



NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY  
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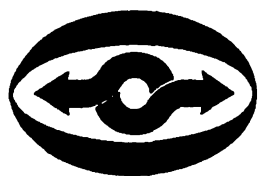
# The Visible and the Invisible

**MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY**

EDITED BY CLAUDE LEFORT

TRANSLATED BY ALPHONSO LINGIS





*Northwestern University*  
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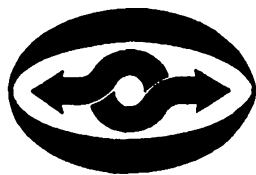


# The Visible and the Invisible

# *Maurice Merleau-Ponty*

*Edited by Claude Lefort*

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FOLLOWED BY WORKING NOTES

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## *Editorial Note*

MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY died on May 3, 1961. A manuscript was found among his papers which contained the first part of a work whose composition he had begun two years earlier. It is entitled *The Visible and the Invisible*. We have found no trace of this title before March, 1959. Before then notes concerning this project bear the reference "Being and Meaning," or "Genealogy of the True," or, lastly, "The Origin of Truth."

### THE MANUSCRIPT

THE MANUSCRIPT consists of a hundred and fifty large pages covered with a dense handwriting, bearing copious corrections. The text covers both sides of the page.

The date March, 1959 figures on the first page, and page 83 is dated June 1, 1959. Apparently the author composed a hundred and ten pages between spring and summer of the same year; then in the autumn of the following year he returned to the composition of his text, setting aside the last eight pages (pp. 103-10) which would have begun a second chapter. The date November, 1960 is written on the second page 103, above the title "Interrogation and Intuition."

### STRUCTURE OF THE WORK

OUTLINES FOR THE WORK are few and do not agree exactly with one another. It is certain that the author was recast-

ing his project during the course of its execution. We can, however, presume that the work would have been of considerable length and that the text we possess constitutes only its first part, which was intended to serve as an introduction.<sup>1</sup>

Here are the few schemata we found:

a) March, 1959 (written at the head of the manuscript):

Part I. Being and World

Chap. I. Reflection and interrogation.

Chap. II. Preobjective being: the solipsist world.

Chap. III. Preobjective being: intercorporeity.

Chap. IV. Preobjective being: the inter-world (*l'entremonde*).

Chap. V. Classical ontology and modern ontology.

Part II. Nature.

Part III. *Logos*.

b) May, 1960 (in a note on the first page):

Being and World.

Part I:

The vertical world	or	the interrogative being
mute		brute
		wild

Part II will be: Wild being and classical ontology.

(and on the second page:)

Chap. I. The flesh of the present or the "*there is*."

Chap. II. The plot (*tracé*) of time, the movement of ontogenesis.

Chap. III. The body, the natural light, and the word.

Chap. IV. The chiasm.

Chap. V. The inter-world and Being.  
World and Being.

c) May, 1960 (in a note):

I. Being and World

Part I: The vertical World or wild Being.

Part II: Wild Being and classical ontology.

Nature

Man

God.

1. Cf. Editor's Foreword.



Conclusion: the fundamental thought—Passage to the differentiations of wild Being. Nature—*logos* history.

cultivated being.

The *Erzeugung*.

## II. *Physis* and *Logos*.

d) October, 1960 (in a note):

### I. Being and World.

Part I: Reflection and interrogation.

Part II: The vertical world and wild Being.

Part III: Wild Being and classical ontology.

e) November, 1960 (in a note):

### I. The visible and nature.

1. Philosophical interrogation.

2. The visible.

3. The world of silence.

4. The visible and ontology (wild Being).

### II. The word and the invisible.

f) (Undated, but probably of November or December, 1960, in a note:)

### I. The visible and nature.

Philosophical interrogation:

interrogation and reflection;

interrogation and dialectic;

interrogation and intuition (what I am doing at the moment).

The visible.

Nature.

Classical ontology and modern ontology.

### II. The invisible and *logos*.

These few indications do not permit us to imagine what the work would have been in its matter and in its form. The reader will form a better idea of it when he reads the working notes we are publishing after the text. But at least we can make use of the outlines in order to discern more clearly the organization of the manuscript itself.

For should we follow only the divisions marked out in the text, we would have to confine ourselves to mentioning a Part

One: "Being and World," and a first chapter: "Reflection and Interrogation," while all the other sections would be parallel, all being equally preceded in the notes by the sign §. But note f), which confirms and completes the preceding note and which has the interest of having been written at the same time as the chapter "Interrogation and Intuition" (the author specifies: "what I am doing at the moment"), shows that we cannot retain this division. For the title of the first part, "Being and World," has been abandoned and replaced by "The Visible and Nature," the sections preceded by the sign § have been regrouped in terms of their meaning, and it becomes clear that the last two sections do not have the same function as the prior ones.

We have therefore decided to restructure the text according to the last indications left by the author. We have first distinguished three chapters, setting them under the heading "Philosophical Interrogation." The first chapter, "Reflection and Interrogation," with three subdivisions, covers the critique of the perceptual faith, scientism, and the philosophy of reflection (*la philosophie réflexive*). The second, "Interrogation and Dialectic," divided into two parts, consists of the analysis of Sartrean thought and an elucidation of the relations between dialectics and interrogation. The third, "Interrogation and Intuition," contains essentially the critique of Phenomenology.

There remains the problem of situating the last section entitled "The Intertwining—the Chiasm," which note f) does not mention. We could make it either the final chapter of "Philosophical Interrogation" or the first chapter of the announced Part Two: "The Visible." Either decision, we believe, can be justified by serious arguments. But in the absence of express indication by the author, the arguments would never appear decisive. In this situation, we have preferred to adopt the solution that involved the least intervention on our part—that is, to let this chapter follow the others.

## STATE OF THE TEXT

THE MANUSCRIPT of *The Visible and the Invisible* was worked over at length, as its numerous erasures and corrections show. Yet we cannot suppose that it had reached its definitive state. Certain repetitions would no doubt have been

eliminated; perhaps the manuscript would have been recast even more broadly. In particular, the definitiveness of the beginning of the text is open to doubt, since a note evokes the possibility of a new arrangement of the exposition. The author writes:

Perhaps redo pages 1-13, grouping together: 1. the certitudes (the thing) (the other) (the truth); 2. the incertitudes (the Pyrrhonian difficulties, the contradictions of thematization); 3. one can neither accept the antitheses, nor confine oneself to materialized certitudes→passage to reflection.

On the other hand, we note that the author twice uses the same text of Paul Claudel (cf. below, pp. 103 and 121) without advising the reader of this repetition. The function of the citation in the two passages is such that a broad recasting would have been necessary.

## THE WORKING NOTES

WE HAVE THOUGHT IT WELL to include after the text of *The Visible and the Invisible* a certain number of working notes which clarify its meaning. The author was in the habit of jotting down ideas on paper, ordinarily without concerning himself with style nor even obliging himself to compose complete sentences. These notes, which sometimes contain but a few lines and sometimes extend over several pages, constitute drafts for developments that figure in the first part of the work or would have figured in its continuation. From the end of the year 1958 on, they were as a rule dated and labeled.

It was neither possible nor desirable to publish all of them. Their mass would have overshadowed the text, and moreover a good number of them were to be excluded either because they were too elliptical or because they had no direct bearing on the subject of the research.

As soon as a selection proved to be necessary, it posed some problems of interpretation, and we feared lest our judgment be mistaken. But, rather than renounce the project, we have taken on the risk of making a choice among them, convinced as we were that by reason of the variety of the themes taken up, the quality of the reflection, the abrupt but always rigorous expres-

sion of the thought, these notes could render the philosopher's work palpable to the reader.

## EDITING OF THE MANUSCRIPT AND THE NOTES

AS FAR AS THE EDITING of the manuscript is concerned, we have limited ourselves in the text to clarifying the punctuation, in concern for facilitating its reading. But in the working notes we have transcribed the text without modification, so as to leave to the expression its first movement.<sup>2</sup>

Wherever we could, we have furnished the references the working notes required or completed those of the author.

When it was necessary to introduce or restore a term in order to give a sentence its meaning, we have put it between brackets and added an explanatory note at the bottom of the page.

Illegible or doubtful terms are indicated in the course of the text in the following way:

illegible: [?]

uncertain: [truth?].

2. In the English translation, too, we have attempted in the text to remain as faithful to the French as possible, though alterations in punctuation and wording have been made when necessary for clarity. The Working Notes, however, are reproduced exactly as they appeared in the French edition.

French words are given in parentheses when it is helpful to include them. Footnotes of the author, the editor, and the translator are numbered consecutively within each chapter; notes written by the editor or the translator are identified to distinguish them from those of Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty's marginal comments are preceded by an asterisk.

In the Working Notes, short dashes are used as standard punctuation and long dashes are used to separate sentences or quasi-sentences.

A number of mistakes in the French edition have been corrected upon consultation with M. Lefort.—A.L.

# The Visible and Nature: Philosophical Interrogation

# 1 / Reflection and Interrogation

## THE PERCEPTUAL FAITH AND ITS OBSCURITY<sup>1</sup>

WE SEE THE THINGS THEMSELVES, the world is what we see: formulae of this kind express a faith common to the natural man and the philosopher—the moment he opens his eyes; they refer to a deep-seated set of mute “opinions” implicated in our lives. But what is strange about this faith is that if we seek to articulate it into theses or statements, if we ask ourselves what is this *we*, what *seeing* is, and what *thing* or *world* is, we enter into a labyrinth of difficulties and contradictions.

What Saint Augustine said of time—that it is perfectly familiar to each, but that none of us can explain it to the others—must be said of the world. [Ceaselessly the philosopher finds himself]<sup>2</sup> obliged to reinspect and redefine the most well-grounded notions, to create new ones, with new words to designate them, to undertake a true reform of the understanding—at whose term the evidence of the world, which seemed indeed to be the clearest of truths, is supported by the seemingly most sophisticated thoughts, before which the natural man now no longer recognizes where he stood. Whence the age-old ill-humor against

1. EDITOR: Opposite the title of the section, the author notes: “Notion of faith to be specified. It is not faith in the sense of decision but in the sense of what is before any position, animal and [?] faith.”

2. EDITOR: “Ceaselessly the philosopher finds himself . . .”: these words, which we introduce to give sense to the following sentences, were the first words of a sentence-body entirely erased by the author.

philosophy is reanimated, the grievance always brought against it that it reverses the roles of the clear and the obscure. The fact that the philosopher claims to speak in the very name of the naïve evidence of the world, that he refrains from adding anything to it, that he limits himself to drawing out all its consequences, does not excuse him; on the contrary he dispossesses [humanity]<sup>3</sup> only the more completely, inviting it to think of itself as an enigma.

This is the way things are and nobody can do anything about it. It is at the same time true that the world is *what we see* and that, nonetheless, we must learn to see it—first in the sense that we must match this vision with knowledge, take possession of it, *say what we* and *what seeing* are, act therefore as if we knew nothing about it, as if here we still had everything to learn. But philosophy is not a lexicon, it is not concerned with “word-meanings,” it does not seek a verbal substitute for the world we see, it does not transform it into something said, it does not install itself in the order of the said or of the written as does the logician in the proposition, the poet in the word, or the musician in the music. It is the things themselves, from the depths of their silence, that it wishes to bring to expression. If the philosopher questions, and hence feigns ignorance of the world and of the vision of the world which are operative and take form continually within him, he does so precisely in order to make them speak, because he believes in them and expects from them all his future science. The questioning here is not a beginning of negation, a perhaps put in the place of being. It is for philosophy the only way to conform itself with the vision we have in fact, to correspond with what, in that vision, provides for thought, with the paradoxes of which that vision is made, the only way to adjust itself to those figured enigmas, the thing and the world, whose massive being and truth teem with impossible details.

For after all, sure as it is that I see my table, that my vision

3. EDITOR: “Dispossesses humanity” is doubtless to be understood. These words belong to the last part of the preceding sentence, erased by the author, and which we reproduce here between brackets: “. . . the grievance always brought against it that it reverses the roles of the clear and the obscure [and that it arrogates to itself the role of making humanity live in a state of alienation, in the most complete alienation, the philosopher claiming to understand humanity better than it understands itself].”

terminates in it, that it holds and stops my gaze with its insurmountable density, as sure even as it is that when, seated before my table, I think of the Pont de la Concorde, I am not then in my thoughts but am at the Pont de la Concorde, and finally sure as it is that at the horizon of all these visions or quasi-visions it is the world itself I inhabit, the natural world and the historical world, with all the human traces of which it is made—still as soon as I attend to it this conviction is just as strongly contested, by the very fact that this vision is *mine*. We are not so much thinking here of the age-old argument from dreams, delirium, or illusions, inviting us to consider whether what we see is not “false.” For to do so the argument makes use of that faith in the world it seems to be unsettling: we would not know even what the false is, if there were not times when we had distinguished it from the true. The argument therefore postulates the world in general, the true in itself; this is secretly invoked in order to disqualify our perceptions and cast them pell-mell back into our “interior life” along with our dreams, in spite of all observable differences, for the sole reason that our dreams were, at the time, as convincing as they—forgetting that the “falsity” of dreams cannot be extended to perceptions since it appears only relative to perceptions and that if we are to be able to speak of falsity, we do have to have experiences of truth. Valid against naïveté, against the idea of a perception that would plunge forth to surprise the things beyond all experience, as the light draws them from the night wherein they pre-existed, the argument does not [elucidate?]; it is marked with this same naïveté itself, since it equalizes the perception and the dream only by setting opposite them a Being that would be in itself only. If, however, as the argument, in the measure that it has validity, shows, we must completely reject this phantasm, then the intrinsic, descriptive differences between the dream and the perceived take on ontological value. And we answer Pyrrhonism sufficiently by showing that there is a difference of structure and, as it were, of grain between the perception or true vision, which gives rise to an open series of concordant explorations, and the dream, which is not *observable* and, upon examination, is almost nothing but blanks. To be sure, this does not terminate the problem of our access to the world; on the contrary it is only beginning. For there remains the problem of how we can be under the illusion of seeing what we do not see, how the rags of the dream can, before the dreamer, be worth the



close-woven fabric of the true world, how the unconsciousness of not having observed can, in the fascinated man, take the place of the consciousness of having observed. If one says that the void of the imaginary remains forever what it is, is never equivalent to the plenum of the perceived and never gives rise to the *same* certitude, that it is *not taken to be worth* the perceived, that the sleeping man has lost every reference mark, every model, every canon of the clear and the articulate, and that one sole particle of the perceived world introduced in it would instantaneously dissipate the enchantment, the fact remains that if we can lose our reference marks *unknown to ourselves* we are never sure of *having* them when we think we have them; if we can withdraw from the world of perception without knowing it, nothing proves to us that we are ever in it, nor that the observable is ever entirely observable, nor that it is made of another fabric than the dream. Then, the difference between perception and dream not being absolute, one is justified in counting them both among "our experiences," and it is above perception itself that we must seek the guarantee and the sense of its ontological function. We will stake out that route, which is that of the philosophy of reflection (*la philosophie réflexive*), when it opens. But it begins well beyond the Pyrrhonian arguments; by themselves they would deter us from any elucidation, since they refer vaguely to the idea of a Being wholly in itself and by contrast count the perceived and the imaginary indiscriminately among our "states of consciousness." At bottom, Pyrrhonism shares the illusions of the naïve man. It is the naïveté that rends itself asunder in the night. Between Being in itself and the "interior life" it does not even catch sight of the *problem of the world*. Whereas it is toward that problem that we are making our way. What interests us is not the reasons one can have to consider the existence of the world "uncertain"—as if one already knew what to exist is and as if the whole question were to apply this concept appropriately. For us the essential is to know precisely what the being of the world means. Here we must presuppose nothing—neither the naïve idea of being in itself, therefore, nor the correlative idea of a being of representation, of a being for the consciousness, of a being for man: these, along with the being of the world, are all notions that we have to rethink with regard to our experience of the world. We have to reformulate the sceptical arguments outside of every ontological preconception and reformulate them

precisely so as to know what world-being, thing-being, imaginary being, and conscious being are.

Now that I have in perception the thing itself, and not a representation, I will only add that the thing is at the end of my gaze and, in general, at the end of my exploration. Without assuming anything from what the science of the body of the other can teach me, I must acknowledge that the table before me sustains a singular relation with my eyes and my body: I see it only if it is within their radius of action; above it there is the dark mass of my forehead, beneath it the more indecisive contour of my cheeks—both of these visible at the limit and capable of hiding the table, as if my vision of the world itself were formed from a certain point of the world. What is more, my movements and the movements of my eyes make the world vibrate—as one rocks a dolmen with one's finger without disturbing its fundamental solidity. With each flutter of my eyelashes a curtain lowers and rises, though I do not think for an instant of imputing this eclipse to the things themselves; with each movement of my eyes that sweep the space before me the things suffer a brief torsion, which I also ascribe to myself; and when I walk in the street with eyes fixed on the horizon of the houses, the whole of the setting near at hand quivers with each footfall on the asphalt, then settles down in its place. I would express what takes place badly indeed in saying that here a "subjective component" or a "corporeal constituent" comes to cover over the things themselves: it is not a matter of another layer or a veil that would have come to pose itself between them and me. The stirring of the "appearance" does not disrupt the evidence of the thing—any more than monocular images interfere when my two eyes operate in synergy. The binocular perception is not made up of two monocular perceptions surmounted; it is of another order. The monocular images *are* not in the same sense that the thing perceived with both eyes *is*. They are phantoms and it is the real; they are pre-things and it is the thing: they vanish when we pass to normal vision and re-enter into the thing as into their daylight truth. They are too far from having its density to enter into competition with it: they are only a certain divergence<sup>4</sup> from the imminent true vision, absolutely

4. TRANSLATOR: *Ecart*. This recurrent term will have to be rendered variously by "divergence," "spread," "deviation," "separation."

bereft of its [prestiges?] and therefore drafts for or residues of the true vision, which accomplishes them by reabsorbing them. The monocular images cannot be *compared* with the synergic perception: one cannot put them side by side; it is necessary to choose between the thing and the floating pre-things. We can effect the passage by *looking*, by awakening to the world; we cannot witness it as spectators. It is not a *synthesis*; it is a metamorphosis by which the appearances are instantaneously stripped of a value they owed merely to the absence of a true perception. Thus in perception we witness the miracle of a totality that surpasses what one thinks to be its conditions or its parts, that from afar holds them under its power, as if they existed only on its threshold and were destined to lose themselves in it. But if it is to displace them as it does, it is necessary that the perception maintain in its depth all their corporeal ties: it is by *looking*, it is still with my eyes that I arrive at the true thing, with these same eyes that a moment ago gave me monocular images—now they simply function *together* and as though *for good*. Thus the relation between the things and my body is decidedly singular: it is what makes me sometimes remain in appearances, and it is also what sometimes brings me to the things themselves; it is what produces the buzzing of appearances, it is also what silences them and casts me fully into the world. Everything comes to pass as though my power to reach the world and my power to entrench myself in phantasms only came one with the other; even more: as though the access to the world were but the other face of a withdrawal and this retreat to the margin of the world a servitude and another expression of my natural power to enter into it. The world is what I perceive, but as soon as we examine and express its absolute proximity, it also becomes, inexplicably, irremediable distance. The “natural” man holds on to both ends of the chain, thinks *at the same time* that his perception enters into the things and that it is formed this side of his body. Yet coexist as the two convictions do without difficulty in the exercise of life, once reduced to theses and to propositions they destroy one another and leave us in confusion.

What if I took not only my own views of myself into account but also the other's views of himself and of me? Already my body as stage director of my perception has shattered the illusion of a coinciding of my perception with the things themselves. Between

them and me there are henceforth hidden powers, that whole vegetation of possible phantasms which it holds in check only in the fragile act of the look. No doubt, it is not entirely my body that perceives: I know only that it can prevent me from perceiving, that I cannot perceive without its permission; the moment perception comes my body effaces itself before it and never does the perception grasp the body in the act of perceiving.\* If my left hand is touching my right hand, and if I should suddenly wish to apprehend with my right hand the work of my left hand as it touches, this reflection of the body upon itself always miscarries at the last moment: the moment I feel my left hand with my right hand, I correspondingly cease touching my right hand with my left hand. But this last-minute failure does not drain all truth from that presentiment I had of being able to touch myself touching: my body does not perceive, but it is as if it were built around the perception that dawns through it; through its whole internal arrangement, its sensory-motor circuits, the return ways that control and release movements, it is, as it were, prepared for a self-perception, even though it is never itself that is perceived nor itself that perceives.<sup>5</sup> Before the science of the body (which involves the relation with the other) the experience of my flesh as gangue of my perception has taught me that perception does not come to birth just anywhere, that it emerges in the recess of a body. The other men who see "as we do," whom we see seeing and who see us seeing, present us with but an amplification of the same paradox. If it is already difficult to say that my perception, such as I live it, goes unto the things themselves, it is indeed impossible to grant access to the world to the others' perception; and, by a sort of backlash, they also refuse me this access which I deny to them. For where the others (or myself seen by them) are concerned, one must not only say that the thing is caught up by the vortex of exploratory movements and perceptual behaviors and drawn inward. If perhaps there is for me no sense in saying that my perception and the thing it aims at are "in my head" (it is certain only that they are "*not elsewhere*"), I cannot help putting the other, and the perception he has, *behind his body*. More exactly, the thing perceived by the

\* The *ὄπισθεν κόσμος* like the monocular image: it is not interposed, isolated, but it is not nothing.

5. TRANSLATOR: . . . *même si ce n'est jamais lui qu'il perçoit ou lui qui le perçoit.*

other is doubled: there is *the one he perceives*, God knows where, and there is the one I see, outside of his body, and which I call the true thing—as he calls true thing the table *he sees* and consigns to the category of appearances the one I see. The true things and the perceiving bodies are this time no longer in the ambiguous relation which a moment ago we found between *my things* and *my body*. Now the true things and the perceiving bodies, whether close-up or distant, are in any case juxtaposed in the world, and perception, which perhaps is not “in my head,” is nowhere else than in my body as a thing of the world. From now on it seems impossible to remain in the inner certitude of him who perceives: seen from without perception glides over the things and does not touch them. At most one will say, if one wishes to admit the perception’s own perspective upon itself, that each of us has a private world: these private worlds are “worlds” only for their titulars; they are not the world. The sole world, that is, the unique world, would be a *κοινος κόσμος*, and our perceptions do not open upon it.

But upon what then do they open? How are we to name, to describe, such as I see it from my place, that *lived by another* which yet for me is not nothing, since I believe in the other—and that which furthermore concerns me myself, since it is there as another’s view upon me? \* Here is this well-known countenance, this smile, these modulations of voice, whose style is as familiar to me as myself. Perhaps in many moments of my life the other is for me reduced to this spectacle, which can be a charm. But

\* Take up again: Yet, just as above the monocular phantasms could not compete with the thing, so also now one could describe the private worlds as divergence with respect to the *world itself*. How I represent the lived by another to myself: as a sort of duplication of my own lived experience. The marvel of this experience: I can count on what I see, which is in close correspondence with what the other sees (everything attests to this, in fact: we really do see the same thing and the thing itself)—and yet at the same time I never rejoin the other’s lived experience. It is in the world that we rejoin one another. Every attempt to reinstate the illusion of the “thing itself” is in fact an attempt to return to my imperialism and to the value of *my thing*. Therefore it does not bring us out of solipsism: it is a new proof of solipsism.

c) Consequences: underlying obscurity of the natural idea of truth or “intelligible world.”

Science will only prolong this attitude: objectivist ontology which undermines itself and collapses under analysis.

should the voice alter, should the unwonted appear in the score of the dialogue, or, on the contrary, should a response respond too well to what I thought without having really said it—and suddenly there breaks forth the evidence that yonder also, minute by minute, life is being lived: somewhere behind those eyes, behind those gestures, or rather before them, or again about them, coming from I know not what double ground of space, another private world shows through, through the fabric of my own, and for a moment I live in it; I am no more than the respondent for the interpellation that is made to me. To be sure, the least recovery of attention persuades me that this other who invades me is made only of my own substance: how could I conceive, precisely as *his*, *his* colors, *his* pain, *his* world, except as in accordance with the colors I see, the pains I have had, the world wherein I live? But at least my private world has ceased to be mine only; it is now the instrument which another plays, the dimension of a generalized life which is grafted onto my own.

But at the very moment that I think I share the life of another, I am rejoining it only in its ends, its exterior poles. It is in the world that we communicate, through what, in our life, is articulate. It is from this lawn before me that I think I catch sight of the impact of the green on the vision of another, it is through the music that I enter into his musical emotion, it is the thing itself that opens unto me the access to the private world of another. But the thing itself, we have seen, is always for me the thing that I see. The intervention of the other does not resolve the internal paradox of my perception: it adds to it this other enigma: of the propagation of my own most secret life in another—another enigma, but yet the same one, since, from all the evidence, it is only through the world that I can leave myself. It is therefore indeed true that the “private worlds” communicate, that each of them is given to its incumbent as a variant of one common world. The communication makes us the witnesses of one sole world, as the synergy of our eyes suspends them on one unique thing. But in both cases, the certitude, entirely irresistible as it may be, remains absolutely obscure; we can live it, we can neither think it nor formulate it nor set it up in theses. Every attempt at elucidation brings us back to the dilemmas.

And it is this unjustifiable certitude of a sensible world common to us that is the seat of truth within us. That a child perceives before he thinks, that he begins by putting his dreams

in the things, his thoughts in the others, forming with them, as it were, one block of common life wherein the perspectives of each are not yet distinguished—these genetic facts cannot be simply ignored by philosophy in the name of the exigencies of the intrinsic analysis. Thought cannot ignore its apparent history, if it is not to install itself beneath the whole of our experience, in a pre-empirical order where it would no longer merit its name; it must put to itself the problem of the genesis of its own meaning. It is in terms of its intrinsic meaning and structure that the sensible world is “older” than the universe of thought, because the sensible world is visible and relatively continuous, and because the universe of thought, which is invisible and contains gaps, constitutes at first sight a whole and has its truth only on condition that it be supported on the canonical structures of the sensible world. If we reconstitute the way in which our experiences, according to their ownmost meaning, depend on one another, and if, in order to better lay bare the essential relations of dependency, we try to break them apart in our thought, we come to realize that all that for us is called thought requires that distance from oneself, that initial openness which a field of vision and a field of future and of past are for us. . . . In any case, since we are here only trying to take a first look at our natural certitudes, there is no doubt that, in what concerns the mind and truth, they rest on the primary stratum of the sensible world and that our assurance of being in the truth is one with our assurance of being in the world. We speak and we understand speech long before learning from Descartes (or rediscovering for ourselves) that thought is our reality. We learn to meaningfully handle language (*language*), in which we install ourselves, long before learning from linguistics the intelligible principles upon which our tongue (*langue*) and every tongue are “based” (supposing that it does teach them). Our experience of the true, when it is not immediately reducible to that of the thing we see, is at first not distinct from the tensions that arise between the others and ourselves, and from their resolution. As the thing, as the other, the true dawns through an emotional and almost carnal experience, where the “ideas”—the other’s and our own—are rather traits of his physiognomy and of our own, are less understood than welcomed or spurned in love or hatred. To be sure, there are motifs, quite abstract categories, that function

very precociously in this wild<sup>6</sup> thought, as the extraordinary anticipations of adult life in childhood show sufficiently; and one can say that the whole of man is already there in his infancy. The child understands well beyond what he knows how to say, responds well beyond what he could define, and this after all is as true of the adult. A genuine conversation gives me access to thoughts that I did not know myself capable of, that I *was* not capable of, and sometimes I feel myself *followed* in a route unknown to myself which my words, cast back by the other, are in the process of tracing out for me. To suppose here that an *intelligible world* sustains the exchange would be to take a name for a solution—and furthermore it would be to grant us what we are maintaining: that it is by borrowing from the world structure that the universe of truth and of thought is constructed for us. When we want to express strongly the consciousness we have of a truth, we find nothing better than to invoke a *τόπος νοητός* that would be common to minds or to men, as the sensible world is common to the sensible bodies. And this is not only an analogy: it is the same world that contains our bodies and our minds, provided that we understand by world not only the sum of things that fall or could fall under our eyes, but also the locus of their compossibility, the invariable style they observe, which connects our perspectives, permits transition from one to the other, and—whether in describing a detail of the landscape or in coming to agreement about an invisible truth—makes us feel we are two witnesses capable of hovering over<sup>7</sup> the same true object, or at least of exchanging our situations relative to it, as we can exchange our standpoints in the visible world in the strict sense. But here again, more than ever, the naïve certitude of the world, the anticipation of an intelligible world, is as weak when it wishes to convert itself into theses as it is strong in practice. As long as we are dealing with the visible, a mass of facts comes to support it: beyond the divergence of the witnesses it is often easy

6. TRANSLATOR: *Sauvage*: wild in the sense of uncultivated, uncultured. There is doubtless an allusion to Claude Lévi-Strauss's *The Savage Mind* (*La Pensée sauvage*) in the term.

7. TRANSLATOR: *Survoler*. Merleau-Ponty likes to call the unsituated point of view of objectivist thought a *pensée de survol*—a “high-altitude thinking” (as Benita Eisler translates in John-Paul Sartre's *Situations* [New York, 1965], p. 229).



to re-establish the unity and concordance of the world. But as soon as one goes beyond the circle of *instituted* opinions, which are undivided among us as are the Madeleine or the Palais de Justice, much less thoughts than monuments of our historical landscape, as soon as one reaches the true, that is, the invisible, it seems rather that each man inhabits his own islet, without there being transition from one to the other, and we should rather be astonished that sometimes men come to agreement about anything whatever. For after all each of them has begun by being a fragile mass of living jelly, and it is already a great deal that they would have taken the same route of ontogenesis; it is still more of a wonder that all, from the bottom of their retreats, would have let themselves be caught up by the same social functioning and the same language; but, when it comes to using these according to their own wills and to saying what no one sees, neither the type of the species nor that of the society guarantees that they should come to compatible propositions. When one thinks of the mass of contingencies that can alter both, nothing is more improbable than the extrapolation that treats the universe of the truth as one world also, without fissures and without impossibles.

### SCIENCE PRESUPPOSES THE PERCEPTUAL FAITH AND DOES NOT ELUCIDATE IT

ONE MIGHT BE TEMPTED to say that these insoluble antinomies belong to the confused universe of the immediate, lived experience, or the vital man, which by definition is without truth, that hence we must forget them until the sole rigorous knowledge, science, comes to explain these phantasms with which we are troubling ourselves by their conditions and from without. The true is neither the thing that I see, nor the other man whom I also see with my eyes, nor finally that total unity of the sensible world and, at the limit, of the intelligible world which we were presently trying to describe. The true is the *objective*, is what I have succeeded in determining by measurement, or more generally by the *operations* that are authorized by the variables or by the entities I have defined relative to an order of facts. Such determinations owe nothing to our *contact* with the things: they express an effort of approximation that would

have no meaning with regard to the lived experience, since the lived is to be taken as such and cannot also be considered "in itself." Thus science began by excluding all the predicates that come to the things from our encounter with them. The exclusion is however only provisional: when it will have learned to invest it, science will little by little reintroduce what it first put aside as subjective; but it will integrate it as a particular case of the relations and objects that define the world for science. Then the world will close in over itself, and, except for what within us thinks and builds science, that impartial spectator that inhabits us, we will have become parts or moments of the Great Object.

We will too often have to return to the multiple variants of this illusion to deal with them now. Here we have to state only what is necessary to rule out the objection of principle that would stop our research at the start: that is, summarily, that the *κοσμοθεωρὸς* capable of constructing or of reconstructing the existing world with an indefinite series of its own operations, far from dissipating the obscurities of our naïve faith in the world, is on the contrary its most dogmatic expression, presupposes it, maintains itself only by virtue of that faith. During the two centuries that it pursued its task of objectification without difficulty, physics was able to believe that it was simply following out the articulations of the world and that the physical object in itself pre-existed science. But today, when the very rigor of its description obliges physics to recognize as ultimate physical beings in full right relations between the observer and the observed, determinations that have meaning only for a certain situation of the observer, it is the ontology of the *κοσμοθεωρὸς* and of the Great Object correlative to it that figures as a prescientific preconception. Yet it is so natural that the physicist continues to think of himself as an Absolute Mind before the pure object and to count also as truths in themselves the very statements that express the interdependence of the whole of the observable with a situated and incarnate physicist. The formula that permits one to pass from one real perspective on astronomical spaces to another and which, being true of all of them, goes beyond the *de facto* situation of the physicist who speaks, does not, however, surpass it unto an absolute knowledge: for it has meaning in physics only when tallied with observations and inserted into a life of cognitions which, for their part, are always situated. What permits the joining together of views which are

all perspective is not a view of the universe; it is only the methodic usage. If we give to that formula the value of an absolute Knowledge, if, for example, we seek in it the ultimate and exhaustive meaning of time and space, we do so because the pure operation of science here takes up for its own profit our certitude, which is much older than it and much less clear, of having access "to the things themselves" or of having an absolute power to survey the world from above.

When it gained access to domains that are not naturally given to man—to astronomical spaces or microphysical realities—the more inventiveness in the wielding of algorithm science has exhibited, the more conservative it has shown itself to be in what concerns theory of knowledge. Truths that should not have left its idea of Being unchanged are—at the cost of great difficulties of expression and thought—retranslated into the language of the traditional ontology—as if science needed to except itself from the relativities it establishes, to put itself out of play, as if blindness for Being were the price it has to pay for its success in the determination of beings. The considerations regarding scale, for example, if they are really taken seriously, should not relegate all the truths of physics to the side of the "subjective"—a move that would maintain the rights of the idea of an inaccessible "objectivity"—but they should contest the very principle of this cleavage and make the contact between the observer and the observed enter into the definition of the "real." Yet we have seen many physicists seek in the compact structure and the density of macroscopic appearances, or on the contrary in the loose and lacunate structure of certain microphysical domains, arguments in favor of a determinism, or, contrariwise, of a "mental" or "acausal" reality. These alternatives show enough to what point science, where it is a question of an ultimate understanding of itself, is rooted in pre-science and foreign to the question of the *meaning of being*. When the physicists speak of particles that exist for but a milliard of a second, their first movement is always to suppose that they exist in the same sense as directly observable particles, except for much shorter a time. The microphysical field is considered as a macroscopic field of very small dimensions, where the horizon phenomena, the properties without carriers, the collective beings or beings without absolute localization, are by right only "subjective appear-

ances" which the vision of some giant [would reduce to]<sup>8</sup> the interaction of absolute physical individuals. Yet this is to postulate that the considerations of scale are not ultimate; it is again to think them in the perspective of the in itself, at the very moment when there is a suggestion to renounce that perspective. Thus the "strange" notions of the new physics are strange for it only in the sense that a paradoxical opinion surprises common sense, that is, without instructing it in depth and without changing anything of its categories. We are not implying here that the properties of the new physical beings *prove* a new logic or a new ontology. If one takes "proof" in the mathematical sense, the scientists, who are alone in a position to furnish one, are also alone in a position to evaluate it. That some of them refuse such proof as a case of begging the question<sup>9</sup> suffices for the philosopher not to have the right—nor the obligation either—to admit it. What the philosopher can note—what provokes his thought—is that precisely those physicists who maintain a Cartesian representation of the world<sup>10</sup> admit their "preferences," just as a musician or a painter would speak of his preferences for a style. This permits us to advance the notion that no ontology is exactly *required* by the thought proper to physics at work (whatever be the subsequent fate of the microphysical theory), that in particular the classical ontology of the object cannot claim to be enjoined by it, nor can it claim a privilege *by principle*, when, for those who maintain it, it is only a preference. Either by physics and by science we understand a certain way of operating on the facts with algorithm, a certain procedure of cognition of which those who possess the instrument are the sole judges—in which case they are the sole judges also of the sense in which they take their variables, but have neither the obligation nor even the right to give an imaginative translation of them, to decide in their name the question of *what there is*, or to impugn an eventual *contact* with the world. Or, on the contrary, physics means to say *what is*—but then it is today no longer justified in defining Being

8. EDITOR: "Would reduce to" is crossed out and "would find again" is written over it. We restore the first expression, since the correction is manifestly incomplete.

9. For example, Louis de Broglie, *Nouvelles perspectives sur la microphysique* (Paris, 1956).

10. *Ibid.*

by the Being-object, nor in confining lived experience within the order of our "representations" and the sector of "psychological" curiosities; it must recognize as legitimate an analysis of the procedures through which the universe of measures and operations is constituted starting from the life world (*monde vécu*) considered as the source, eventually as the universal source. Without this analysis, in which the relative rights and the limits of the classical objectification would be recognized, a physics that would maintain as is the philosophical equipment of classical science and project its own results into the order of absolute knowledge would, like the perceptual faith from which it proceeds, live in a state of permanent crisis. It is striking to see Einstein disqualify as "psychology" the experience that we have of the simultaneous through the perception of another and the intersection of our perceptual horizons and those of the others: for him there could be no question of giving ontological value to this experience because it is purely a knowledge by anticipation or by principle and is formed without operations, without effective measurings. This is to postulate that what is is not *that upon which we have an openness*, but only *that upon which we can operate*; and Einstein does not dissemble the fact that this certitude of an adequation between the operation of science and Being is with him prior to his physics. He even emphasizes with humor the contrast between his "wildly speculative" science and his claim for it of a truth in itself. We will have to show how the physical idealization goes beyond, and forgets, the perceptual faith. For the moment it was enough to note that it proceeds from that faith, that it does not lift its contradictions, does not dissipate its obscurity, and nowise dispenses us—far from it—from envisaging it in itself.

We would arrive at the same conclusion if, instead of underscoring the inconsistencies of the "objective" order, we would address ourselves to the "subjective" order which, in the ideology of science, is its counterpart and necessary complement—and perhaps our conclusion would be more easily accepted through this way. For here the disorder and the incoherence are manifest, and one can say without exaggeration that our fundamental concepts—that of the psychism and of psychology—are as mythical as the classifications of the societies called archaic. It was believed that we were returning to clarity by exorcising "introspection." And to do so was indeed necessary: for where, when,

and how has there ever been a vision of the inside? There is—and this is something quite different, which retains its value—a life present to itself (*près de soi*), an openness upon oneself, which does not look out upon any world other than the common world—and which is not necessarily a closedness to the others. The critique of introspection too often turns away from that irreplaceable way of access to the other as he is involved in ourselves. And on the other hand, the recourse to the “outside” is by itself nowise a guarantee against the illusions of introspection; it gives only a new form to our confused idea of a psychological “vision”; it only transfers it from the inside to the outside. It would be instructive to make explicit what the psychologists mean by “psychism” and other analogous notions. It is like a deep-lying geological stratum, an *invisible “thing,”* which is found somewhere behind certain living bodies, and with regard to which one supposes that the only problem is to find the correct angle for observation. It is also what, in me, troubles itself with the desire to know the psychism; but there is as it were a continually abortive vocation in it: for how could a thing know itself? The “psychism” is opaque to itself and rejoins itself only in its exterior counterparts. And, in the last analysis, it assures itself that those exterior counterparts resemble itself in the way the anatomist assures himself that he finds in the organ he dissects the very structure of his own eyes: because there is a “species man” . . . If we were to render completely explicit the psychological attitude and the concepts which the psychologist uses as if they were self-evident, we would find a mass of consequences without premises, a very long-standing constitutive labor which is not brought out into the open and whose results are accepted as they are without one even suspecting to what extent they are confused. What is operative here is as always the perceptual faith in the things and in the world. We apply to man as to things the conviction it gives us that we can arrive at what is by an absolute overview, and in this way we come to think of the invisible of man as a thing. The psychologist in his turn establishes himself in the position of the absolute spectator. The investigation of the “psychic,” like that of the exterior object, first progresses only by putting itself outside of the play of the relativities it discovers, by tacitly supposing an absolute subject before which is deployed the psychism in general, my own or that of another. The cleavage between the “subjective” and the “objec-

tive" according to which physics defines its domain as it commences, and correlatively psychology also establishes its domain, does not prevent these from being conceived according to the same fundamental structure; on the contrary it requires that: they are finally two orders of objects, to be known in their intrinsic properties by a pure thought which determines what they are in themselves. But, as in physics also, a moment comes when the very development of knowledge calls into question the absolute spectator always presupposed. After all, this physicist of whom I speak and to whom I attribute a system of reference is also the physicist who speaks. After all, this psychism of which the psychologist speaks is also his own. This physics of the physicist and this psychology of the psychologist evince that henceforth, for science itself, the being-object can no longer be being-itself: "objective" and "subjective" are recognized as two orders hastily constructed within a total experience, whose context must be restored in all clarity.

This intellectual overture, whose diagram we have now drawn, has determined the history of psychology for the last fifty years, and particularly of Gestalt psychology. It had wished to constitute for itself its own domain of objectivity; it believed it had discovered it in the structures of behavior. Was there not here an original conditioning which would form the object of an original science, as other less complex structures formed the object of the sciences of nature? As a distinct domain, juxtaposed to that of physics, behavior or the psychism, taken objectively, was in principle accessible through the same methods and had the same ontological structure: in both domains, the object was defined by the functional relations it universally observes. There was indeed, in psychology, a *descriptive* way of access to the object, but by principle it could lead only to the same functional determinations. And, indeed, it was possible to specify the conditions on which in fact such and such a perceptual realization, a perception of an ambiguous figure, a spatial or color level depend. Psychology believed it had finally found its firm foundation and expected henceforth an accumulation of discoveries that would confirm it in its status as a science. And yet, today, forty years after the beginnings of *Gestaltpsychologie*, we have again the sentiment of being at a standstill. To be sure, on many points the initial works of the school have been brought to precision; a number of functional determinations have been

and are being established. But the enthusiasm is no longer with it; nowhere have we the sentiment of approaching a science of man. It is—the authors of the school very quickly realized—that the relationships they establish operate imperatively and are explicative only in the artificial conditions of the laboratory. They do not represent a *first stratum* of behavior, from which one could proceed little by little unto its total determination; rather they are a first form of integration, privileged cases of simple structuration, relative to which the “more complex” structurations are in reality qualitatively different. The functional relation they state has meaning only at their level; it has no explicative force with regard to higher levels, and finally the being of the psychism is to be defined not as an intersection of elementary “causalities,” but by the heterogeneous and discontinuous structurations that are realized in it. In the measure that we have to do with more integrated structures, we come to realize that the conditions account for the conditioned less than they are the occasion of its release. Thus the parallelism postulated between the descriptive and the functional was belied. Easy as it is to explain according to its conditions, for example, such and such an apparent movement of a spot of light in a field that has been artificially simplified and reduced by the experimental apparatus, a total determination of the concrete perceptual field of a given living individual at a given moment appears not provisionally unattainable but definitively meaningless, *because it presents structures that do not even have a name in the objective universe of separated and separable “conditions.”* When I look at a road that retreats from me toward the horizon, I can relate what I call the “apparent width” of the road at a given distance (i.e., the width I measure, by peering at it with one eye only and gauging it on a pencil I hold before me) with other elements of the field also specified by some procedure of *measurement*, and thus establish that the “constancy” of the apparent size depends on such and such variables, according to the schema of functional dependence that defines the object of classical science. But when I consider the field such as I have it when I look freely with both eyes, outside of every isolating attitude, it is impossible for me to *explain* it by conditionings. Not that these conditionings escape me or remain *hidden* from me, but because *the “conditioned” itself ceases to be of an order such as could be described objectively.* For the natural gaze that gives me the landscape, the



road in the distance has no "width" one could even ideally calculate; it is as wide as the road close-up, since it is the same road—and it is not as wide, since I cannot deny that there is a sort of shrinking in perspective. Between the road far-off and close-up there is identity and yet *μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος*, passage from the apparent to the real, and they are incommensurable. Yet I must not understand the appearance even here as a veil cast between me and the real—the perspective contraction is not a deformation, the road close-up is not "more true": the close, the far-off, the horizon in their indescribable contrast form a system, and it is their relationship within the total field that is the perceptual truth. We have entered into the ambiguous order of perceived being, upon which functional dependence has no "grip." The psychology of vision can be only artificially and verbally maintained in this ontological framework: the "conditions" for depth—the disappearance of the retinal images, for example—are not really conditions, since the images are defined as disparate only by relation to a perceptual apparatus that seeks its equilibrium in the fusion of analogous images, and hence here the "conditioned" conditions the condition. To be sure, a perceived world would not appear to a man if these conditions were not given in his body; but it is not they that *explain* that world. A perceived world is in terms of its field laws and laws of intrinsic organization, and not—like the *object*—according to the exigencies of a "side to side" causality. The "psychism" is not an object; but—we emphasize—there is here no question of showing, in terms of the "spiritualist" tradition, that certain realities "escape" scientific determination. Such a demonstration results only in circumscribing a domain of anti-science which ordinarily remains conceived—in the terms of the ontology which precisely is in question—as another "order of realities." Our purpose is not to oppose to the facts objective science coordinates a group of facts that "escape" it—whether one calls them "psychism" or "subjective facts" or "interior facts"—but to show that the being-object and the being-subject conceived by opposition to it and relative to it do not form the alternative, that the perceived world is beneath or beyond this antinomy, that the failure of "objective" psychology is—jointly with the failure of the "objectivist" physics—to be understood not as a victory of the "interior" over the "exterior" and of the "mental" over the "material," but as a call for the revision of

our ontology, for the re-examination of the notions of "subject" and "object." The same reasons that keep us from treating perception as an object also keep us from treating it as the operation of a "subject," in whatever sense one takes the term. If the "world" upon which it opens, the ambiguous field of horizons and distances, is not a region of the objective world, it resists as much being ranked on the side of "facts of consciousness" or "spiritual acts": psychological or transcendental immanence cannot account for what a horizon or a "remoteness" is any better than can "objective" thought. For whether it be given to itself in "introspection," or whether it be the consciousness constitutive of the perceived, perception would have to be, as it were by position and by principle, knowledge and possession of itself—it could not open upon horizons and distances, that is, upon a world which is there for it from the first, and from which alone it knows itself, as the anonymous incumbent toward which the perspectives of the landscape travel. The idea of the subject, and that of the object as well, transforms into a cognitive adequation the relationship with the world and with ourselves that we have in the perceptual faith. They do not clarify it; they utilize it tacitly, they draw out its consequences. And since the development of knowledge shows that these consequences are contradictory, it is to that relationship that we must necessarily return, in order to elucidate it.

We have addressed ourselves to the psychology of perception in general in order to better show that the crises of psychology result from reasons of principle and not from some delay of the research in this or that particular domain. But once we have seen it in its generality, we find again the same difficulty of principle in the specialized branches of research.

For example, one does not see how a social psychology would be possible within the regime of objectivist ontology. If one really thinks that perception is a *function* of exterior *variables*, this schema is (and approximatively indeed) applicable only to the corporeal and physical conditioning, and psychology is condemned to that exorbitant abstraction that consists in considering man as only a set of nervous terminations upon which physico-chemical agents play. The "other men," a social and historical constellation, can intervene as stimuli only if we also recognize the efficacy of ensembles that have no physical existence

and that operate on man not according to their immediately sensible properties but by reason of their social configuration, within a social space and time, according to a social code, and finally as symbols rather than as causes. From the sole fact that social psychology is practiced, one is outside the objectivist ontology, and one can remain within it only by restricting the "object" one gives oneself in a way that compromises the research. Here the objectivist ideology is directly contrary to the development of knowledge. It was, for example, evident to the man brought up in the objective cognition of the West that magic or myth has no intrinsic truth, that magical effects and the mythical and ritual life are to be explained by "objective" causes and what is left over ascribed to the illusions of Subjectivity. Yet if social psychology wishes truly to *see* our society such as it *is*, it cannot start with this postulate, which itself is part of Western psychology; in adopting it we would be presupposing our conclusions. As the ethnologist in the face of societies called archaic cannot presuppose that, for example, those societies have a lived experience of time like ours—according to the dimensions of a past that is no longer, a future that is not yet, and a present that alone fully is—and must describe a mythical time where certain events "in the beginning" maintain a continued efficacy; so also social psychology, precisely if it wishes to really know our own societies, cannot exclude a priori the hypothesis of mythical time as a component of our personal and public history. To be sure, we have repressed the magical into the subjectivity, but there is no guarantee that the relationship between men does not inevitably involve magical and oneiric components. Since here it is precisely the society of men that is the "object," the rules of "objectivist" thought cannot determine it a priori; on the contrary they must themselves be seen as the particularities of certain socio-historical wholes, to which they do not necessarily give the key. Of course there are also no grounds for postulating at the start that objective thought is only an effect or a product of certain social structures, and has no rights over the others: that would be to posit that the human world rests on an incomprehensible foundation, and this irrationalism also would be arbitrary. The sole attitude proper to a social psychology is to take "objective" thought for what it is, that is, as a method that has founded science and is to be employed without restriction, unto the limit of the possible, but which, where nature, and a fortiori

history are concerned, represents a first phase of elimination<sup>11</sup> rather than a means of total explanation. Social psychology, qua psychology, necessarily encounters the questions of the philosopher—what is another man, what is a historical event, where is the historical event or the State?—and cannot in advance class the other men and history among “objects” or “stimuli.” It does not deal with these questions head-on: that is the business of philosophy. It deals with them laterally, by the very manner in which it invests its “object” and progresses toward it. And it does not render useless, it on the contrary requires an ontological elucidation of them.

When it fails to accept resolutely the rules for true “objectivity” in the domain of man and to admit that the laws of functional dependence are here rather a manner of circumscribing the irrational than of eliminating it, psychology will give only an abstract and superficial view of the societies it studies by comparison with what history can offer, and this in fact is what often happens. We said above that the physicist frames with an objectivist ontology a physics that is no longer objectivist. We have to add that it is no different with the psychologist and that it is even from psychology that the objectivist preconceptions return to haunt the general and philosophical conceptions of the physicists. One is struck in this regard when one sees a physicist<sup>12</sup> who has liberated his own science from the classical canons of mechanism and objectivism take up again without hesitation the Cartesian distinction between primary and secondary qualities as soon as he turns to the philosophical problem of the ultimate reality of the physical world, as if the critique of the mechanist postulates within the physical world should in no way affect our manner of conceiving its action upon our body, as if that critique ceased to be valid at the frontier of our body and did not call for a revision of our psycho-physiology. It is, paradoxically enough, more difficult to abandon the schemata of the mechanist explanation in the investigation of the action of the world on man—where they nonetheless have continuously aroused obvious difficulties—than in the investigation of physical actions within the world, where for centuries they could with

11. EDITOR: We should no doubt understand: elimination of the irrational.

12. For example, Eddington. [EDITOR: Arthur Eddington. Cf. in particular *New Pathways in Science* (Cambridge, 1934).]

good reason pass for justified. This is because in physics itself this revolution of thought can apparently be accomplished within the traditional ontological frameworks, whereas in the physiology of the senses it immediately implicates our most inveterate notion of the relations between being and man and the truth. As soon as we cease thinking of perception as the action of the pure physical object on the human body, and the perceived as the "interior" result of this action, it seems that every distinction between the true and the false, between methodic knowledge and phantasms, between science and the imagination, is ruined. Thus it is that physiology is participating less actively than physics in the methodological renewal of today; the scientific spirit sometimes persists there in archaic forms; and the biologists remain more materialist than the physicists. But they too are materialist only when they function as philosophers, and are much less so in the practice of their biology. One day it will indeed be necessary for them to liberate their practice entirely, to pose also the question whether the human body is an object, and hence the question whether its relation with exterior nature is that of function to variable. What is important for us is the fact that this relation has already ceased to be consubstantial with psycho-physiology, as have all the notions that are bound up with it—that of sensation as the proper and constant effect of a physically defined stimulus, and then the notions of attention and judgment as complementary abstractions, charged with explaining what does not follow the laws of sensation. . . . At the same time that it "idealized" the physical world by defining it by wholly intrinsic properties, by what it is in its pure being as an object before a thought itself purified, Cartesianism, whether it intended to do so or not, did inspire a science of the human body that decomposes that body also into a network of objective processes and, with the notion of sensation, prolongs this analysis unto the "psychism." These two idealizations are bound up with one another and must be undone together. It is only by returning to the perceptual faith to rectify the Cartesian analysis that we will put an end to the crisis situation in which our knowledge finds itself when it thinks it is founded upon a philosophy that its own advances undermine.

Because perception gives us faith in a world, in a system of natural facts rigorously bound together and continuous, we have

believed that this system could incorporate all things into itself, even the perception that has initiated us into it. Today we no longer believe nature to be a continuous system of this kind; a fortiori we are far removed from thinking that the islets of "psychism" that here and there float over it are secretly connected to one another through the continuous ground of nature. We have then imposed upon us the task of understanding whether, and in what sense, what is not nature forms a "world," and first what a "world" is, and finally, if world there is, what can be the relations between the visible world and the invisible world. Difficult as it may be, this labor is indispensable if we are to get out of the confusion in which the philosophy of the scientists leaves us. It cannot be accomplished entirely by them because scientific thought moves within and presupposes the world, rather than taking it for its theme. But this labor is not foreign to science; it does not install us outside the world. When along with other philosophers we said that the stimuli of perception are not the causes of the perceived world, that they are rather its developers<sup>13</sup> or its releasers, we do not mean that one could perceive without a body; on the contrary we mean that it is necessary to re-examine the definition of the body as pure object in order to understand how it can be our living bond with nature; we do not establish ourselves in a universe of essences—on the contrary we ask that the distinction between the *that* and the *what*,<sup>14</sup> between the essence and the conditions of existence, be reconsidered by referring to the experience of the world that precedes that distinction. Philosophy is not science, because science believes it can soar over its object and holds the correlation of knowledge with being as established, whereas philosophy is the set of questions wherein he who questions is himself implicated by the question. But a physics that has learned to situate the physicist physically, a psychology that has learned to situate the psychologist in the socio-historical world, have lost the illusion of the absolute view from above: they do not only tolerate, they enjoin a radical examination of our belongingness to the world before all science.

13. TRANSLATOR: *Révéléateur*—in the sense of a photographic developer fluid.

14. TRANSLATOR: "That," "what": in English in the text.

## 4 / The Intertwining—The Chiasm

IF IT IS TRUE that as soon as philosophy declares itself to be reflection or coincidence it prejudges what it will find, then once again it must recommence everything, reject the instruments reflection and intuition had provided themselves, and install itself in a locus where they have not yet been distinguished, in experiences that have not yet been "worked over," that offer us all at once, pell-mell, both "subject" and "object," both existence and essence, and hence give philosophy resources to redefine them. Seeing, speaking, even thinking (with certain reservations, for as soon as we distinguish thought from speaking absolutely we are already in the order of reflection), are experiences of this kind, both irrecusable and enigmatic. They have a name in all languages, but a name which in all of them also conveys significations in tufts, thickets of proper meanings and figurative meanings, so that, unlike those of science, not one of these names clarifies by attributing to what is named a circumscribed signification. Rather, they are the repeated index, the insistent reminder of a mystery as familiar as it is unexplained, of a light which, illuminating the rest, remains at its source in obscurity. If we could rediscover within the exercise of seeing and speaking some of the living references that assign them such a destiny in a language, perhaps they would teach us how to form our new instruments, and first of all to understand our research, our interrogation, themselves.

The visible about us seems to rest in itself. It is as though our vision were formed in the heart of the visible, or as though there were between it and us an intimacy as close as between the sea

and the strand. And yet it is not possible that we blend into it, nor that it passes into us, for then the vision would vanish at the moment of formation, by disappearance of the seer or of the visible. What there is then are not things first identical with themselves, which would then offer themselves to the seer, nor is there a seer who is first empty and who, afterward, would open himself to them—but something to which we could not be closer than by palpating it with our look, things we could not dream of seeing “all naked” because the gaze itself envelops them, clothes them with its own flesh. Whence does it happen that in so doing it leaves them in their place, that the vision we acquire of them seems to us to come from them, and that to be seen is for them but a degradation of their eminent being? What is this talisman of color, this singular virtue of the visible that makes it, held at the end of the gaze, nonetheless much more than a correlative of my vision, such that it imposes my vision upon me as a continuation of its own sovereign existence? How does it happen that my look, enveloping them, does not hide them, and, finally, that, veiling them, it unveils them? <sup>1</sup>

We must first understand that this red under my eyes is not, as is always said, a *quale*, a pellicle of being without thickness, a message at the same time indecipherable and evident, which one has or has not received, but of which, if one has received it, one knows all there is to know, and of which in the end there is nothing to say. It requires a focusing, however brief; it emerges from a less precise, more general redness, in which my gaze was caught, into which it sank, before—as we put it so aptly—*fixing* it. And, now that I have fixed it, if my eyes penetrate into it, into

1. EDITOR: Here in the course of the text itself, these lines are inserted: “it is that the look is itself incorporation of the seer into the visible, quest for itself, which *is of it*, within the visible—it is that the visible of the world is not an envelope of *quale*, but what is between the qualia, a connective tissue of exterior and interior horizons—it is as flesh offered to flesh that the visible has its aseity, and that it is mine—The flesh as *Sichtigkeit* and generality. → whence vision is question and response. . . . The openness through flesh: the two leaves of my body and the leaves of the visible world. . . . It is between these intercalated leaves that there is visibility. . . . My body model of the things and the things model of my body: the body bound to the world through all its parts, up against it → all this means: the world, the flesh not as fact or sum of facts, but as the locus of an inscription of truth: the false crossed out, not nullified.”



its fixed structure, or if they start to wander round about again, the *quale* resumes its atmospheric existence. Its precise form is bound up with a certain woolly, metallic, or porous [?] configuration or texture, and the *quale* itself counts for very little compared with these participations. Claudel has a phrase saying that a certain blue of the sea is so blue that only blood would be more red. The color is yet a variant in another dimension of variation, that of its relations with the surroundings: this red is what it is only by connecting up from its place with other reds about it, with which it forms a constellation, or with other colors it dominates or that dominate it, that it attracts or that attract it, that it repels or that repel it. In short, it is a certain node in the woof of the simultaneous and the successive. It is a concretion of visibility, it is not an atom. The red dress a fortiori holds with all its fibers onto the fabric of the visible, and thereby onto a fabric of invisible being. A punctuation in the field of red things, which includes the tiles of roof tops, the flags of gatekeepers and of the Revolution, certain terrains near Aix or in Madagascar, it is also a punctuation in the field of red garments, which includes, along with the dresses of women, robes of professors, bishops, and advocate generals, and also in the field of adornments and that of uniforms. And its red literally is not the same as it appears in one constellation or in the other, as the pure essence of the Revolution of 1917 precipitates in it, or that of the eternal feminine, or that of the public prosecutor, or that of the gypsies dressed like hussars who reigned twenty-five years ago over an inn on the Champs-Élysées. A certain red is also a fossil drawn up from the depths of imaginary worlds. If we took all these participations into account, we would recognize that a naked color, and in general a visible, is not a chunk of absolutely hard, indivisible being, offered all naked to a vision which could be only total or null, but is rather a sort of straits between exterior horizons and interior horizons ever gaping open, something that comes to touch lightly and makes diverse regions of the colored or visible world resound at the distances, a certain differentiation, an ephemeral modulation of this world—less a color or a thing, therefore, than a difference between things and colors, a momentary crystallization of colored being or of visibility. Between the alleged colors and visibles, we would find anew the tissue that lines them, sustains them, nourishes them, and which

for its part is not a thing, but a possibility, a latency, and a *flesh* of things.

If we turn now to the seer, we will find that this is no analogy or vague comparison and must be taken literally. The look, we said, envelops, palpates, espouses the visible things. As though it were in a relation of pre-established harmony with them, as though it knew them before knowing them, it moves in its own way with its abrupt and imperious style, and yet the views taken are not desultory—I do not look at a chaos, but at things—so that finally one cannot say if it is the look or if it is the things that command. What is this prepossession of the visible, this art of interrogating it according to its own wishes, this inspired exegesis? We would perhaps find the answer in the tactile palpation where the questioner and the questioned are closer, and of which, after all, the palpation of the eye is a remarkable variant. How does it happen that I give to my hands, in particular, that degree, that rate, and that direction of movement that are capable of making me feel the textures of the sleek and the rough? Between the exploration and what it will teach me, between my movements and what I touch, there must exist some relationship by principle, some kinship, according to which they are not only, like the pseudopods of the amoeba, vague and ephemeral deformations of the corporeal space, but the initiation to and the opening upon a tactile world. This can happen only if my hand, while it is felt from within, is also accessible from without, itself tangible, for my other hand, for example, if it takes its place among the things it touches, is in a sense one of them, opens finally upon a tangible being of which it is also a part. Through this crisscrossing within it of the touching and the tangible, its own movements incorporate themselves into the universe they interrogate, are recorded on the same map as it; the two systems are applied upon one another, as the two halves of an orange. It is no different for the vision—except, it is said, that here the exploration and the information it gathers do not belong “to the same sense.” But this delimitation of the senses is crude. Already in the “touch” we have just found three distinct experiences which subtend one another, three dimensions which overlap but are distinct: a touching of the sleek and of the rough, a touching of the things—a passive sentiment of the body and of its space—and finally a veritable touching of the touch, when my right

hand touches my left hand while it is palpating the things, where the "touching subject" passes over to the rank of the touched, descends into the things, such that the touch is formed in the midst of the world and as it were in the things. Between the massive sentiment I have of the sack in which I am enclosed, and the control from without that my hand exercises over my hand, there is as much difference as between the movements of my eyes and the changes they produce in the visible. And as, conversely, every experience of the visible has always been given to me within the context of the movements of the look, the visible spectacle belongs to the touch neither more nor less than do the "tactile qualities." We must habituate ourselves to think that every visible is cut out in the tangible, every tactile being in some manner promised to visibility, and that there is encroachment, infringement, not only between the touched and the touching, but also between the tangible and the visible, which is encrusted in it, as, conversely, the tangible itself is not a nothingness of visibility, is not without visual existence. Since the same body sees and touches, visible and tangible belong to the same world. It is a marvel too little noticed that every movement of my eyes—even more, every displacement of my body—has its place in the same visible universe that I itemize and explore with them, as, conversely, every vision takes place somewhere in the tactile space. There is double and crossed situating of the visible in the tangible and of the tangible in the visible; the two maps are complete, and yet they do not merge into one. The two parts are total parts and yet are not superposable.

Hence, without even entering into the implications proper to the seer and the visible, we know that, since vision is a palpation with the look, it must also be inscribed in the order of being that it discloses to us; he who looks must not himself be foreign to the world that he looks at. As soon as I see, it is necessary that the vision (as is so well indicated by the double meaning of the word) be doubled with a complementary vision or with another vision: myself seen from without, such as another would see me, installed in the midst of the visible, occupied in considering it from a certain spot. For the moment we shall not examine how far this identity of the seer and the visible goes, if we have a complete experience of it, or if there is something missing, and what it is. It suffices for us for the moment to note that he who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it,

unless he is of it,\* unless, by principle, according to what is required by the articulation of the look with the things, he is one of the visibles, capable, by a singular reversal, of seeing them—he who is one of them.†

We understand then why we see the things themselves, in their places, where they are, according to their being which is indeed more than their being-perceived—and why at the same time we are separated from them by all the thickness of the look and of the body; it is that this distance is not the contrary of this proximity, it is deeply consonant with it, it is synonymous with it. It is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication. It is for the same reason that I am at the heart of the visible and that I am far from it: because it has thickness and is thereby naturally destined to be seen by a body. What is indefinable in the *quale*, in the color, is nothing else than a brief, peremptory manner of giving in one sole something, in one sole tone of being, visions past, visions to come, by whole clusters. I who see have my own depth also, being backed up by this same visible which I see and which, I know very well, closes in behind me. The thickness of the body, far from rivaling that of the world, is on the contrary the sole means I have to go unto the heart of the things, by making myself a world and by making them flesh.

The body interposed is not itself a thing, an interstitial matter, a connective tissue, but a *sensible for itself*, which means, not that absurdity: color that sees itself, surface that touches itself—but this paradox [?]: a set of colors and surfaces inhabited by a touch, a vision, hence an *exemplar sensible*, which offers to him who inhabits it and senses it the wherewithal to sense everything that resembles himself on the outside, such that, caught up in the tissue of the things, it draws it entirely to itself, incorporates it, and, with the same movement, communicates to the things upon which it closes over that identity without superposition, that difference without contradiction, that divergence between the within and the without that constitutes its

\* The *Uerpräsentierbarkeit* is the flesh.

† The visible is not a tangible zero, the tangible is not a zero of visibility (relation of encroachment).

natal secret.<sup>2</sup> The body unites us directly with the things through its own ontogenesis, by welding to one another the two outlines of which it is made, its two laps: the sensible mass it is and the mass of the sensible wherein it is born by segregation and upon which, as seer, it remains open. It is the body and it alone, because it is a two-dimensional being, that can bring us to the things themselves, which are themselves not flat beings but beings in depth, inaccessible to a subject that would survey them from above, open to him alone that, if it be possible, would coexist with them in the same world. When we speak of the flesh of the visible, we do not mean to do anthropology, to describe a world covered over with all our own projections, leaving aside what it can be under the human mask. Rather, we mean that carnal being, as a being of depths, of several leaves or several faces, a being in latency, and a presentation of a certain absence, is a prototype of Being, of which our body, the sensible sentient, is a very remarkable variant, but whose constitutive paradox already lies in every visible. For already the cube assembles within itself impossible *visibilia*, as my body is at once phenomenal body and objective body, and if finally it is, it, like my body, is by a tour de force. What we call a visible is, we said, a quality pregnant with a texture, the surface of a depth, a cross section upon a massive being, a grain or corpuscle borne by a wave of Being. Since the total visible is always behind, or after, or between the aspects we see of it, there is access to it only through an experience which, like it, is wholly outside of itself. It is thus, and not as the bearer of a knowing subject, that our body commands the visible for us, but it does not explain it, does not clarify it, it only concentrates the mystery of its scattered visibility; and it is indeed a paradox of Being, not a paradox of man, that we are dealing with here. To be sure, one can reply that, between the two "sides" of our body, the body as sensible and the body as sentient (what in the past we called objective body and phenomenal body), rather than a spread, there is the abyss that

2. EDITOR: Here, in the course of the text itself, between brackets, these lines are inserted: "One can say that we perceive the things themselves, that we are the world that thinks itself—or that the world is at the heart of our flesh. In any case, once a body-world relationship is recognized, there is a ramification of my body and a ramification of the world and a correspondence between its inside and my outside, between my inside and its outside."

separates the In Itself from the For Itself. It is a problem—and we will not avoid it—to determine how the sensible sentient can also be thought. But here, seeking to form our first concepts in such a way as to avoid the classical impasses, we do not have to honor the difficulties that they may present when confronted with a *cogito*, which itself has to be re-examined. Yes or no: do we have a body—that is, not a permanent object of thought, but a flesh that suffers when it is wounded, hands that touch? We know: hands do not suffice for touch—but to decide for this reason alone that our hands do not touch, and to relegate them to the world of objects or of instruments, would be, in acquiescing to the bifurcation of subject and object, to forego in advance the understanding of the sensible and to deprive ourselves of its lights. We propose on the contrary to take it literally to begin with. We say therefore that our body is a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees them and touches them; we say, because it is evident, that it unites these two properties within itself, and its double belongingness to the order of the “object” and to the order of the “subject” reveals to us quite unexpected relations between the two orders. It cannot be by incomprehensible accident that the body has this double reference; it teaches us that each calls for the other. For if the body is a thing among things, it is so in a stronger and deeper sense than they: in the sense that, we said, it is *of them*, and this means that it detaches itself upon them, and, accordingly, detaches itself from them. It is not simply a thing *seen* in fact (I do not see my back), it is visible by right, it falls under a vision that is both ineluctable and deferred. Conversely, if it touches and sees, this is not because it would have the visibles before itself as objects: they are about it, they even enter into its enclosure, they are within it, they line its looks and its hands inside and outside. If it touches them and sees them, this is only because, being of their family, itself visible and tangible, it uses its own being as a means to participate in theirs, because each of the two beings is an archetype for the other, because the body belongs to the order of the things as the world is universal flesh. One should not even say, as we did a moment ago, that the body is made up of two leaves, of which the one, that of the “sensible,” is bound up with the rest of the world. There are not in it two leaves or two layers; fundamentally it is neither thing seen only nor seer only, it is Visibility sometimes

wandering and sometimes reassembled. And as such it is not in the world, it does not detain its view of the world as within a private garden: it sees the world itself, the world of everybody, and without having to leave "itself," because it is wholly—because its hands, its eyes, are nothing else than—this reference of a visible, a tangible-standard to all those whose resemblance it bears and whose evidence it gathers, by a magic that is the vision, the touch themselves. To speak of leaves or of layers is still to flatten and to juxtapose, under the reflective gaze, what coexists in the living and upright body. If one wants metaphors, it would be better to say that the body sensed and the body sentient are as the obverse and the reverse, or again, as two segments of one sole circular course which goes above from left to right and below from right to left, but which is but one sole movement in its two phases. And everything said about the sensed body pertains to the whole of the sensible of which it is a part, and to the world. If the body is one sole body in its two phases, it incorporates into itself the whole of the sensible and with the same movement incorporates itself into a "Sensible in itself." We have to reject the age-old assumptions that put the body in the world and the seer in the body, or, conversely, the world and the body in the seer as in a box. Where are we to put the limit between the body and the world, since the world is flesh? Where in the body are we to put the seer, since evidently there is in the body only "shadows stuffed with organs," that is, more of the visible? The world seen is not "in" my body, and my body is not "in" the visible world ultimately: as flesh applied to a flesh, the world neither surrounds it nor is surrounded by it. A participation in and kinship with the visible, the vision neither envelops it nor is enveloped by it definitively. The superficial pellicle of the visible is only for my vision and for my body. But the depth beneath this surface contains my body and hence contains my vision. My body as a visible thing is contained within the full spectacle. But my seeing body subtends this visible body, and all the visibles with it. There is reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other. Or rather, if, as once again we must, we eschew the thinking by planes and perspectives, there are two circles, or two vortexes, or two spheres, concentric when I live naïvely, and as soon as I question myself, the one slightly decentered with respect to the other. . . .

We have to ask ourselves what exactly we have found with

this strange adhesion of the seer and the visible. There is vision, touch, when a certain visible, a certain tangible, turns back upon the whole of the visible, the whole of the tangible, of which it is a part, or when suddenly it finds itself *surrounded* by them, or when between it and them, and through their commerce, is formed a Visibility, a Tangible in itself, which belong properly neither to the body *qua fact* nor to the world *qua fact*—as upon two mirrors facing one another where two indefinite series of images set in one another arise which belong really to neither of the two surfaces, since each is only the rejoinder of the other, and which therefore form a couple, a couple more real than either of them. Thus since the seer is caught up in what he sees, it is still himself he sees: there is a fundamental narcissism of all vision. And thus, for the same reason, the vision he exercises, he also undergoes from the things, such that, as many painters have said, I feel myself looked at by the things, my activity is equally passivity—which is the second and more profound sense of the narcissism: not to see in the outside, as the others see it, the contour of a body one inhabits, but especially to be seen by the outside, to exist within it, to emigrate into it, to be seduced, captivated, alienated by the phantom, so that the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen. It is this Visibility, this generality of the Sensible in itself, this anonymity innate to Myself that we have previously called flesh, and one knows there is no name in traditional philosophy to designate it. The flesh is not matter, in the sense of corpuscles of being which would add up or continue on one another to form beings. Nor is the visible (the things as well as my own body) some “psychic” material that would be—God knows how—brought into being by the things factually existing and acting on my factual body. In general, it is not a fact or a sum of facts “material” or “spiritual.” Nor is it a representation for a mind: a mind could not be captured by its own representations; it would rebel against this insertion into the visible which is essential to the seer. 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. Not a fact



or a sum of facts, and yet adherent to *location* and to the *now*. Much more: the inauguration of the *where* and the *when*, the possibility and exigency for the fact; in a word: facticity, what makes the fact be a fact. And, at the same time, what makes the facts have meaning, makes the fragmentary facts dispose themselves about "something." For if there is flesh, that is, if the hidden face of the cube radiates forth somewhere as well as does the face I have under my eyes, and coexists with it, and if I who see the cube also belong to the visible, I am visible from elsewhere, and if I and the cube are together caught up in one same "element" (should we say of the seer, or of the visible?), this cohesion, this visibility by principle, prevails over every momentary discordance. In advance every vision or very partial visible that would here definitively come to naught is not nullified (which would leave a gap in its place), but, what is better, it is replaced by a more exact vision and a more exact visible, according to the principle of visibility, which, as though through a sort of abhorrence of a vacuum, already invokes the true vision and the true visible, not only as substitutes for their errors, but also as their explanation, their relative justification, so that they are, as Husserl says so aptly, not erased, but "crossed out." . . . Such are the extravagant consequences to which we are led when we take seriously, when we question, vision. And it is, to be sure, possible to refrain from doing so and to move on, but we would simply find again, confused, indistinct, non-clarified, scraps of this ontology of the visible mixed up with all our theories of knowledge, and in particular with those that serve, desultorily, as vehicles of science. We are, to be sure, not finished ruminating over them. Our concern in this preliminary outline was only to catch sight of this strange domain to which interrogation, properly so-called, gives access. . . .

But this domain, one rapidly realizes, is unlimited. If we can show that the flesh is an ultimate notion, that it is not the union or compound of two substances, but thinkable by itself, if there is a relation of the visible with itself that traverses me and constitutes me as a seer, this circle which I do not form, which forms me, this coiling over of the visible upon the visible, can traverse, animate other bodies as well as my own. And if I was able to understand how this wave arises within me, how the visible which is yonder is simultaneously my landscape, I can understand a fortiori that elsewhere it also closes over upon

itself and that there are other landscapes besides my own. If it lets itself be captivated by one of its fragments, the principle of captation is established, the field open for other Narcissus, for an "intercorporeity." If my left hand can touch my right hand while it palpates the tangibles, can touch it touching, can turn its palpation back upon it, why, when touching the hand of another, would I not touch in it the same power to espouse the things that I have touched in my own? It is true that "the things" in question are my own, that the whole operation takes place (as we say) "in me," within my landscape, whereas the problem is to institute another landscape. When one of my hands touches the other, the world of each opens upon that of the other because the operation is reversible at will, because they both belong (as we say) to one sole space of consciousness, because one sole man touches one sole thing through both hands. But for my two hands to open upon one sole world, it does not suffice that they be given to one sole *consciousness*—or if that were the case the difficulty before us would disappear: since other bodies would be known by me in the same way as would be my own, they and I would still be dealing with the same world. No, my two hands touch the same things because they are the hands of one same body. And yet each of them has its own tactile experience. If nonetheless they have to do with one sole tangible, it is because there exists a very peculiar relation from one to the other, across the corporeal space—like that holding between my two eyes—making of my hands one sole organ of experience, as it makes of my two eyes the channels of one sole Cyclopean vision. A difficult relation to conceive—since one eye, one hand, are capable of vision, of touch, and since what has to be comprehended is that these visions, these touches, these little subjectivities, these "consciousnesses of . . .," could be assembled like flowers into a bouquet, when each being "consciousness of," being For Itself, reduces the others into objects. We will get out of the difficulty only by renouncing the bifurcation of the "consciousness of" and the object, by admitting that my synergic body is not an object, that it assembles into a cluster the "consciousnesses" adherent to its hands, to its eyes, by an operation that is in relation to them lateral, transversal; that "my consciousness" is not the synthetic, uncreated, centrifugal unity of a multitude of "consciousnesses of . . ." which would be centrifugal like it is, that it is sustained, subtended, by the prereflective and preobjective unity of my

body. This means that while each monocular vision, each touching with one sole hand has its own visible, its tactile, each is bound to every other vision, to every other touch; it is bound in such a way as to make up with them the experience of one sole body before one sole world, through a possibility for reversion, reconversion of its language into theirs, transfer, and reversal, according to which the little private world of each is not juxtaposed to the world of all the others, but surrounded by it, levied off from it, and all together are a Sentient in general before a Sensible in general. Now why would this generality, which constitutes the unity of my body, not open it to other bodies? The handshake too is reversible; I can feel myself touched as well and at the same time as touching, and surely there does not exist some huge animal whose organs our bodies would be, as, for each of our bodies, our hands, our eyes are the organs. Why would not the synergy exist among different organisms, if it is possible within each? Their landscapes interweave, their actions and their passions fit together exactly: this is possible as soon as we no longer make belongingness to one same "consciousness" the primordial definition of sensibility, and as soon as we rather understand it as the return of the visible upon itself, a carnal adherence of the sentient to the sensed and of the sensed to the sentient. For, as overlapping and fission, identity and difference, it brings to birth a ray of natural light that illuminates all flesh and not only my own. It is said that the colors, the tactile reliefs given to the other, are for me an absolute mystery, forever inaccessible. This is not completely true; for me to have not an idea, an image, nor a representation, but as it were the imminent experience of them, it suffices that I look at a landscape, that I speak of it with someone. Then, through the concordant operation of his body and my own, what I see passes into him, this individual green of the meadow under my eyes invades his vision without quitting my own, I recognize in my green his green, as the customs officer recognizes suddenly in a traveler the man whose description he had been given. There is here no problem of the *alter ego* because it is not *I* who sees, not *he* who sees, because an anonymous visibility inhabits both of us, a vision in general, in virtue of that primordial property that belongs to the flesh, being here and now, of radiating everywhere and forever, being an individual, of being also a dimension and a universal.

What is open to us, therefore, with the reversibility of the

visible and the tangible, is—if not yet the incorporeal—at least an intercorporeal being, a presumptive domain of the visible and the tangible, which extends further than the things I touch and see at present.

There is a circle of the touched and the touching, the touched takes hold of the touching; there is a circle of the visible and the seeing, the seeing is not without visible existence; <sup>3</sup> there is even an inscription of the touching in the visible, of the seeing in the tangible—and the converse; there is finally a propagation of these exchanges to all the bodies of the same type and of the same style which I see and touch—and this by virtue of the fundamental fission or segregation of the sentient and the sensible which, laterally, makes the organs of my body communicate and founds transitivity from one body to another.

As soon as we see other seers, we no longer have before us only the look without a pupil, the plate glass of the things with that feeble reflection, that phantom of ourselves they evoke by designating a place among themselves whence we see them: henceforth, through other eyes we are for ourselves fully visible; that lacuna where our eyes, our back, lie is filled, filled still by the visible, of which we are not the titulars. To believe that, to bring a vision that is not our own into account, it is to be sure inevitably, it is always from the unique treasury of our own vision that we draw, and experience therefore can teach us nothing that would not be outlined in our own vision. But what is proper to the visible is, we said, to be the surface of an inexhaustible depth: this is what makes it able to be open to visions other than our own. In being realized, they therefore bring out the limits of our factual vision, they betray the solipsist illusion that consists in thinking that every going beyond is a surpassing accomplished by oneself. For the first time, the seeing that I am is for me really visible; for the first time I appear to myself completely turned inside out under my own eyes. For the first time also, my movements no longer proceed unto the things to be seen, to be touched, or unto my own body occupied in seeing and touching them, but they address themselves to the body in general and for itself (whether it be my own or that of another),

3. EDITOR: Here is inserted between brackets, in the course of the text itself, the note: "what are these adhesions compared with those of the voice and the hearing?"

because for the first time, through the other body, I see that, in its coupling with the flesh of the world, the body contributes more than it receives, adding to the world that I see the treasure necessary for what the other body sees. For the first time, the body no longer couples itself up with the world, it clasps another body, applying [itself to it] <sup>4</sup> carefully with its whole extension, forming tirelessly with its hands the strange statue which in its turn gives everything it receives; the body is lost outside of the world and its goals, fascinated by the unique occupation of floating in Being with another life, of making itself the outside of its inside and the inside of its outside. And henceforth movement, touch, vision, applying themselves to the other and to themselves, return toward their source and, in the patient and silent labor of desire, begin the paradox of expression.

Yet this flesh that one sees and touches is not all there is to flesh, nor this massive corporeity all there is to the body. The reversibility that defines the flesh exists in other fields; it is even incomparably more agile there and capable of weaving relations between bodies that this time will not only enlarge, but will pass definitively beyond the circle of the visible. Among my movements, there are some that go nowhere—that do not even go find in the other body their resemblance or their archetype: these are the facial movements, many gestures, and especially those strange movements of the throat and mouth that form the cry and the voice. Those movements end in sounds and I hear them. Like crystal, like metal and many other substances, I am a sonorous being, but I hear my own vibration from within; as Malraux said, I hear myself with my throat. In this, as he also has said, I am incomparable; my voice is bound to the mass of my own life as is the voice of no one else. But if I am close enough to the other who speaks to hear his breath and feel his effervescence and his fatigue, I almost witness, in him as in myself, the awesome birth of vociferation. As there is a reflexivity of the touch, of sight, and of the touch-vision system, there is a reflexivity of the movements of phonation and of hearing; they have their sonorous inscription, the vociferations have in me their motor echo. This new reversibility and the emergence of

4. EDITOR: These words, which we reintroduce into the text, had been erased apparently by error.

the flesh as expression are the point of insertion of speaking and thinking in the world of silence.<sup>5</sup>

At the frontier of the mute or solipsist world where, in the presence of other seers, my visible is confirmed as an exemplar of a universal visibility, we reach a second or figurative meaning of vision, which will be the *intuitus mentis* or idea, a sublimation of the flesh, which will be mind or thought. But the factual presence of other bodies could not produce thought or the idea if its seed were not in my own body. Thought is a relationship with oneself and with the world as well as a relationship with the other; hence it is established in the three dimensions at the same time. And it must be brought to appear directly in the infrastructure of vision. Brought to appear, we say, and not brought to birth: for we are leaving in suspense for the moment the question whether it would not be already implicated there. Manifest as it is that feeling is dispersed in my body, that for example my hand touches, and that consequently we may not in advance ascribe feeling to a thought of which it would be but a mode—it yet would be absurd to conceive the touch as a colony of assembled tactile experiences. We are not here proposing any empiricist genesis of thought: we are asking precisely what is that central vision that joins the scattered visions, that unique touch that governs the whole tactile life of my body as a unit, that *I think* that must be able to accompany all our experiences. We are proceeding toward the center, we are seeking to comprehend how there is a center, what the unity consists of, we are not

5. EDITOR: Inserted here between brackets: "in what sense we have not yet introduced thinking: to be sure, we are not in the in itself. From the moment we said *seeing, visible*, and described the dehiscence of the sensible, we were, if one likes, in the order of thought. We were not in it in the sense that the thinking we have introduced was *there is*, and not *it appears to me that . . .* (appearing that would make up the whole of being, self-appearing). Our thesis is that this *there is* by inherence is necessary, and our problem to show that thought, in the restrictive sense (pure signification, thought of seeing and of feeling), is comprehensible only as the accomplishment by other means of the will of the *there is*, by sublimation of the *there is* and realization of an invisible that is exactly the reverse of the visible, the power of the visible. Thus between sound and meaning, speech and what it means to say, there is still the relation of reversibility, and no question of priority, since the exchange of words is exactly the differentiation of which the thought is the integral."

saying that it is a sum or a result; and if we make the thought appear upon an infrastructure of vision, this is only in virtue of the uncontested evidence that one must see or feel in some way in order to think, that every thought known to us occurs to a flesh.

Once again, the flesh we are speaking of is not matter. It is the coiling over of the visible upon the seeing body, of the tangible upon the touching body, which is attested in particular when the body sees itself, touches itself seeing and touching the things, such that, simultaneously, *as* tangible it descends among them, *as* touching it dominates them all and draws this relationship and even this double relationship from itself, by dehiscence or fission of its own mass. This concentration of the visibles about one of them, or this bursting forth of the mass of the body toward the things, which makes a vibration of my skin become the sleek and the rough, makes me *follow with my eyes* the movements and the contours of the things themselves, this magical relation, this pact between them and me according to which I lend them my body in order that they inscribe upon it and give me their resemblance, this fold, this central cavity of the visible which is my vision, these two mirror arrangements of the seeing and the visible, the touching and the touched, form a close-bound system that I count on, define a vision in general and a constant style of visibility from which I cannot detach myself, even when a particular vision turns out to be illusory, for I remain certain in that case that in looking closer I would have had the true vision, and that in any case, whether it be this one or another, *there is a true vision*. The flesh (of the world or my own) is not contingency, chaos, but a texture that returns to itself and conforms to itself. I will never see my own retinas, but if one thing is certain for me it is that *one* would find at the bottom of my eyeballs those dull and secret membranes. And finally, I believe it—I believe that I have a man's senses, a human body—because the spectacle of the world that is my own, and which, to judge by our confrontations, does not notably differ from that of the others, with me as with them refers with evidence to typical dimensions of visibility, and finally to a virtual focus of vision, to a detector also typical, so that at the joints of the opaque body and the opaque world there is a ray of generality and of light. Conversely, when, starting from the body, I ask how it makes itself a seer, when I examine the critical

region of the aesthesiological body, everything comes to pass (as we have shown in an earlier work <sup>6</sup>) as though the visible body remained incomplete, gaping open; as though the physiology of vision did not succeed in closing the nervous functioning in upon itself, since the movements of fixation, of convergence, are suspended upon the advent to the body of a visible world for which they were supposed to furnish the explanation; as though, therefore, the vision came suddenly to give to the material means and instruments left here and there in the working area a convergence which they were waiting for; as though, through all these channels, all these prepared but unemployed circuits, the current that will traverse them was rendered probable, in the long run inevitable: the current making of an embryo a newborn infant, of a visible a seer, and of a body a mind, or at least a flesh. In spite of all our substantialist ideas, the seer is being premeditated in counterpoint in the embryonic development; through a labor upon itself the visible body provides for the hollow whence a vision will come, inaugurates the long maturation at whose term suddenly it will see, that is, will be visible for itself, will institute the interminable gravitation, the indefatigable metamorphosis of the seeing and the visible whose principle is posed and which gets underway with the first vision. What we are calling flesh, this interiorly worked-over mass, has no name in any philosophy. As the formative medium of the object and the subject, it is not the atom of being, the hard in itself that resides in a unique place and moment: one can indeed say of my body that it is not *elsewhere*, but one cannot say that it is *here* or *now* in the sense that objects are; and yet my vision does not soar over them, it is not the being that is wholly knowing, for it has its own inertia, its ties. We must not think the flesh starting from substances, from body and spirit—for then it would be the union of contradictories—but we must think it, as we said, as an element, as the concrete emblem of a general manner of being. To begin with, we spoke summarily of a reversibility of the seeing and the visible, of the touching and the touched. It is time to emphasize that it is a reversibility always imminent and never realized in fact. My left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand touching the things, but I never reach coincidence; the coincidence eclipses at the moment of realization, and

6. *The Structure of Behavior* [trans. Alden L. Fisher (Boston, 1963)].



one of two things always occurs: either my right hand really passes over to the rank of touched, but then its hold on the world is interrupted; or it retains its hold on the world, but then I do not really touch *it*—my right hand touching, I palpate with my left hand only its outer covering. Likewise, I do not hear myself as I hear the others, the sonorous existence of my voice is for me as it were poorly exhibited; I have rather an echo of its articulated existence, it vibrates through my head rather than outside. I am always on the same side of my body; it presents itself to me in one invariable perspective. But this incessant escaping, this impotency to superpose exactly upon one another the touching of the things by my right hand and the touching of this same right hand by my left hand, or to superpose, in the exploratory movements of the hand, the tactile experience of a point and that of the “same” point a moment later, or the auditory experience of my own voice and that of other voices—this is not a failure. For if these experiences never exactly overlap, if they slip away at the very moment they are about to rejoin, if there is always a “shift,” a “spread,” between them, this is precisely because my two hands are part of the same body, because it moves itself in the world, because I hear myself both from within and from without. I experience—and as often as I wish—the transition and the metamorphosis of the one experience into the other, and it is only as though the hinge between them, solid, unshakeable, remained irremediably hidden from me. But this hiatus between my right hand touched and my right hand touching, between my voice heard and my voice uttered, between one moment of my tactile life and the following one, is not an ontological void, a non-being: it is spanned by the total being of my body, and by that of the world; it is the zero of pressure between two solids that makes them adhere to one another. My flesh and that of the world therefore involve clear zones, clearings, about which pivot their opaque zones, and the primary visibility, that of the *quale* and of the things, does not come without a second visibility, that of the lines of force and dimensions, the massive flesh without a rarefied flesh, the momentary body without a glorified body. When Husserl spoke of the horizon of the things—of their exterior horizon, which everybody knows, and of their “interior horizon,” that darkness stuffed with visibility of which their surface is but the limit—it is necessary to take the term seriously. No more than are the sky or the earth is the horizon a collection of

things held together, or a class name, or a logical possibility of conception, or a system of "potentiality of consciousness": it is a new type of being, a being by porosity, pregnancy, or generality, and he before whom the horizon opens is caught up, included within it. His body and the distances participate in one same corporeity or visibility in general, which reigns between them and it, and even beyond the horizon, beneath his skin, unto the depths of being.

We touch here the most difficult point, that is, the bond between the flesh and the idea, between the visible and the interior armature which it manifests and which it conceals. No one has gone further than Proust in fixing the relations between the visible and the invisible, in describing an idea that is not the contrary of the sensible, that is its lining and its depth. For what he says of musical ideas he says of all cultural beings, such as *The Princess of Clèves* and *René*, and also of the essence of love which "the little phrase" not only makes present to Swann, but communicable to all who hear it, even though it is unbeknown to themselves, and even though later they do not know how to recognize it in the loves they only witness. He says it in general of many other notions which are, like music itself "without equivalents," "the notions of light, of sound, of relief, of physical voluptuousness, which are the rich possessions with which our inward domain is diversified and adorned."<sup>7</sup> Literature, music, the passions, but also the experience of the visible world are—no less than is the science of Lavoisier and Ampère—the exploration of an invisible and the disclosure of a universe of ideas.<sup>8</sup> The difference is simply that this invisible, these ideas, unlike those of that science, cannot be detached from the sensible appearances and be erected into a second positivity. The musical idea, the literary idea, the dialectic of love, and also the articulations of the light, the modes of exhibition of sound and of touch speak to us, have their logic, their coherence, their points of intersection, their concordances, and here also the appearances are the disguise of unknown "forces" and "laws." But it is as though the secrecy wherein they lie and whence the literary expression draws them were their proper mode of existence. For these

7. *Du côté de chez Swann*, II (Paris, 1926), 190. [English translation by C. K. Scott Moncrieff, *Swann's Way* (New York, 1928), p. 503.]

8. *Ibid.*, p. 192. [Eng. trans., p. 505.]

truths are not only hidden like a physical reality which we have not been able to discover, invisible in fact but which we will one day be able to see facing us, which others, better situated, could already see, provided that the screen that masks it is lifted. Here, on the contrary, there is no vision without the screen: the ideas we are speaking of would not be better known to us if we had no body and no sensibility; it is then that they would be inaccessible to us. The "little phrase," the notion of the light, are not exhausted by their manifestations, any more than is an "idea of the intelligence"; they could not be given to us *as ideas* except in a carnal experience. It is not only that we would find in that carnal experience the *occasion* to think them; it is that they owe their authority, their fascinating, indestructible power, precisely to the fact that they are in transparency behind the sensible, or in its heart. Each time we want to get at it<sup>9</sup> immediately, or lay hands on it, or circumscribe it, or see it unveiled, we do in fact feel that the attempt is misconceived, that it retreats in the measure that we approach. The explication does not give us the idea itself; it is but a second version of it, a more manageable derivative. Swann can of course close in the "little phrase" between the marks of musical notation, ascribe the "withdrawn and chilly tenderness" that makes up its essence or its sense to the narrow range of the five notes that compose it and to the constant recurrence of two of them: while he is thinking of these signs and this sense, he no longer has the "little phrase" itself, he has only "bare values substituted for the mysterious entity he had perceived, for the convenience of his understanding."<sup>10</sup> Thus it is essential to this sort of ideas that they be "veiled with shadows," appear "under a disguise." They give us the assurance that the "great unpenetrated and discouraging night of our soul" is not empty, is not "nothingness"; but these entities, these domains, these worlds that line it, people it, and whose presence it feels like the presence of someone in the dark, have been acquired only through its commerce with the visible, to which they remain attached. As the secret blackness of milk, of which Valéry spoke, is accessible only through its whiteness, the idea of light or the musical idea doubles up the lights and sounds from beneath, is their other side or their depth. Their carnal texture presents to us

9. EDITOR: It: that is, the idea.

10. *Du côté de chez Swann*, II, 189. [Eng. trans., p. 503.]

what is absent from all flesh; it is a furrow that traces itself out magically under our eyes without a tracer, a certain hollow, a certain interior, a certain absence, a negativity that is not nothing, being limited very precisely to *these* five notes between which it is instituted, to that family of sensibles we call lights. We do not see, do not hear the ideas, and not even with the mind's eye or with the third ear: and yet they are there, behind the sounds or between them, behind the lights or between them, recognizable through their always special, always unique manner of entrenching themselves behind them, "perfectly distinct from one another, unequal among themselves in value and in significance." <sup>11</sup>

With the first vision, the first contact, the first pleasure, there is initiation, that is, not the positing of a content, but the opening of a dimension that can never again be closed, the establishment of a level in terms of which every other experience will henceforth be situated. The idea is this level, this dimension. It is therefore not a *de facto* invisible, like an object hidden behind another, and not an absolute invisible, which would have nothing to do with the visible. Rather it is the invisible *of* this world, that which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible, its own and interior possibility, the Being of this being. At the moment one says "light," at the moment that the musicians reach the "little phrase," there is no lacuna in me; what I live is as "substantial," as "explicit," as a positive thought could be—even more so: a positive thought is what it is, but, precisely, is only what it is and accordingly cannot hold us. Already the mind's volubility takes it elsewhere. We do not possess the musical or sensible ideas, precisely because they are negativity or absence circumscribed; they possess us. The performer is no longer producing or reproducing the sonata: he feels himself, and the others feel him to be at the service of the sonata; the sonata sings through him or cries out so suddenly that he must "dash on his bow" to follow it. And these open vortexes in the sonorous world finally form one sole vortex in which the ideas fit in with one another. "Never was the spoken language so inflexibly necessitated, never did it know to such an extent the pertinence of the questions, the evidence of the responses." <sup>12</sup> The

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*, p. 192. [Eng. trans., p. 505.]

invisible and, as it were, weak being is alone capable of having this close texture. There is a strict ideality in experiences that are experiences of the flesh: the moments of the sonata, the fragments of the luminous field, adhere to one another with a cohesion without concept, which is of the same type as the cohesion of the parts of my body, or the cohesion of my body with the world. Is my body a thing, is it an idea? It is neither, being the mesurant of the things. We will therefore have to recognize an ideality that is not alien to the flesh, that gives it its axes, its depth, its dimensions.

But once we have entered into this strange domain, one does not see how there could be any question of *leaving* it. If there is an animation of the body; if the vision and the body are tangled up in one another; if, correlatively, the thin pellicle of the *quale*, the surface of the visible, is doubled up over its whole extension with an invisible reserve; and if finally, in our flesh as in the flesh of things, the actual, empirical, ontic visible, by a sort of folding back, invagination, or padding, exhibits a visibility, a possibility that is not the shadow of the actual but is its principle, that is not the proper contribution of a "thought" but is its condition, a style, allusive and elliptical like every style, but like every style inimitable, inalienable, an interior horizon and an exterior horizon between which the actual visible is a provisional partitioning and which, nonetheless, open indefinitely only upon other visibles—then (the immediate and dualist distinction between the visible and the invisible, between extension and thought, being impugned, not that extension be thought or thought extension, but because they are the obverse and the reverse of one another, and the one forever behind the other) there is to be sure a question as to how the "ideas of the intelligence" are initiated over and beyond, how from the ideality of the horizon one passes to the "pure" ideality, and in particular by what miracle a created generality, a culture, a knowledge come to add to and recapture and rectify the natural generality of my body and of the world. But, however we finally have to understand it, the "pure" ideality already streams forth along the articulations of the aesthesiological body, along the contours of the sensible things, and, however new it is, it slips through ways it has not traced, transfigures horizons it did not open, it derives from the fundamental mystery of those notions "without equivalent," as Proust calls them, that lead their shadowy life in the

night of the mind only because they have been divined at the junctures of the visible world. It is too soon now to clarify this type of surpassing that does not leave its field of origin. Let us only say that the pure ideality is itself not without flesh nor freed from horizon structures: it lives of them, though they be another flesh and other horizons. It is as though the visibility that animates the sensible world were to emigrate, not outside of every body, but into another less heavy, more transparent body, as though it were to change flesh, abandoning the flesh of the body for that of language, and thereby would be emancipated but not freed from every condition. Why not admit—what Proust knew very well and said in another place—that language as well as music can sustain a sense by virtue of its own arrangement, catch a meaning in its own mesh, that it does so without exception each time it is conquering, active, creative language, each time something is, in the strong sense, said? Why not admit that, just as the musical notation is a *facsimile* made after the event, an abstract portrait of the musical entity, language as a system of explicit relations between signs and signified, sounds and meaning, is a result and a product of the operative language in which sense and sound are in the same relationship as the “little phrase” and the five notes found in it afterwards? This does not mean that musical notation and grammar and linguistics and the “ideas of the intelligence”—which are acquired, available, honorary ideas—are useless, or that, as Leibniz said, the donkey that goes straight to the fodder knows as much about the properties of the straight line as we do; it means that the system of objective relations, the acquired ideas, are themselves caught up in something like a second life and perception, which make the mathematician go straight to entities no one has yet seen, make the *operative* language and algorithm make use of a second visibility, and make ideas be the other side of language and calculus. When I think they animate my interior speech, they haunt it as the “little phrase” possesses the violinist, and they remain beyond the words as it remains beyond the notes—not in the sense that under the light of another sun hidden from us they would shine forth but because they are that certain divergence, that never-finished differentiation, that openness ever to be reopened between the sign and the sign, as the flesh is, we said, the dehiscence of the seeing into the visible and of the visible into the seeing. And just as my body sees only because it

is a part of the visible in which it opens forth, the sense upon which the arrangement of the sounds opens reflects back upon that arrangement. For the linguist language is an ideal system, a fragment of the intelligible world. But, just as for me to see it is not enough that my look be visible for X, it is necessary that it be visible for itself, through a sort of torsion, reversal, or specular phenomenon, which is given from the sole fact that I am born; so also, if my words have a meaning, it is not *because* they present the systematic organization the linguist will disclose, it is because that organization, like the look, refers back to itself: the operative Word is the obscure region whence comes the instituted light, as the muted reflection of the body upon itself is what we call natural light. As there is a reversibility of the seeing and the visible, and as at the point where the two metamorphoses cross what we call perception is born, so also there is a reversibility of the speech and what it signifies; the signification is what comes to seal, to close, to gather up the multiplicity of the physical, physiological, linguistic means of elocution, to contract them into one sole act, as the vision comes to complete the aesthesiological body. And, as the visible takes hold of the look which has unveiled it and which forms a part of it, the signification rebounds upon its own means, it annexes to itself the speech that becomes an object of science, it antedates itself by a retrograde movement which is never completely belied—because already, in opening the horizon of the nameable and of the sayable, the speech acknowledged that it has its place in that horizon; because no locutor speaks without making himself in advance allocutary, *be it only for himself*; because with one sole gesture he closes the circuit of his relation to himself and that of his relation to the others and, with the same stroke, also sets himself up as *delocutary*, speech of which one speaks: he offers himself and offers every word to a universal Word. We shall have to follow more closely this transition from the mute world to the speaking world. For the moment we want only to suggest that one can speak neither of a destruction nor of a conservation of silence (and still less of a destruction that conserves or of a realization that destroys—which is not to solve but to pose the problem). When the silent vision falls into speech, and when the speech in turn, opening up a field of the nameable and the sayable, inscribes itself in that field, in its place, according to its truth—in short, when it metamorphoses the structures of the visible world

and makes itself a gaze of the mind, *intuitus mentis*—this is always in virtue of the same fundamental phenomenon of reversibility which sustains both the mute perception and the speech and which manifests itself by an almost carnal existence of the idea, as well as by a sublimation of the flesh. In a sense, if we were to make completely explicit the architectonics of the human body, its ontological framework, and how it sees itself and hears itself, we would see that the structure of its mute world is such that all the possibilities of language are already given in it. Already our existence as seers (that is, we said, as beings who turn the world back upon itself and who pass over to the other side, and who catch sight of one another, who see one another with eyes) and especially our existence as sonorous beings for others and for ourselves contain everything required for there to be speech from the one to the other, speech about the world. And, in a sense, to understand a phrase is nothing else than to fully welcome it in its sonorous being, or, as we put it so well, to *hear what it says* (*l'entendre*). The meaning is not on the phrase like the butter on the bread, like a second layer of "psychic reality" spread over the sound: it is the totality of what is said, the integral of all the differentiations of the verbal chain; it is given with the words for those who have ears to hear. And conversely the whole landscape is overrun with words as with an invasion, it is henceforth but a variant of speech before our eyes, and to speak of its "style" is in our view to form a metaphor. In a sense the whole of philosophy, as Husserl says, consists in restoring a power to signify, a birth of meaning, or a wild meaning, an expression of experience by experience, which in particular clarifies the special domain of language. And in a sense, as Valéry said, language is everything, since it is the voice of no one, since it is the very voice of the things, the waves, and the forests. And what we have to understand is that there is no dialectical reversal from one of these views to the other; we do not have to reassemble them into a synthesis: they are two aspects of the reversibility which is the ultimate truth.



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