THE MEANING OF PHENOMENOLOGY IN *THE VISIBLE AND THE INVISIBLE*[1]

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Whoever reads or rereads Merleau-Ponty today cannot fail to be struck by the startling contrast between his way of writing and thinking and the style of philosophical productions that we have gradually got used to since his death, and which seems to be characterized as much by the abandonment of ultimate philosophical questions as by a certain intellectualism or at least a sort of intellectual "bricolage" which has only a faint connection, and a blind one at that, with what we used to mean not so long ago by philosophy—although there is nothing to indicate at present that the time has come to write this story. It is not only because Merleau-Ponty's final philosophy[2] remains incomplete that it presents itself to us as a sprawling abandoned workplace; it is more the case that the majority of our contemporaries, due to the enigma or the blindness which is part of our history, have deserted it. That is, they seem to have lost the meaning of the *questions* which inspire the quest of philosophy—in a word, the quest for origins and for our own origins, which was associated with an extraordinary feeling for *concrete* analyses; whether they relate to sensuous perception, to the experience of the other or even to the use of speech. When Merleau-Ponty, referring to Husserl, talks about an "ontological rehabilitation of the sensible" (PS 167) there is no doubt that this expression also describes the principle of his own project which in this respect finds its climax in the last chapter of *The Visible and the Invisible*, "The Intertwining-The Chiasm" (VI 172–204). Moreover, there is no doubt that there was, as far as he was concerned, a permanent distrust of the abstract, the constructed, the purely conceptual or intellectual; and that this distrust manifests itself in an unusually fluid prose, in a sort of transparence of expression which alone is capable of corresponding to the silences of primordial being or the extremely subtle reversibility which is that of the flesh. But herein lies the unique quality of this philosopher's inimitable style which forces us to say that this sense of the

Thesis Eleven, Number 36, 60–81

concrete—this sense of the real so to speak—is something we no longer have or at least have lost with him in an almost irretrievable way.

I will not make any attempt at the impossible task of recovering this sort of complicity or collusion with the dawnings of the world, with the childhoods of our profound and speechless life. For that involves a kind of natural grace, a felicitous harmony with things and beings, a youthfulness of the eye and the senses which can only be evoked to the extent that it is felt while being read. My aim here will be simply to take up as a whole the impulse which inspired the last philosophy, which is truly metaphysical in that it moves toward a questioning of origins—something that many nowadays strive to proclaim impossible or obsolete from this or that position of knowledge, especially from the position of a certain Heideggerian dogmatism, that thoroughly French monstrosity which has begun to permeate our schools. Such a recovery would be impossible without a guiding thread which in this case will be the meaning of phenomenology. It appears evident, even on a superficial reading, that the late work of Merleau-Ponty is inscribed in the tradition of Husserl's work, and even in the margins of Heidegger's—which has seemed to give credibility, in certain people's eyes to the myth, now widely accepted, of a latent Heideggerianism in someone who is no longer there to defend himself from this charge. It appears to me to be just as urgent to show that the Merleau-Pontian interpretation of phenomenology is strictly speaking neither Husserlian nor Heideggerian, but new, with a novelty which enables it to shake up those opinions loaded with insinuations which relegate phenomenology to a museum full of antiques left behind by an alleged genuine movement of events or by History. I am saying that the *question* of the meaning of phenomenology appears to me to be a strategic one to the extent that it involves the question of the *meaning of philosophy*—which for the last twenty years has been invaded by the so-called human "sciences" or by problems of an epistemological nature.

Having considered the stakes of this project in this way, a preliminary question presents itself to us: how can we grasp the novelty of the meaning of phenomenology in the late Merleau-Ponty in any way at all if it is a matter of genuine novelty which still lies ahead of us and forms part of our future horizons? How can we show this novelty, if we do not to some extent accomplish it ourselves by showing how *horizons* open up to the possibility of unknown developments in the philosopher's approach? In putting the problem in this way, we should therefore remain mindful of two demands. On the one hand, every authentically philosophical work involves, in the extremely complex and subtle interlacing of its arguments and thoughts, an *a priori uncontrollable plurality of horizons*, all the more so when it is brutally interrupted by death. On the other hand it should be kept in mind that this multiplicity of horizons does not simply authorize any arbitrariness by the interpreter; there is a "spirit" in the work which should be respected, or a style suited to the approach of the philosopher which constitutes his uniqueness. If, as I believe, the very mean-

ing of philosophy is at stake in the work of the late Merleau-Ponty, this must also be the case when we bring its horizons to light. But the philosopher has initiated us all sufficiently into the problematics of intersubjectivity for us to be forewarned against the illusion of believing that anyone can ever take possession of the ultimate truth of his work, the totality of his horizons. One of the lessons that he taught us is precisely that if philosophy preserves its unity across the highways and byways of tradition, insofar as it is inspired by a basic question (that of origins in general and of our own origins in particular) this unity is still only an ideal unity. For "the" philosophy, or "the" metaphysics, can never be anything but the *abstraction* of an ideal residue of tradition, a sort of common denominator which presumes that individual denominators can be "factorized" by a single canonical operation. Nevertheless, it is the unity of a universal question in whose pursuit each philosopher recognizes himself. If there is one philosophy, it is only insofar as it is an ideal and as such inaccessible, for the concrete reality of philosophy is made up of a multiplicity of *individual traversals* of the same question. This is why faithfulness to a philosopher involves an unavoidable element of unfaithfulness, which is no doubt the price one must pay to establish a living relationship with him, a price moreover that it is impossible to calculate, as it is impossible to total up this sort of account and clear oneself of such debts.

If then, the field of philosophy, like that of intersubjectivity, is a field where singular experiences crisscross and overlap each other, we cannot, in what follows, give a determinate truth value or determinate objectivity to our account. On the contrary, I believe that the most consistent way to be faithful to the work of Merleau-Ponty is to acknowledge right away the unusual nature of the route that we intend to follow regarding the question which arises from the meaning of phenomenology.

First of all there is the impulse which carried *The Visible and the Invisible* through to its final chapter ("The Intertwining-The Chiasm") which Claude Lefort informs us could just as well have been imagined to be the opening chapter of the second part of the book (VI XXXVII). This impulse is largely inspired by Husserl since it poses the question of perceptual faith, or in Husserl's terms, of the *Urdoxa*, and its criticism of those philosophical approaches—scientism, the philosophy of consciousness or of reflection, the philosophy of the negative and dialectical philosophy—which, each in their own way, take as a starting point the obliteration of this question. Again this impulse is very Husserlian in that it opens with the equivalent of the phenomenological reduction, the initial feint of the philosopher (VI 4). If the philosopher interrogates things themselves to bring them to expression "from the depths of their silence", he does this insofar as he "feigns ignorance of the world and of the vision of the world which are operative and take form continually within him" (VI 4). Not that it is a matter of finding reasons to doubt the existence of the world but, on the contrary, of opening oneself to the "meaning of the being of the world" (VI 6), which is why "we have to reformulate the sceptical arguments *outside of every ontological preconception*" (VI 6, my emphasis). There follows a first outline of phenomenology concerning the thing (VI 7-9), the world (VI 9-10), the other (VI 10-12), ideality and the intelligible (VI 12-14). This initial movement is circular and already presupposes the whole movement, and in the feint which gives rise to it allows us to simulate the "natural attitude" and to reveal all the minor and major paradoxes which bestow on the concrete world the solidity of a genuine enigma and on perceptual faith its "obscurity". This establishes the key and this first paragraph of the *Visible* is almost an "overture" in the musical sense of the term, whose threads and rhythms are only properly developed later, in the chapter titled "Interrogation and Intuition" (particularly pp. 120-129), and manifest themselves fully in the final fragment "The Intertwining-The Chiasm". This stratagem was necessary firstly to justify this type of approach as opposed to the "classical" methods of philosophizing, and conversely, to consider these methods with an eye to everything which poses the question of phenomenology. Much could be said about this opening feint[3] of phenomenology, and we will return to it when Merleau-Ponty talks about the way in which he understands "perceptual faith" which will give us the opportunity to account for the circularity which his work seems to enclose itself in from the beginning.

The phenomenological field which is opened up in this way is in fact very precarious and if we are not careful, it risks closing up immediately. The most immediate obstacle to this opening is constituted not so much by the scientific approach in itself—which Merleau-Ponty pays close attention to in his Lectures at the Collège de France (see esp. TL 84–87, 94–98)—as by its philosophical, not to mention ideological, use in the endlessly recurring versions of scientism, that is, the recourse to "science" as the final word in the explanation of the problem of the world. It is easy to show that this recourse is based on the naive ontology which implies a veritable "in-itself" correlative to a pure objectivity which is accessible to an absolute overview. Now, if this overview borrows from perceptual faith in its ontological dimension—since the objects which are discovered there are presented as existing—it is at the same time its annihilation in that it is set up in a purely exterior way with relation to that which from that point on is constituted as its objects (cf. VI 14-27), whereas the questioning of perceptual faith requires us to involve ourselves in the question itself (cf. VI 26) and to consider our own part in the opening of the phenomenological field.

In this manner Merleau-Ponty arrives at a more developed first thematization of the problem of perceptual faith and philosophy (cf. VI 26-27). The latter is faced with the paradoxical task of having to tell us "how there is openness without the occultation of the world being excluded, how the occultation remains at each instant possible even though we are naturally endowed with light" (VI 28), that is, how we are to understand how "these two possibilities

which perceptual faith keeps side by side within itself" do not cancel each other out (ibid.). For in perceptual faith as such there is always a combination of belief and unbelief, truth and non-truth, certainty of the perceived world and the possibility of a pseudo-world of phantasms (cf. VI 28)—which already allows us to get an idea of why an initial feint is necessary to open up, in the reduction, the phenomenological field. In a sense which will be defined later on, this feint is the feint of the phenomenon as such.

As soon as the problem is put in these terms we are faced with a more subtle obstacle, namely, that of the philosophy of reflection or of the philosophy of consciousness (cf. VI 28–49). In it, so to speak, the feint takes itself to be an object in order to arise out of itself into the transparence of thought. As Merleau-Ponty writes further on (VI 98) in an illuminating sentence, Descartes showed "that the thought, precisely because it is nothing but *absolute appearance*, is absolutely indubitable and that, midway between being and nothingness, it stands more solid before the doubt than the positive and full things" (my emphasis). In fact reflection opens a "third dimension" (VI 29) where the two antinomic components of perceptual faith are homogenized in the *thought* of perceiving and of imagining, and this translucent milieu of ideality gives the illusion of being able to control what depends on illusion and what depends on truth. It does this by creating the illusion of finding the reasons for both in the supposedly seamless unfolding of the thinking subject—which retains from perceptual faith only the *conviction* of going to the things in what is in fact nothing other than the illusion of a pure self-appearing of the spirit (cf. VI 29-31). And we quickly see that this characterization applies also to the "Cartesian" side of Husserlian phenomenology, since the references to the noetic-noematic parallel are quite clear to anyone who knows how to discern them, and also since the criticism of the philosophy of reflection relates in a fundamental way to the problematic of *transcendental constitution*.

In one sense, the position of the reflective attitude is impregnable as it consists in proclaiming that perceptual faith is cancelled out by its manifold paradoxes, and that the tangled web of its threads can only be disentangled from the position of self-adequation, that is, of truth, a position which it appears to establish. In this way it constitutes a necessary moment in the movement which should open us to the field of phenomenology. But if we look more closely at it, we immediately encounter another antinomy which is peculiar to it and which allows us to overcome the illusion which is built into it. There is, in fact, an inevitable blind spot in reflection. On the one hand, in the homogenization that it carried out, it always comes *afterwards*, *a posteriori*, after the enigma of the world, which is a matter for interrogation; on the other hand it claims at the same time to explain *a priori* this very enigma using the same means which its *a posteriori* institution presents to it. It claims to restore, so to speak, to the regime of thought or ideality, the *a priori* constitution of the world which has always already taken place before and without it. Reflection

can therefore only claim to succeed as phenomenology by being guided by an idea of adequation between *a priori* and *a posteriori*, whose realization is made impossible by its very origin. It does not recognize that in setting up the phenomenon as an *object* of thought, it could only ever rejoin the phenomenon as such if in some way it were to abolish itself at the same time as its object (cf. VI 32-34, 46-47, 50, 53). This is what we are talking about when we say that by taking itself as an object, the initial feint of philosophy becomes an illusion of truth as a feint of the feint, that is to say, a feint adequate to itself which pretends to be cancelled out in truth. This in turn, is repaid by the clear-cut distinction between illusory phenomena (phantasms), and veracious phenomena (phenomena corresponding to real things), according to the criterion of an adequation or inadequation of the phenomenon to itself, of the subjective representation to the objective phenomenon. Truth and error prove to be disconnected and because of that even what we have described as the very feint of the phenomenon in itself, as well as that which constitutes perceptual faith as faith, ends up being cancelled out.

This is to say that, taken unilaterally, the reflective attitude in reality only leads to a *phenomenological fabrication*, to an artefact which changes the phenomenon into a conception of the phenomenon which, by an illusion of constitution, is supposedly adequate to the phenomenon itself. This also means that the phenomenological field can only remain open to the reflective attitude if the latter in some way accepts being located in the selfsame position as its antinomy, its own fissure, which is in fact what Husserl always does in the best moments of his work (cf. PS 159-166, 172-181) without faltering when faced with circles and contradictions. This is the paradox of Husserl, caught between the burden of his insertion in the philosophical tradition of the 19th century and the acute phenomenological meaning of his concrete analyses (cf. PS 166-172). It is in this context that Merleau-Ponty posits as a pointer towards further tasks the concept of a hyper-reflection which is meant to change reflection itself by stating clearly the modifications that the former brings into the phenomenological field as soon as it is applied there (cf. VI 39, 47, 53), in such a way that it gives an account of this *phenomenon* or that *appearance* which reflection itself constitutes (cf. my quotation of VI 98, on Descartes). But hyper-reflection itself cannot be anything else than a reflection of reflection, and consequently, an infinite regression of reflection into itself, unless, co-relatively, we consider hyper-reflection as more fundamental than reflection, as a sort of natural lucidity which, having made us glimpse the antinomy of the reflexive posture, imposes on us the requirement to bring to philosophical expression only that which the world *in all its silence* all the same intends to say (cf. VI 39). So in actual fact we need a new departure (cf. VI 43).

Now here again an obstacle stands in our path to perceptual faith and the field of phenomenology, namely, the philosophy of the negative, of Being and Nothingness (primarily Sartre) (VI 52-89), and the philosophy of dialec-

tics (VI 89-95) (primarily Hegel, but while we are talking about it, why not Marx?). The examination of Sartre's thought is, for someone like myself who did not live through that era, strangely and exceptionally long. We will recall only the parts that seem to us to be most important. Faced with the occurrence of something unthought which has always taken place beforehand and in principle avoids any reflection, it would at first sight seem sensible to follow Sartre's idea by assuming that in some way the self of the for-itself is originally alienated from or in ek-stase in wild being, the in-itself. Such an approach does appear to place us immediately in the domain of the pure positive and pre-reflexive in-itself, which has not yet been transformed into ideality by the workings of reflection. The counterpart of this is that the for-itself is basically nothing, that is, nothingness or pure negativity living on the in-itself. All that we can say of consciousness is that, like nothingness, it is not, or it is in the manner of the negative; and if there is a phenomenological reduction, it only finds its condition of possibility precisely in this pure negativity, in this ray of nothingness which lights up being, the world and things. This would account for both the immediate presence of being to consciousness and the transparence of the latter, and all philosophy from then on should be played out in the relationships which places full wild being in opposition to empty evanescent nothingness. However, if we look closer, this philosophy of the negative suffers from the same problems as the philosophy of reflection in that it simply reverses the latter. Instead of putting the positive inside and treating all the outside as pure negative, it defines mind as the pure negative which lives only from its contact with exterior being, which is entirely positive (VI 88). So Sartre's thought proceeds from an initial abstraction and we think that this gives it the character of an almost frantic intellectualism. As Merleau-Ponty rightly explains (VI 75, 81–82, 88, 89, 98), this abstraction puts consciousness in the position of disembodied pure vision, carrying out an overview with relation to wild being, and at best only accounts for the horizon of distances, and of the imminence of the annihilation of vision in being, which comes into play in all vision. Wild being which has been thus presented by initial abstraction is, to tell the truth, only an *illusion* of thought—as if all being could be spread out into pure spectacle—which is reflected in the illusory (even bewitching) instability of the relationships of being and nothingness. And we can say that this illusion is one that we will inevitably fall victim to once we surrender ourselves to this type of large-scale reification of the *a priori* or of the in-itself. If there is being, it can only be in a sort of originating mingling with non-being (cf. VI 89), which constitutes perceptual faith as much as what we called the feint of the phenomenon in itself, where truth and error are intrinsically tied and mixed together. To change the phenomenon into full wild being is to cut it off from its irreducible share in non-being and non-truth, to make an *ontological fiction* of it insofar as the truth of the phenomenon is changed into fiction as soon as the share of truth that there is in it is taken unilaterally, without its share of non-truth which, being embedded in it, brings alive and gives consistency to its share of truth.

In these circumstances it seems that we will be able to at least approach our goal if, instead of moving in this unstable and completely intellectualized milieu of relationships between being and nothingness, we enter into the very movement within which being and nothingness are constituted as poles of a dialectic, that is, into the movement which is intrinsic to the thing itself where the going out of the self into the other (ek-stase of the for-itself) and the returning back into the self from the other (constitution of the for-itself in the negation of the in-itself) only constitutes one and the same double movement (cf. VI 89–92). But if, as Merleau-Ponty points out, this dialectic is indeed in one sense what he is looking for (VI 91) we must also distinguish between "bad" and a "good" dialectic. The "bad" dialectic which is unquestionably Hegel's, consists of a metamorphosis of movement into meaning or thesis, and the conversion of the power of being into an explanatory principle (VI 92–92). Then "what was Being's manner of being becomes an *evil genius*" (VI 93, my emphasis). This is what we criticize when we say that the Hegelian dialectic is the crowning point of the *fiction*. For it brings off this remarkable performance by *using* the very resources of the feint of the phenomenon in itself to construct, in the system of pure thought, a positive and stable ontotheology which only preserves in itself the pure appearance—that is to say the illusion—of movement, which is always only the mediation situated and in some way tamed before it articulates the concepts, even when the system surrenders itself with the intention of joining itself with the very movement of things. This almost delirious hallucination of a Reason which manages to "digest" its opaque areas to manifest itself in its transparence was moreover the hallucination of an entire age which thought it could discover the truth through a certain type of Marxism and surrendered itself to this "evil genius" for a tragic part of its history.

This leaves us with the "good dialectic", the one that knows that "every thesis is an idealization, that Being is not made up of idealizations or of things said" (VI 94), and that, consequently, what we must reject if we are not to immediately restrict the field of phenomenology to an encyclopedia of philosophical concepts, is "the idea that the surpassing that reassembles results in a new positive, a new position" (VI 95). Just as we needed hyper-reflection, so now we need a hyperdialectic, attentive or open to the double movement of the thing itself, at the point where the two movements making up this single movement cross, that is where "there is" something (VI 95), where there is "simply an openness" (VI 99). The new departure that Merleau-Ponty has up to this point announced intermittently now receives its first fundamental and founding expression (VI 101–103). It consists in the *incompletion in principle* of the world, of phenomena, and of ourselves, which founds in reality the *opening* itself of perceptual faith to the world, of perceptual faith to itself, of me

to the other, of the sensible to the intelligible, of the mute world to expression, etc. For us, this is without a doubt the most profound and lasting lesson of the late work of Merleau-Ponty—a lesson which connects it with others in a very great philosophical tradition, namely that of Kant and Schelling. The lesson is that every being, of whatever sort, is always and in principle *unfinished*, repeatedly open to horizons of completion which are themselves irreducibly penetrated with incompletion. And as we shall try to show, it is this incompletion in principle of every thing and every thought which gives Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology a unique character which makes it impossible to ignore.

In any case, the main consequence of this is that philosophy (and therefore phenomenology), at least if it wants to remain faithful to its claim to *reveal* by language the world and ourselves in the silence of their origins, can only be "perceptual faith *questioning* itself about itself" (VI 103, my emphasis). It is not a matter of curtailing our astonishment when faced with the world and changing it into the universe of reasons, thoughts or concepts, but on the contrary of forcing it to speak from its very source. For what constitutes perceptual faith in its innermost core, its truth so to speak, is that it is "a faith because it is the possibility of doubt, and this indefatigable ranging over the things, which is our life, is also a continuous interrogation" (VI 103); or again, it is that "we ourselves are one sole continued question, a perpetual enterprise of taking our bearings on the constellations of the world, and of taking the bearings of the things on our dimensions" (VI 103, see also 119–120, 129). This requires of philosophy a certain style of questioning that we will come back to later.

Another immediate consequence, one just as important on the methodological level at least, is a profound modification of the status of the *ideality* or of the *eidos* which the important chapter entitled "Interrogation and Intuition" (VI 105–129) is devoted to. In fact, "when philosophy ceases to be doubt in order to make itself disclosure, explicitation—since it has detached itself from the facts and the beings (that is, by the phenomenological reduction—MR)—the field it opens to itself is indeed made up of significations or of essences (that is, the phenomenological reduction does not occur without an eidetic reduction—MR), but these significations or essences do not suffice to themselves, they overtly refer to our acts of ideation which have lifted them from a brute being wherein we must find again in their *wild state* what answers to our essences and our significations" (VI 110, my emphasis). All this implies that Husserl's famous eidetic variation consists not so much of an imaginary variation followed by a laying bare of the hard core of things—something which would only be possible by an overview of the phenomenological field (cf. VI 112), for a frontal glance which sees ideality as a positive quality (cf. VI 113)—but rather of a never to be completed circuit of the phenomenological field where the phenomena, "the spatio-temporal individuals" show themselves to be "from the first mounted on the axes, the pivots, the dimensions, the generality of my body" and the ideas as "already encrusted in its joints" (VI 114). In

other words, the idea of the essence is not simply the object of a disembodied eidetic intuition to which pure individuals, "indivisible glaciers of being" (VI 115) would be opposed, but both appear as having always been intrinsically tied as "brute essence and brute existence, which are the nodes and antinodes of the same ontological vibration" (VI 115). The *Wesenschau* is at the joints of experience insofar as it is "the tie that secretly connects an experience to its variants" (VI 116), insofar as it discloses the dimensionality that makes the relationship between classical essence and existence comprehensible (VI 117). Merleau-Ponty is here explaining that the phenomenological field is never pure chaos, but always already *world* or *cosmos* (order) rising on and linked onto sorts of structures of emptiness, or horizons of invisibility or of non-phenomenality. It is as if the essence, hidden in a hollow and constantly about to appear, occurs as a controlling principle of the phenomenon, but a principle which is always anticipated and never seen coinciding with or being transparent in the phenomenon itself (VI 117–119). Let us say that it is an important part of the feint which belongs to the phenomenon in itself, to give the illusion of always having been already supported, *a priori*, in its very existence, by an ideality-principle which however only ever appears hidden in a hollow, like its other face, in the constantly deferred *a posteriori* imminence of a pure manifestation which would make it the object of a pure vision or intuition by coinciding with it. We might add that the idea that the latter is supposed to relate to the pure fact, the pure individual, or the pure essence is only an *illusion of the phenomenon* (namely, of the pure individual, of the pure essence respectively), for "what there is is not a coinciding by principle or a presumptive coinciding and a factual non-coinciding, a bad or abortive truth, but a privative non-coinciding, a coinciding from afar, a divergence, and *something like a 'good error'* " (VI 124–125, my emphasis; for this, see VI 121–123). If there is proximity, it is at a distance; if there is intuition, it is as "auscultation or palpation in depth"; if there is a view, it is as "a view of self, a torsion of self upon self, which calls 'coincidence' into question" (VI 128). Putting it in my terms, every phenomenon is affected by an *originating distortion* by virtue of which on the one hand, there is only a phenomenon for *another* phenomenon, therefore *for* a sensation or an *embodied* vision, by necessity transferred in parts to the register of the sensible or the visible, so that the vision or the sensation of a phenomenon in that sense forms part of the phenomenon itself; on the other hand, and correlatively, by virtue of this the phenomenon appears, and is by necessity phenomenalized as incompleted and in this very incompletion as hinting at the imminence or the *illusion* of a completion. This is incessantly deferred insofar as the completion, the phenomenalization of the non-phenomenal (the invisible) that there is in it, in its horizons, will always only lead once again to the phenomenon which is itself incomplete. It is by virtue of this originary distortion which Merleau-Ponty calls a "good error", that the phenomenon is contained within itself, that is to say it

is *phenomenalized*. And we realize, at the end of this journey of the *Visible*, that if the phenomenological reduction is to be conceived as an initial feint of the phenomenon, it is because it would be a matter of giving perceptual faith its solidity and all its flesh, which consists in its incompletion in principle. But the reduction is also and correlatively thus conceived to let unfold itself the phenomenality of the phenomenon, that is the intrinsic bond in it of truth and falsehood, of true appearance and illusion, of the actuality suitable for its "there is" and the horizons of non-actuality which is paralyzed by it and which just as much constitutes the texture of all "concrete" experience. By virtue of this, if there is the question of "there is" which philosophy must henceforth adapt itself to, and this is the ontological question in Heidegger's sense, this question is itself always *caught* in the phenomenological field as such, and can never be separated from it, insofar as it is itself inscribed in the invisible framework of the phenomenon as the question that *it* demands and which consequently demands us insofar as we are already continually participating in it (cf. VI 119–120, 125–126, 127–128).

The first lesson from all this, which is a revolutionary one when compared with a retentive tendency of the philosophical tradition, is that *the field of ideality itself belongs to the phenomenological field*. It is neither another world nor a "hinter-world", but a dimension (which has itself been put in a phenomenal sense into a lower gear) of the phenomenon (VI 149–156); far from the sensible being set over against the intelligible, both are mixed up in the same tissue, as so many possible experiences of the phenomenon which are only differentiated for a purpose, without ever being excluded or separated, according to the degree of subtlety or of sublimation that the very flesh of these experiences has adopted (cf. VI 149). We will return to this important point when we examine the way in which the Husserlian concept of "strata" is overturned in his theory of the transcendental constitution. The point we want to insist on here is the fundamental one that there can no longer be—unless it is through an occasionally convenient abstracting fiction—a field of pure thought, of pure concept or pure logic, in which thought is applied in an entirely intrinsic and autonomous way, and which would by right be distinguishable, not to mention sovereign, in relation to a field of the sensible and of intuition. For the field of thought comprises an irreducible and uncontrollable part of *phenomenality* in that thought is already enigmatically playing around in the horizons of non-phenomenality of the phenomenon itself, and in that in this game, also enigmatically, it is itself taken with the feint of the phenomenon, gets partially mixed up with it by becoming visible to itself, admittedly, no longer in transparence, but as a *part* of the phenomenon from which it is distinguished only insofar as it is an obscure part and by which it is reflected only to phenomenalize other phenomena. This occurs whether it is a matter of speech or mathematics, of literature or philosophy, of painting or music, in a smooth passage from the "nature" of brute wild being to the "culture" of our social and historical world, a passage that should some day be interrogated for itself.

The second lesson which, as we will see, manifests itself in a group of new perspectives is much more difficult to extract insofar as it belongs to the incomplete side of Merleau-Ponty's last work. Strictly speaking, it is here that we should take responsibility and interpret it more freely at the risk of being unfaithful. Now that we have surveyed the overall impulse of the *Visible* we in fact still have to consider where exactly it is taking us, to grasp the specific nature of this phenomenology, on the one hand in relation to Husserl, which is relatively easy, and on the other hand, in relation to Heidegger, which is much more arduous. This is not so much in consideration of that which could exist as possible ambiguities in the workplace of the *Visible*, but rather in consideration of what in Heidegger, when he is compared to the later Merleau-Ponty, appears all the same to be an extraordinary philosophical stratagem in which what is decisive always appears to be almost deliberately shrouded in obscurity. This obscurity, under the sign of the unfathomable or the ultimate, constantly returns us to the provisional character of all thought which is carried out in finitude, something which would by itself be rather fruitful. But along with this it also more forcefully brings us back particularly to the hallucination of somehow recording beforehand and examining and re-examining within itself the problems that are to be raised there, which is rather sterile and likely to breed dogmatisms. In re-reading Merleau-Ponty we cannot help seeing in this type of stratagem one of the most cunning expressions of modernity, where the opening to the decisive questioning is strangely transformed into a sort of radical perversion of philosophical discourse where we find ourselves surrounded, hypnotized, exhausted without any point of support.

To a careful reader there is no doubt that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is deeply inspired by Husserl's: in this respect we have only to re-read *The Philosopher and His Shadow* where the interpretation of the phenomenological reduction already emphasizes the *Urdoxa*, perceptual faith, and points out that the meaning of the reduction is to shift the natural attitude itself so as to open up the phenomenological field (PS 163-164); and where, similarly, the proposed reading of *Ideas II* leads us to the early part of the last chapter of the *Visible*, as does, as we shall see, the bringing to the fore of problems raised by the transcendental constitution (PS 172-181). But if Merleau-Ponty is Husserlian, he is so with a productive faithlessness. If he extends Husserl by unremittingly drawing on him—the "Working Notes" of the *Visible* bear witness to it—it is by going beyond his "Cartesian" side, by freeing Husserl's work from the crushing burden of the philosophy of reflection. Merleau-Ponty's thought, which is more receptive to the problematic of the *Lebenswelt* that runs through the *Krisis* and the unpublished writings of Husserl's last period than to that of the transcendental *cogito*, thrives on everything that is paradoxical and aporetic in Husserl's work, rather than the approaches that Husserl himself suggested in order to solve the problems. His thought reveals precisely "the

obscurity" of perceptual faith or the intrinsic meaning of the phenomenality of the phenomenon which is revealed in the *Visible* and which in Husserl always tends to be concealed by the traditional limits of a philosophy of consciousness, of a teleology of intentionality. What Merleau-Ponty discloses with Husserl is that all being, all thought, is caught in the phenomenality of the phenomenon and is always already *inscribed* in the phenomenological field.

His discussion of the problem of constitution is noteworthy for the careful consideration that he gives to everything which, in Husserl, overturns the relationships of the constituted to the constituting. The result is that, by means of a change of attitude that the *hyper-reflection* of the *Visible* had already touched on, what is essential in Husserl's *concrete* analyses retains all its meaning. Thus the relationship between the analyses of the "layers" in the transcendental constitution cannot be simply the relationship of foundation to founded—based on the simple application of the principle of sufficient reason—but also the relationships of encroachment, transgression, enjambment, propagation and of overtaking by forgetfulness (which therefore plays a fundamental role in constitution) without any real beginning or end point (PS 172–173). If we consider the problematic of solipsism and intersubjectivity, then solipsism is a "thought-experiment" and the *solus ipse* a "constructed subject" (PS 173), but above all, "true and transcendental solitude . . . takes place only if the other person is not even conceivable" and if there is no longer "a self to claim solitude" (PS 174) from which it follows that the solipsist "layer" is in reality "without ego and without ipse" (PS 174), "the haze of an anonymous life that separates us from being", "a primordial generality we are intermingled in" (ibid.), from which myself and the others are born *together* through the original extasis (ibid.). From that point on "we must conceive of a primordial *We* that has its own authenticity and furthermore never comes to an end but continues to underlie the greatest passions of our adult life and to be experienced anew in each of our perceptions" (PS 175). But if we can in some way revive this layer of *transcendental anonymity* by disconnecting the egological and intersubjective layer, it is because we can, through the *Erinnerung* of the forgetting which is constitutive of the latter, and which is not simple absence (cf. PS 175–176), open ourselves to it in that "each layer takes up the preceding ones again and encroaches upon those that follow; each is prior and posterior to the others, and thus to itself" (PS 176). This leads the phenomenological analysis to move relentlessly into the circularity of ante-references and retro-references (PS 177), the phenomenological or transcendental field being in a block or all of a piece (cf. PS 177, 178), which while always being incomplete, is no less discontinuous by its transgressions and ruptures than it is continuous by its encroachments and enjambments (PS 176). Such is the phenomenological field that it appears to us as a wild world and a wild mind (PS 181) a sort of "baroque world" (ibid.), a being of promiscuity, of polymorphism, of non-compossibles, not ruled *a priori* by the domesticated universe of our thoughts,

but so to speak (that is, *for us*, after the event) always already ordered by a "barbarous source" which while resisting phenomenology in us, "cannot remain outside phenomenology and should have its place within it" (PS 178). Thus phenomenology is confronted with a "renewal of the world which is also mind's renewal, a rediscovery of that brute mind which untamed by any culture, is asked to create culture anew" (PS 181).

From this perspective we can re-read the final chapter of the *Visible*—"The Intertwining-The Chiasm"—as the resumption and outline of the whole problematic of constitution: constitution of the sensible and the visible in and by the narcissism of sensation and of vision both of which have been brought into play by the body (VI 131–139); constitution of the other and of intersubjectivity (VI 140–144); constitution of expression in language (VI 144–145), of thought (VI 145–146); thematic resumption of the problematic of constitution (VI 146–149); constitution of "sensible ideas" (VI 149–152) and of "pure" ideality or of the intelligible (VI 152–153). Indeed this chapter which concludes the work in a fragmentary way is in reality *introductory* if we know how to read it. Strictly speaking, it is in it as well as in some more or less side remarks in the "Working Notes" that we have an opportunity to be able to bring to light the new direction of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and its profound originality in relation to Heidegger's thought.

We already have some idea of the differences between this phenomenology and what we nowadays tend to describe in general terms as Heidegger's phenomenology. There are already some signs alerting us: the genuine "ontological rehabilitation of the sensible" that Merleau-Ponty credits Husserl with (PS 167), but which is even more characteristic of his own work; the keen sense of the phenomenality of the phenomenon which we interpret in terms of its originating distortion, and where ontological truth and falsehood are intrinsically and inextricably tied together; the attention given correlatively to perceptual faith and to the natural attitude in its constitutive "naivety", without speaking of what is the most obvious, and which, in a sense, subsumes what precedes it; the prolonged continuous reflection on the remaining fragments of Husserl's work in regard to which Merleau-Ponty never made the radical break that Heidegger did. And, of course, there is another area which we now want to focus on, namely, the problematic of the *flesh* which we know affects the entire later thought of the philosopher in such great depths, especially in the last chapter of the *Visible*.

In fact, we could not grasp the full importance of the problematic of constitution which is sketched in "The Intertwining-The Chiasm" and its novelty in relation to Husserl if we were not extremely attentive to the reversibility of the flesh, "which is the *ultimate* truth" (VI 155, my emphasis). Without being able to take up here the analyses of Merleau-Ponty and to do justice to the subtlety of his expressions,[4] we are going to try to sort out its direction through what appear to us to be its principal motives. If we take up the whole analysis

of perception and sensation, the whole question of narcissism (VI 133–139), then the result is that "the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen" (VI 139), and that a visibility emerges, a "generality of the Sensible in itself", an "anonymity innate to Myself" which is flesh (ibid.) and which is like the phenomenal tissue of things (cf. VI 135) by virtue of which there is a sort of pre-established harmony between the look and the visible, between sensation and the sensible (cf. ibid.). In fact, there is a connivance between the flesh of the world which is there like the bulk of the sensible, Being of promiscuousness and of encroachment, "polymorphic matrix" (VI 221) of phenomena, "being in latency, and a presentation of a certain absence" (VI 136), and the flesh of the body as a recovery and imperceptible welding of the seeking body and the visible body, of the sentient body and the perceptible body. By virtue of this primordial connivance it is neither myself nor the world in itself which is phenomenalized in the phenomenon, but it is the phenomenon itself which is phenomenalized in its place as if by a sort of torsion or the folding back of the flesh onto itself (cf. esp. VI 138–139). Through this very torsion—this distortion—the phenomenon is shifted from the phenomenal to the non-phenomenal, from the visible to the invisible and to the vision in its own share of invisibility, from the perceptible to the non-perceptible and to sensation in its own reserves of non-perceptibility. This occurs without a rupture or break of continuity, since there is always reversibility from the seeing to the visible, from the sentient to the sensible, and similarly, following the manner of propagation characteristic of the flesh, from the visible to the invisible, from the perceptible to the non-perceptible. Let us say that as phenomenality of the phenomenon, the flesh is the *Horizonthaftigkeit*, the "system" of its interior and exterior horizons which, by the straits that they form, open as much to the non-phenomenal of the phenomenon and hence to other phenomena, as to the non-phenomenal of an *embodied* perception, therefore phenomenalizing itself for a part of itself. In other words, there is only perception *in* the phenomenal (the visible, the perceptible) because there is a non-phenomenal side to the phenomenal and because there is a phenomenal aspect to the non-phenomenal which is constitutive of perception itself (seeing, perceiving), and there is reversibility and enjambment or even *chiasm* of all these terms which we only differentiate in reflection.

Flesh as reversibility or chiasm is really the key to every phenomenon, and consequently, to all constitution: whether it is a matter of the encroachment and of the intersection of sensations among themselves at the heart of the flesh of the body, or of the tangibles among themselves in the flesh of one and the same phenomenon (VI 134–135). Whether it is a matter of the encroachment and intersection of my landscape—not to be taken in the sense of spectacle or panorama, but in the sense of this world that I perceive and that I survey with my upright position—and of those of others in the flesh of a self-same

phenomenal landscape (VI 140–144); or of the reversibility which is at work in the expression in "the reflexivity of the movements of phonation and of hearing" (VI 144) in whose hollow the meaning of a word as imminence of its completion and therefore of its obliteration is constituted. Or again, whether it is a matter of "cohesion without concept" (VI 152) which while constituting the flesh of the work of art (VI 144–152; ES 178–181) allows the flesh of the idea to spring up through the same chiasm; or, of the "surpassing that does not leave its field of origin" (VI 153) of the visibility which is transmitted, always through the same enjambment, from the tangible world and the body "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" (ibid.) making ideality appear in an almost carnal existence "as by a sublimation of the flesh" (VI 155) by virtue of which even "the operative mathematical algorithm make use of a second visibility" (VI 153).

This is to say that the flesh is that by which the phenomenological field discovers its own consistency and autonomy: it is its tissue or element (VI 139–140), that is, what we have called the phenomenality of the phenomenon. For the flesh is every time that which, while folding back on itself so to speak, makes the phenomenon open onto other phenomena than itself, that is to say on other horizons than those which at first sight would be opened as their very own. This is why, while always being able to be torn by the uprooting or the autonomization of a given phenomenon or of such "layer" of phenomena—a tear in which reflective abstraction is swallowed up—the flesh, if we take careful note, is always stitched up in the new dimension left wide open by the tear, is reunited in the flesh of new phenomena or new "layers" of phenomena. Therefore this is why alongside a "bad" use of reflection, that which disentangles the threads of the tissue to reduce them to threads of reasons, there is a "good" use. The latter, instead of proceeding to abstraction which isolates, and to the dialectic of more-being and less-being, to the opposition of the positive and the negative and to its resolution in another positive, allows a new *field* of phenomena to come into view in the phenomenological field. This field is open indefinitely to new phenomenalizations at the place of the intersection or of the chiasm where the flesh, continually in an original creative way, heals somehow both before and at the same time—which is its enigma. For the flesh is also the element of *creation* and invention and this is by virtue of the non-completion in principle of all things that it denotes. The flesh is that which, in the irreducible non-coincidence of the phenomenon to itself, holds together the "I did not know" and the "I have always known", which causes all creation to be at the same time discovery and every phenomenalization out of nothing to be a peculiar course of the same phenomenological field open indefinitely to other possible peculiar courses, yet without anything having been given in advance.

Now what is the relationship of this philosophy, which we persist in calling phenomenology, with ontology, and more strictly speaking to an ontology à la Heidegger? If we devoted ourselves to the game of picking out in the *Visible* the occurrences and the meanings of the word "Being", we would soon notice that these meanings are not clearly defined, that most often the word "Being" is taken in its classical meaning even if in some cases the use is ambiguous. When Merleau-Ponty speaks of new ontology, to my mind there is no doubt that for him ontology communicates with perceptual faith, or rather that perceptual faith requires an ontology that is peculiar to it and which from the viewpoint of ontology in the Heideggerian sense is without any doubt a naive one, though we have seen that Merleau-Ponty laid claim to this very naivete. Likewise it would scarcely help to pick out the few scarce citations of Heidegger in the *Visible*: they are always only casual remarks to explain or justify the use of such and such a word—for example, the very "ester" used by G. Kahn to translate *Wesen*. But what is at stake in this discussion is too important to leave it at that. In fact one could say, not without reason, that the *Visible and the Invisible* proceeds structurally and methodologically like *Being and Time* to the very extent that it intends to bring to language in a legitimate way the silence of mute experience, and to the extent that its apparent point of departure lies in *our* being-in-the-world, in the fact that while being closest to ourselves, we are—in an in principle inexhaustible reserve of non-phenomenality—at the same time always already there, caught or banished from ourselves in the phenomenality of the world. But we must add that *The Visible and the Invisible* generalizes the procedure of *Being and Time* in a remarkable way or at least proposes another version through the roundabout way of an existential analytic of perception as ek-stase in some way sensible to the sensible world. This whole procedure is exploited for the last time in the final chapter of the work by the use of a *Kehre* analogous to that practised by Heidegger, where it is a matter of thinking the flesh, a "notion thinkable by itself" (VI 140), in its *ontological* truth, as if there were a need to think "Being" in the Heideggerian sense whenever Merleau-Ponty writes "flesh".

It is enough to have posed the problem even in these concise terms to immediately feel uncomfortable. Let us re-read this text:

> 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 whenever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an "element" of Being. (VI 139)

And this other note from November 1960: "Do a psychoanalysis of Nature: it is the flesh, the mother", "the indestructible, the barbaric Principle" (VI 267).

If we take note that the term element goes back to certain pre-Socratic ideas—those of the Ionians or of syncretic philosophers as for example Anaxagoras or Empedocles—we see straight away that the late philosophy of Merleau-Ponty shows a sort of remote affinity to them which it certainly does not do with those of Parmenides or Heraclitus, who we know greatly inspired Heidegger. If there is a new ontology in Merleau-Ponty it is, through the mediation of the notion of flesh, much more an ontology of "syncretism"—intersection, overlapping, chiasm—than an ontological monism à la Parmenides (interpreted in this way, it must be said, by Heidegger). And if we consider it carefully, this superficial remark leads us to the heart of the problem: Heideggerian thought operates entirely within the framework of a very subtle *acosmism*, in that for Heidegger the world in its transcendental structure never discloses itself as intrinsically ordered, as an articulation in a transcendental *cosmos* of phenomena—there is no "nature" in Heidegger in the sense of an indestructible barbaric Principle. Things are different in Merleau-Ponty in that for him the world is not simply what appears to us as the Cartesian *artefact*, nor simply this field of beings gathered together by the opening or the clearing of being at the there of its being-the-there, but a field of phenomena as "polymorphic *matrix*" (VI 221) of phenomena held together by the flesh as "element". If there has to be an ancestor of the notion of flesh in the philosophical tradition, it would be found in Plato's *Timaeus* with the *chora*. Like the latter the flesh is a sort of "bastard concept", "half-way between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea", to the very extent that it is the element of intersection, of chiasm, or to speak like the Greeks, of the *composite*. This is why flesh appears as immediately having a *cosmological* dimension (cf. VI 265) not of course in the sense of an eternal cosmic harmony, but in the sense that the field of phenomena already constitutes *a priori* a certain arrangement, a "wild" *cosmos*, a nature, whatever these phenomena might be in other respects. On a more profound level we can see by this that there is a deep divergence of inspiration between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. The former has more and more directed his questioning towards the transcendental-ontological conditions of possibility of thought, towards what must always already be there for thought to take place—and we know that this is the pure "there is" of being and of time. The latter no doubt found this mode of questioning a little too abstract—although vaguely, since we do not have any clear indication on this point in his work (unless perhaps in TL 109–112, esp. 111–112)—insofar as, caught as we constantly already are in the phenomenological field, there can be no other question relating to prejudgment than the question concerning perceptual faith, that is of the mode of our insertion in it which has always already been carried out. In any case, the problematic of being *as being* never appears in his work and this is because in our opinion it simply does not have any meaning in that context: the phenomenon, the phenomenological field and perceptual faith are an irreducible mixture of being and non-being, which is also to say, of *ontological* truth and

falsehood. Just as Plato explicitly invites us to commit parricide with regard to Parmenides, so Merleau-Ponty implicitly invites us to commit parricide with regard to Heidegger. There is no pure ontological "there is" as an *a priori* condition of the revelation or the phenomenalization of being, but there is a "there is by inherence" (VI 145, note), that is to say, always unaccomplished. This requires thought by its very lack of accomplishment, and its accomplishment would only be, if we may be permitted to use this expression, a transcendental illusion insofar as thinking is still phenomenalizing, cramming the horizons of non-phenomenality of the phenomenon with phenomena, and with phenomena which in turn involve their own horizons of non-phenomenality.[5]

For the flesh is precisely the indestructible, which heals in the very movement of its tear. Without being of the past, it is always new while being always the same (cf. VI 267). And this is because the flesh is this indestructible element that the question of knowing why there is something rather than nothing does not present itself immediately. The question of the origin cannot be put as a question of pre-judgment because it presents itself to us irreducibly as a question *of the* origins, a question of the rupture that it must go along with and express, of the origin in origins. So it is not the case, as it may appear easy to believe, that a Heideggerian mode of thought could reduce the late philosophy of Merleau-Ponty to a sort of final version, already "obsolete", of "metaphysics", since this attempted reduction could very well be turned against itself, as we may observe in the Heideggerian insistence on pushing the interrogation in a single direction—that of Being as such—which is itself a form of abstraction descended from classical philosophy although carried to a standard of stringency and refinement never reached previously. It seems to us that contrary to this, Merleau-Ponty advises us not to easily hand over the ground of philosophy and phenomenology to the glamour of an understanding of the abysses—in other times one would have said of a sovereign reason. There is so to speak a humility of the phenomenon which it is too easy to confine to the domain of naivete. It should rather be up to us to be humble in the face of this humility, at least if we wish not to rush things, and regain in philosophy the eternal infancy of the world, the naive complicity which has initiated us and which still initiates us to it as well as to ourselves. If the other questions should be asked, since we do not fail to put them to ourselves, it is necessary that they be asked *after*, for it would be possible that they thus emerge completely transformed.

So if Merleau-Ponty has an ontology, if there is being for him, it is as "universal dimensionality" (VI 265) (there is dimensionality of every fact and facticity of every dimension—this is in virtue of the "ontological difference": VI 270), or it is in the sense of the "amorphous" perceptual world that the *Eye and the Mind* speaks of, the "perpetual resources for the remaking of painting—which contains no mode of expression and which nonetheless calls them forth and requires all of them and which arouses again with each painter a new

effort of expression" (VI 170). Or again, it is in the sense that "music is too far beyond the world and the designatable to depict anything but certain *outlines of Being*—its ebb and flow, its growth, its upheavals, its turbulence" (EM 161, my emphasis). It is a being ("at bottom Being in Heidegger's sense": VI 170) which is "more than all painting, than all speech, than every 'attitude' and which, apprehended by philosophy in its universality, appears as containing everything that will ever be said, and yet leaving us to create it (Proust)" (VI 170). It is a being which is "polymorphism" (VI 212, 252, 253), a "Being in promiscuity" (VI 253) of "transitivism" (VI 270). In other words, this being is the being of the world, the being of the phenomenological field, or again, to paraphrase *Eye and Mind*, the "metaphysical structure" of the flesh (cf. EM 178).

Taking into consideration all that we have said about the problematic of constitution as it was profoundly transformed by Merleau-Ponty, there are different levels of complexity and depth in this structure, since from one level to another, there is most certainly encroachment and renewal, but also transgression and forgetfulness. And among these "levels" there is that which is no doubt the most significant while being at the same time the least obvious, that is the pre-egological field of the transcendental anonymity, the "vertical or carnal universe and its polymorphic matrix" (VI 221) where there is not even *solus ipse* to the extent that there is no *ipse* in it and therefore no one to feel him or herself alone.[6] To conclude, what we would like to say now is that, in this in-depth "tier arrangement" of the metaphysical structure of the flesh the possibility of developing a transcendental phenomenology is presented to us as one of the horizons of the late work of Merleau-Ponty. To be sure this is no longer entirely in the meaning that Husserl gives to this word, but in the meaning where on the one hand, there is *transcendence* of the phenomenon (cf. VI 191–192, 210, 213, 215, 217, 258) and therefore autonomy of a wild *cosmos* of phenomena, and where on the other hand, and correlatively, this anonymous and barbaric universe (which we have not made, but which makes us and in which we are made) can only be opened to phenomenology on condition of putting in brackets or disconnecting (the "phenomenological reduction") any traditional ontological question as well as any ontological question in the Heideggerian sense. In other words, Merleau-Ponty makes us glimpse the possibility of a phenomenology which, like music, is sufficiently withdrawn from the world of our preoccupations, to be in a position to sort out the "blueprints of Being", rhythms, phases or *movements* intrinsic to the phenomenological field, constituting a sort of universal framework, a dynamic frame of dimensions or general dimensionalities in which and on which all our experiences come to be inscribed. Far from giving us an overview with regard to the world, the withdrawal which has been won by this new reduction thrusts us into the heart of a phenomenological field which is fundamentally incom-

plete and open on all sides to movements of possible and partial achievements. We cannot mistake it for a universe or an originary stratum which would have more being than those which come to be inscribed there as its horizons given that every question of ontological priority has been suspended or revoked by the new *epoche*. It is therefore a field which is truly given, if we properly understand the meaning of the world, as the transcendental field of "pre-Being" (VI 213), of the transcendental we, that is, of transcendental phenomenology *in specie*.[7] In our opinion, it is at the heart of this phenomenology that the premises of ontology can be put in place, and to begin with, the premises of that "naive" ontology which is coextensive with perceptual faith, and through which humanization is learnt, in the constitution of the peculiar phenomena of "my" body and that of "others". The constitution of the so-called intersubjective sphere is for us the beginning of a phenomenological anthropology, which is to say also, in the same movement, of a phenomenological philosophy of nature, in its separation—ongoing from the beginning—from what we must call culture.

It could rightly be said that these are enormous problems. They are all the more intricate and involved in that, in this field which is indefinitely open, there is no one privileged path but an indefinite multiplicity of *particular* routes which by the very peculiarity of the movement affecting every route, ought to lead to as many particular versions of phenomenology. There is a deep complicity between art and phenomenology, from the moment that the latter has understood the vanity of its endeavours to reach the unique and privileged point of view of *the* truth. This does not mean moreover that we will revert to a new version of relativism which would be phenomenological relativism, for the peculiarity of the route in the phenomenological field cannot constitute, if we understand it properly, the exclusive and in itself sovereign point of view of a subjectivity on truth. If there is always some truth in this way of philosophizing, it is in the route or *in the movement itself* and no longer in such an acquired "idea". For if we philosophizing beings are *always already* caught in the metaphysical structure of the flesh, it is at the price of this paradox which is that as soon as we begin to philosophize, *we* simultaneously *outline* this structure *anew*, we invent it at the same moment that we thought we were discovering it.

For us, no doubt the most profound lesson that the last thoughts of Merleau-Ponty have taught us is that from now on it will be impossible to philosophize otherwise than in the singular, for the singular is our only way of access to the universal. It is that alone which brings philosophy as well as its entire ancient tradition to life, a tradition we will only be faithful to by being unfaithful to it. This very unfaithfulness constitutes the bond of generations of philosophers, it ensures that we are never finished with philosophy, unless it is labouring under the illusion of a convenient abstraction. As Husserl already said, and as Merleau-Ponty has shown us, to philosophize genuinely is to continually *become a beginner* in philosophy.

Notes

1. This paper originally appeared in the special issue of *Esprit* (June 1983) dedicated to Merleau-Ponty.
2. By this we mean the following writings: *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1968); "Eye and Mind" (in *Primacy of Perception*, pp. 159–190) (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1964); the final resume of lectures at the College de France, published as *Themes from the Lectures, College de France, 1952–1960* (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1970); "The Philosopher and His Shadow", *Signs* (1964), pp. 159–181. Throughout this article I have cited these writings by the acronyms VI, EM, TL and PS respectively, followed by the page numbers.
3. I have suggested a systematic development of this within the Husserlian framework in the first investigation of my "Fondation pour la phénoménologie transcendantale" (Recherches phénoménologiques, I, II, III) (Brussels, Ousia, 1981).
4. This is what we have tried to do elsewhere in "Phénoménalisation, Distorsion, Logologie", *Textures* 72, 4–5, pp. 63–114.
5. cf. my "Fondation pour la phénoménologie transcendentale", op. cit.
6. For this problematic, see esp. VI 83, 201, 209, 212, 217–218, 233–234, 252, 253, 269–270, 274–275.
7. This is the very thing I attempt in my "Fondation pour la phénoménologie transcendentale", op. cit.