal forces, then the crisis in the sciences stems from this foundational definition of nature as external causality. Merleau-Ponty thus accepts the scientific definition of nature in order to subject it—and the sciences—to a critique. By thus investigating the sciences from within, Merleau-Ponty will show not only *how* the sciences remain dependent on an uninterrogated and ultimately unsatisfactory ontology of external causality (“a naïve realism,” Merleau-Ponty says), but also *why* this external point-of-view must be submitted to a radical investigation. The scientific point-of-view is a perceptual situation, and thus calls for a study of perceptual consciousness; this call will lead Merleau-Ponty to phenomenology. (It is worth noting that while Merleau-Ponty offers a profound critique of the scientific notion of nature as external causality in his first book, he does not there develop an alternative conception of nature, nor will the alternative be developed fully until the lecture courses on *Nature* in the mid-1950s. As such, nature will remain phenomenologically reduced, suspended, or placed in the margins for fifteen years; this marginalization will have its price, which will be examined in chapter two. Likewise, the revaluation of the concept of nature will have significant impact on the formation of Merleau-Ponty’s project; this will be taken up in

chapter three.) Such are the critical stakes of his first work.

In the introduction, Merleau-Ponty briefly considers the way in which the natural sciences are grounded in this conception of nature as an externality governed by causality. Biology, he argues, views the organism as a material mass *partes extra partes*, and as such, remains beholden to an entirely mechanist conception of life; this conception—exemplified by the mechanical reflex—is the object of his critique in his first chapter. The conception of nature in physics has at least had the benefit of *neo-Kantian* critical thought. Here, the phrase “neo-Kantian” names the French critical-idealist thought dominant in France in the 1930's, best represented by Merleau-Ponty's teachers Brunschvicg and Hamelin. For them, “reflection discovers that physical analysis is not a decomposition of real elements, that causality in its effective sense is not a productive operation. There is thus not physical nature in the sense that we have just given to the word, nothing in the world that is foreign to mind” (*SC*, 2/3). That is, there is no externality that is not dissolved in thought, precisely because nature is only the idea that we have of it. But this lesson from Kant's *Third Critique* is only half-digested by the French neo-Kantians and modern physics. While it is true, as Kant says, that we think discursively and according to categories, one of which is causality, we must nevertheless act *as if* nature conformed to our representations of it. For a thinker like Schelling, this hypothetical *as if* reserves the menacing possibility that nature is *not* what we think it is, but for Merleau-Ponty's teachers, the imperative *must* means that nature *is* for us *only* our idea of it, nothing more than thought itself—resulting in an intellectualism that dissolves the being of nature into the categories of thought. Even if it turns out that nature or life is indeed only our idea of it, the task is to know how this idea is possible; to suppose that the idea is only an operation of thought, or that it is otherwise imposed from above,

would be to deny the real effectiveness [*Wirklichkeit*] of nature. Indeed, the claim that there is no external nature (a claim central to the ideas of Brunschvicg and Hamelin) is at odds with research conducted in biology, which tries to explain life by attending to the *materiality* of the organism. But even if this attention to the *real* provides the counterthesis to intellectualism, it nevertheless dissolves the organism into its *partes extra partes*, and looks for causal relations among them. Both intellectualism and materialism share the same defect, despite their opposition: both suppose that there is a nature *in-itself*, which, in various ways acts on us, *so that* we have representations, or *so that* we react; and yet neither is concerned to interrogate the being of this causal *in-itself*. Each is thus “liberated of its ontological pretensions, . . . [and] becomes indifferent to the classical antinomies of mechanism and dynamism that suppose a nature in-itself” (SC, 2/3). Finally, even psychology, insofar as it wants to be a natural science, “remains faithful to . . . causal thinking” (SC, 2/3). Consciousness is thought by psychology either as a sector of the real world (and thus as nothing more than the effect of external causes acting upon it, as Hume, perhaps the first thinker of the crisis, might say), or as a cause conceived as “spiritual energy” (Bergson) or as a “force” (Freud) interpenetrating a fluid reality, this interpenetration having a reciprocal relation of cause and effect. The former reduces psychological activity to the result of a nature-in-itself acting upon us, and so falls under the same critique as materialism and intellectualism. The latter, however, supposes that psychological activity is the result of a consciousness struggling to become aware of itself, that is, of a *for-itself*.⁹ This too, however, is an operation comprehensible only by recourse to the notion of causality. Moreover, once recourse to the order of the *for-itself* is made, its relation to the *in-itself* immediately becomes a problem, as “we see quite well when it tries to explain its

action on the body” (SC, 4/3). The result is all the antinomies that accompany the division of human being into the two orders of body and mind. Insofar as the three natural sciences here indicated depend upon but do not interrogate the ontological implications of causality, their own foundations—which remain implicitly metaphysical—are unquestioned and ungrounded, and, in this way too, are in crisis. Merleau-Ponty will thus call into question the notion of causality, and, consequently, also the conception of nature as “the ensemble of external events linked by relations of causality.” But in the name of what does he make this critique? Recall that Merleau-Ponty undertook this project to show that the object of the sciences—in this case, behavior—exceeds the discourses that attempt to circumscribe it. Merleau-Ponty’s strategy in the text is thus to proceed by way of an “analysis of the notion of behavior.” Normally, “behavior” is used to describe the manifest activity of *living* beings, though we often use it “metaphorically” to describe the activity of physical entities (SC, 4/3). To the extent that “behavior” names *the activity of living beings*, and that, *qua* object, behavior escapes the discourses of natural science, then the motif in the name of which Merleau-Ponty engages this critique is therefore that of *life*. In this regard, the project undertaken in *The Structure of Behavior* is *already* a work of phenomenology insofar as phenomenology is a philosophy of life. It is so, Derrida tells us,

because the source of sense in general is always determined as the act of *living*, as the act of a *living* being, as *Lebendigkeit*. But the unity of living, the focus of *Lebendigkeit* which defracts its light in all the fundamental concepts of phenomenology (*Leben*, *Erlebnis*, *lebendige Gegenwart*, *Geistigkeit*, etc.), escapes the transcendental reduction, and as unity of worldly life, even opens up the way for it. When the empirical life, or even the region of the pure psychic, is bracketed, it is still a transcendental *life* or, in the final instance, the transcendental of a *living* present that Husserl uncovers.¹⁰

In a sense, Derrida’s gloss reads like a program of Merleau-Ponty’s engagement with

phenomenology (and, perhaps, as a recollection of Schelling); Merleau-Ponty too will recognize that *life*—which is bound up with behavior, the unreflected, nature, and flesh—is that which the phenomenological reduction uncovers, making the reduction possible and condemning it to failure at the same time, as will be seen later. For the moment, however, the significance of life in the Merleau-Pontian project must be underscored with two traits from *Phenomenology of Perception*, so that force of his critique in *The Structure of Behavior* can be made manifest.

First, in the chapter on “The Body in its Sexual Being,” Merleau-Ponty argues that “sexual life is a sector of our life bearing a special relation to the existence of sex.” This relation is special because “the sexual apparatus has the general current of life running through it . . . [and it sometimes may] monopolize it to its own advantage.” We must indeed recognize that “sexuality is a symptom, and a highly important one,” of existence, but we must not conclude from this that “all existence has a sexual significance.” Maintaining the lessons of *Gestalt* theory, Merleau-Ponty argues that sexuality never functions in isolation, and that “sight, hearing, sexuality, the body are not only the routes, instruments or manifestations of personal existence: the latter takes up and absorbs into itself their existence as it is anonymously given” (*PhP*, 185-86/159).¹¹ In short, sexuality is an expression of existence that allows us to experience the world, and so Merleau-Ponty says that “living [*leben*] is a primary process from which, as a starting point, it becomes possible to ‘live’ [*erleben*] this or that world, and we must eat and breathe before perceiving and awakening to relational living, before belonging to colors and lights through sight, to sounds through hearing, to the body of another through sexuality” (*PhP*, 186/160). The accent is thus put on the primary process—on *living*, on the *life* of the body in its *unity*—as that which makes experience possible and meaningful. Life thus appears

phenomenologically or transcends itself only through its expressions and through its lived experiences, through its secondary processes [*Erlebnisse*]*--*through seeing, hearing, sexuality, or in short, through *sensibility**--*and it is these acts of a living being that constitute the source of meaning for it. There is thus nothing mysterious when Merleau-Ponty writes that “every meaning is incorporated,” precisely because bodily life already involves the realm of meaning, and because the realm of meaning is already rooted in bodily life.

The second trait to be highlighted may complicate the first. In a phrase that announces the criteria of success for phenomenological reflection, Merleau-Ponty notes that “reflection will be sure of having precisely located the center of the phenomenon if it is equally capable of bringing to light its *vital inherence* and its rational intention” (*PhP*, 179/153). Meaning or “rational intention” is rooted in bodily life’s self-transcendence, and bodily life transcends itself through its expression. This means that in its expression, the “vital inherence” of the phenomenon*--*i.e., the unity of life*--*is left behind, or perhaps taken up in another expression, but in any case, not negated; there is a *transcendence in or as inherence*. This means subsequently that reflection will never succeed in its task, because the unity of the phenomenon of life always escapes the reflexive attempt to take hold of it, or, in other words, cannot be hypostatized as a “thing” or as a static representation. Here then is underlined the double importance of life for the Merleau-Pontyan project: on the one hand, life is that which is the source of meaning, and thus that of which phenomenology must take account*--*it opens the way for the reduction; but on the other hand, in virtue of its continuous transcendence, life will always escape, and thus frustrate, reflection*--*and thus makes the reduction impossible. This paradox is already belied in *The Structure of Behavior*: the demand of the natural sciences to understand nature, behavior, or life

on the model of external causality will always be a reduction—and perversion—of the phenomenon, and will lead inevitably to “fantastic images of man” that do not respect the phenomenon as it is lived. Merleau-Ponty’s critique of the natural sciences in the name of life—a critique effected with the assistance of the insights of *Gestalt* theory—will lead him to the problem of perception and into phenomenology.

3. The Critique of Causality: The Dialectical Structure of *Gestalt*.

Behavior names that which exceeds scientific discourse—the problem of life. But also, in its most basic form, as understood by both scientific analysis and by classical psychology, behavior is thought naively on the model of stimulus-reaction, or in other words, *causality*. The most basic form of behavior understood in this way is the *reflex*, and is the object of interrogation in the first chapter. Merleau-Ponty writes that “if I am in a dark room and a glimmer of light appears and moves about on the wall, I will say that it ‘attracted’ my attention, that I turned by eyes ‘towards’ it, that in its movements it ‘caught’ my attention. . . . The light can be thought only as a cause that acts on my organism” (*SC*, 5/7). Scientific analysis will attempt to explain my bodily movements as a response to the stimulus of the light. The appearance of the light imposes itself on my passive retinas, themselves only a point of passage in a pre-established neural circuit, and this in turn excites a motor response—first the dilation of my pupils, then the visual fixation, and finally adjustment in my bodily orientation. Of course, I am not conscious of this series of events, precisely because they are reflexes, which science understands simply as pre-established correlations between certain afferent nerves and effector muscles. In effect,

science understands the reflex behavior as “the excitation and reaction in a multitude of partial processes, exterior to one another in time and space,” wherein neural function “is nothing other than the putting to work of a large number of autonomous circuits,” that is, the setting-off of a mechanical reaction that is already there, programmed, waiting to happen (SC, 5-6/8). Merleau-Ponty characterizes this as a “longitudinal phenomenon” or a “linear series of events” in which “the stimulus has the dignity of a cause” (SC, 12/15). Such is “the scientific and objective representation of behavior.” Moreover, the entire organism is conceived as a sum of reflex-circuits, the whole is constructed out of parts. “The object of science is thus defined by the mutual exteriority of parts and processes” (SC, 10/13).

And yet, Merleau-Ponty points out, research in contemporary physiology, and in particular the research conducted by Kurt Goldstein and V. F. von Weizsäcker, has clearly gone beyond this mechanical, causalist conception of the stimulus-arc. On the basis of this research, he will show that even if we were able to isolate the stimulus-arc scientifically, i.e., artificially, the resultant mechanical description of the arc would be valid neither for the whole organism nor for higher-order behaviors (e.g., love, language), that do not depend upon material stimuli. But in the case of higher-level behaviors, the fact that the mechanical, linear stimulus-arc is an inadequate description will not permit us to say that behavior is the external expression of some inner state or some pure consciousness intending an action, since this notion of intentionality would itself be just another version of causality. Merleau-Ponty’s critique is thus double: on the one hand, against the order of the *in-itself*, i.e., the mechanical reaction, and on the other, against the order of the *for-itself*, i.e., the intentional consciousness which expresses itself. This is why Merleau-Ponty justifies in the “Introduction” his choice of behavior for this investigation:

behavior “is neutral with respect to the classical distinctions of the ‘psychical’ [the for-itself] and the ‘physiological’ [the in-itself] and may thus give us the occasion to define them anew” (SC, 2/4). This means, then, that behavior has its own structure that cannot be situated in either of the two orders—and that can be reduced neither to mechanical reaction or mere thing, nor to pure expression or idea.¹² This double critique proceeds by means of an evaluation of the research conducted by Goldstein and von Weizsäcker.

The research of these two German physiologists is conducted within the horizon of advances made by *Gestalt* psychology, a movement of which Goldstein would become, along with Köhler and Koffka, a major representative. *Gestalt* psychology itself arose as a protest against associationism,¹³ which, at the beginning of the twentieth century, was dominant and held that perception was simply the sum of perceived parts, that the perceived image was nothing more than a *constructum* based on partial stimuli. Against this notion, the Gestaltists argued that a perception is a pattern, structure, or form—a *Gestalt*—that stands out against a background or field (a concept taken from recent developments in physics), a figure standing out against a ground. This background—or what Husserl will call a horizon—is itself not a ‘thing’ perceived, and in no way can perceptions be added together so as to arrive at the horizon *qua* sum. Insofar as a perception is only a standing-out against a background which cannot be totalized, a perception must then be thought as an organically articulated whole, and this whole can neither be decomposed nor calculated by the mere addition of its parts (i.e., stimuli), as associationism would have it.¹⁴ Importantly, the *meaning* of a perception *qua Gestalt* is greater than the parts that constitute the perception; this meaning is *not transcendent* to the parts—it does not exist *in itself*—but rather depends entirely on their perceptual configuration *as a Gestalt*. The central

problem of the relation of structure and signification will be considered in a moment, but first the contributions of Goldstein and von Weizsäcker must be further examined.

Viktor von Weizsäcker's work¹⁵ is a direct critique of the reflex understood according to the notion of the stimulus-arc, and gives us a clear sense of the basic Gestaltist argument. In his work, von Weizsäcker shows that the reflex can never be taken in isolation from its field; the organism is always already in a situation, always already exposed to stimuli, and manages to achieve a relative situational equilibrium. If this equilibrium is disrupted, the entire situation is changed, and the organism strives to re-establish a new equilibrium. The fact that the organism reacts changes *both* the way in which the organism finds itself in a situation, *and*, as a result, the situation itself; on the basis of this new situation, the organism responds anew. Von Weizsäcker writes that "the properties of the object and the intentions of the subject not only mix together, but also constitute a new whole."¹⁶ The organism's response—including the reflex—is thus not the result of "a sum of partial stimuli . . . but a constellation, an order, a whole." There is thus a *dialectic* not only between the parts and the whole of the organism, but also between the organism and the environment, and it is this dialectical relation that defines a *Gestalt*.¹⁷ Whereas associationism and allopathic medicine claim that the part can be isolated, Gestaltism maintains that no such isolation is possible. The lesson that Merleau-Ponty draws from von Weizsäcker's research is that there can be no pre-established stimulus-arc, and that a behavior "is determined by its relation to the whole of the organic state and to the simultaneous or precedent excitations, and that between the organism and its milieu, the relations are not those of linear causality, but of a circular causality" (SC, 12/15). If there appears to be a type of behavior that recurs when the organism is exposed to the same conditions, and if we come to say that these conditions "cause"

this behavior, and if, as a result, we call this behavior a “reflex,” then this is nothing more than a retrospective illusion wherein the so-called stimulus-arc and the causality on which it is based are constituted simply according to “the descriptive norms of the organism” (SC, 28/28). The mistake of certain researchers is to suppose that this retrospective illusion exists in-itself in nature as a longitudinal event; the value of von Weizsäcker’s research is to show the circular, dialectical relation between the organism and its milieu in the constitution of reflex behavior.

From the empirical research of Kurt Goldstein, Merleau-Ponty draws similar theoretical support for his critique of the reflex. As a physician, Goldstein had the unique opportunity after the First World War to study soldiers with brain injuries. The medical and biological thinking of the day saw the human organism as a collection of parts, and symptoms as localized in any of these parts; to treat an illness meant to treat the part, and in principle, a damaged part would be irreplaceable. Through his study of the brain-damaged soldiers, which he would later formalize in *Der Aufbau des Organismus* in 1936, Goldstein argued that symptoms were not simply signs of local damage, but were rather expressions of the attempt of the organism to adjust itself to its milieu under new conditions, to transcend itself while maintaining its vital inherence. The change in one locality (whether it be in the organism or in the milieu) provokes changes in the whole organism, and the extent to which an organism can reorganize itself under these new conditions and attain a new equilibrium is a measure of its well-being. Obviously, this well-being is only ever relative, precisely because the organism never lives in a “pure” milieu, and is always responding to the stimuli presented to it; the dialectic is always “open,” and never achieves a resolution except in the death of the organism.¹⁸ The organism, we know already, cannot be excised from its milieu, and since this latter is ever-changing, then the organism is

constantly *transcending* its current state of affairs towards another, towards a “newly achieved state of ordered functioning . . . *a new individual norm*.”¹⁹ Finally, from this perspective, Goldstein critiques the linear causal notion of the reflex; his argument follows that of von Weizsäcker, but he elaborates explicitly a “profound conviction” that is only implicit in the latter’s work. Goldstein argues that

a state of greater perfection can never be understood from that of less perfection and . . . only the converse is possible [which implies that the behavior of men cannot be explained as animal behavior, that man cannot be reduced to physical processes]. It is very feasible to isolate parts from the whole, but a perfect whole can never be composed by synthesizing it from the less perfect parts. True, the reflex can be understood as a manifestation of the whole, but the whole can never be comprehended from the reflexes.²⁰

The organism can thus be conceived neither as a composite of things, nor as *partes extra partes*, nor on the basis of lower-order processes. Rather, the organism must be understood in terms of *Gestalt*, i.e., in terms of the dialectic of part to whole. What is retained from *Gestalt* research is that a *Gestalt*, in virtue of this dialectical structure, constantly *transcends* itself towards a *higher level* of perfection.

On the basis of his reading of *Gestalt* research, Merleau-Ponty critiques the notion of behavior as a thing *in-itself*; as we have noted, the linear causal reflex exists only in abstraction as a *constructum*. He also critiques the notion of behavior as the expression of a *for-itself*, insofar as the dialectical interaction between the organism and its environment implies constant adaptation, which consequently means that consciousness is never fixed, never pure and transparent to itself, never the master of its domain insofar as its domain is constantly forcing a change in its structure; and indeed the very idea that behavior should be the expression of a thought is just another version of causalism. Finally, the claim that the environment is always

provoking a change in the structure of the organism should not be taken as the Watsonian claim that the organism and its behavior are entirely determined by the environment. Behaviorism holds that animal behavior is nothing more than a response to either stimuli or signals in the environment, i.e., once again, the result of external causal forces. In the former, stimuli elicit a pre-programmed, instinctual, syncretic behavior which is “imprisoned in the framework of its natural conditions . . . prescribed for it” (SC, 114, 104). In the latter, signals elicit a form of non-instinctual behavior, but, as amovible, it allows the animal to adapt “selectively” to its environment in order to fulfill a need.⁶ In both cases, however, behavior is understood only as a response to the milieu. The essential nature of behaviorism is “to flee into the world” and to propose “yet another mechanical model” of behavior (SC, 133/126). Such a model may sometimes be convenient, even convincing, for the analytic description of lower-order behaviors, but they are, as we have seen, wholly inadequate to the description of higher-order (i.e., human) behavior, and it is here in particular where behaviorism is inadequate. The fact that human consciousness can abstract from its situation and consider it from multiple perspectives, the fact that a thing can be known as such only through the multiple *Abschattungen* through which it gives itself, means that human behavior has the ability to orient itself by means of the *possible*; it is *not* completely determined by its environment (just as higher-order behaviors cannot be determined by the addition of several reflex-circuits). Human behavior has this ability to abstract and to consider multiple perspectives precisely because that which behaviorism does not recognize--the circular dialectical structure--is constantly reorganizing and reconstituting the situation in which the organism is found, i.e., constantly constituting new perspectives. Behaviorism thus “flees into the world” to find the cause of behavior, but neither interrogates the

ontological status of this world, nor takes into account the specificity of human behavior—i.e. abstraction, perspectivism, and the use of symbols—for which only the notion of *Gestalt* can account.

Behavior (and let us recall its synonymy with *life*) must thus be understood as a *Gestalt* which is characterized as circular dialectical structure obtaining between the parts and the whole of the organism, as well as between the organism and its environment, a structure of transcendence from lower to higher levels of perfection. Any other attempt to account for behavior inevitably falls into an unsatisfactory logic of mechanical, linear causality. Such a logic destroys the whole in order to analyze the part (or, if one prefers, turns the *Leib* into a *Körper*), and cannot subsequently reconstruct and account for the whole: life escapes. In short, the notion of *Gestalt* alone allows us to conceive of behavior and life as a whole or as a phenomenon. Despite his use of *Gestalt* research to redress the inadequacies of causal mechanism, Merleau-Ponty nonetheless does not abandon himself fully to *Gestalt* theory. He also offers a critique of this research, a critique that effectively applies the arguments of *Gestalt* theory against its own suppositions.²¹ What is the nature of this critique, and what purpose does it serve?

4. The Critique of *Gestalt* and the Problem of Perception.

The work of Goldstein and von Weizsäcker shows that *Gestalt* is a dialectical structure of part to whole, and draws out the implications of *Gestalt* a scientific (specifically, biological, physiological, and medical) approach to the lived body that does not depend on an ontology of external causality. The notion of *Gestalt*, however, first arose from research in the domain of

psychology concerning the nature of *perception*. This research sought to understand how a perceptual *Gestalt* could be recognized *as* something, or in other words, how a perception has meaning, or how a structure has a signification. Glossing a definition of *Gestalt* given by Koffka in his *Principles*,²² Merleau-Ponty writes that “we will say that there is form whenever the properties of a system are modified by every change brought about in a single one of its parts and, on the contrary, are conserved when they all change while maintaining the same relationship among themselves” (*SC*, 50/47). A *Gestalt* is thus understood as a system, and it is convenient, Merleau-Ponty says, to compare this with a physical system. Consider, for example, the “system” by which the physicist understands how bodies fall: the “law” of gravity says that bodies will accelerate towards the Earth at 9.8 m/sec^2 , and on the basis of this constant, the scientist can understand a variety of physical phenomena. Scientists can, for example, predict future events on the basis of antecedent ones, on the condition that the system, and thus the constant, remains stable: such is the “law” of gravity. This “law” is clearly not *absolute*—it depends on the stability of the system, which itself is dependant on the rotation of the Earth, which in its turn is related to the Earth’s solar orbit; a change in the latter provokes a concomitant change in the former. The “law” of gravity does not exist as such in Nature; the “system” does not exist in-itself. There are, rather, relations characteristic of a certain equilibrium, and as long as this equilibrium remains unchanged, so too do the relations. Within this equilibrium, the scientist perceives certain phenomena, and on the basis of these perceptions, he formulates “laws” that are true for this equilibrium, on the condition that they be *repeatedly* articulated and “proven” as constant within this equilibrium. Similarly, *Gestalten* do not exist in themselves as things in nature. The mistake of *Gestalt* theory is that it does not pursue its

investigations to their end: when *Gestalt* theory argues that structures are perceived, it merely supposes that structures *exist to be perceived*, that they have the status of a thing-in-itself existing in nature, and in this, it “remains bound to the implicit ontology of a naive realism” (SC, 139/130). In short, what *Gestalt* theory does not do is to ask after the mode of being of the *Gestalt*. By refusing this question, it runs the risk of becoming yet another version of the causalism against which it had argued: *Gestalt* theory has shown us that behavior cannot be conceived as a thing, and yet in virtue of the unquestioned ontological status of the *Gestalt*, structure is reduced to the thing that it cannot be. If structure is not a thing in nature, what then is it? With this question, Merleau-Ponty will re-articulate the insights of *Gestalt* theory in a new register, and ground them firmly in lived, perceptual experience.

Structures are indeed perceived, but they do not—they *cannot*—exist in nature; quite the contrary, they are *perceived* by the scientist, just as is the “law” of gravity. They *are* only *for* the consciousness that perceives them, and they *are* only *as* objects of consciousness. Thus a structure must be “the idea under which what happens in several places is brought together and summarized” (SC, 155/144) or “an instrument of knowledge and . . . an object of consciousness” (SC, 157/145). This means, first of all, that physics does not locate actual, existing physical structures in nature and make of them ontological structures of perception on the basis of which an entire body of knowledge concerning physical reality is constructed. Quite the contrary, the repeated perception of certain relationships—physical “behaviors”—between part and whole allows the physicist to form an idea about and summarize these perceptions, and this idea is then the organizing perspective or matrix through which physical reality is seen, the perceptual *Gestalt* of physical reality that renders it meaningful *to us*.²³ The *structure* of a

Gestalt is thus nothing more than the *perception* of a relationship of part to whole; the question that haunts Merleau-Ponty's first work is how a structure signifies, a question that will be taken up thematically later in this chapter. Before doing so, a critical question that imposes itself at this point in Merleau-Ponty's analysis, and that will return in his subsequent work as well, must be addressed.

It may well seem that Merleau-Ponty slips here into the very critical-idealist position that he was working to overcome; he seems to say that *Gestalt* is an *idea*. If Merleau-Ponty wants to avoid dissolving nature into the idea of nature, then he must go farther in his attempt to distinguish his position from that of his neo-Kantian predecessors. In order to engage this criticism, it will be necessary to approach it indirectly, by considering what use Merleau-Ponty makes of the ontological revision of *Gestalt* theory. His critique permits a re-examination of the ontological status of "behavior" and its meaning for physical, vital, and human beings. This tripartite distinction, which shall have to be given up in the end, corresponds to those three regions of being treated by the natural sciences in the "introduction." Behavior–life–is conceived as a *Gestalt*, as a perceptual structure that has a signification; but how exactly does a structure *have* signification. At the end of *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty claims that

what is profound in the idea of *Gestalt* with which we began is not the idea of signification, but that of structure, the *joining* of an idea and an existence that are *indiscernible*, the contingent arrangement by which the materials place themselves in front of us to have a meaning or intelligibility in a nascent state. (SC, 223/206)²⁴

From the outset, *Gestalt* named a structure that signifies, and structure was subsequently determined as nothing more than the idealized perception of those "materials [that] place themselves in front of us." The perceptual *Gestalt* as an idea is thus *indiscernibly joined* to what

Merleau-Ponty will call the “resistance of nature.” And yet, to say that the materials present themselves to us as nascent intelligibility—and this is a resolutely phenomenological claim—is to say already that they signify: the things give or show themselves as signs, or more precisely, it is their self-showing that signifies. This signifying self-showing is perceived and idealized as a “law” or a “fact”—but at the same time that nature makes the idea possible (and we still have yet to think the *how* of this possibility), it also resists its subsumption under an idea. A reversal is thus called for: it is not the case that a structure “has” a signification, as if the latter were appended to the former as a supplement, but rather, signification understood as the self-showing of the things (understood, that is, as their phenomenality) is the ground of structure, the self-presentation of what will be perceived *as* a structure. This does not mean that a structure exists in nature, but rather that the materials (i.e., the activity of a living being) present themselves to the scientific observer, and the perception of them summarizes them as a structure. A structure is thus “the *joining* of an idea and an existence which are *indiscernible*,” but when the structure is idealized, when it becomes a concept, the idea is “detached” from the existence, and in this way becomes an “ideal object,” a “law,” a “fact,” a “mathematical object,” etc.

While it is true that, in *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty puts the accent on an analysis of structure as “what is profound in the idea of *Gestalt*,” this is not done to the denigration of signification. In fact, the analysis of structure serves to bring to the fore the problem of signification, and along with it, the problem of materiality, which “presents itself to us as an intelligibility in a nascent state.” This is no doubt why he shifts his attention in the second course on *Nature* to the question of signification, that is, to how animal behavior *signifies* and thus makes possible a structure, under which the observer then subsumes this behavior as

meaningful. In this sense, the studies on animal behavior contribute to unraveling the problem of perception, for, as Merleau-Ponty observes in the closing lines of *The Structure of Behavior*, “if we understand by perception the act that makes us know existences [to which an idea is indiscernibly joined], then all the problems we have just touched on lead back to the problems of perception. It resides in the duality of the notions of structure and signification” (SC, 224/207). The courses on *Nature*, then, are presented as the prolongation, elaboration, or revision of the research initiated in his first work, and need to be considered in the horizon of the meditation on the problem of *Gestalt*, and thus also on the question of the phenomenality of life. In the second half of the first course on *La Nature* (1956-57), Merleau-Ponty interrogates recent developments in theoretical physics, and these must therefore be viewed as a meditation on the *Gestalt* with respect to the physical order. The 1957-58 sequel takes up current research in theoretical biology, and thus remarks on the *Gestalt* with respect to the vital order. These analyses will now be examined in the context of the foregoing investigation of *Gestalt* as the indiscernible joining of structure and signification; after this examination, the discussion of *The Structure of Behavior* will be taken up again.

a. The Physical Order

The comparison of a *Gestalt* to a physical system invites a reflection on the way in which science conceives physical nature as a system, but this reflection is not entirely developed in *The Structure of Behavior*. There, Merleau-Ponty is content to speak generally of the system as a whole, as a relatively stable equilibrium of relations. However, in the second half of the first

course on *Nature* (1956-57), Merleau-Ponty revisits and redevelops this comparison through a philosophical interpretation of contemporary physics, and most notably, of quantum mechanics. Quantum mechanics calls into question the Laplacian ontology of science in part by posing the problem of the representability of physical being, of science's capacity to present an image of physical reality (*N*, 125). If particles, either electrons or photons, also demonstrate the properties of waves, as DeBroglie proved in 1924, then their movement should lend itself to the same kind of representation characteristic of waves. And yet, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle (formulated just three years after DeBroglie's work) shows that the more accurately the particle's movement is measured, the less accurately can its position be known, and vice versa. This means that particles cannot be represented as particles and as waves at the same time, that "it is not possible to find a synthesis" between them, that "they are complementary by excluding one another," and that the quantic universe is articulated not only on a physical impossibility, but also a logical one (*N*, 128). The implication of this paradox is that "existing things [particles] are not individual realities, but generic realities" that do not have specificity in themselves (*N*, 137). The scientific attempt to specify them requires that *either* the position *or* the movement be measured, each at the expense of the other, but "the act of measuring fixes the object, makes it appear in its individual existence, isolated from its field," thus yielding an inaccurate representation (*N*, 127). The value of quantum mechanics is perhaps the recognition that this act of measuring does not give us the object, and that "known nature is artificial nature"; that is, it gives us a set of probabilistic equations that more or less accurately, but never perfectly, predict the behavior of the physical entity (*N*, 128). Moreover, the act of measuring is an act of observation, and here Merleau-Ponty cites Carl-Friedrich von Weizsäcker, the physicist-brother

of Viktor the biologist: “the act of observation is an act of objectivation” that “freezes” the object so that it can be analyzed. This analysis might yield an image of reality, but this image is a “violation of nature” (*N*, 134). Both brothers thus make the same argument: the perception of an event changes the nature of the event. Quantum mechanics thus recognizes that the act of measuring, which is an impossible but necessary operation, is an event *in the world*, and as such, changes the object measured.

For Merleau-Ponty, there are two philosophical temptations resulting from these fundamental ideas of quantum mechanics. First, it is tempting to abandon the idea of truth, because quantum mechanics shows that we cannot determine the physically real as such. We have only measures and equations that allow us to predict future behavior, but there is no ontological content, no mode of being, no reality (*N*, 133); this would amount to the kind of criticism against which Merleau-Ponty is arguing. It is also tempting to go the purely Kantian route and say that the insights of quantum mechanics signify that the ontological order simply does not matter, because the object as we know it is effectively constituted by the subject in the act of observation, and the subject can know *only* this representation. This version of Kantianism is not inconsistent with quantum mechanics. But ultimately, whereas Kantianism wants to unify the manifold of representations into a single representation for-me by means of a subjective act of synthesis, quantum mechanics proves that such a synthesis is impossible, or at least that the resultant representation is dishonest (*N*, 134; 138). Also, by recognizing that the act of observation implicates the physicist in the reality he measures, quantum mechanics recognizes the incarnated situation of the physicist, and thus the impossibility of a pure measure. The (neo-) Kantian perspective does not recognize the perverting influence of incarnation, holding instead

that the transcendental unity of apperception yields a categorically valid representation that can pretend to “truth.” The Kantian temptation must therefore also be resisted because the act of representation yields only a static and perverted image.

Is there a way beyond this dichotomy of the in-itself and its representation? The problems posed by contemporary physics, Merleau-Ponty claims (and these problems are, for him, effectively problems concerning the representation of physical being, and thus ultimately, the problem of the institution of ideal meaning), are situated in this impasse. But the problems posed by quantum mechanics “amount to the problem of perception,” Merleau-Ponty says, and as such, they reveal something about perception, and thus point beyond this dichotomy (*N*, 137). That quantum mechanics recognizes observation as an operation of fixation, that it confesses that this is a necessary operation and that an element of uncertainty will always haunt our calculations, suggests that perception is not simply an isolating attitude, but rather “a natural attitude . . . [that] in the natural field . . . find[s] ambiguous beings,” or “probable beings referring to a sheath of probabilities.” Quantum mechanics shows that perception does not end up at “the things themselves” because these things do not have individual existence; they are generic, “non-determinate . . . negative beings . . . which are neither finite nor infinite” (*N*, 136). What quantum mechanics discloses, then, is that “the perceived world is a world where there is discontinuity, where there is probability and generality, where each being is not constrained to a unique and fixed location, to an absolute density of being” (*R*, 120/154). Scientific research thus allows philosophy “an encounter with certain articulations of being which otherwise it would find difficult to uncover.” But for all that, science, unlike perception, converts nature into “structures of a whole operation,” and thus can give us only an artificial construction of physical

reality, a structural plan—a probabilistic algorithm—“in which reality takes refuge” (*R*, 118/152). This then points back to the problematic relation of structure and signification, of existence and phenomenality, and therefore demands a return to the analyses of *The Structure of Behavior*.

The critique of *Gestalt* was effected by means of a comparison with physical systems. For the physicist, the notion of structure is useful to summarize perceptions under an idea. Such a structure becomes privileged when it can correlate the manifold perceptions of physical reality into a unity; this *unity of correlation* idealizes the perceptions as “facts,” and yields, for example, the “law” of gravity. Physical nature, understood by science as an object of investigation, is thus constructed and defined starting from perception: “perception is not a fact of nature, but is that from which all facts appear” (*SC*, 227/210). On the basis of this *constructum*, the scientist is able to see that the correlation of certain natural relations repeatedly produces the same event, and is able therefore to explain physical behavior as meaningful. This meaning is not *in* nature, but only *for* a consciousness that discerns certain relations in a stable system. The essential point here is that the idea is instituted on the basis of the perceptual relation in/to in the world.²⁵ Thus, Merleau-Ponty writes that a structure is “the *joining* of an idea and an existence which are indiscernible.” This means, first, that the idea is not a category of thought applied to the outside, and second, that the idea we have of nature in no way annihilates the real existence of nature; and as a result, the criticist notion that “there is nothing in the world that is foreign to mind” is inadequate insofar as it dissociates the thing from the idea of the thing, and concerns itself only with the latter. The “idea” of which Merleau-Ponty speaks is an *idealization* of our perception and remains inextricably bound to what is perceived; it is nowise a “pure” idea in the criticist sense. What is perceived makes this idealization possible, because what is perceived is the

relation of parts to whole. To name a *Gestalt* as this “*joining* of an idea and an existence which are *indiscernible*” is also to name the central problem: how is it that the material presents itself to us in such a way as “to have a meaning or intelligibility in a nascent state”? How does material existence show itself in such a way that it can give rise to an idea to which it is then indiscernibly joined? How does a structure *signify*? These questions, gathered together under the problem of *Gestalt*, already point to the institution of meaning, and, as already seen with respect to the physical order, to the problem of perception. The problem is more complex, and more rigorously posed, with respect to the vital order.

b. The Vital Order

Merleau-Ponty avers that biology defines the living organism as “a segment of matter, as an assemblage of real parts juxtaposed in space and existing external to each other, as a sum of physical and chemical actions” (SC, 164/151). But the analysis of *Gestalt* has shown that “in reality, the body cannot be understood as an object” in this way, because “a total molecular analysis would dissolve the structure of functions and the organism in an undivided mass of banal . . . reactions” (SC, 165/152). Thus even if the organism were nothing more than its parts, knowledge of these parts, however total, could never give us a view of the whole. Merleau-Ponty elaborates this critique of a mechanistic view of the living organism in the second course on *Nature* (1957-58) by once again turning to contemporary research in theoretical biology, in particular, the work of Coghill. This work represents not only a critique of the animal-machine, but also, like quantum mechanics, gives some insight into the problem of *Gestalt* as a signifying

structure of perception. The materials in the second course on *Nature* have the additional virtue of showing how perceived being—in this case, animal life—signifies in such a way as to make this structure of perception meaningful.

Coghill's famous study of the axolotl lizard in 1929 showed that the emergence of behaviors—swimming, walking, etc.—was due to the calendar of anatomical development. Motor flexion develops first in the animal's head, because it is there where the first neural connections are configured. Eventually connections are made between the head and the emergent tail, and motor flexion is “translated” as the behavior of swimming. This behavior is due only to “the rhythm of cephalo-caudal maturation,” which means that behavior is nothing more than the result of anatomical maturation. As the number of neural connections increase, so too does the animal's capacity to adapt its behavior; this growth depends only on a “intrinsic potential for growth, i.e., a dynamic system reacting to the environment” (*N*, 192). When the organism reaches developmental maturity, a “total pattern” of behavior is “unfurled”; but curiously, at the same time, the parts of the organism gain their specificity and distinction.²⁶ This would not be a terribly interesting view of behavior (it implies both mechanism and determinism) were it not for the conclusions that Coghill draws in his study, of which Merleau-Ponty offers an interpretation. That there is this “interior possibility of the organism” that constitutes a “reference to the future” suggests that behavior cannot be reduced to its immediate function, which already indicates that the animal body cannot be conceived of as a machine, but must rather be conceived as a dynamic unfurling totality (*N*, 193). This idea of an unfurling totality of behavior poses another philosophical problem: it seems as if there is an immanent principle in the organism itself, which amounts to a vitalistic claim.

One is tempted to conclude, then, that the life of the organism is due to some vital force or “presence of life” in the organism; but this recourse to vitalism is, says Merleau-Ponty, “not thinkable, it is magic” (SC, 169/154). Vitalism, like mechanism, “takes the organism as a real product of an exterior nature” (SC, 165/152). But this is not the conclusion drawn by Coghill. His research shows that even though the parts of the organism gain their specificity as this total pattern unfurls, the emergent totality cannot be reduced to its parts—a conclusion consistent with the work of the Gestaltists. The question then is “how to understand the relation of the totality to the parts, and what status to give this totality?” This is, for Merleau-Ponty, *the same question* that he poses in *The Structure of Behavior*, and he here assigns it considerable importance: “this is the philosophical question posed by Coghill’s experiments, the question that is at the center of this course on the idea of Nature, and maybe of all philosophy” (N, 194). If the character of living being is conceived as this unfurling totality, or as a *Gestalt*, is the debate between mechanism and vitalism finally overcome? How is this totality to be conceived? According to the traditional opposition, either it is entirely distinguished from the materials constituting it, in which case it is transcendent, or it is an interior principle, in which case it is immanent. Does the theoretical work of Coghill point a way beyond this opposition and contribute something new to this question?

Coghill’s work shows that behavior emerges with the maturation of the organism, and that as such, it is not reducible to the immediate functioning of the organism. It is in some way “in advance” of functioning, in that the organism cannot realize immediately what is sketched out and anticipated for it (i.e., a “total pattern”) in the process of maturation; it thus carries a reference to the future. This totality must neither be sought beyond the observable phenomena

as the unfurling of a principle inscribed in matter, as this would be to look for another reality beyond this one, nor must its future be retrospectively read into its past, as if it were preprogrammed, nor must the idea of a perfectibility realizing itself in the organism's biohistory be supposed (N, 195). The results of Coghill's work counter-indicate these ways of conceiving this totality. Merleau-Ponty argues this "reference to a future" must be conceived as coming from the present itself, not contained and prescribed therein, but as "the constant modulation of one life" (N, 194). That is, "the reference to a future" means that the plurality of phenomena to come *is formed in and constitutes a whole*—a life—with a meaning. The "unfurling totality" concerned is thus neither transcendent to the organism, nor achieved by summation, nor an immanent principle of life in the vitalistic sense. Merleau-Ponty clarifies this notion by turning to the world of perception, and cites the example of the becoming of a painting:

Matisse splashes his brush about in places as diverse as possible and, after a certain time, the logic appears . . . Threads are formed, which come from everywhere, and which constitute independent forms, and at the same time we see that these threads realize something that has unity. With the first sign, there appears a halo of possibles, which were not contained in the first sign, and which were unforeseeable starting from it.²⁷

There is thus a view of a totality that may be something other than the sum of its parts; it is whole, and yet for all that is not a transcendent totality. This comparative turn to the world of perception suggests that the total pattern of behavior is only as perceived (and we will return momentarily to this not-so-surprising suggestion), but at the same time, Coghill maintains the idea of an interior principle of development by focusing on the material life of the organism. What philosophical sense can be made of this claim without falling back into a vitalism?

It would be a mistake to view this principle as "a positive principle (as an idea, essence or entelechy)," as we have seen, and so this principle must be "a principle of the negative or of

absence” (N, 207). At any present moment, the organism is empty of what will come; it is leaning towards a future, which is unfurled as a whole with a meaning. The implication is that the present is not a whole, and indeed, insofar as the total pattern of behavior is unfurling according to the calendar of the *process* of anatomical *development*, every present moment is a moment of or in development. The present therefore “is in a state of disequilibrium.” If one posits a principle of absence, then it is possible to say that what is absent in the organism is this equilibrium, and that equilibrium is the future to which it refers. As soon as the organism begins its development—that is, as soon as there is *life*—there is both a rupture with a state of equilibrium, and the fixing of a reference to a future equilibrium.²⁸ The disequilibrium of the organism is due not to any external factor, but is interior to the organism itself—it is its interior principle hinted at by Coghill, and it constitutes his definition of life, which Merleau-Ponty can summarize by means of a fortuitous reference to Whitehead: “life is only the reality of this process.”²⁹ But this process cannot be exhaustively analyzed into its constituent parts with the hope of finding life there. This process of development—life—is surely a reality, is surely real, but if life cannot be found in a microscopic view of the real, where then is it?

If the idea of the organism as the sum of parts or as governed by a positive principle transcendent to it is given up, then perhaps what is called “vital” in the organism is no special cause or magical force, but only “our human way of perceiving it,” as was suggested a moment ago by Coghill’s work: the total pattern *is* only *as* perceived. This would mean, then, that like physical behavior, the vital behavior of the living organism has a meaning, but only “for a consciousness which knows it, and not as a thing which rests in-itself” (SC, 172/159). Were the organism just a thing in nature, then our perception of its behavior “would only be the

macroscopic result of a multitude of elementary actions identical to those of physical systems” (SC, 168/155). The natural scientific attempt to locate the living aspect of a living organism by reducing it to its physico-chemical parts without losing the living aspect has, thus far, not found what it seeks. Whereas events in physical nature *correlate*, the repetition of which allows us to idealize a “law” or “representation” of physical reality, behavior as the manifest activity of a living being is qualitatively different. Vital behavior does not correlate; rather, it is *directed* at something (for example, a sexual or alimentary object, or more generally, its world) and thus has a *sens*. It is an oriented action, it points itself to something, and this pointing, this indication, is a signification; vital behavior thus *signifies*. Thus, whereas “the unity of physical systems is a *unity of correlation*, that of organisms is a *unity of signification*” (SC, 168-69/156). That the significative acts of the organism are unified as a meaning is the result of our perception, and the unity of signification is only “an attribute of the *perceived* organism.” But this is not simply a projection of human meaning onto animal behavior, because the perceived organism is bound to a “a true organism . . . a concrete totality,” or in short, a *life*. (SC, 169/156). This life is the root of signification, and the question is: how? The notion of signification, and the way in which animal behavior signifies, is elaborated by Merleau-Ponty in his second course on *Nature* through a discussion of the work of Uexküll, Russell, Portmann, and Lorenz.

Uexküll is most famous for his notion of the *Umwelt*, which is the aspect of the world in itself [*Welt*] to which the animal addresses itself, and which exists for the animal.³⁰ The animal’s behavior is oriented towards the *Umwelt*, thus marking out a relational structure between the animal and its environment.³¹ This relational structure is what Uexküll is concerned to explain and what interests Merleau-Ponty. The question Uexküll investigates is how an *Umwelt qua*

aspect of the *Welt* comes to be *for* the animal. Uexküll develops his question by investigating the way that both inferior and superior animals relate to their exterior world. Inferior animals are divided into two sub-classes. First, there are those animals that appear as machines—the medusa, the marine worm, the urchin—and that seem to have no relation to their environment. These animals merely function according to a *Bauplan*, an anatomical plan of construction, but this *Bauplan* has only a descriptive value insofar as it allows us to conceive the unity of the life of the animal. The life of the animal itself seems governed by a *Naturfaktor* that does not manifest itself in the *Bauplan* and that we cannot know; it is this *Naturfaktor* that allows us to say that the animals only *seem* to function as a machine. To the extent that they seem this way, these animals “do not have an *Umwelt*, they receive nothing from the external world.” Strangely, less evolved animals—amoebae—“present us with something wholly different from mechanical activity,” because they demonstrate two properties missing from machines: the constitution of forms and regeneration. Amoebae are endlessly flowing protoplasm that endlessly recreate themselves and their *Bauplan*; as “pure production,” they make the *Naturfaktor* appear more manifestly than do the animal-machines.

In both cases, however, inferior animals do not have a reply to the exterior world: there is “a sort of cohesion with their world, a closed unity.” The organism’s only “concern” with its environment is to absorb from it whatever is necessary to function and thus to maintain its life.³² For superior animals, however, the case is different: “the *Umwelt* is no longer a closing-off, but rather an *opening*” to an exterior world to which the animal responds. In effect, the exterior world acts as a sign (Uexküll speaks of a *Merkwelt*), which is “translated” by the nervous system into a behavior, and is then deployed in the animal’s space of operation (the *Wirkwelt*). For

Uexküll, the central nervous system of superior animals is a sort of “rejoinder or retort” to the *Welt*, inserted like a screen between the animal and the exterior world. The operation of the central nervous system is one of distilling, ordering, and interpreting information. The arrangement and organization of the sense organs is such that the animal can deduce from information received “the possibility of an object,” and that it can then orient its bodily position and sensory perception with respect to this object. This proprioceptivity is an important factor in superior animals; the information that they interpret is not stimuli that bombard them, but rather that toward which they orient themselves through their bodily *movement*.³³ This sensibility and motility constitute the animal’s openness to the exterior world, and they allow the animal to situate itself within this world; in this way, it produces its own *Umwelt* by selecting and tailoring aspects of the world to itself. What philosophical lesson does Merleau-Ponty draw from Uexküll’s work? As we attempt to respond to this question, let us recall that we are situated—and trying to understand our situation—at the indiscernible joining where materiality—animal life—signifies, and through this signification makes possible the institution of an idea that summarizes it and to which it is subsequently joined.

Uexküll’s early work was concerned to understand the unfurling of an *Umwelt* in which the animal lives. With regard to inferior animals, this unfurling seems to be the work of an unknowable *Naturfaktor*. But with regard to superior animals, we see that the animal defines its territory, produces its *Umwelt*, through its movement and sensory organization. But even here, Uexküll wants to speak of *Natursubjekt* that is unfolded in the production of the *Umwelt*. In this nuanced change of vocabulary, Merleau-Ponty suggests that Uexküll moves from a Kantian to a Schellingian position. In either case, the idea of an unthinkable anteriority is not what is

philosophically interesting about Uexküll's work. What's interesting is the idea of the production of the *Umwelt*. Merleau-Ponty underlines two aspects: first, with regard to superior animals, there is a *sensible openness to the exterior world which it encounters through its motility*; second, on the basis of this, the animal *defines its emplacement by making varying use of what it encounters* ("signs"). Certain crabs, for example, will use the same object, the anemone, for camouflaging, protecting, or feeding itself, or for replacing a damaged shell. This suggests to Merleau-Ponty that the productivity of the *Umwelt* is oriented towards the *interpretation of signs*, and thus constitutes a sort of "pre-culture." With the advent of the living being and the concomitant unfurling of an *Umwelt*, there is thus an opening of a spatio-temporal field in which the animal makes use of signs, and it is in this sense that the vital behavior of a living organism seems to signify.

This provisional conclusion is reinforced in the second course on *Nature* by a turn, first, to the work of E.S. Russell, then to that of Portmann and Lorenz; their findings must now be considered. Russell argues that physiological relations between cells or between organs are already a "behavior in an internal circuit," and that behavior in general is to be understood as a "prolongation of the organism's activity beyond its body."³⁴ This is clarified by means of several comparisons, the most famous of which is between internal tissue repair and an animal's repair of its dwelling. Russell's analysis shows that the physiology of tissue repair has a behavioral aspect insofar as there is a migration of deep cells towards the gaping surface of a wound, i.e., the behavior, as an interior physiological process, is directed outwards towards the surface, thus opening to the beyond the body. Similarly, faced with the reconstruction of its casing, the larva behaves in a precise way, using whatever materials it can to repair the damage. It directs its

behavior outward in order to maintain a certain interiority. Russell concludes that there is a “*directiveness*” to all organic behavior. This is an *orientation* of the living being towards a goal, and this orientation manifests itself both physiologically and behaviorally, to the point where this is no longer a border between the two. This orientation or directiveness constitutes a kind of finality, characterized as a “limited and specialized teleology operant under specific conditions.” Merleau-Ponty underlines two aspects of Russell’s work. First, the blurring of internal physiology and manifest behavior suggests a “mutual cohesion between the parts of the organism, [and] between the organism and its surroundings”; second, this directiveness of behavior or “weak teleology” is not oriented towards any final end other than that of normal functioning (thus a finality that is at the same time a non-finality), and is directed from the inside towards the outside, towards the beyond of the body. Insofar as behavior refers to an outside, Merleau-Ponty argues that it demonstrates a “pre-signification.”

This referral to an outside or notion of presignification is taken up and deepened in Portmann’s study of animal appearance.³⁵ Portmann’s principle claim is that the differentiation of animal life is more clearly expressed on its external surface, that is, that the animal body is a manner of expression. Contained in this idea is an argument against “the assimilation of life to the notion of the pursuit of utility,” and thus against Darwinism. For example, some animals display an ornamentation which is not at all useful, and even complicates their existence. Likewise, if the complicated sexual displays of many animals were aimed only at utility (i.e., procreation), the ceremony ought to be much more economical. Portmann’s study suggests that life is not submitted uniquely to a principle of utility, and that animal appearance and ornamentation (and certain behaviors dependant on these, like sexual display) have a “form

value.” This form value is not the manifestation of an evolutionary finality, a utility, or an intentional purpose. In what, then, does this value consist? Portmann suggests that animal appearance has the status of “an organ for being-seen.” If in superior animals the body is indeed a manner of expression, then bodily appearance always “refers to a possible eye,” not just the eye of the scientific observer, but also and primarily the eye of other members of the same species. While it is true that the animal does not have a perception of its own body (that would imply animal consciousness), the fact of animal appearance in, for example, the sexual display, “has an existential value of presentation.” In other words, appearance is a signifying, a way for an animal to constitute itself as a sign and thus to show itself to others. For Merleau-Ponty, Portmann’s work confirms that behavior can be defined only by a perceptual relation, and more importantly, “that Being cannot be defined outside of perceived being. *Life is the power to invent the visible.*”³⁶

Lorenz, with Tinbergen and Frisch, developed the principles of ethology, the basic premise of which is that entire behavioral sequences are genetically determined patterns released by sign-stimuli in the animal’s environment.³⁷ These “instinctual tendencies or schema”³⁸ are species-specific, and are often indistinguishable from physiological function. All of this has the air of causal mechanism, reinforced by Lorenz’s recurrent metaphor of key (sign-stimuli) and lock (behavior), but Merleau-Ponty underlines certain aspects of Lorenz’s work that go beyond a purely mechanistic interpretation. The first is that these schema are not perfect; that is, there can be a *substitution* of sign-stimuli that elicit the same response (the animal can be duped). Lorenz, present at a duckling’s birth when its mother was absent, provided the necessary sign-stimuli to elicit the duckling to view him as its mother. This phenomenon of imprinting shows that the

animal can fixate on a nonspecific element, and that it “anticipates an aspect or element of the world.” This substitutability suggests that sign-stimuli do not have the status of a cause, but rather, of the evocation of an innate complex that has no pre-fixed goal or object. Merleau-Ponty argues in *The Structure of Behavior* that this innate instinctual complex is not purely mechanistic, but is rather a global structure that orients the animal to its milieu; like any structure, it is a dialectical relation between the animal and its environment, and it is this that accounts for the substitutability of sign-stimuli. The beaver faced with deforestation will still build a dam (execute its instinctual tendency) using whatever materials (signs) it can find in its milieu; this in no way suggests a special “beaver *tekhné*” but rather, as Merleau-Ponty says in *Nature*, “a manifestation of a style,” a way of relating to the world (N, 252).

Lorenz’s discovery and analysis of imprinting suggests also that animals are directed to their surroundings by the perception of forms, the sign-stimuli, which can be visual, auditory, odorous, or tactile. The forms perceived can be very clear and distinct signals that release the instinctual behavior, or they can be relatively weak, in which case instinct is “derailed” and passes from “instinctive activity to *symbolic activity*” (N, 252). That is, the activity released will not be consummated, but will be only “a seeming to do.” Merleau-Ponty characterizes this as a *displacement* of instinct to symbolic function, which takes on a social-communicative value, for example, as training young, signaling alarm, or displaying sexuality or superiority. The animal is thus not a slave to a biological mechanism, but rather “a being who sees and shows itself” (N, 254). With the emergence of this symbolic activity, Merleau-Ponty argues that it is valid to speak of animal culture. Moreover, these two aspects underlined by Merleau-Ponty—substitutability and displacement—suggest that animal instinctual behavior functions and is

ordered like a language, and so signifies meaningfully (or institutes the symbolic) within a species.³⁹ Lorenz himself makes the comparison: “just as different forms of verbal symbols of our language are not ordered by their meaning and are fixed only by convention, so too is it for the innate activating schemes.” He even goes so far as to propose a “comparative philology” of these schemes. The important point for Merleau-Ponty is that the animal *body* and behavior as the manifest activity of life are the root of symbolism.

What should be retained from this detour through the studies of animal behavior? Let us recall first the problem-horizon in which they are undertaken. The vital aspect of the organism—its life—can be grasped only as a *Gestalt*, which is defined as the joining of an idea and an existence which are indiscernible, or as the intertwining of structure and signification. Coghill’s work confirms that the vital must be grasped as a total pattern, but the organism itself is not simply perceived: it has a real existence, and the whole question is to know how the parts of this existence relate to the unfurling totality that presents itself to perception, such that what unfolds there coheres as a unity of signification. All of these studies concern the way in which the living organism relates to its environment (and thus concerns a structure), and in what way this relating is also a degree of signification or an intelligibility in a nascent state. Uexkull shows a *sensible openness* to the world that the animal produces by interpreting signs. Russell specifies that all behavior is *oriented towards an outside*, constituting the condition for presignification. Portmann adds that this reference to an exterior is in fact *a reference to a possible eye*, which indicates that animal behavior signifies as much to other animals as it does to the human onlooker. This indication is developed by Lorenz’s work on the *symbolic displacement* of instinctual behavior. That animal behavior signifies or unfolds as signification in no way means

that the animal has language, nor that this behavior is meaningful for them; behavior is meaningful only when “a consciousness finds and sees unfolding in it the unities of signification,” that is, only when it unfurls as a totality to a perceptual consciousness (SC, 175/161). Animal behavior signifies simply because it relates the animal to signs in its environment, and this *relating*, which is nothing more than the animal’s own *bodily action* or *inter-action* with the environment, is also a *differentiation*. Uexküll contributes that the animal differentiates an environment-for-it [*Umwelt*] from the world-in-itself [*Welt*]. Russell describes how the animal differentiates an inside from an outside, and directs itself towards the outer. Portmann shows how the animal’s organ for being-seen differentiates the animal externally, and how this differentiation constitutes both a perceptual signification and an inter-animality. And Lorenz investigates how differentiated instinctual schemes give rise to species-specific symbolic activity that can be studied by a promised comparative philology. Insofar as the animal’s own activity—its *living*—is that which differentiates, that which inscribes difference and thus relation between it and its environment, or between part and whole, we can say that its life constitutes itself as differential signs, and thus signifies. In this way, an existence presents itself in a nascent state of intelligibility to a perceptual consciousness, which in turn grasps the signs in a unity of signification. What is grasped, says Merleau-Ponty, has the status of a “phenomenon in the Kantian sense,” and we can say that for Merleau-Ponty, the Kantian phenomenon is another name for the indiscernible joining.⁴⁰

There are thus four important contributions to be recognized in this passage through the studies on animal behavior. First, that a structure presents itself as signification is a function of the relation of parts to whole. Second, that this relating is the activity of the living organism and

is understood as differentiation; if Merleau-Ponty is a phenomenologist of life, then he will want to grasp this principle of differentiation, and his attempt to do so is one of the reasons that he is led to the ontological study of Nature (i.e., the first course), and in particular to find the *Naturphilosophie* of Schelling.⁴¹ Third, that signification is made possible by the activity of the real existence of the organism, i.e., through the sensibility and mobility (which are its means of differentiation) of its living body; the body is thus the root of signification.⁴² Finally, that animal behavior appears to us as meaningful suggests to Merleau-Ponty that there is “the participation of the animal in our perceptual life and the participation of our perceptual life in animality” (*R*, 136/165). What is implied here is not only that animality gives itself to us as meaningful via perception, but also that there is an *Einfühlung* or relation of empathy between us and them, which can be partially explained, we shall see, in terms of the dialectic of the *Gestalt*, but which will also be an abiding theme in Merleau-Ponty’s thought. What is called “vital” or “life,” then, is indeed our human way of perceiving it; through our perception of its appearing, its existence is disclosed to us as meaning. Finally, we must recall a lesson learned from the Gestaltists: the vital order cannot be reduced to the physical order, although it is not absolutely other to it. Merleau-Ponty argues that “the relation of each order to the superior order is that of part to whole . . . [and so] the advent of superior orders . . . suppresses inferior orders as autonomous and . . . [re-] constitutes them with a new signification,” i.e., a more complex structure (*SC*, 195/180). The investigations in the physical order disclosed how the dialectical relation of part to whole comes to signify, and this relation was taken up and re-articulated in a more complex fashion in the vital order. This means, first, that the traditional, Aristotelian division of the universe into distinct regions (the physical, the vital, and the psychological) can no longer be understood as three

different “powers of being,” or as three distinct realms of essence existing side by side, each the object of a regional ontology; rather, they must be understood as “three dialectical moments” or three forms of unity, each of which is sublated, in the Hegelian sense, in a more complex structuration (*SC*, 153/142). The very possibility of regional ontology is thus called into question, insofar as such ontologies would concern only a fragment of the whole. But more importantly, this upward movement of the dialectical structure also means that what we have just discovered in the vital order will be taken up in a new and more complex structure in the human order.

c. The Human Order

Recall that Merleau-Ponty’s proposal was to examine the relations between consciousness and nature; with the discussion of the human order, the heart of the problem is reached, because, like the lower orders, the human order is also conceived as a dialectic, this time between consciousness and exteriority. This is a critical moment in the text. On the one hand, the task of the book was originally to critique the operative presuppositions under which science forms a representation of its object. This soon became a question of phenomenality, of the way in which the object presents itself to consciousness. The question of phenomenality is linked to the problem of *Gestalt*. Objects present themselves to consciousness in virtue of their dialectical structure, a differential structure that signifies, and we examined the operations of the dialectical structure of relation in the physical order (part to whole) and of living in the vital order (animal to milieu). But in order to undertake this interrogation, we had to suspend the question of this

consciousness to which the things present themselves. Consciousness was implied all along, but was never questioned. We have learned that “what we call nature is already consciousness of nature, what we call life is already consciousness of life, what we [are about to] call mental is already an object in front of consciousness” (SC, 227/210). The discussion of the human order thus explicates that which has been implicit: how consciousness relates to an exteriority. The scientific spectator is now placed in question, and can no longer remain on the outside. The curious effect of this is that the dialectic of the human order is not the crowning moment of what has preceded; it is also their ground.

There is perhaps confusion in what is meant by consciousness, and so to approach this question, we should perhaps begin negatively, by saying what consciousness is *not*. Merleau-Ponty explicitly rejects the Platonic-Cartesian metaphor of the pilot in the ship or the artisan and his tool to express the relation of mind and body. There is not some vital principle or “soul”; consciousness is not something that descends into the body and uses it, not another substance added on to that of the body (SC, 225ff/208ff). Nor can it be a schematic *a priori* that synthesizes manifold data into a judgment that converts an object into its logical existence, in that this act of intellection or exercise of judgment already presupposes some primordial sensible contact with the object (SC, 185-86/166-67). It is, in fact, nothing more than this naive, primordial, sensible contact with the things that constitutes consciousness in its primitive state, and, to describe it, Merleau-Ponty seeks instruction from psychological studies of the infant. Such studies show that babies are conscious first of the face and gestures of people, particularly their mothers’, but not yet of the lines, forms, colors or perspectives that compose them: infantile consciousness does not decompose the whole into its analytical parts.⁴³ It thus “has the double

character of *aiming* at human intentions rather than objects of nature or at pure qualities . . . and of grasping them as proven realities rather than as true objects,” i.e., they are a lived reality (SC, 180/164). Ordinary objects are grasped later on, and only through the intervention of language, through naming; the essential point here is that naive consciousness aims at or relates to something that it experiences as *a lived reality*. As naive, this consciousness has no philosophical axe to grind, it does not worry about how the faculties attach an “I think” to each sensible image in a temporal manifold and then hold them altogether as a representation, it is not *thetic*: there is *a unity of intention*.

If we also recall that “the advent of a superior order . . . suppresses inferior orders . . . and gives [to them] a new signification,” i.e., that the vital order is sublated in the human, then the nature of this aiming-at can be further specified. Primitive consciousness is embodied in an organism directed or oriented to its environment (Russell) in virtue of sensible openness (Uexküll, Goldstein); as the outwardly directed activity of a sensible organism, it is a bodily behavior.⁴⁴ This openness to exteriority, this sensible contact with the things that characterizes naive consciousness, is called *perception*, and is a properly human expression of the structured relation we found in the vital order. Naive consciousness is thus *perceptual consciousness*, a consciousness that is nothing more than its look.⁴⁵ It is through perception understood in this way—as incorporated—that naive consciousness is defined and aims at exteriority. Notice, then, that perception is only a sublimated, restructured form of animal sensibility; understood in its primitive state, perceptual consciousness is nothing more than perceptual, sensible contact with the things, an original *aisthesis*, and experiences them as a lived reality. At the same time, perception is not simply reducible to animal sensibility, because “mental acts have their own

meaning and interior laws” (SC, 195/181). This must be further explicated.

Animals are oriented to signs in their milieu by which they differentiate a world-for-them from the world-in-itself and through which they relate to their milieu. These sign-stimuli are substitutable, but once a substitution has taken place, there is no variation, and the animal relates to it only as that sign and nothing else (thus Lorenz *was* the duckling’s mother). The chimpanzee can use a branch of a tree as a baton in order to reach the banana, but when it does, the branch is no longer a branch, but only a baton. Animal activity thus “loses itself in the real transformations that it effects. For the human, however, the branch of the tree that has become a baton is a branch-of-a-tree-that-has-become-a-baton, one same *thing* with two different functions, visible for him in a plurality of aspects” (SC, 190/175). This capacity to vary perspective, to create instruments, to create new structures, to see possible or virtual use in a sign, is one of the differences between animal sensibility and human perceptual consciousness, suggesting that this latter can abstract and is oriented *symbolically*. This can be seen more clearly in terms of sexual function. For the animal, the sexual act is purely instinctual and, whether the sign-stimuli releasing the behavior be the opposite sex of the species or a doorknob, there is “a periodicity and monotony of the sexual life of animals”: in two words, animals mate. But in principle, “this mode of behavior does not subsist as such in the human. Reorganized in their turn in new wholes, the vital behaviors disappear as such” (SC, 195/181). Our sexual life is not purely functional or instinctual; it is sometimes for pleasure, sometimes an expression of love: there are variations. Moreover, if the human has successfully integrated the lower-orders in a properly human expression, then the mere presence of a sign-stimuli (the human sexual object) does not automatically unleash “the mating ritual”; the capacity to abstract and to vary perspectives makes

it possible to *love* another for reasons entirely unrelated to biological function.⁴⁶ Human perception can thus not be reduced to a more evolved form of animal sensibility, but must be understood as a new and peculiarly human structuring in which animal sensibility is sublated—suppressed but preserved with a new expression. It is not the case that man is simply a rational animal, but neither does consciousness exist outside of the concrete situations in which it is incarnated. The qualitative difference is that human perception is *perspectival* and *symbolic* and thus oriented by the *possible* and the *virtual*.

And yet, if the human can vary its perspectives on a thing and use it in different functions, this supposes that the brute existence experienced sensibly by perceptual consciousness has become a perceived object-for-consciousness, that the material has been joined to an idea, and that a judgment has been made. The occurrence of this transformation, and thus also the emergence of the higher orders of consciousness (intellection, representation, judgment), can be witnessed by interrogating naïve consciousness more profoundly. Naïve consciousness lives in “direct commerce with the things,” and, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, there is something there in the visual spectacle itself that calls for this transformation.⁴⁷ What is notable about this visual spectacle, about the way things give themselves? The analysis of the physical order showed that physical laws do not give us an explanation *of* structures, since structures do not exist as such in nature, but rather, they represent an explanation *in* structures that arise through our perception. Similarly, the analysis of the vital order showed, with Portmann, that animals present themselves through their appearance. But neither does the whole of physical nature present itself in a structure, nor does the whole of the animal present itself through its skin. If the original definition of *Gestalt*, as a figure standing out against a background or field which itself is

untotalizable, is recalled, then the same motif is seen. The things present themselves as perspectives or profiles, as *Abschattungen*; they never wholly give themselves over to us, there is something that resists, that hides itself. This “is precisely what makes the perceived possess within itself a hidden and inexhaustible richness, makes it ‘thing’.” (SC, 201/185). When we say, then, that human consciousness is perspectival, this in no way means a subjectivism, but rather “the assurance that communicating with a world richer than what we know of it, that is, with a real world” (SC, 201/185). For naive consciousness, then, the things are

perspectival beings: it is essential to them to offer themselves without an interposed milieu and to reveal themselves only gradually and never completely; they are mediated by their perspectival aspects, but this is not a logical mediation since it introduces us to their carnal reality: I grasp in a perspectival aspect, which I know is but one possible aspect, the thing itself that transcends it.⁴⁸

In short, then, the things present themselves through their perspectives, and a consciousness can vary the perspectives by changing its bodily orientation with respect to it. But for naive consciousness, there is no question of eidetic variation or synthesis of the manifold, and it does not worry about states of consciousness or representations; thanks to its embodiment, it simply perceives the things directly, as if by magic. But this magic, it turns out, is nothing more than the spectacle of the visible. Like a child at a circus, naive consciousness gazes upon the spectacle with *wonder*.⁴⁹ This wonder is possible precisely because consciousness is a naive, perceptual consciousness, and is nothing more than its embodied look: in short, there is not yet a difference between body and mind for it; there is, rather, a *unity of man* which is not yet broken—the body hasn’t yet become a machine or an object of anatomy, the mind hasn’t yet become a distinct existence for-itself or *cogito*. Naive consciousness is thus *innocent*, or perhaps it would be better to say that the desire to re-establish this originary magical contact is itself a *nostalgia for a lost*

innocence. When, how is this innocence lost?

The body, we have seen, is that which allows naive consciousness to live among the things, but there are experiences—for example, when the body is sick—in which the body itself becomes an object, a thing to be studied. In such moments, it is sundered in two, into a phenomenal body that appears, and into a real body with a thickness or resistance that seems to give it the status of a thing; in other words, the body now divides into an idea and an existence, and the task, as always, will be to think their indiscernible jointure that, for the moment, has come unhinged. That which once lent us immediately to the world now stands as a intermediary between us and the world, and, suddenly, the world itself, and with it, the nature of perception, is changed. No longer is perception a direct commerce with the things; rather, real events in the real world act upon my real body, and are reproduced therein as an image. Consciousness is then forced to ask how it is that this image is formed, how it is that something outside of me has gotten inside me as an image, and whether or not this image in me is indeed a true representation of what is outside me. It has to ask questions, it has to explain with theses what was obvious for naive consciousness, and it offers convenient explanations like external causality or real transitivity. This “bad turn” or loss of innocence happens as soon as naive consciousness takes note of and addresses itself to its body as different from it, as a thing. The Descartes of the *Dioptrique* tried to do away with this transitive explanation by arguing that the external thing acts not on the body, but on the soul, evoking sentiments. But this only substitutes an ideal transitivity for a real one, and requires, as a result, the construction of physiological schema that make us understand how the evoked sentiments become perceptions that correspond to and resemble the thing: the argument from the pineal gland, in short, does not explain perception.⁵⁰

The abandonment of extra-mental things is a critical step for Descartes, and leads inexorably to his most important idea: by turning perception inwards, by desiring to describe human experience from within, Descartes “discovers” (though it might be better to say “institutes”) the *cogito*. The story is well-known, so the only necessary remark for the moment is that this turn inside has the effect of definitively doing away with naive consciousness: perception is no longer sensible and direct contact with the things, but an intellectual operation by which we have a lucid and certain idea of something. Through reflection, the thing comes to be defined as the thought of the thing, seeing becomes the thought of seeing—but vision itself, the things themselves, remain outside of thought. Consequently, there are now two orders external to one another, and ultimately, only in God are they truly re-united.

While Descartes manages to overcome the notion of real transitivity by turning inward, he is still forced to turn to God for the ultimate solution to the mystery of perception. He thus opens the way for Kantian critical idealism, where the fateful turn is accomplished and a form of consciousness that is far from naive—a consciousness that represents and judges—is articulated. Again, the story is well-known, but two points of interest with regard to Kant should be indicated. First, Kant’s analysis of knowing shows that the only way that knowing subjects know a thing is because a thing appears; it is phenomenal, and Kantian philosophy would thus be phenomenology. Moreover, a thing appears, but is not its appearance; this returns us to what is obvious for naive consciousness and states it as a philosophical thesis. In Kantian philosophy, I can grasp the thing in perception (which here means by virtue of the transcendental unity of apperception) because in perception I grasp its phenomenal appearances, and, for me, these are all that the thing is; prisoner of my representations, I can know no more than them. Secondly,

and immediately related to this, in Kantianism, all conceivable reality is an object of consciousness, and in order to know it, there must be a transcendental structure of consciousness. This transcendental attitude is exactly what has been required by the problem of *Gestalt*. There is thus a truth in intellectualism, just as there is a truth in empiricism, that must be preserved. Nevertheless, it seems that the truth of intellectualism expressed by Kantian idealism is particularly compelling, and it looks as if all the analyses undertaken in *The Structure of Behavior* with the aim of arguing against a critical idealist view only come to confirm in the end its Kantian basis. Is it really the case, Merleau-Ponty worries, that after all this, we are led to a criticist position? (SC, 222-23/206).

The Kantian view seems to rejoin the evidences of naive consciousness, but in fact, this is only a seeming. It is born after the unity of man has been sundered, after the body has become, instead of “the living envelope” through which we have sensible contact with the things, an object that constitutes itself in front of consciousness, thinkable only as the correlate of a subject and no longer experienced as lived (SC, 224/207). This reflexive move divides the unity of man into body and mind, object and subject, which constitutes the loss of innocence;⁵¹ Kantian philosophy can heal the breach only by an intellectualist theory of perception, in which the body, like all things, gives up its real existence for a logical one (the body becomes the body-as-known-by-an-epistemological-subject), and two orders external to one another are established.⁵² Now, it cannot be denied that man has both a bodily life and a spiritual life, each with its own unity and meaning; as long as consciousness remains naive, these two are held together in a *unity of man*. But clearly, consciousness does not remain naive; in virtue of “a natural error,” which it commits itself because “it is natural for it to misunderstand itself,” consciousness comes to interpose the

body between the world and itself. The mistake is that the body is *not* this screen; it is “a phenomenon endowed with an original structure,” and if the magic that gives us the things is to be understood, then this original structure must be understood first and in an original manner (SC, 236/218). Such would be the task of a *Phenomenology of Perception*. Spiritual life cannot be led back to a function of the body, precisely because intentions (which “have their own meanings and laws”) can be more than the merely instinctual; nor can bodily life be reduced to a mere mental image or a thing animated by a soul, precisely because the mental “dialectic is not conceivable outside of the concrete situations in which it is embodied. One does act with mind alone.” After the work of reflection has begun, and that necessary, natural *error* has been committed, there is no possibility of a return to naive consciousness as such, for to do so would be to abandon the rigor of science for the rapture of sensualism.

The lessons of *Gestalt* have perhaps given us some clue as to how to begin to think this lost unity of man without slipping back into either realism or intellectualism, mechanism or vitalism, while at the same time respecting what is learned from them. This unity is, first, not a *monism* held mysteriously together in a pineal gland, in God, or in an apperceptive synthesis. The body is not the soul, and the soul is not the body; body and soul are held together in unity in virtue of this dialectical *relation*. The unity of man is composed of a *duality* of terms (and not a *dualism* of substances), each of which implies the other, and stands out as meaningful only against the other.

There is the body as mass of chemical components in interaction, the body as dialectic of living being and its biological milieu, the body as dialectic of social subject and his group; . . . Each of these degrees is soul with respect to the precedent, body with respect to the following. The body in general is an ensemble of paths already traced, of powers already constituted; the body is thus the acquired dialectical ground upon which a higher ‘formation’ is accomplished, and

the soul is the meaning which is then established. (*SC*, 227/209).

Thus, body and mind are two terms of a dialectic in which the first serves as the ground for the second, which in turn surpasses but encompasses the first; insofar as body is an “acquired dialectical ground” in which is included the “path already traced” through the dialectic of organism and milieu, the unity of man constituted by the dialectic of body and mind is in the world. But this is not a complete solution, and a complete solution cannot be offered in *The Structure of Behavior*, precisely because the analyses are inaugurated by a methodological ruse (a presupposed consciousness operating from the outside) which now turns out to be a major fault. We saw that the necessary but fatal error of reflection introduces several distinctions whereby *le corps propre* is divided into the phenomenal body as known and the real body as thing. The point, however, is to grasp it as *lived*. If consciousness is embodied (and if nothing else, the naive attitude has shown us “that at every minute, consciousness proves its inherence in an organism” (*SC*, 225/207)), then no attempt that begins from an external point of view will be equal to the task; one needs to start again, *from the inside*. At the very least, though, the argument from *Gestalt* has shown us that human existence is this structured, dialectical unity. As such, Gary Madison’s assessment that Merleau-Ponty’s critical reappropriation of the notion of *Gestalt* results in the “discovery” of the bodily structure as being-in-the-world, which then becomes the principal theme of *Phenomenology of Perception*, is correct.⁵³

As long as body and mind remain as two *de facto* orders external to one another, we will always inevitably have to fall back to idealism or realism, intellectualism or empiricism, mechanism or vitalism, in order to explain their relation. But the critical analysis of the *Gestalt* as “joining of an idea and an existence which are indiscernible,” and more precisely, the situation

of perceptual consciousness at this jointure, teaches how these oppositions are in fact derivative from a more originary sensible contact with the things. Like the animal body, the human body as “an animal of perceptions and movements” (the study of which, emphasizing the institutional power of its expressive gestures, will be a key theme of *Phenomenology of Perception*) differentiates itself from the world; in so doing, the living activity of the body inscribes the two orders of body and soul, of subject and object, and thus makes possible the concrete notion of a “pure,” constituting consciousness. Thus the study of the human body and of perceptual consciousness, already broached in *The Structure of Behavior*, will show once and for all why and how Merleau-Ponty’s position does not fall back into the critical idealism he was critiquing, and more precisely, why the idea to which an existence is indiscernibly joined is not an idea in the criticist sense. Indeed, the analysis of perceptual consciousness as primordial contact with the things, as an *aisthesis*, already gives us an essential clue: perceptual consciousness is not a pure, but rather, a *contaminated* consciousness, and so the idea itself is never pure, never merely the application of the categories of thought to an external order, and moreover, consciousness is never absolute, never absolved of its fundamental incarnation.⁵⁴ At the end of the day, this long journey through the problem of the *Gestalt* is itself not resolved as a problem; rather, its nature, domain, and scope *as a problem* is more thoroughly circumscribed. At the very least, the posing of the problem in the first work allows us to overcome the notion of external causality and leads us to a point of view that is wholly within embodied, perceptual, contaminated consciousness; in this regard, *The Structure of Behavior* begins with an external point of view, and inexorably calls this point of view into question, leading us methodically to the inside. By now it should be clear that this “inside” is not to be understood in any traditional sense, not as the interiority of a

subjectivity already clear to and closed in on itself: “The truth does not ‘inhabit’ only the ‘interior man,’ or rather there is no interior man, man is in the world, and it is in the world that he knows himself,” writes Merleau-Ponty in the preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*. The regressive move to the inside made possible by the analyses of *The Structure of Behavior* leads to our incarnated experience *in* the world, the inside of which is a living dimension of being (*Ph.P.*, iii/v). Recall again that the objective aim of *The Structure of Behavior* was to understand the relation of consciousness and nature, of how the inside related to an outside; this aim is only partially accomplished in *The Structure of Behavior*. The analyses begun there will be taken up and deepened in all of Merleau-Ponty’s work starting with *Phenomenology of Perception*, and will lead to the reconception of this relation as “a relation to Being which is made *from the interior of Being*.”⁵⁵ Understanding this interior work of Being is Merleau-Ponty’s task, and in this regard, *The Structure of Behavior* is the first critical step in the elaboration of this project. In this way, it demonstrates the need for a sequel, and the value of phenomenology.

5. Conclusion.

The task of *The Structure of Behavior* was to examine the relations of consciousness and nature, and the pursuit of this task, undertaken via a long meditation on the *Gestalt*, leads Merleau-Ponty to a deep interrogation of the indiscernible joining, where the question becomes one of how a material existence presents itself as a nascent intelligibility that can be subsumed under an idea that it itself makes possible through its own activity. The problem remains

unsolvable as long as an external point of view is maintained, and in fact the entire force of the critique of *The Structure of Behavior* is directed toward a radical placing in question of this point of view, as we see most clearly when the human order is subjected to the critical Gestaltist reinterpretation. This same moment in the text makes it clear that “consciousness” and “nature”—as well as their relation—cannot be conceived as two orders external to one another, but rather, precisely because it is incarnated, consciousness is “in” nature, indiscernibly joined to the material existence of which it comes to have an idea; and thus it will be through a phenomenology of the body that this interrogation is deepened.

Insofar as Merleau-Ponty “deconstructs” the externality of consciousness and nature, and submits the relation of external causality to a radical critique, he is engaged in a philosophical interrogation of that which the natural sciences never confront, namely, their operative presuppositions about the being of nature: “applied science uncovers bodies of fact without ever achieving any radical self-expression, because it takes for granted traditional ontologies and never directly confronts the problem of being” (*R*, 128/159). The sciences thus remain beholden to a Cartesian ontology of the object, from which is derived a concept of nature as external causality. As Merleau-Ponty notes, the

idea of natural being *qua* object in itself, which is what it is because it cannot be another thing, derives from the idea of an unlimited being, infinite or *causa sui*, and this in turn comes from the alternation between being and nothing. The Cartesian concept of nature will outlive this ontology, enduring as the common stock of scientists who continue to struggle to bring their own achievements within its jurisdiction until the quite un-Cartesian developments in contemporary science open up for them *a different ontology* (*R*, 99/137).

Thus Merleau-Ponty wants to liberate philosophy of its commitments to a Cartesian ontology of the object, which classically depends on the alternation of being and nothing, by which being

comes to determine itself fully as the Object. This is why the studies on animal behavior and animal life are so important: they open the way to a “different ontology.” By attending to the way in which the manifest activity of a living body *differentiates* itself from the world (and thus signifies), Merleau-Ponty uses the insights of contemporary science to show *the work of negativity within Being*; this demonstration will be developed through recourse to the work of Schelling, a presentation of Merleau-Ponty’s reading of which we present in chapter three.

The studies on animality are important for a second, related reason. With regard to the work of the Portmann, Merleau-Ponty articulates “the decisive character of an ontology of life and the living being.”⁵⁶ He writes that “it appeared that all zoology assumes from our side a methodical *Einfühlung* into animal behavior, with the participation of the animal in our perceptive life and the participation of our perceptive life in animality” (*R*, 136/165). There is thus a double participation, an *Ineinander* of the animal and human, and from this we can draw several conclusions that are taken up as elements of Merleau-Ponty’s late ontology. The animal participates in our perceptive life by inscribing difference, by inventing the visible, which is to say, by installing “the reflections, shadows, levels, and horizons between things,” which, we know, is how the perceived world is understood—not as a thing, but as differences between things.⁵⁷ We thus perceive according to these differences, and so if we see that *there is* an animal, it is because animal life as an expression of natural being “is *that which makes there be*, simply, and at a single stroke, such a coherent structure of *a being*.”⁵⁸ By inventing the visible, animal life participates in and sustains our perceptive life.

But on the other hand, that our perceptive life participates in animality suggests an intimacy between the human and the animal. It does not imply a hierarchy of species with

humans at the apex; “living creatures are not superimposed upon one another, the transcendence of one by the other is, so to speak, *lateral*.”⁵⁹ Here this is a marked difference from Merleau-Ponty’s initial position in *The Structure of Behavior*, which Gary Madison justifiably characterized as a *vertical* transcendence. It is no longer the case that the human order is a superior order that sublates the inferior order of animality; rather, this *laterality* and *empathy* suggests a kinship or communication between the animal body and the human body (and indeed, we learn in the last published working note, written as a plan for the project, that “the second part is not Nature in itself, a philosophy of Nature, but a description of the man-animality *intertwining*”(VI, 328/274). What we call perception is thus the way we lend our body to the world, our human mode of animal sensibility, which discloses Being as perceived Being, just as animal behavior–life–unfurls as a total pattern, a phenomenon. This is what the intertwining or *Ineinander* animal-man teaches us: animal life “has” meaning that *we* can know as meaningful because we participate in it and disclose it through our bodies.⁶⁰ Thus we need only look into ourselves, into our own *life*, in order to understand the secrets of *the institution of meaning*, of how a material existence gives itself to us as an idea, of how the effective operation of the Real gives rise to the Symbolic, and of transcendence in/as inherence.⁶¹ The development of this claim, which amounts to the problem of perception, “would demand an ‘aesthesiology,’ a study of the body as a *perceiving animal*” (R, 177/196), and is undertaken in part in *Phenomenology of Perception*. This text must now be taken up and interrogated.

2 Phenomenology and its Shadow: Merleau-Ponty at the Limits of Phenomenology

When Merleau-Ponty was nominated for the chair in philosophy at the Collège de France in 1951 (which he assumed in 1952), he was required to submit a *prospectus* of his work, a look forward to work that he was then in the midst of preparing. Even if, in the last pages, it provides the reader with a clue as to Merleau-Ponty's current projects (the abandoned *Prose of the World* is mentioned explicitly and discussed in some detail; *The Origin of Truth*, which would later become *The Visible and the Invisible* is mentioned only as a promise¹), this text, published only in 1962,² is, however, more important as a *retrospectus*, in that Merleau-Ponty assesses and summarizes his work published up to that point, notably *The Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception*. Characterizing the task of the phenomenologist as similar to that of the archaeologist, Merleau-Ponty contends that his second work restores "the perceived world [which] is buried under the sedimentations of later knowledge." Phenomenology as archaeology is thus a digging-down, and what is uncovered and exhumed is originary, "brute" perceptual experience, which reveals things to be "not opaque, indivisible 'givens' that are simply exhibited to a consciousness . . . not bounded entities whose laws of construction we possess *a priori*, but [rather] open, inexhaustible systems" (*RMM*, 403/5), a finding that was confirmed earlier in the discussion of quantum mechanics. Moreover, phenomenology holds that

the perceiving subject is not this absolute thinker; rather, it functions according to a natal pact between our body and the world, between ourselves and our body.

Given a perpetually new natural and historical situation to control, the perceiving subject undergoes a continued birth; at each instant, it is something new. Every incarnate subject is like an open notebook in which we do not yet know what will be written. Or it is like a new language; we do not know what works it will accomplish, but only that, once it has appeared, it cannot fail to say too much or too little, to have a history and a meaning. The very productivity or freedom of human life, far from denying our situation, utilizes it and turns it into a means of expression (*RMM*, 404/6).

The “subject,” in other words, is not a constituting consciousness, not a cogito in the Cartesian sense, but is rather a continuous birth, a continual coming-to-presence, never fixed, never completely determined, even if all of its possibilities are given with its initial upsurge. That all of its possibilities should be given does not condemn it to a determinism; “like a new language,” it constantly recreates itself through the poetic, expressive power that is its *life*, by which it becomes a “means of expression,” and through which it will “have a history and a meaning,” transforming and transcending its given past and opening itself to a future, thus inscribing its life in that “open notebook,” in a sort of originary autobiography.

The studies on animality have already shown that expression is rooted in the body; as such, it is an original formation of perceptual life. But the critical Gestaltist analysis of the human order also showed that what is peculiar to expressive *human* signification is that it is oriented by the possible, that it “preserves and continues our perceptual life even while transforming it.” The expressive use of the human body transforms our naive, silent, perceptual life because “expressive gestures have a diacritical value: they announce the *institution* of a symbolic system capable of redesigning an infinite number of situations. They are first a language” (*RMM*, 404/7). Anchored originally in the body as expressive gesture, language takes up, transcends, and transforms the Real as the Symbolic, it “sublimates our incarnation” (*RMM*,

405/7), or in the conceptual vocabulary of *The Visible and the Invisible*, it carries us beyond the heavier flesh of the visible to the lighter, more rarified flesh of language (VI, 197/153). The similitude of subject as “like a new language” thus announces not only what Merleau-Ponty considers to be the fundamental insight of *Phenomenology of Perception*, but also the domain of his subsequent research; it is thus not surprising that in the years following the publication of that work, Merleau-Ponty’s attention is dominated by the themes of expression and language.³

Merleau-Ponty is himself quite forthright about the importance of the phenomenon of expression: “the study of perception could only teach us a ‘bad ambiguity,’ a mixture of finitude and universality, of interiority and exteriority. But there is a ‘good ambiguity’ in the phenomenon of expression” (RMM, 409/11). He thus sees in the phenomenon of expression the means to overcome the various shortcomings of his first work, not the least of which is this ‘bad ambiguity’ that will be addressed later. Moreover, he sees in expression an *institutionary power*; or better, he sees expression as a modality of institution, if not institution *par excellence*. We live in a world where speech, that expressive use of the body, is already an institution; the subject is born into an always already instituted network of signifiers, a symbolic matrix that precedes him and that he must pick up and learn to use. Symbolism is rooted in the expressive use of the body; the body is thus the real ground of expression. When the question of the ontological status of the body is posed, it leads directly to the heart of the bad ambiguity, where what remains unthought, and what passes as unreflected in *Phenomenology of Perception*, can be discerned. Here the limits of phenomenology will be discovered, and insofar as the phenomenon of expression is both that good ambiguity, and a modality of institution, then at these limits, one may begin (but only begin) to discern what is beyond phenomenology. An examination of the

phenomenon of expression will thus prolong and deepen the meditation on institution.

The analysis of the phenomenon of expression must first be contextualized within the development of Merleau-Ponty's thought, and ultimately, this analysis will not yield a complete view of institution. The phenomenon of expression occupies a precise place in *Phenomenology of Perception*, which itself must be situated within phenomenology. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty's concerns within phenomenology are very precise, focusing not only, as we saw in chapter one, on the problem of *life*, but also on the question of meaning. Merleau-Ponty endorses the program that Husserl announces (a return to the things themselves, a return to the lifeworld), but his endorsement is not blind acceptance; his is a critical reading of phenomenology, that approaches the limits of phenomenology, and finds there something of which phenomenological reflection cannot take account, an *unreflected* that nevertheless imposes itself on phenomenology, making it possible and rendering it impossible at the same time. And even if the word "unreflected" is itself only a reflexive determination of reflection, phenomenology must take account of it as a problem of reflection; it may be the case that phenomenological reflection's inability to take account of its own unreflected origin necessitates a transformation of phenomenology, but to determine this transformation requires first a determination of the nature of the unreflected, or rather, the unreflected as nature. Merleau-Ponty argues in a later essay that the ultimate task of phenomenology is to understand what resists phenomenological reflection, to bear its shadow (*S*, 206/159).

What shadow haunts the limits of phenomenology, and in what manner does it weigh not only on Husserl's, but ultimately also on Merleau-Ponty's, phenomenology, thus necessitating a transformative reading, and leading to "something else"? This transformative reading does not

necessarily constitute an abandonment; indeed, it is effected only through a continuous interrogative engagement with phenomenology. This transformative reading will necessitate a deferral and a detour: a full account of institution, as we already noted, will not here be disclosed, but only prepared, because to do so would be to jump over the shadow, to avoid that which lurks at the limits of phenomenology; and what lurks there, one may already suspect, is natural being, “the barbaric principle of which Schelling spoke” (*S*, 225/175). If expression is therefore to be understood as a ‘good ambiguity,’ then the thought of the Prince of the Romantics, an able phenomenologist in his own right, will have to be examined in chapter three.

The procedure in this chapter, then, will be to understand Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology* as the first stage of a transformative reading of phenomenology. To do so requires, first, that Merleau-Ponty’s efforts be situated within the movement of phenomenology, and in particular, with respect to two moments that determine his orientation within this movement, namely, Husserl’s analysis of the crisis, and Heidegger’s reinscription of “phenomenology.” In the first moment, the “inner historical method” of phenomenology (which, on the one hand, presents itself as a critical revision of Husserl’s earlier, “static” attempts at phenomenology, and, on the other hand, is a critical analytical tool with respect to the projects of both science and philosophy) will be examined; this in turn will permit a demonstration of the logic of institution with respect to “tradition.” Merleau-Ponty’s critique of Husserl will also be woven into this discussion, and in particular, the ground will be laid for a critique of reflection that will be completed in chapter three with the assistance of Schelling. The second moment (Heidegger) will provide Merleau-Ponty with the means to radicalize a notion of phenomenology that will help to free him from Husserl’s idealism, and provide the means to see better the

direction of Merleau-Ponty's later thought. Merleau-Ponty himself does not recognize the extent to which his own work, which is taken up in the second section of this chapter, remains bound to this idealism; this chapter will not hesitate to point out where and in what way Merleau-Ponty's work suffers from the hangover of these idealist commitments. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty should be subjected to the same critique he levels against Husserl. At the same time, the emergence and significance of the phenomenon of expression will be noted, and its critical potential, with which Merleau-Ponty will work to overcome his own shortcomings, will be established. The conclusion of this chapter will return to the question of phenomenology and its shadow, indicating what remains unthought in Merleau-Ponty's early phenomenology. Let us begin, then, by allowing Merleau-Ponty to inscribe himself in the movement of thought known as phenomenology.

1. The Institution of Phenomenology: Situating Merleau-Ponty

Merleau-Ponty begins the "Preface" of *Phenomenology of Perception* with a gesture that characterizes many of his interpretations: it would be easy, he says, to look casually at this discourse called phenomenology and decide that it is based on vague demands and mystical ideas, that it is wrought with internal contradictions and changes in position, that its aim is not well-defined. The *other* contemporary movement of the day, whose adherents included Frege, Cohen, and the Viennese, priding itself on clarity and logic, must have had no patience for this fog of neologisms passing themselves off as ideas, and was no doubt "inclined to give up the idea of covering a doctrine which says everything," must have wondered "whether a philosophy

which cannot define its scope deserves all the discussion which has gone on around it,” must have concluded that it was “faced by a myth or a fashion” (*PhP*, ii/vii). One can imagine the objections that “the reader pressed for time” would have posed to phenomenology. On the one hand, it claims to be the study of essences, a transcendental philosophy that brackets out opinion in order to describe the *a priori* conditions of possibility through which the pure transcendental ego is able to know something, to make a judgment with apodictic certainty, and in this, it wants to be a philosophy *qua* rigorous science. And yet, on the other hand, it “puts essences back into existence,” it wants to re-achieve a primitive contact with the inalienable presence of the always-already-there world, and it pretends to describe lived experience (*PhP*, iii/ix). On the surface, phenomenology wants two things at once: a turning inwards to the logic of thought, and a re-turning to the things themselves, to lived experience, to the lifeworld. Are these not contradictory desires for one sole discourse? Husserl himself, it seems, is forced to modify his position, from a static to a genetic phenomenology, in order to take account of the results of his own investigations stemming from this double desire. Dissatisfied with the contradictions of the master, one might turn to the version of phenomenology proposed by his most famous student, Heidegger, as less contradictory; but, Merleau-Ponty points out “the whole of *Sein und Zeit* springs from an indication given by Husserl and amounts to no more than an explicit account of the ‘*natürlicher Weltbegriff*’ or the ‘*Lebenswelt*.’ which Husserl, towards the end of his life, identified as the central theme of phenomenology” (*PhP*, ii/vii). Such an offhand comment is by no means to be taken as a reductive critique of Heidegger, as we shall see later in this chapter, but rather, as an attempt to situate his thought in a movement that has, according to Merleau-Ponty, the task of elaborating those structures of brute experience— i.e., the structures of the

world of *life*—that make existence and experience meaningful. It is thus not at all strange that Merleau-Ponty opens the preface with the question “what is phenomenology?” because the fact remains that in the half-century of its existence, the question “has by no means been answered” (*PhP*, ii/vii). Traditional philosophers may well see only contradiction in what they understand of it, but phenomenology is not simply just a myth or just a fashion, and indeed, “even if this were the case, there would still be a need to understand the prestige of the myth and the origin of the fashion” (*PhP*, ii/viii). This chapter proposes just such an understanding of the prestige and fashion of phenomenology, at least as it appears to Merleau-Ponty; more precisely, his Merleau-Ponty’s reading of phenomenology, the way he cuts its cloth to suit his fashion, and thus, the way in which he inscribes himself in its movement, will be elucidated. Before beginning, however, it is worthwhile to say something about the style of interpretation that guides the analyses of this chapter, a style that itself is bound up with Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of phenomenology.

The reading here is not meant to circumscribe those aspects of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology that coincide with Husserl’s, nor is it meant to catalogue a list of identifiable shared themes that might serve as a lazy shorthand, allowing us to reduce Merleau-Ponty’s thought to a series of propositions about phenomenology. Such a reading would be at odds with Merleau-Ponty’s own notion of interpretation, which, for him, is always a *retrieval* of what remains *unthought* (*S*, 207ff/160ff). This first appearance of what shall become the logic of *Stiftung* must be further specified. Cataloguing, Merleau-Ponty argues, is the business of the tradition, which, in order to contextualize phenomenology in the canon, reduces it to a set of manageable theses and erroneously subsumes it under the heading “philosophy of consciousness.” Functioning like a bad museum, which takes paintings from every epoch, and

hangs them, willy-nilly, next to one another regardless of their origin, and thus forgets the living context from which they emerged, installing them in a sort of historicity of death as mere survivals of some long-gone past, so too is the tradition a forgetting of origins, of the lived experience that gave rise to the thought in question. This is particularly inappropriate for the thought of Husserl, itself unappropriable, because, as Merleau-Ponty observes, “Husserl’s philosophy is almost entirely in the unpublished manuscripts . . . and will remain more a style rather than a precise philosophy.”⁴ Heeding no admonishment, the tradition nevertheless appropriates a thinker’s effort for the sake of convenience by reducing it “too strictly to what he himself said” (*S*, 207/160). In this way, the tradition’s relation to what it appropriates exhibits an interpretive risk akin to that taken in the phenomenological attempt to resolve the problem of the other by means of analogy.

The perception of the other, like the understanding of a philosopher’s thought, begins from the fact that “I lend myself to the other, I make him from my own thoughts.” But in so constructing the other, I forget its originary presence to me, concerning myself instead with commentaries and objective knowledge of the other, which can only be solipsist in the end. As Merleau-Ponty says, “we would not overwhelm them with our importunate comments, we would not stingily reduce them to what is objectively certified of them, if they were not there for us to begin with” in their originary presence (*S*, 206/159). That is, only by forgetting the other’s presence, and equally only by forgetting that Husserl worked on a day-to-day basis and published relatively few of his reflections, only by forgetting that phenomenology was always a problem never solved, only then can we talk about the “other” or the “work” as an object. As with the other, in rendering Husserl’s work “objective,” we reduce it to something other than what it is

and lose sight of the problematic that animates his thinking. Rather than engaging in that violently reductive interpretation that would give us a neat system of concepts deployed to solve regional problems, Merleau-Ponty reactivates Husserl's thought by means of interrogation so as to engage the problem to which it addresses itself as a problem. In this kind of engagement, one is not so much concerned with a delimitation of what is and is not said, or with an inventory of concepts, or with the measure of Husserl's success, but rather with *what remains unthought*. Why? Because "to think is not to possess the objects of thought, it is to circumscribe by them a domain to think, which we have not yet thought" (S, 207/160). The thought of a philosopher thus does not consist in a series of positive statements or propositions, but rather, like the perceived world, it exists indirectly "through the reflections, the shadows, the levels, the horizons between things . . . certain articulations between things said" which would serve as *parages* to delimit a field and thus incite us to think again (S, 207/160). Merleau-Ponty's style of interpretation thus consists in marking out what remains unthought in Husserl's work, of grasping the nature of the problematic in which Husserl's thought was engaged, of resisting the kind of gesture that would forget the lived experience of that thinking.

Wishing to avoid the traditional gesture of interpretation, wary of forgetting the origins of phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty engages Husserl in an interrogative dialogue, engaging him as a philosopher in a terrain marked out by what Husserl thought, in order to discern what remains unthought. Merleau-Ponty himself notes the risk that "sometimes we may push Husserl where he did not wish to go," but the value of this risk exceeds its danger. "When Husserl came to the end of his life," Merleau-Ponty remarks, "there is an unthought of Husserl, that very much belongs to him, and which however opens unto *something else*" (S, 207/160). It is to this *something else*

that Merleau-Ponty's reading of phenomenology will lead; and implied in this is that phenomenology will have to be transcended or transformed, in order to accord with the demands that this *something else* places upon thought. In what then does phenomenology consist? In the preface to his most famous work, Merleau-Ponty elaborates those theses which he takes to be fundamental, but before turning them, it may be useful to sketch a more general idea of phenomenology by attending to the historical horizon in which its task is articulated, and by which Merleau-Ponty's reading is informed.

a. Husserl's Phenomenology and *The Crisis of European Sciences*

First, let us take a very general notion from the later Husserl as an index of how phenomenology understands its task. Husserl argues at the close of Part One of *The Crisis* that philosophers "are functionaries of mankind." He continues: "the quite personal responsibility of our own true being as philosophers, our inner personal vocation, bears within itself at the same time the responsibility for the true being of mankind; the latter is, necessarily, being toward a telos, and can only come to realization, if at all, through philosophy—through us, if we are philosophers in all seriousness" (C, 15). By functionary, he does not mean that we are in the service of an external power (e.g., the state), but rather, insofar as our true being is *teleological*, we are in service only to ourselves as the being through whose philosophizing and idealizing activity the teleology articulates itself. He thus very clearly defines *our* task as philosophers, as the realization of the *telos* of mankind, and asserts that *our* philosophy, i.e., phenomenology, is alone suited to the task. In what does this *telos* of humanity consist? "It is not something . . .

[mankind] already has with the self-evidence of the ‘I am,’ but something he only has and can have in the form of the struggle for his truth, *the struggle to make himself true*” (C, 15; emphasis added). Thus for the later Husserl, “man” is not simply and no longer the name of a mundane psychological agent or ego, no longer a static noetic consciousness to which noema appear and are actively synthesized by logically discernible, transcendental structures, but rather, “man” is a struggle to realize “his” *telos* through the media of culture and history. Husserl wants to ask after this *telos*: the way in which it is instituted, its historical transformations, and the implications of our being-towards it. To pose such questions is thus both to grapple with the crisis in which the modern European sciences, philosophy, and man all find themselves, and to ask after the nature of institution.

For Husserl, the portentous and fateful (but not originary) moment in the determination of mankind’s *telos* is to be found in the Renaissance’s rejection of the medieval mode of man in favor of a recovery or reactivation of a more ancient model, which was understood by the Renaissance as a “philosophical form of existence, a free giving over of oneself to reason” (C, 8). There is, however, a consequential difference between the ancient model and the Renaissance’s appropriation of it. This difference can be localized in the question of man’s relation to the surrounding world. The ancients lived in their surrounding world naively and straightforwardly, engrossed in daily activity and governed by a natural attitude; the surrounding world is here understood as the horizon of all life activity, and always inhabits consciousness, albeit not as a thematic object of attention: this is the *lifeworld* (C, 111). Daily activity in the lifeworld, as a drift-life [*Dahinleben*] or a living-along-with [*Hineinleben*], is one of finite tasks: once each is accomplished, each fades into the past, into nothingness, without consequence. Given this naive

life of natural praxis, one wonders what motivation there is to leave it behind. Husserl responds in one word: *curiosity*, which has “its place in natural life as an ‘intrusion’ in the course of ‘serious living’” (C, 285). From this ‘desire for the new’ emerges a new sort of attitude: one of wonder [*thaumazein*]. Certain curious individuals who are so attuned to their surrounding world turn away from the natural attitude and finite practical interest in order simply to wonder about the world, to question it, to accept it no longer on the basis of faith [*doxa*]. Stepping back from the world, the philosophically curious human becomes a non-participating spectator, and the lifeworld becomes the object of his thematic interest: this is the beginning of *theoria*, a new way of seeing the world (C, 8, 285). From this incipient theoretical interest, a distinction arises between the actual world of naive faith and the world as seen theoretically. Theoretical man wants to know the world in its truth; the most powerful technique at his disposal is *measure* (C, 26). That is, the first theoretical men were natural philosophers, for whom the positions of the sun and moon in the sky, the trajectory of the most readily observable wandering stars, and their mutual relations, could all be measured and plotted; the observation of apparent mathematical regularity in the heavens had an immediate practical use on earth (e.g., agriculture). In like manner, all natural bodies appeared in space and time through their primary, measurable qualities, and this allowed the observer to figure more or less accurate representations. The degree to which these representations corresponded to natural phenomena made them useful to predict certain events, to make valid comparisons, to discern relations, etc. Measurement thus became the means to know the world in a more certain way, yielding “true” representations of objects and objective events in the world.

Thus, from the desire to know the object emerges the idea of objective truth-in-itself,

which then replaces the naive faith of lived experience as the standard from which man draws his norms (C, 22). The birth of philosophy, understood by the ancients as the universal science of the totality of what-is (and as such, it was originally indistinct from science), marks the transition from *doxa* to *episteme*, from faith to knowledge, from uncritical living-in and naive straightforwardness to reason and reflection.

Philosophy/science is thus understood as a special class of cultural structures [*Gebilde*], a spiritual acquisition unlike any other: with its institution, mankind is fundamentally transformed (C, 9). This transformation begins with a few isolated individuals, who reconstruct the real world and the real events in it as ideas, which, unlike real things and the ordinary objects of finite tasks, have significance to human beings and speak to “our vital need” in that they help to make sense of our place in the totality (C, 12). The acquisitions made through philosophical insight are thus not real things, and as such do not exist: they are unreal, ideal (C, 286). They may not *exist*, but they *are*: rather than fading into nothingness, whatever is acquired through the productive praxis of idealization throws itself into Being. Idealization is therefore an objectifying activity—and herein lies the inception of Being as Object, the consequences of which for Husserl and phenomenology shall come to fore later.⁵ What gives philosophy/science its singular privilege as a cultural acquisition is that its insights can be transmitted to others in identical form via repetition in linguistic embodiment, thus instituting them as ideal.⁶ From this communicability there results an ideal communalization, binding people together as a group, a state, a nation, and thus inscribing them in a tradition that guarantees the transmission and survival of acquired, ideal meaning-structures to future generations; moreover, each acquisition makes possible another, *ad infinitum*. These ideal meaning-structures are thus both imperishable

and transitional, as Husserl notes in his Vienna Lecture:

when theoretical interest is developed, each result acquires in advance the sense of a merely relative goal; it becomes the pathway to ever newer, ever higher goals within an infinity marked off as a universal field of work, as the domain of science. Science then signifies the idea of an infinity of tasks, of which at any time a finite number have been disposed of and are retained as persisting validities. These make up at the same time the fund of premises for an infinite horizon of tasks as the unity of one all-encompassing task (C, 279).

There are many consequences to this change in attitude and advent of *theoria*, the most fundamental of which is that human existence now operates within, and directs itself to, a *futural horizon of infinity*. Each ideal acquisition is only a relative approach to the infinite horizon. By ‘infinity,’ Husserl means that the ideal meaning-structures are inexhaustible and indefinitely repeatable and renewable by future generations. In Husserl’s reading, then, the originary institution of philosophy gives humanity its *telos*, its destiny and destination: man is now understood as engaged in the infinite task of disclosing the truth of the object (C, 279). The lived experience of the naive attitude is, as it were, concealed, overridden and overwritten by ideality, or in a word, forgotten. This determination of the *telos* of humanity as infinite task is the portentous change effected by the originary institution of philosophy: an *Urstiftung* that is simultaneously a *Besinnung*.

Such is the *Urstiftung* of philosophy with the ancients. Idealizing acts of consciousness–science–institute a model of man, the originary meaning of which is subsequently obscured in the medieval period (about which Husserl has little to say), and then reactivated [*nachgestiftet*] by modern philosophy; what can be said of this *Nachstiftung*? If, in its originary institution, philosophy was understood as the science of the universe, of the whole, and as such was not yet particularized into regional sciences, then the situation with the modern reactivation

must be understood in a palpably different fashion. Modern philosophy retains this notion of philosophy as universal science, but now the natural sciences themselves have become autonomous and regionalized. Each obeys its own imperative (which is in fact the same demand for objectivity): the natural sciences continue their methodical investigations of the ‘objective’ world, while philosophy proper had the task of unifying the sciences in one universal theoretical system that would ground them in apodictic certainty, and that would be constituted by rational structures (C, 12-13). Geometry and mathematics—i.e., the sciences of measure—had already been successfully applied by the natural sciences to the instrumental mastery of nature; but the universal system of reason from which the principles of these sciences were to be derived had not yet been disclosed by philosophy. The modern reactivation of the ancient model thus takes place along a dual front—natural science, which had had practical success, and philosophy, which had not yet achieved its goal (C, 8-9). Each stems from a common root: the world as object of theoretical interest (although the deeper root, i.e., the lifeworld, has been obscured). Moreover, this dual front is articulated through the intellectual efforts bearing the signatures of two proper names—“Galileo” and “Descartes.” Husserl is quite clear that these two proper names do not refer to the actual, living people, but rather, as proper names, they are *exemplary* (C, 24). Husserl is also quite clear that neither Galileo nor Descartes was fully aware of what each was doing, for two reasons. First, because just as every *Nachstiftung* involves some sort of transformation, so too does each of theirs, in the form of a “fateful omission” (C, 49) of not interrogating the presuppositions they receive from the tradition. Second, because, like every institution, their ideas “live in very diverse noetic modes of the consciousness of the persons who function as the bearers of their development: sometimes they strive forward like instincts, without these persons

having the ability to give an account of where they are going” (C, 9). Let us briefly consider the exemplary and institutional significance of each.

Galileo belonged to a tradition of natural science born with philosophy; from it, he inherits geometry as a science of pure idealities, without ever asking after the means and meaning of this inheritance (the “fateful omission”). We have already seen *in nuce* how these idealities arise: they are neither given as such in the immediacy of perception, nor are they the result of the free play of imagination; rather, the measurable primary qualities of natural bodies as they appear allow the scientist to approximate various spatial shapes that have a degree of regularity. As man’s technical ability to measure with greater accuracy increases, so too does the regularity of geometrical forms; a notion of perfectibility thus allows limit-forms to appear, and since these can be infinitely repeated and thus idealized, new constructions can be built on their basis. Importantly, the notion of geometrical space, of which forms are finite and concrete instantiations, is linked to the notion of the infinite and the infinite task, and this in turn forms an intimate bond between geometry and natural philosophy (C, 38-39). By means of a move from the particular to the general, the modern scientist believes the totality to be rational and infinite like geometrical space, and therefore systematically masterable by one universal science from which geometry and mathematics derive. Because Galileo was also a tributary of a neo-Platonic tradition that held that the real (nature) participates in the ideal (the doctrine of *metaxis*), and since astronomy had already proven the general validity of this notion, for Galileo it was obvious that the real could be made ideal via the systematic application of geometrical and mathematical science (C, 37-41, *passim*). The relativism of perceptual experience lent an urgency to the mathematization of nature: the variation of the real in its appearance could be overcome by

idealizing the real content, marking the first step beyond the subjectively relative towards the objectively verifiable. Galileo's dream is thus the disclosure of the invariant mathematical structure of the world, a disclosure that would allow us to attain something that had not been possible empirically and naively: exactness (C, 27). Method thus acquires exactness and precision, and mathematical modeling based on method quickly becomes confused with the truth of the object.

Galileo accepts as given that the mathematical-geometrical method could conquer the relativism of the sensible world. The belief is well-justified when it comes to primary qualities (measurable magnitudes), but secondary qualities present a special difficulty that could be overcome by means of an indirect mathematization, that is, a conversion of the qualitative into the quantitative (C, 34-35). Thus, although he never suspected that light and color might be describable according to a wave-based mechanics, the notion of indirect mathematization anticipates what will later be verified experimentally; the notion thus sets in motion a history of scientific thinking that finds its first major verification in Newton and that goes unchallenged until Bohr and Einstein. Galileo's decisive achievement for the future, according to Husserl, is the coordination of the real with an ideal, mathematical model; but this achievement is undercut by the fateful omission of not engaging in a historical reflection back [*Rückfrage*] to the original meaning-bestowal of the tradition he receives. Moreover, once this coordination takes place, there is subsequently an interiorization of mathematical thinking coupled with an increasing formalization and algebraization of the natural sciences, which reaches its first, mature version in Leibniz's *mathesis universalis* (C, 45). This turn *inwards* is also a decisive turn *away from* what the sciences are supposed to explain, i.e., away from their ground, the lifeworld, which is

concealed or covered-over by the ideal sediment of method (C, 48-53, *passim*). Concerned only with objective “facts,” the new, idealized natural sciences exclude all questions of valuation, cultural configuration, and spiritual acts, i.e., all meta-physical questions (C, 9). It is by reason of this double movement of the concealment and exclusion of *life* from the purview of the sciences that Husserl can speak of a crisis in the sciences: despite their best intentions, the sciences detach themselves from their object of inquiry and no longer speak to “our vital need,” to the meaning of human being. Let us try to sharpen the sense of this crisis by turning to that other portentous reactivation in Descartes.

Like Galileo, Descartes inherits a tradition that fatefully he does not interrogate, but accepts as obvious; he cannot be faulted for this, because these presuppositions “were not merely remains of the Scholastic traditions, nor merely accidental prejudices of his time, but were things taken for granted throughout the millennia” (C, 75). In order to determine what is radical and new in his *Nachstiftung* of the idea of philosophy, the interpreter must “extract what was really involved in his thinking and separate what he becomes conscious of from what was concealed from him” by the sedimentation of the tradition. By bracketing these latter, concealed presuppositions, the interpreter can “clarify and think through to the end what was original in Descartes’s thought” (C, 75). This can be accomplished, Husserl says, by attending with care to the movement of thought initiated in the first two *Meditations*. Let us recall, first, that for Descartes, philosophy was still the queen of the sciences and retained “the formal meaning of the one all-encompassing science, the science of the totality of what is” as it was originally determined in the primal institution of the Greeks (C, 13, 74); the regional sciences were likewise considered dependent branches of the universal science of philosophy. Descartes’s dream was to

formalize this universality as the unity of a single theoretical system that would treat all meaningful questions in a rigorous, scientific manner, according to a rational and intelligible methodology. In short, the task was to construct a systematic philosophy in which all the sciences would find their ground. Seen in this light, the first major philosophical contribution made in the *Meditations* is the first step towards the ideal of universal philosophy and its methodology, namely, the notion of methodical doubt understood as a radically skeptical version of the *epokhe*. The “Cartesian way” places everything in doubt, and thus brackets it out of consideration; it places in question all convictions, whether they be the claims to validity of the sciences, or the naive sense-experience of the lifeworld (C, 76-77). With everything thus suspended, a question imposes itself: how can any primal ground of certainty be exhibited if everything is dubitable?

Descartes’s well-known response is his second major contribution: it was I who methodically doubted, and doubting is a form of thinking. The cogito is thus excluded from the *epokhe* as the agent responsible for its execution, and it alone is the indubitable ground of certainty; any other claim—even mathematical ones—that would pretend to universality and certainty must be led back to the ground of the cogito. In this way, through methodical doubt, Descartes discloses the ground of the cogito on the basis of which the universal system ought to be possible (C, 76-78, passim.). But then Descartes takes his reflections in a fatal direction: he asks what *kind* of ego is disclosed through doubt, and specifically whether it belongs to a human being; his answer is portentous. Insofar as the living body of the sensible human being is an object in the world, it is bracketed by doubt: like the world itself, it becomes mere a phenomenon for the ego, transformed into an idea (C, 78-80, passim.). The result is the Cartesian dualism of

mind and body, the sundering of the whole human being into two regions: the body and its natural inclinations are held in suspense as the dubitable source of sensible experiencing (and Descartes does not ask what philosophical insight might be gained by interrogating sensibility as such), while the ego is determined as *mens sive animus sive intellectus*, the realm of pure thinking (C, 79). He thus betrays the radicality of the *epokhe*, in that he makes a valuative decision about the body, excluding it so that he might realize his goal. (It is this moment of exclusion that constitutes, according to Merleau-Ponty, Descartes's *diplopia*, whereby he excludes an ontology of the existant in favor of an ontology of the object; this will be taken up again in chapter three). Moreover, Descartes doubly misinterprets what is disclosed through his own insights: on the one hand, he identifies the ego with the soul, which as a mythico-religious presupposition should have been bracketed (Husserl calls this the "psychologistic falsification of the pure ego" (C, 78)); on the other hand, he elevates "my" ego disclosed through doubt to the universal ego, an elevation that can be accomplished only through the concomitant strategy of excluding the body, i.e., by the exclusion of the *human* and of *life*. This rejection of life, undertaken in order to secure the cogito as ground (and mirrored in the concealing of the lifeworld in the mathematical method of the natural sciences), is the decisive move of the modern *Nachstiftung* of philosophy. Husserl's assessment of the cost of this move echoes Schelling's opinion that "the whole of modern philosophy since its inception (through Descartes) has this common deficiency—that nature does not exist for it and that it lacks a living ground" (SW, VII: 356/ 30).

Descartes thus undermines his own radicality; the institution of the modern idea of philosophy bears within itself the seeds of its own dissolution. Even though Descartes initiates

“a completely new manner of philosophizing which seeks its ultimate foundations in the subjective” (C, 83), these foundations are undermined by a persistent interest in the objectivity of the world. In other words, Descartes wants to ask how clear and distinct perceptions of the cogito can constitute “a metaphysically transcendent validity” and thus relate to—and know—an outside (C, 77). To answer the question, he has to make the cogito itself an object in the world; intended to be the ground of the sciences, it paradoxically “is *grounded* as a legitimate object of study within the sciences, i.e., in psychology” (C, 80). If the ego, excluded from the world by the radical *epokhe*, is meant to be the ground of all the sciences, ostensibly including the new science of psychology, then an obvious paradox results: the ego cannot become an object of study “since everything in the world derives its meaning from” the ego, and therefore a discourse that would pretend to study it objectively could not be grounded (C, 81). Moreover, that the ego should relate to an outside is obvious to Descartes, and yet, this obviousness is problematic in that the outside is immediately suspect and subject to doubt; “for centuries almost no one took exception to this obviousness . . . and no one actually raised the question whether, in respect to the egological sphere of being, an ‘outside’ can have any meaning at all” (C, 83). This double fault occurs because Descartes does not consistently maintain the *epokhe*, and the “what is obvious” sneaks back in to undermine what is acquired from the scientific attitude. Because Descartes did not make clear to himself the paradoxes arising from his analyses, and more importantly for Husserl, because Descartes does not interrogate the historical tradition he receives, whatever is radical in Descartes’s thought is lost, and the attempt to articulate a *philosophia perennis* or unified theoretical system results in failure.

Modern philosophy from Descartes to Kant and beyond then obsessively turns inward in

the attempt to save the project from complete collapse; the result is that the chasm between philosophy and science grows, and the crisis deepens. More precisely, the unresolved paradoxes arising from Descartes's attempt lead to dogmatic rationalism, skeptical empiricism, and Kant's criticism and systematic idealism, each of which addresses itself to the question of the possibility of philosophy to accomplish its task (C, 83ff). As with the method of the sciences, there is an interiorization of philosophy and a subsequent turn away from the lifeworld as source and ground of meaning; philosophy thus fails to understand the root of its own problem. Empiricism, for example, will view our sensate relation to the outside as an event in nature, as the causal action of the thing on an organ; since everything takes place in the objective world, the notion of the subject is abandoned in favor of a pure objectivism. Rationalism, on the other hand, posits an absolute subjectivity as the subject of experience and rejects the materialistic objectivism of empiricism in favor a pure interiority, the rational structures of which give us the concept of the thing. Following Husserl's lead, and in a move already familiar from *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty takes up this classic opposition in the introduction to *Phenomenology of Perception*, claiming that both share the same prejudice, i.e., the notion of "a universe perfectly explicit in itself" (*PhP*, 86/71), or more simply, the notion of Being as ideal Object that can be perfectly and completely known through method. Like Husserl, Merleau-Ponty argues that this notion of the universe is a received and uninterrogated notion that in fact conceals the deeper, more fundamental lifeworld: "we started off from a world in itself which acted upon our eyes so as to cause us to see it, and we now have consciousness of or thought about the world, but the nature of this world remains unchanged: it is still defined by the absolute mutual exteriority of its parts, and is merely duplicated throughout its extent by a thought which sustains it" (*PhP*, 77/63).

Just as Husserl claims that we must return to the lifeworld to overcome the consequences of the fateful omission of modern thought, so too does Merleau-Ponty argue that there is “pre-objective realm that we have to explore in ourselves if we wish to understand” our lived experience (*PhP*, 77/63). Merleau-Ponty’s thesis, and his argument concerning the problematic nature of a return to the lifeworld, will be further elaborated later in this chapter.

One may well believe that the Kantian critical project overcomes the opposition of rationalism and empiricism, but Husserl does not adhere to this belief; rather he claims that despite whatever theoretical advance Kant may make, he too fails to return to the lifeworld. Kant even rules that such a return to “the ultimate presuppositions of the possibility and actuality of objective knowledge” is not possible, for these “cannot be objectively knowable” (*C*, 93). Thus, no philosophy, no science has ever made thematic this realm that is taken for granted. In *The Crisis*, Husserl attempts such a thematization (which is at the same time an attempt to distinguish his position from Kant’s) and characterizes this realm, the lifeworld, not as the objective, but rather as an *anonymous subjectivity* which is not yet aware of itself as an infinite teleology (*C*, 111 ff). (A question here imposes itself: in taking the lifeworld as a *theme* of investigation, does Husserl not then take it as objective, despite himself? Such is the question Merleau-Ponty will pose to Husserl, as we shall see). As a totality of spiritual processes from which idealities arise, the lifeworld is understood more generally as all activity of *life*. Husserl compares the lifeworld to a living organism that could be dissected and examined, but “which could be *understood* only by going back to its deeper roots” (*C*, 113-14); with this metaphor, the import and necessity of Merleau-Ponty’s analyses of the living organism elaborated earlier is clarified, and their significance is re-inscribed in the register of a return to the lifeworld. The life-activity of this

anonymous subjectivity yields a universal and ideal meaning-construct, which comes to be called “world” (in distinction from the lifeworld), and through which life “objectifies itself as human subjectivity, as an element of the world” (C, 285). A truly radical philosophy that avoids the pitfalls of objectivism, that resolves at least some of Descartes’s paradoxes, thus overcoming the crisis, would have to be “the systematic and purely internal consideration of the anonymous subjectivity which ‘expresses’ itself” (C, 287). Since man is the medium of this expression, since he is the bearer of this teleology, Husserl asks, “is it not, in the end, our human being, and the life of our consciousness belonging to it . . . which is the place where all problems of living inner being and external exhibition are to be decided?” (C, 113). It is worth observing that Husserl places the emphasis not on human being as *Dasein*, as Heidegger does, but rather on the life of consciousness, which commits him then to transcendental subjectivism. If philosophy is to succeed in its own self-realization, it must return to and expose the anonymous subjectivity as a transcendental subjectivity, which in Husserl’s mind is *the* object of phenomenology; in other words, the lifeworld is neither a thing nor a place, but the naive consciousness of an anonymous subjectivity seeking to take hold of itself. Modern philosophy, in Husserl’s view, has not yet understood the necessity of this return to the lifeworld, and for this reason remains in crisis.

While modern philosophy, in its attempt to overcome the difficulties of Descartes’s institutional move and to secure the theoretical edifice of the universal science, succumbs to an inner dissolution, the natural sciences themselves continue to progress at an astonishing pace, such that by the nineteenth century their success was unassailable. Moreover, because metaphysical questions concerning the conception of modern man as an infinite teleology of reason were consigned to the failing philosophical project, so too was the philosophical status of

humanity called into question; obsessed with justifying itself, philosophy no longer speaks to “our vital need.” This, then, is the sense of the crisis in philosophy of which Husserl speaks, and we now see clearly its origins: it is to be found not so much in the *Urstiftung* of philosophy with the ancients as in the fateful omission of both “Galileo” and “Descartes” to engage in a historical reflection in order to determine the original meaning-bestowal of the tradition they receive and take as obvious in their *Nachstiftung*. The concomitant failure of philosophy and success of the positive sciences result in a devaluation of philosophy and the creation of “fact-minded people” (C, 16). After all, who in their right, rational mind would want to think philosophically about, for example, the body, when medical science can give us useful facts about it? Who in their right, rational mind would worry about the meaning of existence, when the natural sciences have reduced us to a pile of bio-chemical physical matter and processes subject to and understandable by the laws of nature? Who would dare dwell on the apparently useless questions of metaphysics when science gives us practical answers and explanations? Schelling often complained that modern philosophy and science, in cutting us off from nature and from the things themselves, have effectively castrated us; Husserl echoes this sentiment when he says that “positivism has decapitated philosophy” (C, 9). Whichever head we lose, we also lose life. The situation is clearly critical; what then is to be done?

For Husserl, the answer is simple: phenomenology can save us from the crisis, because phenomenology alone engages in a questioning-back [*Rückfragen*] through the inner-historical transformations of sedimented meaning, back to the originary lived experience of the lifeworld, back to the “forgotten meaning-fundament” of all idealizations, which bestows meaning in an originary institution (C, 48). More radically than those who have come before him, Husserl

remains committed to the Cartesian project of bringing

latent reason to the understanding of its own possibilities and thus . . . bring[ing] to insight the possibility of metaphysics as a true possibility—this is the only way to put metaphysics or universal philosophy on the strenuous road to realization. . . the only way to decide whether the *telos* which was inborn in European humanity at the birth of Greek philosophy . . . is a factual, historical delusion, . . . or whether Greek humanity was not rather the first breakthrough to what is essential to humanity (C, 15).

The meaning of this phenomenology, its historical method, and that at which it aims, the lifeworld must be grasped. Husserl's assessments of both Galileo and Descartes already give us a sense of the historical method, and shows us that "history" is not to be understood in an ordinary sense. In that Husserl has declared that phenomenology alone can save us, phenomenology is called into the service of the historical present, and the only way to understand this historical present is through "an understanding from the within of the movement" of philosophy, i.e., according to its *inner historical and teleological* movement (C, 15). In order to grasp this movement, phenomenology must in fact begin with mundane history—e.g., with what Galileo and Descartes factually achieved—and then inquire back through the manifold layers of meaning implicitly presupposed in their achievements. The disclosure of every new layer of meaning requires an examination of externalized historical facts, their inner meaning, and teleology, in order to see how and on what presuppositions that layer is constituted and sedimented. This zigzag-like procedure would eventually lead all the way back to the originary passive syntheses of naive existence, that is, back to the lifeworld itself, to the life of the living organism. If phenomenology is to be a rigorous science, it must clarify for itself its own inner history, which is at the same time humanity's struggle for its truth, its own coming-to-be. History in this peculiarly phenomenological sense is thus "from the start nothing but the vital

movement of the coexistence and interweaving of original meaning-formation and meaning-sedimentation” (C, 356), and the investigation of it opens “depth problems that are quite unknown to ordinary history” (C, 354). This said, it is clear that the “method” of inner-historical inquiry is also bound up with a logic of *Stiftung*, a logic to which we shall give formal and systematic expression later.

To conclude the discussion of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty’s critique can be anticipated by recalling that the goal of the regressive historical inquiry is to return to the lifeworld, and brings its function as ground [*Boden*] of the sciences into view (C, 116ff); Merleau-Ponty’s questioning concerns the nature of this return and its goal. We have already seen that this return consists in large part in a critical examination of the idealizing function as that which leads to an objectivation of Being and thus to a forgetting of the lifeworld: the return is thus meant to get to the root of objectivism, to recuperate forgotten origins in order to grasp their originary and institutionary meaning-bestowal. Does Husserl manage to do this? Merleau-Ponty’s short answer is in the negative for at least four intertwined, almost indissociable reasons, the first of which concerns the description of the lifeworld. One supposes that on the basis of the critique of idealization, the lifeworld will receive a radical and original description. Instead, Husserl provides this description:

The world as lifeworld has, even prior to science, the *same* structure that the objective sciences presuppose . . . as *a priori* structures and systematically unfold in *a priori* sciences Prescientifically, the world is already a spatio-temporal world; however, in regard to this spatiotemporality, there is no question of ideal mathematical points, of pure straight lines or planes, not question at all of . . . *exactness* belong to the sense of the geometrical *a priori*. The bodies familiar to us in the lifeworld are actual bodies, but not bodies in the sense of physics. The same is true of causality and spatiotemporal infinity. The categorical features of the lifeworld but are not concerned, so to speak, with the theoretical idealizations

and the hypothetic substructions of the geometrician and the physicist. (C, 139-140).

Husserl thus wants to say that there is an invariant, *a priori* structure to the lifeworld, and that we can attain it through the phenomenological reduction and the inner-historical method. But in describing it, he says it has the *same* structure, the *same* form that the sciences presuppose. This form is spatiotemporality, by which all phenomena appear in both the lifeworld and the scientific world. In this regard, there is an eidetic continuity between these two worlds, and indeed, we must specify that these two worlds are the *same* world experienced differently. The difference consists in the status of bodies. Bodies encountered in the lifeworld are real, actual bodies that have not been worked over by science—they are brute, raw, material bodies; bodies in the scientific world, on the other hand, as scientific *descriptions* of bodies, or idealized bodies grasped, via an appropriate method, purely in terms of their idealized *form*. In other words, the difference is that between bodies as lived and bodies as thought. However, by insisting on grasping the lifeworld in terms of its eidetic form, Husserl brackets the question of raw, brute materiality. Husserl's fault, in Merleau-Ponty's eyes, is to submit these brute bodies to the *epokhe*, to put the brute and the raw, the opacity of the world and the resistance of nature, out of play; as a result, one does not find the original and originary description of the lifeworld that one had hoped. Instead, one finds the formal conditions for the possibility of appearing in the lifeworld, the conditions by which material bodies lend themselves to the idealizing, constituting function of consciousness, or in other words, the conditions under which "the things themselves" become idealized *objects*. Thus even though Husserl characterizes the lifeworld as an anonymous *subjectivity* teleologically destined to become fully aware of itself, he describes the

structure of the lifeworld as the form of *objectivity*. Merleau-Ponty's critique thus aims to disclose in Husserl exactly what Husserl's reading disclosed in Descartes: despite the desire to describe a transcendental subjectivity as the ground of a *philosophia perennis*, a persistent interest in objectivity undermines the realization of the task.

Merleau-Ponty develops this criticism by pointing out an ambiguity in the nature of the return, which he articulates in a footnote at the close of the second part of *Phenomenology of Perception*:

Husserl in his last period concedes that all reflection should in the first place return to the description of the world of living experience [*Lebenswelt*]. But he adds that, by means of a second reduction, the structures of the world of experience must be reinstated in the transcendental flow of a universal constitution in which all the world's obscurities are elucidated. It is clear, however, that we are faced with a dilemma: either the constitution makes the world transparent, in which case it is not obvious why reflection needs to pass through the world of experience, or else it retains something of that world, and never rids it of its opacity. (*PhP*, 418/365).

Merleau-Ponty argues that Husserl's thought moves increasingly in the second direction, recognizing the opacity of the world, and that this direction should be solicitous for phenomenology; Merleau-Ponty characterizes this direction as a "descent into our archaeology" which would not leave "intact our instruments of analysis . . . our conception of noesis, of noema, of intentionality . . . our ontology" (*S*, 208/165) implying that phenomenology in its traditional sense would have to move beyond itself. If the world as lived does indeed muddle reflection's attempt to grasp it, then it is difficult to see how one could ever achieve a 'pure' or 'absolute' transcendental subjectivity. However, Husserl remains explicitly committed to the viewpoint of transcendental subjectivity, and privileges the role of constitution as the function that idealizes the world as a transparent noematic correlate. Constitution is thus an idealizing

activity. Throughout *The Crisis*, one of Husserl's principle worries is that idealization objectifies Being, or gives us a conception of Being as Object, and he aims his critique against objectivism in general. The history of the idealizing function led him to special consideration of Galileo and Descartes, each of whom contributes to the achievement of the conception of Being as Object. Merleau-Ponty's manifold complaints about the lack of originality in the description of the lifeworld, about the bracketing of the raw and the brute, and about the nature of constitution thus amount to an accusation: Husserl's phenomenology remains beholden to the objectivism that it seeks to denounce. As long as phenomenology remains a philosophy of consciousness, there is not, and cannot be, a radical return to the world of life, because life will always be grasped in a reflexive framework, as an ideal object.

A truly radical return would have to solicit the foundations of phenomenology and force it to move beyond itself. Echoing and elaborating on Merleau-Ponty's claim in this regard, Derrida has shown the problem of return in his notion of contamination. Briefly, Husserl wants on the one hand to maintain a distinction between the transcendental and the empirical, the formal and the material; but on the other hand, the birth of ideality is an empirical event to which Husserl wants to assign transcendental significance. In Derrida's reading, the return to the lifeworld shows that this would be possible only if the empirical and transcendental are somehow already mutually implicated; moreover, just as Merleau-Ponty claims in the footnote cited above ("or else it retains something of that world, and never rids it of its opacity"), the transcendental status of ideality would be contaminated with the empirical from which it arose, and the empirical would have to be contaminated with the transcendental for the move to be possible. The impossibility of the radical return is thus ordered from the outset by Husserl's own distinctions, which then are

called into question by the strategies Husserl uses to engage in his critique. Derrida thus makes explicit what Merleau-Ponty implies: none of Husserl's analytic tools can remain intact, and the mere possibility of a return—even if it is unrealizable—solicits the foundations of phenomenology.

In the end, then, Merleau-Ponty wants to say, with Husserl, that there is indeed a crisis stemming from the prejudice of an objective in-itself shared by both modern philosophy and the sciences, and that the deep root of this prejudice is the determination of Being as Object. But against the German master, the French protégé argues that Husserl does not manage to get to the root of objective thought, and so the pernicious weed grows back in the field of phenomenology. In Merleau-Ponty's eyes, Husserl repeats objectivism when he offers a formal eidetic description of the lifeworld, which is itself an idealization. To determine something in terms of its *eidos* is, for Merleau-Ponty, the characteristic gesture of objectivism, the root of which is the presupposition that such an eidetic determination—which requires the bracketing of the raw and the brute materiality in favor of form—is possible in the first place. What is presupposed in this is that the brutality of the brute, and along with it, the negativity of the negative, is neutralized so that Being can be fully what it is as Object. (Note here that it is the brutality of the brute that will come to name the character of the “something else” onto which Merleau-Ponty's thought opens, as demonstrated in chapter three). The presupposition is a classically metaphysical one by which Being is determined as essence. Merleau-Ponty argues that by suspending brute materiality as Husserl does, he effectively negates the negative, and it is only in this way that Being can be what it is in its plenitude. He thus faults Husserl for holding to a metaphysical ideal of Being that is what it is in virtue of its negation of the nothingness that precedes it.

Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl thus moves back and forth between appreciation and

critique. The critique will thus consist in directing at Husserl the same critique that Husserl addresses to the tradition; in sum, for Merleau-Ponty, Husserl remains committed to a Cartesian ontology of the object, and so does not and cannot achieve his great goals of overcoming the crisis and fulfilling Descartes's dream of philosophy as rigorous science. One may well wonder if Husserl himself did not come to recognize this when, near the end of his life, he remarked: "Philosophy as rigorous science—the *dream is over*" (C, 389).⁷ Despite these critiques, Merleau-Ponty insists that there is still something gained through the method of the *Rückfrage*. That is, phenomenology's attempt to take account of its inner-historical meaning and to secure itself as rigorous science may well dissolve because of its own aporias, but this failure is *productive* in at least two senses. First, it exposes the idealizing function as a mode of objectivism, and even if Husserl remains beholden to the tradition he denounces, his critical efforts open the possibility of a more radical return to the lifeworld. This return would have to be a return to life itself, and this again justifies Merleau-Ponty's studies on animality: there, his appreciation for Husserl's zigzag method comes into full relief as Merleau-Ponty moves back and forth between what the theoretical life-sciences have to say about life, and life itself; out of this zigzag, a philosophy of life begins to trace itself out. This return remains a work to be done, and must be done, because the object of the return, i.e., the lifeworld, is "our common truth"; the philosopher, Merleau-Ponty writes echoing Husserl, "is professionally bound to the task of defining and clarifying the conditions which make humanity possible—that is, the participation of all men in a common truth," i.e., the lifeworld.⁸ This gives a sense of the task Merleau-Ponty sets for himself, the ongoing phenomenological reflection on what it means to be human. Husserl's last contribution to this reflection may have been a failure, but it brings to the fore once again the problem of life as

the source of meaning. This means, secondly, that Husserl's phenomenology cannot be reduced *simply* to a philosophy of consciousness, because the whole effort serves as a clue to point beyond itself to "something else." Merleau-Ponty's own phenomenology, we shall see, also aims at this something else, but it can aim at it only by retracing—and thus surpassing—the path of Husserl's thought; the record of this attempt is to be found, at least in part, in *Phenomenology of Perception*. The theme and status of phenomenology will be taken up later in this work (in anticipation, and in parentheses, it is the logic of *Stiftung* that motivates Merleau-Ponty's revaluation of phenomenology), but first, the second determining definition of phenomenology that contributed to the formation of Merleau-Ponty's intellectual horizon must be considered.

b. Heidegger and "Phenomenology"

In his famous "Letter to Richardson," Heidegger reflects on his own philosophical development and on his conception of philosophy. He writes:

As my familiarity with phenomenology grew, . . . the question about Being . . . remained always in view. So it was that doubt arose whether the 'thing itself' was to be characterized as intentional consciousness, or even as the transcendental ego. If, indeed, phenomenology, as the process of letting things manifest themselves, should characterize the standard method of philosophy, and if from ancient times the guiding-question of philosophy has perdured in the most diverse forms as the question about the Being of beings, then Being had to remain the first and last thing-itself of thought. Meanwhile, 'phenomenology' in Husserl's sense was elaborated into a distinctive philosophical position according to a pattern set by Descartes, Kant, and Fichte. The historicity of thought remained completely foreign to such a position The Being-question, unfolded in *Being and Time*, parted company with this philosophical position, and that on the basis of what to this day I still consider a more faithful adherence to the principle of phenomenology.⁹

Heidegger's worry about Husserl's phenomenology is that it does not, in fact, get back to the things themselves; we have heard echoes of this worry in Merleau-Ponty's critique of Husserl's last work. Heidegger also argues that his own *magnum opus* is "more faithful" to Husserl's famous call, and indeed, Merleau-Ponty seems to agree with this when he says in the "Preface" to *Phenomenology of Perception* that everything Heidegger does in *Being and Time* amounts to an "explicit account" of the *Lebenswelt*, i.e., a more radical, more faithful return. Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger thus agree that there is a need, starting from Husserl, to be more radical than Husserl. To inquire about the radicality and faithfulness of this return by attending to the *phenomenon* as Heidegger conceives it is justified because, along with Husserl's later texts, it too forms the horizon of phenomenology in which Merleau-Ponty inscribes his own efforts.

In section 7 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger defines for us the phenomenological method of the investigation. While the intention here is not to give an exhaustive interpretation of this important section of the introduction, it is nevertheless worthwhile to take account of some of the key themes expressed there. Heidegger wishes to elucidate the meaning of "phenomenology" by interrogating the meaning of the word itself; this interrogation gives us insight into the task of the phenomenological "method." First, as a "method," it is nowise a collection of analytical techniques that one can indifferently apply to a given situation; as a "method," phenomenological inquiry does not name "the *what* of the objects of philosophical research as subject-matter, but rather the *how* of that research" (SZ, 27/50). It characterizes the way in which we will approach the objects of our investigation, and this approach itself requires that we go "to the things themselves," that is, that we do *not* apply any theoretical constructs appropriated from elsewhere or try to view the things through the lens of philosophical categories. To go back to the things

themselves means that we let them show themselves from out of themselves, to let the things that one is talking about be seen as they disclose themselves to us (SZ, 34/58). This demand for self-evidence is “the preliminary concept of phenomenology,” and Heidegger examines its two etymological components, deriving respectively from the Greek *phainomenon* and *logos* (SZ, 28/50). Heidegger recalls the tropic texture from which the Greek word *phainomenon* is derived: the middle-voiced verb *phainesthai*, “to show itself,” is derived from the active *phaino*, “to put in the light,” whose stem *pha-* is related to *phos*, “the light.” On this basis, Heidegger proposes to translate the word *phenomenon* as “that which shows itself in itself,” i.e., as that which can be brought to light (SZ, 28-29/51). This needs to be rigorously distinguished from “seeming” and especially from “appearance.” A “seeming [*Scheinen*],” Heidegger reminds us, already presupposes that something has shown itself *as* what it is not—i.e., a thing that *does* show itself *can* show itself *as* other than it is—as such, a seeming is a structural possibility of a phenomenon (SZ, 29/51). An appearing [*Erscheinen*] on the other hand is an observable event which announces that something has not shown itself as such, and refers us to this something, just as symptoms are the indication of a disease which does not show itself as such (SZ, 29-30/53). This distinction is extremely important insofar as Being does not show itself as such, and is veiled by its not-showing-itself, i.e., its appearance; in this regard, by means of these distinctions, Heidegger is articulating the framework (call it the ontological difference if you like) of one of the central themes of his phenomenological investigations, namely the self-disclosure of Being, or the question of truth. What is essential here, however, in this analysis is the concept of phenomenon as that which shows itself from out of itself. Let us turn to the other essential component in question, that of the *logos*.

Provisionally accepting the translation of *logos* as discourse, Heidegger insists that the meaning of discourse be determined more fully, and this determination is effected by means of a recourse to Aristotle's explication of the function of discourse. This function, for Aristotle, is *apophainesthai*: the root word *phainesthai* refers back to the previous discussion, such that the *logos* is that which lets something—that which the discourse is about—be seen (SZ, 32-33/55-56). As apophantic, the *logos* speaks *from* what it is about: we cannot simply apply or employ just any words to speak about the thing that is showing itself through the *logos*; what is said in discourse must be uttered forth from the thing itself if the thing is to be authentically manifested in the discourse and thus discursively accessible to others.¹⁰ While Heidegger in this section goes on to show the ways in which *logos* as *apophansis* is thoughtfully and structurally related to *synthesis* and judgment, to truth as *aletheia*, and to reason, what is important here is that the *logos* is a letting-something-be-seen or a making manifest of what is being talked about. In this particular section of *Being and Time*, Heidegger merely mentions the relation of the *logos* to the Greek verb *legein*; he does however draw out this relation explicitly in his essay "Logos."¹¹

One small aspect of this important essay is germane to the full explication of the signification of the word, and thus useful in the attempt to sketch out a correspondence with Merleau-Ponty. This is especially important in the context of the larger project of this present dissertation, insofar as Merleau-Ponty claims first, that "the perceptual world is at bottom Being in the sense Heidegger gives it," that is, the object of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological investigations fundamentally coincides with that of Heidegger's. Second, Merleau-Ponty claims that "what we seek . . . is a true *explicitation* of Being, i.e., not the exhibition of a being, even an infinite one, in which operates—in a manner that in principle is incomprehensible for us—the

articulation of beings one after the other, but the *unveiling* of Being” (N, 266-67). In these passages, Merleau-Ponty’s proximity to the Heideggerian problematic becomes clear, and his special emphasis on the word *explicitation* will be made even more relevant by reflecting with Heidegger on the signification of the verb *legen* and its relation to the *logos*.

Explicitation is a noun, the substantial form of the French verb *expliciter*, to make explicit, to interpret;¹² as a noun, it approximates a translation of the German word *Auslegung*, a word used quite often by Heidegger as the positive complement of *Destruktion*. By *Auslegung*, Heidegger means the “laying before” (*poser devant*) of Being, the exposition of hermeneutic structures that allow Being to show itself. Heidegger uses the word *Auslegung* and not *Interpretation* in his essay on “Logos,” because the former has an etymological link with the verb *legen*, to pose or to posit something, to lay out. The verbal root of *legen* belongs to the same family as the verb *lesen*, to read, but also to gather. These two verbs, *legen* and *lesen*, themselves find their origin in the Greek verb *legein*, from which we of course derive *logos*, which signifies to gather and to lay before. In the essay “Logos,” with which Merleau-Ponty was familiar,¹³ Heidegger observes that our understanding of *Logos* is, or ought to be, determined by its two German heirs, *legen* and *lesen*, or more precisely, is to be understood as *die lesende Lege*, *la pose recueillante*. Now, *Auslegung* communicates not only with *legen*, *lesen*, and *Logos*, but is composed also of the prefix *Aus-*, *vers l’extérieur*, towards the outside. *Explicitation* as a translation of *Auslegung* is thus the folding-out, the *dépliment*, of that which is gathered or folded in, *implié* (or even *impliqué*) towards the exterior, and this ex-plication, this unfolding in language, would be the movement of *Logos*.¹⁴ This movement is thus not an exhibition, not a pure showing, because Being does not show itself as such; as an *explicitation*, it is the gradual

unveiling or *dévoilement* of Being.¹⁵ This all-too-brief discussion of *legein* as it is expressed in the essay “Logos” has the advantage not only of clarifying and elaborating the discussion of the concept of *logos* as the “letting-something-be-seen,” but also shedding light in a preliminary manner on the way in which Merleau-Ponty will make use of this concept in his own project, which was just provisionally characterized as an ontological explication of the perceptual world, that is, as a *hermeneutic*. Let us return to section 7 of *Being and Time*, and follow Heidegger in explaining how the concept of the phenomenon and the concept of the logos are to be taken together and understood as *phenomenology*.

Heidegger quickly establishes the signification of phenomenology by taking its root words together: “formulated in Greek as *legein ta phainomena*, where *legein* means *apophainesthai* . . . ‘phenomenology’ means *apophainesthai ta phainomena*—to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself” (SZ, 34/58). This formula is remarkable for its passivity, or better, for its middle-voice quality. To be sure, it names only the *how* of phenomenological investigation: we *let* that which shows itself *be seen* according to its *own self-showing*. The things will show themselves as things, but in their self-showing, something else does not show itself as such, and is covered over by the self-showing of the thing. This “something else” is the Being of the things, which “constitutes their meaning and their ground,” and which is covered over, dissimulated, and ultimately forgotten.¹⁶ The cardinal problem of philosophy is the question of the meaning of Being in general, and therefore the operative demand of phenomenology is that Being disclose itself and its structures as phenomena; in this way, phenomenology is in the service of an unforgetting [*aletheia*] of Being, and as such bears the philosophical responsibility of the remembering of Being (SZ, 33/56). As

such, phenomenology becomes ontology. The disclosure of Being and its structures requires a preliminary investigation in order to secure the point of departures and means of access—Being “must be *wrested* from the objects of phenomenology”—there must be a clearing-away of that which covers over (SZ, 36/61). In order that we have any access whatsoever to the question of being, we must begin from what is “ontico-ontologically *distinct–Dasein*”—i.e., from the kind of Being that is able to pose the question of Being (SZ, 37/61). In other words, we must begin from “ourselves” once the meaning of “ourselves,” has been phenomenologically clarified; in this clarification, the structures of Being are disclosed to Dasein’s understanding of Being. This undertaking is therefore also an interpretation [*Auslegung*] of Being. Phenomenological description is thus also a hermeneutic, not only because the phenomenological task is “the business of interpreting” as we understood it above, but also in the large sense that the disclosure of the structures of Dasein by which Being and its structures are made known to Dasein’s understanding is also the “working out [of] the conditions on which the possibility of *any* ontological investigation depends” (SZ, 37/52). Phenomenology, for Heidegger, is thus *not* simply about how things present themselves to consciousness and how consciousness subsequently knows them as such; it is not simply about a noetic-noematic correspondence; it is rather the philosophically responsible way to address ourselves to the fundamental question of philosophy. It would be possible to dwell indefinitely with Heidegger, but these these summary comments about the meaning of phenomenological investigation must suffice, in order to return to the principal argument.

The aim in this section has been to characterize Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of

phenomenology as emerging from within a horizon of a movement of thought, the two principal determinants of which are given by Husserl and Heidegger. The conventional wisdom concerning the impact of these two determinations on the formation of Merleau-Ponty's thought normally dictates that the "young" Merleau-Ponty was influenced by Husserl and then "later" turned to Heidegger. While there is a smidgen of truth to this—Heidegger published a great deal in the 1950s, a decade that also saw a plethora of French translations of his work—this conventional wisdom is too convenient and needs to be reconsidered. The most influential Husserlian texts for Merleau-Ponty were those from the period of *The Crisis*—i.e., *after* Husserl had read Heidegger. Further, Merleau-Ponty had read *Being and Time* in the late 1930s, and comments in the Preface to *Phenomenology of Perception* that "the whole of *Sein und Zeit* springs from an indication given by Husserl and amounts to no more than an explicit account of the 'natürlicher Weltbegriff' or 'Lebenswelt' which Husserl towards the end of his life had identified as the central theme of phenomenology." While this characterization of Heidegger's work as "no more" than an elaboration of a Husserlian theme may appear rather reductive, it at least suggests a mutual implication of the thought of Husserl and Heidegger in each other, an *Ineinander* of thinking, in which Merleau-Ponty also imbricates his own work. It also suggests that from the very beginning Merleau-Ponty's understanding of phenomenology is determined just as much by Heidegger's as it is by Husserl's, a suggestion that supports Heidegger's claim that all thinkers worthy of the name are engaged in the same movement of thought. Particularly just, then, is Renaud Barbaras's assessment: there is no question of a "Husserlian Merleau-Ponty" or a "Heideggerian Merleau-Ponty," but rather only of a Merleau-Ponty who, operating within a movement of thought opened and articulated by his German predecessors, develops his

own perspective that borrows from, but moves beyond, Husserl and Heidegger.¹⁷ Having seen Merleau-Ponty's commitment to the phenomenon of life, let us turn to his great work *Phenomenology of Perception* in order to see what becomes of phenomenology—and the problem of life—for Merleau-Ponty.

2. The Phenomenology of Institution: *Phenomenology of Perception*.

Insofar as the problems left unresolved at the close of *The Structure of Behavior* all lead back to the problem of perception, one naturally expects to find their solution in the sequel to that first work, wherein Merleau-Ponty fully takes up phenomenology as a method and installs himself in the movement we have just tried to sketch. But if one is looking for solutions in *Phenomenology of Perception*, one is likely to be disappointed. Instead, what one finds is a deepening of the problem, a more thoughtful—but not definitive—posing of the problem *as a* problem. Merleau-Ponty himself later characterizes the work as a regressive analysis to the “within” of the perceptual behaviors of the perceiving organism through which its “exceptional” relation to its world is more profoundly interrogated (thus marking a continuity with the intention stated in the opening line of *The Structure of Behavior*). The living activity of the body as an animal of movement and perception—its expressive, gestural, bodying-forth, its perceptual behaviors—amounts to a power of symbolic institution through which the world appears as meaningful or as instituted. This means therefore that life institutes the Symbolic, and can be grasped only through what it has instituted. The problem is thus more thoughtfully posed as the problem of *institution*, on which Merleau-Ponty never ceases to meditate.

Even if the power of symbolic institution is approached in Merleau-Ponty's great work, the effort remains somewhat disappointing, in that the approach is made from within phenomenology, understood as a philosophy of consciousness. Merleau-Ponty thus does not grasp institution in a radical and originary way. His failure is due to his adherence to a certain subjective idealism (and we may even say naturalism) inherited from Husserl's phenomenology (a more generous reading might say that Merleau-Ponty intentionally fails precisely in order to point out the inadequacies of Husserl's phenomenology; either reading yields the same conclusion: the failure is productive in that it obliges Merleau-Ponty to engage continuously with phenomenology and to move beyond it). Such is the thrust of Jean Beaufret's critique of Merleau-Ponty in the 1946 discussion following Merleau-Ponty's defense before the *Société Française de la Philosophie*. There, Merleau-Ponty vigorously defends his work against the attacks of colleagues who remain partial to idealism, realism, and psychologism. At a key moment near the end of the debate, Beaufret rises to defend Merleau-Ponty against claims that he has been too—even dangerously—radical:

I wish only to emphasize that many of the objections which have been addressed to Merleau-Ponty seem to me unjustified. I believe they come down simply to objecting to his perspective itself, which is that of phenomenology. To say that Merleau-Ponty stops at a phenomenology without any means of going beyond it is to fail to understand that the phenomenon itself, in the phenomenological sense of the term, goes beyond the realm of the empirical. The phenomenon in this sense is not empirical but rather that which manifests itself really, that which we can experience, in opposition to what would be only the construction of concepts. Phenomenology is not a falling back into phenomenism, but the maintenance of contact with the thing itself. If phenomenology rejects intellectualist explanations of perception, it is not to open the door to the irrational, but to close it to verbalism. Nothing appears to me less pernicious than *Phenomenology of Perception*. The only reproach I would make to the author is not that he has gone too far, but rather that he has not been sufficiently radical. The phenomenological descriptions which he uses in fact maintain the vocabulary of idealism. In this

they are in accord with Husserlian descriptions. But the whole problem is precisely to know whether phenomenology fully developed does not require the abandonment of subjectivity and the subjective idealism as, beginning with Husserl, Heidegger has done.¹⁸

Merleau-Ponty himself comes to recognize that Beaufret is essentially correct in his critique. In this section, Beaufret's critique will be elaborated from within Merleau-Ponty's text; at the same time, the elements pertinent to a logic of institution uncovered by Merleau-Ponty in

Phenomenology of Perception (elements that will subsequently be taken up and interrogated by him throughout the 1950s) will be underlined. Additionally, there is an unthought aspect in the 1945 work that will be circumscribed in this chapter, only in order to become the explicit object of investigation in the third chapter; this unthought element will turn out to be the privileged medium through which Merleau-Ponty thinks the problematic of institution. To be sure, this unthought element is nature. The reading here of Merleau-Ponty will thus be like Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl, alternating between appreciation and critique. A preliminary examination of what Merleau-Ponty considers to be the main themes of phenomenology will open the way to a more detailed interrogation of the principal axes of argumentation in *Phenomenology of Perception*.

a. Main Themes in the "Preface"

In the preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty tells us that phenomenology is a movement of thought and a style of thinking, and, in an echo of Heidegger, he claims that it "is accessible only through a phenomenological method" (*PhP*, ii/viii). This

method has its peculiarity, and Merleau-Ponty wishes to take stock of the major themes that characterize and sometimes confuse it, a confusion that almost always arises in the contrast of “early” to “later” Husserl. In order to understand Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, it is important to grasp these themes and the key ideas that govern Merleau-Ponty’s great book. Let us begin by rapidly recalling the principal path of thought that has brought Merleau-Ponty to phenomenology in the first place. The first chapter demonstrated that Merleau-Ponty’s explicit desire in his first work was to examine the relations between nature and consciousness; to fulfill this desire, Merleau-Ponty argues that, especially with regard to vital nature, the sciences are unable to treat nature without either dissecting it into its *partes extra partes*, or dissolving it into its idea. Neither realism nor idealism can shed any light on the relation of consciousness and nature. Moreover, throughout the first work, the central claim is that any meaning is always *for* a consciousness that perceives it, and never simply in-itself; the external point of view of consciousness is thus presupposed, and the entire argument is structured according it. At the end of the analysis, however, it is disclosed “the natural thing, the organism, behavior. . . [these] exist only by their meaning, but the meaning which supports them is *not yet* a Kantian object, the intentional life which constitutes them is *not yet* a representation, the understanding that gives access to them is *not yet* an intellection” (SC, 241/224). Finally, Merleau-Ponty concluded that “all the problems that we have touched upon lead back to the problem of perception” (SC, 240/223). It would thus appear that if the consciousness to which meaning appears is *not yet* a constituting consciousness, and if indeed its relation to nature is only a problem of perception, then the unresolved task can be addressed only by a return to consciousness and to perception, in order to investigate what they indeed are.

Merleau-Ponty thus wants to resolve the embarrassing situation in which he finds himself: on the one hand, he has maintained throughout that behavior is meaningful only if a consciousness perceives it as such, that is, only if it appears; but on the other hand, the consciousness to which it appears has not been submitted to an interrogation, and so even if it is *not yet* the reflexive cogito of idealism, it nevertheless looks *as if* he is stuck in a version of idealism. Merleau-Ponty must thus distinguish his position from idealism; and so he asks, if the consciousness to which meaning appears is not yet a constituting consciousness, what then is it? *The Structure of Behavior* has already demonstrated that it is a *perceptual* consciousness, and the studies of animal behavior have shown that, in virtue of the *Ineinander* of animality and humanity, perceptual consciousness cannot be simply a cool, detached, non-participating spectator looking at nature from an external point of view, but is rather a sensibility, a behavior of an organism with respect to its environment. The examination of this perceptual consciousness, which is only sketched in *The Structure of Behavior*, is the object of investigation in *Phenomenology of Perception*. The adoption of the external point of view in the first work thus serves to denounce realism, but only at the price of an embarrassing idealist hangover; the regressive analysis of the second work, i.e., the return to the internal point of view of perceptual experience, is meant to cure this lingering idealism, and to set us squarely on that third way, phenomenology.

Given this, it is not surprising to see Merleau-Ponty begin his discussion of phenomenology by contrasting it with idealism. The idealism of science “is built upon the world as directly experienced, and if we want to subject science to rigorous scrutiny and arrive at a precise assessment of its meaning and scope, we must begin by reawakening the basic experience

of the world of which science is the second-order expression” (*PhP*, iii/viii). The question, then, is to understand how the world of second-order expressions arises from, is grounded in, and ultimately covers over, a more originary experience of the world. This question is another version of the one already posed in *The Structure of Behavior*: how does a materiality that presents itself as nascent intelligibility acquire a spiritual significance? The question thus reminds us that we are thus still at the indiscernible joining. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, the question will take form around the phenomenon of *expression*, which in the end is a modality of *Stiftung*. Returning to the present analysis, the problem with scientific idealism, and indeed all idealism in general, is that it is “always both naive and at the same time dishonest, because it takes for granted, without explicitly mentioning it, the other point of view, namely that of consciousness.” It is therefore not surprising that ultimately in *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty will not reject consciousness; his task will be to show how what comes to be called consciousness is anchored in, and emerges from, the lived experience; or rather, he will attempt (and we will be vigilant with regard to this attempt) to grasp the phenomenon of life not cognitively, but rather existentially—as it is *lived*. Thus he does not fault idealism so much for holding to the point of view of consciousness, but rather for not interrogating this point of view; in other words, in Merleau-Ponty’s view, idealism misconstrues the nature of consciousness. “Descartes and particularly Kant detached the subject or consciousness by showing that I could not possibly apprehend anything as existing unless I first of all experienced myself as existing in the act of apprehending it. They presented consciousness . . . as the condition of there being anything at all” (*PhP*, iii/ix). The consciousness of idealism is a representing, constituting consciousness, and is presupposed as the condition of possibility of all experience; experience for

this consciousness becomes the ‘thought of’ experience. Consequently, idealism also misconstrues the world, reducing it to a noematic correlate. If the phenomenological imperative is to be observed faithfully, then the phenomenologist must recognize that “the world is there [*il y a le monde*] before any possible analysis of mine, and it would be artificial to make it the outcome of a series of syntheses” (*PhP*, iii/x). Such an “impregnable subjectivity, untouched by being and time” that holds the world at arm’s length and pretends to leap outside the flux of time loses sight of its own beginning, that is, loses sight of its situation in the world. Phenomenology as a return to the things themselves is therefore to be understood as a return to the givenness of the world in order to give a descriptive account of it.

But as already indicated, this return is not simple, and its difficulties no doubt account for the reason why Husserl devoted so much of his time to clarifying the problem—and the virtue—of the phenomenological reduction. Husserl’s own presentation of the problematic suggests the problem of idealism, and indeed, it is here that Merleau-Ponty articulates one of his central objections to Husserl. Merleau-Ponty notes that in many of the early texts, Husserl presents the reduction “as a return to a transcendental consciousness before which the world is spread out and completely transparent . . . so that the world is nothing but ‘world-as-meaning,’ and the phenomenological reduction is idealistic” (*PhP*, v/xi). If pushed to its limits, it would become “a logically consistent transcendental idealism [that] rids the world of its opacity” (*PhP*, vi/xii). In other words, even if Merleau-Ponty accepts that the reduction reveals that the world is *for* us, he will refuse to conclude, as Husserl does, that the world is therefore also constituted *by* us qua noematic correlate. Such a conclusion could only be drawn on the basis of “an incomplete reflection, which reflects on things, but forgets to reflect on itself” (*PhP*, vii/xiii); and indeed,

this is no doubt why Husserl always described himself as a perpetual beginner. What, after all, does the reduction demand? It demands a return to the world itself, but in such a manner that we “refuse it our complicity,” we suspend our judgment about it, in order to bring into relief those intentional threads that bind us to the world, but to which we are blind because we take them for granted (*PhP*, ii/vii). The virtue of the reduction is thus that it allows us to see how we are in the world and thereby also how we stand out against the background of the world. In so doing, the reduction makes clear that a consciousness that reflects on the world is always situated in the world, that it is nowise a pure, detached spectator. The results of the reduction force the later Husserl to recognize that we are not an Absolute Mind existing in some celestial space, and to “find on the contrary that a real mind, according to its essence, can only exist tied to materiality as the real mind of a body.”¹⁹ The reduction is not an abduction, it does not lead *away from*, but rather, *back to* the *real body* of the mind, back “an *unreflected life* that is its initial, constant, and final situation” (*S*, 208/164). Like Husserl, for Merleau-Ponty the discovery of the unreflected is already an act of reflection; but unlike Husserl who seeks to grasp it within the framework of a reflexive philosophy, for Merleau-Ponty the unreflected is that which reflection can never quite grasp without distorting, that which would distort even reflection. Over against the ‘wrong turn’ of Husserl’s implicit idealism, Merleau-Ponty writes that “the most important lesson that the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction” (*PhP*, ix/xiv), which means that there is always something—here called the unreflected, but elsewhere, the resistance of nature—that thwarts the reduction. This shows convincingly that if we consider the extent to which we are involved in the world, then “there is no thought that embraces all of our thought.” The reduction’s ruinous encounter with the unreflected is unavoidable, necessary, and

productive; Merleau-Ponty's own encounter with it will eventually lead him to give up the philosophy of reflection.

Given all this, Merleau-Ponty reinterprets the meaning of essence [*Wesen*]. Once again, it is quite possible to see essence in an idealistic light, to think essence in as detached from existence, as the metaphysical "truth." And certainly, the early texts of Husserl, particularly the *Logical Investigations* and its dream of a universal grammar, encourage such a reading. But again, if the original motivation of such an interpretation is examined, it becomes clear that Husserl was always trying to understand "our effective involvement in the world" and make it "amenable to conceptualization," and that the idea of essence is in fact a means to this end, not an end in itself (*PhP*, ix/xiv). That is, "our existence is too tightly held in the world to be able to know itself as such at the moment of involvement, and . . . it requires the field of ideality in order to become acquainted with and to prevail over its facticity" (*PhP*, ix/xv). The idea of essence, and the eidetic reduction, is only a tool to help us make sense of the opaque and tangled threads that bind us to life, and thus to name the structures that make our lived experience meaningful; without them, there would be no meaning, there would be only silence. The task of phenomenology, Husserl says (and Merleau-Ponty never tires of invoking this formulation), focuses on "that as yet mute experience . . . which we are concerned to lead to the pure expression of its own meaning."²⁰ The field of ideality may well help us to conceptualize this mute experience, but this field does not exist in a state of separation; in that it is still *of* the world, it still affords us access to what it designates. The meaning of essence must not, therefore, be understood as a theory of forms akin to Platonism, but rather, as something closer to the Heideggerian notion of *Wesen*: coming-to-pass, "upsurgence," "unfurling," or even "creature,"

and thus as the breaking of the silence of antepredicative life. The notion of *Wesen* understood in this way would therefore be closely bound to what Husserl calls operative intentionality [*fungierende Intentionalität*], which must not be understood as an act of consciousness, but rather as an intentionality of the world that makes things and consciousness stand out as *Wesen* of the world. From this we learn to recognize “consciousness itself as a project of the world, destined to the world which it neither embraces nor possesses, but to which it always directs itself” (*PhP*, x/xvii), and that it will be “consciousness” through which the intentionality of the world is realized. This reading of *Wesen* also allows Merleau-Ponty to say that the world is “the only *Logos* that pre-exists” (*PhP*, xvi/xxi). Recalling here the discussion of *Logos* as it pertains to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology—i.e., as *explicitation*, as the ‘letting-something-be-seen’—then it becomes clear that Merleau-Ponty’s reinterpretation of the Husserlian notion of essence in a Heideggerian register constitutes a determination of those structures that let the world as *Logos* come to pass, or as the essential articulation of the phenomenal field that install therein the differences of levels, reflections, and shadows that give to the perceptual world its depth and meaning. Thus, as early as the Preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*, the way in which the perceptual world is Being in Heidegger’s sense is already manifest, as is the preparation for Merleau-Ponty’s engagement with Heidegger’s thinking.

The Preface thus discloses how Merleau-Ponty develops a response to the question “what is phenomenology?” by playing Husserl against himself. The pattern of argument always contrasts the early Husserl, who so easily lends himself to an idealist interpretation, with the later Husserl, who seems to promise something else. When *Phenomenology of Perception* is published, Merleau-Ponty is one of only a handful of people outside of Husserl’s immediate

circle who has had access to “the later Husserl,” even though the access was relatively brief and limited in scope. The later Husserl is thus received by Merleau-Ponty with an enthusiasm that is later moderated via the critique he directs against phenomenology. A Husserlian may well blame this enthusiasm for the various distortions they would find in Merleau-Ponty’s reading of Husserl, to which Merleau-Ponty would only confess: “we have sometimes pushed Husserl where Husserl himself did not wish to go.” This response to the critic may serve to summarize his attitude in reading Husserl (or anyone else for that matter), characterized by a double gesture of acceptance and refusal. That is, Merleau-Ponty’s critique of Husserl never constitutes a rejection, but rather a critical appropriation and reinscription of certain key motifs in an attempt to adhere more faithfully and more radically to the things themselves, to *life* itself. For this reason, Françoise Dastur rightly characterizes Merleau-Ponty as something of a philosophical raider or pirate; the treasure acquired, however, does not remain what it is: it is transformed through a productive reading into Merleau-Ponty’s own philosophical project.

What, then, emerges from this prefatory reading of Husserl? By and large directed against the idealist variant of objective thought, Merleau-Ponty wishes to cull from the reading the philosophical tools needed to transform the notion of consciousness and world, and thus overcome the dualism of subject and object. This transformation begins as a rediscovery of lived experience prior to it being worked over by reflection, prior to the dualist decision. Through this return, we learn that the world of life is to be understood as a pre-existent *Logos*, of which “consciousness” is a project (one wants to say *Wesen* here); in this sense, phenomenology is genetic in that its task is to make explicit this project. So far, this does not seem very different from Husserl’s project, as presented earlier, but Merleau-Ponty would like to believe that there is

at least one qualitative difference: whereas Husserl will subject the *Lebenswelt* itself to the reduction, holding it at arm's length in order to survey it intellectually, thus remaining within the horizon of a philosophy of consciousness that aims to know the object and its validities, Merleau-Ponty prefers to attend to the thickness of the lifeworld, to the brutality of the brute, and to the differences that inscribe themselves in the lifeworld; for, in his view, it is only through these differences that the world exists as an articulated world of meaning, the meaning to which we are condemned. On a general level, then, Merleau-Ponty finds in phenomenology a promising counter-thesis to idealism (and "naive" realism), and the countering begins with an attempt to correct idealism's double misconstrual of consciousness and world. The question that now imposes itself is: how does Merleau-Ponty go about this, and does his strategy succeed?

b. *Je suis mon corps. Le corps est au monde. Bad Ambiguity.*

Following the claim at the close of *The Structure of Behavior*, the discussion of perception as a problem is the natural starting point for his analyses, and it unfolds according to a familiar rhythm. "Not wanting to prejudge anything," Merleau-Ponty announces, "we will take objective thought literally and we will not pose any questions to it that it does not already pose to itself" (*PhP*, 86/71). The presupposition of objective thought, shared by its two principal variants (idealism and realism), is that of a universal in-itself. Part One of *Phenomenology of Perception* takes up and deepens the analysis, already begun in *Structure*, of the (non-)alternative of idealism and realism, and examines perception from within the philosophical framework of each of the two, opposing terms of the (non-) alternative. Thus, various psychological theories

of perception (sensationalism, associationism, intellectualism, etc.) are declared insufficient in their attempts to apprehend perception, because either they say that perception is the result of a discrete causality, which has as its consequence the dissolution of the body into a mechanistic causal network, or they say that perception is an intellectual function of a disembodied consciousness, for which the body itself is at most only the body-as-represented. What each misses, or refuses to take seriously, is the phenomenon of *embodiment*; this phenomenon, as neither pure in-itself nor pure for-itself, thus has the same philosophical status as behavior. The long analysis of the phantom limb, which is susceptible to neither a physiological nor a psychological explanation, underscores the extent to which consciousness is embodied, and reveals the many threads that bind the subject to the world via its body, a situation that is often obscured, even repressed, by personal existence. “Having a body is, for a living creature, to be involved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them” (*PhP*, 266/231). To reduce the body to a mere object, as a realist analysis would do, or to dissolve it into its idea, as an idealist analysis does, would therefore be to lose the body as my means of being in the world. The analysis of the phantom limb (and of other bodily disorders that confound the attempts of objective thought to explain the body) leads to the claim that “*Je suis mon corps*,” and that perception as a behavior is a modality of my body. This means that the “je” *is* its body, that the being of subjectivity is also the being of the body; it means also that “je” *follows* its body, that what will come to be called consciousness is derivative of bodily life. It is impossible to think of the subject without a body, and indeed a subject without a body would not be a subject at all. Given all this, Merleau-Ponty can say that the body is a “natural self [*moi naturel*]” (*PhP*, 239/206), and that “je” as its body must be understood in a non-

personal way; therefore, not as “je,” not as “Maurice,” but rather, as “an anonymous and generalized existence,” as an *On* (*PhP*, 271/240; cf *VI*, 201/254). Note here that this impersonal *on* is a *natural* self: the meaning of the adjective *natural* must be investigated. Two interpretations of this modifier are possible. First, within the framework of Husserlian phenomenology, a natural self is the naive self, the subject of finite tasks and of the natural attitude, free of the pretensions of reflexive philosophy and the syntheses of active constitution; as such it is still a subjectivity. Second, the natural self *qua* body is an organism, a material mass that presents itself as a nascent intelligibility, an “animal of perceptions and movements,” or what Merleau-Ponty will later call *corporeity*. In this regard, the natural self cannot be understood in a personalistic mode, thus underscoring the impersonal aspect of the *on*; Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the autonomic vital processes that aliment this conception when he writes that “the body is to the world as the heart is to the organism” (*PhP*, 235/203), and later on, “it is not me who makes my heart beat” (*PhP*, 262/231). Here, then, we have a connection between Nature—or at least, the natural—and life, which remains uninterrogated in *Phenomenology of Perception*; the need to bring this unthought to light, the need for phenomenology to “descend into its basement” and treat the question of the natural, will be one of the principal problems that leads Merleau-Ponty into a meditation on the concept of Nature in the mid-1950s. But what consequences follow, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, by determining the body as a natural self?

Determined as a natural and anonymous self, the body is thus lifted out of the order of the in-itself, but does not yet belong to the order of the for-itself—it is thus neither a pure physiology nor is it subsumed under an idea. The body then is a type of being that challenges the

conventional wisdom inherited from Descartes that “there are two senses, and two only, of the word ‘exist’: one exists either as a thing or else one exists as a consciousness. The experience of our own body, on the other hand, reveals to us an ambiguous mode of existing” (*PhP*, 231/198). Merleau-Ponty thus shows how bodily existence escapes from the two opposed directions of thought, escapes from dualism; but this demonstration has its price. “In order to prejudge nothing, “ Merleau-Ponty refuses to adopt a positive philosophical position with regard to the body, adopting instead a strategy of double (or maybe triple) refusal. The body as ambiguous is *neither* for-itself *nor* in-itself, and yet is also *both* one *and* the other, *without* becoming being-in-and-for-itself. In showing the irreducibility of the body to either thing or idea, Merleau-Ponty does not grasp the lived experience of the body in its originality; instead, caught up in the oscillation of ambiguity, the body remains caught up in reflexive oppositions and determinations. And in so far the body is grasped through reflexive categories, Merleau-Ponty seems to maintain an idealism. This means, in effect, that although his critique is here directed against idealism, the fulcrum of that critique is still caught up in the conceptual vocabulary of idealism; he should—and ultimately will, by his own hand—be subjected to the same criticism he levels against Husserl. The seeds of his own self-critique are sewn with this notion of bad ambiguity, and come to fruition as he works through its implications; in this regard *Phenomenology of Perception* must be viewed as a transitional work, and, with regard to its explicit aims, it fails. This apparent failure is, however, a necessary one, so that the passage to a more radical philosophical position can take form. Merleau-Ponty’s failure is thus similar to Husserl’s, in that it opens the way to a deeper interrogation and a radicalization of his position.

The unfolding of this possibility can be seen by attending to the complement of the claim

that “*je suis mon corps*.” Even if this claim permits the body to be more than a mere biological mass on the side of the in-itself, it still is an object in the world. This would pose little problem (or perhaps problems of a different sort) in the case of a corpse; but the body qua *corps propre* is a *living* body and a *natural* subject. To say, then, that “*le corps est au monde*” seems to maintain the very dualism that Merleau-Ponty seeks to overcome. Yet, if this claim is interrogated a bit further, a possible route beyond this dualism begins to emerge, even if Merleau-Ponty does not explore the philosophical implications of this route until the period after *Phenomenology of Perception*. What does it mean to be *au monde*? It cannot mean that the body is *in* the world like an ordinary thing, nor does it mean that it is *at* the world as if the world were merely confronting it. Rather, implied in the French *à* is the idea that I *belong to* the world and at the same time that I *orient* myself *to* and am *oriented by* the world; to say that I am “*in* the world” is not incorrect, but the English locative *in* does not fully capture the sense of orientation and belonging. Thus, to be *au monde* both underscores the ambiguity of the body and begs the question: if the body is in the world as both/neither subject and/nor object, then what happens when it qua subject confronts itself qua object? This scenario is played out in the famous description, borrowed from *Ideas II*, of one hand touching the other, of the body’s reflection on itself, when it turns back on itself, or when “it catches itself from the outside engaged in cognitive processes,” making itself into an object.²¹ When I touch my left hand with my right hand, my touching hand grasps my touched hand as a thing; but then I am suddenly aware that my left hand is also sensing. The functional relations are thus reversed, but the hand—be it touching or touched—remains a hand, the same hand but different in function. When I touch myself touching myself, I effect a sort of reflection—and this is in fact the initial emergence of the

cogito as a reflexive cogito, a grasping of itself by itself: the body is thus a subject in that it senses itself, and also an object, in that it is sensed by itself. This peculiar reflexivity or reversibility shows that at one moment the body is a subject existing for-itself, and at the next, an object existing in itself, but never both at the same time. The body thus never manages to coincide with itself. It is precisely because the natural subject is a *non-coincidence* that its structure is understood as a structure of *dehiscence*, as an opening; this opening must also be heard in the *à* of *au monde*. This reflexivity or reversibility of the body is both a defect and a virtue. A defect, because rather than overcoming the opposition of reflexive philosophy, it makes its terms coexist. A virtue, because it reveals the body as an opening, an *Offenheit* to the world, through which the body encounters the world, or through which the *Logos* of the world articulates itself and becomes meaningful for the body. By virtue of this opening, the body is oriented to and situated in the world, and pursuing the implications of the double *à*—which marks at once a transcendence *and* an inherence—Merleau-Ponty is led to a meditation on expressivity; this meditation begins with an examination of the body’s spatiality.

Situated in and by the world, the body adopts a posture with respect to it. This corporeal schema marks the way the body stands out against the background of the world (cf. *PhP*, 237/206); as a *Gestalt*, this schema will have something to do with signification. And indeed, the bodily schema simultaneously marks out the body as a point in space (as an “absolute here”) and relates the body to a horizon (a “there”). The body thus unfurls spaces around itself, and by marking out a here and a there, by marking out the perimeter of an *Umwelt*, the body inscribes signs, and thus signifies. It does so not only in virtue of its structure, but also because of an activity proper to it: the body *moves*. Through its motility, the body is able to encounter the

world and things, can lay claim on the world, has a “preobjective view,” that is, a sensible experience, of the world. Even though they are already there [*il y a le monde*], the things and the world appear *to me* only as a function of the movements of my body. Thus Merleau-Ponty is able to say that “the consciousness I have of my body is a sliding consciousness, the sentiment of a power [*pouvoir*],” or better, that “consciousness is originally not a *je pense*, but a *je peux*” (*PhP*, 160/139), not a cogito but a potentiality, a plurality of possible modes of engagement, a potentiality that is never exhausted because the horizon to which it is directed remains forever inaccessible and unmasterable. Two key, interrelated lessons are to be derived from this discussion of space. The first is that the body definitively gives up whatever thingliness or objectivity it might have had in order to become an ensemble of powers that define it once and for all as a subject (though again, the kind of subject it becomes is clearly not yet the Cartesian cogito, and is still a *natural* self); secondly, and consequently, we see that the body is capable of transcending itself without abandoning itself, and that this transcendence in/as inherence is *institutionary*: “far from my body’s being for me no more than a fragment of space, there would be no space at all for me if I had no body” (*PhP*, 119/102). The prolongation of the body beyond itself institutes by signifying (by making signs, a here and a there) the perceptual field in which the body will encounter the world in a meaningful way; there is thus an originary operation by which the body moves beyond itself, and acquires a more than biological or material existence. Merleau-Ponty names this transcendent mode of bodily being *expression*, and its privileged modality is speech. The analysis of the reflexive structure of the body thus leads us to see an intertwining of institution, expression, and signification, and it will be a profound interrogation of this intertwining after 1945 that leads Merleau-Ponty to transcend his own position in

Phenomenology of Perception. Merleau-Ponty's first attempt to think the implications of this intertwining can be seen in the chapter on "The Body as Expression, and Speech."

c. Expression, Signification, Institution

It is by and large against the specter of a pure language—and thus against Husserl's idealism and promise of a pure universal grammar—that Merleau-Ponty directs his critical analysis of speech in *Phenomenology of Perception*. And, given Merleau-Ponty's explicit interest in the later texts of Husserl, it is possible to say that he is elaborating on what the old Husserl called *Sprachleib*, the living body of speech. Thus the emphasis will be on speech as a use of the body, as a living praxis; and not surprisingly, Merleau-Ponty's position emerges from the familiar pattern of the double refusal. Neither empiricism, which reduces language to a physiological phenomenon and confuses reality with the verbal image, nor intellectualism, which makes language into a purely categorial operation and sees a pure correspondence between sound and meaning, can account for the phenomenon of speech as a whole—that is, neither can account for the living dimension of speech (*PhP*, 194/174-75). The common fault of both is that they suppose a separation of thought and language, suppose that language is in some way the "clothing" of thought. In each case it is a matter of picking up and using ready-made or second-order significations in order to translate a meaning that is already clear to itself. For Merleau-Ponty, the question is not one of a thought already clear to itself that then dresses itself up in ready-made significations in order to externalize itself; rather, his interrogation is addressed to what in speech has the power to "accomplish thought" or to makes it surge forth (*PhP*, 199/178).

His concern, in other words, is to analyze the institutional power of “speaking speech,” and the nature of his inquiry will have to be specified further.

Over against the familiar (non-)alternative, then, Merleau-Ponty makes the deceptively simple argument that “*le mot a un sens*” (*PhP*, 198/177). This does not mean that meaning is contained “in” the word as a naive correspondence theory would hold, nor does it mean that signification is captive to the sonority of the utterance, nor even that a universal syntax or grammar could ever deliver the meanings of empirical languages. Rather, the word has a *sens*, a meaning and a direction, in that it orients the speaker to a particular situation or to things in the world, and this orientation is itself a meaningful disposition toward the world. Implied in this is that the meaning of a linguistic utterance emerges from a prior dynamic and corporeal situation *au monde*, which is itself *also* always already oriented by language. In other words, meaning arises from bodily *expression*, from the body’s *gestures* as it situates itself in the world; but these gestures are themselves never wholly free of language, not purely natural: they are already caught up in language. Merleau-Ponty says that “I reach back for the word as my hand reaches towards the part of my body which is being pricked; the word has a certain location in my linguistic world, and is part of my equipment. I have only one means of representing it, which is uttering it, just as the artist has only one means of representing the work on which he is engaged: by doing it” (*PhP*, 206/180). Linguistic expression, speech, is thus a living praxis, and has a “power of signifying entirely its own,” a power to mark out my place in the world, but that place is already marked out for me by a language that precedes me, because “we live in a world where speech is an *institution* . . . which assumes that the decisive step of expression has been taken” (*PhP*, 213/184). Merleau-Ponty’s concern for the institutional power of speaking speech thus

leads him to pose the question of the origin of language, but his argument demonstrates that our situation in the world is always already a linguistic situation, *une situation langagière*; this implies that since we are already caught up in language, the origin can therefore be thought only from within language, in virtue of a sort of *après coup*. The question of the first word will be taken up again momentarily, but for now, it is clear that Merleau-Ponty is already close to the Heideggerian (and Lacanian) perspective that language has us. For this very reason, he undertakes the analyses of the acquisition of language and the child's relation to others and otherness when he holds the chair in pedagogy at the Sorbonne in the late 1940s. In a thesis that Lacan will develop throughout the 1950s (under the rubric "the Other as Language" or "the Other of Language"), Merleau-Ponty argues that the acquisition of language by the child is also the acquisition of an entire linguistic and cultural history of which the child is unaware, but which will continue to affect the child's relation to the world and to others. The child's place in the world is already determined linguistically before it is born, and it must assimilate this language that is not its own (its mother['s] tongue), and thus alienate itself from itself in order to become part of a community of meaning (the realm of the Symbolic). Thus we can say that insofar as the *le mot a un sens*, language, and particularly speech understood as a gestural use of the body, is a way of orienting us in/to the world, and that this orientation is one over which we have little or no control. It is in this sense that "we are condemned to meaning," and indeed, we learn here "a new meaning of the world 'meaning.' . . . Bodily experience forces us to acknowledge an imposition of meaning that is not the work of a universal constituting consciousness, a meaning that clings to certain contents. My body is that meaningful core that behaves like a general function and which nevertheless exists" (*PhP*, 171-172/146-47). What remains to be thought,

then, is the institutionary power of the gesture, and so we take up again the question of the first word.

For Merleau-Ponty, to pose the question of origin is important in that “our view of man will remain superficial so long as we fail to go back to that origin, so long as we fail to find, beneath the chatter of words, the primordial silence, and as long as we do not describe the action which breaks this silence. The spoken word is a gesture, and its meaning, a world” (*PhP*, 213/184). The question of origin will thus be approached through an analysis of the gesture, but additionally the approach has already been oriented by a clue concerning the nature of the gesture given in the discussion of spatiality: through its own *pouvoir*, the body transcends itself in an institutionary way that unfurls space around the body for the body, opening it to future possibilities of spatial encounter. In like manner, the expressive speech act allows the body to escape the order of the in-itself; but unlike the transcendence of spatiality, the expressivity of speech has the peculiar privilege “that alone of all the expressive operations, speech is capable of sedimenting itself and of constituting an intersubjective acquisition” (*PhP*, 222/190). The cumulative sedimentation of speech carries the body beyond its natural thingliness to cultural product, or more precisely, to an ever growing accumulation of already-constituted significations that themselves constitute the matrix of the cultural world. The body thus sediments itself into language [*langage*], into the Symbolic, through its own bodily use of language [*langue*], through its own Real operations, and is subsequently given over to a world where speech is already an institution. During the period of *Phenomenology of Perception*, this sedimentation is thought to be not so much due to the supplement of writing, which is seen by Merleau-Ponty as only “an essential mutation of speech,”²² but rather to a process internal to speech: “it forgets itself as a

contingent fact,” forgets its anchorage in bodily expression. Moreover, “the function that we divine in language, [i.e.,] that it reiterates itself, depends on itself, or that like a wave reassembles itself and retakes itself in order to project itself beyond itself” (*PhP*, 229/197), leads speech to acquire an independent existence as sedimented, ready-made significations, resulting in the illusion that speech and thought are as external to one another as are body and soul.

It is therefore possible to understand, on the one hand, why Merleau-Ponty characterizes speech as “the excess of our existence over natural being” (*PhP*, 229/197); this excess is nothing other than sedimentation, or speech as an institution, which is due to the internal, speaking power of speech. The result of this institutional power is everyday, spoken speech, the elements of which can be used, recombined and made to yield new significations: words speak about, refer to, and produce more words. For Merleau-Ponty, then, the expressive power of the body unfurls the domain of ideality, of sedimented “equipment,” of a linguistic context up in which the body is caught, and through which its natural bodiliness is overcome. But on the other hand, it becomes increasingly difficult as a result of sedimentation to see how we can speak about the first word. Merleau-Ponty nevertheless does not avoid the question of origin, but his analysis will neither lead us a datable event nor result in a cognitive or evolutionary theory of language. Merleau-Ponty’s implicit suggestion here is that the question of origin can only be approached by means of an *après coup* or a retrospective illusion; the origin will thus be only an effect of the non-origin, as Derrida would say. Insofar as speech is originally a natural gesture, it will be to an analysis of the natural gesture that Merleau-Ponty turns.

The analysis of the gesture leads back to the “silent behaviors” of the body, of which the motile unfurling of space is an example. Once the use of the body has inscribed a “here” and

“there,” bodily gestures can indicate these places, but these gestural indications would be only a mute pointing. Others may well be able to imitate these simple, indicative gestures, and in doing so, they lend their bodies to the world as I intend it through my gestures, and thus through the inner possibilities of their bodily life (i.e., their proprioceptivity and motility), they come to understand the meaning of my gestures. One might therefore conclude that the “natural” gesture has a “natural” meaning, that it “indicates a certain relation between man and the sensible world, that the world is given to the spectator by natural perception, and that the intentional object is offered to the witness at the same time as the gesture itself,” or in short, that the meaning of the gesture is inherent to the gesture (*PhP*, 213/185). This conclusion is, however, only provisional, and is immediately complicated when we consider the emotional gesture. If my face turns red, I clench my fists, and stomp my feet, it would be clear to the spectator in front of me that I am angry, and no cognitive operation on their part would be required to understand my anger. “The gesture does not make [him] think of anger, it is anger itself” (*PhP*, 212/184). Just as with the indicative gesture, the meaning of my anger is “recaptured” by the Other when they adjust their bodily schema to the world as I outline it in my gestures. The inner possibilities of their bodily life allow them to understand my anger, *on the condition* that their body, like mine, is a Western body, and lives in a world where the institution of speech is like mine. Were the Other Oriental, my fits of rage would make little sense. If on the contrary, upon accepting a gift from him I smiled (a gesture which in the West communicates joy and gratitude), the Oriental Other would be insulted, in that the smile expresses anger in Eastern cultures. Given that the emotional gesture appears to be culturally relative, how then is it possible to speak of “natural” gestures and “natural” meaning?

For Merleau-Ponty, the answer is that gestures are neither wholly natural nor wholly cultural. One cannot speak of a pure, naturally expressive sign in the way that smoke betrays fire, nor can one suppose some “natural convention” through which gestural signs are fixed to the object they intend (because “conventions are a late form of relationship between men and presuppose an earlier means of communication”). Rather, we must say that

everything is both manufactured and natural in man, as it were, in the sense that there is not a word, not a behavior which does not owe something to simply biological being—and which at the same time does not slip away from the simplicity of animal life, does not divert vital behaviors from their meaning/direction [*sens*], through a sort of *leakage* [*échappement*] and through a genius for ambiguity [*équivoque*] that may serve to define man. . . . Behaviors create significations that are transcendent with respect to the anatomical apparatus, and however immanent to the behavior as such, since the behavior is taught and is understood Speech is but one particular case of this (*PhP*, 221/199).

Merleau-Ponty once again here describes the motif of transcendence in/as inherence. All expressive behavior, including speech, is anchored in the body as “natural” self, and thus owes something to biology; but precisely the “natural” powers to move, to signify, and to express lift the “natural” self out of the mechanical order of the in-itself. But there is nevertheless *something* about the natural, about nature, *something* that gets diverted and taken up in the order of the Symbolic (without conferring closure upon the realm of the Symbolic, maintaining itself as a rupture, as something that cannot be completely taken up, as something that frustrates the movement of symbolization), *something* in nature that imposes itself and makes possible its own overcoming. In a living, natural being, this *something* can be grasped only as it is expressed, as/in/through expression: “already the simple presence of a living being transforms the physical world” into a world of significations, as seen in the case of bodily movement. If speech is but a

particular case of this motile behavior, then it comes as no surprise that Merleau-Ponty describes its “natural” origin in a particular form of motility, i.e., in terms of e-motion.

In a speculative passage phrased entirely in the subjunctive conditional, Merleau-Ponty argues that *if it were* [*si on pouvait*] possible to suspend all the laws of grammar, syntax, and phonetics, and *if it were* possible to return via a reduction to that moment when a primordial silence was broken by the first word, then we *would probably* discover that all the elements—words, vowels, phonemes—of a language “are so many ways of ‘singing’ the world, and that their function is to represent things not, as a naive onomatopoeic had it, by reason of an objective resemblance, but because they extract, and literally express, the emotional essence of it” (*PhP*, 218/187). With the word “emotion,” Merleau-Ponty seems to be close to what Heidegger expresses with the German words *Befindlichkeit* and *Stimmung*, the disposition and attunement by which we find ourselves in the world. For Heidegger, attunement affects the whole of Dasein, befalls us, seizes us in manner over which we have no control, and in this seizure, reorients Dasein to the world; attunement is not something Dasein chooses for itself. Similarly, the Merleau-Pontian notion of emotion implies that the human body is in the world, present to the world, and that the world affects its whole sensible apparatus—the body is moved by affective, sensate experience, and responds to this affection. The response is emotional expression, an affective disposition, a singing of the world. Thus Merleau-Ponty writes that “the predominance of vowels in one language, or of consonants in another . . . do not represent so many arbitrary conventions for the expression of one and the same idea, but several ways for the human body to sing the world’s praises and finally *to live it*.”²³ The particular song sung by the body is conducted by the way in which it finds itself or lives in the world, and thus particular

languages are only the sedimentations of different attunements. Articulated, vocalized, linguistic signification is thus a prolongation and completion of silent gestures, of emotional and expressive uses of the body. Thus, *if there were* an origin of language, it could only be conceived in terms of an existential structure of our way of inhabiting the world, which, through the power proper to speech, sediments as a cultural institution; but since we philosophers operate from within this institution, we can only speculate about the origin, can only view it as an effect of the non-origin, and we can only do so starting from the structure of the body. Through this interrogation, we at least learn why “the full meaning of a language is never translatable into another,” i.e., because two different languages are different affective and corporeal ways of being in the world; indeed, “we may speak several languages, but one of them always remains the one in which we live.”²⁴ In the end, then, speech and signification are modes of bodily comportment, attuned by and expressive of its situation in the world, and they are privileged modes because of their power to sediment as cultural institutions and thus to forget their origins.

Now, Merleau-Ponty argues with respect to his position on language that “there is nothing resembling the famous naturalistic positions which equate the artificial sign with the natural one, and try to reduce language to emotional expression. The artificial sign does not lead back to the natural sign, because there is no natural sign in man” (*PhP*, 219/188). While it may be true that Merleau-Ponty avoids a naturalism *in* language by arguing that there is no natural correspondence between anatomy and signification, it is equally true that his position concerning language is grounded *on* a naturalism of the body. The entire argument concerning expression is developed starting from the body conceived of a *natural* self that has *natural* powers to transcend itself. If, by following Merleau-Ponty’s argument, one concludes that the origin of

language must be conceived as an existential structure of the body, then likewise must one recognize that the origin has a strictly empirical and natural sense, that language and speech are just particular, expressive uses of the body; in this way, Merleau-Ponty does not escape totally from naturalism: a *weak naturalism* persists. Let us recall what meaning and weight this criticism has.

It was argued earlier that Merleau-Ponty identifies the problem of life as his central question, which, in his first book, is intimately bound to the question of *Gestalt*. His philosophical critique of Gestalt theory leads him to the indiscernible joining where materiality presents itself to perception as a nascent intelligibility, and his explicit task is how meaning emerges at this joining, or as Coghill put it, how the anatomical parts of an animal cohere as an unfurling totality called a living organism. The question is how to conceive this living totality, and thus, at the end of Merleau-Ponty's first book, all questions come back to the problem of perception. The study of the body in his second book is an attempt to address this problem, because "a theory of the body is already a theory of perception" (*PhP*, 265/203). How so? The analysis of the motility of the body reveals that it transcends itself as mere natural thing, and in so doing, marks out a field of meaning, signifies a world. This transcendence is already perception, because "perception is just that act which creates at a single stroke, along with a cluster of data, the meaning which unites them—indeed which not only discovers the meaning which they have, but moreover, causes them to having meaning."²⁵ Perception is nowise understood as an intellectual act of consciousness, but rather as the existential structuring of the world by the body's signifying movements, a structuring that differentiates the world spatially, or more simply, that inscribes differences in the world. It is in this way that "our perceptual life

participates in animality,” as Merleau-Ponty observed in the second course on Nature. Now the problem of perception amounts to understanding precisely how materiality presents itself as a nascent intelligibility, and the analysis of the body is meant to show that the body itself is the motor or mediator of the institution of meaning, the means by which the *Logos* of the world articulates itself. But in *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty does not grasp the body in its originality, as we have seen, but instead seizes it in terms of an irreducible ambiguity, in terms of the double refusal, in terms of the reflexive categories of a philosophy of consciousness; in other words, he does not interrogate Nature and the natural. There may indeed be a stunning analysis of the natural power of bodily transcendence and its implications, but the *ground* of this transcendence—that *something* that imposes itself and governs the operation of transcendence—remains *unthought*. To purge himself of this weak naturalism, Merleau-Ponty must submit this *unthought something* to a radical interrogation. Nature, the natural, natural being remain as the shadow of phenomenology.

Merleau-Ponty’s naturalism is not a naturalism in the traditional sense, but insofar as the question of Nature remains unthought in 1945, it is a weak , and perhaps even naïve, naturalism. And this is no doubt the major reason why he turns, in the 1950s, to a long interrogation of the concept of nature. But in the same text (i.e., the chapter on speech and expression) where this problematic unthought announces itself most clearly, so too does the key idea of institution surge forth in the privilege accorded to the speaking power of speech to institute a sedimented cultural acquisition (the Symbolic), albeit in a fashion starting from the expressive use of the body, and thus contaminated already by the weak or naïve naturalism. Because this unthought must still be unravelled, the analysis of the meaning and significance of institution must be deferred. If the

persistent promise to outline a logic of institution, a word that (along with its German cognates) has dominated the present chapter, is once again delayed, the deferral is justified for the following reasons. On the basis of the reading of phenomenology and of *Phenomenology*, it is possible already to discern the logic of institution as elaborated first by Husserl in his *Crisis* texts, and later as appropriated by Merleau-Ponty. It would be possible, for example, to say that institution is an operation of transcendence whereby a field of meaning is opened in which the past acts of *life* acquire an ideal signification, and then sediment as a cultural acquisition available to everyone to take up again and use as part of the equipment by which living space and living relations are geometrized, mathematized, idealized, communicated, and understood ideally. This sedimented field of meaning has already been named the Symbolic, and through it, the past (i.e., our biological, animal, natural past) survives as an ideal acquisition. But this survival requires a forgetfulness of the originary, living relations that animate the past and that make the institution of the Symbolic possible, such that the past itself can be thought only in and through what it institutes, in virtue of a retrospecularity, an *après-coup*.²⁶ The past, or what Lacan might call the Real, survives in/as the Symbolic (Lacan refers to this particular version of *le petit objet a* as the “leftover” Real, which remains despite symbolization, and operates as the traumatic cause or as that which interrupts the law), but in order for the acts of our life to survive as ideal, *we must die*. Sur-vival implies a going-beyond-life, a transcendence of life, an excess over life. This is precisely why survival also constitutes the promise of an infinitely and indefinitely open future, seen clearly in the case of language, which has the power to reassemble itself in new modes of creative expression. Contained in institution is thus “not just survivals or residues, but also the invitation to a sequel, the necessity of a future,” for institution as the *advent*

of meaning is a surplus of meaning yet-to-come, *à-venir*, a continual coming-forth or coming-to-pass, a continual *adventure* of meaning. The future thus comes at us from out of the past (and here we hear echoes, not only of Heidegger, but also of Coghill). What survives, and what is promised to the future, is the trace of our human finitude, the trace of an ephemeral life: life itself is translated into the eternity of the Symbolic. Implied in this (and here we think we name the great lesson of *Phenomenology of Perception*, which Merleau-Ponty already names as the problem of *Gestalt* in *The Structure of Behavior*, and which he will continue to elaborate and deepen) is the argument that the phenomenon of life is only the symbolic institution to which it gives rise, only the reality of the process. This is why Merleau-Ponty says that we are condemned to meaning: “the problem of the world . . . consists in the fact that *it is all there*” (*PhP*, 230/198).

All of this *could* be said now, but the expression of it would be philosophically inadequate for two reasons. First, in addition to dislodging the elements of a logic of institution, the reading of Merleau-Ponty, and of Merleau-Ponty’s reading of Husserlian phenomenology, has also aimed to show the extent to which both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty remain tributary to a certain subjectivism or idealism; if the effort has been at all successful, then it is clear that Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology in 1945 remains a philosophy of consciousness, which in turn implies that an analysis of institution would remain, as it does in Husserl, an act of consciousness. And this in turn would only underline the force and weight of Beaufret’s critique of Merleau-Ponty, and subject Merleau-Ponty to the same critique he addresses to Husserl. Moreover, the demonstration has shown that Merleau-Ponty’s subjectivism or idealism remains linked to a weak or naive naturalism of the body. Insofar as nature remains the unthought of

Phenomenology of Perception, and insofar as Merleau-Ponty undertakes a radical interrogation of it in the subsequent years, then a full account of institution can be explicated only after Merleau-Ponty moves through the interrogation of Nature, and thus beyond the philosophy of consciousness. With this justification in mind, then, let us conclude this chapter.

3. Conclusion

The critical claim of this chapter has been that Merleau-Ponty does not think the body *as* expression, as the title of his chapter would have us believe, but rather thinks expression *starting from* the body. The body itself is understood on the one hand in terms of a “natural self,” and on the other hand in terms of the reflexive determinations of the double refusal. As such, it is not grasped in its originality, but rather only in terms of its irreducible and ambiguous structure or form. We can thus say that just as Merleau-Ponty criticizes Husserl for bracketing the operativity of material life (what we earlier called the brutality of the brute) in order to grasp the lifeworld in terms of its *eidos*, so too in Merleau-Ponty’s effort is the natural (the *unthought something*) ultimately referred back to a cogito and grasped in terms of a philosophy of consciousness and the language of subjective idealism. Merleau-Ponty is quite clear in his demonstration that this cogito is not the reflective and intellectual consciousness of Kantian idealism, but rather is an embodied and obscure cogito that, through its bodily acts, seeks to bring itself to clear expression. The body, in other words, is subtended and animated by a *tacit cogito* that seeks to utter itself forth and take hold of itself:

when I try to express myself, I crystallize an indefinite collection of motives

within an act of consciousness There is consciousness of something, something shows itself, there is the phenomenon. Consciousness is neither self-positing nor self-ignorance, it is not dissimulated to itself, that is, there is nothing in it that does not in some way announce itself to itself, even though it need not know this expressly (*PhP*, 462/403-404).

The prepersonal or anonymous power of the natural self thus turns out to be the operant intentionality of a tacit cogito, a mute experience seeking to bring its own meaning to expression, and in uttering itself forth in this way, it crystallizes itself as a cogito.

Years later, Merleau-Ponty comes to recognize that the specter of subjective idealism that haunts his 1945 work, and in particular the notion of the tacit cogito, means that the entire effort undertaken there amounts to a psychology; this does not mean that the results must be rejected, but rather reinterpreted. Thus, “I must show that what we might call ‘psychology’ (*Phenomenology of Perception*) is in reality ontology” (*VI*, 230 and 237/176 and 183). This passage to this ontology will require “the elaboration of notions that must replace those of transcendental subjectivity . . . subject, object, meaning,” i.e., the very notions that dominate *Phenomenology*; and indeed, “the problems posed in *Ph.P.* are unsolvable because I started there from the distinction ‘consciousness-object’” (*VI*, 253/200). Not only did Merleau-Ponty start from this distinction, but as we see with the tacit cogito, he remains within in this distinction; the tacit cogito is itself singled out as an “impossible” notion that “does not resolve these problems” but on the contrary is itself the index of a problem. The problem that it names, and to which it is a clue, the problem to which the interrogation of expression also points, is that of institution. If Merleau-Ponty does indeed take Beaufret’s critique seriously, if indeed he has not been radical enough in his reading of phenomenology, not as radical as Heidegger, who abandons altogether the perspective of subjectivity and the language of idealism, then Merleau-Ponty must move

beyond phenomenology as philosophy of consciousness and reinterpret the problem of institution in an ontological perspective in order to overcome the critique. In this regard, his work posterior to 1945 must be read not as a radical break, but as a continuation and a deepening of the problem already circumscribed. (The ontological reinscription of the Husserlian motif of *Stiftung* will bear more than a passing relation to the Heideggerian *Ereignis*, the advent of appropriation, which is bound up with the unfurling of the *Logos* in Heidegger; this assertion would however have to be developed at length. This possible ground of a *rapprochement* between Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger will be left for a future occasion).

Now, it is clear that in order for Merleau-Ponty to proceed, to radicalize his thesis and to deepen his research, he has to go beyond phenomenology as a philosophy of consciousness. But this going-beyond does not entail a rejection. Quite the contrary, Merleau-Ponty proceeds by means of a continued and continuous interrogation of phenomenology and of Husserl's texts, i.e., he continues to interrogate the unthought in Husserl, which in turn leads him to interrogate the unthought in his own work. This is seen clearly in the essay "The Philosopher and his Shadow," written to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of Husserl's birth, and contemporaneous with the courses on Nature. There, Merleau-Ponty circumscribes phenomenology's ultimate task, points out its shadow, the same shadow that lingers in the margins of his own text. To conclude this chapter and to mark the transition to the next, let us look one last time at this shadow and grasp the nature of this ultimate task.

Previously in this chapter, Merleau-Ponty's negative critique of Husserl was emphasized; this critique hinges on the argument that Husserl remains beholden to the categories of reflection, to the vocabulary of idealism, to the Cartesian ontology of the object, that in effect, Husserl's

philosophy is and always will be a philosophy of consciousness, even if in the later Husserl there seems to be the promise of “something else” that phenomenology qua philosophy of consciousness cannot grasp. In the re-reading of Husserl effected in this 1959 essay, that “something else” begins to take form, and it is that to which Merleau-Ponty addresses his investigations. To characterize phenomenology as a philosophy of consciousness is “not the whole truth” (S, 205/162). The other half shows that phenomenology “descends towards the sphere of the *Urpräsentierbare*” (S, 224/178). To take account of this other half brings to the fore a serious problem, that of “the mediation between the world of Nature and the world of persons” (S, 225/178). Now, interestingly, the ‘world’ of which Merleau-Ponty speaks in *Phenomenology of Perception* is described variously as “already there” [*il y a le monde*] or as the “world of our natural life,” but it is never grasped in an originary sense, never subjected to an interrogation. Similarly, the body, a project of this world, is described as a “natural subject” that has “natural powers of expression.” Just as Merleau-Ponty criticizes Husserl for not grasping the *Lebenswelt* in its originality, but rather for subjecting it to a reduction that makes it ultimately a correlate of consciousness, so too does Merleau-Ponty not grasp the world in its originality. He does not grasp the *Leben* of the *Lebenswelt*, he does not grasp nature. In order to be a rigorous phenomenologist, Merleau-Ponty thus has to take account of the other half of the truth of phenomenology—he has to “descend towards Nature” and transcend the philosophy of consciousness in order take hold of the deeper historical and philosophical truth of phenomenology. He is thus led into an interrogation of nature, and thus it is no surprise that he devotes no less than three courses at the Collège to this exact task. At the close of “The Philosopher and His Shadow,” Merleau-Ponty argues that “the ultimate task of phenomenology .

. . is to understand its relation with non-phenomenology”—that is, with what does not belong to, or what escapes from, the philosophy of consciousness. To pursue this “other half”—or what was earlier called “something else”—is not a radical departure from the phenomenological project, and is in fact anticipated—if only in the vaguest of ways—from the moment Husserl articulates the phenomenological reduction: the *epokhe* demands that the naive natural attitude be overcome in favor of the transcendental attitude, in order to bring to the fore the structures by which the subject perceives and knows the object. But this in no way implies a destruction of the world of Nature or the positing of another world of ideas. The Ego is still situated in nature, and the value of the *epokhe* is to bring into relief the structures of this situation. Phenomenology is thus never absolved of the world of nature; and nature always haunts phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes this point in the last paragraphs of his essay, writing that “what resists phenomenology in us—natural being, the ‘barbaric’ principle of which Schelling spoke—cannot remain outside of phenomenology and must find its place in it” (S, 225/178). The ultimate task, then, is to take account of nature.

What is most striking is that in this essay devoted to Husserl, Merleau-Ponty alludes to Schelling as the philosopher who already names—in the figure of the barbaric principle—the problem that phenomenology must confront, and who has thus already engaged in phenomenology’s last task. This allusion, inserted as a hiatus, is not an incidental or accidental remark; it serves as a clue that exhibits the importance of Schelling’s thought for Merleau-Ponty’s late project. This clue will be examined in the next chapter.

3 *Être Sauvage* and the Barbaric Principle: Merleau-Ponty's Reading of Schelling in *La Nature*

At first blush, it may seem unusual to insist that F. W. J. Schelling plays an important role in the formation of Merleau-Ponty's later thought, let alone that he counts among Merleau-Ponty's privileged philosophical interlocutors. Indeed, in Merleau-Ponty's published work prior to the appearance of *La Nature*, Schelling is mentioned explicitly by name only twice, both in the same context: once, we have seen already, in "The Philosopher and His Shadow," and again in the *résumé* for the 1956-57 course on nature, out of which the essay on Husserl grew. Moreover, bibliographic research of secondary materials on Merleau-Ponty prior to 1995 reveals not one single entry on Schelling, and investigations yield only two references to Schelling in the secondary material. The first appears in Paul Ricoeur's introduction to Gary Madison's book: noting the import of the role of contingency in Merleau-Ponty's thought, Ricoeur writes that "existential contingency is now taken up by a movement of the coming to light of Being itself which is no longer in any way an 'accident.' If this is the way it is, is it not to Schelling, who moreover is referred to . . . that one would have to relate Merleau-Ponty rather than to Heidegger and Husserl?"¹ The second appears in Père Xavier Tilliette's volume on Merleau-Ponty in the *Que sais-je?* series, remarking elliptically only that "Merleau-Ponty's concept of nature would thus refer us to the *Naturphilosophie* of German Romanticism, and in particular Schelling's, with which it has much in common."² Given thus the paucity of mention of Schelling by both

Merleau-Ponty and his readers, a proposed a dissertation on “Merleau-Ponty and Schelling” would seem to be based on a pretended relation or on a philosophical fantasy concocted to bring together two apparently disparate philosophers, each of whose projects have been important, accidentally or intentionally, to the formation of this dissertation.³ Sustained only by the authority of Ricoeur, and especially by that of Tilliette, who not only had been Merleau-Ponty’s student in the 1950s but also is *le maître incontesté* of Schelling studies in France, the publication of *La Nature*, in which Merleau-Ponty treats Schelling’s philosophy over the course of twenty-five pages, was greeted enthusiastically as the initial proof that the hypothesis was not, in fact, fantasy.⁴

In the previous two chapters, it has been demonstrated that Merleau-Ponty’s intention, explicit from the beginning, is to re-examine the relations of consciousness and nature. This re-examination begins with the presupposition governing the scientific point of view, namely, that consciousness and nature are external to one another, and that nature itself is only the sum total of exterior events linked by causality. This conception of nature results from the modern reactivation of philosophy, or more precisely, from the “fateful omission” in this reactivation to interrogate its own inner-historical meaning. The scientific or external point of view thinks that it finds meaning in nature, and depends on arguments drawn from either idealism or realism, intellectualism or materialism, to ground and justify its findings, that is, to account for meaning. Merleau-Ponty shows first how none of these options is defensible, and then subjects the external point of view to a critique with the aid of arguments drawn from *Gestalt* theory, and later with the findings of recent research in the theoretical sciences. This critique reveals that the problem the relations of consciousness and nature is in fact a problem of perception, a problem that is

situated at the indiscernible joining, that jointure where the question poses itself: How does materiality present itself, such that it can be perceived as meaningful? The studies of quantum mechanics and animal behavior, which amount to a deeper interrogation of signification, provide some clues to understanding this problem by showing that nature operates independently of our thought (i.e., that there is *life*), and that it is this very operation that makes our thought about nature possible. But still, it is we who perceive this operation at work and who interpret it as meaningful, and so an interrogation of the problem of perception is necessary. Phenomenology teaches us that perception is always a lived experience, that it is incarnated, and therefore that a phenomenology of the body is already a phenomenology of perception. The transition from *The Structure of Behavior* to *Phenomenology of Perception* is a regressive movement, in that we move from perception conceived externally to the inside of perception. The goal of this move is to understand how our natural life, via an expressive power proper to it, gives rise to a network of significations which are then available to us, and with which we turn back on the world in order to signify it, to translate it into signs, so that we read the world as meaningful. But as we have seen, we are born into a world where speech is already an institution, where there already exists a network of significations that we must pick up and learn to use, i.e., we must assimilate ourselves to a language that is not our own, that exists before us and that prepares our place in the world before we enter it; this is what Lacan calls the Other of, or as, language.

The transition is partly accomplished when the *institutionary power of expression* is disclosed as a function of the natural operativity of the body qua *natural self*; but the objective of the move is partly missed as well, in that the body is grasped in terms of the reflexive categories of idealist philosophy, and the meaning of the material and of the natural is not radically

interrogated. Because Merleau-Ponty does not grasp the body in its originality, he is subject to the same critique that he addresses to Husserl: his phenomenology is ultimately a subjective idealism that deploys the strategy of bracketing out content in favor of form, and as such, not a truly radical return to the things themselves.

When Merleau-Ponty named the problem of the indiscernible joining, he already understood that *something* (which has been named variously as materiality, the brutality of the brute, the unreflected, and, finally, nature) imposes itself, *something* that provokes a reflection on it and seize it, but at the same time, *something* that is radically recalcitrant to the categories of reflection.⁵ As long as phenomenology remains a philosophy of consciousness, i.e., a reflexive, idealist philosophy, it will be incapable of taking hold of this unreflected something, incapable of taking hold of the unconscious past out of which consciousness emerges. Now, as a brief aside, it is worth noting that the critique that Merleau-Ponty addresses to phenomenology as a philosophy of consciousness is the similar to the critique that Lacan addresses to Merleau-Ponty: the psychoanalyst insists that Merleau-Ponty's point of view remains a philosophy of consciousness, and as such it can never grasp the "Freudian thing." More critical still, Lacan also insists that Merleau-Ponty's claim that *there is something* is itself a phantasm constructed from within the Symbolic, i.e., that it is only a linguistic construct, a sort of originary myth invented by language. It seems that Merleau-Ponty is not unaware of this problem, and that in part, it motivates his critique of phenomenology; at the same time, it also is clear that Merleau-Ponty would never have been able to adopt or adapt to Lacan's position that everything is merely (a function of) language. He expresses this very objection at the Bonneval conference in 1960 ("Sometimes it makes me uneasy to see the category of language [*langage*] occupy the whole field"⁶); for him,

the opening to Being is not linguistic, but rather, perceptual—in the perception that *there is something*—where also he sees the subsequent birth of the word. To this, Lacan retorts that the emphasis on perception makes psychoanalytic experience inaccessible to Merleau-Ponty, and more precisely, that a psychoanalytic evaluation of the signifier fundamentally alters the nature of perception in a way that phenomenology cannot understand.⁷ There would thus seem to be an irresolvable differend between Merleau-Ponty and Lacan; this is not the place to work through the differend. It is, however, worth mentioning that the differend concerns, on the one hand, an interpretation of the unconscious, and, on the other hand, the (alleged) primacy of perception (or more precisely, how exactly to understand perception and its relation to signification). At the very least, Merleau-Ponty does indeed recognize the import of criticizing phenomenology as a philosophy of consciousness (whether this recognition is fully due to the influence of Lacan is a matter for debate), and he maintains the *perceptual faith* that *there is something*, some brute existence that we experience in the life of our body, something non-linguistic and that is not simply a retrospective effect of the play of language, but that is nevertheless intertwined with language, something very close to what Lacan calls R2, that residue of the Real which resists symbolization, a residue that enters Lacan's work only after Merleau-Ponty's death. Merleau-Ponty's differend with Lacan on these points, which will have to be developed in greater detail elsewhere, will be lurking in the background of this chapter.

That said, it is clear that Merleau-Ponty and Lacan at least agree that if the relations of consciousness and nature are to be radically rethought, it does not suffice to remain on the side of consciousness, especially after this side has been profoundly called into question; this is why the problems of *Phenomenology of Perception* remain unsolved and irresolvable. Indeed, what is

required is a deeper interrogation of nature, which Husserl appropriately called “the other side of man.” In order to be truly radical, to achieve a truly radical revaluation of the relations of consciousness and nature, one would have to ask what about nature escapes the philosophy of consciousness; one would, in other words, have to “think” nature from within. But this is obviously an impossible problem, in that to interrogate nature supposes that one is already on this side of the language one will use to interrogate, or that what one is interrogating is, in fact, something already caught up in language. “The philosopher speaks,” Merleau-Ponty writes, “but this is a weakness in him, and an inexplicable weakness: he should stay quiet, coincide in silence, and rejoin in Being a philosophy that is already made there. . . . His entire ‘*oeuvre*’ is this absurd effort. He was writing to tell of his contact with Being; he has not told of it, and would not know how to tell of it, since it is silence. So he starts again . . .” (VI, 166/125). Philosophy, as the work of reflection, fails in its attempt to make the silent world of perception speak, and it perverts this world by making it speak a language that is not its own. What is required is to let this world speak itself, to coincide with what it says from out of itself. One thing gleaned from the studies of animal behavior and from the phenomenon of expression is that this silent world of nature, of perception, “would *not* be the *contrary* of language” (VI, 233/179), but rather, that it signifies, that it makes signs, that it *invents the visible*.

“There is the world of silence,” Merleau-Ponty argues, and it is “the perceived world [which] is an order where there are non-linguistic [*non-langagières*] significations: yes, non-linguistic, but for all that, they are not *positive*” (VI, 225/171). In the examination of the second course on nature, an examination that perhaps came too early in the present essay, it was disclosed how animal life invents the visible and thus signifies—i.e., how it institutes non-

linguistic significations in the silent world of perception and thus assists in bringing this silence to expression—through its power to differentiate, to inscribe differences, and thus, to signify. Thus the studies of animal life are meant, on the one hand, to demonstrate that *il y a quelque chose* that is neither a mere thing nor a category of language, and, on the other hand, to specify the notion of non-linguistic signification: in that they are not positive, and insofar as they are inscribed by *sensibility*, by the *aisthesis* of corporal and animal life, “the silent persuasion of the sensible is the only way for Being to manifest itself without becoming positivity, without ceasing to be ambiguous and transcendent” (VI, 267/214).⁸ Recognizing the inadequacies of his previous attempts, realizing that his efforts as a philosopher to tell of this *quelque chose* have all failed, Merleau-Ponty the philosopher must start again, must coincide with the silence of the perceived world and try to describe it as it discloses itself. The question of authentic access to this something has already been broached by Merleau-Ponty in the phenomenology of the body, but this phenomenology must be radicalized or pushed to its limits. In any case, Merleau-Ponty is not alone in this task; indeed, he recognizes that Schelling has to some degree already engaged in it. It will thus be through the reading of Schelling in the first course on nature that Merleau-Ponty will be able to pose the problem of nature as an ontological problem, or more precisely, as a problem of institution, of how Being discloses itself in and through the institution of beings, letting them stand forth while itself withdrawing into the oblivion of forgetfulness. Schelling’s work is thus decisive for the elaboration of the Merleau-Ponty’s ontology.

If one asserts that Schelling’s work exercised an influence on Merleau-Ponty, or inversely, that Merleau-Ponty has a “reading” of Schelling, then one must be clear and precise about what work was read, about how Merleau-Ponty prepared his course. While Merleau-

Ponty did have recourse to the original German version of Schelling's *Sämmtliche Werke*, his reading of Schelling is mediated, on the one hand, by the available French translations, which were few, and, on the other hand, by two secondary sources, namely, Karl Löwith's 1935 text on *Nietzsche: The Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same* (which contains a short discussion of Nietzsche's relation to Schelling) and Karl Jaspers's *Schelling* (which had appeared in German in 1955 and had been sent to Merleau-Ponty by the author); these two secondary sources are frequently cited in the course notes.⁹ The three, slim volumes of French translations at Merleau-Ponty's disposal had been prepared by Jankélévitch. The *first* volume is a translation of the "Philosophical Letters on Criticism and Dogmatism," corresponding to *SW*, I: 281-342; Merleau-Ponty makes no reference to these in the course notes. The *second* volume is a collection entitled *Essais* and includes excerpts from several works; if the reading is "mediated" by these translations, this means not only that Merleau-Ponty used the translations in his preparations (even if he sometimes corrected them or spontaneously effected his own), but also that his *exposé* of Schelling's ideas generally follows the order of Jankélévitch's presentation of the excerpts. To this end, listing the contents of *Essais* is in order. The collection opens with two excerpts from *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, namely, the introduction, written for the first edition in 1797, and the appendix to the introduction, written for the revised edition in 1804; these correspond to texts contained in *SW*, II: 1-344. Following this, one finds a scant twenty pages ("The Relations of the Real and the Ideal") from the 1798 text *On the World Soul* (*SW*, II: 359-378). Next, the introduction and the final, "extra-systematic" part of *System of Transcendental Idealism* (*SW*, III: 338-376 and 607-635); the 1804 "Philosophy and Religion" (*SW*, VI: 14-70); the entirety of *Philosophical Inquiries into the nature of Human Freedom* (*SW*,

VII: 333-416); and the *Stuttgart Seminars* (*SW*, VII: 417-487). Up until this point, Jankélévitch presents the texts in historical order, but suddenly, and without apparent reason, the 1799 “Introduction to the First Sketch for a System of the Philosophy of nature” (*SW*, III: 269-326) interrupts the chronology. The remaining texts are all from very late in Schelling’s philosophical career: an excerpt from the “Lectures on the History of Modern Philosophy” (*SW*, X: 1-200), and an excerpt from the 1836 Munich conferences concerning the “Exposition of Philosophical Empiricism” (*SW*, X: 225-286). Thus, after the recoil back to 1799, there is a leap ahead, skipping right over those fecund years from 1811 to 1815, when Schelling was engaged in various attempts to sketch *The Ages of the World*. This gap is filled in, but only somewhat, with the *third* volume of Jankélévitch’s translations, which is a presentation of the third and last version (i.e., the 1815 attempt) of *Ages*, in which no mention is made of the (admittedly rare and difficult to find) previous versions of 1811 and 1813. Merleau-Ponty’s *exposé* of the materials follows almost exactly Jankélévitch’s presentation of them, but is more limited in scope, taking up the excerpts from the three texts comprising the philosophy of nature (i.e., the *Ideas*, the *World Soul*, and the *Sketch*) in the first two sections of the part of the course devoted to Schelling, followed next by a discussion of the 1800 *System* in sections three through five, and then by a more general discussion of the value of Schelling’s work in sections six and seven. The project of *The Ages of the World* is alluded to only indirectly, but in a determinate manner, as we shall see; the essay *On Human Freedom* is mentioned only in the *résumé*, also in a determinate manner.

Given all this, then, the claim that Merleau-Ponty had a “reading” of Schelling may well be overly generous. Nevertheless, there is, in fact, something of fundamental importance at stake

in Merleau-Ponty's engagement with Schelling's thought, something that imposes itself on, and helps to shape, Merleau-Ponty's project. The aim in this chapter is to take account of that something. The chapter will unfold, first, by situating Schelling in Merleau-Ponty's itinerary, not only in the course on nature but also with an eye to what comes later. Next, it will turn to and develop a number of key moments in Schelling's thought, guided by the plan of the course on nature. Schelling's work will thus be elaborated beyond what Merleau-Ponty said of it, taking the risk, as Merleau-Ponty did with respect to Husserl, of sometimes pushing Merleau-Ponty in a direction he may not have wished to go. This risk is justified, because the notes contained in *La Nature* were taken by an unknown student auditing the course; as such, they represent not so much what Merleau-Ponty said or thought, but rather, what the student heard and managed to document. One could easily complain about the *quality* of this documentation—some of the notes, especially at the beginning of the course, are sparse and disjointed, the arguments lacking in development, marked by clear lapses in attention on the part of the student and by mistakes in citations. Finally the prose is clearly not the polished, elegant prose of Merleau-Ponty's texts. Yet at the same time one can sympathize with this unknown student, since every student has been in this position, shared in this lived experience: it is quite imaginable that the student sometimes documented only what interested him or her that day, that at other times he or she was taken up in the reverie of thought provoked by what was said, and that on some occasions the student noted only what he or she did not understand, etc. The student did not know that someday these notes would be accredited to Merleau-Ponty himself, did not know that someday the notes would be made public and circulate in a community of scholars, for surely if the student had known this, the notes would be much better.¹⁰

But complaining about their quality will yield no interesting results. It might be more fruitful to attend the fact that these notes *are documented*. One of the key claims of “The Origin of Geometry” is that documentation is the last “step” in the original institution of ideal objects, preceding first by the inventor’s internal iteration, and then the linguistic embodiment [*Sprachleib*] in the community. Husserl writes:

Now we must note that the objectivity of the ideal structure has not yet been fully constituted through such actual transferring of what has been originally produced in one to others who originally produce it. What is lacking is the persisting existence of the ‘ideal objects’ even during periods in which the inventor and his fellows are no longer wakefully so connected or even are no longer alive. What is lacking is their continuing-to-be even when no one has realized them in self evidence. The important function of written, documenting linguistic expression is that it makes communication possible without immediate or mediate personal address; it is, so to speak, communication become virtual.¹¹

For Husserl, then, documentation is necessary for the ideal object to be fully what it is. Both Merleau-Ponty and Derrida hear in this that written documentation is not simply a substitute or degradation of speech, not a mere aid to memory. The necessity of written documentation arises because something is lacking in the ideal structure, and this lack must be filled if the ideal object is to be what it is. What is lacking? What does writing bring to the scene in order to complete it? Husserl is clear: “persisting existence.” Writing thus effects a transformation in the ontological status of the ideal-structure, endowing it with “supratemporality,” as Merleau-Ponty says (NC2, 11), or “non-spatio-temporality” in Derrida’s rendering.¹² This supratemporality conferred onto the ideal object by writing does not mean that the object then exists outside of time; rather, the ideal object becomes “sensible” and “public,” it circulates freely in the community, it becomes part of the equipmental context, it is “incarnated,” and sediments into a world where speech is already an institution. The study of the institution of ideality has shown

that, once instituted, ideal objects are not governed by any hard and fixed rules except usage; nor is the ideal object a closed entity, but rather, “generic realities” or “ambiguous beings,” and, in that they are subject to use, they are also subject to mutation and deformation caused by their own internal possibilities. They are “like a new language” in that we do not know what they will produce, just as Pythagoras did not know that his theorem would someday produce the quadratic formula, just as the poet does not know how her language will reorganize itself in a new meaning, just as the weaver, whom the writer resembles, “works on the backside of his material and then suddenly finds himself surrounded by meaning” (*S*, 56/44-5). Insofar as documentation is an essential step in the institution of ideality, it is bound up with *Stiftung*; but there is more to this story of writing.

Documentation in fact serves a double necessity: on the one hand, it takes the idea out of the iterative loop in the head of the inventor, thus giving it objectivity; on the other hand, it puts the ideal object back into use, conferring upon it an intersubjectivity. In the movement of this double necessity, documentation makes possible *virtual* communication, which means that the *presence* of the actual inventor is no longer required. Thus in order for an originary meaning-structure to survive as an ideal object, in order for the ideal object to have a life of its own in a community, the author must *die*. Thus writing implies what Derrida calls “a transcendental sense of death,”¹³ and Merleau-Ponty makes reference to this idea at least twice. In the 1959-1960 course notes for “Husserl at the Limits of Philosophy,” which comprises a careful translation of, and commentary on, Husserl’s “Origin of Geometry,” Merleau-Ponty speaks of Camus the person and Camus the writer in the context of the “inevitable discordance between author and reader” (*NC2*, 12). If we meet a living author, we ask him to make “clarifications about what he

wrote 20 years ago, and we don't believe him if he says something" other than what we expect; even more unbelievable is the author's claims that his work is still ahead of him. We quickly reduce him to what he has already said and already done. We thus make him into a text, we do not care about his life today or about his current projects for the future; we want to *understand* the author, and to accomplish this, we must kill him. Camus the writer is already written; his ideas, words, and texts can be communicated virtually, and have already become virtual idealities, allowing us to speak about "Camus," to reduce him to a theme, to idealize him and to situate him in a tradition. But also, the becoming-virtual of Camus institutes him as a network of significations, signposts that mark out a field of meaning known as "Camus," into which we can insert ourselves, and by which we can oriente ourselves to something beyond the field, something as yet unknown, but which our engagement with "Camus" will disclose (NC2, 13). In order for Camus to become "Camus," Camus had to die. In this way, writing implies death for Merleau-Ponty, just as it does for Derrida.

It is in exactly this same vein that Merleau-Ponty speaks of Husserl in the opening pages of "The Philosopher and His Shadow." Over against the objectivating and appropriative tendency deployed by the tradition in its manner of interpreting a philosopher, a method that "wants the meaning of the work to be entirely positive and susceptible in principle to being put in the form of an inventory that delimits what there is in the work and what is not there," Merleau-Ponty prefers to interpret in a dialogical or interrogative milieu, "where the philosopher of whom we are speaking and the philosopher who is speaking are present together" (S, 202/160). Present *together*, but *not* present *to* one another. Husserl is, after all, *dead*. What, then, does it mean to be present *together* when the philosopher of whom we are speaking is dead, is absent?

Minimally, it implies a non-presence. More specifically, though, Merleau-Ponty writes that “when Husserl *ends his life* [*termine sa vie*: arrives at the end, brings it to term, the *terminus*], there is an unthought in Husserl that is really his and that nevertheless opens onto something else” (S, 202/160). Thus, Husserl’s presence is lacking, it is a non-presence, and only because Husserl’s productive, thoughtful life has been translated into the ideal life of significations that endure long after the man has died can we advance, starting from what he thought, to what remains unthought. Documentation, implying the death of the author, thus does not give us “objects of thought,” but rather marks out a space or milieu for thinking to occur, a space where the philosopher meets his shadow. Documentation, as the institution of an ideal object, or of the text or the work of a dead writer, institutes a signifying field, a field of differential signs, a field articulated by “the reflections, shadows, levels, and horizons between things,” into which we must advance, and by which we orient ourselves and our thinking, taking up (or being swept away by) what is already there and moving beyond it to “something else.” Like all institution, documentation marks an “invitation to a sequel and the necessity of a future,” and like all institution, it involves what Derrida named a “transcendental sense of death,” a death of the living past or of the author, a forgetting of origins.

The course notes on *La Nature*, despite whatever one may say about their quality and accuracy, present the documentation of a once living speech and with the invitation to pick up what is there, to be carried away by it, and to engage in thinking. If one therefore pushes Merleau-Ponty where he himself did not wish to go, it is in response to his own invitation to do so. And if one does not join the tragic chorus that always laments Merleau-Ponty’s “untimely death,” it is because Merleau-Ponty himself gives reason not to. Merleau-Ponty is dead, and only

because he collapsed of a mortal thrombosis at the height of his career does Merleau-Ponty the person become “Merleau-Ponty” the writer, or the written; he becomes a shadow, a clandestine companion whose thought points to what is unthought. The manner of interpretation observed in this essay thus follows Merleau-Ponty’s own, and with this justification, the assertion that there is indeed a “reading” of Schelling is valid, as long as the assertion is accompanied by the recognition that “to think is not to possess the objects of thought,” but rather to think according to them. Emerging now from this long digression, it is time to situate Schelling in Merleau-Ponty’s thought, first within in the first course on *La Nature*, which will require a global consideration of the course itself, and then more generally with respect to the formation of Merleau-Ponty’s project. Such a situation will then give way to a more detailed examination of some motifs in Schelling’s work, and finally to a discussion of what use Merleau-Ponty makes of Schelling.

1. Situating Schelling in the first course on *La Nature* (1956-57).

The retrospective *résumé* prepared at the end of the academic year attests that the point of the first course on nature was “not to do a history of the concept of nature,” but rather “to take as a reference the Cartesian concept of nature, which, for better or worse still overhangs our ideas about nature,” and to disengage the elements necessary for the resolution of problems associated with Cartesian ontology (that is, the “fantastic image of man, of spirit, and of history” that result from it) (*R*, 92-3/130-1). The way in which the course unfolds, and how Schelling is situated in it, needs to be considered; but first, it is worth noting how this course is unusual with respect to

the previous courses that Merleau-Ponty had given at the Collège de France. From 1952 to 1956, Merleau-Ponty normally gave two courses: one on Monday, typically seminar-style, and oriented towards the careful examination of texts; and the other on Thursday, typically lecture-oriented. Usually the two courses were thematically linked, such that what was derived from working through the texts on Monday was sublated in Thursday's lectures, which would then govern how the next Monday's texts were read. Thus, in 1952-53, there were courses on "The Sensible World and the World of Expression" and "Studies in the Literary Use of Language." These were followed in 1953-54 by a lecture course on "The Problem of Speech" and a seminar concerning "Materials for a Theory of History." The courses in 1954-55 were on "Institution in Personal and Public History" and on "The Problem of Passivity," and these were followed the next year by a pair of courses on "Dialectical Philosophy." It is clear that the two principal concerns for Merleau-Ponty are expression and history. Following this movement of courses, Merleau-Ponty begins his series on nature, the lectures of which are given on *both* Monday *and* Thursday; this plan is followed the next year (1957-58), and then the series is interrupted in 1958-59 with one single course on "The Possibility of Philosophy Today," before resuming with "Nature and Logos" in 1959-1960, the same year as the reading course on "The Origin of Geometry." The first two courses on nature are thus unusual, first, in that they occupy Merleau-Ponty's entire workload, and second, in that they seem to disrupt the flow of the first series of courses on language and history, marking a transition to more ontologically oriented courses. Merleau-Ponty himself does not give any justification for this study of nature. Chapter two argued that this turn to nature is Merleau-Ponty's own *Rückfrage*, his turning back on his own work in order to disclose its inner-historical development and its own unthought presuppositions.

However, by presenting the unfolding of the courses in this way, a larger context for the courses on nature becomes manifest; this larger context presents itself as an argument concerning the reasons why Merleau-Ponty chose to devote three years to the theme.

The years following the publication of *Phenomenology of Perception* are devoted to the elaboration of a theory of expression (and this is confirmed in the presentation of the suite of the courses). This theory has two forms or two moments. On the one hand, it is comprised of linguistic, literary, and “painterly” research into the phenomenon of expression; on the other hand, intertwined with these researches are the elements of a general theory of intersubjectivity, the coexistence of men and women in a culture where ideas and values circulate in a community or tradition, in a single, shared history, in “our common truth,” the lifeworld (and this is, no doubt, why Merleau-Ponty returns to meditate on “The Origin of Geometry” in 1959). *The theory of expression thus becomes a philosophy of history, and these two versions or moments of expression are joined by the concept of institution.* The courses on nature follow immediately after the course on institution. Why? The concept of institution shows how the Symbolic arises, and how this results in a forgetting of origins, such that it *appears* consequently that the Real is only a retrospective construction in the Symbolic. The forgetting of origins provokes a crisis of meaning, from which there derive “fantastic images” of man, mind, culture, and history, or in other words, a ghostly *immaterialism*, which would seem to deny the fact that we are living, material creatures that have bodies (R,121 /155). If such an immaterialism is to be avoided, then the *ground [sol]* of institution must be interrogated; this ground is determined as nature, and only through an interrogation of this ground can the operation of institution be understood better and in an ontological register. In this regard, the concept of nature is a *generic* title that names a

certain type of being: *that which is not instituted, but which is the ground of institution*; by investigating this ground, Merleau-Ponty wants to show that there is a real operation—that something happens in the Real—so that it transcends itself as the Symbolic. This is one of the principal reasons why the courses on nature are situated as they are in the *suite* of courses at the Collège de France, as well as that which assigns them their singular importance.

That said, let us return to an examination of the first course on nature. Divided into two “parts” (the first of which is subdivided into an introduction and four “chapters,” the second into an introduction and three “chapters”), the course begins, as any course does, with a *teaser*. Asking why we should even bother to study nature, especially if our idea of it is only ever “the product of a history during which it acquired a series of accepted meanings that end up making it intelligible,” (i.e., that it is only a retrospective construction, and thus wholly taken up in the Symbolic), Merleau-Ponty responds that there is nevertheless a “primordial, non-lexical meaning” that is obscured or lost in this history and that must be recuperated (*N*, 19). This primordial sense comes originally from the Greek nominal form *physis*, defined by Liddell-Scott (from which is here offered but a selection) as “II. a. nature, the order or law of nature; b. origin, birth . . . III. the universe. . . IV. as a concrete term, creatures or animals,” and verbal form *phuo-*, defined as “A. *trans.* 1. To bring forth, to produce; 2. concerning men, to beget, engender, generate; . . . B. *pass.* 1. To grow, wax, arise . . . ; 2. to be born, to be descended from.” The verbal term is subsequently translated in Latin as *nascor*, and eventually into the French as *naitre*, *vivre*, to be born, to live. This more primordial sense is thus associated with generation and generativity, with life and living, with coming-to-pass, with the advent of creatures.¹⁴ Over against the decrepit Cartesian concept that robs nature of its materiality, its generative capacity,

and its sensuousness, Merleau-Ponty wants to retrieve this more primordial sense. If this sense is taken seriously, then what is discovered is that:

There is nature wherever there is a life that has meaning, *but where, however, there is not thought*. . . . nature is what has a meaning without this meaning having been posited by thought: it is *the autoproduction of a meaning*. nature is thus different from a simple thing. It has an interior, is determined from within. . . . And nature is different from man: it is not instituted by him, and is opposed to custom, to discourse.

nature is the *primordial*, that is, the non-constructed, the *non-instituted*. . . . nature is an enigmatic object, an object that is not an object at all; it is not really in front of us. It is our *ground* [*sol*]*—not what is before us, but rather, that which carries us.* (N, 19-20).

Here, the themes discussed a moment ago are confirmed: nature is the *non-instituted*, the *auto-production* of meaning, i.e., that which makes institution possible; as such, it names the problem of *ground* (and we note in advance that Merleau-Ponty construes the problem of ground as institution; as such, he will be less concerned to think through the fecundity of nature in itself than to understand how this productive operation of the Real transcends itself and institutes the Symbolic). Moreover, nature is where there is no thought, beyond the limits of reflection; once thought comes on to the scene, there is no longer nature, or rather, nature has been worked-over by the categories of thought, and is thus de-natured. This theme is hardly unique to Merleau-Ponty, and readers of Schelling will also recall it from the opening pages of the “Introduction” to the *Ideas for a Philosophy of nature*, where he writes:

How a world outside of us, how a nature and with it experience, is possible—these are questions for which we have *philosophy* to thank; or rather, *with* these questions, philosophy came to be. Prior to them, mankind had lived in a (philosophical) state of nature. At that time, man was still at one with himself and the world about him. In obscure recollection this condition still floats before even the most wayward thinker. Many never lose it and would be happy in themselves if the fateful example did not lead them astray; for nature releases no one willingly from her tutelage, and there are no *native* sons of freedom. (SW, II:xx/10).

For Schelling, philosophy as a work of freedom is that idealizing act that separates or divorces (here already the theme of *Scheidung* announces itself) mankind from the bosom of nature, that act by which he turns back on nature, thus separating himself not only from her protection, but also, insofar as he is her son (and not a native son of freedom), separates himself from himself. What was originally whole is “dissected” and split asunder by philosophy, and as such, philosophy is necessarily ruinous; for this reason Schelling calls it “a spiritual sickness in mankind.” His judgment concerning the philosophical denaturing of nature is severe:

So long as I myself am *identical* with nature, I understand what a living nature is as well as I understand my own life; I apprehend how this universal life of nature reveals itself in manifold forms, in progressive developments, in gradual approximations to freedom. As soon, however, as I separate myself, and with me everything ideal, from nature, nothing remains to me but a dead object, and I cease to understand how a life outside of me can be possible (*SW*, II:xx/36).

Thus, philosophy is not only a spiritual sickness, but also results in the death of living nature. It is thus not surprising to find in Schelling’s work a critique of philosophical reflection that parallels Merleau-Ponty’s. Schelling, like Merleau-Ponty, asks: if philosophy as reflection cannot access nature without denaturing it, then what can? How is it to be thought from the inside? How does it produce meaning from out of itself? Schelling gives a clue that anticipates Merleau-Ponty’s own orientation to the problem: “I am myself *identical* to nature,” which, at first blush, means that, in virtue of this identity, nature discloses itself through me. This idea was already discerned at the basis of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the body: the structures of the body disclose the *logos* of the sensible world; but Merleau-Ponty failure to grasp the body in its originality is one of the principal motivations for the passage through nature. The reading of Schelling will have its effects in leading Merleau-Ponty to radicalize and to reinscribe that which remained

unthought in his earlier work. In the introduction to the 1959-1960 course, i.e., *after* he has read Schelling, he notes in a manner strikingly similar to Schelling that

what we are seeking . . . is a true *explicitation* of Being, i.e., not an exhibition of a Being, even infinite, in which operates—in a manner incomprehensible to us in principle—the articulation of beings on one another, but the unveiling of Being. . . . It is thus necessary for us that the nature in us have some relation with the nature outside of us, and it is even necessary that *the nature outside of us be unveiled by the nature that we are* (N, 266-67).

One of the stakes in Schelling's work, and in Merleau-Ponty's reading of it, is a critique of reflection, and thus also of phenomenology; these will be taken up later in the chapter. For the moment, however, it is worth noting both these shared concerns of Merleau-Ponty and Schelling, and that their articulation occasions a final justification for these courses on nature. As a means to continue the analysis of the course, let us consider briefly this ultimate justification.

If Merleau-Ponty finds a more originary sense of nature in the Greek *physis* as generation, birth, life, growth, or flourishing, he also recognizes that the discourse of modern philosophy has only provided aberrant images of this more primordial sense and that this is the best philosophy can do. Thus his project is both to reactivate a more originary sense, and to study these aberrant images as the means for this reactivation (and recall that this aberration is due to the fateful omission of the modern reactivation of the sense of philosophy, discussed in chapter two). Thus, he will take the Cartesian concept of nature as a "point of reference," because it dominates, in some form or other, the traditional scientific thinking about nature, and then, by a turn to the sciences, he will attempt to dislodge the elements of an alternative view that is itself grounded in our lived experience of nature. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty is not proposing a philosophy of nature; rather, in the introduction to the third course, in 1959-1960, the ultimate justification for

this turn to nature (and the way in which this turn is to be characterized) is that nature is to be understood

as a leaf or layer of Being -- The ontology of nature as a way into ontology, the way that we prefer here because the evolution of the concept of nature is a more convincing propaedeutic, and shows more clearly the necessity of ontological mutation. We will show how the concept of nature is always an *expression* of an ontology—and a *privileged* expression (*N*, 265).

Thus, the project is not a philosophy of nature, but rather a study of nature that inscribes itself in an explicitly ontological project, as an *expression* of an ontology, thus returning us to the question of expression and *Stiftung*. The *privileged* character of this expression is to be found in the *history* of its expression, which does not begin with Descartes, but clearly finds there a fundamental mutation that, in its turn, necessitates a change in orientation, from philosophy or phenomenology to (we say provisionally) ontology, or (as Merleau-Ponty said more and more frequently), *non-philosophy*. Let us now consider this Cartesian mutation, and turn to the content of the course.

Some cursory remarks on the Stoic sense of nature precede the short section on Descartes (to whose conception of nature Merleau-Ponty returns in the second and third courses, finally devoting a whole course to “L’ontologie cartésienne” in 1960).¹⁵ There are, in fact, according to Merleau-Ponty, *two* concepts of nature in Descartes, each stemming from the same conception of God as infinite, as *naturans* or natural productivity, but each developing in opposed directions, resulting in what Merleau-Ponty calls an ontological diplopia or strabism. On the one hand, if God is an infinite productivity, then nature is only product, “the exterior realization of a rationality that is in God” (*N*, 266), and as such, has no interiority of its own. Nature is thus understood as *partes extra partes*, as exteriority or extension, and as such, is conceived as a

machine, produced and operated by the Demiurge, governed by a system of laws that themselves derive according to necessity and as necessary from God's infinity. While only the infinite mind of God can know the whole of nature, each of its parts can be known by a finite mind through the *lumen naturale* of pure understanding, which gives us the certitude that the world is what it is because it could not be something else, and even if God had created the world as chaos, it would still evolve into *this* world by the necessity of the laws deriving from God. God alone is capable of positing the whole as an object. In this sense, nature as product, as *naturata*, is entirely posited by God, and is understood as the positive object, which then becomes the model of Being. To this conception of nature in Descartes, Merleau-Ponty gives the name "ontology of the object" (*N*, 169ff).

But at the same time, and on the other hand, alongside of this conception Descartes maintains that the world is effectively real; that is, he maintains that "we are not in relation with correlates of thought, but with realities . . . which cannot be understood by pure mind," but to which we are oriented in virtue of our bodily *natural inclination* (*N*, 171). To this conception of nature, Merleau-Ponty gives the name "ontology of the existent" (or sometimes "ontology of the event" or the "ontology of the element," in *N*, 173).¹⁶ The problem here for Descartes is with the conception of the body. If the previous hypothesis is maintained, then the body would be conceived as a collection of parts or as a machine; and yet, the experience of the body reveals that it is held together as a unity by the power of the soul. Here's the diplopia according to Merleau-Ponty: if one maintains the first hypothesis, then one cannot think the unity of the body and the soul, but if one maintains the second, then one cannot think their difference; Descartes wants to think *both* the unity *and* difference of body and soul at once (*N*, 173). His only strategic

recourse is to reject the ontology of the existent from the field of pure understanding: *we* finite creatures cannot understand the unity of body and soul, though we might be able to have a sentiment of it; ultimately, then, it is only God in whom the contradiction is resolved (to anticipate, Schelling is going to say quite the contrary, i.e., that only because God is contradiction is there *life*). The ontology of the existent is thus suppressed, its problems neutralized in God, and the notion of necessary being, and thus also the ontology of the object, takes center stage.¹⁷ For Merleau-Ponty, Descartes's diplopia, this tension between two ontologies of nature, is the very tension that characterizes Western philosophy, and the resolution of this tension in favor of the ontology of the object gives an essentialist, objectivist determination to the tradition from Descartes to Husserl (as discussed in chapter two). Indeed, in the chapter following the one on Descartes, Merleau-Ponty shows how this tension is displaced or translated into a humanism in Kant and Kantianism, while retaining all the same contradictions, which are (barely) staved off by the *als ob*.¹⁸

It is at this point that Schelling first appears in the course, in the chapter entitled "The Romantic Concept of nature," preceded with the question: "must we not discover a new sense of the word 'nature', as residue that we cannot eliminate, a romantic idea of a *savage* nature?" (*N*, 58). With this question, Merleau-Ponty gives a preliminary justification for the turn to Schelling: the Cartesian concept and its heirs consider nature only as a formal idea, without any real content, for the understanding; this formal conception has no interior, and, as in Husserl, the content, or what was earlier called the brutality of the brute, is bracketed or suspended. By thus turning to the Romantic conception as developed by Schelling, Merleau-Ponty expects to find a radical challenge to the Cartesian idea; this in turn will allow him to push his own thinking

beyond the limits of phenomenology, to overcome the formality of the idea of nature and return to the real operation of its material content. Its materiality is thus *sauvage*, so let us turn now to the “chapter” on Schelling in order to see how the Prince of the Romantics is situated with respect to the whole. On the basis of this, the role and function of Schelling’s thought in the development of the course will be determined more clearly. This situation is *double*.

In the *résumé*, we find confirmed what we already suspect: Schelling is situated in the first instance as the philosopher who “most overtly challenges the Cartesian idea of necessary being” and the ontology of the object, and who thus attempts to liberate the ontology of the existent (*R*, 142-43/106). The Cartesian “idea of natural being as object-in-itself *is* what it *is* because it cannot be something else, [and it] emerges from an idea of being without restriction, infinite or cause of itself, and this in its turn [emerges] from an alternation of being and nothing”: a metaphysical idea (*R*, 144/108). For Schelling, on the other hand, “the Absolute is no longer being the cause of itself, the absolute antithesis of nothingness, and nature no longer has the absolute positivity as the ‘only possible world’” (*N*, 73). As response to the Cartesian conception, Merleau-Ponty sees in the Schellingian conception

the primordial being which is *not yet* the being-subject *nor* the being-object . . . from it to us there is *neither* derivation *nor* caesura; it has *neither* the serrated texture of a mechanism *nor* the transparency of a whole anterior to its parts; we can conceive it *neither* as it engenders itself, which would make it infinite, *nor* as it would be engendered by another, which would lead it to the condition of a product and of a dead result. (*R*, 95/133-4).¹⁹

The challenge then will be to conceive natural being in a primordial and a non-metaphysical way, for to do otherwise would yield only abstract and dead results. In this way, Merleau-Ponty shares Schelling’s objection that “the whole of modern European philosophy since its inception

(through Descartes) has this common deficiency—that nature does not exist for it and that it lacks *a living ground*” (SW VII: 356/30). We once again are reminded that the problem of *nature* also names the problem of *ground*, as well as that of *life*.

Schelling’s work thus presents itself to, and is situated by, Merleau-Ponty in the first place as a critique of the Cartesian ontology of the object; more precisely, Merleau-Ponty rightly points out that this critique arises out of, and is oriented by, Schelling’s engagement with the Kantian permutation of this ontology. This will be taken up later; for the moment, let us continue to examine how Schelling is doubly situated in the course. The “chapter” is divided into three parts; the first is devoted to Schelling, while the second and third are devoted respectively to Bergson and Husserl, two thinkers not normally associated with Romanticism. If, in the first instance, Schelling’s work is a response to Descartes’s, then in the second, Schelling’s philosophy forms the background for these two twentieth-century thinkers, who are, to a certain extent, viewed as different heirs to the Schellingian legacy. The Bergsonian critique of metaphysics hinges on a conception of Being as primordial and temporal, from out of which is developed the thesis of a natural operation that is neither mechanism nor teleology. When Husserlian phenomenology flounders at the limits of reflexive philosophy when it encounters nature, it is led to unexpected consequences, articulated by Husserl in the unpublished manuscripts.²⁰ Two different directions, sometimes opposed, but largely contemporaneous, are thus anticipated by Schelling, one concerning natural productivity, the other the limits of reflexive philosophy.

Merleau-Ponty’s critique of idealism in Husserl will soon be completed thanks to the reading of Schelling unfolding here. In brief, the reading of Schelling will be the occasion to

place Husserlian phenomenology and Bergsonian positivism in direct but productive opposition, which, in its turn, will allow Merleau-Ponty to free himself from the residues of idealism in phenomenology (and thus to push it beyond philosophy of consciousness), and the residues of positivism in Bergsonism (and thus to read Bergson more generously than he had previously, placing an emphasis on “the negative at the heart of being”).²¹ Through this negotiation, Merleau-Ponty’s own position begins to emerge; what allows Merleau-Ponty to bring Husserl and Bergson to the bargaining table is the preliminary reading of Schelling.

(Indeed, the focus will remain on *phenomenology* as the Schellingian legacy in Merleau-Ponty’s thought is explored. If there were still a notion of completeness governing this text, then there would have to be a complementary discussion of that other contemporary heir, i.e., Bergson, following, as Merleau-Ponty does, the development of Bergson’s thought from *Matter and Memory* to *Creative Evolution* and beyond. Attention would have to be given, in particular, to the interpretation Merleau-Ponty gives of the ideas of *matter*, *duration* and *élan vital*. In addition, there would have to be an examination of Bergson’s critique of metaphysics, or more precisely, his critique of Positive Being, which *is* fully what it *is* in virtue of its overcoming a Nothingness different from and preceding it (note that it is this very critique that Merleau-Ponty uses against Husserl, as seen in chapter two, above). Over against this metaphysical conception, Bergson attempts to articulate a concept of the negative within the very heart of Being, as part of Being’s operation. On this point, Merleau-Ponty notes that Bergson is neither a positivist nor a metaphysician: Being is what it is, not by virtue of having overcome a Nothing that precedes it, but rather, because of the labor of the negative within it. This idea, inherited from Schelling, stands as an invitation to read Hegel and Heidegger on this issue as well. This Bergsonian

thread, however, need not be pursued here; instead, it will suffice to claim that, with regard to Bergson, Merleau-Ponty wants to emphasize the negative in the very heart of Being, which was inherited by Bergson from Schelling, via Ravaisson. The intricacies of this analysis of the other branch of the family tree descending from Schelling can thus be left for another time.)

The situation of Schelling in the course is thus *double*, on the one hand, with respect to what has come before, and on the other hand, with respect to what is yet to come. Having now made some general observations on the course and Schelling's double situation within it, an examination of Schelling's place in Merleau-Ponty's later thought is the next order of business. This examination is preliminary to a consideration of Schelling's work in greater detail. This strategy will give the sense of what purpose the reading of Schelling serves, and will thus also provide the occasion to *re-situate* Schelling with respect to Merleau-Ponty's project.

2. Re-situating Schelling in Merleau-Ponty's work after *La Nature*.

"The Philosopher and His Shadow," where Schelling is first explicitly mentioned as the philosopher who has already engaged in the ultimate task of phenomenology, dates from 1958, and is thus contemporaneous with the courses on nature. Merleau-Ponty invokes Schelling in this important essay because Schelling has already attempted to bring into philosophy what remains resistant to it, and more importantly, has named this resistant remainder *the barbaric principle*. Without getting too far ahead, it is fair to suppose that, in virtue of a textual synonymy, the trace of Schelling is to be read wherever Merleau-Ponty invokes the barbaric. In both published and unpublished writings of the same period (i.e., 1956-1961), several such allusions are to be found,

allusions that give an indication of the importance of Schelling for Merleau-Ponty's project.

Perhaps the most important of these references is found in a working note dated November 1960, which is worth citing in its entirety:

"Nature is at the first day" [*au premier jour*]: it is there today.

This does not mean: myth of indivision and coincidence as *return*.

The *Urtümliche*, the *Ursprüngliche* is not of long ago [*d'autrefois*] in the past. It is a question of finding in the present the flesh of the world (and not in the past), an "always new" and "always the same" – A sort of time of sleep (which is Bergson's nascent duration, always new and always the same). The sensible, nature, transcend the past-present distinction, realize from within a passage from one into the other Existential eternity. The Indestructible, *the barbaric Principle*

Do a psychoanalysis of nature: it is the flesh, the mother.

A philosophy of the flesh is the condition without which psychoanalysis remains anthropology

In what sense the visible landscape under my eyes is, not exterior to, and linked synthetically to . . . other moments of time and to the past, but has them really behind itself in simultaneity, inside itself, and not it and them, side by side, "in" time.

(*VI*, 320-1/267).

There is much to think in this note, beginning with a reference to Lucien Herr's commentary on Hegel, "who refuses to nature all efficacy [*Wirklichkeit*] . . . whereas Schelling allows thinking a life of nature" (*N*, 76). To deny nature efficacy would mean to leave it reposing in itself as a thing, or as Schelling says, to leave it "revolving in the indifferent circle of sameness, [which] would get us nowhere and remain meaningless and lifeless" (*SW*, VII: 345/18). The continually productive life of nature is not "in" some datable, distant past—such is not the sense of the *au premier jour*; rather, the primordial, the originary, is to be found in the thickness of the living historical present, in the flesh of the world—and what we find there is an *always new*, which promises a future, and an *always the same*, which preserves the past. The *au premier jour* thus

names the inexhaustible capacity of nature to bring itself to presence—such that the past survives within it, and it opens onto a future. The *au premier jour* does not name a date or place when nature *was*, nor does it name some lost origin that we could ever hope to retrieve, and thus does not name a *d'autrefois*; it names rather the very activity of coming-to-presence, and is thus bound up with questions of temporality and phenomenality. In this way, the productive life of nature that Schelling wants to think has a relation to the Husserlian logic of *Stiftung*, that is, as that which is not constituted by reflexive consciousness, as that which “in every respect baffles reflection,” or, in other words, as that which phenomenology must confront in its ultimate task (*R*, 95/133). But whereas, for Husserl, *Stiftung* remains within the realm of consciousness as constitutive of habit, ideality, and ideal objects, it can already be discerned here that Merleau-Ponty wants to extend this logic to the realm of that which consciousness does not construct. He wants to think it in a more originary sense, wants to think an *Urstiftung*—that problem, once again, of the first word, or, to coin a phrase, of the “iftherewere*Stiftung*.”

Nature *au premier jour* transcends temporal distinction while at the same time implicating the past and the present in a mutual relation of *Ineinander*, and thus institutes “a system of temporal indices” (*VI*, 227/173). Nature apposed as “existential eternity”—the past that was never present, the absolute past, the immemorial—further determines not only its character, but also the extent to which Merleau-Ponty installs himself within Schelling’s philosophical horizon. As Père Tilliette has remarked, this relation between eternity and time is “the Schellingian problem *par excellence*,” the problem of how the Absolute temporalizes itself, of how it qua *Unbedingt* shows itself as *bedingt*, of its coming-to-presence, and therefore, also the problem of ground and existence, of grounding and of *Wesen*.²² This “abyss of human reason,”

as Kant called it, is what Schelling tried to think throughout his philosophical career, and in one telling passage (to which we shall return), Merleau-Ponty underscores that “as Schelling has remarked, there is in nature something which makes it such that it would impose itself upon God himself as an independent condition of his operation. *Such is our problem.*”²³ It thus seems that, by virtue of a philosophical solidarity, Schelling is an ally of Merleau-Ponty, an ally who has already engaged in the task that Merleau-Ponty takes as his own.²⁴ And while Schelling is not invoked by name in this working note, the barbaric principle is; specifically, it is invoked as a synonym for nature, and therefore, the reader is invited to read this note in a Schellingian perspective. At the same time, the note provides a clue as to how Merleau-Ponty wishes to read Schelling. Let us pursue our reading of this note, and try to discern some of its implications.

In the working note, Merleau-Ponty gives a clue as to how he will read Schelling, and specifies the perspective in which he will grasp the meaning and significance of the barbaric principle: this precision *re-situates* Schelling, this time with respect to Merleau-Ponty’s own project. The note says we need not seek nature *d’autrefois*: there are certain lived experiences—like “the time of sleep,” for example, or dreams and memory—in which the logic “always new, always the same,” shows itself. Bergson’s notions of duration and simultaneity, alluded to in the note, may be useful for understanding these experiences (or inversely, these experiences understood against the background of Schelling may well teach us how to read Bergson). But strikingly, Merleau-Ponty announces, in a manner descriptive of his own project, that what is required in order to grasp the significance of these lived experiences, and indeed, in order to bring into phenomenology the natural being that has remained resistant to it, is “a *psychoanalysis* of nature, it is the flesh, the mother.” A psychoanalysis is thus called for, and the

barbaric principle would be understood in the perspective of this psychoanalysis, which would have to be complemented by a parallel analysis of the flesh and the mother, since “a philosophy of the flesh is the condition without which psychoanalysis remains anthropology.” But how does Merleau-Ponty understand this psychoanalysis? He specifies its character in a note written a few weeks later: it would be neither Freudian/clinical (there is no expectation of a cure or transference), nor Sartrian/existential (there is no hole to be filled nor a desire to be in-itself-for-itself), but rather, it would be an “*ontological* psychoanalysis” (VI, 323/270). A preliminary psychoanalysis of nature will be thus articulated within an ontological perspective, as the psychoanalysis of natural being. Some clarity as to what such an ontological psychoanalysis of natural being would mean can be gained by briefly considering the preface that Merleau-Ponty had been invited to write in 1960 for the work of Doctor Hesnard, a text where once again there is a telling allusion to the barbaric principle.

In this short text, Merleau-Ponty examines the “convergence” of a “phenomenology that descends into its own basement . . . with Freudian research.”²⁵ Even if these researches are no longer shocking with “their recall of what there is of the *barbaric* in us,”²⁶ psychoanalysis, like phenomenology is directed towards “a zone of experience that we have not integrated.” Psychoanalysis and phenomenology “are directed to the same latency” which is designated by the word “unconscious” by the psychoanalysts.²⁷ Freudian research, which may have at one time shocked the Victorian public by revealing that we are governed by animal impulses sometimes held in check by the demands of civilization and sometimes irrupting as abnormal behavioral patterns, and which may have once shocked the philosophers by revealing that our conscious mind is not the master of its domain, is thus understood by Merleau-Ponty as the persistent

interrogation of the barbaric principle of natural being of which the experiential integration remains a task to realize. And even if the name given by psychoanalysis to this principle remains problematic, philosophy does not give us “the means to express better this intemporal, this indestructible in us.” The name, in fact, matters little, for what is essential is “to know that the word is the index of a mystery.”²⁸ An ontological psychoanalysis of nature would thus take as its project the disclosure of the same “latency” that phenomenology at its limits takes as its ultimate task, a latency that psychoanalysis may call the unconscious, but which Schelling names the barbaric principle. In several places in the working notes, Merleau-Ponty clarifies how he understands this latency; these notes serve to underline the ontological aspect of this psychoanalysis. The emphasis is definitively not on a *psyche* as the subject of this analysis, for if it were, Merleau-Ponty would be unable to free himself of the notion of the tacit Cogito. In a note he writes:

perception is unconscious [*inconsciente*: adjective]. What is the unconscious [*l'inconscient*: noun]? That which functions as a pivot, an existential, and in this sense, it *is* and *is not* perceived. For one perceives only figures on levels – And one perceives them only by their relation to the level, which is thus unperceived. The perception of the level: always *between* objects, it is that around which. . . . The occult in psychoanalysis (the unconscious) is of this sort . . . it is the *hinge*. . . (VI, 243/189).

This note recalls the nature of perception as a “diacritical, relative, and oppositive system” (VI, 267/214), and that the perceived world “endures only through the reflections, shadows, levels, and horizons between things (which are not things and are not nothing but on the contrary mark out by themselves the fields of possible variation in the same thing and in the same world)” (S, 202/160). The function of the unconscious is understood as that which makes there be these shadows and reflections, as that which differentiates the perceived world, and makes it endure; as

an “existential,” it names a structure that sustains and discloses the perceived world. We are also reminded that “the perceived world is, at bottom, Being, in the sense that Heidegger gives to it” (VI, 223/170). The ontological character of the psychoanalysis of nature is thus underscored: as a privileged expression of ontology, it will disclose the structures that allow Being to show itself.²⁹ For both Heidegger and Freud, neither Being nor the unconscious show themselves directly. Being shows itself only as beings or as the history of Being, and is disclosed through that one being, Dasein, that can pose the question of its own Being; similarly, the unconscious shows itself indirectly as dreams, parapraxes, and behaviors. This no doubt is why Merleau-Ponty will insist that his ontology must be an *indirect ontology*, and why this ontology is to be articulated through an interrogation of the body and its expression, hence, through an interrogation of art, literature, and the sciences.³⁰

To the extent that psychoanalysis and phenomenology share, in Merleau-Ponty’s reading, the same goal, and if this ontological psychoanalysis is the way in which Merleau-Ponty will grasp Schelling’s barbaric principle, then how Schelling is situated with respect to Merleau-Ponty’s project begins to become clear. The reader may already be asking the very question that will remain in the background of the subsequent analyses: does the proposed psychoanalysis of nature have something to do with the problem of institution, and if so, in what way does Schelling’s work contribute to the elaboration of this, “our problem”? Nature, the barbaric principle, is linked to a reading of the unconscious, the *hinge* that separates and joins, that marks out difference, that allows the perceived world or Being to appear; this recalls Schelling’s problem, cited above, which is another version of “our problem.” Schelling’s situation in Merleau-Ponty’s later thought is thus a crucial one: Schelling’s thought is situated at the *creux* or

hollow that allows Being to appear. Now that a sense of the direction in which Merleau-Ponty wants to take his reading of Schelling has been clarified, it is time to develop the reading of Schelling as Merleau-Ponty unfolds it in the first course on nature. The explication of Merleau-Ponty's elaboration require careful attention to several moments of Schelling's *oeuvre*, the first of which is drawn from Schelling's early *Naturphilosophie*. Before turning to the specifics of Schelling's work, a more global sense of his overall problematic is necessary.

3. The Absolute and The Problem of Ground

Schelling, the *Wunderkind* of German Idealism, was strongly marked by Spinoza and Fichte while he was at the *Tübinger Stift*, but it was above all the Kantian critical project that formed his immediate intellectual horizon; as Merleau-Ponty notes, the *First Critique* is the departure point of the Schellingian adventure. Kant wrote therein, in reference to the Cartesian ontology of the object, that

unconditioned necessity, which we so indispensably require as the last bearer of all things, is for human reason the veritable abyss [*Abgrund*]. Eternity itself, in all its terrible sublimity, . . . is far from making the same overwhelming impression on the mind; for it only measures the duration of things, it does not support them. We cannot put aside, and yet also cannot endure the thought, that a being, which we represent to ourselves as supreme amongst all possible beings, should, as it were, say to itself: "I am from eternity to eternity, and outside me there is nothing save what is through my will, but when then am I?" All support here fails us; and the greatest perfection, no less than the least perfection, is unsubstantial and baseless [*grundlos*] for the merely speculative reason, which makes not the least effort to retain either the one or the other, and feels indeed no loss in allowing them to vanish entirely.³¹

That is, the positive object in Descartes—God himself—is, as an abyss, unthinkable by human

understanding, and thus to be able to know the ground of *what is* remains beyond the limits—and is the ruin—of human knowledge; it necessarily remains beyond the limits of human knowing as a *supposition* that human reason “indispensably requires,” an idea that reason gives to the understanding as regulative or limiting, but of which the understanding has no concept. *Grosso modo*, we can neither not have the idea of it, nor think it; hence, the aporetic *Abgrund*. Kant takes up this theme again in section 76 of the *Critique of Judgment*, writing that

reason forever demands that we assume something or other (the original basis [*Urgrund*]) as existing with unconditioned necessity, something in which there is no longer to be any distinction between possibility and actuality; and for this idea our understanding has absolutely no concept, i.e., it cannot find a way to present such a thing and its way of existing. For if the understanding thinks it (no matter how), then we are merely presenting the thing as possible. If the understanding is conscious of it as given in intuition, then it is actual, and no thought of possibility comes in. Hence the concept of an absolutely necessary being [this *Abgrund* of reason], though an indispensable idea of reason, is for human understanding an unattainable problematic concept.³²

This means, as Kant indicates further on in the paragraph, that from the point of view of human understanding, “there is something which for it as human understanding is transcendent, . . . but which reason nevertheless treats as belonging to the object [i.e., to the in-itself, into which human cognition cannot penetrate but can only represent] and turns into a principle.”³³ Reason thus provides a regulative principle to the understanding, restricting the understanding from attaining to it. Human cognition thus cannot know the *Urgrund*, but reason *demands* it as an idea, and it operates as a principle. Kant’s “demonstration” of the teleological principle in nature falls within the purview of this argument.

His arguments here are well-known. Kant argues that if the works of nature were accomplished without a *telos*, then the organic products of nature would be inexplicable to us

(and it is only in organic products that we can seek a *telos*, because they alone meet the requirements of natural purpose: first, “the possibility of its parts . . . must depend on their relation to the whole. . . . second . . . the parts of the thing combine into the unity of a whole because they are reciprocally cause and effect of their form. For only in this way is it possible that the idea of the whole should conversely (reciprocally) determine the form and combination of all the parts, not as cause . . . but as the basis on which someone judging this whole cognizes the systematic unity in the form and combination of all the manifold contained in the given matter”³⁴). The *telos* to which the organic product is directed must not be extra-natural, must not be posited or imposed by a divine intelligence, for if it were, then the products of nature would be of a *technical* sort (Kant says: “a work [or product] of art”); the organic product would then be a mere mechanism. Therefore, organic bodies must have ends that are purely internal and natural, i.e., that are nature’s own, conferred (or communicated: *Mitteilung*) onto the product by nature via its productive operation.³⁵ But immediately after this “proof” of a natural teleology, a question imposes itself on Kant: is the *telos* real, or is it merely one that we attribute to it and that exists only ideally? Is it immanent to the process of nature, or is it assigned by the faculty of judgment? Kant opts for the latter: if there were an immanence and reality of natural finality, we could not say *what* it is, we could not even say *that* it is (as actual and real), but only that it *must be* . . . and *for us*, it can *only* be an *idea*. The teleological principle is only an idea, of the same sort as that “indispensable idea” without which reason cannot do. The real existence to which the idea is indiscernibly joined is, in this way, phenomenologically reduced. It is not that Kant denies the real existence of nature, but rather, “contains” it, sends it away, rejects it from the sphere of human knowing.³⁶ Only in so containing the real can we act *as if* nature corresponds to

our representations of it; the *as if* of the regulative principle is “a necessary principle for human judgment [*Urteil*] in dealing with nature,” i.e., any conscious act of judgment about nature and her products must necessarily presuppose this idea of reason, thus restricting all knowledge of nature to the subjective sphere. In chapter one, it was claimed that, for Kant, this *as if* constitutes an imperative *must* (“all thinking *must* be like this and cannot be otherwise”), but that for Schelling, the *as if* is to be heard in the subjunctive, as the menacing possibility that nature *might not* be what we think it is. Kant does not deny this possibility, but argues that we “gain nothing” if we investigate it. Much of Schelling’s work, especially in the area of the philosophy of nature, is devoted to a critical interrogation and calling into question of this *as if*, as if he wanted to say of the *as if*: “As if!”

Schelling’s critical response to Kant takes form on manifold levels, among which is counted his engagement with Fichte. Note here that reason, in addition to giving that indispensable and abyssal idea, is also that which gives the moral law; Fichte, like so many of his generation, wondered if—and how—theoretical and practical reason were compatible, if they share the same suprasensible basis (*Grund*, again) and thus whether there could be a unified system of reason. Kant himself, in the first introduction to the *Third Critique*, asserts that there must indeed be a ground of unity that constitutes both “the ground of nature and that which is practically contained in the concept of freedom.”³⁷ Fichte’s project aims explicitly at the disclosure of this ground, and in this regard, he ventures boldly into what Kant named the *Abgrund*. Eventually, in his attempt to disclose the single, fundamental principle of reason, Fichte believed that he could show that both theoretical and practical reason were derivative of a single *activity* by which the self posits itself, an activity that in the *First Critique* is that

“common, but to us unknown, root” of the twin faculties of human cognition, i.e., the activity of the creative imagination; this same activity, in the *Second Critique*, is that by which the free subject gives itself the moral law. In order for there to be this subject, and therefore in order for there to be knowledge, theoretical or practical, there must be, in Fichte’s view, an act or deed [*Tathandlung*] by which the subject posits itself. This act is both necessary and unconscious, in that it precedes consciousness as its necessary condition, and in that it cannot, as an act, become an object of consciousness. There can thus be no objective proof of, or theoretical access to, this originary self-positing. Moreover, self-positing is not an act that ends once it is accomplished, but is, rather, an ongoing activity by which the self represents itself to itself, and is therefore infinitely productive, referring the representations it produces back to itself; Fichte’s analysis of self-positing is thus an explication of what Kant called the intellectual intuition.³⁸ At bottom, for Fichte, the intellectual intuition, characterized as an infinite, unconscious, productive activity, is the unconditioned condition for all (self-)consciousness.

In his early, “Fichtean” period, Schelling (like Fichte) calls this unconditioned and unobjectifiable act the Absolute Self—absolute, in the sense of *Unbedingt*—and declares it the principle of all philosophy. The lesson Schelling takes from Fichte is that the essential character of this Absolute Self is one of infinite activity. Fichte argues that this infinite activity encounters the external world as resistance or limitation, as a “check” [*Anstoss*] on its activity that returns it to itself, i.e., limitation is nothing more than the folding-back of the infinite activity on itself; this folding-back or return-to-self constitutes, for Fichte, self-consciousness. While Schelling accepts the principle of the Absolute Self as the infinite activity of self-*positing*, he does not, however, simply accept Fichte’s position, arguing famously that it reduces the world of nature to nothing

more than the not-I, thus voiding it of its real content. By drawing out the implications of Fichte's position, Schelling marks a critical distance from him. First among these implications is that the domain of human knowledge is circumscribed by this return-to-self; something, i.e., the not-I, nature, is ruled out of bounds, and Fichte thus remains true to Kantian criticism, reinscribing the idea of the thing-in-itself. Secondly, because the domain of the I is circumscribed and determined by the functional exclusion of the not-I, or in other words, in terms of *what it is not*, Schelling is able to detect and exploit the trace of a Spinozist theme in Fichte's work. Unafraid of embracing Spinoza, Schelling writes to Hegel, "I have meanwhile become Spinozist!" explaining that "for Spinoza, the world (the object, in opposition to the subject) was everything; for me, it is the Self."³⁹ The Fichtean Self does not include everything, as we have just indicated; for Spinoza, on the other hand, the world (the object, God, nature) does include everything (but, Schelling protests, includes everything, including the Self, as *thing* in a mechanical system); philosophy, as the science of the whole, must have the Whole, the Universal [*das Alle*] as its fundamental principle. For this reason, Schelling will stop using the phrase *Absolute Self*, employing the abbreviated *Absolute* (after 1795, Schelling employs *das Absolute* instead of the substantialized adjective *Unbedingt*: the neuter noun is used because, Schelling notes, the Absolute neutralizes, or is absolved of, difference) to name the fundamental principle. Third and finally, Schelling agrees that Fichte is quite right to argue that the infinite activity of the Absolute is "limited" and returned to itself *by itself*, but he contests that Fichte does not properly recognize the major consequences of this. What the Absolute encounters in having its activity reflected back to itself, is only *itself as an object*, which then stands against the infinitely "expansive" activity as an inhibition (*Hemmung*) or "contractive" counter-activity.⁴⁰ But,

Schelling says, this would be contrary to the essential character of the Absolute, which, as unobjectifiable, unconscious, and *Unbedingt*, cannot be an object.

The contradiction, in Schelling's eyes, implies *a loss of the Absolute*;⁴¹ rather than achieving a return-to-self as self-coincidence, rather than grasping itself as *one*, the Absolute, in virtue of the activity proper to itself, divides or *differentiates itself into two*.⁴² For Schelling, this *originary partition* of the Absolute is the true sense of Kantian *Urteil*, and is the necessary condition not only for all consciousness and all philosophy, but also for all productivity, generation, and ultimately, life; if the infinite expansive activity were not, in some way, inhibited, it would dissipate into nothingness and produce nothing, and thus it is only through its inhibitive self-contraction that it produces something. Following the lead of his friends Novalis and Hölderlin,⁴³ Schelling argues that an originary whole (Hölderlin names it *Being*) splits itself asunder as a result of its own activity. That into which the originary whole differentiates itself has already been glimpsed: determined at first as the infinite activity of the Self or *subject*, it folds back on itself and confronts itself with itself as an *object*. The Absolute thus differentiates itself as the *subjective* (which Fichte had called the Self) and the *objective* (which Spinoza had called nature); but, note first that these *two* are in fact permutations of the *same* originary and infinite activity of the lost whole, the Absolute, in which they were contained as *indifferent* (or as difference-in-unity), and, second, to each part the principle and activity of the whole is *communicated*, such that they are "whole parts."⁴⁴ Indeed, philosophy can study each part in its attempt to realize its task: if philosophy begins with the subjective, it becomes a transcendental idealism; if philosophy begins with the objective, it becomes *Naturphilosophie*. This means, consequently, that when Schelling speaks of nature in his *Naturphilosophie*, he means nature as

this Whole Part to which the principle and activity of the Absolute has been communicated, and likewise when he speaks of the Self in his transcendental idealism (however, Schelling will also use the phrase *erste Natur*, first or primal nature, especially after 1801: this phrase designates that nature that is in the Absolute or God, which was once held in *Indifferenz*, but is now given a privilege as, for example, that which is in God but not God). Kant and Fichte both limit themselves to the subjective, excluding nature as the not-I; this does not amount to a denial of nature, but does beg the question as to how we can have necessary representations of it that conform to the laws of the mind. Here, is where the import of the young Schelling's work is most keenly felt: because I am identical to nature (and this phrase is heard in a deeper register than previously), because the subjective is originally identical to the objective, then "the system of nature is at the same time the system of our mind," and vice-versa (*SW*, II: xx/41). The reason, then, that we have any idea whatsoever of nature is because "nature is Mind [*Geist*] made visible, Mind the invisible nature. Here then, in the absolute identity of Mind in us and nature outside us, the problem of the possibility of a nature external to use must be resolved."⁴⁵ This means, then, that the "indispensable idea" that we "require" (and under this category we would include the principle of teleology, and the sublime) is not merely a subjective ideal of reason, but is also an effective principle (soon to be qualified as barbaric) at work in nature, i.e., not simply *ideal*, but also *real*. We will meditate more on this in the next section.

The principle by which the Self posits itself is thus also the principle by which nature organizes itself. From this, we note three consequences: first, the critical delimitation of the structures of human self-consciousness will also be the construction of nature *for us*, i.e., the idea we have of nature, or mind as invisible nature.⁴⁶ Second, as visible mind, nature is an

intelligence seeking to express itself through the works of nature, an intelligence that organizes itself in the same way that the Self posits itself; as such, this intelligence is only the activity of intellectual intuition, an infinitely productive activity through which nature organizes itself as a system, as a whole, or ultimately, as an *organism*. We will attend to the organism later, but we note here that Schelling takes up this notion of an intelligence in nature two years later, at the very beginning of the *Einleitung* to the *Erste Entwurf*:

Intelligence is double: blind and unconscious, or free and consciously productive; unconsciously productive in the conception of the world, consciously productive in the creation of an ideal world.

Philosophy suppresses this opposition by affirming that the conscious activity is primordially identical to the unconscious [activity] and is issued from the same root: it sees a *direct* proof of this identity in the activity that is both conscious and unconscious and that presides over the creations of *genius*; it finds an *indirect* proof of it, *outside* of consciousness, in the products of nature where it observes a total fusion of the ideal and the real. (*SW*, III: 269.)

Intelligence is thus productive, though it is not always aware of itself as such; through its products, it tries to become away of itself as the productivity that it is. This intelligence is nothing more than *Geist*, the Absolute, unfolding itself in order to arrive at that point where it knows itself.

Just as a transcendental idealism will disclose how there is an *ideal* construction of nature for the Self through its self-positing, so too must a *real* study of nature disclose how nature “expresses and realizes” the laws of the mind (*SW*, II: xx/42). Precisely because I am originally identical to nature, there is a *double* imbrication, a Husserlian *Ineinander* of each in the other, and thus both transcendental idealism and *Naturphilosophie* are necessary as complements to one another; the question of the precedence or priority of one over the other matters little. And yet, because they are necessary *complements*, neither idealism nor realism will be able to pretend

to the status of Science of the Absolute, nor will either be able to achieve the task of philosophy to restore the whole; the loss of the Absolute is thus irrecoverable. Both the attempt to disclose a system of nature and the attempt to disclose a system of the mind will therefore ultimately fail, and indeed, the very notion of system called into question, because neither, individually or in tandem with its other, will be able to disclose its *ground* of identity. Schelling must, however, work through the twin projects in order to reveal their limits, and to achieve a higher point of view, which begins to emerge in his work after 1801, but which never quite attains full and complete expression. This persistent failure to “fly higher” (as Novalis urged him to do⁴⁷) will not make Schelling a bad philosopher, who, as Hegel sniped, pursues his philosophical education before the public, but rather, as David Krell assesses, will generate some of the most splendid and productive failures in the history of philosophy. These failures lead Schelling to the most radical and abyssal posing of the problem of ground.⁴⁸ In this regard, Schelling’s “failures” amount to nothing less than a radical reinscription of philosophy. Merleau-Ponty is thus quite right in noting that Schelling’s adventure begins with an interrogation of the Kantian *Abgrund*, and this exposition has provided a sense of what is at stake in this interrogation.

The exposition has drifted off-course a bit; let us return to the problem by recalling that this digression began in the context of a consideration of the *Abgrund* of human reason. At the very least, the digression has shown that, for Schelling, what is for Kant the ruin of thought names a problem, or more precisely, *the* problem of ground; for Schelling, the problem of ground is also the problem of the Absolute. This ground—i.e., the unconditioned necessity of *Urgrund*, the absolute ground of all that is, or in a word, God—must be a *living* ground, because otherwise, nature would be a mechanism, void of productive life, and its works mere products of

technique; freedom would then be inexplicable, and the philosophical image of human being would be completely contrary to our lived experience. As Schelling says,

God is not a God of the dead but of the living. It is incomprehensible that an all-perfect Being could rejoice in even the most perfect mechanism possible. No matter how one pictures to oneself the procession of creatures from God, it can never be a mechanical one, nor a mere construction or setting-up [*Hinstellen*], whereby the construct is naught in itself. Just as certainly, it cannot be an emanation whereby that which has flowed forth remains the same as its source, thus lacking individuality and independence. The procession of things from God is God's self-revelation. But God can only reveal himself in what is like him, in free beings that act by themselves, for whose existence there is no ground save God, but who are as God is. He speaks, and they are there. (*SW*, VII: 346-46/19)

The problem of ground, then, is no ordinary problem; in these few lines, Schelling gathers a host of matters around it: among them we note the issues of identity and difference, the possibility of freedom, the question of system, a critique of mechanism, and most importantly, the question of life and living generation. The problem of ground will be determined in manifold ways throughout Schelling's text, but it will never cease to be a problem—indeed, *the* problem. With this in mind, he worries about how we can even “designate it except as ‘primal ground’ [*Urgrund*] or rather, as ‘non-ground’ [*Ungrund*]” (*SW* VII: 406/87). This originary non-ground precedes the opposition of all dualistic oppositions as their “absolute indifference,” or what we called a moment ago the *identity* of Self and nature. The whole of the Schellingian enterprise will be to understand how this indifference differentiates itself and thus makes such oppositions possible (that is, to understand productivity and generation), and how this principle of self-differentiation is communicated to its products. The problem of ground must therefore be posed in such a way that the *life* of free, self-determining, and self-conscious incarnated beings is possible.

As a brief parenthesis, and in order to underscore that the problem of ground circumscribed in Schelling's work has import for our reading of Merleau-Ponty, it is worthwhile to turn to a fortuitous passage from Heidegger's "On the Essence of Ground." There, in the third and final section of this essay, Heidegger writes that ground is nowise a thing, that when we speak of ground we do not mean a nominal, substantive entity; rather, the problem of ground in fact names the *grounding relation*, and "is *strewn* in manifold ways. There are three such ways: (1) grounding as establishing [*Stiften*: instituting, for Merleau-Ponty]; (2) grounding as taking up a basis [*Bodennehmen*]; (3) grounding as the grounding of something [*Begründen*]."⁴⁹ Heidegger will want to determine the ontological character of this grounding relation from out of the transcendence of Dasein, and so for him this problem is situated within the horizon of the question of Being. For this present essay, on the other hand, what is important is that *Stiften* is named as one of the ways in which grounding construes itself, and that, in this naming, it "evidently cannot have an ordinary, ontic meaning"; moreover, Heidegger goes on, "this manner of grounding has a priority." This allows us to say that centrality of the problem of *Stiftung* in Merleau-Ponty means that he is engaged in a thoughtful posing and interrogation of the problem of ground, and it is above all with regard to this posing that Merleau-Ponty installs himself in the problem-horizon already delimited by the thought of Schelling.

But let us return to Schelling, and the way in which he further determines this character of the problem of ground, by examining one of those "whole parts" into which the Absolute differentiates itself, namely, nature, which is explored in those texts comprising the *Naturphilosophie*. The first question to consider is that of the indiscernible joining, of how nature lends itself to us so that we have intelligible ideas about it; our intelligible ideas about it

are necessary ones, and for Schelling this necessity is due to the fact that the real and the ideal organize themselves according to the same logic, communicated to them from the Absolute. As a result, then, the analysis will be led to the “inside” of nature and to the question of nature’s productivity; this in turn will lead to a deeper (re-)consideration of that double movement of expansion and contraction gestured at a moment ago.

4. The Idea of nature and the Question of Life: Construing the Problem of Ground at the Indiscernible Joining

The representative texts at the core of the *Naturphilosophie* form a triptych: The *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* in 1797 were followed a year later by *Vom der Weltseele*, and then by the *Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie*, originally given as a course in 1799, then published after a retrospective *Einleitung* had been prepared to introduce it; excerpts from all of these texts, we noted, were consulted by Merleau-Ponty in his preparations for the course. Let us try to assess briefly their importance for Merleau-Ponty. Some attention has been given already to the “Introduction” of the *Ideen*, but it is time to develop further one of the central claims therein, namely, that the system of nature is also the system of mind, in order to provide a fuller sense of what is at stake in this text. Doing so will require attention to some passages that could not have failed to catch Merleau-Ponty’s eye; these will no doubt lead to others with which Merleau-Ponty may not have been familiar. This interrogation will allow not only us to sharpen and deepen the idea of nature that Schelling is seeking to articulate, but also to show how Schelling’s concern is rejoined to Merleau-Ponty’s project.

Recall that Schelling's explicit question in the *Ideas* is how something real becomes ideal, that is, how something outside of us gets into us (SW, II: xx/23). This question presupposes that what was once whole has been differentiated as ideal mind and real nature. Moreover, in order for the mind or self to know anything at all, it must have already posited itself, and likewise, nature's organization must be such as to present itself to mind as intelligible; Schelling's question is thus articulated at the indiscernible joining. Now, if the philosopher were to try to work out the relations of the ideal and real from *this* side of the originary partition, he would have to say that "nothing real reaches us directly except by intuition," and he would then be obliged to ask what intuition is (SW, II: xx/173. And yet, if he were to try to respond to that query from *this* side of the originary partition, he would have to say *either* that intuition is a passivity preceded by an external impression (but then he would have to ask, as the empiricist does, how such impression is possible, and how it becomes a valid representation for the mind, and he would worry that nature becomes a mere mechanism), *or* that intuition is only a function of thought and not due to any reality outside of us (but then he would find himself in the unfortunate position of the intellectualist, denying external reality and reducing the real to mere thought) (SW, II:xx/174.) Neither of the options can give any insight into the question of the indiscernible joining. The dilemma can be resolved, Schelling argues, only by recalling that the ideal and the real are originarily identical, and are the parts of a lost whole, the principle of which is communicated to the parts. The encounter with Schelling's predecessors revealed that this originary whole is understood as an infinite, self-differentiating activity; on the basis of this, we can understand how intuition is possible. The originary activity of the whole is communicated to its parts; this means, consequently, that all thinking, including intuition, "is preceded by an

original activity, which, *because it precedes* thinking, is to that extent absolutely undetermined and unconfined” (SW, II:xx/174). This *ideal* activity is, as infinite, *expansive*, and continually moves outward. But equally, the *real* must also be understood as this activity in a different modality (or under a different power, in a different potency, as Schelling will say after 1801); this means that when the ideal encounters the real, it encounters it “as an activity *opposed* to it” (SW, II: xx/177). This encounter *inhibits* or limits the expansion; hence the counter-activity is *contractive*. Only through this experience of limitation does the ideal activity feel itself to be unlimited, and as such, it feels the limitation it encounters as an inhibition, as a sensation of being hampered; therefore, through limitation, the ideal activity has the *sensation* of encountering *something*. Thus “we have *two mutually contradictory activities as necessary conditions for the possibility of intuition*” (SW, II: xx/175); in other words, it is through the sensation of limitation through that the intuition of the real is given. Several consequences follow from this transcendental deduction of the conditions of possibility of intuition. First, in that each activity is infinite, their opposition is also infinite; but this does not mean that there is a cancellation of forces or a stalemate. Rather, “the product of opposing activities is always something finite” and “unites within itself the two activities” (SW, II: xx/177). The opposition is thus *productive* (we note that this productivity is possible only because the original activity divides itself in two and opposes itself to itself) and the product is, as it were, double: on the one hand, *for the mind*, this joint product is called *intuition*, and is that by which something is given to us as qualitative *this*, i.e., given in terms of its *form*. On the other hand, in that the intuition is the intuition of *something*, the joint product is called *matter* (or rather, it might be safer to say that what is produced are the conditions for the possibility of matter). Matter here has a twofold

determination: on the one hand, in its *ideal* potency, and insofar as it is produced only through the experience of limitation, matter is only the “mind intuiting its activities in equilibrium”(SW, II: xx/175);⁵⁰ that is, what the mind takes to be a resistance outside of itself is only its activity being inhibited by a counter-activity. But importantly, the mind recognizes neither the limitation as a counter-activity, nor (and we will take this up again) as an activity to which it was originally identical; as such, it does not grasp itself as the activity that it is, i.e., does not grasp its ground. Rather, the mind mistakes limitation as the resistance of an external world, or as matter, and this error concretizes the difference between the subjective and the objective. But on the other hand, matter is also to be understood in its *real* potency; if nature “expresses and realizes” the mind, if the system of the mind is also that of nature, then consequently, Schelling says, matter, as the product that unites within itself the two activities, “is nothing but these force.” (SW, II: xx/173). This is a delicate point: Schelling is not attempting to think what matter is *in-itself*, but rather what matter must be in order for it to present itself to the mind, and for the mind to conceive it, and eventually, how it must operate in order to sustain the activity of nature; therefore, he concludes, “attractive and repulsive forces [i.e., the expansive and contractive activities in their real potency⁵¹] constitute the essence of matter itself,” the same play of forces that constitute the mind (SW, II: xx/171). On the basis of this, and over against the mechanical vision of matter propounded by Newton and Kant, Schelling argues for a *dynamic* conception of matter, which, in Schelling’s view, justifies the claim that nature is visible Mind: “in the *dead object*, everything is *at rest*—there is not conflict, but eternal equilibrium. Where physical forces divide, *living* matter is gradually formed; in this struggle of divided forces the living continues, and for that reason alone we regard it as a visible analog of the mind.” In short, only where there is oppositional

difference or contradiction is there life, productivity, and generation; without contradiction, without difference, there is only death.

A question begs itself here: what exactly is meant by force? What is its being? Schelling explicitly rejects the idea that force is imposed from the outside, and that it acts on hard matter as a cause. He seems rather to argue for the reverse, namely, that matter exists only as a concretization or crystallization of forces, where force is understood as a modality or potency of the expansive and contractive activities of the Absolute; these activities in their real potency as repulsive and attractive forces constitute the general polarity of all natural products, as well as what Schelling terms nature's duplicity. Once matter is organized as a product uniting the contradictory and productive forces within itself, it will interact with other matter, and a play of forces will be sustained, generating more products in nature. But since the mind manages neither to grasp limitation as an opposing force, nor as a force to which it was originally identical, the philosopher likewise cannot answer the question of the being of force; the philosopher can understand it only in terms of its products, retrospectively. Of force itself, the philosopher can say only that it follows from the principle of the Absolute. Insofar as matter is conceived as the play of forces, uniting them within itself as a product, there will always be something that escapes from our conception of matter. That "something" is the very activity—force—that gives rise to it, and that the mind cannot grasp; Schelling therefore names it (and this is one of many names) a "material principle." Now, matter as a product unites the productive forces within itself, but this unity is not one that dissolves the oppositional difference; quite the contrary, the difference and the productivity it makes possible are maintained in, but held in check by, the product. The means that matter is the first visible concretion of the

Absolute's attempt to get hold of itself through the difference that it incises in itself; but this attempt is a failure (matter is an "aborted product of nature") because matter does not know itself to be this difference-in-unity. In that matter is a dumb product of a blind and unconsciously productive intelligence (or, what amounts to the same, an intelligence that cannot know itself in the product), Schelling names it a material *principle*. We note here three additional important points that follow from this: first, because the productive difference is not dissolved in the products, the productivity remains in (or is communicated to) the product as a potential; the product is therefore relatively stable, but not permanent, because the productivity could overtake and thus dissolve it in process (more on this forthwith). Second, on the basis of this conception of matter as the play of attractive and repulsive forces, Schelling thinks that an entire system of nature can be disclosed; the sciences, if they are to be grounded, will have to go looking everywhere for this polarity of forces, and all natural phenomena, like electricity, magnetism, combustion and the chemical process, in both the inorganic and organic realms, will have to be explained according to this dynamic conception of matter.⁵² Third and finally, the variety of matter will be accounted for as differing intensities of the basic forces in their productive play; this means that any matter can disrupt or unbalance the opposition of activities in other matter, thus sustaining (or reactivating) the play of forces. This dynamic, which is at the basis of all chemistry, allows *living* matter to form; as such, the material principle is bound up with a *principle of life*. Schelling writes:

the essence of life does not consist at all in a force, but rather in a free play of forces which is continually sustained by some external influence. What is necessary in life are the universal forces of nature that are in play; what is contingent, which sustains the play by its influence, must be something particular, i.e., in other words a material principle. Organization and life do not express

anything at all which exists in itself, but only a specific form of being The principle of life is therefore only the cause of a certain form of being, not the cause of being itself (*SW* II: 566).

Since, in Schelling's dynamic conception, inorganic matter is alive, it cannot properly be called "inorganic," and consequently, through its continual process, through the constantly sustained activity of nature, it eventually gives rise to (what was once called, when such distinctions mattered) organic matter, to organisms. What is thus seen here is that matter interacts with other matter in chemical process, and this sustains the productive play of forces, which, in turn, is the basis of *life*. Such is the function of the material principle—or of the materiality of matter, the brutality of the brute—in the dynamic conception of nature that Schelling is unfolding. To suspend this materiality, as both Descartes and Husserl do, would therefore be to miss the phenomenon of life, resulting in dead objects; this is the very direction of both Schelling's critique of Cartesian philosophy and Merleau-Ponty's critique of Husserlianism.

The play of forces thus makes the life of the organism possible, but just as there is something about matter that remains unthematizable by the mind, so too is it the case with the living organism. Unlike inorganic matter, which lends itself easily to the retrospective illusion of cause and effect, and which can be dissolved into lesser, constitutive parts (the interaction of which must also be understood dynamically), the organic product is not reducible to lesser parts, and must be conceived as a whole. And unlike the inorganic product, which can be subjected to chemical or electrical processes and made to produce something different from itself (as in the case of a salt, produced when an acid and a base enter into chemical relation), the organic product "produces *itself*, *arises* out of itself; every single plant is the product only of an individual of its own *kind*, and so every single organism endlessly produces and reproduces only

its own species.”⁵³ Since the organic product is not reducible to other kinds, it cannot be conceived of in terms of parts, but only as a whole, and “this whole itself consists only in the *interaction* of the parts” (*SW*, II: xx/31). The parts of the whole “are real parts, that exist without my participation,” and they exist in relation to one another, and thus relate to the whole.

Wherever “there is a necessary relation of whole to part and of part to whole, there is a *concept*. But this concept dwells in the organization, and can by no means be separated from it . . . [the organism] organizes itself” and through this self-organization, lends itself to conceptuality, “*its unity lies in itself*” (*SW*, II: xx/31). Thus, the concept “has no reality in itself” as a *concept* (*SW*, II: xx/33), but, *realiter*, is only that which makes the organism exist as a whole, and cannot be disjoined from the whole without at the same time unraveling the whole. In other words, in that the organism, like matter, is a product of the activity of nature, it is a product of an intelligence that is blind and unconsciously productive, and so does not know itself as the product it is, does not know its ground; consequently, within it, there are no distinctions between form and matter, or between cause and effect, and as a result, “this particular matter could only arise and come to be with that particular form, and *vice versa*,” i.e., as a whole (*SW*, II: xx/33). But since the organic whole results from the self-organizing activity of nature, there is at the basis of the organization an indwelling concept that makes the product intelligible for us, and that allows us to grasp it as an organization. Truly speaking, is a concept only for *us*, who *do* make distinctions between form and matter, between cause and effect, and between part and whole, and who struggle to understand how what is outside of us has gotten in us (indeed, it would not even make sense to call it a concept unless it is referred to us; were there no us, there would be no concept, but there would be an organism that, presumably, would not be conscious of itself as an

organism, and therefore, would not have meaning). As a whole, as a real object, the organic product, like matter, is an imperfect “reflex” of the Absolute, in that it reflects a unity of the ideal and the real; but since it is produced blindly and unconsciously, it does not know itself to be this unity. And moreover, because it is *we*, i.e., the subjective order of mind, who conceive the organism according to its indwelling concept, then it is we who break it apart—we separate what is, in the object itself, inseparable; in this way, we will have a concept of the organic product, and it will present itself to us intelligibly as an organization, but at the same time, by disjoining the concept from the whole, we miss the whole, or more precisely, we miss that activity that gives rise to it as a whole, we miss that free play of activities that constitute the essence of *life*. By grasping it according to its concept, we betray it; the real object becomes the thought of the object (but, we note in both anticipation and in recall, that the real object institutes a symbolic matrix in virtue of its own self-organizing and self-differentiating activity; it lends itself to conceptuality and symbolization, and we can understand the meaning of this lending via the phenomenological investigation of the body, as in chapter two, *supra*. This means that the sign-system we use to grasp the real object is not wholly arbitrary, that it is instituted by the real activity of the real object, through its transcendence-in-inherence). Thus, we might say that “the birth of organization is the death of the organism,” because in lending itself to idealization, something—life—escapes.⁵⁴ The principle of life, like the material principle with regard to matter, inheres in the organism *qua* whole, but cannot be grasped as such by consciousness without violating the integrity of the whole.

Thus we see Schelling is here engaged in a meditation on the indiscernible joining, and in his discussion, he brings to the table several elements that could not but have impressed Merleau-

Ponty. First and foremost, both the Self and nature are “whole parts” of the Absolute; the principle by which they organize themselves is communicated to them from the Absolute in that originary act of scission. With regard to the objective order of the real, Schelling shows that what is produced through the blindly productive activity of nature contains its unity or its ground within itself, but does not know it as such; moreover, *we* do not know it as such either, in that the principle of life, like the material principle, each of which names the productive free play of forces (and ultimately, the problem of ground), remains ungraspable, and the Absolute remains lost. Similarly, with regard to the subjective order of the Self, Schelling shows that the Self’s attempt to understand how something outside of itself gets into it as an idea is always a failure, because it mistakes that which it experiences as limitation or inhibition for the resistant reality of the external world, and thus fails to grasp the very activity to which it was originally identical, i.e., itself. This critique of idealism and reflection will be prolonged in *The System of Transcendental Idealism* of 1800, and for now, it is noteworthy that the theme of the 1800 work is already prepared in the *Naturphilosophie*: in missing the activity, the Self fails to take hold of its ground, which remains beyond the orders of consciousness; as the condition for the possibility of consciousness, the unthematizable ground of this activity from which the orders of the ideal and real emerge can rightly be called *the transcendental unconscious*. Now, what will be seen here is a double critique of both idealism and realism, in favor of a third way, a kind of waltzing critique that anticipates Merleau-Ponty’s own method of the critical interpretation of antithetical positions; moreover, while there may be no room for talk of Absolute forces in Merleau-Ponty, his appreciation for the integrity of the whole over against the dissolution of the whole into its parts has already been measured in the analysis of the *Gestalt*. This theme of the transcendental

unconscious will be taken up in the next section, but first let us continue our analysis of nature.

In his summary presentation of Schelling's central ideas concerning nature, Merleau-Ponty draws above all from the *Einleitung* and *Grundriss* to the *Erster Entwurf*. Nature, he writes,

is both passive and active, product and productivity, but a productivity that always needs to produce something else (for example, human generation, which ceaselessly renews itself). There is a double movement of expansion and contraction, that Löwith compared to respiration, that never goes to the end of its movement except in death, and that designates the character of a relative and always recommencing production. . . . nature is neither God nor World. It is a producer that is not all-powerful, that does not manage to end its production: it is a movement of rotation that produces nothing definitive. There is a general "duplicity" of nature just as necessary as nature itself. If productive nature were to withdraw itself from the product, it would be death (*N*, 61).

Most of themes presented in this summary statement are already familiar, but let us risk repetition by complementing it with a passage from the prefatory part of the *Erste Entwurf*, entitled "Outline of the Whole," where these lines are inscribed:

so that a real activity makes itself into an infinite and productive activity (and as such, an ideal activity), this activity must be inhibited, retarded. Yet since the activity is originally only one, it cannot exhaust itself in a final product . . . and in each individual product, the tendency towards the infinite development must have its place again. The analysis cannot be permitted to end in a thing which is only a product: it can stop only at that which is purely productive . . . it is precisely for this reason that this is the goal at which our analysis will never arrive.⁵⁵

This story well-known: following from the principle of the Absolute, the real activity is originally singular and expansive; but in order that it produce something, it must be inhibited lest it dissolve in the infinite. This inhibition, Schelling reminds us a few lines later, "is conceivable only on the sole condition that the formative drive [*Bildungstreib*: it is interesting that *activity* and *force* have now been replaced with *drive*, implying a *pulsional need*] divides

itself in two opposed directions.”⁵⁶ There is thus a sort of “internal scission” within this activity, whereby it differentiates itself and thus opposes itself to itself. The inhibitive splitting of the formative drives gives to nature “a general duplicity,” which is the condition of all production, without which there would be nothing. What is produced “is nothing definitive,” is nothing other than the productivity-inhibited. Before we take up the double movement that resembles rotation (or in Löwith’s view, respiration), let us make more explicit this last point, and draw out some of its implications. Recall that this productivity can never be exhausted, and that the product unites in itself these duplicitous forces; as such, the product contains the productivity in potential, and becomes productive in its turn. Product and productivity cannot be separated, but must be maintained as a duality: if nature were simply product or *Natura naturata*, then the conditions of its possibility would lie outside of it, which would make the product the work of artifice, and which would be contrary to the idea of nature as a system; if, on the other hand, nature were pure productivity or *Natura naturans*, no product would ever be produced to inhibit the process, resulting in its dissolution; in short, if there were no duality, nature would be at rest, and thus dead. Productivity must therefore be contained in the product as a potential, there must be a duplicitous unity; in the inorganic product, this potential can be disrupted or restored by electrochemical processes. But in the organic product or organism, this duplicity “on a deeper level will appear as the differentiation of the sexes,”⁵⁷ and thus constitutes the capacity of the organism to reproduce itself, i.e., constitutes a generative capacity; in this sense, the internal contradiction or duplicitous unity of nature is the condition for all life.

The claim that productivity remains in potential is important, for it implies both the possibility that the productivity can once again surge forth and overtake the product, and that the

product is only a temporary inhibition for the infinite productivity. Hence the product is “nothing definitive,” and this is “nature’s struggle against everything individual.”⁵⁸ The imperative nature of Kant’s claim that we must act *as if* nature conformed to our thinking of it holds the terrible possibility of the resurgence of productivity at bay, and now we see that Schelling’s subjunctive reading of the *as if* reveals that terrible possibility to be subjacent to every natural product; what Kant rules out as an *Abgrund* is this horrifying productivity of nature that finds itself at the center of Schelling’s posing of the problem of *Grund*.

Nature is thus as *destructive as productive*—its coming-to-be is also its passing-away—and in this sense can be said to name the *Wesen des Grundes*. The echo of nature’s destructivity is heard everywhere in Schelling’s work, and Merleau-Ponty cites several examples (all from the 1809 essay) that echo some moments from Kant. Nature as a “destructive fire” and as “the anger of God,” and as “destructive and savage” recalls those passages, described by some as Kant’s best writerly moments, in the *Critique of Judgment*, where Kant speaks of “nature in its wildest, most unbridled disorder and devastation” and as an “abyss that menaces to gobble everything up.”⁵⁹ In drawing attention to this destructive aspect of nature, Merleau-Ponty quite rightly invokes the *barbaric principle*. The attribution of this textual evocation has, however, proven to be a minor mystery. Merleau-Ponty summarizes Schelling’s argument that duplicitous nature is “that most ancient element . . . that always remains present in us as in all things” (*N*, 61).

(Notice that nature is the most ancient *element*: we cannot but think here not only of the notion of the Greek notion of element, but also Merleau-Ponty’s famous phrase that “the Flesh is an *element* of Being” (*VI*, 184/139). Notice also that this element is present *both* in us *and* in all things, thus making us belong to the same tissue; that is, nature, or what Merleau-Ponty calls the

Flesh, is an original *elementality* about which we will have something to say in our conclusion).

But next, the student notes indicate a citation, presumably read out by Merleau-Ponty in the course, and that gives a further determination of the *erste Natur*: “it is the fundamental stuff of all life and of every *Dasein*, something horrible, a barbaric principle that we could overcome, but never cast aside.” The editor indicates in a footnote that this “is Merleau-Ponty’s translation; another translation appears in K. Löwith, 182-183,” as if the citation were to be attributed to Schelling. When one consults Löwith, one does indeed find this very passage, and quickly discovers that it is erroneously attributed to *SW* I: 222, “On the Possibility of Form in Philosophy”; an examination of this text, however, yields nothing of this sort. A more comprehensive and exhaustive search finally reveals that Löwith’s citation is wrong, both in content and in attribution, and that in fact, this passage cannot be attributed *as such* to Schelling. It seems rather to be a gloss of several passages from the closing pages of the 1815 version of *The Ages of the World*. The now obsolete English translation (prepared by F. Bolman in *Schelling: The Ages of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), 229-230, corresponding to *SW*, VIII: 338-39) of the first passage in question reads: “But if they were capable of penetrating the outside of things, they would see that the true basic substance of all life and being is just what is terrible”; this accounts for the first half of Löwith’s gloss. The second half, which mentions the barbaric principle, is gleaned from a few pages later (cf. *SW*, VIII: 343/234). This context of the second passage is a complaint about modern philosophy, which is characterized without surprise as “emasculated” [*Ent-mannung*]; the giddy idealism of Reason has given us

a world which is nothing but an image, indeed, an image of an image, a nought of

a nought, a shadow of a shadow; men who are also only images, only dreams of shadows; a people who, in the good-natured effort to attain so-called enlightenment, really arrived at the dissolution of all into thoughts, but who lost all their strength together with their darkness, and lost also that barbaric principle . . . which when conquered but not annihilated is the foundation of all greatness and beauty.

The citation from Löwith serves as a convenient summary of these two passages, and it seems that Merleau-Ponty lifts the phrase “barbaric principle” from Löwith’s gloss, not from Schelling’s text; we thus wonder if Merleau-Ponty read *The Ages of the World*, but despite this misgiving, some general comments about (just one theme in) Schelling’s unfinished project will soon be ventured as if Merleau-Ponty did indeed read it. Before doing so, however, and with this minor mystery happily resolved, let us enquire further after the barbaric principle.

Why is the phrase “barbaric principle” introduced? What does it name? Merleau-Ponty invokes it at the very moment that he wants to underscore the destructive aspects of nature, a destructivity that belongs to productivity, i.e., as we’ve seen, the productive force contained in potential in the product can be unleashed in such a way that something new is produced, but the previous product is overcome, dissolved in process, reclaimed by nature in her struggle against the individual. Schelling would certainly accept this manner of invocation, adding to it that the Enlightenment has resulted in the forgetting of this origin of all greatness and beauty (and here we might rejoin the analyses of chapter two, in that this forgetting of origin, characteristic of the institution of tradition, is effected in Descartes’s fateful omission in his reactivation of philosophy). The light of Reason dispels the darkness of the irrational, and believes that all can be conquered by thought, that there is nothing that “cannot be dissolved by the menstruum of the most acute concept, nor be volatilized in the fire of the most spiritual thinking” (*SW*, VIII:

343/234-5). But the *lumen naturale* of Reason does not illuminate every dark corner of existence, and for those still shadowy nooks and crannies, it invents clever strategies of marginalization and exclusion, as we have seen with respect to Descartes's suppression of the ontology of the existent. The barbaric thus names the forgotten origin, the ground of all things; denying it does not make it go away, just as the American obsession with health, exercise, youth, vitamins, and the genetically-based research for longevity does not change that fact that we will grow old and we will die. The barbaric principle continues to subtend all things, remains subjacent and subjunctive, and no Kantian *must* or *as if* can neutralize its barbaric power to reclaim what it produces. If we say that the barbaric principle names the simultaneously productive and destructive activity of nature, then we note simply that nature is *not pretty*, that she is *even dangerous*; it is thus not surprising to find in Schelling that ancient theme that to pierce her veil is to risk insanity and death. We now begin to see that what is named as a principle—be it a material one, or another that names life—is more than a regulative ideal that marks the limits of cognition, so that our earlier, “safe” description of it as “unthinkable” is hardly adequate in that what is named by the principle is utterly *barbaric*; we begin to see, in other words, just how fragile the subjunctive *as if* really is.

All of this argument is contained in the very choice of the word *barbaric*. Derived from the Greek *barbaros*, signifying the strange, the foreign, the *savage*, or those uncultivated non-Greeks who would invade and ravage the Greek Apolline civilization, what is barbaric and terrible is thus linked to a Dionysian *irrationality*, to violence, to an all-devouring rage. As such, it is also “unruly,” Schelling tells us, and the question then is *to understand how this unruliness becomes ruled, how the irrational becomes rational, how chaos becomes order*; the fault of

modern philosophy, we've seen, is that it has forgotten this raging violence subtending everything, and goes about its business as if order and reason were simply given as such (Descartes's idea of necessary being: the world is what it is because it could not have been otherwise). Now, even though Schelling does not use this phrase until 1815, it seems promised everywhere in his *Naturphilosophie* of the 1790s, and it is equally clear that the early work is concerned not only with the problem of the indiscernible joining, and not only with posing the question of ground, but also with the related question of how the irrational becomes rational, of why, as Merleau-Ponty said, we are condemned to meaning (indeed, these three problems are so intimately tied together as to be almost indissociable). Finally, and not surprisingly, insofar as the barbaric principle names that destructive productivity that escapes the Self's attempt to grasp it, that forever eludes and frustrates reflection, it also includes within itself the material principle and the principle of life (or, better, these latter are particular instantiations of the barbaric principle, and function "locally.") A question here imposes itself: if the barbaric activity of nature remains essentially unmasterable, blind and unconscious, such that the natural product does not know itself to be this activity, then how can a reflexive philosophy of consciousness ever secure a purchase on it? By what right do we speak of it so glibly, as if it were known to us, as if it were accessible to us? Is it not the case that it forever eludes the Self's attempt to grasp it? This worry was articulated by Merleau-Ponty at the close of *The Structure of Behavior*, necessitating the move to the *Phenomenology of Perception*, as seen in chapter one; for Merleau-Ponty, the outcome of this worry was a critique of reflection and a move beyond the philosophy of consciousness. Schelling shares in this worry, and he too will critique idealism at its root. To anticipate, or perhaps to reiterate, Schelling was also a good phenomenologist: the point is not to

think this activity, but rather “to live [*leben*] and to experience [*erleben*] it”;⁶⁰ it is through the thickness of lived experience that the living and barbaric ground, which reflexive idealism cannot grasp, is proven, because lived experience, our life and death, our lifedeath, are testamentary to it. Human being is a testament to the barbaric ground because we live and die by it (or, if one wants to speak more metaphysically, we have “the power of the center”). Nature as a living ground differentiates itself, and thus through its duplicity, opens a space of difference out of which natural beings emerge and stand forth. That kind of natural being that can reflect on, and try to understand, its natural past, is human being; and so the question might be raised: what is shown when a conscious and free being reflects on its blind and unconscious past? Can this reflection disclose the “common ground of preobjective Being” (*N*, 61) in which I and nature are originally identical? In other words, the principle of material life disclosed by *Naturphilosophie* is to be linked to the transcendental unconscious; it is now time to explore that structure and its function.

5. The Unreflected: Nature as the Transcendental Unconscious

The analysis of nature discloses that there is, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, an “excess of being over the consciousness of being” (*N*, 61), and that this excess, formalized as a barbaric principle, “disconcerts reflection.” Merleau-Ponty can thus characterize the Schellingian project as an attempt to rediscover “nature in our perceptive experience before reflection” (*N*, 63) or better, to rediscover what Merleau-Ponty calls, with respect to the Husserlian enterprise, *être brut*. But for Schelling, the emphasis on the destructive face of nature indicates neither a brute being that has

been worked over by the determinations of reflection, nor a pre-reflexive being that might be re-discovered beneath our idealizations, as it does for Husserl, but rather, savage being, *être sauvage*. Merleau-Ponty often uses these two terms appositively, sometimes interchangeably, but it is important to hear the echo of the Schellingian barbaric in *être sauvage*, i.e., the productivity and destructivity of nature, which is not heard in the Husserlian *être brut*. Unlike Bergson, Merleau-Ponty assesses, Husserl had no truck with natural productivity (and we have seen in chapter two that he suspends the materiality of the lifeworld, i.e., that which sustains productivity, reducing nature to mere form, to the “whole of sensible objects”), but there is nevertheless something that brings Schelling and Husserl together. Like the young Schelling, Husserl “wanted to rehabilitate the idea of nature in the framework of a reflexive philosophy,” and like Schelling, is led to unexpected, sometimes radical, consequences (*N*, 102). The evidence of this in Husserl is the persistent failure of the *epokhe* to overcome the natural attitude, frustrating phenomenological reflection and requiring it to start again; if the failure is due to the “resistance of nature,” then the manner of this resistance must now understand. What resists is not a hard chunk of matter, but rather, the real operation within nature by which she transcends herself while inhering in herself. And so Husserl, unlike Schelling, holds the question of the operation of the real in suspense, and thus remains within the horizon of subjective idealism, whereas Schelling pushes the envelope and lets the real operation of nature explode the horizon of subjective idealism. The passage through Schelling has thus far shown that what resists, and what Husserl suspends, is nature understood as the ground of institution, where the problem of ground is construed as the barbaric principle. But would be the consequences of an idealist attempt to rehabilitate nature in the framework of a reflexive philosophy? Is it not the case that

such an attempt will fail precisely because the barbaric activity always exceeds our consciousness of it? How exactly does Schelling explode the paradigm of subjective idealism? And what consequences must Husserl face when his attempted reflexive rehabilitation meets its limits?

For Husserl, the persistent failure of reflection is commemorated not only in his published recommencements of phenomenology, but also in unpublished manuscripts like the one commonly referred to as “The Earth Does Not Move.” There is much to comment on in this essay, contemporaneous with *The Crisis*, but attention will be given to only one theme, following one of Merleau-Ponty’s own indications at the close of the section on Husserl in *La nature*. Recall first that in *The Crisis*, Husserl argued that the lifeworld has two functions, as world-horizon (that is, its transcendental function, as the condition for the appearance of things or for the way beings come into presence), and as earth-ground (*Erdboden*: recall that *Bodennehmen* is one of the determinations of the grounding problem analyzed by Heidegger in “On the Essence of Ground”), that is, its ontological function, which, we argued, is reduced in *The Crisis* in favor of the transcendental function. In his unpublished meditation, Husserl returns to, and further develops, this second function. As the ground of all of our daily activities and all of our sciences, the Earth is not just one object among other objects, and therefore, the scientific view of the Earth as a physical body floating in space is an aberrant image. In opposition to the scientific view, Husserl argues that the earth-ground is the pre-given ground from which all things ultimately take on meaning, and thus is neither something that we can survey with thought and reduce to a noema, nor something of which we earthlings can ever rid ourselves, for we carry it with us in our bodies, which, as living, earthly bodies, refer us back to the Earth from which they arose, no matter where we might be in space, even if we were born on another planet. The

mistake of the sciences is to situate the Earth as an astrophysical object among other, similar objects, and thus, to forget its function as ground; indeed, this forgetting is necessary precisely in order to situate the Earth as an astrophysical body, and as a noematic correlate for scientific noesis. In re-presenting it in this way, science makes things easy for itself, but the re-presentation (like any representation, of course) is *not* the Earth. The Earth as ground is an originary object, and as such, is something that we cannot constitute in thought; rather, as that which from which meaningful objects arise, the Earth is an *institutionary ground*.⁶¹ The Earth withdraws from the representations that it makes possible, and so the clever strategy of relegating the ontology of the lifeworld to the margins in favor of the transcendental aspect in Husserl's late thought, according to Merleau-Ponty's more generous reading, "becomes increasingly the means of unveiling the back side of things that we have not constituted . . . these beings beneath our idealizations and objectifications which secretly nourish them and in which we have difficulty recognizing noema . . . and which is the soil of our experience," i.e., that in which we are enrooted (*S*, 227/180; *N*, 110-112). To reflect on the Earth, then, not only disconcerts phenomenological reflection, revealing its limits, but also, precisely in revealing these limits, uncovers deeper problems of meaning, brings into relief more difficult questions; in short, by suspending the materiality of matter, by holding at bay and in brackets the questions of real operation and natural productivity, Husserl does not so much refuse the question as he does let it stand forth *as a question*. Posing the problem of the Earth-ground *as a problem* opens the door to an unthought domain in Husserl, and this is, for Merleau-Ponty, the principal interest in the little unpublished essay on the Earth; it stands as an invitation to move beyond the subjective-idealist confines of phenomenological reflection, and it is in the direction of this *beyond* that

Merleau-Ponty wants, with Schelling's help, to push (his reading of) Husserl.

For Schelling, on the other hand, the persistent failure of idealist reflection is most clearly documented in *The System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800). Schelling proposes in this seminal text to reconstruct "a progressive history of the consciousness of self" (*SW* III: 330/2). The ground of this consciousness of self "rests on the agreement of something objective and something subjective," a pre-established harmony, that is, on a point of absolute difference, on a non-ground prior to all difference, just as in the *Naturphilosophie* (*SW* III: 334/5).⁶² But whereas *erste Natur* was blindly and unconsciously productive, the productivity of the Self in transcendental idealism is conscious and free. Moreover, nature's goal (if it can be said to purposive and teleological) is to become aware of itself, but "the dead and unconscious products of nature are merely abortive attempts that she makes to reflect herself" (*SW* III: 340/6), attempts which fail precisely because they cannot grasp themselves as the productive product that they are; the goal "is achieved only through the last and highest order of reflection, which is none other than man" (*SW* III: 340/6). Presumably, self-conscious man can grasp and represent to himself what the products of nature cannot; this presumption is put to the test in the text of 1800. Finally, in the *Naturphilosophie*, the problem of ground was construed as the barbaric principle; here too it will be construed as a principle, and Schelling tells us straight away that this principle shall be the intellectual intuition, or more simply, the principle of identity, which "is the same as the principle of ground" (*SW* VII: 359/34). It is thus clear that transcendental idealism and the philosophy of nature seek to disclose their common ground. In what way is this construal of the problem of ground—qua intellectual intuition, on or through which is grounded the Self—to be understood from within the order of the subjective?

In the *System*, the Self's self-positing is understood on the model of the intellectual intuition, through which "there arises for us the self, insofar as it is its own product, at once producing and produced. The identity between self as producing and self as produced is expressed in the proposition self=self" (*SW* III: 366/25). The "=" by no means names the identity of sameness, but rather, as one may suspect, a transitive productivity (*SW* III: 373/30); the self is understood as a generative and infinite activity by which it produces itself-as-object from out of itself, and then attempts to set itself-as-productivity (the subjective self) and itself-as-product (the objective self) in a relation of identity. Thus, "the Self is nothing more than a producing that becomes an object to itself, that is, an intellectual intuition. But now this latter is an absolutely free action, and so cannot be demonstrated, but only demanded" (*SW* III: 369/27). The principle or ground of self-consciousness is, in its immediacy, *posited*. But a system of transcendental idealism wants to realize the elusive dream of modern philosophy, wants to represent and demonstrate this principle as the ground of all knowledge, and to do so, must mediate it, breaking it up into discrete epochs and then try to reconstruct as a "history" that which happens in the flash of eternity. The *System* is a record of this history. Now there are at least two ways to read this history: one could hold that transcendental idealism successfully reconstructs the intellectual intuition as discrete epochs and thus accomplishes the goal of modern philosophy by articulating a system of reason that discloses its own ground, and subsequently grounds all knowledge with apodictic certainty. But then those who would hold this view would then be forced to make sense of the last, "extra-systematic" section of the 1800 text, in which Schelling argues that art alone can show what idealist philosophy cannot prove, i.e., that the ground of the system cannot be demonstrated by science, but only exhibited in the work of art. This means that the 1800 text

must be read as an elaborate ruse, as proof that transcendental idealism (or idealist, reflexive philosophy) as a discourse is unequal to the task of disclosing and containing its own ground; the *System* discloses the limits of systematicity, and to this extent, marks the end of that Cartesian hope for a system of Reason that would ground all the other sciences. Let's continue to delimit some of the contours of this ruse before turning to the extrasystematic exhibition of ground.

The reconstructed history offered by transcendental idealism attempts to retrace the activity of the intellectual intuition. The immediate act wherein the Self becomes an object for itself, and recognizes itself in this object, constitutes the originary agreement that grounds the Self: what Schelling later calls indifference, he names here "the concept of subject-object" (*SW* III: 373/30; cf *N*, 66ff). But in order for there to be an agreement, there must first be a difference: just as we saw with regard to nature, the originary, singular activity of the Self must differentiate itself: there must be "an originary identity in duplicity and vice versa" (*SW* III: 389/42). The originary and unitary identity of the Self is lost; the history of self-consciousness is the attempt of the Self to lay hold of itself again in its originary identity, to become conscious of itself. In becoming-object to itself, however, the originary, singular, infinite activity limits itself, and thus mediates its immediacy. Schelling attends to this limitation with the same care that he treated inhibition in the *Naturphilosophie*, and we need not repeat that same logic here. We will note, though, that the outcome of the Self's self-limitation yields the same problematic: in order to represent itself to itself, the Self must limit its activity, but in so doing, it represents itself as *objectified*. If the intellectual intuition is infinite activity, how can it recognize itself in a finite, limited product? It cannot, for in producing itself as an object, the self produces itself as *what it is not*. Its attempt to become aware of itself is always directed back to the activity-objectified,

and not the activity itself. For the Self to become conscious of itself, the originary identity subject-object must be split in two as subject *and* object, for this division is the condition of all consciousness; and yet, “the originary act, because it is the condition of all limitation and all consciousness, does not come to consciousness and remains unconscious,” precisely because it is lost at the moment that the conditions for becoming conscious of it are established (*SW* III: 409/58). Insofar as the activity of the intellectual intuition is the unconscious condition of all consciousness, we might call it the transcendental unconscious, noting, first, that this names precisely that which consciousness cannot grasp, i.e., the originary activity from which it emerges, or more simply, its own unconscious past, and noting, second, that this is but an initial and provisional definition of the unconscious in Schelling.

Now, the Self’s self-positing happens in the instant of eternity, but “we” philosophers are obliged to reconstruct this instant temporally, to break it apart into discrete moments or “epochs in the history of self-consciousness, and to establish them in their interrelations” in order to “prove” or “demonstrate” the original postulate of the intellectual intuition. What is documented in *The System* of 1800 is thus an imitation in time of an originary act that takes place in and for eternity, without our mediation. The present mediation, however, reveals that in its eternal self-positing, the Self must objectify itself as what it was not, and therefore is not what it is; trying to overcome this bad faith, the Self descends into time, and this descent is simultaneously a sending-away or repression of eternity. The upshot of this is that the postulate of the Self can only be a postulate, and so cannot be proven; we must *suppose* or *assume* that the intellectual intuition has taken place in eternity and for eternity. This means that *The System* is doomed to fail as a system from the very beginning. One can see this fate inscribed in the very structure of

the text: as a free imitation of an original act, philosophy must divide the act into epochs, must temporalize it. But in temporalizing it, the eternity is always already missed. The first epoch traces the development from original sensation to productive intuition, in which the self differentiates itself from mere nature (we attended to this with some care in our earlier discussion of matter). The second epoch traces consciousness from its productive intuition to reflection, by which it begins to grasp itself as individuated. The third epoch moves from reflection to will, to the emergence of an autonomous self-conscious and free being. Each epoch is a progressively more sophisticated attempt of the Self to become conscious of itself, but the lesson learned at the close of the third epoch is that the Self's self-positing can only be a free act of will, that it experiences itself, but cannot explain itself, as will, as if to say that it is aware of itself as a striving, but cannot explain to itself why it is the striving that it feels itself to be (*SW*, III:524-527/148-150). The ground—the unconscious—remains withdrawn; theoretical philosophy in its systematic form reaches an end: transcendental philosophy cannot prove its own postulate.

Happily, where philosophy fails, art succeeds. Systematic philosophy must exclude and cannot prove its ground, but something outside the system can at least exhibit it in a way that philosophy cannot. In the extra-systematic part six, Schelling argues that aesthetic consciousness alone is able to have an experience of the original identity that is posited but unproved by philosophy: the art-product “devines” the unconscious, and so has a privilege as “the organ and document of all philosophy” (*SW*, III: 628/231). The aesthetic intuition is that kind of intuition in which is exhibited “an identity of conscious and the unconscious in the self, and consciousness of this identity” (*SW*, III: 625/229). The object of this intuition, the work of art, has as a peculiar character in that it “unites within itself the characteristics of both” the conscious and

unconscious, freedom and nature. The work of art is, at least at first, produced consciously, and thus is a work of freedom. In that it exhibits ideally the indifferent unity of the Absolute, it “functions” as the natural organism does in its real exhibition; both the work of art and the natural organism “exhibit to me an original identity of the conscious and unconscious activities” (*SW*, III: 619/225). But they also differ in a fundamental way: natural organisms are purposive products, but are not aware of themselves as such, nor can the Self grasp the natural organism in terms of the original unity, as we saw earlier. The aesthetic intuition of the work of art, however, allows the Self to recognize the image of unity and to judge it as beautiful. Schelling elaborates further on this difference: “nature begins as unconscious [i.e., as necessary] and ends as conscious [in freedom]; the process of production is not purposive, but the product is. [On the other hand,] the Self must begin (subjectively) with consciousness and end without consciousness, or objectively; the self is conscious with respect to production, but unconscious with regards to the product” (*SW*, III: 628-29/232). The natural organism thus raises itself to consciousness (in its highest form, as human being), but in doing so, separates what was originally identical; the work of philosophy as a work of consciousness fails to surmount this separation, but the work of art somehow manages to restore it as a symbol or image.

But now a question imposes itself: how is it that the work of art can be such as to reflect this restored unity? Clearly, since philosophy fails to prove it (resulting in the act of abstraction by which the Self posits itself as a willing), then “the objective factor must be supplied by something independent of freedom” (*SW*, III: 614/220). What would that be? This unknown factor, “whereby the objective and conscious activities are brought into unexpected harmony, is none other than the Absolute” (*SW*, III: 615/221),⁶³ which works through the artist like “a dark,

unknown force, like destiny, without the cooperation of, and to some extent in opposition to, freedom” (*SW*, III: 615/222). The work of art begins subjectively, but at some moment in its production, necessity takes over, and so the work ends unconsciously. Necessity speaks through the artist without his cooperation and inscribes itself in the work of art. This dark force “is denominated by the obscure concept of genius” (*SW*, III: 615/222). Genius results in a work in which the original identity is exhibited or radiated back as an image; to this extent, genius is closely bound up with imagination [*Einbildungskraft*] which “builds into unity” [*hineingebilt*] that which is separated (*SW*, III: 625/230). Genius, by which the unconscious and objective enters into the work, is neither learned nor practiced, but “can only be what we may call in a word, the element of poetry in art” (*SW*, III: 618/224), and so the work of art shows the non-objective principle from which the whole of philosophy must start, but cannot prove; in this way, the work of “art constitutes the ideal of science, and where art is, science has yet to attain” (*SW*, III: 622/227).

Now, the digression through this discussion of art is meant to serve two purposes. The first is to illustrate the limits of idealist reflection and to show that the system can only be completed “extra-systematically,” which allows the claim that *The System* is a sort of elaborate ruse, in that it shows how systematicity is always going to fail, and will always require a supplement. But secondly, this occasions a speculative suggestion. Schelling relies on the “obscure” category of genius, which has the air of a *deus ex machina* explanation for creativity, and might well be subject to the same objections that Socrates poses to poetic inspiration; but is it really all that obscure? The speculative suggestion is that it is this very category of genius that Merleau-Ponty is interrogating in his late essay “Eye and Mind.” Recall that in his last

completed work, Merleau-Ponty first, and once again, examines the kinaestheses of the body, noting that the body “sees and is seen . . . and so is caught in the fabric of the world,” the same fabric in which are stitched (Merleau-Ponty says “encrusted,” borrowing from Bergson) the things (*OE*, 18-19/162-63). In virtue of being immersed in the visible in this way, the body has a carnal relation to things; science “manipulates things and gives up inhabiting them” (*OE*, 9/159), but “art, especially painting, draws upon this fabric of brute meaning” (*OE*, 22-23/164). Through its kinaestheses, through its *pouvoir* that constitutes it as a *je peux*, the body inspects the world in a carnal and sensible way, and because the body is both seer and seen, then in its inspection of the world, it folds back on itself and sees itself seeing. Now, we live in a world of idealizations, and so our carnal relation to the world has been worked-over; but if we dig beneath the layers of these idealizations, we re-establish this primal, carnal, sensible contact. The painter is exemplary in this regard, because he already

lives in this texture as a man lives in his house . . . the painter lives in fascination. The actions most proper to him—those gestures, those paths that he alone can trace and that will be revelations to others . . . seem to emanate from the things themselves . . . inevitably the roles between him and the visible are reversed. That is why so many painters have said that *the things look at them*. (*OE*, 31/167; emphasis added).

The things look at the painter: this is not a schizophrenia or paranoia, but rather, the very definition of genius as Merleau-Ponty reinscribes it phenomenologically. The analysis of the body reveals that the seer is also the seen; likewise, the visible and vision belong to the same texture, to the same “pre-objective being”: the painter feels that the things are looking at him because what he sees in them is his own self, his own activity of vision looking back, recognizing there that the *pouvoir* animating his body of flesh is also that which animates the flesh of the world, of which the body is just a peculiar instance. Through his body, the artist lends himself to

the world; through their corporeity, the things lend themselves to painterly vision, and so “the eye is an instrument that moves itself, a means which invents its own ends; it is that which has been moved by some impact of the world, which it then restores to the visible through the offices of an agile hand” (*OE*, 25/165). In short, “painting celebrates no other enigma than that of visibility . . . and gives visible existence to what profane vision believes to be invisible. . . . This voracious vision opens upon a texture of Being,” and discloses it, invents the visible (*OE*, 26/166). Who can fail to hear the Schellingian notion of genius in the background of this? Who can fail to hear the echo of the claim that “I am identical to nature”? Painterly vision divines the unconscious, discloses the enigma of visibility, lets speak the silent and unconscious ground of invisibility; like animal life, painterly vision invents the visible, and thus signifies, it institutes signs or symbolic matrices according to which we learn to see anew. In that “the painter’s vision is a continuous birth” (*OE*, 32/168) of the visible, insofar as the work of art is a reflex of the originary identity or objectification of the intellectual intuition, we might say, as Heidegger does in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” that art is the establishment [*Stiftung*] of truth.⁶⁴ These rhetorical tropes will have to remain as mere suggestions, and a complete and detailed analysis of the ground of aesthetics shared by Merleau-Ponty and Schelling will have to be developed elsewhere.

Now, the System of 1800 is an elaborate ruse in that it illustrates the limits the subjective idealist position. The Self’s reflexive attempt to take hold of its ground always misses its mark; to be exact, what the Self misses is its own activity, and it has the unfortunate tendency of mistaking this activity (when it encounters it in the experience of limitation) for the resistance of the external world, for an “unreflected.” The kind of reflective activity that makes this mistake is

what Hegel calls external reflection, and so it might be said that Schelling offers a critique of external reflection in that he shows that what is “unreflected” is not an external chunk of matter, but rather, what ultimately eludes reflection is its own act. Merleau-Ponty knew this as well, as is clear when he writes:

The movement of recovery, of recuperation, of return to self, the progression toward internal adequation, the very effort to coincide with a nature that is already ourselves and that is supposed to unfold the things and the world before itself—precisely inasmuch as they are a return or a reconquest, these operations of reconstitution or of reestablishment that come second, cannot by principle be the mirror image of its internal constitution and its establishment . . . reflection recuperates everything except itself as an effort of recuperation, it clarifies everything except its own role (VI, 76/51).

Merleau-Ponty thus understands what Schelling shows well in his elaborate ruse: the activity that makes reflection possible is mistakenly posited by reflection as an unreflected; in this regard, the category of the unreflected is created in reflection’s return upon itself. Now in *The System of 1800*, this unreflected bears the title “the unconscious,” and thus far, it has been given the relatively innocuous definition of the transcendental conditions for the possibility of consciousness. Earlier, this unconscious was to be linked to the barbaric principle, but this linkage has remained unspecified. In that this notion of the unconscious occupies a central place in Schelling’s later reflections, our provisional understanding of it must be transcended; to do so requires that the confines of idealism be overcome, and that idealism be set aside as an inadequate attempt to construe the problem of ground. As a failure, *The System* is at least a productive failure, in that it produces a critique of reflection and of the subjective position of transcendental idealism; it also poses the problem of ground as a problem, giving it the name “unconscious.” It is this re-consideration of the construal of the problem of ground qua unconscious that must now be considered.

6. Nature as the Unconscious of God.

The status of this unconscious must be further specified by noting, first, that it is surely not a Freudian unconscious, but neither is it totally alien to Freud's project. While Schelling does not give the reader of the 1800 *System* a great deal of determination with regard to this concept, leaving it as the unreflected transcendental condition for the possibility of consciousness, it is nevertheless at the center of his subsequent reflections. Recall what this notion names: it refers to the activity of the intellectual intuition by which the Self posits itself; but recall also that insofar as I am identical to nature, it also refers to the same activity that is named by the barbaric principle. The activity named by these is the expansive and contractive movement of the Absolute, the "pre-objective Being" that communicates the principle of its activity to both nature and Self. If clarity is to be gained with regard to both the barbaric principle and the transcendental unconscious, it will be worthwhile to re-examine this double movement; in doing so, light will also be cast on the related question of how the orderly, rational world of consciousness and visible nature comes to be out of its chaotic and unconscious past, or in the language of Merleau-Ponty, of how we are condemned to meaning.

The activity of the Absolute sunders itself in two; by differentiating itself, the originally expansive activity opposes itself to itself, thus contracting itself, and through this limitation, is contained as orderly products that (temporarily) regulate the unruly productivity. This principle allows us to pose the problem of ground in terms of matter, life, the barbaric, and most recently, the unconscious; each of these determinations of the problem of ground refer back to that double movement of expansion and contraction. The Absolute moves outward, swells infinitely in all

directions at once, away from the absolute density of its Absolute center, not unlike an explosion of light; but it will not flee from itself altogether, for the absolute density of its zero-point acts like gravity, pulling it back the center, provoking a contraction, countering, and thus regulating, its expansion. A metaphor drawn from astrophysics will permit this to be thought more clearly. Imagine the stellar event known as a supernova (one could even refer to a more local event, like solar storms): at a certain moment, by astrophysical processes that take place within the stellar furnace, a sudden, rapid, and violent expansion takes place; this event cannot, and ought not, be represented with geometrical spherical shapes and indicative arrows drawn as straight lines from the center of the sphere outward, because such representation might lead us to believe in a series of linear events, as if the expansive movement outward were smooth and equal on all sides. A more appropriate image would be that of a roaring fireball (in a “wetter” metaphor, Schelling invokes the “churning sea” of Platonic matter⁶⁵); imagine how the fire (which is sometimes said to have a life of its own) rolls back on itself, and how this rolling-back lets fire meet fire, roaring forward and rolling back again in a continuous diremption (and intentionally implicit here is that the argument that a singular activity should divide itself in *two* is insufficient; from one comes not two, but *many*). In the case of the supernova, the chaotic expansion means that the chaos of elements and elemental processes expanding randomly in all directions at once will meet up with other elements and elemental processes, entering into reaction with them; these reactions produce new events, and in this roaring fireball or churning sea of reactions and events through which everything rolls back on everything else, expansion reaches a maximum. The elemental furnace burns the most near the center, and so the density of events there will counter expansion at its maximal point, and a sudden collapse or contraction of the supernova event takes place, yielding

a white dwarf, or possibly, a black hole. The chaos is “regulated,” and the event-horizon unfolds and is achieved, by means of its continuously diremptive action on itself.

This double movement can be thought without the metaphorical supplement of speculative astrophysics (on the basis of which, incidentally, can be understood Löwith’s metaphor—which is in fact Schelling’s: expanding, contracting, expanding again, and so on, the Absolute *breathes*, it is *alive*; as such, it is conceived by Schelling as the absolute *organism*⁶⁶); a moment in Schelling’s work provides clear expression to this double movement and its consequences. This moment is in the unfinished project of *The Ages of the World*; a detailed analyses of these texts will not be undertaken, because their richness and complexity is simply too immense for this present dissertation. Instead, a few, very general comments will be made about just this one very precise theme, and they will be made with the assistance of a guide. The theme in question is the same theme that is at the center of Žižek’s analyses in his commentary on *The Ages of the World*.

Žižek closely follows and carefully explains the problematic that Schelling develops in the *Weltalter* project. When Schelling introduces his problem in the 1815 draft, he writes:

God is the oldest of beings. . . . Freedom and necessity are in God. . . . necessity is in God before freedom, inasmuch as a being must first be in order to be able to act freely. Necessity lies at the basis of freedom and, as far as there can be such a distinction in God, is the first and oldest thing is God himself Now even though the God who his the necessary is also he who is the free, the two are not the same. What a being is by nature and what it is by freedom are two quite different things. If it were already everything by necessity, then it would be nothing by freedom. And yet, by common consent, God is the most spontaneous being.

Everyone recognizes that God created beings besides himself, not by virtue of the blind necessity of his nature, but by the highest spontaneity. Indeed, to be more exact, by virtue of God’s mere necessity there would be no creature, since that necessity only refers to God’s being as his own. Thus in creation God surmounts by freedom the necessity in his nature, and it is freedom which

overcomes necessity, not necessity that overcomes freedom.

What is necessary in God we call God's nature. . . . but even this nature in God is living, is indeed the greatest vitality. (*SW* VIII: 209-210/95-96).

Schelling's entire program is in this citation. The question that Schelling is here posing is, as Zizek puts it, that of God's phenomenalization, "how . . . it happen[s] that God . . . discloses himself and thereby appear to himself,"⁶⁷ or of how the Absolute leaves itself and subsequently returns to itself such that it knows itself as what it is. As is clear, the God who knows himself as God, as the creative God of freedom, or as God-for-himself, has come to be out of the God-in-himself who does not know himself as such, by overcoming the necessitous nature in him. Indeed, he must have come to be the God of freedom, for if he did not do so, there would be no creation, no creature. This nature that is in God but not God thus "imposes itself on him as an independent condition of his operation," and to understand this operation is, Merleau-Ponty tells us, "our problem." The problem is not to know this in-itself as such, but rather to understand the how of this movement by which God comes to be, comes to know himself; to do so requires that what is meant by this nature in God be understood, and the attempt to understand must begin with a contrast with Schelling's earlier position. The young Schelling held that nature and Self, the ideal and the real, were "in" God as indifferent, as a difference in unity, and that God the Absolute differentiates itself by virtue of its proper activity; the later Schelling inflects this view slightly, arguing that God is "first" (it is doubtful to what extent we can speak of priority here, since all of this happens in eternity, "before" time) this dark and necessary nature (i.e., *erste Natur*). How then is this nature to be understood? Schelling contends that it must be understood according to two co-eval principles: "the outflowing, outspreading, self-giving essence [i.e., an expansive activity], and an equally eternal power of selfhood, of return unto self, of being-in-self

[i.e., a contractive activity]” (*SW* VIII: 211/97). Thus the nature in God that is not God is understood according to the logic of expansion and contraction; in its “first moment,” the God of necessity is, as it were, this nature fully contracted: “God, according to the necessity of his nature, is an eternal no, . . . an eternal contraction of his nature into himself, in which contraction no creature could live” (*SW* VIII: 218/103-104). But this God of necessity fully contracted into himself is, in fact, not God, but rather “belongs to what is necessary in God, and taken strictly, God is called God only with respect to his freedom” (*SW* VIII: 244/133). How can God become himself? Because “with a like necessity of his nature . . . God is also [or if one prefers, in a “second moment”] an eternal yes, an eternal outgoing, giving, communicating of his essence” (*SW* VIII: 218/104). (Note that there is a sort of reversal with regard to the younger Schelling, who argued that the activity of the Absolute was originally, i.e., in a first moment, expansive; but this reversal is not total, in that Schelling here is attempting to think a “zero-point,” i.e., the “before” of expansion. That is, expansion does not take place in a void, it must start from something, and what is new here in the later Schelling is that “something” is full contraction, absolute density . . . but of what? There must be something there to be contracted, or that contracts, and yet, this is prior to the creation of something that must be there; equally, primal nature cannot yet be visible nature, since the latter is created by God in order to overcome the anxiety provoked by the former. We cannot even ask what it is that is there-but-not-there, because it is, as yet, without being; these disturbing choric difficulties are at the heart of all philosophy, constituting the index of a mystery, indeed, *the* mystery of the origin of the universe).

Insofar as the first, necessitous nature in God is to be understood according to these two, opposing principles, then we can say that “first nature is of itself in . . . a necessary

contradiction, posited together with its nature, and which therefore, strictly speaking, is its nature” (*SW* VIII: 219/105). Indeed, there is no other way to conceive of this primal nature except as contradiction, for otherwise, “if primal nature were in harmony with itself . . . there would be an abiding one, and never a two, an eternal immobility without progress. As certainly as there is life, there is contradiction in primal nature Contradiction alone brings life” (*SW* VIII: 219-220/105-6). This contradiction of opposite forces is a continual combat: “the stronger that the first. . . pulls in order to bring the essence into the depths, the more this essence resists everything which is of an expansive nature strives, the more forcibly to expand itself the more it has been contracted” (*SW* VIII: 245/134). This combative and contradictory opposition would seem to get us nowhere, and is characterized by Schelling as a “rotary motion,” as an “eternal revolving in itself, a kind of circle . . . in which the distinction of higher and lower is annulled Even the concept of beginning and end [and of first and second moments] is annulled in this rotation.”⁶⁸ It is at this moment that Žižek’s Lacanian analysis has its initial value: Žižek characterizes this rotary motion as a “psychotic-chaotic universe of blind drives,”⁶⁹ and this in turn gives us a “grandiose, Wagnerian vision of God in the state of an endless pleasure in pain, agonizing and struggling with himself, affected by an unbearable anxiety, . . . suffer[ing] simultaneously the impossibility of closing itself up, of withdrawing fully into itself, and the impossibility of opening itself up . . . so that it is caught in a vicious cycle of pulsation—every attempt at creation-expansion-externalization repeatedly aborts, collapses back into itself.”⁷⁰ The God of necessity, who is nothing more than this rotary motion, is stark, raving mad; or at least, terminally anxious. Like the anxious doctoral student, God rubs his hands together, he pulls out what is left of his hair, he tries desperately to advance, only to find that his every effort goes

nowhere, and so collapses in a fit, deletes what he has written, and tries again with no success; this God, like the candidate, is tortured, unable to break free of the noose of madness tightening around his neck, spinning his wheels and getting nowhere. How will this tortured God of necessity ever break free from this quagmire of rotation? How will he ever surmount the chaotic universe of blind drives, and become the creative God of creation?

The answer is deceptively simple, and no prescription is required: he must *choose* to do so, he must take a resolute decision [*Ent-scheidung*]; he can either continue to revolve around in that same tortured circle, or he can make a decision to leave it behind. How is this decision made? The answer is inscribed in the rotary motion itself, which must be inspected more closely.

Insofar as the God of necessitous nature is “first” contracted fully in himself, and is an eternal No or eternal denial of himself, he is essentially negative, he posits himself as non-being; thus, “the original life of blind necessity could not be called one that is, because it never really attained stability, being, but remained mere striving and desire for being” (*SW* VIII: 267/155). Strictly speaking, God is not, he has no being. Why this desirous striving? Because, as Schelling writes, “a being cannot negate itself without thereby turning in upon itself, thus making itself the object of its own willing and desire . . . to posit one’s self as not being, and to will one’s self, are therefore one and the same thing” (*SW* VIII: 224/110). Thus, by virtue of being not, God wills himself to be. That is, in that “first moment,” when God is fully withdrawn into himself, he is *not*, he is pure nothingness who “enjoys his non-being.”⁷¹ In actively wanting nothing, the will is negation, contraction. However, since positing one’s self as not-being is the same as willing one’s self, then this pure nothingness is, at the same time, the pure *possibility* of being, pure freedom, or the countermovement of expansion. Since we are still stuck in this grinding, rotary

movement, the expansion will be countered by another contraction, because “if life were to stop here, then there would be nothing but an eternal exhaling and inhaling, a continual alternation of living and dying, which is no true being, but only an eternal impulse and zeal to be, without any real being” (*SW* VIII: 232/119). God is thus still not, but no longer pure not. However, life does not stop there, in that the “first” expansion countering the “first” contraction is turn countered by a “second” contraction. But in this “second” contractive negativity, the will that wants nothing negates itself as negative: this “second” contraction is therefore a contraction in a double sense, not only as restriction, but also in the sense of contracting an illness (Schelling already plays on this double meaning in the *Erste Entwurf*): in negating its negativity, the will that wants nothing becomes a will that wants something, and thus “contracts Being”: “the desire [to be] is now quieted insofar as it has now really attained stable being,” and God *is* (*SW* VIII: 267/155). This contraction of being—simultaneously a restriction or containment and a coming-down-with, but also, in a third sense, a peristaltic contraction like that of a sphincter that pushes-out,⁷² is ultimately a *decision*, indeed, *the* decision by which God pushes himself out, expels the vortex (or turns himself inside-out) and simultaneously pushes-away or pushes-down the psychotic-chaotic vortex of contracted nature. The decision is thus not a free decision to overcome duplicitous necessity, not taken on the side of freedom, but rather a necessary decision to be free, a tumultuous decision or ordeal that necessity necessarily undergoes by its psychotic-chaotic labor on or within itself; only retrospectively does it appear that freedom has “conquered” necessity. Contracting, expanding, contracting again, necessitous nature squeezes the free God out of itself in “an orgasm of forces” (*SW* VIII: 328/217), and in this same movement, sends itself away, withdraws itself into an Absolute Past: in his orgasmic decision, God quite literally

comes to be.

This story is not yet over, but it would be an error to fail to recall that at the root of decision, the root of *Entscheidung*, is *Scheid*, sheath, vagina; and its verbal form *scheiden*, to separate, divide, diverge, divorce (in his decision, God has separated himself from his chaotic nature, established a difference between him, the creative God of freedom who exists, and his ground, necessitous nature). One might therefore be inclined to attempt here an analysis of this critical moment in Schelling's work in terms of the *Scheid*, and say that in his act of decision, God turns himself inside out, invaginates himself . . . or herself . . . or in short, that Schelling's work might be termed an invaginated metaphysics (or hymeneal, in Derrida's sense, because, first, in invaginating himself, God turns the inside out and the outside in, and second, while the necessitous nature of God is repressed, tucked away in a lockbox, and thus separated from him, he remains forever joined to it, joined and separated).⁷³ To give into this temptation would soon lead to related issues of sexual difference, castration and pregnancy (and these have been hinted at throughout), and to a re-examination of productivity in terms of *Zeug*, *zeugen*, and *erzeugen*; such a temptation is indeed compelling, not only because such a reading is called for by Schelling himself in his systematic deployment of this vocabulary, but also because this sexual reading of Schelling's conception of nature would be consistent with Merleau-Ponty's attempt to retrieve an archaic conception of nature as *physis* over against the decrepit Cartesian (and Husserlian) conception. But this temptation will be refused, however, for three reasons: first, such a reading has alleged all along the development of the reading of Schelling without it becoming an explicit theme; second, it has not been made an explicit theme of this present dissertation because others have more capably made it a theme in their work on Schelling;⁷⁴ third, and most legitimately,

Merleau-Ponty's project, which is explicitly the object of this thesis, is ultimately not identical to Schelling's, and while Schelling's conception of a dynamic, living, and sexualized notion of nature surely has a sympathetic reader in Merleau-Ponty, the Frenchman has a precise interest in Schelling's project, i.e., he is less interested in productivity as such than he is in how this real productivity institutes the Symbolic. In other words, while Schelling's work is, for Merleau-Ponty, articulated at the indiscernible joining, the problem of the indiscernible joining is posed within the horizon of the question of institution—that is, when Merleau-Ponty identifies this operation of nature in god as “our problem,” we must remember that “our problem” is that of institution. He keeps company with Schelling not only around the conception of a living, sexualized nature, but also, and more importantly, around the question of how we are condemned to meaning, of how the world of meaning emerges from the chaos of irrationality. And so instead of pursuing a sexual reading of Schelling, which is admittedly a necessary but undeveloped *lemma* within the argument, the relevance of Schelling's argument for “our problem” of institution will be extracted.

When God pushes himself out and thus comes to be through his decision, he at the same time pushes-away that psychotic vortex of drives. Only with this sending-away or repression of the vortex of drives can we say that there is a true beginning, for “if there were nothing except blind necessity then life would remain in this dark, chaotic condition of an eternally therefore never beginning, eternally and therefore never ending, movement” (*SW* VIII: 252/140). The contradictory rotary movement is thus of itself not the beginning, for this pulsation itself cannot constitute a stable ground; the beginning begins—there is a ground—only when the movement is repressed in the decision, for there is a “true beginning . . . [in] that which is the ground of a

continual progress, not of an alternately progressing and retrogressing movement.”(*SW* VIII: 229/116). This dark, chaotic ground has to be contracted and repressed or sent away so that God can exist, for otherwise, if there were no difference between ground and existence, we would be left with only the mere identity of self-sameness, a non-productive identity that would generate neither life nor freedom. God is a God of the living, after all, and if his free act of creation is to be accounted for, the difference between ground and existence must be maintained. The distinction is established in the act of decision, in the sending-away of ground: *Grund ist Abgrund*. By sending-away his the rotary movement of chaotic drives, God becomes conscious of himself as free and creative, and in becoming conscious, he excludes that of which he is unconscious—namely, himself, in another form, under a different power—as eternally past; this exclusion is not a negation, for the past is also eternally *his* past, and he remains attached to it, and even though “he puts it in concealment, it is still what it was before . . . [namely, a] consuming fire that still slumbers in that life, only quieted” (*SW* VIII: 268/157) repressed, sent-away. Thus,

that which is at the same time excluded and drawn into consciousness can only be what is unconscious [*Bewusstlose*]. Therefore, all consciousness has what is unconscious as ground, and, just in coming to be conscious, this unconscious is posited as past by that which becomes conscious of itself . . . the unconscious and conscious in God were comprehended in the same indivisible act of becoming conscious, the conscious as what is eternally present, but the unconscious with the character of what is eternally past. (*SW* VIII: 262/150).

Thus, what was hitherto called the unconscious in Schelling is not something that first exists, out of which consciousness comes to be, nor is it merely and simply the transcendental conditions for the possibility of consciousness; rather, both consciousness and the unconscious result from the act of decision: God gives birth to himself—he institutes himself—as the God of freedom, as

consciousness, and simultaneously represses that from which he was born, constituting it as the unconscious. Indeed, the decisive act itself by which God simultaneously comes to be and secludes his ground must also be relegated to the side of the unconscious: “the decision which is to make a true beginning . . . must not be brought before consciousness or recalled” (*SW* VIII: 314/204). The act happens in eternity, for eternity, and remains in an eternal past. This means that “the unconscious” itself comes to be only after the fact, *post-festum*, and is itself constituted as a sort of *Nachträglichkeit*. Thus it is only because God exists, only in virtue of his coming-to-be, only because he is a creaturely *Wesen*, only through the act of decision, that there is an unconscious, that there is, *après-coup*, ground. In this regard, Merleau-Ponty is quite right when he says in that 1960 note, which has served as a sort of epigraph for this chapter, that there is no myth of originary indivision, and no coincidence of return; and he is equally right in his comments on reflection, *supra*, when he claims that reflection creates that to which it returns; it turns out that this mythical story of God before he is God properly so-called is a necessary fantasy, one that God himself needs in order to be himself and in order to ground his extence, and one that philosophy needs in order to account for the meaning to which we find ourselves condemned. Whereas the old God was anxious, the new God is . . . delusional?⁷⁵

Minimally, what is disclosed here is that the rule of order (i.e., the free and creative God) comes to be by overcoming chaos (i.e., the tortured necessity of the nature in God), and that this overcoming is, in fact, the sphinctral or orgasmic work of expansion and contraction; God institutes himself as God properly so-called. Thus, when Merleau-Ponty notes that there is something in God that is not God but that nevertheless imposes itself on him as a necessary condition of his operation, and identifies this as “our problem,” he is referring explicitly to the

real effectivity of necessitous nature in God that results in a transcendence-in-inherence, or to the operation in the Real that leads to the institution of the Symbolic (this again, we recall from earlier in this chapter, is at the basis of his differend with Lacan, who will maintain that in fact the Real, and any operation we pretend to see at work in it, is only an effect of, and articulated from within the horizon of, the Symbolic). Now, truth be told, when Merleau-Ponty points to “our problem,” the passage in Schelling that he has explicitly in mind is not drawn from *The Ages of the World*, but rather, from that much-commented-upon scene in the 1809 essay *On Human Freedom* in which Schelling stages the auto-birthing of God; we know this, first, because it is not likely that Merleau-Ponty read the *Ages*, but is likely he read the 1809 text, as this latter appears in Jankélévitch’s translation, and second, because the language that Merleau-Ponty uses to identify “our problem” is drawn almost verbatim from the 1809 text. This presents no interpretive problem, however, since the unfinished project of the *Ages* is, at least in part, an elaboration on this single scene; moreover, in what can only be perceived as yet another cheat, commentary on this scene has been deliberately avoided, since it is the object of others’ analyses, notably John Sallis and David Krell.⁷⁶ However, it can be avoided no longer, for both near the end of that scene of auto-parturition, and in what immediately precedes it, there is the articulation of a thought that most clearly and directly expresses what is at stake for Merleau-Ponty in all of this (and granted, this also appears in the *Ages*, but in a less clear form); risking redundancy, it must be examined, in order to complete the discussion of the unconscious.

The scene, already familiar from the preceding analyses, is staged in terms of the problem of ground. Schelling contests that “to be separated from God, things must come forth from a ground different from him. But as nothing can be outside of God, the only solution to this

contradiction is that the things have their ground in what which in God himself is not himself, that is, what makes the ground of his existence”(SW VII:359/33). The principle of this Ground that is in God but not God must “not express an identity that, turning in a circle of selfsameness, would be non-progressive, and thereby, insensible and deprived of life. The unity of this principle is immediately creative” (SW VII:346/18). The ground must be *living*, its principle *creative*: this creativity is not a mechanical production of the same, but rather, as a *zeugen*, is bound to a living reproductivity of difference, a continual *Entzweigung*, which is the very definition of life for Schelling, constituting the ground as “something real and effective,” without which there would be only death. The preceding has also disclosed that this Ground of God’s existence, in God but not God, “is *nature*—in God, inseparable from him, but nevertheless distinguishable from him” (SW VII:358/32). When nature is repressed by God, when he masters himself, he properly exists and is God properly so-called; but nature can be his ground only if he already exists. In this regard, nature as the Ground of God’s existence, as his unconscious, has the structure of *Nachträglichkeit*: it is only after that God is God properly speaking that retrospectively the ground is posited as ground, and we have seen that this positing of ground requires that it be sent away or repressed: *Grund ist Ab-grund*. This sending-away of ground is effected via a resolute decision and by force of will: the will that wants nothing turns back on itself and thus wants something.

God suffers from this will, which has the character of a longing [*Sehnsucht*], “that continually forces the One to give birth to itself. It is not itself one, but is however coeternal with it” (SW, VII:359/34). The will as a kind of languorous desire is what it is not, implying a lack or a negativity. Hence, Schelling says, “a will in which there is no understanding, . . . a will which

for this reason is not an autonomic and perfect will, since it is the understanding which is properly said the will at the heart of will . . . the concern for a will which wants understanding . . . a will that is not conscious” (*SW*, VII:359/34). *Sehnsucht* is thus a will which does not understand what it wants, and it wants nothing other than wanting. Schelling calls it *der nicht wollende Wille*, and it constitutes a first potency of being, the *Seynskonnede*, the being-able-to-be. This indeterminate wanting of being-able-to-be is “the infinite lack of being” and refers itself only to itself. However, it is already not nothing. Its own essence, its being-able-to-be obliges it to be already, and as such, it determines itself. It must be something. There is thus a second potency, the necessity of being, *das Seynsmussende*, and it is constrained to be what it is, and it does not have its own will. The will is originally without understanding is indeterminate but becomes determinate. In this regard the will which is *Sehnsucht* configures and regulates itself, and this birth of regularity is also the birth of God. But the birth of God and the imposition of order do not exhaust the being-able-to-be of the originary will, which persists but as sent away, repressed as “an absolutely irreducible residue,” as an always operant power which manifests itself as “the anger of God.” Necessity—that unthinkable *Abgrund* of thought—is thus not unconditioned, as Kant said.

What is made clear in the 1809 text (and remains obscure in the 1815 version of the *Ages*) is that even though God comes to be God properly so-called, he does not yet know himself. What is required is that he see himself in an image, that he pass through something like the mirror stage; but the mirror in which he sees himself is one that he creates for himself, and indeed, it is as and through Creation that he sees himself. Schelling specifies: “in response to the desire that is from the obscure ground, the first emotion of the divine creature, an internal

reflexive representation is formed in God himself, thanks to which . . . God perceives himself in an image. It is through this representation that God, considered absolutely, is realized effectively for the first time” (*SW* VII:360-61/35). Thanks to this image, God becomes determinate, becomes what he is and knows himself as such, while guarding within himself the destructive fire of nature, his unconscious ground, secluded away in the lockbox of the Absolute Past. Thanks to the mirror image, God is what he *should* be, and this is the third potency, the *Seynssöllende*: he *should* be what he *is*, and *is* what he *should* be. Yet the possibility persists that he may be otherwise; unlike Descartes, necessary being is what it is, but *not* because it could not be otherwise. It is the consequence and risk of his living ground, and it is here that the difference from the Cartesian ontology of necessary being is most clearly marked. God thus comes-to-be – He is a *Wesen* – in virtue of a languorous will seeking to know itself.

Now, this representation that forms in God as the means through which he knows himself, is “the *Word* of this desire” (*SW*, VII:361/36). This recalls a passage cited earlier in this chapter, and that precedes the staging of God’s birth: “the procession of things from God is God’s self-revelation. But God can reveal himself in creatures who resemble God, in free, self-activating being for whose existence there is no reason save God. He *speaks* and they are there.” The image that forms in God is thus the Word, and he pronounces it, he exteriorizes outside of himself what is inside himself. This exteriorization is also the result of that same expansive-contractive movement that sends away the *Grund* as *Ab-grund*; that movement “goes through all visible nature . . . and visible nature, in detail and in its entirety, is an image of this every forthgoing and returning movement” (*SW* VIII: 231/118). God thus squeezes out visible nature, and it carries with it a trace of that rotary movement, conferring upon it the capacity to generate,

to become. But the image of visible nature, insofar as it is an image of necessity, is, for God, an insufficient mirror in which to see himself, because as creative and free, he must see himself in creatures like him; hence the Word of God also generates that finite creature called man. It is with regard to the pronunciation of the Word that Žižek's analysis makes has its second value. Žižek shows that in pronouncing a word, the "subject contracts his being outside of himself, coagulates the core of his being in an external sign . . . [by which] I find myself outside myself . . . in a signifier that represents me."⁷⁷ The verbal exteriorization of God, his contraction outside of himself, is his self-showing or revelation, it "gives form . . . to the instruments of his revelation," that is, the visible world, and to that privileged creature that inhabits it. But notice: God reveals himself as a sign, he signifies, and thus invents the visible; in this way, through his contraction outside himself in the guise of the pronunciation of the Word, there is the transition from the Real (that tortured and antagonistic vortex of drives) to the Symbolic, to a network of signifiers correlated to a field of meaning. The pronunciation of the Word, we can say, is thus the institution of God as ideality, as symbolic matrix. But in pronouncing the word, which is, Žižek argues, the paradigmatic case of creation, God hands himself over to the Other: the sign in which he invests himself is not-him; he alienates himself from himself, becomes what he is not, in order that he may create the mirror in which he will see only a distorted and inadequate representation of himself.⁷⁸ The signifier in which God contracts his being and through which he exteriorizes himself is thus arbitrary, contingent. The Schellingian irony, as Žižek has rightly shown, is that the pronunciation of the Word, the very moment of creation, implies the finitization and exteriorization of God. By pronouncing the Word, God simultaneously relieves his anxious tension by pushing it away into the Absolute Past, and pushes himself out as the Free

God of Creation. God has issues, to be sure, and he would be an extra-ordinary analysand; Schelling shows, before Freud, the value of the talking cure.

Now a sense of what is meant by “unconscious” in Schelling’s work is discerned; it is not simply the transcendental conditions for the possibility of consciousness, but, in virtue of its identity with the barbaric principle, it is an index of the problem of ground. More than that, though, it names the real operation of primal nature, showing, in all its abyssal and aporetic glory, the difficulties that one encounters when tries to think through the operation by which the Real transcends itself and institutes itself as the Symbolic. This is what Merleau-Ponty names “our problem,” and why he turns to Schelling as the thinker who has already construed our problem as the problem of ground, and who has engaged in the ultimate task of phenomenology, which is to say, to bring into phenomenology what has remained resistant to it, namely, natural being, and thus also, to effect a fundamental transformation of phenomenology. In this regard, it can now be affirmed definitively that Merleau-Ponty does indeed have a “reading” of Schelling, and that something important is at stake in that reading. What is gained from this discussion? What has this to do with “our problem”? How is that “something important” to be assessed? These questions will be assessed in the conclusion.

4 Conclusion: Nature, Ontology, and Institutions for the Future.

It is clear that Schelling's efforts throughout his career to think the problem of the Absolute's phenomenalization give us not only a rigorous challenge to the Cartesian notion of necessary being, but also, an attempt to think what Husserl bracketed, namely, the real operation of materiality and of natural productivity, or what Merleau-Ponty called the "resistance of"; as such, Merleau-Ponty does indeed have a "reading" of Schelling, even if, in the published work, that "reading" is not fully developed. Through this reading, Merleau-Ponty is able to push beyond phenomenology as a philosophy of consciousness, to bring into phenomenology that which resists it, and thus transform it. The emphasis on the barbaric in Schelling's work allows Merleau-Ponty to conceive the brutality of the brute as a negativity at work within Being itself, as opposed to a metaphysical notion that would oppose Being to a Nothing that precedes it, and that then must negate that Nothing in order to be fully what it is as Being or as the Positive Object. Through an interrogation of nature as the barbaric principle, we are led to a meditation on what Merleau-Ponty named *Être sauvage* or the Flesh. Before we consider this, let us recall the trajectory of the argument that has brought us to this point.

The discussion of Schelling was opened when, after a reading of *Phenomenology of Perception*, it was shown that Merleau-Ponty left the materiality of matter, the brutality of the brute, or, in a word, nature, unthought; that is, he clearly recognizes that there is an "inhuman

ground” operating beneath consciousness and through the body, but he does not submit this to an interrogation. Instead, precisely because Merleau-Ponty will take hold of the body in terms of the double refusal (neither in-itself nor for-itself), he does not seize it in an original and radical way; he calls it a “natural self,” but the meaning of the “natural” is left unthought, resulting in a “bad ambiguity.” The reading of *Phenomenology* also revealed that Merleau-Ponty dislodges “the good ambiguity” of the phenomenon of expression, a structure of transcendence-in-inherence by which the body, in virtue of a power to orient itself in (and to be oriented by) the world, transcends itself as a natural self while maintaining its vital inherence, thus instituting a symbolic network of signifiers (first in terms of space, a “here” and a “there,” which already inscribes differences in the world) up in which the subject is then caught, and condemned to meaning. The understanding of the body’s motile proprioceptivity was prepared by the studies on animality (recall that the body is itself “an animal of perceptions and movements,” but is not reducible to mere animality, because the inscription of signifying differences effected by human corporeal gestures sediment and accumulate, become available for use by us, taking on a life of their own, containing the past and promising a future, constituting a history and a tradition, and opening the possibility of adventure; in short, we humans are oriented by the possible and the virtual, whereas animals, who are poor in world, remain in the present and the actual), which themselves revealed how animal life signifies, invents the visible, and thus makes materiality stand before us as a nascent intelligibility, lending itself to the institution of meaning. The phenomenon of expression as a modality of institution will thus become the means for Merleau-Ponty to deepen and to radicalize his own insights (recall that he says that what he discovered in *Phenomenology of Perception* was a psychology that must now be reinscribed as an ontology),

but in order for him to perform this self-critique, he must think the ground of expression. Insofar as expression is understood as a natural use of the body, and the body as a natural me, it will be nature, which was left uninterrogated, that will constitute the ground of expression, and thus also, of institution. This, then, is what led to a meditation on the concept of nature, which from the outset is determined as that which we do not constitute, but rather, as that which institutes, or in other words, as that generic being which is the ground of institution. The meditation on the concept of nature is, at least in the first course, an examination of the historical permutations or aberrant images of nature, resulting from those fateful omissions in the modern reactivation [*Nachstiftung*] of the originary institution [*Urstiftung*] of philosophy, born co-evally with natural science and dependant upon a view of nature as *physis*. What is fateful in that reactivation, localized in the exemplars of “Descartes” and “Galileo,” is a failure to question back to the original meaning-bestowal of the tradition that they receive and take for granted; at the moment of their critical engagement, the tradition, in virtue of its own inner possibilities bestowed to it at the moment of originary institution, had already worked over the idea of nature so that it was no longer understood as *physis*, but rather as externality or as object. Both “Galileo” and “Descartes,” i.e., both natural science and philosophy receive a concept of nature that has already forgotten its origin, that is already instituted, and then distort the image further by leaving it uninterrogated. This doubly distorted image of nature then becomes the basis of scientific methodology (Merleau-Ponty says it “still overhangs our ideas”), generating “fantastic images” of man, the state, history, etc. Husserl, though his inner-historical critique, wanted to challenge this idea by returning to the things themselves, but his very methodology (constitution) and his philosophical commitments to subjective idealism oblige him to bracket what is most originary

(i.e., the operation of *physis*, the materiality of the material) in order to take hold of the lifeworld; he thus repeats the objectivism he wanted to uproot. It was in this context that Schelling was encountered.

From the very beginning, Schelling is critical of the modern reactivation or aberration of the idea of nature, and the systems built on it, arguing that its various configurations reduce it to a mere external thing deprived of life; that is, none of the principle modern configurations (Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, Kant, Fichte) of the concept of nature can account for life (because its condition of possibility, i.e., contradiction, is inevitably “resolved” in God or under the title of necessary being), and each tend toward either a mechanical conception (denying the possibility of freedom) or an intellectualist one (denying the real effectivity of nature). Schelling thus wants to retrieve a concept of nature as a living nature that makes freedom possibility and maintains itself as a generative and creative productivity; in other words, Schelling wants to think nature as living ground, or conversely, to construe the problem of ground as living nature. Consequently, he is led to one of those places that Husserl didn’t want to go, to the heart of the question of natural productivity, and he attempts to articulate there the logic of operation in the Real, a natural operation that generates the world and those existing things in it, serving as their ground, a disclosure of Being that lets beings stand fourth. By posing the problem of ground in this way, and by rigorously following the implications of this construal of the problem, Schelling is led ultimately to fantastic results, wild stories about a psychotic and gender-confused God who suffers a longing to give birth to himself; we have come to understand this birth, this pronunciation of the Word, as God’s invagination or self-exteriorization, and at the same time, the repression or sending-away of that torturous operation that compels God to make his decision

to be. What emerges here is an independent operation of the Real that, through its own work on itself, transcends itself as the Symbolic; the operation does not exhaust itself in its self-transcendence, but rather, always remains subtending as a barbaric possibility that could someday surge fourth again to disrupt the order that it makes possible, to reclaim the existence that it has made stand fourth. What is gained in the passage through the work of Schelling is not only a critique of the Cartesian ontology of the object and the attempt to rehabilitate a living conception of nature, but also, and more importantly for “our problem,” *a concrete and ontological model of originary institution*, and a rigorous thinking through of the *ground of institution*.

Schelling tells a story about the beginning, about how the beginning begins, about how *there is something*. Like all stories about the beginning, it can be told only after the beginning has begun, only after the fact, narrated retrospectively as an *après coup*, such that it always appears that the outcome is a necessary one, as if all the events in the story *must* have followed one upon the other in a logically necessary way so as to arrive at that outcome. And indeed, all of philosophy is just the attempt to take hold of its beginning, according to Hegel. One of the traits that sets Schelling’s story apart from, say, Descartes’s (which insists that things are the way they are because that’s how God made them, and even if they had been otherwise, they would have turned out this way, because that’s how God is: the idea of necessary being), is that what is retrospectively called necessity is merely a single possibility, the *contingency* that things could have been otherwise, and that the possibility of another outcome still subtends what is. Thus, it is a story about happenstance and accident, about possibility and subjunctivity, the *as if* and the *if it were*.

Schelling’s story is speculative and metaphysical, to be sure, but logical and principled as

well. Merleau-Ponty might not like the language of Schelling's story: one will not find in Merleau-Ponty's work such notions as expansion and contraction, or of an anxious God of necessity who longs to be free, nor even of the Absolute that communicates its principle to its products. But this is not an objection to the story as such; what is important for Merleau-Ponty is neither whether God was psychotic, nor the exact manner of operation of expansive and contractive forces, nor whether we can access this operation. What matters is the structure and its signifying operation that is named in the story. What matters is that *there is something*; what matters is that *the institution has taken place*. This, then, is why Merleau-Ponty identifies Schelling's problem as "ours."

The structure and its signifying operation that is interrogated by Schelling in his work is everywhere present in Merleau-Ponty. For example, the studies on animal behavior, especially Coghill's work, showed that what we call life is only our way of perceiving the unfurling of a totality. We can tell stories about that unfurling, we can say that there is an anatomical calendar of maturation consisting of several discrete epochs that somehow, as if by magic, inhere as a unity, or we can compare it to Matisse's evocation of the visible in his studied brush stroke, and see that magic at work. The comparisons are provocative, and the explanations are interesting; we can spend a lot of time disabusing them of various undesirable philosophical commitments, but ultimately, what matters is that the institution has taken place, that we look and see that there is a living beast there, and life is only the reality of the process. And we can also look at other works in theoretical biology in order to learn how that beast's motility and proprioceptivity orient it to its world, how it comes to discriminate aspects of its world by using its body, inscribing difference and thus signifying in such a way that the whole differentiated system lends

itself to us in such a way that we see a meaning there, but what matters is that the institution has taken place. What the animal studies show scientifically, and what Schelling thinks through rigorously, is that the story we tell about the beginning, a story that can only ever be retrospective precisely because the institution has taken place, is a story articulated according to a principle. In the first chapter, with respect to the studies on animality, we named this *the principle of difference*; in the third chapter, we named it *the barbaric principle* (and linked it, on the inside of Schelling's work, to other principles, of life, of materiality, of the Absolute, and of the unconscious). It is this principle that operates in such a way as to disclose meaning, to let beings stand forth as meaningful; through its operation, we see that there is the phenomenon of life, and likewise, that there is the visible world, that *there is something*. This barbaric principle of difference is "the invisible armature of the visible world" and "is *there* without being an *object*, it is pure transcendence, without an ontic mask," it is what makes there be a visible world (VI, 257). In a word, Merleau-Ponty names this barbaric principle of difference the flesh, *la chair*, which is only the "*differentiations* of one sole and massive adhesion to Being" (VI, 270), that connective tissue which is less a thing that it is a "power of breaking forth, a productivity, a fecundity" (VI, 262), or a "perpetual pregnancy, perpetual parturition, generativity and generality" (VI, 155). What have learned from Schelling if not that production and generation is the work of the barbaric principle of difference?

We have also seen that Merleau-Ponty comes to assign to nature the privileged locus of this barbaric principle of difference, where nature is no longer understood as it was at the outset of *The Structure of Behavior*; the scientific view of nature as external causality has by now been utterly overcome. Rather, with Schelling, and according to an archaic definition that has been

obscured by the power of the Tradition to forget its origins and retrieved through Merleau-Ponty's thoughtful engagement with the history of the concept, nature is now thought as *living ground*, or the Flesh, *la chair*, which translates the Husserlian *Leib*. If we were to have written a fourth chapter, it would have demanded a return to *The Visible and the Invisible* in order, first, to interrogate this non-concept of flesh, and second, to examine more carefully the role of language (i.e., the "this side" of institution) in the indirect ontology that would disclose this non-concept. A few indications will have to suffice.

First, recall that nature is the title of a generic being that names the ground of institution, and that Schelling better than anyone else has disclosed how to think the grounding operation: it is through its own self-differentiation, through the operation of the barbaric principle of difference, that nature is "productive" and alive, that it lets beings stand fourth and serves as their ground (and, importantly, would also reclaim them: the barbaric always involves death and destruction as much as production and generation; those who say that there is no negativity in Merleau-Ponty have not considered this figure of the barbaric carefully.). Nature, and the ontology that accompanies it, is the first great theme that occupies Merleau-Ponty's attention from January, 1959 (the date of the first working note) to March 1960 (the date of the last), and figures prominently in his plans for his unfinished project. In January 1959, Merleau-Ponty already recognizes

The necessity of a return to ontology—the ontological question and its ramifications: The subject-object question;
the question of intersubjectivity;
the question of nature.

Outline of ontology projected as an ontology of brute being. Draw up the picture of savage being. (VI, 165).

A few weeks later, we find these sketches:

in my first volume—after physical nature and life, make a third chapter where the human body will be described as having a ‘spiritual’ side. Show that the life of the human body cannot be described without it becoming a psycho-physical body. . . . —Give my equivalent of the Cartesian concept of nature as the institution that makes us have at one stroke what a divine science would makes us understand—Give an aesthesiology. (VI, 168)

And again:

Plan of the first part: to see, by an immanent analysis, what has become of ‘nature,’—and thereby, life, —and thereby, man as a psycho-physical subject. Circularity: already what we say of nature anticipates what we will say about logic and will be taken up again in the second part . . . But in reality, all these particular analyses of nature, life, the human body, language, will make us gradually enter into the *Lebenswelt* and ‘savage’ Being. (VI, 166-67).

The references to nature and how it is situated in Merleau-Ponty’s plan could be multiplied by looking almost anywhere in the working notes; the last, dated, published note is, however, indication enough:

My plan: 1. The visible
2. Nature
3. Logos.

. . . we must thus not start *ab homine* as does Descartes (the first part is not ‘reflection’), we must not take nature in the Scholastic sense (the second part is not nature-in-itself, not a philosophy of nature, but a description of the man-animal *intertwining*), and we must not take the Logos and the truth in the sense of the Verb (the third part is neither logic, nor teleology of conscious, but the study of the language that has man)

. . .

Nature as the other side of man (as flesh, and nowise as ‘matter.’)

The *Logos* as realizing itself in man, but nowise as his *property*. (VI, 274-275)

Through these indicative plans, the centrality of the concept of nature in Merleau-Ponty’s thought in 1959-1960 is manifest . To underscore it once again, consider this passage from the introduction to the third course on nature:

Nature as a leaf or layer of total Being—the ontology of nature as a way towards ontology, a way that we prefer here because the evolution of the concept of nature is a more convincing propaedeutic, shows more clearly the necessity of an ontological mutation.

We will show how the concept of nature is always the expression of an ontology—and a privileged expression . . .

What we are seeking, on the contrary, is a true explicitation of Being, i.e., not the exhibition of a Being, even as Infinite, in which is operated (in a manner that we cannot in principle understand) the articulation of beings one on the other, but rather, the unveiling of Being as what they [beings] modelize or cut up, that which makes that they are together on the side of what is not nothing (*N*, 267-67).

Across these notes, nature is quite clearly linked to an ontological problem, to ‘savage’ Being, to animality, to language and signification, and to the institution of the Symbolic that ‘has man.’

The analysis of nature as a privileged *expression* of an ontology recalls, on the one hand, that Being discloses itself through nature’s expression, that is, through the work institution: here again, Schelling proves instructive, providing a concrete model of institution. Through his work, the operation of primal nature, the “unconscious of God,” by which nature transcends itself through its own work on itself, thus instituting a network of the Symbolic, is disclosed; in other words, an ontological psychoanalysis of nature would articulate those structures by which Being discloses itself and withdraws itself from the disclosure, retreating into the invisibility of the unconscious. Being withdraws, and the unconscious is instituted, only in and through the disclosure of beings that it makes possible; without this decisive exteriorization, there would be nothing. Nature as an expression of ontology must be understood in this light and it is to make this theme in Schelling explicit as an ontological problem, related to “our problem” of institution, that Merleau-Ponty proposes an ontological psychoanalysis of nature.

The analysis of nature as the expression of ontology leads, on the other hand, more deeply into the lifeworld, and discloses its ground of savage Being as the barbaric principle of difference

in such a way that it lets beings stand fourth on the side of what is not nothing; that which Husserl left bracketed in the lifeworld, namely, the materiality of the material or the brutality of the brute, is thus grasped in a more fundamental (institutionary) way. The analysis could be deepened simply by following Merleau-Ponty's seminar: in 1958-1959, he interrupts the courses on nature and inserts two courses, one on "La philosophie aujourd'hui," in which he re-examines some ideas in Husserl, and devotes considerable space to a reading of Heidegger, and in particular, to understanding how it is that language has us (and thus, we might say, to reading the logic of institution into Heidegger), and the other on "Husserl aux limites de la phénoménologie," in which he returns to the lifeworld via a reading of "The Origin of Geometry" and attends with the utmost care to the logic of institution (even if a cognate of the word appears only once in Husserl's text); it is perhaps no small co-incidence that, at the very moment that writing and ideality come on the scene, Merleau-Ponty punctuates his reading of Husserl with an examination of Heidegger's just-published essay on "Language" and takes up again the question of the way in which language has us. Is it all that surprising, then, that the next year, when Merleau-Ponty continues the suite of courses on nature, he gives to the third course the title "Nature and Logos: The Human Body," as if to indicate that the human body—that human being—is situated between nature as the ground of institution, and the language that has us, i.e., the world where speech is an institution? Would it be fair to say, then, that it is in and through our lived, carnal experience, that the institution has taken place?

It is thus not surprising that the second great theme of the working notes, written at the same time as these aforementioned courses, is language; this theme would have to be taken up and explored in relation to theme of institution. For now, however, some indications from the

working notes to underscore its centrality will suffice. The notes already cited underscore the extent to which the meditation on nature is intertwined with the theme of language; in addition to those, consider these. First:

What is constantly and principally implied through this whole first part is the *logos*: I speak of things as if that did not call language into question! The thematization of language overcomes another stage of naiveté, discloses yet a little more the horizon . . . –the passage from philosophy to the absolute, to the transcendental field, to the wild and vertical Being is by definition progressive, incomplete But I will then have to disclose the non-explicated horizon: that of the language I am using to describe all that –and which codetermines its final meaning (VI, 232/176).

Merleau-Ponty is thus quite aware of the retrospectivity of language, and of the circularity of the analysis implicit in it. The self-differentiating transcendence of the real as the symbolic, or as language, necessitates a reflection on language as well as on the very movement of this self-differentiating transcendence as the movement of *logos*; this no doubt accounts for why he inserts the meditation on Heidegger's essay on "Language" in the 1959 course. He seems to gather all of these insights together in a summary fashion in a note dated 27 October 1959, a note that also anticipates his differend with Lacan:

I describe perception as a diacritical, relative, oppositional system That is right. But there is all the same this difference between perception and language, that I see the perceived things and that the significations on the contrary are invisible. The natural being is at rest in itself, my look can stop on it. The Being whose home is language cannot be fixed, looked at, it is only from afar (VI, 267/214).

The logic of institution is thus similar to that described by Saussure, and this then would necessitate a return to Merleau-Ponty's reading of structuralist linguistics. The basic lesson is that the disclosive movement of Being, or what he calls, after Heidegger, the *Wesen* (verbal), is a differential movement through which the perceptual world is made to signify. What has already

been said in this dissertation constitutes the background against which the analysis of language and of the *logos* would be understood.

Finally, all of these analyses concerning nature, language, and indirect ontology would point to that most difficult moment in “The Intertwining, the Chiasm,” the bond or indiscernible joining between flesh and idea, the moment of institution, as a way to open a reading that we would have given in a fourth chapter (VI, 149). On the basis of that, it would then be possible to understand the flesh in terms of savage Being, the barbaric principle of difference, and institution. As a summary gesture, or as an anticipation of how a fourth chapter would conclude, consider these famous remarks “defining” the flesh:

the flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term ‘element,’ in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an ‘element’ of being. (VI, 139)

In naming the Flesh an *element* of Being, Merleau-Ponty refers us back once again to the Greeks, and in particular, to Timaeus’s discourse about *khôra*; just before Timaeus arrives at his most famous descriptions, he declares, starting at 49b, in yet another attempt to take hold of the problem with which he is dealing, (which is nothing short of the generation of the universe, and as such, not alien to “our problem” of institution), that “we must resolve some preliminary questions concerning the nature of fire and of other bodies that go together with it,” that is, questions concerning the elements. His meditation leads him to a discussion of the elemental, and eventually, famously, to the *khôra*; an examination of these passages, which Merleau-Ponty himself seems to call for when he says, *à propos* of his project of doing a psychoanalysis of

nature, that nature is “the flesh, the mother,” would thus confirm for us that the what is elemental in the Flesh is the barbaric principle of difference, which would include in it a notion of negativity. The Flesh is therefore not a warm, fuzzy, Catholic space where all differences are overcome, but rather, precisely because it is “the very stuff of life,” is also the stuff of death, of the negative, of violence, of the barbaric, where differences and contradiction are the condition for the possibility of life, where the rustling of differences make life meaningful. That Schelling’s favorite Platonic dialogue should here be invoked is further proof of the abiding influence of Schelling’s thought on the development of Merleau-Ponty’s late work.

But this missing fourth chapter remains a work to be done, and a work already begun, because the institution has taken place. Even if, or maybe because, this present dissertation is far from complete, it is time to bring it to an end, even if the idea of closure is, according to the logic of institution, an impossible idea (“an initiation, that is, not the positing of a content, but the opening of a dimension that can never again be closed . . . once we have entered this strange domain, once does not see how there could be any question of ever leaving it” (*VI*, 151-152)). This dissertation, in the end, performs the idea it names: materials presented themselves as if by accident, and oriented us in such a way that they became meaningful, but the meaning instituted is hardly exhausted in its expression, it contains within it hints of what is to come, and has opened a field of future possibilities. The institution has taken place: what future possibilities does it open?

2. Institutions of the Future

What has just been outlined here, as a sketch of a proposed fourth chapter concerns the

themes of nature, ontology, and language in Merleau-Ponty's unfinished work; these themes, like those studied in this dissertation, are to gathered around the principal axis of institution. It is now clear that nature, as the ground of institution, is no mere thing, no hard chunk of matter, but rather names perpetual differentiation, a differentiation that is not merely abstract and formal, but is, on the contrary, concrete and material, a differentiation that names the reality of the process of life itself. Nature, as the ground of institution, thus names a structure that signifies, and is to be located at the indiscernible joining. But nature also names savage Being; this does not mean that Being has a predicable quality, i.e., one cannot assert that "Being is savage" with the expectation that this claim would "define" Being as undefinable, or as something that would withdraw from every attempt to circumscribe it. Rather, to link, via a passage through Schelling's barbaric principle, nature and savage Being (and thus also to summarize this linkage under the title of Flesh) is to make an assertion of a different sort, namely, that Being "is" Difference, that Being differs (and thus, perhaps, that Being is not what it is, that it never coincides with itself), or that Being, through a differential activity proper to itself, institutes beings, communicates to them this productive ground of difference so that they too may differ from themselves, and thus stand out, ek-sist. The passage through Schelling (and the reading of "The Origin of Geometry," which has always subtended and informed what has been proposed in this dissertation) also shows the way in which the originary differential ground of institution is obscured, forgotten, or repressed when it makes beings stand fourth; beings are thus the indirect means to access the Being, and through which Being shows itself.

But this does not mean that Being is exhausted in its showing: it institutes itself as beings, sediments itself as a cultural acquisition, and it is only through this sedimentation that we come

to understand Being as Institution. Institution is thus never complete. Being as Institution “designates 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” (S, /59). This, then, is the reason why a fourth chapter on language would have to be written, because it is “the principle instrument of our relations with the world,” through which “a total meaning which is more legible and more enduring” comes to pass, and thus constitutes the medium of an indirect ontology (S, /55). That institution is never complete implies also that once a meaning has been instituted and becomes sedimented as a cultural acquisition, or once the real has transcended itself as the symbolic, then future reactivations (*Nachstiftungen*) are possible, reactivations that take up again what has been sedimented, bring its originary meaning-bestowal back to life, and, by reinscribing it in a new register, make possible new adventures of meaning. With this in mind, and as the means to a conclusion, I would like, on the basis of the institution that is this disseration, to outline several reactivations that I will pursue in my future research.

a. The Phenomenology of the Unconscious and the Psychoanalysis of Nature

There has been, throughout the work, an on-going meditation concerning what is implied in the phrase “a psychoanalysis of nature,” that Merleau-Ponty used to describe his own efforts in 1960. Concomitantly, there has been an attempt articulate the terms of Merleau-Ponty’s differend with Jacques Lacan. If the full meaning of a “psychoanalysis of nature” is to be grasped, and moreover, if the choice of this word (instead of “ontology” or “hermeneutics”) is to be justified, then there must be a sustained interrogation of Merleau-Ponty’s relation to psychoanalysis.

In order to achieve this full sense, it would have to be preceded by a reflection on what I will call the phenomenology of the unconscious, that is, an examination of Merleau-Ponty's reading of Freudian structures, beginning with the critical formulations in *The Structure of Behavior*. There, Merleau-Ponty is skeptical of the value of Freudian psychoanalysis, arguing (and his argument is in no small part due to the influence of his friend Politzer) that Freud interprets psychoanalytic phenomena (repression, complex, regression, sublimation, etc.) in terms of causality. According to Merleau-Ponty's reading, libidinal forces are seen as causes producing effects in a mechanical and linear manner; he proposes to interpret them otherwise, in terms of structure and structuration. According to this alternative interpretation, normal behavior would then be defined as a successful structuration of past experiences into one's life: "normal structuration is one which reorganizes conduct in depth in such a way that infantile attitudes no longer have a place or meaning in the new attitude; it would result in perfectly integrated behavior, each moment of which would be internally linked with the whole" (SC, 192/177). Abnormal behavior, neuroses and psychoses, are due neither to unreleased or unexpressed libidinal forces, nor to repressed childhood memories, but rather, to an unsuccessful integration of these experiences in their adult structure. For the Merleau-Ponty of *The Structure of Behavior*, the Freudian unconscious is thus to be read in terms of structure, and more precisely, in terms of the way in which structures interact to produce a coherent restructuring of behavior. Much later, in the "Preface to Hesnard," Merleau-Ponty radically revises his appreciation of the Freudian discourse, and so we would want to follow these revisions throughout his work.

If in his first book, Merleau-Ponty's reading of Freud is *critical*, in his second book, it is *absent*: all discussions of abnormal behavior, most especially the famous case of Schreber, are

taken not from Freudian psychoanalysis, but rather from Binswangerian Daseinanalysis, and a full account of his reading of psychoanalysis would have to take this preference into account. It seems that Merleau-Ponty wants to leave behind the notion of causal force that he sees operating in Freudian discourse, and take up instead a more Heideggerian approach that he understands to be consistent with his reading of structure; thus, the Binswangerian examples allow him to attend to those existential structures by which Dasein finds itself in the world. He does not return to the Freudian discourse until he writes "Man and Adversity" in 1951, at approximately the same time that he is beginning to interrogate more profoundly the phenomenon of expression. Already in this essay, Merleau-Ponty begins to dislodge a reinterpretation of the unconscious, a word that will forever remain for him "the index of a mystery." Shortly before the writing of this essay, he gives several lectures at the Sorbonne on child development, in which he begins his public confrontation with Lacan, specifically concerning the acquisition of language, and through which he deepens his appreciation of his claim that "we live in a world where speech is already an institution." What we see emerging from "Man and Adversity," then, is a conception of the unconscious not as an agency of libidinal energies, but as that which exists before us, as language and as the visibility of the world, as the Other and the other of the Other, and thus, a conception that is consistent with the emerging motif of institution. This conception is developed in the 1955 course on passivity (i.e., the course that complements that on institution), in the third course on nature, and in the working notes. What is seen emerging across this development is, an interpretation of the unconscious according to the principle of difference, as that which inscribes differences in the world and makes it signify. This interpretation allows him not only to bring psychoanalysis closer to his transformative reading of phenomenology, as seen in the "Preface to

Hesnard,” but also to the logic of institution.

But perhaps the greatest consequence of this emerging phenomenology of the unconscious is that it establishes the terms of engagement with Lacan.. The two friends clash publicly—either in spoken engagements or in written texts--on several occasions concerning the status of the unconscious, the nature of signification, and the primacy of perception. In that the unwritten fourth chapter on institution and language would include among its foci the relation of perception and signification, or perception as a diacritical system, it would be a necessary preface to this study on Merleau-Ponty’s relation to Lacan. It would be through an interrogation of the phenomenology of unconscious, and of his differend Merleau-Ponty/Lcan, that a full sense of what Merleau-Ponty means psychoanalysis of nature would finally be dislodged.

b. The Hinge: On the Phenomenology of Life.

The study on psychoanalysis would itself be preliminary to, and anticipatory of, a broader series of explorations. The proposed title, “The Hinge,” is meant to be doubly evocative: on the one hand, the hinge refers back to the indiscernible joining, to that pivot where the real transcends itself as the symbolic while inhering in itself as the real, to that structure that establishes differences in the perceptual world and makes it signify, or, in a word, to that structure that is the unconscious. On the other hand, the hinge refers to Merleau-Ponty himself, who stand at the hinge, between two generations of thinkers as a sort of intergenerational vanishing mediator. And what he mediates is a philosophical reflection on the phenomenon of life. To be exact, Merleau-Ponty’s thinking can be seen to mediate at least three inter-generational relations:

between Bergson and Deleuze, between Heidegger and Derrida, and between Binswanger/Canguilhem and Foucault (and, in this light, his reading of psychoanalysis may be said to be located at the hinge between Freud and Lacan). More precisely still, this project will take as an operating hypothesis that this intergenerational hinge, on which a phenomenology of life turns, is oiled by a reading of Schelling.

In order to illustrate the nature of this larger project on the phenomenology of life, I will attend only to the first hinge Bergson/Deleuze. In this dissertation, Schelling was situated in such a way as to provide the philosophical background against which a confrontation between Husserl and Bergson would be established, but this confrontation never took place, insofar as the concern of this dissertation was explicitly with phenomenology. The first exploration within the purview of this future project would take up the thread of Bergson. This would require a return to Merleau-Ponty's earliest works in order to measure his early appreciation of Bergson, and to trace its evolution up until *La Nature*, and the article generated from it, "Bergson in the Making." The argument would thus develop starting from the 1936 review of Sartre's *Imagination*, in which Merleau-Ponty contends with his friend over how to interpret the status of the *image* in Bergson's *Matter and Memory*. For Bergson, image is no mere representation, and does not occupy a mental space; rather, as the very title of the book suggests, the Bergsonian image is located at the indiscernible joining, i.e., at that very place where the phenomenon of life is located. Merleau-Ponty returns to meditate once again, and anew, on Bergsonian matter and image in *La Nature*; this meditation is complemented by a reading of natural productivity in *Creative Evolution*, and Merleau-Ponty attempts to show that Bergson's understanding of natural productivity is itself mediated by a reception (via Ravaisson) of Schelling's barbaric principle. It

is not without a little interest that Deleuze was an auditor in Merleau-Ponty's courses at the time, and that Merleau-Ponty was so impressed with Deleuze's work on Bergson that he asked his student to prepare a text for the volume he was then editing, *Les philosophes célèbres*. This article later became the basis of Deleuze's *Bergsonism*, itself a text that provides an entrée into Deleuze's pre-1968 work, especially to *Difference and Repetition*, the central theme of which is life. The very title of Deleuze's *doctorat d'état* suggests a relation to the principle of difference that is due in no small part to Merleau-Ponty's work on institution. Situating Merleau-Ponty between Bergson and Deleuze on the question of life would be thus the first volley in this larger project, to be followed by similar reflections on the hinges Heidegger/Derrida and Binswanger and Canguilhem/Foucault.

We could go on, we could list more, something about the institution of tradition, of history, and the political, perhaps. But maybe we've said enough for now. In any case, we have plans. Oh yes. Lots of plans. The institution has taken place.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Phenomenology and the Human Sciences," tr. J. Wild, in *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. J. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 43.

2. Ibid., 44.

3. Here we already name a problematic in phenomenology that has been the object of critique by Jacques Derrida and others. There is, in fact, in the early works of Husserl, particularly the *Logical Investigations*, the tendency to posit an *a priori* that would be the essence of, for example, all language; in this regard, the would indeed be The Truth understood as a transcendental signifier. But it is clear, in Derrida's reading as well as in Merleau-Ponty's, that Husserl gives this thesis up when he moves from a static to a genetic phenomenology. Derrida traces this movement first in his Master's thesis, then in *Speech and Phenomenon* and finally in the *Introduction* to Husserl's "Origin of Geometry." Merleau-Ponty seems aware of it as early as the "Preface" to the *Phenomenology of Perception*, and tries to situate the meaning of this Husserlian *Kehre* in his essay on "The Philosopher and his Shadow." For a detailed narrative account of this shift in Husserl's perspective, undertaken with attention to the question of history, and thus in dialogue with Derrida and Merleau-Ponty, see Françoise Dastur, *Husserl: Des mathématiques à l'histoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995), 101-123.

4. The ambivalence about the phenomenological orientation of this work was first noted by Theodore Geraets, in his *Vers une nouvelle philosophie transcendente. La genèse de la philosophie de M. Merleau-Ponty* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), which is one of the very few works in any language that gives careful attention to *The Structure of Behavior*. (The others are A. DeWaele, *Une philosophie de l'ambiguïté* (Louvain: Editions Nauwelaerts, 1951) which gives a minutious account of the entire text; and a mere 15 pages in Gary Madison, *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty* (Athens: The University of Ohio Press, 1971), which focuses almost exclusively on the notions of the dialectic and structure; prior to 1976, there are a half dozen articles on this text, between 1976 and 1996, there are no articles and no dissertations devoted to it. In brief, this book has all but disappeared from the shelves of those who read Merleau-Ponty). One of the valuable insights of Geraets' book is that he argues that there is a "change in method . . . which is not clearly recognized by the author himself" (39), and that seems to be located in the fourth chapter. Geraets contends that this change is due to the discovery, upon Merleau-Ponty's trip to the Husserl Archives, of phenomenology, which show him how it would be possible to develop a transcendental philosophy without slipping into the critical idealism that he was denouncing (130ff). Geraets's argument is thus consonant with the one we are about the develop concerning the preparation of this text; moreover, we will have the chance to witness the advent of this change in method, which we characterize as *an appeal for phenomenology*, in section 4c of the present chapter.

5. The information in this paragraph is a summary of the presentation in H.L. Van Breda, "Merleau-Ponty and the Husserl Archives at Louvain," tr. S. Michelman in *Merleau-Ponty: Texts and Dialogues*, ed. H. Silverman and J. Barry, Jr (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press

International, 1992), 150-161.

6. The former appears in *Husserl: Shorter Works*, ed. P. McCormick and F. Elliston, tr. F. Kersten (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), pp 222-233, and is often referred to as "The Earth Does Not Move." The latter essay is not translated in English. Both appear in French in Edmund Husserl, *La terre ne se meut pas*, tr. D. Franck and D. Pradelle, respectively, (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1989), pp. 11-29 and 35-64.

7. Edmund Husserl, "The World of the Living Present and the Constitution of the Surrounding World External to the Organism," tr. F. Ellison and L. Langsdorf in *Husserl: Shorter Works*, op.cit., pp. 238-250. The German title, given by Schütz, is "Die Welt der lebendigen Gegenwart und die Konstitution der ausserleiblichen Umwelt," is rendered in French, as "Le monde du présent vivant et la constitution du monde ambiant extérieur à la chair," tr. J-F Lavigne in *La Terre ne se meut pas*, op.cit., pp. 69-94.

8. In a famous passage from his *Essai philosophique sur la probabilité* (1814), Laplace says that "we thus have to envisage the present state of the universe as an effect of its antecedent state, and as the cause of that which will follow. An intelligence which at any given moment would know all the forces animating Nature, and the respective situation of the beings composing it, if moreover this intelligence were sufficiently vast to submit these data to an analysis, then it would embrace in the same formulation the movements of the largest bodies of the universe as well as those of the lightest atom: nothing would be uncertain for it, and both the future and the past would be present to its eyes." For Merleau-Ponty, this thought is indicative of the attitude and methodology inherited from Descartes, and dominates nineteenth century French scientific thinking, because this thought affirms (1) a causalism, (2) an analytic conception of Being, and (3) a spatial conception of natural being as extension. See *N* 123-4. Modern physics, particularly quantum mechanics, overcomes Laplacian ontology. See *N*, 125ff, and below.

9. In the three short pages that constitute the "Introduction" to *The Structure of Behavior*, we acquire a clear view of Merleau-Ponty's manner of presenting an argument. He will always present, in the best terms possible and often so convincingly that he seems to be endorsing them, two opposed views—intellectualism and materialism, the in-itself and the for-itself—only in the end to reject both in favor of a third way. Very often—and it is the case with *The Structure of Behavior*—this third way (here, *Gestalt* theory), will be used as a means to critique definitively the two alternatives, and then itself be subjected to a critical examination on the basis of which it will be rehabilitated and reappropriated.

10. Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomenon*, tr. D. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 10.

11. The dissolution of sexuality into an anonymous existence will elicit a dissatisfaction of the psychoanalysts and evoke the critique of one, André Green, "Itinéraire de Merleau-Ponty," *Critique*, 211 (1964).

12.SC, 136/125: "Behavior insofar as it has a structure does not have a place in any of these two orders. It does not unfold in objective space and time like a series of physical events . . . and it would serve nothing to say that behavior 'is conscious' and that it reveal to us a being for-self hidden behind a visible body as its inverse"; and also, 138/127: "behavior is not a thing, but nor is it an idea, it is not the envelope of a pure consciousness, and I am not a pure consciousness as the witness of a behavior."

13.This psychology is also the object of critique in *PhP*, 20-64/20-34.

14.It is worth noting here, with regard once again to Merleau-Ponty's methodology, that he is here contrasting two opposed views, one of which, the Gestaltist view, is effectively dominated by the other, Causalist view. This opposition is itself based on another, that between part and whole. The causalist explanation valorizes the part, claiming that the whole can be reconstructed based on an analysis of the part. The Gestaltist view *reverses* this opposition and valorizes the whole. Merleau-Ponty's strategy, by "adopting" the Gestaltist view, is then in its first moment a strategy of reversal.

15.Viktor von Weizsäcker, "Reflexgesetze" in *Handbuch der normalen und pathologischen Physiologie*, hrsg. von Bethe, t. X, 38-19. Cited in SC,9/11.

16.V. Von Weizsäcker,45; cited in SC, 11/13..

17.The introduction of this notion of circular dialectic allows two echoes to be heard: Hegel and Heidegger. It is not clear if, in 1938, Merleau-Ponty had yet read Heidegger, nor is it clear that one would have to in order to have an idea of the hermeneutic circle. Merleau-Ponty was, however, a regular auditor at Kojève's courses on Hegel during this time, and it is reasonable to say that Merleau-Ponty wants to read *Gestalt* theory as based on the *Aufhebung*, which he names several times in the text. The notion and meaning of the dialectic will preoccupy Merleau-Ponty later as well, first in his 1955 course "Dialectical Philosophy," in which he examines different versions of the dialectic, and then again in his last course "Philosophy and Non-Philosophy Since Hegel," in which he reads--mediated by Heidegger--the dialectic of experience in Hegel's "Introduction" to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. By the time of this last course, Merleau-Ponty is speaking of *hyperdialectic* or a "dialectic without synthesis." The extent to which this ongoing meditation constitutes a re-mark on his earlier efforts would have to be addressed elsewhere.

18.See especially Goldstein, *The Organism*, 226-8. This notion that the organism is always "open" and never simply thingly is a conclusion drawn from the dialectic, and one should compare the Gestaltist understanding of it with Hegel's in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, particularly the sections on life, where life is understood as "a continual diremption of forms," i.e a perpetual differentiation. Merleau-Ponty's position will come close to this, as we shall see later. Moreover, one could remark this openness as the opening of *Da-* of *Dasein*. The validity of such a remark would, however, have to be measured by recourse once again to the reading of Hegel, via Heidegger, in the last lecture course.

19.Goldstein, 185.

20. Goldstein, 390.

21. We have said above that Merleau-Ponty's initial strategy is a sort of *reversal* of the valorization of the opposition of part to whole, and of causalism to Gestaltism. But it is now clear that *reversal* is but one moment of his argument, for he is about to critique to notion of *Gestalt* and put it to work in a new way, in a new economy. In this regard, the second moment of his strategy is one of *re-inscription*. We indicate this not so much in order to invest Merleau-Ponty with what Rodolphe Gasché says of Derrida's strategy of deconstruction, but rather to point out that the sophistication of Merleau-Ponty's argument is at a level that merits this comparison.

22. Karl Koffka, *Principles of Gestalt Psychology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1935).

23. The relationships that we perceive mean nothing in themselves, and exist as relationships only because we perceive them as such.

24. Emphasis added. This *joining* or *jointure* will become—and is already—a major theme in Merleau-Ponty's intellectual itinerary.

25. The notion of perception is clearly central here, but is not yet the object of Merleau-Ponty's interrogation; it is clearly not any traditional notion of perception, and it will not be until the end of chapter III that we recognize that perception is pure sensible openness to and contact with the world. This notion of perception then becomes the principle object of his next work.

26. For a more complete summary of Coghill's experiments, which he recounts in his *Anatomy and the Problem of Behavior* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), *N*, 188-192.

27. *N*, 205. While the point is not so much to compare the organism to the work of art here, the example is nonetheless neither accidental nor innocent, recalling in a striking way Schelling's claim in his "Further Exhibitions from the System of Philosophy," that "the universe is grounded in the absolute as the most perfect organic essence and as the most perfect work of art: for reason that knows the universe in the absolute, in the absolute truth; for the imagination that represents it in absolute beauty. Each of them express the same unity under different aspects, and both fall in the point of absolute difference, the knowledge of which is both the origin and the goal of knowledge." (*SW*, IV: 423).

28. One cannot help but hear an echo of the Freudian idea of lifedeath in Coghill's description of an equilibrium or stasis interrupted and then constantly sought-after as a reference to a future; would it not be the case, then, that the equilibrium would be restored only in death? And that the life of the organism, its constant modulation by which it seeks to attain the ever-elusive and deadly future, would this life not be governed by a drive beyond the pleasure principle?

29. *N*, 208. Merleau-Ponty devotes an entire "chapter" to Whitehead in the first course, an analysis with which he concludes the year. See *N*, 153-165.

30. We can find no evidence, not even correspondence from his friend Eugen Fink, to suggest that Merleau-Ponty was familiar with Heidegger's 1929/30 course, of which Fink was a great fan, and in which Heidegger characterizes the work of Uexküll as one of the "two decisive steps" in contemporary biological research (the other being Driesch), decisive precisely because his notion of the *Umwelt* and the way the animal relates to it. The lesson that Heidegger will draw from Uexküll, summarized in the claim that "the animal is poor in world," is consistent with Merleau-Ponty's conclusion, as we shall see. See Martin Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, tr. W. McNeill and N. Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 261-264. Compare Heidegger's assessment with Merleau-Ponty's presentation, in *N*, 220-234.

31. The presentation of the work of Uexküll that we here offer is a summary of Merleau-Ponty's notes, *N*, 220-234.

32. Compare this with paragraphs gathered under the title "The Will to Power as Life," in Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, tr. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), 341-365.

33. Compare Heidegger, who worries about "the incompleteness of our interpretation of the essence of the organism: the lack of any determination of the essence of motility belonging to the living being." He writes: "All life is not simply organism but is just as essentially process, thus formally speaking motion . . . a motility of a particular kind . . . determines the being of the animal as such." In *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, op. cit., 264-5.

34. Merleau-Ponty assesses Russell's *The Directiveness of Organic Activities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1946), in *N*, 234-240.

35. Adolf Portmann's *Die Tiergestalt: Studien über die Bedeutung der tierschen Erscheinung* (Basel: Reinhardt, 1945) is analyzed by Merleau-Ponty in *N*, 244-248. One should take note of a recent article by Jacques DeWitte, "L'interanimalité comme intercorporéité et intervisibilité: Merleau-Ponty lecteur de Portmann," in *Corps et Individuation: Colloque sous la direction de Jean Gayon et P-F Moreau* (Dijon: Université de Dijon, 1998), 89-119. DeWitte argues that either Merleau-Ponty got Portmann wrong, or the student notes were poorly taken; in other case, DeWitte offers a clear presentation of Portmann's work and Merleau-Ponty's assessment of it.

36. *N*, 247. Emphasis added. Compare *R*, 133/163. Here through the work of Portmann we witness the acquisition of a vocabulary that was not in play in 1938-1942, and that is clearly linked to the project of *The Visible and the Invisible*. See, for example, *VI*, 242, 267-8, 299-301, 310-11/189, 213-4, 246-48, 257-58.

37. Konrad Lorenz was awarded the Nobel Prize with Tinbergen and Frisch for his work in physiology. Merleau-Ponty summarizes his work (mostly articles) sometimes directly, sometimes through the mediation of Ruyer, in *N*, 248-259.

38. Lorenz distinguishes the "pure instinct" (feeding, fleeing, fighting, sexual reproduction; in short, survival) which generally are not species-specific and physiologically localized in the limbic system, from these "instinctual tendencies" (e.g. the consummatory act of the eagle, the

nest-building activity of the heron, and imprinting) which are species-specific, localized in other parts of the nervous system, and have no object. In both cases, the instinctual behavior is released when the animal encounters the necessary sign-stimuli. Lorenz's studies focus on these latter.

39. It seems that Merleau-Ponty is pushing his interpretation far beyond the theoretical findings of Lorenz in this double suggestion that animal behavior is structured around the notions of substitution and displacement (metaphor and metonymy) and that it passes from the Real to the Symbolic. Moreover, it seems that much of the interest in interpreting Lorenz in this way comes from a contemporary debate with which Merleau-Ponty was familiar. Benveniste published "Communication animal et langage humain," [*Diogenes*, 1 (1952)] in which he was concerned to make exactly the comparison Merleau-Ponty is making in his course, and on which he seems to be relying; to this article responded Haldane, "Rituel humain et communication animale," [*Diogenes*, 4 (1953)], which contested the comparison in favor of the notion of "ritualization," which Merleau-Ponty characterizes as an ambiguous concept. It seems as if his notion of symbolic activity as a displacement of instinctual behavior depends upon a clarification of this concept, and that this results in a restrained argument that animal behavior as "symbolic language" is only "a *phenomenon* of mutual expression." The interpretation of Lorenz is thus in line with those of Uexküll and Portmann, i.e., that the structure of animal behavior signifies; it should not be read as a claim that animals have language. The student notetaker was probably insufficiently familiar with this debate between Benveniste and Haldane, and so Merleau-Ponty's clarificatory contribution is obscured in the notes.

40. SC, 172/159. And yet, would not life conceived as such remain noumenal? Different and withdrawn from its phenomenal appearing? The problem is hardly resolved, and these analyses provide us only with an "index of the problem." Life, the noumenal, always remains beyond reflection's capacity to grasp it. Merleau-Ponty will appeal to phenomenology as a discursive attempt to describe what remains unreflected, but as we shall see in the next chapter, phenomenology remains a philosophy of consciousness and is thus incapable of the task it sets for itself, and this will necessitate a passage to a new ontology, an indirect ontology, the premise of which is that this problem cannot be resolved, because the only access to Being we have is through perceived being, through the phenomenal; Being itself always remains in retreat. *The Structure of Behavior* thus presents us not only with the need for phenomenology, but also with the seeds of a critique.

41. We examine this in some detail in chapter 3, below. For the moment, the proximity of Merleau-Ponty's thinking to *Naturphilosophie* in general is already clearly discerned. Our claim here that Merleau-Ponty is interested in thinking both process and this principle of differentiation, and that this principle should be linked with the motricity of the body, again invites comparison not only with Heidegger (see footnotes 30 and 33, above), but also with Deleuze, who as a student at the Sorbonne was also a regular auditor at Merleau-Ponty's lectures in the 1950s. See in particular *Différence et répétition* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968).

42. We see here the anticipation of what Merleau-Ponty will say later in *The Visible and the Invisible*, that every use of the body is primordial expression.

43. SC, 180/164. Merleau-Ponty here cites a study by Shinn, "Notes on the Development of a Child," *Studies*, I: 1-4, 1893-99 (University of California). However, this work is considerably developed in the lecture courses he gave at the Sorbonne as Professor of Child Psychology, before his appointment to the Collège de France. These courses are regrouped in *Merleau-Ponty à la Sorbonne: Résumé de cours, 1949-1952* (Paris: Cynara, 1988). There are, moreover, certain adult experiences that allow us to understand primitive consciousness, and here Merleau-Ponty offers the particular example of playing soccer; see SC, 183/165.

44. This fact of embodiment of consciousness is what the psychological theories of perception—based on units of sensation, association, attention, and judgment—all miss. They are criticized in detail in *PhP*, 3-51.

45. Husserl calls this naive, perceptual consciousness the natural attitude; later, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty will call it *perceptual faith*. At the same time that a Husserlian vocabulary is implied, so too is a Hegelian thematic. Perception or perceptual consciousness is that consciousness which has not yet rigorously distinguished itself from a pure 'here' and a pure 'now,' it believes what it encounters, and has not yet become conscious of itself as consciousness. Perceptual consciousness in Hegel is a transitory stage between immediate Sense-Perception and Understanding, on the way to self-consciousness. Higher order activities of consciousness, like representation, judgment, and the formation of an idea, must be dialectically arrived at, and cannot be supposed to be what consciousness is, as the critical-idealists would have. There are thus two phenomenologies at stake here: one descriptive and Husserlian, the other dialectical and Hegelian.

46. SC, 204/189. The idea of "normal" or "successful" integration of the lower-orders here is important, is developed in the course of a structural re-evaluation of Freudianism, and anticipates Canguilhem's work on *The Normal and the Pathological*. "Normal structuration is one which reorganizes behavior in depth in such a way that infantile attitudes no longer have a place or meaning in the new attitude; it would result in perfectly integrated behavior, each moment of which would be internally linked with the whole." To the degree that the lower order behavior is not integrated, it is abnormal, perverse, or "fragmentary" behavior. Sexual obsession or fetishism, and indeed all "complexes" of a sexual nature, would thus not be due to some "pretended unconscious" but rather to improper integration. We quickly note here that Merleau-Ponty's reading of Freud in this early text is extremely undeveloped and entirely mediated by Politzer's gloss on it, as if Merleau-Ponty had not yet read it directly. The very least we can say about it is that (1) he recognizes the importance of the Freudian contribution to philosophical conceptual vocabulary; (2) he is suspicious of the idea of "the unconscious" existing as a thing or force behind consciousness as a cause of behavior; and (3) he wants to reconceive these ideas in terms of structures and structuration. See SC, 191-195. His view of Freud will deepen considerably between 1938 and 1960, as he himself recognizes in the "Preface to Hesnard."

47.SC, 189/170. Cf. also 200-204/184-188. In these pages, Merleau-Ponty introduces a characteristic theme of his work, i.e. that naive consciousness lives among the things, which is, we say again, the theme of perceptual faith. The entire last chapter of *The Structure of Behavior*, which we are here approaching, has a resolutely phenomenological tone, and the major themes of phenomenology are recognizable, even named as such by the author, who refers to Husserl explicitly more frequently than in the rest of the book. This perhaps suggests that the last chapter was written or substantially revised after 1938, i.e. after the first preparation of the manuscript, and after Merleau-Ponty had visited to the Husserl archives. There is thus perhaps a grain of irony when he writes in *Phenomenology of Perception* that present day readers have “the impression, on reading Husserl or Heidegger, not so much of encountering a new philosophy as of recognizing what they had been waiting for” (*PhP*, ii/viii), as if he had been waiting only to find a way to re-write his thesis; to read it without irony, the discovery of phenomenology allows Merleau-Ponty finally and definitively to distance himself from the critical idealism against which he had been arguing.

48.SC, 202/186 With this, Merleau-Ponty is able to maintain both an argument against intellectualism (things are not unities of judgment and are incarnated in their appearances) and an argument against empiricism (the things are beyond their sensible manifestation). This becomes a *leitmotif* in the *Phenomenology*, and for some reasons, many commentators (Dillon and Silverman notably) think that this is one of Merleau-Ponty’s most significant contributions to continental thought. To maintain such a thesis however reveals a rather limited view of Merleau-Ponty.

49.Michel Haar is often (in his essays “Painting, Perception, and Affectivity,” and “Proximity and Distance vis-à-vis Heidegger in the later Merleau-Ponty”) very critical of those who proclaim Merleau-Ponty to be “the French Heidegger” (e.g. Wahl), because, while there is indeed a certain relationship between the two, there is a huge difference, and for Haar this difference can be articulated in one word: attunement. Haar sees one of Heidegger’s major contributions in the thinking of *Stimmung*, *Grundstimmung*, and what it means to be *bestimmt*, and contests that nowhere does Merleau-Ponty even come close to this thinking. It is true, on the one hand, that Merleau-Ponty does not devote a section, paragraph, or lecture course to *Stimmung* as a fundamental structure of *Dasein*, but on the other hand, it seems to us extreme, given the *wonder* of naive consciousness, to suggest that there is *no* attunement in Merleau-Ponty. There is at least *some*, and on the basis of this *some*, one might be able, at least *somewhat*, to respond to Haar’s argument. Haar also contends that the thought of negativity and the nothing in Merleau-Ponty—which in Heidegger is linked to the *Grundstimmung* of *Angst*, is at best weak, “perhaps the most benign and least redoubtable figure of nothingness in the whole history of philosophy.” One of the demonstrations we hope to provide in this thesis—particularly in the reference to Schelling—is that there is indeed a thinking of the negative and the nothing that is a bit more subtle, sophisticated, even insidious, than Haar would like to admit. We will thus implicitly try to sketch a rejoinder to Haar’s objection, but this is not to make of Merleau-Ponty another—French—Heidegger. Ultimately, we agree with Haar on this one point—that Merleau-Ponty is *not* Heidegger—but unlike him, we do not consider this a disadvantage or defect.

50. Merleau-Ponty's presentation of Descartes first begins on pp. 206-210 of *The Structure of Behavior*, and ends only with his death in 1961. In this text he is concerned only to show how Cartesianism fails to explain and needlessly complicates perception, and how it inaugurates the notion of the *cogito* on which all of modern philosophy and modern scientific ontology is grounded. Merleau-Ponty will never stop interrogating this fateful moment in philosophy: Descartes is constantly interrogated in the *Nature* courses as that which we must get over, there is a long section in "Eye and Mind" devoted to the problem of perception in Descartes, and his last course is devoted entirely to "L'ontologie cartésienne et l'ontologie aujourd'hui." It was just after Merleau-Ponty had finished preparing his lecture notes dated May 4, 1961 on Descartes that he literally dropped dead of a thrombosis.

51. Compare again Schelling's discussion in the "Introduction" to the *Ideas for Philosophy of Nature*, discussed below in chapter three, of those sons of nature who tear themselves away from their mother's bosom.

52. Cf. *SC*, 215-7/197-201, *passim*. See also *SC*, 220/204: "By becoming the pure subject who objectively knows the world, man realizes the absolute consciousness with respect to which the body and individual existence are no more than objects, and death is deprived of meaning."

53. Madison, 18.

54. We use the word *contaminated* in the sense that Jacques Derrida gives to it in his *Introduction à "L'origine de géométrie" d'Edmond Husserl*, and *La voix et la phénomène*, i.e., as the mutual imbrication of the transcendental in the empirical and the empirical in the transcendental. Merleau-Ponty of course does not have recourse to this concept in 1938, but the convenience of our retrospective appropriation of it allows us the occasion to mark a difference between Merleau-Ponty and Hegel. The Hegelian notion of "a concept that has not yet become the consciousness of itself," which Merleau-Ponty indicates is the Hegelian meaning of *Gestalt* (*SC*, 227), supposes that the concept will eventually grasp itself dialectically; the Derridean notion of contamination implies on the contrary that we will never, except by the most problematic strategies, succeed in purging the concept of its impurities. To the extent that perceptual consciousness is, for Merleau-Ponty, always our *embodied* contact with the world, he will in the end be closer to Derrida than to Hegel. This proximity will be tested in our reading of "The Origin of Geometry," the text from which Derrida's derives his notion of contamination.

55. *VI*, 200. See also Merleau-Ponty's description of his project there as an "ontology of the within" (290), an "intraontology" (280), an "endo-ontology" (279), as an "invagination" (200). The Being in question is always a "Being in indivision" (271), i.e. prior to the work of reflection, a Being in "promiscuity" (307), a "brute" or "savage" Being (e.g. 256; see also our third chapter); our relation to this Being is always one of attachment or "adherence" (183), belonging, intertwining, and contact, a chiasmic implication of the seeing in the visible (177) or of the sensing in the sensible (153). The entire ontological project of *The Visible and the Invisible*, already anticipated in outline in *The Structure of Behavior*, works against that "total philosophical error" (311) of the objective presence of Being that holds itself in front of me as an

Object to be surveyed. Merleau-Ponty calls this view of Being “the ontology of object” (see chapter two, below) or “the ontology of the in-itself,” and the discourse that accompanies it a “thinking from above” [*pensée du survol*]; he opposes to it an “ontology of the element” or more famously an “ontology of the flesh.” Rather than installing itself in front of us as objective Being does, fleshy or elemental Being is all around us, “it sustains and alimments us”; as such, we do not survey it, but rather we work actively—and our life is this work—for its “*avènement*.” Thus, “Being is that which *demand*s creation of us so that we have experience of it” (251).

56. Elisabeth de Fontenay, *Le Silence des bêtes* (Paris: Fayard, 1998), 657. Translation mine.

57. *S*, 203/160. Compare to *VI*, 242/189: “This means: perception is unconsciousness. What is the unconscious? What functions as a pivot, an existential, and in this sense, is and is not perceived. For one perceives only figures upon levels—and one perceives them only by relation to the level, which therefore is unperceived.—The perception of the level: always *between* the objects.” The being of life is thus connected with the Merleau-Pontian notion of the unconscious.

58. *R*, 131/161. There is here the implicit suggestion of another intertwining, between signification and visibility. See for example, *VI*, 267-268/213-14, the working note beginning “I describe perception as a diacritical, relative, oppositional system. . . .”

59. *R*, 136/165. This notion of laterality is the basis of Levinas’s worry about Merleau-Ponty. See his notes in *Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty*, ed. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990), as well as his essay “Meaning and Signification,” in *Collected Papers*, tr. and ed. A. Lingis (Dordrecht: Nijhoff,)

60. See, for example, *S*, 223/177: “Since we *are* at the jointure of Nature, of body, of soul, and of consciousness, since we live it, we cannot conceive of a problem whose solution is not sketched out in us and in the spectacle of the world, and there must be the means to compose in our thought what goes without saying in our life.”

61. See *Ph.P.*, v/viii: “We shall find in ourselves, and nowhere else, the unity and true meaning of phenomenology.” Compare this with the text cited in footnote 60, above, and also the text in *N*, 267: “Nature in us must have some relation with the Nature outside of us, it must even be that the Nature outside of us is unveiled by the Nature that we are . . . By the nature in us, we can know Nature, and reciprocally, it is from us that living beings and even space speak to us.” Here, then, we see not only the profound and ontological necessity of the regressive move to the inside, but also the ever-increasing urgency to engage in an ontology of Nature.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. On the reasons concerning the abandonment of *The Prose of the World*, and the relation of this text (a) to other texts subsequently published (e.g. “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,” and “On the Phenomenology of Language,” both in *Signs*), and (b) to the project of *The Visible and the Invisible*, see Claude Lefort’s “Avant-Propos” in *La prose du monde*.
2. The text in question was published under the title “Un inédit de Maurice Merleau-Ponty,” in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 4 (1962), 401-409. The subtitle “A Prospectus of His Work” is added by the English translator.
3. Consider, for example, “Cézanne’s Doubt” and “The Novel and Metaphysics,” both in the collection *Sense and Non-Sense*, which appeared in 1948, the preparation of *The Prose of the World*, already underway in 1949, and the texts that emerge from it (see note 1, above), as well as the first courses given at the Collège de France, from 1952 to 1954, which are themselves continuations of some of the courses undertaken while Merleau-Ponty held the chair in Child Pedagogy at the Sorbonne, especially “The Child’s Relations with Others,” and “Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language.” See also, for example, the studies of Renaud Barbaras, “De la parole à L’Etre: Le problème de l’expression comme voie d’accès à l’ontologie,” in *Le tournant de l’expérience* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1998), 183-200.; Françoise Dastur, “Le corps de la parole,” in Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de Cours (1959-1960) suivi de Recherches sur la phénoménologie de Merleau-Ponty*, sous la direction de R. Barbaras (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), 349-368; Yves Thierry, *Du corps parlant: Le langage chez Merleau-Ponty* (Bruxelles: Ousia Press, 1987); Mauro Carbone, “La dicibilité du monde: Langage et expression chez Merleau-Ponty,” in F. Heisdeck (ed.), *Merleau-Ponty: Le philosophe et son langage* (Grenoble: J. Millon, 1993). Insofar as language and expression are dominant themes in Merleau-Ponty and in research on his work, this list is nowise exhaustive; in bibliographic research conducted at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, we counted over 350 entries—articles, books, and theses—in five languages (French, English, Italian, German, Spanish) on aspects of these intertwined themes, dated from 1985 to 1998.
4. Merleau-Ponty, letter to Père Van Breda, 1 June 1942; in Van Breda, “The Husserl Archives at Louvain,” op.cit., 155.
5. On the question of the determination of Being as Object in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, see Renaud Barbaras, “Merleau-Ponty et la racine de l’objectivisme husserlien,” in *Tournant de l’expérience*, op.cit.
6. This is, of course, one of the principal themes of “The Origin of Geometry”; see C, 357-59; Derrida’s commentary in his *Introduction*, op. cit., 66-107; Merleau-Ponty’s telegraphic remarks, in NC2, passim.

7. To be fair, we must say that it is clear from the context of the passage that Husserl is speaking about the fatigue of his old age, and not about the project of rigorous science.

8. "Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man," in *The Primacy of Perception*, op.cit., 45.

9. Martin Heidegger, "Letter to William Richardson," in William J. Richardson, *Heidegger: From Phenomenology to Thought* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), xii-xiv.

10. Heidegger takes up this discussion again and in much greater detail first in sections 34 and 35 of *Sein und Zeit*, and then later in his essays *Logos* and those comprising *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, most notably that entitled "Language."

11. Martin Heidegger, "Logos," in *Early Greek Thinking*, tr. and ed. D.F. Krell with F. Capuzzi (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 59-78; the essay originally appeared in Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1967).

12. This noun should not be confused with the more common *explication*, the substantial form of the verb *expliquer*.

13. Merleau-Ponty not only knew this essay well, but also may have even contributed, in a casual manner, to its translation. The translator, Jacques Lacan, was preparing it the same year that Merleau-Ponty gave the lectures courses on Nature, eventually meeting with Heidegger and his wife at the Lacan country estate. Merleau-Ponty and Lacan and their wives dined together twice monthly at La Coupole; we can only imagine the conversations the two men had while their wives danced under the dome. It is surely not coincidental that the two should be engaged in a deep reading of Heidegger at the same time.

14. Not the *Logos* itself, but the trace of it, appearing as a citation, *entre guillemets*, a wordplay that is perhaps etymologically unjustified, but not altogether without merit, as it allows us to say that Being itself is withdrawn, does not appear as such, but only as a citation, i.e., as the Said.

15. Unveiling or *dévoilement* is also Heidegger's translation of the Greek *aletheia*, which for him is how truth is to be understood; we have just seen--albeit as a sketch--in section 7 of *Being and Time* in what way this question of truth is to be understood phenomenologically.

16. SZ, 35/59: "Manifestly it is something that proximally and for the most part does *not* show itself at all: it is something that lies *hidden*, in contrast to that which proximally and for the most part does show itself; but at the same time it is something that belongs to what thus shows itself, and it belongs to it so essentially as to constitute its meaning and its ground."

17. Renaud Barbaras, *De L'être du phénomène: Sur l'ontologie de Merleau-Ponty* (Grenoble: J. Millon, 1991), 365. By the "beyond" here, Barbaras would like to suggest a more philosophically radical idea of phenomenology, such that Merleau-Ponty is no longer a phenomenologist, but rather is doing something radically different; we prefer a more restrictive reading of "beyond," in the sense that Merleau-Ponty does indeed manage to develop his own

unique perspective that is reducible neither to the Husserlian nor the Heideggerian, but that he remains within the movement of phenomenology as we have attempted to define it in this chapter. While Barbaras's book, in our view, is undoubtedly the best secondary monograph on Merleau-Ponty, showing in great detail how, where, and in what way Merleau-Ponty breaks free from Husserlian idealism, it suffers from an almost allergic reaction to Heidegger, by a nearly total refusal to examine Merleau-Ponty's relation to the Heideggerian perspective. Indeed, in one telling passage at the end of Barbaras's analysis, he cites the note to which we have alluded several times ("... the perceptual world is Being in the sense Heidegger gives to it. . ."), but he intentionally occludes the mention of Heidegger in order to avoid, perhaps, a proximity between the two thinkers the distance between whom he has attempted to mark out. This evasion of the Heideggerian position marks Barbaras's differend with Françoise Dastur, who like Barbaras rightly insists on the relation to Husserl, but is far more generous in what concerns the relation to Heidegger, arguing that it is Merleau-Ponty's growing engagement with Heidegger that orients his post-*Phenomenology* investigations in language and nature, and that this engagement also allows Merleau-Ponty to radicalize his reading of Husserl in the late 1950s, from which emerges the outlines of his final position. See her "La lecture Merleau-pontienne de Heidegger," in *Chiasmi Internationale*, 2 (2000).

18. Jean Beaufret, "Comments," in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Primacy of Perception," in *The Primacy of Perception*, tr. J. Edie (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1964), 41-42.

19. Husserl, cited in *S*, 208/164. The citation is from *Ideen III*, *Hua V*, Beilage I, 117.

20. Cited in *PhP*, xx/xv. Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, tr. D. Cairns (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 38

21. *PhP*, 109/93. This constitutes the body as a "kind of reflection," which is "always imminent and never realized in fact."

22. *PhP*, 210/182. Merleau-Ponty's develops his position concerning writing and expression by arguing that "the greatest service done by expression is not to commit to writing ideas which might be lost. A writer hardly ever re-reads his own works, and great works leave in us at a first reading all that we shall ever subsequently get out of them. The process of expression, when it is successful, does not merely leave for the reader and the writer himself a kind of reminder, it brings the meaning into existence as a thing at the very heart of the text, it brings it to life in an organism of words, establishing it in the writer or the reader as a new sense organ, opening a new field or a new dimension to our experience." Thus, even if writing is only an essential mutation of speech, it is not simply mere documentation or a transcendental historicity of death. Rather, writing, like speech, is here conceived as *a living organism*, and as such, it has the power to open a new field of meaning; like any living organism, it does so through its power of differentiation, as we saw above in chapter one. Merleau-Ponty will continue to explore the themes of writing and difference, especially in exemplary literary texts (those of Proust, Stendhal, Beauvoir, Claude Simon) throughout the 1950s, a decade in which he also takes up in a serious manner the lessons of Saussurian school, with which he had not yet engaged during the preparation of

Phenomenology. We can thus begin to see the extent to which Merleau-Ponty's thinking on language, literature, and writing anticipates Derrida's (and possibly Foucault's, Deleuze's, and perhaps, Blanchot's.)

23.*PhP*, 218/187. Merleau-Ponty's argument here is reminiscent of Rousseau's in his *The Origin of Languages*. There, Rousseau makes an anthropological and climatological argument (which is meant as heuristic) that the people of Southern Europe, particularly the Italians, *sing* their language, which is dominated by vowels, because of the warm weather. They thus *ooooh* and *aaaah* while basking under the warm sun of the peninsula. On the other hand, the peoples of the North, particularly the Germans, tend to chatter because it is *k-k-k-k-alt* in Alt-Saxony. The Southerners thus suffer from a vowel movement whilst the Northerners are consonated. That aside, Rousseau's argument, if considered without the aide of a deconstruction, is nostalgic for a lost origin, whereas for Merleau-Ponty, this origin cannot be recuperated, can only be wholly speculative or retrospecular, as we have tried to suggest.

24. Merleau-Ponty here cites an example from Lawrence of Arabia, a description of his failed attempt to assimilate to the life of the Arabs with whom he lived for many years. While he succeeded in leaving behind his English self, he never managed 'to take on the Arab skin.' Our own experience confirms Lawrence's observations. After having lived, worked, taught, wrote, and dwelled in France and in French for nearly five years, we no longer find ourselves comfortable in our American garb, but equally we recognize that we will never be French. We are still astonished by the radically different demands that these two languages—English and French—place upon our way of being in the world, and our manner of expression, both existential and literary. Indeed, a significant portion of this present dissertation was prepared directly in French for a seminar given at the Collège International de Philosophie, but a mere translation of those texts yielded a wholly unsatisfactory English version, necessitating not only a re-writing, but a re-thinking of the approach to the problem, a completely new orientation to the object. Existentially, we feel shared out between two selves: an American self, whose habits and customs we very often wish to deny, and a French self, which can only ever at best be an affectation, even if we feel comfortable in the cut of its cloth. Ultimately, though, no matter how well we wear French, we live in, through, and according to our native tongue. In this regard, Merleau-Ponty's comment is particularly apt: to assimilate fully another language, 'it would be necessary to make the world which it expresses one's own, and one never belongs to two worlds at once,' without the risk of madness, as Lawrence points out. See *PhP*, 218-19n1/187n1. Merleau-Ponty quotes T.E. Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 31-32.

25.*PhP*, 49/ 36. Perception is thus an expressive act of the human body, which is "defined in terms of its property of appropriating, in an indefinite series of discontinuous acts, significant cores which transcend and transfigure its natural powers." *PhP*, 227/193.

26. Merleau-Ponty never tires of citing Husserl's claim that the institution of a tradition is always the forgetting of its origin; and indeed, it is this same claim at the base of Derrida's reading of the transcendental sense of death.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. Paul Ricoeur, "Forward" to Gary Madison, *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty*, op.cit., xix.

2. Xavier Tilliette, *Que sais-je? Merleau-Ponty* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1973), 63. See also note 4, below.

3. *And you may ask yourself: well? How did I get here?* This work came to pass at first by accident: a first-year seminar on phenomenology required a research paper, and insofar as Merleau-Ponty's name continually resurfaced as the phenomenologist whose principal worry was art and the aesthetic, which was then the philosophical domain that interested me the most, I began a reading of his works on art, thinking that this would be the easiest way to rid myself of the required seminar paper. Another accident in another seminar, this time on Levinas, this time a required presentation, led me back again to Merleau-Ponty (Levinas has a differend with him in a series of footnotes in "Sens et signification.") and to a reading of *Signs*. A final accident in a third seminar, on Derrida's *The Truth in Painting*, was my encounter there with the then newly published *Memoirs d'aveugle*, in which Derrida extends a little further his ambivalent reading of Merleau-Ponty, which then became the theme of my Master's thesis. A series of accidents thus oriented me to Merleau-Ponty, who imposed himself gradually on my thought. The case is quite different with regard to Schelling, whose work was first encountered in a seminar devoted to it (and to Novalis's and to Nietzsche's), and which I *intentionally* chose to attend as a tonic for the miseries provoked by my attempt to engage with Hegel. Still engaged in a reading of Merleau-Ponty at the time of the seminar on Schelling, I could not help but see themes in the latter that were also expressed by the former, and vice versa. A sort of apotheosis was achieved when the intentions of the course, which at the moment were focused on a single scene in Schelling, led me to the (accidental?) discovery of a single text by Merleau-Ponty: the *résumé* of the 1956 course, in which he invokes exactly the same scene in Schelling, a scene that Merleau-Ponty identified as "our problem." I began to think that maybe these philosophers were not so disparate, that maybe there was a fundamental relation between them that needed to be explicated, and as this suspicion grew, so too did this dissertation project. The suspicion has acquired the status of a general validity; the dissertation, however, remains suspicious, if not suspect. My director had me include those last three words, and I'm not sure how I feel about them.

4. See Tilliette's *magnum opus* entitled *Schelling. Une philosophie en devenir*, 2 volumes (Paris: J. Vrin, 1970). Father Tilliette has informed me in a private conversation held at his home in Paris on 15 February 1997 that these notes are but a faint echo of the seminar on *La nature*, which Tilliette attended regularly, and that moreover, they are not representative of the enthusiasm with which Merleau-Ponty treated Schelling's work. When asked if this latter comment might not be the nostalgia of an internationally recognized expert on Schelling, Tilliette responded, "*Mais non, c'était Merleau-Ponty lui-même qui m'a encouragé de faire ma thèse sur Schelling! Il était tellement enthousiast pour les idées de Schelling, celles qu'il n'avait pas connues très bien avant, et il a insisté plusieurs fois dans le cours que tout le monde devrait lire*

Schelling, que Schelling était un phénoménologue exceptionnel. Je suis allé le voir un jour à son appartement au Boul' Saint Mich pour lui annoncer que j'allais faire la thèse sur Schelling, et Merleau qui ne me connaissait pas très bien, lui il m'a offert tout aide et m'a beaucoup soutenu."

With this anecdote, Tilliette thus validated the nature of the project. He also informed me, in a manner confirming anecdotes related by Jacques Taminiaux and Claude Lefort, that Merleau-Ponty worked with very sparse lecture notes, preferring to lecture spontaneously. He would rarely quote texts unless he had them present to consult; if the text was originally in German, he would have had any available French translation alongside the original German, retranslating it in front of his audience and then commenting at length on it. Tilliette recalls that "*c'était absolument le cas avec les textes de Husserl, mais aussi avec ceux de Schelling et de Kant.*" Tilliette recalls that Merleau-Ponty did spend a very long time translating and commenting on the texts from the philosophy of nature, "*beaucoup plus que l'indiquent-elles les notes publiées, qui ne sont que fragmentaires,*" but did not recall which German edition of Schelling's works was used by Merleau-Ponty.

5. In other words, there is something in the Real that remains resistant to symbolization; Lacan formalizes this as *le petit objet a*, or rather, it is one of his manifold (re-)interpretations of this fundamental idea of his thought. More precisely still, the idea that there is a remainder resistant to symbolization is designated by Lacan as the Real (R2), or by means of a typographical convention, as *objet (a)*, and is linked to the idea of the traumatic cause, and later, to the *objet perdu*, among other things. Later still, Lacan will argue that *le petit objet a* is in fact a retrospecular construct of the big Other, and claim, for example, that there is no sexual relation. Minimally, we can see here that *le petit objet a* enjoys quite a remarkable career in Lacan's work, subject to manifold re-interpretations, and as such, there is no single place in Lacan's work to which we might refer the reader; however, some indicative references would include *Le Séminaire* IV, IX, XI, XII, and XIV, and that's just for starters. The difference in conception of *le petit objet a* between *Séminaire* IV (1956-57, i.e., those years when Merleau-Ponty was developing his argument in the courses on nature) and IX (1961-1962, i.e., just after Merleau-Ponty's death) is perhaps most striking, marked visibly by the uses of parentheses. *Séminaire* XI is also quite noteworthy, because it occurs in 1963-64; in late 1963, *Le visible et l'invisible* was published, and Lacan decides to comment upon it; his rhetoric, like that contained in his *homage* in *Les Temps Modernes* after Merleau-Ponty's death, is typically megalomaniacal, arguing, on the one hand, that Merleau-Ponty was moving closer to his position, but, on the other hand, was still trapped within the logic of the philosophy of consciousness. When the future son-in-law, Jacques-Alain Miller, asks if, on the basis of *Le visible et l'invisible*, Lacan would back off of some of his more stringent criticisms of his dearly departed friend, Lacan responds with a categorical "Absolutely not!" Now, what seems interesting to us is that Lacan's most fecund developments concerning *le petit objet a* are either contemporaneous with Merleau-Ponty's course, or come in the wake of it. I am thus inclined to agree with Cecilia Sjöholm, who, in recent, but as yet unpublished, work (delivered as a presentation at the annual meeting of The Symposium, July 2000, in Perugia, Italy) has argued that there is more of Merleau-Ponty in Lacan than there is Lacan in Merleau-Ponty; this thesis will be the object of further development in the future.

6. Remarks attributed to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, with the approval of Madame Merleau-Ponty, by J.B. Pontalis, in his summary presentation of the discussion following the presentation by Laplanche and Leclaire, "L'inconscient: Etude Psychanalytique," at the Colloque Bonneval, 1960. The proceedings of this Colloquium, including the paper and Pontalis's summary of the discussion, are published in Henri Ey, *L'inconscient, Vie: Colloque de Bonneval* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1966); Merleau-Ponty's remarks appear on page 143. A discussion of these events appears also in Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co*, tr. J. Mehlman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 314-15. Roudinesco reports what is already well-known from ulterior accounts by Laplanche and Pontalis: Lacan was livid that Pontalis would not only "misrepresent" Merleau-Ponty (even though his widow, his daughter, and his nephew, Laplanche, Hyppolite, and Ricoeur all confirmed Pontalis's account), but also that Pontalis would betray Lacan in this way.

7. Very good work on the differend between Merleau-Ponty and Lacan is being done by James Phillips. See his "Merleau-Ponty and Lacan: The Confrontation of Phenomenology and Psychoanalysis," in *Disseminating Lacan*, ed. F. Raffoul and D. Pettigrew (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 69-107. This article is part of a series of investigations that will soon be published as a book-length study.

8. The claim here that Being must not become positivity is directed against the Cartesian ontology of the object, wherein Being is posited as the Object or as Essence.

9. See K. Löwith, *Nietzsche, Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, tr. J. Harvey Lomax, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), and K. Jaspers, *Schelling*, (Frankfurt: Piper, 1955), untranslated. Merleau-Ponty received a copy of Jaspers's book from the author, according to Madame Suzanne Merleau-Ponty, during a conversation at her residence, 20 May 1997. Madame Merleau-Ponty confirmed her husband's enthusiasm for Schelling, recounted by Tilliette in note 4, *supra*, but her account was not nearly as effusive as Tilliette's. "Mais alors," she added, "*mon mari faisait ses recherches, et moi, je faisais les miennes.*" She thus could not address the question as to *what* interest her husband had in Schelling, nor *why* Schelling suddenly appears within the scope of his interests, only *that* he had an interest.

10. The typed notes, contained in two notebooks, were discovered by accident when the library of the ENS-St-Cloud moved into a new building; no name is marked on them, nor is there any indication whatsoever of who might have been responsible for them. The first notebook contains 108 A4-sized pages, the second contains 71. Both sets of notes are difficult to read because they had been typed on carbon paper (remember that?) and had smudged.; the library had the good sense to make photocopies (of mediocre quality) of them in 1988, but since then, the original copy was lost. Those photocopies have now themselves been photocopied and catalogued in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. Merleau-Ponty's own notes for these courses are almost completely illegible, and tend to be only bibliographic references and short "laundry-lists" of points to be made during his lectures. They are currently being deciphered by Stéphanie Ménasé, who has the rare talent of being able to read Merleau-Ponty's hand-writing.

11. Edmund Husserl, "The Origin of Geometry," in *The Crisis of European Sciences*, op.cit, 360. See also Derrida's *Introduction* and Merleau-Ponty's *Notes de Cours*.

12. Jacques Derrida, *Introduction to Husserl's "Origin of Geometry,"* tr. J.P. Leavy (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 90; *Introduction à L'origine de la géométrie d'Edmund Husserl* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), 88.

13. See Paola Marrati, *La trace et le genèse: Derrida lecteur de Husserl et Heidegger* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1997), 48ff; forthcoming in English translation from Stanford University Press. See also Leonard Lawlor, "Translator's Introduction," to his translation of Merleau-Ponty's 1959-1960 course on Husserl's "Origin of Geometry" and related texts, entitled "Husserl aux limites de la phénoménologie," translation (as yet untitled) forthcoming from Northwestern University Press, 2001. The notes were published in French after being transcribed and assembled by Franck Robert under the title *Merleau-Ponty, Notes de Cours sur L'origine de la géométrie de Husserl, suivi de recherches sur la phénoménologie de Merleau-Ponty, sous la direction de Renaud Barbaras* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999). We signal here that the French publication of the notes is absolutely insufferable, for the following reasons. First, insofar as Husserl's text was not yet translated, and given that this was the Monday course, Merleau-Ponty translated "The Origin of Geometry" while commenting on it. The course, available in Box VII, envelope 5 at the Merleau-Ponty archives, contains 55 A4-sized pages, mostly written recto-verso, sometimes folded in half so that there are four faces on which to write, in an extremely dense, virtually illegible manuscript, with the author's own marginal comments, numbered continuously by the author. Some of the sheets were evidently added as revisions or addenda, marked by the addition to the original page number of the indications "bis," "ters," "quatro," etc. (A second series of page numbers, which do not correspond to Merleau-Ponty's, was added by the Bibliothèque Nationale during their inventory of the Archives). Some of the pages contain Merleau-Ponty's written translations of passages (usually whole paragraphs) of "The Origin of Geometry," citing the pages number from the *Husserliana*, VI: 364-386; other pages contain the elements of a commentary (sometimes whole paragraphs of developed argument, sometimes a list of important points, sometimes sentence fragments). The translations have not been included in the publication; instead Robert refers the reader to Derrida's translation, which of course sometimes differs palpably from Merleau-Ponty's (a salient example: Merleau-Ponty translates *Stiftung* as *institution*; Derrida translates it as *fondation*). Since Merleau-Ponty's arguments are based on textual commentary, to refer to *another* translation, which has served as the basis of *another* project, is inconvenient at best. Moreover, some of the translations contain marginal or parenthetical commentaries, which are not included in the French publication; the decision to exclude the translations thus deprives the reader of a significant portion of the work of the seminar. Since the French publication has appeared, Renaud Barbaras has compiled a long list of a variety of errors, ranging from typographical mistakes on the part of the printer, to errors in transcription, and orthographic faults in both French and German. More importantly, some additional notes from this course have been located in Box VII, envelope 6, containing the notes for the Thursday course, "La philosophie aujourd'hui," probably placed there by accident. The French edition of these notes is thus inadequate and incomplete; it is perhaps ironic that Lawlor's English translation, which corrects the mistakes, includes the new notes (but unfortunately not

Merleau-Ponty's translation), and respects Merleau-Ponty's numbering, will be better than the original French edition. His "Introduction," entitled "*Verflechtung*: The Triple Significance of Merleau-Ponty's Course Notes on Husserl's 'Origin of Geometry,'" is extremely insightful with regard to the relations between Merleau-Ponty and Derrida concerning the reading of this text, as well as to the way in which Merleau-Ponty was preparing his engagement with Heidegger. The argument concerning documentation and institution to which this footnote is appended is the fruit of a long conversation we had with Leonard Lawlor, Mauro Carbone, and Wayne Froman, at the International Phenomenology Symposium in Perugia, Italy, July 16-23, 2000, which was devoted entirely to Merleau-Ponty's last lecture courses.

14. And obviously lurking in the margins here is Heidegger's analysis of *physis* in his essay "The Anaximander Fragment," in the collection of essays published in translation under the title *Early Greek Thinking*, ed. and tr. D.F. Krell and F. Capuzzi (New York: Harper, 1970). We know that Merleau-Ponty knew this essay, and so we would want to insert here a long digression. Such a digression would, however, belong to Merleau-Ponty's emerging engagement with Heidegger, and would thus be the stuff of a thesis other than our present one; as such we would prefer to leave Heidegger in the margins. We can observe, though, that Heidegger interprets *physis* in the context of Anaximander's saying, and so is concerned to follow a path different from, but not alien to, the one that we are contending that Merleau-Ponty is pursuing. We will have to retrace these paths elsewhere.

15. I neither intend, nor is it possible, to provide a complete analysis of Merleau-Ponty's reading of Descartes, which spans across all of his works from 1938 to 1961. Thus, I do not return to the works of Descartes to test and evaluate Merleau-Ponty's reading. In these passages, I am merely providing a summary of his presentation of Descartes as it appears in *La nature*, pp. 25-39 and 169-176; we have also consulted "L'ontologie cartésienne" in Merleau-Ponty, *NC*, : 221-267. This latter text is Merleau-Ponty's attempt, interrupted by his death, to reinterpret the two senses of nature in Descartes via a careful reading of *The Meditations* and *Dioptrique*. The part of the course devoted to a reading of Descartes is preceded by a part called "Fundamental Thinking in Art," in which Merleau-Ponty examines vision in contemporary painting, comparing it to a Cartesian notion of vision, followed by a discussion of the visible in literature. The lectures on Descartes begin on 13 April 1961; the fifth of these lectures, called "God as light and as abyss," was scheduled for 4 May 1961, and is in fact the very text Merleau-Ponty was editing when he died. For a comprehensive evaluation of Merleau-Ponty's reading of Descartes, which takes into account all of the recently published materials, see the as-yet unpublished doctoral dissertation of our friend and colleague, Jenny Slatman, of the Universiteit von Amsterdam.

16. See also Renaud Barbaras, "De l'ontologie de l'objet à l'ontologie de l'élément," in *La Tournant de l'expérience*, op.cit., 183-200.

17. For a discussion, different from our own, of this objectivism and its consequences, see Renaud Barbaras, "Merleau-Ponty et la racine de l'objectivisme husserlien"; for a discussion of Merleau-Ponty's response to the ontology of the object, which returns to the Greek sense of element, see Barbaras, "De l'ontologie de l'objet à l'ontologie de l'élément," both in his

collection *Le Tournant de l'expérience* (Paris: Vrin, 1998), 63-80 and 201-224, respectively.

18. This one single sentence referring to sixteen pages of text in *La Nature* is not as gross of an oversimplification as it may appear. The section on Schelling opens with this same assessment: "The Cartesian idea of nature had not been completely exorcized by Kant. Certainly with Kant, nature is no longer constructed by God, but by human Reason. However the content remains identical" (59). Moreover, the third "chapter" of the first course is composed of two unequal parts. The first part deals, in only three pages, with Kant's ideas concerning, first, his Copernican revolution and, second, the two senses of nature that emerge from this revolution; the second part, only four pages, argues very generally that in *Critique of Judgment*, Kant seeks to unify these two senses of nature, and his solution is "strictly humanist" (47). The ten remaining pages of this "chapter" are devoted not to Kant but to the ideas of Merleau-Ponty's neo-Kantian teacher, Brunschvicg, whose claims we have already had the occasion to criticize in chapter one, above. If Merleau-Ponty had more to say about the Kantian idea of nature, and we suspect that he did, it was not recorded. There are thus two principle lessons to be retained from this "chapter": first, Kant's humanism is a repetition of the same tension found in Descartes, but displaced from God to man; second, the *Critique of Judgment* shows that there is something about nature, the kind of nature to which an ontology of the existent responds, that clearly resists being subsumed under the idea, that cannot be made an object of understanding (see page 45btm-46top: Merleau-Ponty refers in passing to both section 76 of *KU*, and to Schelling) This second lesson is, however, given only as a hint, and is not developed by Merleau-Ponty until the subsequent chapter on Schelling. For Schelling's reference to *KU*, see, for example, *SW*, I: 242.

19. Compare with the working note on "*Wesen* (verbal)" in *VI*, 228-9/174-5.

20. See especially manuscripts D 17 (May 1934) "Foundational Investigations of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of nature," and D 18 (May 1934) "Notes on the Constitution of Space," The former appears in *Husserl: Shorter Works*, op.cit., and is often referred to as "The Earth Does Not Move." The latter essay is not translated in English. Both appear in French in Edmund Husserl, *La terre ne se meut pas*, op.cit.

21. On this confrontation, see Renaud Barbaras, "Le Tournant de l'expérience: Merleau-Ponty et Bergson," in his eponymously titled collection, op. cit., 33-62.

22. Xavier Tilliette, *L'Absolu et la philosophie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1987). The inclusion of *Wesen* on our list is not Tilliette's, but our own, and it becomes one of the principle motifs of Merleau-Ponty's reading of Heidegger, in *NCI*, 91-148.

23. *R*, 96/134. Emphasis added. Merleau-Ponty is here referring to a scene in Schelling's 1809 essay *On Human Freedom*, the scene of God's auto-parturition. See *SW*, VII: 359ff.

24. For a precise statement of this task, see the first paragraph of the résumé of the course, in *R*, 91-92 /130-131.

25.Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Phenomenology and Psychoanalysis: Preface to Hesnard's *L'oeuvre de Freud*," tr. A. Fisher in K. Hoeller (ed.), *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry*, XVIII:1-3 (1985), 70. Translation modified. The motif of "descending into the basement" recalls the metaphor of archaeology, by which Merleau-Ponty named his own efforts in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Husserl himself uses archaeological metaphors earlier on (in, for example, *Logical Investigations*), but later abandons them in favor of *geological* metaphors (e.g. layers of *sedimented* meaning). Bernhard Waldenfels argues that the word "archaeology" entered French phenomenology via Fink. See Waldenfels, *Phänomenologie in Frankreich*, 41-42.

26.Ibid.

27.Ibid., 71.

28.Ibid.

29.I am not suggesting that the proposed "psychoanalysis of nature" can be reduced simply and neatly to an ontological project that we attempt to describe herein. Indeed, a full assessment of this project would have to place Merleau-Ponty's project in communication with the discourse properly called 'psychoanalysis.' For a skeptical view, see also Dorothea Olkowski, "A Psychoanalysis of nature?" in *Chiasmi International*, 2, forthcoming, 2000. A more interesting view is currently being developed by Cecilia Sjoholm, whose work on Merleau-Ponty's reading of psychoanalysis was first presented, along with my own and that of Phillippe Van Heute, in a joint session at the International Phenomenology Symposium in Perugia, Italy, July 15-23, 2000.

30.See, for example, *VI*, 233/179: "I will be able to take a position in ontology, as demanded by the introduction, on to specify its theses, only after the series of reductions that the book develops and which are all in the first part, but which are truly accomplished only in the last part . . . *We cannot do direct ontology*. My 'indirect' method (being in the beings) alone conforms to being." The object of Merleau-Ponty's critique here, i.e., the philosopher who performs a *direct* ontology, is not clear. My hypothesis, which remains only a hypothesis, is that by 'direct ontology,' Merleau-Ponty means the 'ontology of the object' that requires that Being be conceived as the positive object, or that determines Being in terms of essence, i.e., the objectivism that emerges from Descartes and that dominates the philosophical tradition until the twentieth century.

31.Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, op. cit., "The Ideal of Pure Reason"; *KrV* A613/B641.

32.Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, tr. W. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 286; *KU* 403

33.Ibid., 287; *KU*, 404.

34.Ibid., 252; *KU* 373.

35.On this point, I refer the reader to the analysis of David Farrell Krell, in the opening pages of his *Contagion: Sexuality, Disease, and Death in German Idealism and Romanticism*

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 3-15. This text was given originally as a seminar (or maybe two seminars) at DePaul University, and then as a lecture course at the Collegium Phaenomenologicum, both (or all three) of which I attended, and which were instrumental in the formation of my present dissertation. Krell attends to those passages in Kant's *Third Critique* where the more baneful side of raw nature—what Krell calls the “dire forces of nature”—asserts itself, and argues that these dire forces disrupt the edifice of the *Critique* and causes Kant to despair because he cannot find in nature the final moral purpose that would unite theoretical and practical philosophy. Krell then takes up three post-Kantian thinkers—Novalis, Schelling, and Hegel—in order to see how these dire forces of nature give both the “minuscule seeds of fecundity and the impalpable source of fatal contagion”(15) to their philosophical projects. Krell's analyses unfold along those “immodest” concerns that are familiar to his readers: sexuality, reproduction, genitality and generation, disease, monstrosity—in short, the stuff of life considered not abstractly, not formally, but in its materiality and finitude, those things that are “closest to us,” as Nietzsche would say, like blood and semen, body parts, and raging desire, the stuff of which we cannot rid ourselves no matter how elaborate and well-developed our idealizing function may be—indeed, the very stuff that frustrates idealization and reflection, the stuff “we burn in order to invoke spirit,” as the author sometimes says in mockery of Hegel and others. It's not surprising that a pure Kantian would not like, and may even be offended by, Krell's “distasteful” approach to Kantian and post-Kantian thought (and indeed, to Western philosophy, in that most if not all of his philosophical works in this domain have been preludes to a promised “theory of genitality”), but Kant himself asked the question “What is mankind?” Surely an answer to this question requires a return to the body, a return to organicity and organs, to the very stuff of human being. In this regard, Krell's work is radically phenomenological, though he might not agree with that characterization.

36. This is the context in which the Analytic of the Sublime is articulated. For Kant, the sublime is not “in” nature; rather, our experience of the sublime is only the mind's attunement in judging nature as sublime; that is, what we experience as sublime is only our mind trying to raise itself to the magnitude—mathematical or dynamic—that it encounters; the mistake, in Kant's view, is to then attribute the sublime to certain objects in nature (those that seriously challenge the mind, and thus make it aware of its sublimity, like thunderstorms and churning seas), i.e., to the object, when it is, in fact, only within the realm of the subject. It is in this way that the experience of the sublime constitutes a limit or regulative ideal for the mind; moreover, it is experienced as a feeling, a displeasurable one, that there is indeed something beyond this limit to which the cognitive powers of the mind are not equal. Since we do not have the cognitive apparatus to go there, then “we will gain nothing” by investigating it. In this regard, it is an abyss of human reason. Schelling is, of course, dissatisfied with this explanation. For other analyses of the sublimity of nature and its relation both to the critical project and to German Idealism, see, e.g., Krell, 7-15 (wherein he characterizes the whole of Schelling's early project as an engagement with “inhibitive sublimity”); Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Leçons sur l'analytique du sublime*; and the unpublished doctoral dissertation of Matthew Pacholec.

37. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 401; *KU*, 212'.

38.Kant, of course, had ruled out of the domain of *human* knowledge the possibility of the intellectual intuition, maintaining that it was not even thinkable. Fichte too says that the intellectual intuition is not within the domain of human knowledge, but is the necessary and unconscious act or deed [*Tathandlung*] that precedes and conditions it, but which itself does not come to consciousness and cannot be demonstrated—it must and can be only *posited*—by philosophy. The question of the intellectual intuition—its status and “logic”—becomes a dominant theme of German Idealism after Kant; an excellent study of its significance has recently been prepared by Xavier Tilliette, *L'intuition intellectuelle de Kant à Hegel* (Paris: J.Vrin, 1995).

39.Reprinted in W. Kaufmann, *Hegel: Reinterpretation, Texts , and Commentary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 302f.

40.On early formulation of the expansive and contractive activities, and their relation to the Absolute as *Unbedingt*, see, for example, *SW*, I: 165-6; “On the I as Principle of Philosophy,” tr. F. Marti, in F.W.J. Schelling, *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays (1794-1796)* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1980), 72-73.

41.This argument is taken up by Hegel, especially in *The Science of Logic*, as the immediate mediation of immediacy. On the basis of it, Hegel will famously criticize Schelling’s wish to start with the Absolute, conceived as *Indifferenz*, as “the night in which all cows are black.”

42.It is worth recalling here Merleau-Ponty’s oft-quoted phrase by which he characterizes the folding-back of the Flesh as a “coincidence always imminent but never realized in fact.” The return as coincidence, for both Merleau-Ponty and Schelling, would be, in Schelling’s words, an endless and “indifferent circle of sameness, which would get us nowhere and remain meaningless and lifeless” [*SW* VII: 345/18]. It is only in the space opened by non-coincidence, which we considered in chapter two, *supra*, under the title of the *à* of *être à*, that Being discloses itself as life and is not reduced to mere mechanism.

43.See Hölderlin, “Urteil und Sein,” reprinted in English translation as “Judgment and Being,” in *Friedrich Hölderlin: Essays and Letters on Theory*, tr. and ed. T. Pfau (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 37-38; the text appears to have been written in 1795. See also, Novalis, *Werke*, I: 650, 656; II: 712, 828.

44.We are, perhaps desperately, and no doubt without success, trying to compact several Schellingian ideas into one short passage space here. The argument to which this note is appended would have to be developed considerably, and across Schelling’s work from the mid-1790s, as well as from the post-1800 “identity philosophy” where he begins to employ the predicate *Indifferenz* to describe the Absolute. Our desperation here stems from the unrealizable desire to treat Schelling comprehensively, unrealizable because it would require a dissertation of its own. We beg the reader’s indulgence if they should find our treatment here too quick, for we recognize our self that much more, far too much for this present dissertation, to say on this point.

45.Kant immediately complains that Schelling’s response is another version of hylozoism, which is “the death of the philosophy of nature.” Schelling seems to shrug off this retort, making the

counterargument that to reject the principle of a teleology immanent to nature is also to reject the principle, disclosed by Fichte, of an unconscious intelligence that precedes the conscious act of reason; in other words, Kant cannot make his argument for the teleological principle as an indispensable idea of reason unless there is already really a teleology that expresses itself as the unconscious intelligence. While Schelling might not worry about the charge of hylozoism, he nevertheless seeks to avoid actually being a hylozoist, carefully skirting vitalist or animist positions, and, as Krell shows, “eschewing the notion of a single life force.” See Krell, *Contagion*, op.cit. 11, 73-114.

46. On this point, see Xavier Tilliette, “La nature, l’Esprit, le visible et l’invisible,” in *L’Absolu et la philosophie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1987), 44-57.

47. Novalis, *Werke*, I: 652-53.

48. Faulkner once called *The Sound and The Fury* his “most splendid failure.” David Krell often uses this phrase in relation to Schelling, and I have lifted it from him in this context.

49. Martin Heidegger, “On the Essence of Ground,” tr. J. Sallis, in *Pathmarks*, ed. W. McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 127.

50. See also *SW* I: 380; “Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the Science of Knowledge,” tr. T. Pfau, in *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F.W.J. Schelling* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 88.

51. The expansive activity continually moves outward, thus repelling away from itself, away from the center towards the periphery, and also repulses any resistance it might encounter; hence the expansive activity is also a force of repulsion. The opposite activity, called contractive, is also a force of attraction, because, insofar as it is “akin” to the ideal activity, it attracts this latter to it as that at which it aims, i.e., the opposite force does not simply oppose, but rather attracts its opposite to it, to the periphery.

52. Thus, in the *Ideas*, Schelling devotes considerable effort to the analysis of these phenomena, especially the chemical process, because these phenomena work to disrupt or alter or to restore the play of forces. It is through this disruption that matter does not settle as inert or as a dead object, and likewise, it accounts for qualitative differences in matter. To develop his insights on natural phenomena, Schelling draws on his studies of physics, chemistry, and biology, conducted while at Leipzig in 1796; that is, he draws on the scientific interpretations of the brute facts of nature. Indeed, given that the late Eighteenth Century was particularly fecund for the sciences, Schelling has no shortage of data (from which we present here just a sample). We note also that the text of the *Ideas* is incomplete: Schelling concentrates largely on the physical sciences, and promises, on the basis of these, to develop a physiology. This physiology is, however, delayed, and is in fact never entirely worked out, even in the most coherent attempts at it appear in the 1799 *Erste Entwurf* (and in its noteworthy appendix on illness; on these points, we refer the reader to David Krell’s study in *Contagion*, op.cit.). In any case, the text of the *Ideas* is striking for its discussion of recent developments in the sciences (and Schelling’s fascination with the

sciences, it must be said, is shared by Merleau-Ponty: one can learn a tremendous amount of science by reading these two philosophical interpreters of it). Schelling is particularly intrigued by Lavoisier's chemical explanation of combustion in 1792, which puts an end to Phlogiston theories, and his descriptions of the decomposition of elements. Likewise, studies on electricity (Volta, Franklin) and magnetism, heat, and chemical affinity (LeSage) are discussed by Schelling. Especially interesting are the attempts to translate the natural phenomena or inorganic matter to the organism. Thus, discussions of Galvani's recent discovery of animal electricity in 1791, corrected and generalized subsequently by Volta, are followed by Haller's analyses of muscular irritability from the 1760s; these are later (in 1780) taken up and given a new significance by the work of John Brown, as a theory of illness as an imbalance between irritation and irritability. Joining Brown's work on irritability with Lavoisier's work on oxygenation, Girtanner makes irritability the general principle of life; Kiellmayer elaborates on this in 1793 by adding sensibility and reproduction to the list of the constitutive functions of the process of life. On the basis of these researches, Schelling wants to discern a system in nature: the ideas disclosed in the *Ideas* are given more systematic expression in the other texts of the triptych.

53.SW, I: xx, *Ideas*, 30. Organic reproduction may well generate individuals of the same species, but this does not mean that reproduction is a continual reinscription of the same. Rather, the reproduction of the organism produces new individuals of the same species, and so is "always turning back into itself." This reproductive repetition is one that engenders difference, different individuals of the same species, but not mechanically produced copies. In this regard, we might say that reproductivity is an ominous and mortal force that sacrifices the individual organism to the species-being, in that the organism not only produces something in which it sublates itself, but also each individual is just a vanishing, a temporary and ephemeral product that is ultimately dissolved in the menstuum of continual process. Reproductivity thus involves death, and it will be no surprise if we therefore refer the reader to Krell's *Contagion*, the subtitle of which, *Sexuality, Disease, and Death in German Idealism and Romanticism*, announces the centrality of this very theme.

54.I have borrowed this phrase from my colleague Anna Vaughn, who once used it in a text on Schelling, although neither I nor she can recall exactly where (it is not in her dissertation); even if I do not have a precise source for this phrase, we will give all the credit for it to her.

55.This translation is by David Farrell Krell, effected originally for a seminar in German Idealism and Romanticism at DePaul University in 1995-96. Krell subsequently published the translation (NB: of only "The Outline of the Whole") with commentary in his *Contagion*, 73ff.

56.See Krell, 77.

57.See Krell, 77.

58.See again Krell, *Contagion*. Where Schelling speaks of "nature's struggle against everything individual," Krell speaks of the *dire forces* of nature. He includes among them not only sexual difference and sexuality, but also disease and death.

59. *Critique of Judgment*, 295ff ; *KU*, 410ff.

60. *N*, 62; *SW* I: 222. "What Kant, at the extremity of his sober discourse, conceived as a dream, I wanted to live and experience."

61. The Earth as institutionary ground is the object of a working note, dated June 1, 1960, and bearing the title "Transcendental History, Transcendental Geology/Historical Time, Historical Space/Philosophy." The working note reads: "Oppose to a philosophy of history like that of Sartre (which is finally a philosophy of 'individual praxis;—and in which history is the encounter of this praxis with the inertia of 'worked-over matter,' of an authentic temporality with what congeals it), not, doubtlessly, a philosophy of geography (it would be as vain to take as an axis the encounter of an individual praxis with the spatial in Itself as its encounter with the inert, the 'relations between persons' mediatized by space as the relations between persons mediatized by time)—but a philosophy of structure which, as a matter of fact, is formed better on contact with history. For history is too immediately tied to individual praxis, to interiority, it hides too much of its thickness and its flesh for it not to be easy to reintroduce into it the whole philosophy of the person. On the contrary, geography—or rather: the Earth as *Ur-Arche* brings to light the carnal *Urhistorie* (Husserl, *Umsturz* . . .) In fact it is a question of grasping the *nexus*,—niether 'historical' nor 'geographical'—of transcendental history and of transcendental geology, this very time that is space, this very space that is time, which I will have rediscovered by my analysis of the visible and the flesh, the simultaneous *Urstiftung* of time andspace that makes there be an historical landscape and a quasi-geographical inscription of history. Fundamental problem: sedimentation and reactivation." *VI*, 312/258-259. The problem on institution is clearly named in this working note, and linked to questions not only of geology and geography, but also to history, time, space, and finally, to a critique of Sartre. For a reading of this note, see Anthony Steinbock, "Reflections on Earth and World," in *Merleau-Ponty: Difference, Materiality, Painting*, ed. V. Foti (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, 1996), 90-111.

62. The reference to Leibniz ought not go unignored with respect to both Schelling and Merleau-Ponty. Concerning the Leibnizianism of the latter, see Renaud Barbaras, *De l'être du phénomène* (Grenoble: J. Millon, 1991), 263-276.

63. Schelling here footnotes the word "absolute" with the phrase "the primordial self."

64. Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, tr. and ed. A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper Collins, 1971), 61-62.

65. *SW*, VII: 360/35. See also the unpublished doctoral dissertation of my friend and colleague, Anna Vaughn-Clissold.

66. This idea is developed by Schelling in both the *Erste Entwurf* (especially the concept of organism) and in *Die Weltseele*. The very idea of a world-soul is an ancient belief that holds that the whole world, the universe, is pervaded by an animating principle, by life. The idea of a living, breathing Absolute gives to it a physiological, corporeal quality, gives it *flesh*.

67.Slavoj Zizek, *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters* (London: Verso, 1996), 14.

68.*SW* VIII: 229/116. For a long time, I have been fixated on the attempt to explain this metaphor otherwise, mechanically, in terms of an overworked motor that does not quite have the power to accomplish what it is meant to do, as if the timing belt on the motor were too loose or too tight. If the belt is too loose, the motor either spins freely and non-productively, not catching on the belt, and thus does not function as a motor; if the belt is too tight, it constrains the motor, requiring the expenditure of more energy, producing more friction and heat, such that the motor eventually grinds to a halt. This mechanical metaphor is wholly inadequate to what Schelling is attempt to explain, which neither is mechanical nor comes to a halt, but at the same time, I like the idea of a grinding or wild, tortured motor that tries to get going but is threatened with mechanical failure by the heat it produces by overworking itself. It would be wise to draw the metaphors from Schelling, who also compares the movement here described to systole and diastole, to inspiration and expiration; Zizek also offers a nice metaphor, citing the animal trap that contracts more brutally the more the animal seeks to escape from it.

69.Zizek, 13.

70.Zizek, 24.

71.Zizek, 22; he is here quoting from the 1813 version of *The Ages of the World*, in F.W.J. Schelling, *Die Weltalir. Fragmente. In den Urfassungen von 1811 und 1813*, ed. Manfred Schröter (Munich: Biederstein, 1946), 134.

72.This third sense of contraction is especially obvious in “The Stuttgart Seminars,” in *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory*, op.cit., 207: “What is superior in God expels, so to speak, the inferior.” The seminars, given 1810 to a private audience, mark the transition from the 1809 essay on freedom to the thrice aborted project of *Ages*, begun in 1811.

73.The title originally proposed for this dissertation was “Invaginated Metaphysics.” Merleau-Ponty is also fond of this word; see, e.g., *VI*, 200/153

74.See David Farrell Krell, *Contagion*, op. cit.; “The Crisis of Reason in the Nineteenth Century: Schelling’s Treatise on Human Freedom (1809), in J. Sallis, G. Moneta, and J. Taminiaux, *The COLlegium Phaenomenologicum: The First Ten Years* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988), 13-32

75.We may even go further in diagnosing what ails God. At *SW* VIII: 322/211, Schelling writes: “when . . . in the highest degree of antagonism, when [the rotary motion of drives] cannot really separate nor yet remain, it happens that something intermediate occurs, and matter, as if put into a self-lacerating rage, bursts apart into single, independant centers which, because they too are still held and driven by contrary powers, likewise rotate about their own axes.” The anxiety of God throws him into a masochistic rage; worse still, he bursts apart, fragments himself, cannot integrate himself and his corporal zones. God is schizophrenic, and Creation, schizogenetic. And

if we may return to our earlier astrophysical metaphor, we might now say that the supernova neither explodes as a white dwarf nor collapses as a black hole, but rather gives birth to a whole galaxy of new stars.

76. In addition to those texts by Krell, cited above, we also encourage the reader to consult John Sallis, "Ground," in *Delimitations: Phenomenology and the End of Metaphysics*, second, expanded edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 221-234.

77. Zizek, 43-44.

78. Zizek, 45.