

LUCE IRIGARAY



# *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*

TRANSLATED BY

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The Invisible of the Flesh:  
A Reading of Merleau-Ponty,  
*The Visible and the Invisible*,  
"The Intertwining—The Chiasm"

"If it is true that as soon as philosophy declares itself to be reflection or coincidence it prejudices what it will find, then once again it must recommence everything, reject the instruments reflection and intuition had provided themselves, and install itself in a locus where they have not yet been distinguished, in experiences that have not yet been 'worked over,' that offer us all at once, pell-mell, both 'subject' and 'object,' both existence and essence, and hence give philosophy resources to redefine them." (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 130).<sup>1</sup>

Up to this point, my reading and my interpretation of the history of philosophy agree with Merleau-Ponty: we must go back to a moment of prediscursive experience, recommence everything, all the categories by which we understand things, the world, subject-object divisions, recommence everything and pause at the "mystery, as familiar as it is unexplained, of a light which, illuminating the rest, remains at its source in obscurity."

<sup>1</sup> Page references following the quotations from Maurice Merleau-Ponty are to *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

"If we could rediscover within the exercise of seeing and speaking some of the living references that assign themselves such a destiny in a language, perhaps they would teach us how to form our new instruments, and first of all to understand our research, our interrogation themselves." (P. 130).

This operation is absolutely necessary in order to bring the maternal-feminine into language: at the level of theme, motif, subject, articulation, syntax, and so on. Which requires passage through the night, a light that remains in obscurity.

"The visible about us seems to rest in itself. It is as though our vision were formed in the heart of the visible, or as though there were between it and us an intimacy as close as between the sea and the strand." (Pp. 130-31).

If it were not the visible that was in question, it would be possible to believe that Merleau-Ponty is alluding here to intra-uterine life. Moreover, he uses "images" of the sea and the strand. Of immersion and emergence? And he speaks of the risk of the disappearance of the seer and the visible. Which corresponds doubly to a reality in intrauterine nesting: one who is still in this night does not see and remains without a visible (as far as we know); but the other seer cannot see him. The other does not see him, he is not visible for the other, who nevertheless sees the world, but without him. And if everything, the totality, is organized around him, then the other, one could almost say, sees nothing? A disorganized world? If the mother, or the woman, sees the world only from the perspective of the maternal function, she sees nothing. Except from this zero of the infant's nocturnal abode? The invisible of its prenatal life. This intimate secret of its-their birth and shared knowledge [connaissance]. What-had-not-yet-been-seen of and by its-their look. Seeing the universe in function of or beginning with that—

which will never appear as something seen within the field of the visible.

Perhaps it comes about that, out of his nostalgia, man wishes to see that which she does not see? Her own invisible? His return would also be the search for this night of hers. Wanting to appropriate two invisibles, two positions of the one in relation to the other where they touch without the possibility of seeing each other, and without for all that finding the one behind the other. A look forever organized, or disorganized, around an impossibility of seeing [*un impossible à voir*]. Insurmountable other of the visible, not reducible to its invisible other side. It is a question of another world, another landscape, a *topos* or a locus of the irreversible.

The next sentence can be understood in the open field through this interpretive gesture: if we based ourselves in this visible, or rather in its resting place [*repos*], its heart, and if it passed into us, vision would vanish at the moment of its formation through the disappearance of either the seer or the visible.

Thus: there is either no more seer, or subject, or no more world, or visible. Either the one or the other at opposite poles, antagonistic, adverse. Although he dismisses the subject and the object, Merleau-Ponty nevertheless retains this polarity: seer/visible, which presupposes, here in particular, that the visible, still invisible in its resting place, would have vision and could give it to or take it away from the seer. Later on, he says that the seer and the visible are reversible, that in a way they come back to the same thing, but after having set up this dissociation from the start: the risk of the disappearance of the one or the other.

What follows returns the privilege to the seer's look. But of a vision in between the diurnal and the nocturnal in its touch. A look that is too close to make use of a certain perspective, of discrimination, distancing, or mastery? A carnal look, which becomes that which gives perspective to "things": shelters them, gives birth to them, wraps them in the touch of a visi-

bility that is one with them, keeps them from ever being naked, envelops them in a conjunctive tissue of visibility, an exterior-interior horizon in which, henceforth, they appear without being able to be distinguished, separated, or torn away from it.

*"Whence does it happen that in so doing it leaves them in their place, that the vision we acquire of them seems to us to come from them, and that to be seen is for them but a degradation of their eminent being?"* (P. 131).

Enveloping things with his look, the seer would give birth to them, and yet the mystery of his own birth would subsist in them. For now they contain this mystery of the prenatal night where he was palpated without seeing. A passive forever lacking an active. More passive than any passivity taken in a passive-active couple. A passivity that tries to turn itself into activity by sculpting, moving the totality of the world into a reversion of the intrauterine abode. Between these two extremes, there is a breach: the place of the other. The seer tries to put back together the most passive and the most active, to overcome the invisible of/in the other insofar as it would constitute a night that his look needed to reduce in order to organize his field of vision. He tries to establish a *continuum*, a duration, between the most passive and the most active. But he cannot manage it. Especially without memory of that first event where he is enveloped-touched by a tangible invisible of which his eyes are also formed, but which he will never see: with no seer, neither visible nor visibility in that place.

Perhaps there exists, there is, a *foreseeing* where the maternal is concerned? Something that would make the child believe it is seen before it sees? That the invisible looks at it? And, if the mother foresees her child, imagines it, she foresees it also in this sense that the feeling of it within herself is sometimes transformed into vision: a clairvoyance of, and within, the flesh. Could it be that he uses this clairvoyance to surround things?

Constituting them as things, or reduplicating them as things, with that encompassing look with which he envelops them.

Whence does it happen that "to be seen is for them is a degradation of their eminent being"? Sight reduces the invisible of things and of the look, their tissue, their clothing of seeing flesh, that nostalgia for a first abode lodged in and on them, which will be twice lost: in the coming to being of the seer and, even more, in the look's becoming vision; in the envelopment of things in names and in a network of names, a language, from this point, this axis, where their "soul," their cloak of invisibility, their immiscion in a fleshly layering [*feuilleter*] is degraded, flattened? Which happens through their appearing only from a vantage point, a sort of photograph that puts them into the world while wrenching them from their surroundings, the thickness of their gestures, which are also visual. But once there, opened up to the contemplation of their unfolding?

*"What is this talisman of color, this singular virtue of the visible that makes it, held at the end of the gaze, nonetheless much more than a correlative of my vision, such that it imposes my vision upon me as a continuation of its own sovereign existence?"* (P. 131).

At this point, the talisman of color appears, with its "atmospheric" properties, which are irreducible to the form that seeing defines. Color? The symptom and aftereffect of our incarnation, our genetic fate, our identity prior to any proper form perceivable from outside, to any visible, which will nevertheless appear but without ever encompassing itself in its growth. Color? That by which I (male or female) am moreover affronted as if by a genealogical heritage that I cannot change: I can change neither the color of my eyes nor my vision of things or of the atmosphere that results from this color. Correlatively (?), from without, color signals to me that it holds sovereignty over the purchase or the influence of my gaze. That it allows me to see rather than that I make it conform to my decisions? That it pours

itself out, extends itself, escapes, imposes itself upon me as the reminder of what is most archaic in me, the *fluid*. Through which I (male or female) received life and was enveloped in my prenatal sojourn, by which I have been surrounded, clothed, nourished, in another body. Thanks to which I could also see the light, be born, and even see: air, light. . . . Color resuscitates in me all of that prior life, the preconceptional, preobjective, presubjective, this *ground* of the visible where seeing and seen are not yet distinguished, where they reflect each other without any position having been established between them. Color bathes my gaze, which sees it, perceives it more or less well, changes it in its visibility, but can never delimit it, create it, bend it to its decisions. Color constitutes a given that escapes from the subjective realm and that still and always immerses the subject in an invisible sojourn of the visible, a sojourn that cannot be mastered: whether infernal or celestial, preceding or following a determinate incarnation into subject-object duality. This color, the correlative of my vision, of vision, far from being able to yield to my decisions, obliges me to see.

"How does it happen that my look, enveloping them [things], does not hide them, and, finally, that, veiling them, it unveils them?" (P. 131).

Following this detour by way of color, his sentence links up without a transition to what was being said about the vision of things. As if this passage on color had been only a parenthesis, whereas it will be developed at length. How should this construction be understood? What is its relation to the note at the bottom of the page? Not only is it a question of course notes here, and not really of a text, but the passage demonstrates an astonishing reversal: my gaze, which would receive itself from the visible, envelops things without hiding them and unveils them while veiling them. My gaze would be a connective tissue between the interior and the exterior. But formed inside (through "the incorporation of the seer into the visible"), even if

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it is perfected outside. Formed within the living tissue of my body. On the inside prior to the constitution of its interior horizon. How do the inside of conception-organization and the inside of internal horizons mingle? Two leaves of my body and two leaves of the world seem to make it impossible for another flesh to be visible and seeing, between the one and the other. The subtlety of what is said of the visible and of its relation to the flesh does not rule out the solipsistic character of this touch(ing) between the world and the subject, of this touch(ing) of the visible and the seer in the subject itself.

Merleau-Ponty's whole analysis is marked by this labyrinthine solipsism. Without the other, and above all the other of sexual difference, isn't it impossible to find a way out of this description of the visible, doubled with that of the tactile of the touching hands? But unless we are to remain within the confines of this rigorous and luxuriant approach, we must ask the question of the other as touched and touching. And of an other whose body's ontological status would differ from my own.

"We must first understand that this red under my eyes is not, as is always said, a quale, a pellicle of being without any thickness, a message at the same time indecipherable and evident, which one has or has not received, but of which, if one has received it, one knows all there is to know, and of which in the end there is nothing to say. It requires a focusing, however brief: it emerges from a less precise, more general redness, in which my gaze was caught, into which it sank, before—as we put it so aptly—fixing it. And, now that I have fixed it, if my eyes penetrate into it, into its fixed structure, or if they start to wander round about again, the quale resumes its atmospheric existence. Its precise form is bound up with a certain woolly, metallic, or porous (?) configuration or texture, and the quale itself counts for very little compared with these participations." (P. 131).

Color is never a pellicle of being without thickness, in contradistinction to certain spectacles. Color is not deciphered without focusing, without taking into account its surroundings, the tex-

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ture of the support in which it appears. A red is red in accord with or in function of its material ground, from which it cannot be separated. Also the concept of red is impossible. One could go so far as to say that it has no meaning. Color cannot be abstracted from its material ground, but it also cannot be seen except in contrast to other colors. Red is only red when it is joined with other colors which it dominates or which dominate it, which it attracts or which attract it, which it repels or which repel it. In short, it is a certain node in the weave of the simultaneous and the successive. "It is a concretion of visibility, it is not an atom." There would be no "moment" of redness? Nevertheless, color is linked to the transient much more than to other visibles. But this transience is more that of the flesh of the visible, which is recalled with difficulty, than of the precision of form (and) of the concept. Red, any color, is more in the mode of *participation* than of the solitary emergence of the concept.

"A naked color, and in general a visible, is not a chunk of absolutely hard, indivisible being, offered all naked to a vision which could be only total or null, but is rather a sort of straits between exterior horizons and interior horizons ever gaping open." (P. 132).

What is perceived would be not so much the color and the thing but the difference between things and colors. Sensation would have neither an object nor a moment, but it would take place only in the intervals *between*, through difference, succession. A sort of silent scale?

Ferdinand de Saussure describes the meaning [*sens*] of language thus, at least its organization. For Merleau-Ponty, is sensation already structured like a language? There would be no place for this bath in which my gaze is immersed, nor for this contemplation which touches on eternity, or which joins the moment and eternity. The gaze on or of the flesh of the visible is still modulated in the manner of a demiurgic possession. . . . Which reverses values somewhat? Sensation is without doubt what we feel as most naively instantaneous. All the more reason

to remember this, and that it is not a simple reserve for the appearance of the concept.

"Between the alleged colors and the visible, we would find anew the tissue that lines them, sustains them, nourishes them, and which, for its part is not a thing, but a possibility, a latency, and a flesh of things." (Pp. 132-33).

Where does this tissue come from? How is it nourished? Who or what gives it consistency? My body? My flesh? Or a maternal, maternalizing flesh, reproduction, subsistence there of the amniotic, placental tissue, which enveloped subject and things prior to birth, or of tenderness and the milieu that constituted the atmosphere of the nursing, the infant, still of the adult.

Here, Merleau-Ponty makes flesh go over to the realm of things and as if to their place of emergence, their prenatal ground, their nourishing soil. . . . Indefinitely, he has exchanged seer and visible, touching and tangible, "subject" and "things" in an alternation, a fluctuation that would take place in a milieu that makes possible their passage from one or the other "side." An archaic fleshly atmosphere, a sojourn that it is difficult not to compare once again to the intrauterine or to the still barely differentiated symbiosis of infancy. Whence come eyes? Only eyes? But also *in the world*. Things would look at us. Above all where color or colors are concerned, things would recall all that they keep of the flesh of the world and notably of visibility.

According to Merleau-Ponty, the look would be a variant of touch. It palpates, envelops, espouses things. It discovers them as if it already knew them, "as though it knew them before knowing them." And no one knows who commands this secret complicity between things and the "subject," this "prepossession of the visible." No one knows, but the relationship of touching and being touched, which is very close to that of interrogating and being interrogated, perhaps indicates the secret of this still "obscure" alliance between looking and being looked

at. If my hands can quickly and with deft movement perceive the textures of matter—for example, of what is smooth or rough—this is a function of their kinship with the tactile world.

*"This can happen only if my hand, while it is felt from within, is also accessible from without, itself tangible, for my other hand, for example, if it takes its place among the things it touches, is in a sense one of them, opens finally upon a tangible being of which it is also a part. Through this crisscrossing within it of the touching and the tangible, its own movements incorporate themselves into the universe they interrogate, are recorded on the same map as it."* (P. 133).

This is only possible, if my hand, felt from within, is accessible from without, itself tangible to another hand. If it takes its place among the things it touches, opens onto the tangible of which it is a part, and if there occurs within it the crisscrossing of the touching and the tangible. Thus, "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" (p. 133).

My movements incorporate themselves in the universe they interrogate. Two introjections, introspections cross. Two passages from within to without, from without to within, would be recorded on the same map. My hand and its "other side," and the universe and its "other side" would be inscribed on the same horizon, would mingle their knowledges, their assimilations, in the same cycle or orbit, each one putting the other within without, without-within? Which is impossible? Neither my hand nor the world is a "glove," nor can either be reduced to its clothing. Neither my hand nor the world is thus reversible. They are not pure actual phenomena, pure pellicles that are graspable one by the other, even empathetically. They have their roots, which are not reducible to the visible moment. Their roots and their atmospheres. To reverse them thus, the one in the other, would amount to destroying them in their own lives. My hand feels itself from within and it is felt from without.

These two "systems are applied upon one another, as the two halves of an orange. It is no different for the vision."

This comparison with the orange seems strange. Is it still "valid," if the *two hands are joined*? Which brings about something very particular in the relation feeling-felt. With no object or subject. With no passive or active, or even middle-passive. A sort of fourth mode? Neither active, nor passive, nor middle-passive. Always more passive than the passive. And nevertheless active. The hands joined, palms together, fingers outstretched, constitute a very particular touching. A gesture often reserved for women (at least in the West) and which evokes, doubles, the *touching of the lips* silently applied upon one another. A touching more intimate than that of one hand taking hold of the other. A phenomenology of the passage between interior and exterior. A phenomenon that remains in the interior, does not appear in the light of day, speaks of itself only in gestures, remains always on the edge of speech, gathering the edges without sealing them. This gesture, reserved for prayer (?), could represent that of the two halves of the universe applied one upon the other at different times of their becoming. It can also be performed with the gaze: the eyes meet in a sort of silence of vision, a screen of resting before and after seeing, a reserve for new landscapes, new lights, a punctuation in which the eyes reconstitute for themselves the frame, the screen, the horizon of a vision.

*"There is double and crossed situating of the visible in the tangible and of the tangible in the visible; the two maps are complete, and yet they do not merge into one. The two parts are total parts and yet are not superposable."* (P. 134).

Of course there is a relation of the visible and the tangible. Is the doubling redoubled and crisscrossed? This is less certain. The look cannot take up the tangible. Thus I never see that in which I touch or am touched. What is at play in the caress does not see itself. The in-between, the middle, the *medium* of the caress does not see itself. In the same way and differently, I do

not see that which allows me to see, that which touches me with light and air so that I see some "thing." This is perhaps, as far as I am concerned, what Merleau-Ponty calls the site of flesh in which things bathe? They begin to appear in a fog or a mist of invisibility. And it is still possible that my look—the most developed of all the senses—disturbs the intelligence of my hand, of my touching. That it makes a screen which freezes the tactile nuptials, paralyzing the flow, turning it to ice, precipitating it, undoing its rhythm. The visible and the tactile do not obey the same laws or rhythms of the flesh. And if I can no doubt unite their powers, I cannot reduce the one to the other. I cannot situate the visible and the tangible in a chiasmus. Perhaps the visible needs the tangible but this need is not reciprocal?

Besides, if this doubled and crisscrossed situating of which Merleau-Ponty speaks neglects the sensible *medium*, then it also neglects the *micous* of the carnal. We can agree that there is a situating of the visible in the tangible and of the tangible in the visible. But the two maps are incomplete and do not overlap: *the tangible is, and remains, primary in its opening*. Its touching on, of, and by means of the other. The dereliction of its ever touching this first touching. Which is true of the visible. And which opens up the question of "God" but in a certain forgetfulness of the primary maternal-feminine. Which entails the fact that God is always entrusted to the look and never sufficiently imagined as tactile bliss. Who imagines the beyond as an infinitely blissful touching? Being touched by God, for example. Which is impossible to imagine insofar as God is the counterweight to immersion in intrauterine touching?

Deprived of this bliss, God will always be thought of as a god who touches in suffering but not in joy or bliss. A God who wounds in order to reopen the way to primary nostalgia? Never a God who envelops me, surrounds me, cradles me. . . . Who loves me carnally, erotically. Why not? What kind of God is this? One who corresponds to a transcendental that is metaphysical but not physical (except prior to the first sin?). A God

who would have created me as man or woman to make me guilty of my *body*? Who would have made us male and female to make the fulfillment of his creation sinful, forbidden, or impossible? Who is this God? And who has, since the beginning, committed the sin of simony vis-à-vis God? While speculating on the text of the law? But above all while exploiting (consciously or unconsciously) the meaning of the word. This is a difficult question; but more and more it seems to me that God has always been a victim of simony. Were it otherwise, would grace come to pass more easily? Whoever writes a truth or makes a pronouncement, above all concerning God, should always add: *open [ouvert(e)]*.

Thus there is a crossing of the tangible in the visible and of the visible in the tangible, according to Merleau-Ponty. In this situating can be understood a desire for mastery that denies the opening of each of the maps.

But,

— I do not see the source of light that allows me to see. I sense it, often when I forget about it.

— I do not see the sound source that allows me to hear; I sense it.

— I do not see my body, or only a little.

— I do not see that in *which* I caress; the caress always takes place in a milieu which is its "proper" milieu, which remains invisible; the most tangible of the tangible or the tangible "itself" does not see itself.

Moreover, the chiasmus of the visible and the tangible is inverted in time. Is this what is at stake in the first sin? The tangible is primary and the visible claimed to equal it, even to surpass it. A tangible should remain intangible to figure as a blank space of the tangible in the visible: thou shalt not *touch* the tree of the *knowledge of good and evil*. The fact of having *touched* the fruit of that tree, of having tasted it, turned the tangible into something forbidden (you shall not touch each other, except to

reproduce), and especially in the flesh of the visible: they saw that they were naked and they were obliged to cover themselves. The tangible represented a divine happiness, an "earthly paradise," until the moment when it entered into the perspective of the knowledge of good and evil. Of black and white? Of dichotomous oppositions that break into its tissue, riddle it with judgments, that transform touch into something other than itself while destroying palpation in disembodied, abstract forms of the sensible, cutting it up according to alternatives that respect neither its thresholds, its approaches, nor its mouths.

What is more, this transgression of the limits of the flesh, and of its visible, to have access to knowledge, or another knowledge, resulted in exile from the threshold of the earthly paradise, where the door of the garden and the entryways of the flesh overlapped according to the destiny that God had given us. For having wanted access to a knowledge that was alienated from carnal happiness, a knowledge that situated the tangible in the visible and the visible in the tangible according to the usual mode of our *episteme*, man was condemned to labor, suffering, carnal exile, the quest for God, the exploitation of nature for his nourishment. . . .

The two maps of the visible and the tangible are not completely situated the one in the other and the other in the one. If one were to "situate" [*relever*], it would be the tangible. But it remains instead the ground that is available for all the senses. A landscape much vaster but never enclosed in a map, the tangible is the matter and memory for all of the sensible. Which remembers without remembering thematically? It constitutes the very flesh of all things that will be sculpted, sketched, painted, felt, and so on, out of it.

First of all, the tangible is received, perceived prior to the dichotomies of active and passive. It is received like a bath that affects without and within, in fluidity. It is never completely situated in the visible. And, furthermore, in the tangible itself, it is not sure that it can transform itself into act.

With regard to the look, perhaps it is acquired later, even

though it is received from and in the flesh, and it would or could take up that which can not be taken up? Can I live in the visible independent of touch? I can certainly go quite far. I distance myself, for the greater part, from my sensible body. And it remains that I see only by the touch of the light, and my eyes are situated in my body. I am touched and enveloped by the felt even before seeing it.

The question is perhaps that of the "situating" or of the translocation into my interior landscape. It is the felt that should conduct me there. Can I transform, transmute the sensible into some inwardness? How so? What will be lacking from this intimate landscape? It will always be incomplete.

With regard to the movements of my eyes, they do not take place uniquely within the visible universe: they also happen in the living crypt of my body and my flesh.

"Without even entering into the implications proper to the seer and the visible, we know that, since vision is a palpation with the look, it must also be inscribed in the order of being that it discloses to us; he who looks must not himself be foreign to the world that he looks at. As soon as I see, it is necessary that the vision (as is so well indicated by the double meaning of the word) be doubled with a complementary vision or with another vision." (P. 134).

Someone must see me, so that I can be possessed by whoever sees me.

Without examining how far this identity of the seer and the visible may go, two questions can be put to him:

- that of the *prenatal sojourn* which is always invisible, in any case to my eyes, and in a way that another seer can see me seeing and I can see him: in this sense none of us can be substituted for his (or her) mother from the perspective of the gaze, the daughter being able to palpate the invisible "as" her mother does (the "as" is meaningful only through its difference from the impossibility of one who never carries an infant in her womb);
- that of the place of an *other sex* which sees me without



my being able to see it too, and vice versa, especially in the name of the tangible and of an irreversible inversion of the gaze into a flesh for which no other can be substituted.

"The body unites us directly with things through its own ontogenesis, by welding to one another the two outlines of which it is made, its two lips: the sensible mass it is and the mass of the sensible where it is born by segregation and upon which, as seer, it remains open." (P. 136; translation modified).<sup>2</sup>

Two lips, a strange comparison: one on its side (the sensible mass it is), one on the side of the other (mass where it is born through segregation), to which, as a seer, it remains open. One lip that remains in or of its own sensible, another from which it will emerge, which it will see, and to which it will stay tied as seer. One that remains more on the side of touch? The other with the flesh of the visible? Two lips that do not touch each other in the same sensible realm, that, rigorously speaking, do not touch at all, unlike the lips of our "body."

The singularity of the body and the flesh of the feminine comes:

— both from the fact that the lips are doubled there: those above and those below;  
 — and from the fact that the sensible which is the feminine touches the sensible from which he or she emerges. The woman being woman and potentially mother, the two lips of which Merleau-Ponty speaks can touch themselves in her, between women, without having recourse to seeing. These two dimensions of which Merleau-Ponty speaks are in her body. And hence she experiences it as volume in a different way?

<sup>2</sup> (At this point in Lingis's English translation, "lips" is substituted for "lips," a typographical error that seems to mime what Irigaray calls the invisibility of the feminine.—Tr.)

And this would be one of the differences between men and women, that these lips do not re-join each other according to the same economy. Whereas one needs the mother or her substitute, the other suffices within herself to be two, being mother and woman. The two being in the same already and still in the invisible?

"Ideas are the other side of language and calculus. When I think they animate my interior speech, they haunt it as the 'little phrase' possesses the violinist, and they remain beyond the words as it remains beyond the notes—not in the sense that under the light of another sun hidden from us they would shine forth but because they are that certain divergence, that never-finished differentiation, that openness ever to be reopened between the sign and the sign, as the flesh is, we said, the dehiscence of the seer into the visible and of the visible into the seer." (P. 153; translation modified).

This never-finished differentiation might be the symptom, the secret recollection of a sexual difference that has never been achieved in language. Something would always sing "behind" words, like the trace of the resistance of an other that is irreducible to myself, that would require the unceasing practice of openness between signs. Letting the flesh appear between the sign and the sign. Dehiscence of the seer in the visible and of the visible in the seer which is insurmountable between these two "signs": masculine and feminine, living signs that, as seer and visible, will never see each other. That in which their differences consist is experienced in touch but is never "seen." Not even in the meeting of their flesh. Flesh, the flesh of each one is not substitutable for the other. It is—prior to any God—transcendence here and now. While God can help to arrange space, space-time, he never takes "the place of." He lets difference be achieved, even invites it to happen. He does not fulfill it.

"And just as my body sees only because it is a part of the visible in which it opens forth, the sense upon which the arrangement of the sounds opens reflects back upon that arrangement." (Pp. 153-54).

"My body sees only because it is part of the visible." If I cannot see the other in his alterity, and if he cannot see me, my body no longer sees anything in difference. I become blind as soon as it is a question of a differently sexed body. I may barely perceive some exterior phenomenon that reveals a little of the flesh of the visible. Where this is concerned, I remain in darkness, operating on "premonitions," "tact," "radar," "wave-lengths"? And the abundance of vestimentary compensation [suppléance] hardly makes up for this nudity, this dereliction? of my sexed body, devoid of carnal visibility.

Not seeing that "because it is part of the visible in which it opens forth, the sense upon which the arrangement of the sounds opens" reflects back on my body.

In utero, I see nothing (except darkness?), but I hear. Music comes before meaning. A sort of preliminary to meaning, coming after warmth, moisture, softness, kinesthesia. Do I hear first of all? After touch. But I cannot hear without touching; nor see, moreover. I hear, and what I hear is sexually differentiated. Voice is differentiated.

Do meaning and language inverse the order of hearing? Thus, first of all, I hear something of the feminine, some vocalizing in the feminine. However, language is said, is ordered in the masculine, except when it is a case of what linguists call a mark. The feminine follows the masculine grammatical norm, which is supposedly neuter or neutral, by adding to it a mark: *e*.<sup>3</sup> The feminine precedes and follows the masculine in language. The first music and the first meaning are perceived differently from what will or will not result from them as felt. Only rarely does the first music return to the subject (cf. Nietzsche's nostalgia on

<sup>3</sup> (In French, an *e* is the mark of feminine gender.—Tr.)

this subject, for example). When meaning does return, it is normally marked "grave," in the different senses of the word, while the first music is on the light, acute side. This vocalism is the most memorable, and/but it is not repeated in the weave of language. Which would come into being to take its place?

"For the linguist language is an ideal system, a fragment of the intelligible world." (P. 154).

Language is an ideal system not only for the linguist but for every speaking subject. In our language, we are always basically idealists. Cut off from mother nature, where, whence, we are born, from our archaic state, our archives of flesh. Twisted "upon ourselves," but starting from a primary part of the self that is abandoned "with the other"—another feminine for both sexes. A part of the self does not come back to us in its primary-perception-reception. A part of our vitality that is buried, forgotten with the other, sometimes in the other, and which we receive with an other "voice," that of an ideal order (?) which covers us over. And which lacks voice, moreover. The text of the law, of codes, no longer has a voice. Even if it is in some way built upon the "model" of the voice.

"But, just as for me to see it is not enough that my look be visible for X, it is necessary that it be visible for itself, through a sort of torsion, reversal, or specular phenomenon, which is given from the sole fact that I am born." (P. 154).

Why does birth imply this solipsism? It is true that it implies solitude. But can solitude be represented as this "torsion on oneself," notably through a specular phenomenon? Do the specular and the carnal belong to the same or to different orders? How do they articulate with each other, exclude each other? And, even though I can touch myself in a number of parts of my body, it is not possible for me to see myself in some of these. Notably it is impossible for me to see my look. I can see myself, partially, by narrowing my field of vision. I see certain parts of

my body. But my *face* is never visible to me—naturally. I need a mirror to see it, and I never see it during the activities that constitute its carnal visibility. Does my face represent what is at stake in the passage from nature to culture, the stakes of representation? My back is difficult for me to see as well. And I am always being veiled, unveiled, violated by the other in this face. And the parts of my body that I cannot protect from my look.

Nor will I ever see the *mucous*, that most intimate interior of my flesh, neither the touch of the outside of the skin of my fingers nor the perception of the inside of these same fingers, but another threshold of the passage from outside to inside, from inside to outside, between inside and outside, between outside and inside: I will always feel veiled, unveiled, violated, often by the other in this dimension which I cannot protect with my look. These mucous membranes evade my mastery, just as my face does, yet differently. The joined hands, not those that take hold one of the other, grasp each other, but the hands that touch without taking hold—like the lips. The joined hands perhaps represent this memory of the intimacy of the mucous.

As for mirrors, they give access to another order of the visible. Cold, icy, frozen-freezing, and with no respect for the vital, operative qualities of laterality. I see myself in the mirror as if I were an other. I put that other that I am in the mirror between the other and myself, which disconcerts this experience of the inverted laterality of the other. The other whose left hand can seize my right hand, for example. Making me more passive than any passivity of and within my own touch. Forcing me into the within and the beyond of my horizon. Of all possible mastery. Whether it's an event or an accident, that depends. . . . Between the other in the mirror and the other who inverts me, there is also the other of the same, at once closer and more distant. Also a phenomenon of visibility, given that without realizing it, the other detains my look as it sees him, and that he sees that which I cannot see of myself. A mutual dereliction in which we consti-

ture, each for the other, holes in the invisible other than intra-uterine life or carnal relations in the strict sense. The black hole of that into which we disappear, each into the other, continually.

Traditionally, man claims to be the one who sees, the one whose horizon would not be pierced from one end to the other both by his "own" vision and by the look of the other who sees him. This belief, this will for mastery, probably constitutes one of the most fundamental illusions of the flesh. The screen or armor that places an interdiction on loving relations. And the postulate of a God who is both invisible and who sees all, which makes up for the blind gaze of the other.

My face is always in darkness. It is never born. This is probably why it is at stake in a metaphysics that wants to bring into the light that which is not yet clear. And that maintains the most radical *polemos* with the maternal, the intrauterine: irreducible darkness.

(It is odd that when Jacques Lacan theorized the entrance into the specular world, he described the infant and its mother seeing themselves and each other in the same mirror. If the infant does not see himself alone in the mirror, how can he differentiate himself from his mother? He runs the risk of reduplicating, or creating, a confusing fusion with her if he enters into this other world with her.)

Moreover, it does not seem that he needs a mirror to look at his mother and perceive her as *you*. The mirror functions as the sword of differentiation, the passage to a world other than that of the living, but not as that which would give the child access to the way out of the mother's world. To affirm this would be to say that he lacks the ability to use his eyes, including as a mirror, and that he needs a mirror to see the other.)

*"So also, if my words have a meaning, it is not because they present the systematic organization the linguist will disclose, it is because that organization, like the look, refers back to itself: the operative Word is*

*the obscure region whence comes the instituted light, as the muted reflection of the body upon itself is what we call natural light.*" (P. 154).

If my words have meaning, it is because they touch the other from the starting point of my perception, and having touched me and touching the other, they organize a possible dwelling for these perceptions. When the other understands, he gives and returns to me my dwelling. So long as he or she inhabits and relates to himself or herself in a habitable way. And so long as my words carry the meaning of a dwelling. Whence comes the necessity of "organization," a sort of "house" that does not cut itself off from perceptions but shelters them and allows them to inhabit, cohabit, socially as well as politically.

*"The operative Word is the obscure region whence comes the instituted light."* (P. 154).

That which is operative in the word remains obscure once light is instituted. Thus light and its norms are based on an efficacy or an effectivity that is not very clear. Is the maternal-feminine engaged, enacted, while remaining in obscurity, especially where its social impact is concerned?

*"As there is a reversibility of the seeing and the visible, and as at the point where the two metamorphoses cross what we call perception is born. . . ."* (P. 154).

This reversibility is Merleau-Ponty's hypothesis. As if the seen enveloped me in its vision? Isn't this a sort of animism in which the visible becomes another living being? In his view, are the seeing and the visible two aspects of himself? Two metamorphoses of himself that intersect in a closed system? Perception takes place in this crisscrossing of the seeing and the visible, of the look and the visible, of the one who looks and the world, things that are already enveloped, surrounded, "layered" by looks. Does the seer see-perceive because of the fact that the visible is already clairvoyance? I would not be able to receive the

visible world if there were no kinship between what I see there and my vision. This reversibility of the *world* and the *I* (which Merleau-Ponty refuses to dissociate, to separate into two) suggests some repetition of a prenatal sojourn where the universe and I form a closed economy, which is partly reversible (but only in the opposite direction, if reversibility can have meaning: the in utero *providing* it, the *hypokeimenon*, is more on the side of the maternal-feminine, the future "subject" or seer on the side of the world or of things), or some anticipation of a heavenly sojourn, unless it is an alliance or a love pact between the world and things. In this indivisibility of the seer in relation to the visible, does some trace of animism remain as a sort of enveloping by the maternal power that is still present following birth, or as an anticipation of the presence of God? Or both? In this idea, something is said about the fact that no mourning has been performed for the birth process, nor for the cutting of reversibility through some umbilical cord. Although a pertinent analysis of the way I form a weave of sensations with the world, it is one that excludes solitude even though its own systemization is solipsistic. This seer is never alone, he dwells unceasingly in his world. Eventually he finds some accomplices there, but he never meets others. His universe represents, or re-creates, a vast intertwining of umbilical cords or passages. Perception would take place at each crossing of placental tissue with an embryonic nursing that is always in direct connection with it (her).

If I wanted to apply some terms here which I do not really like to use outside of their strictly clinical setting—where, moreover, I do not use them as such—I might say that Merleau-Ponty's seer remains in an incestuous prenatal situation with the whole. This mode of existence or of being is probably that of all men, at least in the West. Also, given the historic period when Merleau-Ponty was writing, he would have been one of the few or one of the first people to have felt this. Is it still true that the perception of this situation remains veiled, an obscure light which illuminates the whole? Still without changing the move-

ment or the dimension of "things" or of the relations between them.

"So also there is a reversibility of the speech and what it signifies; the signification is what comes to seal, to close, to gather up the multiplicity of the physical, physiological, linguistic means of elocation, to contract them into one sole act." (P. 154).

Speech, too, would form a sort of tissue with that which it signifies, signification coming to seal up each act, a crossroads of speech acts. Like a weaving stitch that holds the threads in a given space-time, fulfills their potentialities, their powers in a realization which, for this moment, completes the work, its virtualities.

"As vision comes to complete the aesthesiological body . . ."

(P. 154).

Merleau-Ponty accords an exorbitant privilege to vision. Or else, once again, he expresses the exorbitant privileging of vision in our culture. Must my aesthesiological body be completed by vision? Why completed? Why vision? Does it represent the sense which is the most capable of completing? The most unweaving/revealing? That which covers? Especially gaps, depths, abysses? That which finishes, finishes me in relation to the other? In particular the other who is touching and being touched. The look by which I touch also creates a spectacle that allows me to approach the other without immediately being open to his, or her, senses. At least I may think so. And think of myself as autonomous, completed by my visual construction. It becomes the power and the fault in my aesthesiological body. Equally because in a certain way nothing is as sensitive, especially to touch, as my sight. But it can give me the illusion of a closed world, one that is closed because of the fact that I, male or female, was born of, issued from, an other, woman-mother. What Merleau-Ponty seeks is something that closes the circuit

of my relations with the universe in all its dimensions, and that allows me to perceive in the place where it is closed up. Vision is effectively a sense that can totalize, enclose, in its own way. More than the other senses, it is likely to construct a landscape, a horizon. Up to a certain point. It happens that movement is a more adequate way of building myself an aesthesiological body. And that, moving through the world, across the universe, or dancing, I construct more of a dwelling for myself than through vision. Merleau-Ponty would want it to be vision which closes—and works—my body, including the reversibility of the visible. And for the horizon to perfect me in a network, a garment, a skin, which we give ourselves, which we weave unceasingly in order to live, to be born. And to dwell, also, in a certain darkness, enveloped, also, in the visible, which is never pure transparency but carries in it, with it, the opacity, the weight, the thickness of the flesh. His analysis of vision becomes even more detailed, more beautiful, as it accords him the privilege over the other senses, as it takes back a great deal of the phenomenology of the tactile. Of course, vision is a mode of the tactile, but by giving it the privilege of closing up the aesthesiological body, Merleau-Ponty says of it what he could have said of the skin, the mucous, of their contacts. His phenomenology of vision almost mistakes itself for a phenomenology of painting or of the art of painting. On occasion, he speaks of it with the lyricism of one who loves art rather than with the rigor of a philosopher, as if one must give oneself over to its weights and measures. It is simply a question of signifying that this privilege accorded to vision indeed gives it some dimensions that metaphysics neglects, but there still remains the *privilege* of this sense over the others. Reduction of the tactile into the visible, to begin with. Fulfillment of the idea, of idealism, under its material, carnal aspects. A way of talking about the flesh that already cancels its most powerful components, those that are moreover creative in their power. At least there is a great risk of perpetuating this

state of things when the relation to the world is "closed" or directed by the visible (or by that tactility between the hands which is at issue in this text).

"And, as the visible takes hold of the look which has unveiled it and which forms a part of it, the signification rebounds upon its own means, it annexes to itself the speech that becomes an object of science, it antedates itself by a retrograde movement which is never completely belied—because already, in opening the horizon of the nameable and of the sayable, the speech acknowledged that it has its place in that horizon; because no locutor speaks without making himself in advance allocutory, be it only for himself; because with one sole gesture he closes the circuit of his relation to himself and that of his relation to the others, and, with the same stroke, also sets himself up as delocutory, speech of which one speaks: he offers himself and offers every word to a universal Word." (P. 154).

Signification is in language. It antedates itself in language, the expectation of speech as well as the look in the visible. The movement (since it is a question here of aesthesiology) does not seem the same in each case. Language would be more of the order of a temporal bridge between retroaction and anticipation. The "subject" keeping itself always in this endless crisscrossing of an anticipation and a recurrence [*effet de retour*], a reversal [*effet de rebours*] to that which is said and which becomes available for another saying. There again, the circle is closed by the sedimentations of its comings and goings.

Two points may be noted, among others:

1. The circularity of these speech patterns explains why it is so difficult to effect any changes. The entire speaking body of the subject is in some way archaeologically structured by an already spoken language. To signify to him that this language must or can be modified amounts to asking him to modify body, his flesh. Which cannot be done in a day. Or in a year. Resistance to all the discoveries that convulse language can be understood in this way. Also the impossibility of accepting, without a detach-

ment that is truly difficult to conceive for one who does not feel its carnal necessity, the idea that discourse is *monosexual* and that it is necessary to make room, leave a place, for another discourse, one that is put together differently. This resistance shows itself to be at least as strong, if not stronger, where psychoanalysts are concerned, insofar as they deal with a store of conscious language. They do not accept for all that that this store, this *background*,<sup>4</sup> might be interpretable, might unfold itself like a language, the repressed-censored of another sex that asks to come into being.

2. These sedimentations of language weave between past and future, and my present speech is rooted in what has already been said and closes up the circularity between the subject and his speech. Language, languages find themselves constituted like another ground, or rather like another circular matrix, with which the subject maintains permanent exchanges, from which he receives himself without always being able or willing to modify it. Moreover, he calls his language his "mother tongue," which is the sign of a substitution rather than a reality. His language is in no way created by a mother or mothers, except insofar as it sometimes reduplicates the dwelling in the mother and in nature. But this reproduction is not a maternal creation.

This language and these languages, therefore, are firmly rooted, and undoubtedly there is nothing more difficult than changing their culture. Especially since the subject also anticipates his interlocutor, his allocutor, since he creates his own allocutor, since "with one sole gesture he closes the circuit of his relation to himself and that of his relation to the others, and, with the same stroke, also sets himself up as *delocutory*, speech of which one speaks: he offers himself and offers every word to a universal Word" (p. 154). In his speech acts but also in his linguistic relation with the other, the subject closes his circle, his bubble.

<sup>4</sup> (In English in the original text.—Tr.)

Speech is not used to communicate, to encounter, but to talk to oneself, to duplicate and reduplicate oneself, to surround, even to inter oneself. There is no becoming, except that which is already closed off. No air, except that which would exhale words already spoken, already brought into existence? Nothing new, nothing being born in this *universal word* which amounts to the most solipsistic construction, constitution of a subject who would no longer know, or not know, the event. Who, in a certain way, would always have been there, turning in circles from the beginning, in a language that has been determined in this way. Like a present that would move around while remaining the same? A sort of puncture in the tissue of the world, between the tissue of the world and that of the subject, between the tissue of language and the thread of the subject, as both are transposed and exchanged with each other, like a machine that puts or sews things together by making a forward stitch backward, a backward stitch forward, and so on, indefinitely. Without any creation, invention, event, or randomness except for this interminable operation.

No new speech is possible here. One cannot imagine any allocutor, any other of either sex. No other description tells so rigorously of incarceration in a "universal Word." This Word which would not give place to the unforeseeability of God, the universe, the other. A Word of "perpetual repetition"? A Word that no longer has an *open* future and consequently shuts out certain enunciatory practices: cries for help, announcements, demands, expressions of gratitude, prophecy, poetry, and so on. Necessarily, an other is present in these practices, but not that allocutor for whom I can substitute myself, whom I can anticipate. The circuit is open. Meaning does not function like the circularity of something already given and received. It is still in the process of making itself. And the superior overview of a metalanguage is and will always be partial where this is concerned. It is not possible to overhang or encircle such a production of speech. Ceaselessly engaged in seeking its rhythm, its

measure, its poetry, its house, its country, its passages, its short-cuts, toward itself, toward the other, others—the same or foreign—its ethics. A speech that is always at risk, stable and unstable, like a step that is discovering itself, inventing itself at each instant, also in function of the newness of the landscape. A speech in which there is nothing of the universal. Even if occasionally it expresses the universe better than an unchanging, eternal speech. A neutral speech, about the neuter? The speech of a subject who tries unceasingly to compensate for his incarnation in his language, his tongue, and who elaborates moreover a technically powerful machine, a sort of mechanical miming of parturition, but one that is not a "sublimation of the flesh." Hardly even a mechanism of solipsistic survival. A kind of duplication or stand-in for the constitution of the flesh? A reversal of the maternal gift of flesh, in the autarchy of the subject of and in language.

For a sublimation of the flesh, what is lacking is a passage through silence and solitude which leads to the existence, the emergence of a speech of one who is born in a space still to be defined by him, to be marked by him, so that, when speaking of himself, he can also speak of himself to the other, and hear him.

*"We shall have to follow more closely this transition from the mute world to the speaking world. For the moment we want only to suggest that one can speak neither of a destruction nor of a conservation of silence (and still less of a destruction that conserves or of a realization that destroys—which is not to solve but to pose the problem). When the silent vision falls into speech, and when the speech in turn, opening up a field of the nameable and the sayable, inscribes itself in that field, in its place, according to its truth—in short, when it metamorphoses the structures of the visible world and makes itself a gaze of the mind, intuitus mentis—this is always in virtue of the same fundamental phenomenon of reversibility which sustains both the mute perception and the speech and which manifests itself by an almost carnal existence of the idea, as well as by a sublimation of the flesh."* (Pp. 154–55).

There is no silence for Merleau-Ponty. The structure of a mute world is such that all the possibilities of language are already given there. Nothing therefore about the dereliction of the lack in language or about the creative virtualities that would inscribe themselves in this silence. Speech is or is not actualized, but its field and its means and their possible realizations are already there. Nothing new can be said. No way to say it can be invented. Everything is there and is unceasingly reversible. Just as in the case of the visible. Speech has, among other functions, that of bearing the silence of the visible into sonority, of metamorphosing it and itself into a gaze of the mind, "always in virtue of the same fundamental phenomenon of reversibility which sustains both the mute perception and the speech and which manifests itself by an almost carnal existence of the idea, as well as by a sublimation of the flesh" (p. 155).

The almost carnal existence of the idea and the sublimation of the flesh are seductive utterances and hypotheses, yet puzzling ones insofar as their permanences, their cycles or rotations are always already there, where the work that would make the idea become carnal and subliminate the flesh is never accomplished. It would be enough to remain in a state of reversibility—"the ultimate truth"—for these operations or these conditions to take place. Whereas it is the opposite. If reversibility is not interrupted, the sublimation of the flesh cannot be achieved.

In other words: if the cord is not cut and there is no end to the osmotic exchanges with the maternal world and its substitutes, how can the sublimation of the flesh take place? It keeps on becoming in a closed circuit, in a sort of nourishing relationship with the other. Is it sublimated in order to accede to union with the other? It seems that this is not the case. Does it perpetuate a condition, maintain it with its permanence, amortize its cuts and shocks? What is called reversibility here is perhaps that by means of which the subject produces some mucous on the outside and is reenvolved by it. Some elaboration of the carnal undoubtedly takes place there. But always in its solipsistic relation to the

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maternal. There is no trace of any carnal idea of the other woman nor of any sublimation of the flesh with the other. At best an alchemy of substitution of a placental nourishment. A sort of layering that represents the archaeology of the subject, of the world, of their exchanges. But this archaeology already existed. The subject and the world would be already completed even when they were engaged in making themselves. Would they elaborate themselves in relation to an unchanging ground and horizon? In order to change the subject, his language, his world, everything would have to be undone and remade, including what is called the possibilities of language. Its grounds and foundations. And this postulate of a universal speech in which we exchanged, as in some unchanging, pregiven, presupposed exchange, would have to be brought into question.

*"In a sense, if we were to make completely explicit the architectonics of the human body, its ontological framework, and how it sees itself and hears itself, we would see that the structure of its mute world is such that all the possibilities of language are already given in it. Already our existence as seers (that is, we said, as beings who turn the world back upon itself and who pass over to the other side, who see one another with eyes)." (P. 155).*

In Merleau-Ponty's view, the world turns back on itself. The seer does not open his eyes to the world or the other in a contemplation that seeks and respects their different horizons. Does he turn over the world as he turns his hand, his plaything, his creation? Could he plumb the structure of the world to its depths or manage to encompass it? But what gesture, what quality of gesture could make him believe that he has encompassed the world? Is it an intuition or a belief that Merleau-Ponty needs in order to think? A ground that he must give himself? A ground or thought that circles back to the same point while it progresses. In order to progress. Like the sun of the earth moving around the sun and around itself? We would perceive, encounter the world, look at the other at the crossing-

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points of these circles? Catching sight of each other, seeing each through the other.

Catching sight of each other, if we find ourselves on the course at the crisscrossing of the circles that make this possible? Which does not seem to be a matter of course given the reversibility between the visible and the seer, the closed world that reversibility entails for the *I* or the *you*. Within this world, movement is such that it would take extraordinary luck for two seers to catch sight of each other, find each other on the track of the same circle and cross paths, or look at each other as they walk in parallel lines. Or might it happen that they see each other's eyes? Another possibility which is highly unlikely. For this to come about, it would have to happen that two *seers* assimilated the "universal Word," its effects, the world, in exactly the same way, and that they found each other at the same point in space and time. An unlikely stroke of luck or chance? Or of grace? Which makes us identical at a given moment.

But Merleau-Ponty does not speak of this. The rest can only be an illusion of the flesh. We never catch sight of each other, and we do not see each other's eyes. No matter how universal speech may be, a world, *our* world separates us, a world from which we are never separated—in any case according to the kind of relations we entertain in Merleau-Ponty's analysis. We "turn the world back on itself" and "pass over to the other side" because we are seers? Undoubtedly, at each instant, for a pellicle of the horizon of visibility, not for the whole world. The world would have to be completed. Which is possible if the explanation of the architectonics of the body, "its ontological framework," shows that all the possibilities of language are given in the mute world. The world cannot be perceived without language, yet all of language exists virtually in silence. All that remains to be said is that the world is isomorphic with the subject and vice versa, and the whole is sealed up in a circle. Nothing new happens, only this permanent weaving between the world and the subject. Which supposes that the subject sees

the whole, that he is the clairvoyant seeing of everything, with nothing left over—neither of the world nor of himself. If all of language already resides in the silence of the subject and of the world, like their ontological tissue, then I can turn the world back on itself and return to myself after having passed to the other side. Am I playing at hoops with the world (of) language? What do I add? Or what do I take away? It is always the same. I revolve around the "center," the point of anchorage, without getting closer. I keep on repeating a gesture which perhaps digs me in, deepens me? Digs in and deepens the world? Unites us? According to Merleau-Ponty, energy plays itself out in the backward-and-forward motion of a loom. But weaving the visible and my look in this way, I could just as well say that I close them off from myself. The texture becomes increasingly tight, taking me into it, sheltering me there but imprisoning me as well.

In a certain way, this subject never enters the world. He never emerges from an osmosis that allows him to say to the other, "Who art thou?" But also, "Who am I?" What sort of event do we represent for each other when together? Irreversible events except where death is concerned. The phenomenology of the flesh that Merleau-Ponty attempts is without question(s). It has no spacing or interval for the freedom of questioning between two. No other or Other to keep the world open. No genesis. No grace. Having become a god, man works and plays with the world until it is worn out? Very carefully. But not without a certain ennui? By himself.

*"And, in a sense, to understand a phrase is nothing else than to fully welcome it in its sonorous being, or, as we put it so well, to hear what it says." (P. 155).*

Here, meaning is mixed with sound, the totality of the chain of what is said, which is integral in all differentiations of the verbal chain. It is given with the words for those who have ears to hear, and who are situated in a landscape overrun with words,

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which is henceforth but a variant of speech. Everything is given, inside and outside. It remains only to welcome, decode, interpret, and hear.

*"In a sense the whole of philosophy, as Husserl says, consists in restoring a power to signify, a birth of meaning, or a wild meaning, an expression of experience by language, which in particular clarifies the special domain of language." (P. 155).*

Everything is given, and yet the function of philosophy is to restore a power to signify, a birth of meaning, or a wild meaning. The question is: can this be possible for it without changing the foundations of language? Without lifting the hypothesis that reversibility is the final truth? A hypothesis that must be questioned and "opened up" if a meaning which has not yet been heard is to come into existence, that of a language which is sexuate and which encounters through speech and in the world a sex which is *irreducible* to it, and with which it is impossible to have relations of reversibility without remainder.