As we have seen, Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy comes between subjectivism and objectivism. Again, we must begin with lived through embodied experience, with an embodied experience that opens upon and crosses into the natural and social world. Both the subject’s lived through experience and the stable patterns of the natural and social world must be taken into account. Or more precisely, it is at the intersection of the subject’s experience and the forceful pattern of the natural world, as well as with the relatively stable structures of the social institutions, that meaning is formed. This intersection, this crossing into one another of the subject’s experience and the structures of the world and society is what social scientists and philosophers should attempt to grasp. Meaning does not spring full blown from the minds of isolated rational individuals. Nor is it simply the passive result of an objective structure. Nor is it merely constructed by the free play of language. It is the result of the coming together of the embodied subject and the stable (and yet also shifting) structures of the natural and social world.

All citations of Merleau-Ponty’s texts will refer to their English translations.

**Introduction**


**Chapter 1 Mind-Body Problem**


5 See Chapter 2 below.
Merleau-Ponty states: “it is true to say that my perception is always a flux of individual events” as well as that these events are given perspectively. “But it is also true to say that my perception accedes to things themselves, for these perspectives are articulated in a way which makes access to inter-individual significations possible; they ‘present’ a world.” (SB 219)

That is to say, perceptual form or structure is based in our concrete, embodied perceptual encounter with a really existing patterned world (with a world that is experienced as existing on its own) and is meaningful (and is thus not just a thing), yet this meaning is not yet the meaning or significiation of an abstract idea, even though it is the basis for more abstract ideas (including the abstract, “objective” ideas of science). Perceptual experience (or the perceptual experience of the lived-through body as it bonds with its immediate surroundings in the world) thus bears within itself the duality of structure and meaning, of the objective and the subjective, of body and mind. Again, we see this duality in the structure/meaning of that which is perceived, and we will later see it in the fact that the body can perceive itself perceiving, can perceive the human body as a thing that perceives.

Again, “it is true to say that my perception is always a flux of individual events and that what is radically contingent in the lived perspectivism of perception accounts for the realistic appearance. But it is also true to say that my perception accedes to things themselves, for these perspectives are articulated in a way which makes access to inter-individual significations possible; they ‘present’ a world.” SB 219

See Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of Helmholtz’s experiment, SB 77, and also his discussion of the color perception of a gray ring on a red and green background, SB 83.


Here, again, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, we see Merleau-Ponty framing the mind-body relationship as a relationship between the experiencing subject and a horizon that runs beyond the subject but with which the subject always remains in contact.

“For what precisely is meant by saying that the world existed before any human consciousness? An example of what is meant is that the earth originally issued from a primitive nebula from which the combination of conditions necessary to life was absent. But every one of these words, like every equation in physics, presupposes our pre-scientific experience of the world, and this reference to the world in which we live goes to make up the proposition's valid meaning. Nothing will ever bring home to my comprehension what a nebula that no one sees could possibly be. Laplace's nebula is not behind us, at our remote beginnings, but in front of us in the cultural world. What, in fact, do we mean when we say that there is no world without a being in the world? Not indeed that the world is constituted by consciousness, but on the contrary that consciousness always finds itself already at work in the world.” (PhP 432)

“The cube with six equal sides is the limiting idea whereby I express the material presence of the cube which is there before my eyes, under my hands, in its perceptual self-evidence. The sides of the cube are not projections of it, but precisely sides. When I perceive them successively, with the appearance they present in different perspectives, I do not construct the idea of the geometrized projection which accounts for these perspectives: the cube is already there in front of me and reveals itself through them...The thing, and the world, are given to me along with the parts of my body, not by any ‘natural geometry’, but in a living connection comparable, or rather identical, with that existing between the parts of my body itself.” (PhP 204-205)
As we have seen, and now further confirmed, we cannot meaningfully speak about the objective body being the cause of what appears in the mind, for we cannot meaningfully speak about the object in-itself, since it is necessarily given through our embodied perceptions. Moreover, we cannot meaningfully speak about the objective body being the cause of what appears in the mind because perceptual consciousness cannot be understood as simply a result of discrete external events. Perception reveals a meaningful figure/ground structure, with a whole that is greater than a mere sum of its discrete parts. Active bodily perception is a meaningful orientation toward the world. It is neither a passive thing nor a mere collection of bits of data or discrete events.


We should notice here the continuity of Merleau-Ponty’s thought, for we can now observe that he prefigures the chiasm relationship between body and world expressed in *The Visible and the Invisible in Phenomenology of Perception*. “My gaze ‘knows’ the significance of a certain patch of light in a certain context; it understands the logic of lighting. Expressed in more general terms, there is a logic of the world to which my body in its entirety conforms . . .” (PhP 326). Yet the world still runs beyond the perceiver. “Although a part of our living experience, it [the thing] is nevertheless transcendent in relation to our life because the human body...has running through it a movement towards the world itself” (PhP 326-327, my bracket addition).

Offering a specific example of “unity” of the human body as subject and human body as object, Merleau-Ponty mentions tactile experience and how the hand seems to know the movement required to feel the smoothness or roughness of a surface. Moving the hand too fast or too slowly or pressing on the surface to firmly or weakly will not work, and it is only if the hand and the surface it touches seem to cooperate that the property of the surface appears. This experience can take place only if the body is a two-dimension being, as has been described above. The body touches because as an embodied being it is capable of being touched from the outside. The body touches only because it is an embodied being immersed in a field of other embodied beings. (see above and VI 133)

See Martin Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty’s Ontology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988). Dillon was one of the first scholars to highlight the significance of the crisscrossing of relationship between the perceiving body and the world, with the world remaining the primary term (see Chapter 9, “The Reversibility Thesis”, 153-176) and the fundierung relationship between perception and language, with perception remaining the primary term (see Chapter 10, “Language: Foundation and Truth”, 177-223). Dillon’s work has had a significant impact on what I present here.


Here is their abstract: “Certain simple visual displays consisting of moving 2-D geometric shapes can give rise to percepts with high-level properties such as causality and animacy. This article reviews recent research on such phenomena, which began with the classic work of Michotte and of Heider and Simmel. The importance of such phenomena stems in part from the fact that these interpretations seem to be largely perceptual in nature – to be fairly fast, automatic, irresistible and highly stimulus driven – despite the fact that they involve impressions typically associated with higher-level cognitive processing. This research suggests that just as the visual system works to recover the physical structure of the world by inferring properties such as 3-D shape, so too does it work to recover the causal and social structure of the world by inferring properties such as causality and animacy.”

See also “Heider and Simmel (1944) animation” Online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTNmLt7QX8E

22 The editor of The Visible and the Invisible provides the following Heidegger reference: Unterwegs zur Sprache (Tübingen, 1959), 13. “Die Sprache ist: Sprache. Die Sprache spricht. Wenn wir uns in den Abgrund, den dieser Satz nennt, fallen lassen, stürzen wir nicht ins Leere weg. Wir fallen in die Höhe. Deren Hoheit öffnet eine Tiefe” (See VI 250, footnote 82). The following English translation is available, on the 3rd page, at http://teachlearn.pagesperso-orange.fr/Heidlang.pdf “Language is--language, speech. Language speaks. If we let ourselves fall into the abyss denoted by this sentence, we do not go tumbling into emptiness. We fall upward, to a height. Its loftiness opens up a depth.”

23 See http://cogweb.ucla.edu/Discourse/Narrative/michotte-demo.swf

24 See Merleau-Ponty, The Structure of Behavior, Chapter Three, The Physical Order; The Vital Order; The Human Order, with Section II of this chapter devoted to Structure in Physics, Section III to Vital Structure, and Section IV to the Human Order, pages 137-184. See also Merleau-Ponty, Nature, which follows the general structure of The Structure of Behavior sections just mentioned. The First Course of these published lecture notes deals with the Concept of Nature, pages 3-122, while the Second Course deals with the Concept of Nature, Animality, the Human Body, and the Passage to Culture, pages 123-200. The Third Course presuppose what has been established in the first two, pages 201-284.)


Chapter 2 Perception Language Relationship


35 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by the Working Notes*.


39 Merleau-Ponty, “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence” in *Signs*. Referred to in the text as ILVS.


41 Merleau-Ponty even regards this “as a revision of Hegelianism, which is the discovery of phenomenology, of the living, real and organized relation between the elements of the world.”—a phenomenology that does not rationally construct the world but has brought it to a more articulate expression. (TFL 44-45). Thus, “language is borne by our relation to the world and to others, yet language in turn supports and creates it.” (TFL 117-118; I have made a minor alteration to this translation).

We have seen that when Merleau-Ponty discusses how a word gets its meaning he mentions two sources: our bodily, perceptual, emotional encounter with the world and by how a word is used in certain social situations. The latter bears some similarity to Wittgenstein’s “meaning as use” in the context of a “language game”, i.e., a word gets its meaning by how it is used in the context of a certain social situation. Some in both the Anglo-American and Continental philosophical traditions have argued that the meaning that a word takes on in the context of various social settings is arbitrary, and this of course means that there is no criterion for the correctness of a linguistic use or description. In other words, there is nothing outside the hermeneutic system, i.e., no transcendental signified, that can be used to judge the accuracy of the system. This is not the case within the context of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, for the body’s perceptual encounter with the world provides a means to check the accuracy of linguistic use. See Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of Saussure below.

In order to do this “we need only take language too in the living or nascent state, with all its references, those behind it, which connect it to the mute things it interpellates [or questions, or summons, or calls forth] . . . Language is a life, is our life and the life of the things. Not that language takes possession of life and reserves it for itself: what would there be to say if there existed nothing but things said? It is the error of the semantic philosophies to close up language as if it spoke only of itself: language lives only from silence; everything we cast to the others has germinated in this great mute land which we never leave. But, because he has experienced within himself the need to speak, the birth of speech as bubbling up at the bottom of his mute experience, the philosopher knows better than anyone that what is lived is lived-spoken, that, born at this depth, language is not a mask over Being, but…the most valuable witness to Being….that the vision itself, the thought itself, are, as has been said [by Jacques Lacan], ‘structured as a language,’ are articulation before the letter…But…if we consider the speaking word, the assuming of the conventions of his native language as something natural by him who lives within that language, the folding over within him of the visible and the lived experience upon language, and of language upon the visible and the lived experience, the exchanges between the articulations of his mute language and those of his speech, finally that operative language which has no need to be translated into significations and thoughts, that language…brings to the surface all the deep-rooted relations of the lived experience wherein it takes form, and which is the language of life and of action but also that of literature and of poetry— then this logos is an absolutely universal theme, it is the theme of philosophy. Philosophy itself is language, rests on language; but this does not disqualify it from speaking of language, nor from speaking of the pre-language and of the mute world which doubles them: on the contrary, philosophy is an operative language, that language that can be known only from within, through its exercise, is open upon the things, called forth by the voices of silence, and continues an effort of articulation which is the Being of every being.” (VI 125-127, my bracket additions)


43 See The Visible and the Invisible, 170-171 referencing Phenomenology of Perception, 400-409. See also The Visible and the Invisible 175-176.


Merleau-Ponty states the following in “Phenomenology and the Science of Man” with respect to Husserl. “One sees in Husserl the idea of a double envelopment. It is true that reflective thought, which determines the meaning or essence, ends by possessing its object and enveloping it. But it is also true that essential insight always understands the concrete perception of experience as something here and now which precedes and envelops it . . . [The essence] presupposes that an individual has appeared and that one has had a view of it. It also presupposes the Sichtlichkeit, the visibility of this individual. Or to put it in another way, it is no insight into essence if one’s reflection cannot turn to a corresponding individual, if one cannot work out ‘a sense of examples’ to illustrate this insight.” This idea of “double envelopment” is comparable to Merleau-Pontys use of Hegel’s claim that criteria measure experience but that experience also measures the criteria. According to the Lapointe bibliography (see endnote above) “Phenomenology and the Science of Man” was originally delivered as a lecture entitled Les Sciences de l’homme et la phénoménologie (cours de 1951-1952). Les Cours de Sorbonne. Paris: Centre de Documentation Universitaire. It was published in English in Primacy of Perception, see page 68. My bracket addition.

See also Merleau-Ponty, Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language, trans. Hugh Silverman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973). “La Conscience et l’acquisition du language,” Bulletin de psychologie, no. 236, XVIII 3-6 (1964), 226-159. See page 8 where Merleau-Ponty states that phenomenological description puts us in “contact with the facts, helps us understand them in themselves, by reading them, and then interpreting them so as to give them a meaning.” Moreover, he continues, “the criteria for this [phenomenological] method will not be a multiplicity of facts which will serve as proofs for predefined hypothesis. The proof will be in the fidelity to the phenomena, i.e., in the precise hold which we will have of the material used and, to some extent, our proximity to pure description.”

As we have just seen, perceptual meaning itself is indirect, with a somewhat stable foreground always connected to an implied background, to an open-ended horizon. Perception does reveal stable foregrounds and stable structures and even norms but it does not reveal discrete units of positivist meaning. It is language that helps express these meanings more precisely, but even here the words and significations of language are embedded in an open field of perceptual and linguistic significations, in a field of open ended perceptual and linguistic significations in relationships that continually cross into one another, with the perceptual structures and relations remaining the primary term. The silence that he seeks in mute perception is not contrary to language, he says, for language will always be involved in our efforts to bring perceptual meaning more fully to light, i.e., to expression.

Merleau-Ponty “Working Notes” state the following:

“There will therefore be a whole series of layers of wild being. It will be necessary to recommence the Einfühlung [sympathetic understanding], the Cogito several times.----For example, at the level of the human body I will describe a pre-knowing; a pre-meaning, a silent knowing.
--sense of the perceived: ‘size’ before measurement, the physiognomic size of a rectangle, for example
--sense of the other perceived: Einigung [unification] of my perception of one same man by virtue of existentials which are not literally ‘perceived’ and yet operate in perceptions (Wolff)
--sense of ‘perceived life’ (Michotte): what makes an appearance animate itself and become ‘creeping’ etc.
But I will then have to disclose a non-explicated horizon: that of the language I am using to describe all that------And which co-determines its final meaning.” (VI 178, my bracket additions)

See also Phenomenology of Perception. “Every perception takes place in an atmosphere of generality, and is presented to us anonymously. I cannot say ‘I see the blue of the sky’ in the sense in which I say I understood a book, or that I have decided to devote my life to mathematics…Every time I experience a
sensation, I feel that it concerns not my own being, the one for which I am responsible, and for which I make decisions, but another self, which has already sided with the world, which is already open to certain of its aspects, and synchronized with them. Between my sensation and myself there stands always the thickness of some primordial acquisition which prevents my experience from being clear to itself” (PhP, 215–216).

52 Merleau-Ponty, “From Mauss to Levi-Strauss” in Signs, 114-125, see especially 115. My bracket addition.

Chapter 3 Relationship to Husserl’s Philosophy

53 I will focus on Merleau-Ponty’s later works: “On the Phenomenology of Language,” The Prose of the World, both originally composed in 1951, “The Philosopher and His Shadow,” originally published in 1959, and “Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology,” a lecture course delivered 1960. Yet I will also consider his early The Structure of Behavior (La Structure du comportement, 1942) and his great middle work Phenomenology of Perception (Phénoménologie de la perception, 1945), as well as other writings scattered throughout the temporal arc of his career. Merleau-Ponty, throughout his academic career, is sympathetic to Husserl’s more existential tendencies and critical of his tendencies toward idealism and rationalism, especially the tendency to cognitively construct our experience of the world. Yet, it appears that Merleau-Ponty was especially enthusiastic about Husserl’s increased move toward existence in his later thought, which Merleau-Ponty dates as “from Ideen II on,” including “Die Frage nach dem Ursprung der Geometrie als intentionaler-historisches Problem,” in Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie and “Umsturz der koprernikanischen Lehre.” Thus (because of this enthusiasm) the focus in the present manuscript on what Merleau-Ponty regards as Husserl’s later works. Moreover, and even though aware of Husserl’s later manuscripts as early as 1939, it is in Merleau-Ponty’s own later works (especially 1959-1960, but as early as 1951) that he seems increasingly inspired by Husserl’s late turn towards existence, undoubtedly because his own works had been increasingly inclined in this direction as well. For text citations see endnotes 63 and 78 below and the bibliography. For Merleau-Ponty’s enthusiasm regarding Ideen II see the comments by its translators on page xvi: “Merleau-Ponty was a very reserved man, but one of us can remember clearly a conversation with him in which he, with sudden animation, spoke so rapturously of the second Ideas and described his study of it as ‘une experience presque voluptueuse.’” Follow the link below in endnote 63. In addition, in Phenomenology of Perception Merleau-Ponty also cites the following as among Husserl’s late works: Méditations cartésiennes (Paris, Colin, 1931) and the unpublished 6th Méditation cartésienne, edited by Eugen Fink. See Phenomenology of Perception, vii. Mention should also be made of Merleau-Ponty’s Reading of Husserl, eds. Ted Toadvine and Lester Embree (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), especially Dan Zahavi’s “Merleau-Ponty on Husserl: A Reappraisal,” 3-29. Zahavi’s mentions the tendency of Merleau-Ponty scholar’s not to take Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of Husserl very seriously (4-5). My purpose here is not to challenge the accuracy of Zahavi’s claim or to enter a dialog with other attempts to make sense of the relationship between Merleau-Ponty and Husserl. What I offer here is a close reading of what Merleau-Ponty actually says.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology” in *Themes from the Lectures at the College de France 1952-1960*, trans. John O’Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 113-123. This is a brief ten-page summary of Merleau-Ponty’s course offered in 1960. This summary will be cited and referred to in the text as TFL. It was originally published as “Husserl aux limites de la Phénoménologie” in *Résumés de cours, Collège de France 1952-1960* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968). Merleau-Ponty’s actual Course Notes, rather than just the brief summary mentioned immediately above were published as follows: *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, ed. Leonard Lawlor, with Bettina Bergo, Course Notes trans. Leonard Lawlor (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002). The Course Notes will be cited and referred to in the text as Limits.


In personal conversations.


These headings and much of what Merleau-Ponty says about Husserl under them are quite similar to what Merleau-Ponty says about Husserl in his well known Preface in his *Phenomenology of Perception*. In the introductory remarks of the Preface of *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty’s great mid-career work, Merleau-Ponty states, in less developed form, some of what he articulates about Husserl in his later work. Here is (approximately) what he says in the earlier manuscript: phenomenology seeks to grasp essential structures but only as they make contact with existence. Phenomenology suspends our belief in the world but only to better understand it where it rests. It attempts to describe experience as it is lived rather than to understand it simple as a result of contingent events or as it is conceived by abstract thought. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty proceeds, further pointing out (as he did in his later works) the frequent tension in Husserl’s thought. Husserl contrarily seeks both a “genetic phenomenology,” a phenomenology that traces its origins, and a “constitutive phenomenology,” a phenomenology that grasps these origins in a cognitively constructed present (PhP vii-viii). Again, Merleau-Ponty’s general comments here are strikingly similar to his later comments on the later Husserl. Let us proceed, with Merleau-Ponty, to pursue these points in greater detail.

The Preface proceeds to discuss the four “celebrated phenomenological themes” as they have come together in experience.

Phenomenology as description of lived through experience. Phenomenology seeks to describe experience and does so, obviously, from the point of view of the experiencing subject. Yet, Merleau-
Ponty proceeds to inform us, Husserl’s philosophy is different from the idealistic turn to the conceptual conditions that are necessary for the possibility of the experience of the world to occur (as we find in Descartes and Kant). Husserl does not want to construct the world conceptually but to bring what exists to the clearest possible expression. Moreover, idealistic philosophies cannot explain a perceptual world that is meaningful but not yet conceptual, that is meaningful even though it does not fit into a precise conceptual framework. (PhP viii-xi) Here we see the same focus on lived through experience, rather than experience conceptualized, that we find Merleau-Ponty focusing on in Husserl’s latter works.

The phenomenological reduction. Merleau-Ponty proceeds to the phenomenological reduction, which, “for a long time,” was regarded as idealists, for the world was treated as a meaning spread out before a reflecting consciousness, as a meaning that is the same for all because all share the same rational mind. Yet this sort of idealistic philosophy knows nothing of the other person, for, by definition, all minds are the same. Husserl, however, recognizes the problem of the other, and this recognition proceeds from the fact that he sees that the experiencing subject has a body, and thus has an exterior, and can thus be experienced from the outside. Moreover, if this is so, if the subject has an exterior that can be viewed by others, then the subject must be in and among the events of the world. And if this is so, if the subject is in the world and is intimately bound up with it, then the only way to grasp our relationship to the world is to temporarily suspend our involvement with it. We must reflect, and this reflection “steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire; it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus bring them to notice.” In addition, since Husserl becomes increasingly aware that we are part of the events of the world as they unfold in time, he becomes increasingly aware that any attempt to grasp the temporal flow of experience is always a part of this flow. The pre-reflective experience of the world always temporally outruns our reflective attempts to grasp it. Thus, the reduction is not a retreat into a unifying rational consciousness in the moment, but the attempt to grasp the realization of the prior existence of the world, indicating that a complete reduction is not possible. Husserl’s reduction, then, according to Merleau-Ponty, and as he stresses in his later interpretation of the later Husserl, must not be misunderstood as a retreat into a reflecting rational consciousness in the moment, but as an attempt to grasp our relationship to a pre-existent world. (PhP xi-xiv)

Essences. It is well-known that Husserl used a transcendental reduction (the suspension of belief in the world just considered above), but he also employed an eidetic reduction (a grasping of essences) which is necessarily a part of the transcendental reduction. We must cease to identify with our being-in-the-world if we wish to grasp it, not as a simple fact of existence but as meaning. We must attempt to grasp its essence.

Merleau-Ponty briefly takes up the claim, made by the Logical Positivism, that the meaning of words is a product of historical events. While this is certainly true in part, word meanings would be bare if we did not “enjoy direct access to what it designates.” It is certainly true that language helps us separate the abstract meaning of essences from specific events, but it is also true that this separation is only apparent and that the essences would mean nothing if they did not pass through our contact with actual events. “Husserl’s essences are destined to bring back all the living relationships of experience, as the fisherman’s net draws up from the depths of the ocean quivering fish and seaweed.” Thus, the eidetic reduction is intended to bring to light not words but the world before any conceptualization. Or, to restate this in a language more consistent with the later works of both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, words are to bring to light, or to express more clearly, the mute meaning of our perceptual world.

In addition, Merleau-Ponty, referencing agreement with Husserl, takes a stand here with respect to skepticism that is similar to the one articulated in his later works: we would not be concerned with the distinction between reality and our dream states if the distinction was not already present in our experience. What we should do is clarify the distinction as it is given in our experience not seek to find conceptual criteria for the distinction that come to it from the outside. (PhP xiv-xvii)

Intentionality. Here Merleau-Ponty points out that the notion of intentionality, i.e., that consciousness is always directed toward something, is not new, and that Kant had already considered this as a part of its character. If, as Kant already pointed out, and Husserl also realized, the unity of consciousness requires a relationship to a unified world, the difference between Kant and Husserl is that
for Husserl the unity of the world is lived rather than represented conceptually, as it is for Kant. Husserl, that is to say phenomenology, is not trying to grasp the world intellectually, using “a law of the physio-mathematical type,” but is trying to find expressions that capture and bring to light a unique manner of being-in-the-world. When trying to grasp an historical event, for example, we must not look at just the economy, or just at class relationships, or politics, or ideology, but we must look at all these aspects of society simultaneously as they are lived through by its inhabitants. Husserl sought to grasp this total meaning, and not just a conceptual representation of a few indices, and this is what Merleau-Ponty finds in the later Husserl as well, even more so. (PhP xvii-xix)

As Merleau-Ponty says in his concluding remarks of the Preface, for phenomenology “rationality is precisely measured by the experiences in which it is disclosed.” Rationality exists in the bringing to light the patterns and structures of our lived through world, patterns and structures that are perceptual and open, like those of a Cezanne painting or even of a jazz melody. (PhP xix-xxi) These themes Merleau-Ponty advances in his later works.

63 The Ideen II, Husserliana Bd. IV citation is Merleau-Ponty’s, as written. The title for the full series of Husserl’s collected works is Husserliana: Edmund Husserl Gesammelte Werke. The English translation of Ideen II is Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy - Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution, translated by R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer, (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989). Online at: https://archive.org/stream/IdeasPartliHusserlIdeasli#page/n0/mode/1up I will here reproduce Merleau-Ponty’s citations as written. According to the translators of Ideas II (translators’ comments, pp XI-XIII), the first draft of Ideen II was written by Husserl in 1912, went through numerous revisions, was set aside in 1928, was transcribed at the Husserl Archive at Louvain after Husserl’s death in 1938, and was finally published in 1952. Merleau-Ponty was apparently aware of the transcribed manuscript as early as his 1939 visit of the Archive. We know from H. L. Von Breda’s account that Merleau-Ponty visited the Husserl Archive at Louvain in 1939. Van Breda draws our attention to the fact that Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology of Perception (Phénoménologie de la perception, 1945) mentions his visit to the Archive, cites Ideen II on page 92, and also mentions two other Archive texts in his bibliography, Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie II and III, and “Umsturz der kopernikanischen Lehre.” Van Breda mentions that the Krisis texts viewed by Merleau-Ponty were IIIA and IIIB. He also mentions that the “first two parts of the Krisis” had been published in Philosophia in 1936. See H. L. Van Breda, “Merleau-Ponty and the Husserl Archive at Louvain” in Text and Dialogues: Merleau-Ponty, eds. Hugh Silverman and James Barry Jr (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1992), 150, 153. See Ted Toadvine “Merleau-Ponty’s Reading of Husserl: A Chronological Overview” in Merleau-Ponty’s Reading of Husserl, eds. Ted Toadvine and Lester Embree (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 234.

64 Merleau-Ponty quotes Husserl here: “The soul’s reality is based upon corporeal matter, not the latter upon the soul.” Shadow 164, Ideen III, Husserliana. Bd, V, Beilage I, 117.

65 See Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology of Perception, translator’s note, for the definition of ek-stase: “Active transcendence of the subject in relation to the world. The author uses either the French word extase, or Heidegger’s form ek-stase . . .” (PhP 70).

66 Merleau-Ponty adds the following: “Perhaps nowhere better than in these lines can we see the dual direction of Husserl’s reflection, which is both an analytics of essences and an analytics of existences. For it is ‘ideally’ that whatever is given to one subject is as a matter of principle given to all others, but it is the ‘fundamental and original presence’ of sensible being that the obviousness and universality which are conveyed by these relationships of essences come.” Shadow 171

67 See also Merleau-Ponty’s footnote 38, Shadow 177.

69 See also Merleau-Ponty’s following comments: “...between my movements and what I touch, there must exist some relationship by principle, some kindship, according to which they are...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, open finally upon a tangible being of which it is also a part” (VI 133). “...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” (VI 133).


73 M. C. Dillon rightfully argues that the recognition of the other requires both similarity and difference. See M. C. Dillon, “Écart: Reply to Lefort’s ‘Flesh and Otherness,’” in *Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Galen A. Johnson and Michael B. Smith (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990), 16.

74 In the Modernist philosophical tradition, the way out of the isolated ego (other than the Cartesian argument by analogy, i.e., that I project my interior into an objective body that appears analogous to my own) is typically an appeal to the universality of reason, which is thought to be possessed by, or at least open to, all individuals. To say the least, this position has proven to be problematic.


76 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” trans. Carleton Dallery in *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 159-190. “L’Oeil et l’espirit,” dated July-August 1960, first appeared in *Art de France*, no.1, Janvier 1961, 187-208. This was the last essay that Merleau-Ponty published before his untimely death in May of 1961. Regarding *The Visible an Invisible*, Claude Lefort’s editorial note mentions the draft that came to be published under this title was probably composed between March 1959 and November 1960, xxxiv.) The English translation of “Eye and Mind” will be cited in the text as E&M.


78 Edmund Husserl, “Der Ursprung der Geometrie als intentional-historisches Problem,” ed. Eugen Fink, in Edmund Husserl, *Husserliana VI*, Beilage III, pp. 365-86. *Husserliana VI* was published as *Die Krisis*
In fact, Merleau-Ponty says, “language is ‘interwoven’ (Verflochten) with our horizon upon the world and humanity. Language is borne by our relation to the world and to others, yet language in turn supports and creates it.” (TFL 117-118, translation modified).

See also Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of the “tree of my duration” in The Visible and the Invisible, 111, cited above.

Unpublished text by Husserl.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology, editor Leonard Lawlor, with Bettina Bergo, Course Notes trans. Leonard Lawlor, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002); this is a presentation of Merleau-Ponty’s actual Course Notes, rather than just the summary of the notes seen above. The Course Notes will be cited and referred to in the text as Limits.

Leonard Lawlor, the translator of Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology, uses “pointed brackets” to sometimes translate Merleau-Ponty’s use of German terms or to provide an English translation of a German passage from a Husserl text cited by Merleau-Ponty. See Lawler’s comment on page xl.

In most cases, in this section on Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology, I have used the translations of German terms, offered here in square brackets, already provided by Leonard Lawlor.

Merleau-Ponty is undoubtedly here referencing Daniel Defoe’s novel Robinson Crusoe.

The quote in pointed brackets is drawn from Husserl’s “Der Ursprung der Geometrie als intentional-historisches Problem.” See note 24. above). See Lawler’s editorial comment in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology, xliii.

Merleau-Ponty continues: “Dangers of a science which is ganz den logischen Aktivitäten hingegeben (Husserliana VI 376) <‘completely given over to logical activities’>: science allows Sinnverwandlungen (Husserliana VI 376) <‘transformation of sense’> which work to the benefit of logical method, but these transformations are distinct from the Ursprung [origin] (Husserliana VI 376 n. 6). One can inherit propositions and the method in order to construct always logically new idealities without inheriting the capacity to reactivate beginnings Sinnesquellen (Husserliana VI 376) <‘sources of sense’>. Therefore Sinnentleerung [the emptying out of sense] during which one continues the Methodik technischen Verwertung (Husserliana VI 378) <‘methodics of technical application’>” (Limits 61, my bracket addition).

We must say “further” helps (rather than completely makes possible) for, after all, stories, traditional ways of acting and working, and even culture as a whole can be and have been transmitted from one generation to the next by word of mouth.

Again, it is Husserl’s later thought, as expressed in “The Origins of Geometry,” that Merleau-Ponty cites in Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology. It is Husserl’s later thought, as he also expresses it in Ideen II, that seems to resonate with Merleau-Ponty’s own developing later thought.


We have seen above that ek-stace is defined as: “Active transcendence of the subject in relation to the world.” (PhP 70). See also Merleau-Ponty’s following comments: “In all uses of the word sens [meaning, direction, sense, way, manner] we find the same fundamental notion of a being orientated or polarized in the direction of what he is not, and thus we are always brought back to a conception of the subject as ek-stase, and to a relationship of active transcendence between the subject and the world. The world is inseparable from the subject, but from a subject which is nothing but a project of the world, and the subject is inseparable from the world, but from a world which the subject itself projects” (PhP 430, the bracket addition is from a note by the translator). See also Merleau-Ponty’s comment that Laplace’s scientific nebula is a cultural construct and not a thing in itself, and that, moreover, we really do not have access to the thing in itself, apart from our perceptual encounter with it. Re-citing the passage already cited above: “What, in fact, do we mean when we say that there is no world without a being in the world? Not indeed that the world is constituted by consciousness, but on the contrary that consciousness always finds itself already at work in the world. What is true . . . is that there is a nature, which is not that of the sciences, but that which perception presents to me . . .” (PhP 432). Nature is only given to us through our embodied perceptual encounter with it, yet it is also experienced as running beyond this perceptual encounter, both spatially and temporally. The world transcends the immanence of our perception.

Merleau-Ponty states: “In the present and in perception, my being and my consciousness are at one, not that my being is reducible to the knowledge I have of it or that it is clearly set out before me—on the contrary perception is opaque, for it brings into play, beneath what I know, my sensory fields which are my primitive alliance with the world—but because ‘to be conscious’ is here nothing but ‘to-be-at . . .’ (‘etre a . . .’), and because my consciousness of existing merges into the actual gesture of ‘ex-sistence.’ It is by communicating with the world that we communicate beyond all doubt with ourselves. We . . . are present to ourselves because we are present to the world” (PhP 424).

This is similar to Merleau-Ponty’s comment regarding Laplace’s nebula in PhP 432. See above.

Merleau-Ponty continues: “. . . latent intentionality . . . ceases to be a property of consciousness, of its ‘attitudes’ and of its acts, to become intentional life—It becomes the thread that binds, for example, my present to my past in its temporal place, such as it was (and not such as I reconquer it by an act of evocation) . . .” (VI 173).


As already indicated, Merleau-Ponty’s 1952 essay “Indirect Language and Voices of Silence” borrows heavily from The Prose of the World, which he composed sometime in the early 1950’s but left unpublished. The 1952 essay is republished by the author, without changes, in his 1960 anthology Signes. This certainly indicates that he does not abandon the ideas that he was formulating in early 1950’s but rather that they provide a link between his early work, The Structure of Behavior, his great middle work, Phenomenology of Perception, and his late, posthumously published The Visible and the Invisible.

As already indicated above, Merleau-Ponty is quite explicit about identifying Husserl’s more idealistic period with the his earlier Logische Untersuchungen and about identifying Husserl’s more existential period with his later “The Origins of Geometry.” Here is Merleau-Ponty’s characterization of Husserl’s
earlier thought regarding the eidetic analysis of language. “This project assumes that language is one of
the objects supremely constituted by conscious, and that actual languages are very special case of a
possible language which consciousness holds the key to---that they are a system of signs linked to their
meaning by univocal relationships which . . . are susceptible to a total explication.” While Merleau-Ponty
believes that Husserl moves away from this position in his later “The Origin of Geometry,” as we have
seen, he thinks that Husserl still relies too heavily on the total intellectual possession of experience, on a
total coincidence of present thought with past experience, and on the “unconditional general validity” of

99 See Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of phenomenology’s fundierung relationship in Phenomenology of
Perception, 127, 394.

100 Richard Velkley, “Edmund Husserl” in History of Political Philosophy, 3rd edition, Leo Strauss and
Joseph Cropsey editors (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 870-887. Hereafter cited as
HPP.

101 Merleau-Ponty on Husserl: “The philosopher is, he says, ‘working in the service of humanity,’
meaning that the philosopher is professionally bound to the task of defining and clarifying the conditions
which make humanity possible---that is, the participation of all men in a common truth” (PrP 44-45).

102 John O’Neill, “Marcuse, Husserl and the Crisis of the Sciences” in Philosophy of the Social Sciences

103 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Humanism and Terror, An Essay on the Communist Problem, trans. John

104 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Adventures of the Dialectic, trans. Joseph Bien (Evanston; Northwestern
University Press, 1973), 77-78, 204. Originally published as Aventures de la dialectique (Paris:
Gallimard, 1955).

Chapter 4 Criticism of Heidegger: A Brief Note

105 Douglas Low, “Merleau-Ponty’s Criticism of Heidegger,” Philosophy Today, Volume 53, Fall 2009,
273-293.

106 Richard Askay, “Heidegger, the body, and the French philosophers,” Continental Philosophy
the text, respectively, as Askay and Aho.

107 Martin Heidegger, Zollikoner Seminare, Protokolle—Gespräche—Brief Herausgegeben von Medard
Boss (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1987). Referred to as ZS-G. English translation: Zollikon
(Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001). Referred to as ZS-E.

Row, 1962). Referred to as BT. Translators Macquarrie and Robinson comment on Heidegger’s use of
“ontic” and “ontological.” “While the terms ‘ontisch’ (‘ontical’) and ‘ontologisch’ (‘ontological’) are not
explicitly defined, their meanings will emerge rather clearly. Ontological inquiry is concerned primarily
with Being; ontical inquiry is concerned primarily with entities and the facts about them.” (BT 31)

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Phenomenology and the Science of Man,” in *The Primacy of Perception*. Referred to in the text as PSM.

Here we see Merleau-Ponty following a certain thread in Husserl thought. We have seen above that he also critical of other threads.

It can perhaps be said (and, in fact, must be said) that Merleau-Ponty’s *The Visible and the Invisible* develops the integration between the ontic and ontological, between the body and the mind, between the human body and the world more completely than any other author.

**Chapter 5 Merleau-Ponty’s Criticism of Sartre’s Philosophy**


Merleau-Ponty does go on to say that the searchlight metaphor is inadequate for perception because it does not capture the implied context or horizon of perceptual experience. Yet the metaphor is adequate in the sense that it reveals perception’s openness upon a common world.


The transliteration of λέγω is legó, which means “to say” or “to speak” but also to “lay down to sleep,” and “laying an argument to rest,” as in “bringing a message to closure.” See http://biblehub.com/greek/3004.htm Given the context of the cited passage, Merleau-Ponty appears to mean that being is there in the strong sense of something that can settle an argument. There is the evidence of being, even if this evidence is not absolute.


129 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Marxism and Philosophy” in Sense and Nonsense, 128.


131 Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, as cited above, for Sartre’s discussion of “the look” of the other see 252-302, especially 259-283, most especially 280-283, and for his discussion of “being-with” others see 413-430. For a convenient brief version of this “being-with” section see the excerpts of various pages from this section in Phenomenology and Existentialism, ed. Robert Solomon (New York: University Press of America, 1980), 441-447. See also Jean-Paul Sartre, No Exit and three other plays (New York, Random House, 1955), especially 47.
132 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique*, see the section entitled “Need,” 79-83, and “The Fused Group,” 345-404, see especially 354, for a discussion of the dialectic between the *individual* and the *social*.


134 George Rupp, *Beyond Individualism: The Challenge of Inclusive Communities* (Columbia University Press, 2015). Rupp opens Chapter 1, “Passionate Conviction and Inclusive Community” with the following statement: “This chapter offers in summary form of the central claim of this book: modern Western Individualism must engage with rather than simply reject the myriad ways that societies worldwide embrace core convictions grounded in particular communities. Individualism as it has evolved in the West is powerfully attractive. Yet it unavoidably encounters concerted opposition from the deeply rooted patterns that it disrupts and in effect would overturn.” 11.


136 Some passages from my “Merleau-Ponty’s Corpus: A Philosophy and Politics for the 21st Century” in *Journal of Philosophical Research*, Volume 34, 2009 have been used here, although usually re-written.


139 David Schweickart has made an admirable attempt to provide updated economic (as well as social/political) analyses from the point of view of the political left. See, for example, his *After Capitalism*, 2nd edition (Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011).

**Chapter 6 Merleau-Ponty, Modernism, Structure, and Postmodernism**


M.C. Dillon, “Merleau-Ponty and Postmodernity” in *Merleau-Ponty Vivant*, xxv.


See also Jacques Derrida, *Ousia and Gramme: Note on a note from Being and Time*, also in *Margins of Philosophy*, 66)


See Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s “Eye and Mind,” where Merleau-Ponty discusses open, non-geometrical perception that is nevertheless stable and meaningful, translated Carleton Dallery in The Primacy of Perception, ed. James Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 159-190. Revised translation by Michael Smith in The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader (1993), ed. Galen Johnson (Evanston, Ill., Northwestern University Press, 1993), 121-149. We might also add here the “tripper” who experiences a fractured perceptual world while under the influence of the powerful drug LSD reports nothing of this sort during “normal” perception. Moreover, the principles of Gestalt perception have been so widely confirmed that they have practically reached the status of “laws.” Obviously, within the context of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, these laws are not to be regarded as unchanging formal essences or logical principles. They state perceptual regularities not fixed formulas.

See Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s chapter entitled “Freedom,” in Phenomenology of Perception.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

WORKS BY MERLEAU-PONTY

Chronology of significant Merleau-Ponty texts, with citation abbreviations.


GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Douglas Low earned a PhD in philosophy from the American University in Washington, D.C. and a MLS from Kent State University in Ohio. He served as a philosophy faculty at Urbana University of Ohio, where he taught for many years. He left Urbana University as a full professor in philosophy in order to pursue his interest in computers and computer research. He recently retired as a reference librarian and library faculty from the University of West Florida. As a library faculty emeritus, he remains active at the University of West Florida in both the library and a number of reading groups. He continues to read and write in the area of philosophy and maintains a website at https://www.douglaslow.net/