unconscious of the writer conceals in it. It may be supposed that the mimetic process that expresses itself in this way in the activity of the writer was, in the very distant times in which script originated, of utmost importance for writing. Script has thus become, like language, an archive of nonsensuous similarities, of nonsensuous correspondences.

This aspect of language as script, however, does not develop in isolation from its other, semiotic aspect. Rather, the mimetic element in language can, like a flame, manifest itself only through a kind of bearer. This bearer is the semiotic element. Thus the coherence of words or sentences is the bearer through which, like a flash, similarity appears. For its production by man—like its perception by him—is in many cases, and particularly the most important, limited to flashes. It flits past. It is not improbable that the rapidity of writing and reading heightens the fusion of the semiotic and the mimetic in the sphere of language.

"To read what was never written." Such reading is the most ancient: reading before all languages, from the entrails, the stars, or dances. Later the mediating link of a new kind of reading, of runes and hieroglyphs, came into use. It seems fair to suppose that these were the stages by which the mimetic gift, which was once the foundation of occult practices, gained admittance to writing and language. In this way language may be seen as the highest level of mimetic behavior and the most complete archive of nonsensuous similarity: a medium into which the earlier powers of mimetic production and comprehension have passed without residue, to the point where they have liquidated those of magic.

FROM *THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF PERCEPTION*

MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY

What is phenomenology? It may seem strange that this question has still to be asked half a century after the first works of Husserl. The fact remains that it has by no means been answered. Phenomenology is the study of essences; and according to it, all problems amount to finding definitions of essences: the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness, for example. But phenomenology is also a philosophy which puts essences back into existence, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than that of their "facticity." It is a transcendental philosophy which places in abeyance the assertions arising out of the natural attitude, the better to understand them; but it is also a philosophy for which the world is always "already there" before reflection begins—as an inalienable presence; and all its efforts are concentrated upon re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world, and endowing that contact with a philosophical status. It is the search for a philosophy which shall be a "rigorous science," but it also offers an account of space, time and the world as we live them. It tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is, without taking account of its psychological origin and the causal explanations which the scientist, the historian or the sociologist may be able to provide. Yet Husserl in his last works mentions a "genetic phenomenology," and even a "constructive phenomenology." One may try to do away with these contradictions by making a distinction between Husserl's and Heidegger's phenomenologies; yet the whole of *Sein und Zeit* springs from an indication given by Husserl and amounts to no more than an explicit account of the "naturlicher Weltbegriff" or the "Lebenswelt" which Husserl, towards the end of his life, identified as the central theme of phenomenology, with the result that the contradiction reappears in Husserl's own philosophy. The reader pressed for time will be inclined to give up the idea of covering a doctrine which says everything, and will wonder whether a philosophy which cannot define its scope deserves all the discussion which has gone on around it, and whether he is not faced rather by a myth or a fashion.

Even if this were the case, there would still be a need to understand the prestige of the myth and the origin of the fashion, and the opinion of the responsible philosopher must be that *phenomenology can be practiced and identified as a manner or style of thinking, that it existed as a movement before arriving at complete awareness of itself as a philosophy*. It has been long on the way, and its adherents have discovered it in every quarter, certainly in Hegel and Kierkegaard, but equally in Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. A purely linguistic examination of the texts in question would yield no proof; we find in texts only what we put into them, and if ever any kind of history has suggested the interpretations which should be put on it, it is the history of philosophy. We shall find in ourselves, and nowhere else, the unity and true meaning of phenomenology. It is less a question of counting up quotations than of determining and expressing in concrete form this *phenomenology for ourselves* which has given a number of present-day readers the impression, on reading Husserl or Heidegger, not so much of encountering a new philosophy as of recognizing what they had been waiting for. Phenomenology is accessible only through a phenomenological method. Let us, therefore, try systematically to bring together the celebrated phenomenological themes as they have grown spontaneously together in life. Perhaps we shall then understand why phenomenology has for so long remained, at an initial stage, as a problem to be solved and a hope to be realized.

It is a matter of describing, not of explaining or analyzing. Husserl's first directive to phenomenology, in its early stages, to be a "descriptive psychology," or to return to the "things themselves," is from the start a foreswearing of science. I am not the outcome or the meeting-point of numerous causal agencies which determine my bodily or psychological make-up. I cannot conceive myself as nothing but a bit of the world, a mere object of biological, psychological or sociological investigation. I cannot shut myself up within the realm of science. All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless. The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced, and if we want to subject science itself to rigorous scrutiny and arrive at a precise assessment of its meaning and scope, we must begin by reawakening the basic experience of the world of which science is the second-order expression. Science has not and never will have, by its nature, the same significance *qua* form of being as the world which we perceive, for the simple reason that it is a rationale or explanation of that world. I am not a living creature nor even a "man," nor again even "a consciousness" endowed with all the characteristics

which zoology, social anatomy or inductive psychology recognize in these various products of the natural or historical process—I am the absolute source, my existence does not stem from my antecedents, from my physical and social environment; instead it moves out towards them and sustains them, for I alone bring into being for myself (and therefore into being in the only sense that the word can have for me) the tradition which I elect to carry on, or the horizon whose distance from me would be abolished—since that distance is not one of its properties—if I were not there to scan it with my gaze. Scientific points of view, according to which my existence is a moment of the world's, are always both naive and at the same time dishonest, because they take for granted, without explicitly mentioning it, the other point of view, namely, that of consciousness, through which from the outset a world forms itself round me and begins to exist for me. To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always *speaks*, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learned beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is.

This move is absolutely distinct from the idealist return to consciousness, and the demand for a pure description excludes equally the procedure of analytical reflection on the one hand, and that of scientific explanation on the other. Descartes and particularly Kant *detached* the subject, or consciousness, by showing that I could not possibly apprehend anything as existing unless I first of all experienced myself as existing in the act of apprehending it. They presented consciousness, the absolute certainty of my existence for myself, as the condition of there being anything at all; and the act of relating as the basis of relatedness. It is true that the act of relating is nothing if divorced from the spectacle of the world in which relations are found; the unity of consciousness in Kant is achieved simultaneously with that of the world. And in Descartes methodical doubt does not deprive us of anything, since the whole world, at least in so far as we experience it, is reinstated in the *Cogito*, enjoying equal certainty, and simply labelled "thought of. . . ." But the relations between subject and world are not strictly bilateral: if they were, the certainty of the world would, in Descartes, be immediately given with that of the *Cogito*, and Kant would not have talked about his "Copernican revolution." Analytical reflection starts from our experience of the world and goes back to the subject as to a condition of possibility distinct from that experience revealing the all-embracing synthesis as that without which there would be no world. To this extent it ceases to remain part of our experience and offers, in place of an account, a reconstruction. It is understandable, in view of this, that Husserl,

having accused Kant of adopting a "faculty psychologism," should have urged, in place of a noetic analysis which bases the world on the synthesizing activity of the subject, his own "*noematic reflection*" which remains within the object and, instead of begetting it, brings to light its fundamental unity.

The world is there before any possible analysis of mine, and it would be artificial to make it the outcome of a series of syntheses which link, in the first place sensations, then aspects of the object corresponding to different perspectives, when both are nothing but products of analysis, with no sort of prior reality. Analytical reflection believes that it can trace back the course followed by a prior constituting act and arrive, in the "inner man"—to use Saint Augustine's expression—at a constituting power which has always been identical with that inner self. Thus reflection is carried off by itself and installs itself in an impregnable subjectivity, as yet untouched by being and time. But this is very ingenuous, or at least it is an incomplete form of reflection which loses sight of its own beginning. When I begin to reflect my reflection bears upon an unreflective experience; moreover my reflection cannot be unaware of itself as an event, and so it appears to itself in the light of a truly creative act, of a changed structure of consciousness, and yet it has to recognize, as having priority over its own operations, the world which is given to the subject because the subject is given to himself. The real has to be described, not constructed or formed. Which means that I cannot put perception into the same category as the syntheses represented by judgments, acts or predications. My field of perception is constantly filled with a play of colors, noises and fleeting tactile sensations which I cannot relate precisely to the context of my clearly perceived world, yet which I nevertheless immediately "place" in the world, without ever confusing them with my daydreams. Equally constantly I weave dreams round things. I imagine people and things whose presence is not incompatible with the context, yet who are not in fact involved in it: they are ahead of reality, in the realm of the imaginary. If the reality of my perception were based solely on the intrinsic coherence of "representations," it ought to be forever hesitant and, being wrapped up in my conjectures on probabilities, I ought to be ceaselessly taking apart misleading syntheses, and reinstating in reality stray phenomena which I had excluded in the first place. But this does not happen. The real is a closely woven fabric. It does not await our judgment before incorporating the most surprising phenomena, or before rejecting the most plausible figments of our imagination. Perception is not a science of the world, it is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of a position; it is the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them. The world is not an object such that I have in my possession the law of its making; it

is the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and all my explicit perceptions. Truth does not "inhabit" only "the inner man," or more accurately, there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself. When I return to myself from an excursion into the realm of dogmatic common sense or of science, I find, not a source of intrinsic truth, but a subject destined to the world.

Probably the chief gain from phenomenology is to have united extreme subjectivism and extreme objectivism in its notion of the world or of rationality. Rationality is precisely proportioned to the experiences in which it is disclosed. To say that there exists rationality is to say that perspectives blend, perceptions confirm each other, a meaning emerges. But it should not be set in a realm apart, transposed into absolute Spirit, or into a world in the realist sense. The phenomenological world is not pure being, but the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people's intersect and engage each other like gears. It is thus inseparable from subjectivity and intersubjectivity, which find their unity when I either take up my past experiences in those of the present, or other people's in my own. For the first time the philosopher's thinking is sufficiently conscious not to anticipate itself and endow its own results with reified form in the world. The philosopher tries to conceive the world, others and himself and their interrelations. But the meditating Ego, the "impartial spectator" [*uninteressierter Zuschauer*] do not rediscover an already given rationality, they "establish themselves," and establish it, by an act of initiative which has no guarantee in being, its justification resting entirely on the effective power which it confers on us of taking our own history upon ourselves.

The phenomenological world is not the bringing to explicit expression of a pre-existing being, but the laying down of being. Philosophy is not the reflection of a pre-existing truth, but, like art, the act of bringing truth into being. One may well ask how this creation is *possible*, and if it does not recapture in things a pre-existing Reason. The answer is that the only pre-existent Logos is the world itself, and that the philosophy which brings it into visible existence does not begin by being *possible*, it is actual or real like the world of which it is a part, and no explanatory hypothesis is clearer than the act whereby we take up this unfinished world in an effort to complete and conceive it. Rationality is not a *problem*. There is behind it no unknown quantity which has to be determined by deduction, or, beginning with it, demonstrated inductively. We witness every minute the miracle of related experiences, and yet nobody knows better than we do how this miracle is worked, for we are ourselves this network of relationships. The world and reason are not problematical. We may say, if we

wish, that they are mysterious, but their mystery defines them: there can be no question of dispelling it by some "solution," it is on the hither side of all solutions. True philosophy consists in re-learning to look at the world, and in this sense a historical account can give meaning to the world quite as "deeply" as a philosophical treatise. We take our fate in our hands, we become responsible for our history through reflection, but equally by a decision on which we stake our life, and in both cases what is involved is a violent act which is validated by being performed.

Phenomenology, as a disclosure of the world, rests on itself, or rather provides its own foundation. All cognitions are sustained by a "ground" of postulates and finally by our communication with the world as primary embodiment of rationality. Philosophy, as radical reflection, dispenses in principle with this resource. As, however, it too is in history, it too exploits the world and constituted reason. It must therefore put to itself the question which it puts to all branches of knowledge, and so duplicate itself infinitely, being, as Husserl says, a dialogue or infinite meditation, and, in so far as it remains faithful to its intention, never knowing where it is going. The unfinished nature of phenomenology and the inchoative atmosphere which has surrounded it are not to be taken as a sign of failure, they were inevitable because phenomenology's task was to reveal the mystery of the world and of reason. If phenomenology was a movement before becoming a doctrine or a philosophical system, this was attributable neither to accident, nor to fraudulent intent. It is as painstaking as the works of Balzac, Proust, Valery or Cézanne—by reason of the same kind of attentiveness and wonder, the same demand for awareness, the same will to seize the meaning of the world or of history as that meaning comes into being. In this way it merges into the general effort of modern thought . . .

THE PHENOMENAL FIELD

It will now be seen in what direction the following chapters will carry their inquiry. "Sense experience" has become once more a question for us. Empiricism had emptied it of all mystery by bringing it down to the possession of a quality. This had been possible only at the price of moving far from the ordinary acceptation of the word. Between sense experience and knowing, common experience establishes a difference which is not that between the quality and the concept. This rich notion of sense experience is still to be found in Romantic usage, for example, in Herder. It points to an experience in which we are given not "dead" qualities, but active ones. A wooden wheel placed on the ground is not, *for sight*, the same thing as a wheel bearing a load. A body at rest because no force is being exerted upon it is again for sight not the same thing as a body in which opposing forces are in equilibrium. The light of a candle changes its appearance for a child when, after a burn, it stops attracting the child's hand and becomes literally repulsive. Vision is already inhabited by a meaning (*sens*) which gives it a function in the spectacle of the world and in our existence. The pure *quale* would be given to us only if the world were a spectacle and one's own body a mechanism with which some impartial mind made itself acquainted. Sense experience, on the other hand, invests the quality with vital value, grasping it first in its meaning for us, for that heavy mass which is our body, whence it comes about that it always involves a reference to the body. The problem is to understand these strange relationships which are woven between the parts of the landscape, or between it and me as incarnate subject, and through which an object perceived can concentrate in itself a whole scene or become the *imago* of a whole segment of life. Sense experience is that vital communication with the world which makes it present as a familiar setting of our life. It is to it that the perceived object and the perceiving subject owe their thickness. It is the intentional tissue which the effort to know will try to take apart. With the problem of sense experience, we rediscover that of association and passivity. They have ceased to be problematical because the classical philosophies put themselves either below or above them, giving them everything or nothing: sometimes association was understood as a mere *de facto* co-existence, sometimes derived from an intellectual construction; sometimes, passivity was imported from things into the mind, and sometimes analytical reflection would find in it an activity of understanding. Whereas these notions take on their full meaning if sense experience is distinguished from quality: then association or rather "affinity," in the Kantian sense, is the central phenomenon of perceptual life, since it is the constitution, without any ideal model, of a significant grouping. The distinction between the perceptual life and the concept, between passivity and spontaneity is no longer abolished by analytical reflection, since we are no longer forced by the atomism of sensation to look to some connecting activity for our principle of all co-ordination. Finally, after sense experience, understanding also needs to be redefined, since the general connective function ultimately attributed to it by Kantianism is now spread over the whole intentional life and no longer suffices to distinguish it. We shall try to bring out in relation to perception, both the instinctive substructure and the superstructures erected upon it by the exercise of intelligence. As Cassirer puts it, by mutilating perception from above, empiricism mutilated it from below too: the impression is as devoid of instinctive

and affective meaning as of ideal significance. One might add that mutilating perception from below, treating it immediately as knowledge and forgetting its existential content, amounts to mutilating it from above, since it involves taking for granted and passing over in silence the decisive moment in perception: the upsurge of a *true* and *exact* world. Reflection will be sure of having precisely located the center of the phenomenon if it is equally capable of bringing to light its vital inherence and its rational intention.

So, "sensation" and "judgment" have together lost their apparent clearness: we have observed that they were clear only as long as the prejudice in favor of the world was maintained. As soon as one tried by means of them, to picture consciousness in the process of perceiving, to revive the forgotten perceptual experience, and to relate them to it, they were found to be inconceivable. By dint of making these difficulties more explicit, we were drawn implicitly into a new kind of analysis, into a new dimension in which they were destined to disappear. The criticism of the constancy hypothesis and more generally the reduction of the idea of "the world" opened up a *phenomenal field* which now has to be more accurately circumscribed, and suggested the rediscovery of a direct experience which must be, at least provisionally, assigned its place in relation to scientific knowledge, and to psychological and philosophical reflection.

Science and philosophy have for centuries been sustained by unquestioning faith in perception. Perception opens a window on to things. This means that it is directed, quasi-teleologically, towards a *truth in itself* in which the reason underlying all appearances is to be found. The tacit thesis of perception is that at every instant experience can be coordinated with that of the previous instant and that of the following, and my perspective with that of other consciousnesses—that all contradictions can be removed, that monadic and intersubjective experience is one unbroken text—that what is now indeterminate for me could become determinate for a more complete knowledge, which is as it were realized in advance in the thing, or rather which is the thing itself. Science has first been merely the sequel or amplification of the process which constitutes perceived things. Just as the thing is the invariant of all sensory fields and of all individual perceptual fields, so the scientific concept is the means of fixing and objectifying phenomena. Science defined a theoretical state of bodies not subject to the action of any force, and *ipso facto* defined force, reconstituting with the aid of these ideal components the processes actually observed. It established statistically the chemical properties of pure bodies, deducing from these those of empirical bodies, and seeming thus to hold the plan of creation or in any case to have found a reason immanent in

the world. The notion of geometrical space, indifferent to its contents, that of pure movement which does not by itself affect the properties of the object, provided phenomena with a setting of inert existence in which each event could be related to physical conditions responsible for the changes occurring, and therefore contributed to this freezing of being which appeared to be the task of physics. In thus developing the concept of the thing, scientific knowledge was not aware that it was working on a presupposition. Precisely because perception, in its vital implications and prior to any theoretical thought, is presented as perception of a being, it was not considered necessary for reflection to undertake a genealogy of being, and it was therefore confined to seeking the conditions which make being possible. Even if one took account of the transformations of determinant consciousness, even if it were conceded that the constitution of the object is never completed, there was nothing to add to what science said of it; the natural object remained an ideal unity for us and, in the famous words of Lachelier, a network of general properties. It was no use denying any ontological value to the principles of science and leaving them with only a methodical value, for this reservation made no essential change as far as philosophy was concerned, since the sole conceivable being remained defined by scientific method. The living body, under these circumstances, could not escape the determinations which alone made the object into an object and without which it would have had no place in the system of experience. The value predicates which the reflecting judgement confers upon it had to be sustained, in being, by a foundation of physico-chemical properties. In ordinary experience we find a fittingness and a meaningful relationship between the gesture, the smile and the tone of a speaker. But this reciprocal relationship of expression which presents the human body as the outward manifestation of a certain manner of being-in-the-world, had, for mechanistic physiology, to be resolved into a series of causal relations.

It was necessary to link to centripetal conditions the centrifugal phenomenon of expression, reduce to third person processes that particular way of dealing with the world which we know as behavior, bring experience down to the level of physical nature and convert the living body into an interiorless thing. The emotional and practical attitudes of the living subject in relation to the world were, then, incorporated into a psycho-physiological mechanism. Every evaluation had to be the outcome of a transfer whereby complex situations became capable of awakening elementary impressions of pleasure and pain, impressions bound up, in turn, with nervous processes. The impelling intentions of the living creature were converted into objective movements: to the will only an instantaneous fiat was allowed, the execution of the act being

entirely given over to a nervous mechanism. Sense experience, thus detached from the affective and motor functions, became the mere reception of a quality, and physiologists thought they could follow, from the point of reception to the nervous centers, the projection of the external world in the living body. The latter, thus transformed, ceased to be my body, the visible expression of a concrete Ego, and became one object among all others. Conversely, the body of another person could not appear to me as encasing another Ego. It was merely a machine, and the perception of the other could not really be *of the other*, since it resulted from an inference and therefore placed behind the automaton no more than a consciousness in general, a transcendent cause and not an inhabitant of his movements. So we no longer had a grouping of factors constituting the self co-existing in a world. The whole concrete content of "psychic states" resulting, according to the laws of psychophysiology and psychology, from a universal determinism, was integrated into the *in-itself*. There was no longer any real *for-itself* other than the thought of the scientist which perceives the system and which alone ceases to occupy any place in it. Thus, while the living body became an exterior without interior, subjectivity became an interior without exterior, an impartial spectator. The naturalism of science and the spiritualism of the universal constituting subject, to which reflection on science led, had this in common, that they leveled out experience: in face of the constituting I, the empirical selves are objects. The empirical Self is a hybrid notion, a mixture of in-itself and for-itself, to which reflective philosophy could give no status. In so far as it has a concrete content it is inserted in the system of experience and is therefore not a subject; in so far as it *is* a subject, it is empty and resolves itself into the transcendental subject. The ideality of the object, the objectification of the living body, the placing of spirit in an axiological dimension having no common measure with nature, such is the transparent philosophy arrived at by pushing further along the route of knowledge opened up by perception. It could be held that perception is an incipient science, science a methodical and complete perception, since science was merely following uncritically the ideal of knowledge set up by the perceived thing.

Now this philosophy is collapsing before our eyes. The natural object was the first to disappear and physics has itself recognized the limits of its categories by demanding a recasting and blending of the pure concepts which it had adopted. For its part the organism presents physico-chemical analysis not with the practical difficulties of a complex object, but with the theoretical difficulty of a meaningful being. In more general terms the idea of a universe of thought or a universe of values, in which all thinking lives come into contact and are

reconciled, is called into question. Nature is *not* in itself geometrical, and it appears so only to a careful observer who contents himself with macrocosmic data. Human society is *not* a community of reasonable minds, and only in fortunate countries where a biological and economic balance has locally and temporarily been struck has such a conception of it been possible. The experience of Chaos, both on the speculative and the other level, prompts us to see rationalism in a historical perspective which it set itself on principle to avoid, to seek a philosophy which explains the upsurge of reason in a world not of its making and to prepare the substructure of living experience without which reason and liberty are emptied of their content and wither away. We shall no longer hold that perception is incipient science, but conversely that classical science is a form of perception which loses sight of its origins and believes itself complete. The first philosophical act would appear to be to return to the world of actual experience which is prior to the objective world, since it is in it that we shall be able to grasp the theoretical basis no less than the limits of that objective world, restore to things their concrete physiognomy, to organisms their individual ways of dealing with the world, and to subjectivity its inherence in history. Our task will be, moreover, to rediscover phenomena, the layer of living experience through which other people and things are first given to us, the system "Self-others-things" as it comes into being to reawaken perception and foil its trick of allowing us to forget it as a fact and as perception in the interest of the object which it presents to us and of the rational tradition to which it gives rise.

This phenomenal field is not an "inner world," the "phenomenon" is not a "state of consciousness," or a "mental fact," and the experience of phenomena is not an act of introspection or an intuition, in Bergson's sense. It has long been the practice to define the object of psychology by saying that it was "without extension" and "accessible to one person only," with the result that this peculiar object could be grasped only by means of a special kind of act, "internal perception" or introspection, in which subject and object were mingled and knowledge achieved by an act of coinciding. The return to the "immediate data of consciousness" became therefore a hopeless enterprise since the philosophical scrutiny was trying to *be* what it could not, in principle, *see*. The difficulty was not only to destroy the prejudice of the exterior, as nil philosophies urge the beginner to do, or to describe the mind in a language made for representing things. It was much more fundamental, since interiority, defined by the impression, by its nature evaded every attempt to express it. It was not only the imparting of philosophical intuitions to others which became difficult—or rather reduced itself to a sort of incantation de-

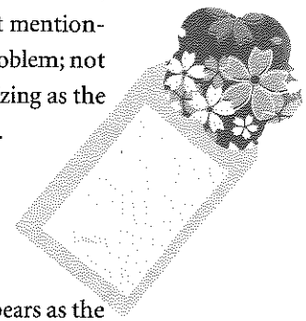
signed to induce in them experiences comparable to the philosopher's—but the philosopher himself could not be clearly aware of *what* he saw in the instant, since he would have had to think it, that is, fix and distort it. The immediate was therefore a lonely, blind and mute life. The return to the phenomenal presents none of these peculiarities. The sensible configuration of an object or a gesture, which the criticism of the constancy hypothesis brings before our eyes, is not grasped in some inexpressible coincidence, it "is understood" through a sort of act of appropriation which we all experience when we say that we have "found" the rabbit in the foliage of a puzzle, or that we have "caught" a slight gesture. Once the prejudice of sensation has been banished, a face, a signature, a form of behavior cease to be mere "visual data" whose psychological meaning is to be sought in our inner experience, and the mental life of others becomes an immediate object, a whole charged with immanent meaning. More generally it is the very notion of the immediate which is transformed: henceforth the immediate is no longer the impression, the object which is one with the subject, but the meaning, the structure, the spontaneous arrangement of parts. My own "mental life" is given to me in precisely the same way, since the criticism of the constancy hypothesis teaches me to recognize the articulation and melodic unity of my behavior as original data of inner experience, and since introspection, when brought down to its positive content, consists equally in making the immanent meaning of any behavior explicit. Thus what we discover by going beyond the prejudice of the objective world is not an occult inner world. . . .

Psychological reflection, once begun, then, outruns itself through its own momentum. Having recognized the originality of phenomena in relation to the objective world, since it is through them that the objective world is known to us, it is led to integrate with them every possible object and to try to find out how that object is constituted through them. At the same time the phenomenal field becomes a transcendental field. Since it is now the universal focus of knowledge, consciousness definitely ceases to be a particular region of being, a certain collection of "mental" contents; it no longer resides or is no longer confined within the domain of "forms" which psychological reflection had first recognized, but the forms, like all things, exist for it. It can no longer be a question of describing the world of living experience which it carries within itself like some opaque datum, it has to be constituted. The process of making explicit, which had laid bare the "lived-through" world which is prior to the objective one, is put into operation upon the "lived-through" world itself, thus revealing, prior to the phenomenal field, the transcendental field. The system "Self-others-world" is in its turn taken as an object of analysis and it is now a

matter of awakening the thoughts which constitute other people, myself as individual subject, and the world as a pole of my perception. This new "reduction" would then recognize only one true subject, the thinking Ego. This move from *naturata* to *naturans*, from constituted to constituting, would complete the thematizing begun by psychology and would leave nothing implicit or tacitly accepted in my knowledge. It would enable me to take complete possession of my experience, thus equating thinking and thought. Such is the ordinary perspective of a transcendental philosophy, and also, to all appearances at least, the program of a transcendental phenomenology. Now the phenomenal field as we have revealed it in this chapter, places a fundamental difficulty in the way of any attempt to make experience directly and totally explicit. It is true that psychologism has been left behind, that the meaning and structure of the percept are for us no longer the mere outcome of psycho-physiological events, that rationality is no longer a fortunate accident bringing together dispersed sensations, and that the Gestalt is recognized as primary. But although the Gestalt may be expressible in terms of some internal law, this law must not be considered as a model on which the phenomena of structure are built up. Their appearance is not the external unfolding of a pre-existing reason. It is not *because* the "form" produces a certain state of equilibrium, solving a problem of maximum coherence and, in the Kantian sense, making a world possible, that it enjoys a privileged place in our perception; it is the very appearance of the world and not the condition of its possibility; it is the birth of a norm and is not realized according to a norm; it is the identity of the external and the internal and not the projection of the internal in the external. Although, then, it is not the outcome of some circulation of mental states in themselves, neither is it an idea. The Gestalt of a circle is not its mathematical law but its physiognomy. The recognition of phenomena as an original order is a condemnation of empiricism as an *explanation* of order and reason in terms of a coming together of facts and of natural accidents, but it leaves reason and order themselves with the character of facticity. If a universal constituting consciousness were possible, the opacity of the fact would disappear. If then we want reflection to maintain, in the object on which it bears, its descriptive characteristics, and thoroughly to understand that object, we must not consider it as a mere return to a universal reason and see it as anticipated in unreflective experience, we must regard it as a creative operation which itself participates in the facticity of that experience. That is why phenomenology, alone of all philosophies, talks about a transcendental *field*. This word indicates that reflection never holds, arrayed and objectified before its gaze, the whole world and the plurality of monads, and that its view is never other than partial and of limited power. It is

also why phenomenology is phenomenology, that is, a study of the *advent* of being to consciousness, instead of presuming its possibility as given in advance. It is striking how transcendental philosophies of the classical type never question the possibility of effecting the complete disclosure which they always assume *done somewhere*. It is enough for them that it should be necessary, and in this way they judge what is by what ought to be, by what the idea of knowledge requires. In fact, the thinking Ego can never abolish its inherence in an individual subject, which knows all things in a particular perspective. Reflection can never make me stop seeing the sun two hundred yards away on a misty day, or seeing it "rise" and "set," or thinking with the cultural apparatus with which my education, my previous efforts, my personal history, have provided me. I never actually collect together, or call up simultaneously, all the primary thoughts which contribute to my perception or to my present conviction. A critical philosophy attaches in the last analysis no importance to this resistance offered by passivity, as if it were not necessary to become the transcendental subject in order to have the right to affirm it. It tacitly assumes, consequently, that the philosopher's thinking is not conditioned by any situation. Starting from the spectacle of the world, which is that of a nature open to a plurality of thinking subjects, it looks for the conditions which make possible this unique world presented to a number of empirical selves, and finds it in a transcendental ego in which they participate without dividing it up, because it is not a Being, but a Unity or a Value. This is why the problem of the knowledge of other people is never posed in Kantian philosophy: the transcendental ego which it discusses is just as much other people's as mine, analysis is from the start located outside me, and has nothing to do but to determine the general conditions which make possible a world for an ego—myself or others equally—and so it never comes up against the question: *who is thinking*? If on the other hand contemporary philosophy takes this as its main theme, and if other people become a problem for it, it is because it is trying to achieve a more radical self-discovery. Reflection cannot be thorough-going, or bring a complete elucidation of its object, if it does not arrive at awareness of itself as well as of its results. We must not only adopt a reflective attitude, in an impregnable *Cogito*, but furthermore reflect on this reflection, understand the natural situation which it is conscious of succeeding and which is therefore part of its definition; not merely practice philosophy, but realize the transformation which it brings with it in the spectacle of the world and in our existence. Only on this condition can philosophical knowledge become absolute knowledge, and cease to be a speciality or a technique. So there will be no assertion of an absolute Unity, all the less doubtful for not having had to "come into Being."

The core of philosophy is no longer an autonomous transcendental subjectivity, to be found everywhere and nowhere: it lies in the perpetual beginning of reflection, at the point where an individual life begins to reflect on itself. Reflection is truly reflection only if it is not carried outside itself, only if it knows itself as reflection-on-an-unreflective-experience, and consequently as a change in structure of our existence. We earlier attacked Bergsonian intuitionism and introspection for seeking to know by coinciding. But at the opposite extremity of philosophy, in the notion of a universal constituting consciousness, we encounter an exactly corresponding mistake. Bergson's mistake consists in believing that the thinking subject can become fused with the object thought about, and that knowledge can swell and be incorporated into being. The mistake of reflective philosophies is to believe that the thinking subject can absorb into its thinking or appropriate without remainder the object of its thought, that our being can be brought down to our knowledge. As thinking subject we are never the unreflective subject that we seek to know; but neither can we become wholly consciousness, or make ourselves into the transcendental consciousness. If we were consciousness, we would have to have before us the world, our history and perceived objects in their uniqueness as systems of transparent relationships. Now even when we are not dealing with psychology, when we try to comprehend, in direct reflection and without the help of the varied associations of inductive thought, what a perceived movement, or a circle, are, we can elucidate this singular fact only by varying it somewhat through the agency of imagination, and then fastening our thought upon the invariable element of this mental experience. We can get through to the individual only by the hybrid procedure of finding an *example*, that is, by stripping it of its facticity. Thus it is questionable whether thought can ever quite cease to be inductive, and whether it can assimilate any experience to the point of taking up and appropriating its whole texture. A philosophy becomes transcendental, or radical, not by taking its place in absolute consciousness without mentioning the ways by which this is reached, but by considering itself as a problem; not by postulating a knowledge rendered totally explicit, but by recognizing as the fundamental philosophic problem *this presumption* on reason's part.



EXPERIENCE AND OBJECTIVE THOUGHT: THE PROBLEM OF THE BODY

Our perception ends in objects, and the object once constituted, appears as the reason for all the experiences of it which we have had or could have. For example, I see the next-door house from a certain angle, but it would be seen

differently from the right bank of the Seine, or from the inside, or again from an aeroplane: the house *itself* is none of these appearances: it is, as Leibniz said, the geometrized projection of these perspectives and of all possible perspectives, that is, the perspectiveless position from which all can be derived, the house seen from nowhere. But what do these words mean? Is not to see always to see from somewhere? To say that the house itself is seen from nowhere is surely to say that it is invisible! Yet when I say that I see the house with my own eyes, I am saying something that cannot be challenged; I do not mean that my retina and crystalline lens, my eyes as material organs, go into action and cause me to see it; with only myself to consult, I can know nothing about this. I am trying to express in this way a certain manner of approaching the object, the "gaze" in short, which is as indubitable as my own thought, as directly known by me. We must try to understand how vision can be brought into being from somewhere without being enclosed in its perspective. . . .

Taken in itself—and as an object it demands to be taken thus—the object has nothing cryptic about it; it is completely displayed and its parts co-exist while our gaze runs from one to another, its present does not cancel its past, nor will its future cancel its present. The positing of the objects therefore makes us go beyond the limits of our actual experience which is brought up against and halted by an alien being, with the result that finally experience believes that it extracts all its own teaching from the object. It is this *ek-stase* of experience which causes all perception to be perception of something.

Obsessed with being, and forgetful of the perspectivism of my experience, I henceforth treat it as an object and deduce it from a relationship between objects. I regard my body, which is my point of view upon the world, as one of the objects of that world. My recent awareness of my gaze as a means of knowledge I now repress, and treat my eyes as bits of matter. They then take their place in the same objective space in which I am trying to situate the external object and I believe that I am producing the perceived perspective by the projection of the objects on my retina. In the same way I treat my own perceptual history as a result of my relationships with the objective world; my present, which is my point of view on time, becomes one moment of time among all the others, my duration a reflection or abstract aspect of universal time, as my body is a mode of objective space. In the same way, finally, if the objects which surround the house or which are found in it remained what they are in perceptual experience, that is, acts of seeing conditioned by a certain perspective, the house would not be posited as an autonomous being. Thus the positing of one single object, in the full sense, demands the compositive bringing into being of all these experiences in one act of manifold creation. Therein

it exceeds perceptual experience and the synthesis of horizons—as the notion of a *universe*, that is to say, a completed and explicit totality, in which the relationships are those of reciprocal determination, exceeds that of a *world*, or an open and indefinite multiplicity of relationships which are of reciprocal implication. I detach myself from my experience and pass to the *idea*. Like the object, the idea purports to be the same for everybody, valid in all times and places, and the individuation of an object in an objective point of time and space finally appears as the expression of a universal positing power. I am no longer concerned with my body, nor with time, nor with the world, as I experience them in ante-predicative knowledge, in the inner communion that I have with them. I now refer to my body only as an idea, to the universe as idea, to the idea of space and the idea of time. Thus "objective" thought (in Kierkegaard's sense) is formed—being that of common sense and of science—which finally causes us to lose contact with perceptual experience, of which it is nevertheless the outcome and the natural sequel. The whole life of consciousness is characterized by the tendency to posit objects since it is consciousness, that is to say, self-knowledge, only in so far as it takes hold of itself and draws itself together in an identifiable object. And yet the absolute positing of a single object is the death of consciousness, since it congeals the whole of existence, as a crystal placed in a solution suddenly crystallizes it.

We cannot remain in this dilemma of having to fail to understand either the subject or the object. We must discover the origin of the object at the very center of our experience: we must describe the emergence of being and we must understand how, paradoxically, there is *for us* an *in-itself*. In order not to prejudge the issue, we shall take objective thought on its own terms and not ask it any questions which it does not ask itself. If we are led to rediscover experience behind it, this shift of ground will be attributable only to the difficulties which objective thought itself raises. Let us consider it then at work in the constitution of our body *as* object, since this is a crucial moment in the genesis of the objective world. It will be seen that one's own body evades, even within science itself, the treatment to which it is intended to subject it. And since the genesis of the objective body is only a moment in the constitution of the object, the body, by withdrawing from the objective world, will carry with it the intentional threads linking it to its surrounding and finally reveal to us the perceiving subject as the perceived world.