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Anonymity and Ambiguity in Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology:
Discerning the Fundamental Structure of Incompleteness
in Perceptual and Intersubjective Life

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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This work explicates what I identify as the fundamental structure of incompleteness that characterizes the human experience of meaning and that, I argue, informs an ethical imperative in our relations with others. Drawing on the work of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, I begin by showing how we overlook this incompleteness in perception. I argue that our experience of perceptual meaning almost always excludes its essential indeterminacy: that is, we experience meaning as coherent and complete, even though it is necessarily limited by our spatial and temporal situation. I show how what Merleau-Ponty refers to as the "anonymous" body—that which makes possible our participation in the perceptual world—contributes to this pretension and, moreover, informs our preference for what is familiar and complete over what is unfamiliar and incomplete in our experience. I go on to demonstrate how our anonymous facility in the world always includes others, who aid in our development of this anonymous sense of self. I further demonstrate how others also challenge this sense of anonymity, in so far as they expose its limits. However, as in our perceptual life, in our intersubjective life we also resist recognizing these limits. Other people constitute the deepest and most prevalent dimension of indeterminacy in our experience; yet we often perceive them as familiar and easily recognizable and, in doing so, we resolve the ambiguity of our experience of them. I argue that we deny the incompleteness of our access to others because they expose the fundamental tension between the inherent limits of our experience and our comfortable facility in the world; they demonstrate to us our own finitude, which the structure of our experience otherwise conceals. Yet the ambiguity of our experience of others is equally the source of our potential relations with them and of our opportunities for further self-development; it is, I argue, fundamentally creative. My work thus develops a phenomenological account of intersubjectivity and, on the basis of this account, argues that an ethics of relations with others must recognize the unforeseeable possibilities inherent in our experiences of them. What becomes apparent in a close examination of perceptual experience—namely, the incompleteness of our experience of meaning—is, I argue, essential to defining the ethical imperative in our relations with others.

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Introduction

When we describe our experience, we often look to the objects that comprise it, and that give it its meaningful richness. We say what they are and how they appear to us, which may also include how they affect us and, moreover, how we respond to them. But if we attend more closely, we notice a contrast between what is actually there and what we experience. For instance, at any moment we usually encounter only part of an object rather than all of it, all at once. However, it is not only their spatial integrity—that they are fully what they only, in fact, partially appear to be—but also the complex of meaning objects may have for us, that exceeds what is immediately given. In an important sense, then, the apparent fullness of our experience conceals a more basic incompleteness. We always experience more than is there and, as a result, we overlook what remains indeterminate.

This incompleteness is arguably more pronounced, and has more significant consequences, in our relations with others, who always retain dimensions of inaccessibility, and thus of indeterminacy. Even though others may appear to us as analogues of ourselves, we will never know them as such. They are indeterminate because our experience of them will never fully comprehend, or coincide with, their experience; we are always, to a certain extent, exclusive of each other. However, our access to others is limited not only by their fundamental indeterminacy, but also by the presumptiveness of our familiarity with them. We take for granted that our experience of others fully accounts for who they are, even outside the particularity of our relations with them, and thus fail to notice its inherent limits.

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In this work, I focus on the ways in which our experience conceals its fundamentally incomplete, and thus indeterminate, nature. I turn to perception to demonstrate the temporal structure of meaning in our experience, and to show how we, for the most part, implicitly relate to perceptual meaning as determinate and complete, rather than as open and unfinished. I argue that, in our intersubjective life, we also often relate to others as determinate, whether in our implicit patterns of interaction, or in the more explicit commitments that define our relations with them. However, to deny the openness of our relations with others is equally to deny their inherent creativity, realized in the possibilities for development and transformation they continually offer us. I argue that in order to take up these possibilities, we must recognize that we are not the sole arbiters of meaning in our experience, and that our familiarity with others does not preclude their fundamental indeterminacy. Thus, I argue, the incompleteness of our experience of others demands our openness to new and unanticipated meanings and, moreover, our acknowledgment of our responsibility in their creation.

Drawing on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and, to a lesser extent, Edmund Husserl, I begin by developing the terms of my analysis in a close study of perception. In Chapter One, I show how the incompleteness of our experience is rooted in the openness of our temporal situation. Our perceptual experience is always unfolding, and so always incomplete. But while the temporality of perception renders it fundamentally indeterminate in its openness to the future, I demonstrate that it likewise informs its implicit meaningfulness and coherence. I draw on contemporary studies of perception in order to show how our experience privileges what is familiar and known in the expectations that contribute to its pretension of completeness. I argue, however, that because the meaning of our perceptual experience is fundamentally temporal, it is never fully available to us in the present, though we nevertheless perceive it as such. To develop

this point further, I turn to habits, which I analyze in the final section of this chapter. I show how the establishment and continued performance of a habit, like perception itself, relies upon a fullness of meaning that is, in fact, never fully available in the present.

In my second chapter, I expand and deepen the account of temporality I set forth in Chapter One. I begin by examining Merleau-Ponty's account of the "habitual body," in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Like the perceiving body, the habitual body is, according to Merleau-Ponty, "anonymous"; it makes possible our inclusion in a world whose meanings we take up implicitly in our engagement with it. The habitual body is "anonymous" in so far as it inhabits this world unreflectively, without the distinctive contributions of one's individual personality or resolution. I argue that Merleau-Ponty's notion of anonymity thus describes the way in which we are at a distance from our own experience, and challenges the assumption of self-possession that characterizes our everyday interactions with the world. I turn to Merleau-Ponty's account of the phantom limb in order to explicate the temporal implications of anonymity. I argue that the phantom limb demonstrates the way in which the habitual body establishes an anonymous temporality, that is, a temporality derived from one's personal response to current demands, but that ultimately becomes detached from those demands, such that the world it enacts may no longer be possible. I go on to argue that this anonymous temporality also characterizes reflective life, which is traditionally considered distinctly personal. To support this argument, I show how the account of temporality Merleau-Ponty develops in his analysis of the phantom limb is further developed in his critique of Descartes' *cogito*. While "I think" seems to be an atemporal and exclusive assertion of self-definition, I follow Merleau-Ponty's claim that it, like the "I can" of the capable, habitual body, is always situated within a world and, as such, incorporates a certain degree of blindness to its own situatedness. Thus, I

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argue, we are not always authors of the reflective narratives we assume as definitive of ourselves, though we may take them up as accurate accounts of our most intimate inner life. I go on to argue that, moreover, just as the habitual body becomes one's predominant way of approaching the world, so too may the narratives that define one's reflective life assume a normative force, and thus foreclose our taking up other possible narratives and the further understanding of oneself they could make possible. Thus, the possibility of self-knowledge is both grounded in and fundamentally limited by our involvement in the world. In the final section of the chapter, I consider what implications these limits to self-knowledge have for a theory of meaning that affirms the "I" in its engagement in the world rather than in reflection.

My third chapter applies the insights of my analysis of perception and temporality to intersubjective experience, focusing in particular on the relationship between one's anonymous sense of self and others. In the first two sections of the chapter, I argue that the anonymous sense of self always incorporates, and thus reflects the contributions of, others. I take as my starting point the central claim of Merleau-Ponty's essay, "The Child's Relations with Others," namely, that the child first identifies with others before developing an individuated, distinct sense of self. I show how Merleau-Ponty's work in this essay develops an account of what I refer to as primordial anonymity, which describes the way in which the child's early bodily needs are not experienced as her own, but rather are shaped by others' responsiveness to them. I draw on the work of object-relations theorists D. W. Winnicott and Melanie Klein to support this account. As a result of this primordial anonymity, I argue, the child's experience of her own body is affectively charged by her relations with others. I go on to demonstrate how these early relations introduce her to her perceptual and motor capabilities, which inform her development of a body schema and, in turn, a distinct sense of self. I argue that recent criticism in

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contemporary philosophy and developmental psychology of Merleau-Ponty's claim in this essay overlooks its philosophical import, namely, that we must learn to discern the proper boundaries between ourselves and others—boundaries that we continually negotiate in adult life. Thus, I go on to demonstrate how this primordial anonymity is reflected in adult bodily experience, in particular, in the way in which others inform one's anonymous sense of capability expressed in the "I can." In the third and final section of the chapter, I argue that though others are constitutive of our anonymous sense of self, they also challenge our ability to inhabit it comfortably. I turn to Simone de Beauvoir's novel, *She Came to Stay*, in order to illustrate the way in which our recognition of the distinction between ourselves and others entails recognizing the inherent limits of our sense of the world and of ourselves—limits that are otherwise obscured in the anonymous dimensions of our experience.

My work in Chapter Four examines these limits, and the consequent incompleteness of our experience, as the foundation of meaning in our relations with others. I begin by presenting the account of intersubjectivity Merleau-Ponty gives in his chapter on "Others and the Human World" in *Phenomenology of Perception*. I show that because Merleau-Ponty emphasizes our lack of self-possession, and thus the incompleteness of our experience of ourselves, his account of our experience of others does not fall prey to the philosophical problems of traditional accounts of intersubjectivity, such as solipsism. Following Merleau-Ponty, I demonstrate that our lack of self-possession—evident in the anonymous dimensions of our experience—is, rather, the condition of our experience of others. I go on to argue that the presumptiveness inherent in this anonymity informs our experience of others, yet fails to exhaust their necessarily indeterminate reality outside our expectations of them. In the second section of the chapter, I return to the work of object-relations theorist Melanie Klein to account for why we deny this

indeterminacy in our experience of others. I argue that recourse to anonymity in our interpersonal lives—in deference to social roles, for example—is opposed to the essential ambiguity of our experience of others. But because this ambiguity may threaten the security of our sense of the world and of ourselves, we may privilege our own evaluations of reality over reality itself; we thus falsely claim sole authority over the meaningfulness of our experience. I argue that in doing so, however, we fail to experience others *as* others, and thus fail to take up the creative potential inherent in our relations with them. In the final section of the chapter, I give a positive account of the ambiguity of our relations with others and its creative potential, focusing in particular on its critical role in self-development. I examine the determinate commitments, implicit and explicit, that give shape to our relations with others. I argue that these commitments are always informed by the incompleteness of our experience of others, which, as I demonstrated in earlier chapters, is temporal, but also magnified by the indeterminacy of the lives they lead apart from us. Thus, if our commitments to others are to be consistent with the nature of intersubjective reality, I argue, they must likewise be commitments to openness—more specifically, open to being transformed by others and also open to the unanticipated meanings that are always possible in our relations with them. I go on to claim that to acknowledge this openness, and the consequent indeterminacy of meaning in our relations with others, however, is also to acknowledge that we are responsible for the meanings we do, in fact, create. I argue that in this sense, the inherent creativity of our relations with others is equally expressive of the role we always have in actively making, and also in implicitly taking up, meaning in our intersubjective lives.

This work thus demonstrates the way in which our experience often conceals its own incompleteness and, in doing so, conceals the way in which determinate meanings take shape out

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of a more fundamental indeterminacy. While this concealment contributes to the coherence of

our perceptual experience, and is a consequence of our temporal situation in the world,

recognizing this fundamental indeterminacy in our intersubjective life is critical to our

recognizing the possibilities for self-knowledge and self-transformation that others continually

offer us and, moreover, is critical to our recognizing our own responsibility in taking up and

creating the meanings of the world we share with others. Thus, what this work first identifies in

a close examination of perceptual experience turns out to be essential to defining the ethical

imperative in our relations with others.

Chapter One.   Perception, Habit, and the Predominance of the Familiar

What is constantly familiar is constantly unfamiliar. . .

--- Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive Synthesis*, 59

Introduction

Phenomenological analyses have traditionally focused on perception as our most basic

and immediate contact with the world to reveal both the possibilities and limits of individual

perspective in concrete, lived experience. What these analyses have shown, however, is that

perception does not neatly separate what is clearly given from what is not given at all, but rather

always includes obscure and obscured elements. In the opening pages of the *Phenomenology of*

Perception, Merleau-Ponty argues that this indeterminacy is not a deficiency of perceptual

experience, but essential to it. He claims that "we must recognize the indeterminate as a positive

phenomenon."[1] While it may seem obvious that perception does not always yield us its objects

clearly and distinctly, Merleau-Ponty's stronger claim here is that perception never yields its

objects to us *completely*. That is, the indeterminacy of our experience—its lack of absolute

definition and its temporal incompleteness—can never be resolved; it speaks to the

inexhaustibility of the objects we are constantly encountering, the familiar objects we know most

intimately as well as those with which we have only cursory interactions. To disregard this

indeterminacy is, according to Merleau-Ponty, to "build perception out of the perceived,"[2] that

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[1] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012) 7 [7]. Unless otherwise noted, throughout this work, page references to the Phenomenology of Perception will refer to Landes' 2012 translation of *Phénoménologie de la perception*. I will include page references to Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith (New York, NY: Routledge Classics, 2002) in brackets "[ ]" following the references to Landes' translation.

[2] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 5 [5].

is, to mistake the object as we may know it, in its fullness and familiarity, with our perceptual experience of it, which at any given moment is limited.

Yet the world as we live it does not *seem* indeterminate. That is, my experience claims a pretension of fullness, of completeness, and it is only when I reflect upon it that I recognize the incommensurability of the completeness I take it to have with the reality of what I in fact perceive. For example, when I look at the café across the park, I don't see its façade as merely that, but rather as the façade of a three-dimensional structure that offers shelter and coffee. From my particular vantage point I can see only one of its sides fully, and another partially, but they indicate to me two other unseen sides that, along with the two in view, form a structure which I can walk into. Something similar could be said about the many other objects around me: if I consider them more closely, I recognize that I encounter them only in limited profiles, not in the fullness I implicitly take them to possess. Arguably, this implicit fullness lends coherence to my experience: I encounter full, and thus recognizable objects, even when I only perceive limited profiles of them. Moreover, these objects always have meanings for me that exceed what they present to my senses, and that likewise contribute to their fullness. For instance, from where I sit in the park, I can hear a saxophonist playing the melody of "My Favorite Things." I do not hear a mere string of notes, but rather a song whose course I follow and at the same time anticipate. Just as the structure I see means "coffee" and "shelter," and the sounds I hear suggest a John Coltrane album, I am always encountering objects with meanings that exceed my sensory experience of them. In this way the limits of my individual perspective disappear in what it makes available to me—the world in all of its manifold appeal. Thus, my perceptual experience does not always *seem* indeterminate because it affords me the fullness of the world in which I

live and to which I am always responding, a fullness that reflects the constancy and diversity of sensory experience *and* the complex of meanings this experience always has for me.

In this first chapter, I will present a study of these basic structural features of our perceptual experience, in order to account for how we overstep the limits set by both our perceptual capabilities and what is given to them. While Merleau-Ponty's work on perception provides the background for my thinking on this topic, I will devote a large portion of this chapter to Edmund Husserl's *Analyses Concerning Passive Synthesis*. It is in this work that we receive a detailed and compelling account of the way in which the coherence of our experience is accomplished without any explicit effort on our part: to put it more simply, this work describes how meanings happen beneath our notice. This insight has important consequences for how we relate to what is indeterminate, or wholly unknown, in perceptual experience, and allows us to give a preliminary sketch of the character of our epistemological orientation in the world.

In the opening section of this chapter, on "Perceptual Incompletion," I will consider Husserl's account of perception in his lectures on passive synthesis, along with Alva Noë's more recent work on perception, in order to discern the structural motivations and character of perceptual indeterminacy. In the following section, on "The Temporality of Perception," I will consider the apparent completeness of perception as a consequence of its temporal character, of the way in which the immediate past and the directedness towards the future inform our experience of the present. I will present Husserl's account of "retroactive crossing out" as a specific demonstration of the openness of perceptual experience to future discovery. In light of Husserl's account of the temporality of perceptual experience, in the third section of this chapter, on "Habit," I will consider habit as a challenge to, but ultimately supportive of, our essential openness to the future. In this section, I will show how Merleau-Ponty's thinking complements

Husserl's work on passive synthesis, specifically the idea that meaning within our experience is never fully realized in the present. I will go on to discuss how habits, and perception as a motor-habit in particular, give us insight into the temporal structure of learning.

I.   Perceptual Incompletion

In their experiments with figure, light and color, many of the paintings of the early 20th century demonstrate that perception accomplishes something, that it both reconciles and conveys a complex of color, shape and dimension in the meaningful presentation of an object to the perceiver. These paintings do this either by effectively denying the viewer this accomplishment, in depicting objects that have been flattened to one dimension, or by presenting it in explicit detail, displaying multiple, simultaneous aspects of a single object. Henri Matisse's *Gourds* (1916), for example, presents an array of objects outlined in black, their surfaces nearly flat in appearance, despite some degree of shading which conventionally gives the impression of depth. But even the pitcher, which out of all the objects has the most shading, seems to let the viewer in on the secret of its appearance; it displays its depth as contrived, as the explicit manipulation of color and shape. Pablo Picasso's painting *Woman and pears (Fernande)* (1909) also uses color and shape to present objects that challenge and dissect normal perception. The figures in this painting have an explicitly sculptural quality because their contours have been brought into multi-dimensional relief. Rigid geometrical shapes dramatically isolate what we would normally perceive as subtle curves in the woman's neck, at her temples. We see the "interlocking of our perspectives"[3] that are more often implicit in a two-dimensional view of an object. Both of these

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[3] Merleau-Ponty, <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, 349 [389].

paintings depict objects that present a defiant contrast to the seamlessness of normal perception. In their complications, they show us that we usually take this seamlessness for granted, that our perceptual experience is for the most part effortlessly coherent in its presentation of complex and meaningful objects.

Husserl undertakes a close, philosophical study of the same phenomena that are examined in early twentieth-century paintings, namely, the familiar objects of perceptual experience. He is specifically concerned with how we encounter these objects as meaningful in light of the parameters of normal perception—parameters that are so creatively exposed and manipulated in Matisse and Picasso's paintings. At the beginning of his lectures on *Analyses Concerning Passive Synthesis*, originally given between 1920 and 1926, Husserl characterizes perception as "a constant pretension to accomplish something that, by its very nature, it is not in a position to accomplish."[4] As discussed in the opening pages of this chapter, "its very nature" is *limited*, unable to give an exhaustive view of any one object at once. Nevertheless, it is also in "its very nature" to give this object *as complete*, and thus to make assumptions regarding what is otherwise beyond its reach.

Husserl's work on passive synthesis considers the ways in which objects both provoke and correct this "pretension" of perception. His aim in these lectures is to explain how it is that we experience single, unified objects even though we always only encounter these objects in profiles.[5] "Profiles" are not distinctive to those objects we only glimpse from the side: even when our view is direct and unobstructed we never see all of an object all at once; rather, there will always be aspects, dimensions of it, that are not available to our view. For example, as I sit in the park, I perceive a single tree next to me, though each time I look at it, its appearance is

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[4] Edmund Husserl, <u>Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis</u>, trans. Anthony J. Steinbock (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers) 2001, 39.

[5] Husserl, <u>Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis</u>, 39.

slightly different. The wind is constantly moving its branches, its leaves, and so even if I fix my

gaze on the tree for a longer period of time, I must admit that its appearance is not fixed. These

various appearances are profiles of a single object, this tree. Should I take time-lapse

photographs of this tree, each shot—a captured profile—would be noticeably different, yet the

tree, for me, remains the same. Thus, there is a disparity between what I actually perceive, and

what my perceptual experience presents to me, namely, this single object.

Husserl's notion of *intentionality* accounts for the coherence in our experience of objects,

despite this disparity. It is most often used to describe *consciousness*, that is, our awareness of

our experience, as well as the objects—concrete, abstract, imaginary—that are always included

in this experience. To formulate a definition of intentionality that anticipates Merleau-Ponty's

work, we could say that consciousness is always consciousness of something that is *meaningful*

to it, and Husserl's notion of intentionality already describes the relationship between

consciousness and its objects that traces the development of this meaningfulness. Because our

perception of objects is always incomplete, their meaning for consciousness can never be static,

but is always open to further modifications. More specifically, there are unseen sides to objects,

or details of its appearing sides that are unclear. Husserl designates the former as "outer

horizons" and the latter as "inner horizons" to describe the ranging potential of intentional

consciousness to increase the perceptual knowledge of an object.[6] "Intentions" of an object may

be "full"—that is, substantiated in our experience with the object—or "empty"—that is,

unsubstantiated, based on our former experience of similar objects, or current environmental

suggestions—or any gradation between the two, depending on the extent of consciousness's

acquaintance with that particular object. According to Husserl, because any one instance

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[6] Husserl, <u>Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis</u>, 43.

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contains limited access to a given object, let alone the myriad objects that often comprise our experience, "every momentary phase of perception is in itself a network of partially full and partially empty intentions."[7]

As our discussion of perception as pretension suggests, intentional consciousness always seeks to "fill" inner and outer horizons, to render familiar and known what is currently unfamiliar and unknown, and thus to preserve a unity, or concordance, between the two in perceptual lived experience. In this endeavor it often "approximates" the whole object; "it grasps into an emptiness that cries out for fulfillment."[8] This "emptiness," however, is not wholly open to any appearance of an object, but rather is framed—or, to use Husserl's term, "prefigured"—by the full or partially full intentions of the appearing object that anticipate other appearances in concordance with its existing "sense," or meaning: the white brick of the appearing side of the café prefigures the white brick of the side I cannot see. What is prefigured is consistent with what is already "there."

"Prefiguring" thus always includes those aspects or profiles of objects that are beyond our current reach but whose perception we nevertheless anticipate in our current experience of the object. These empty intentions undergird the coherence of our experience, using what is familiar to preempt what is unknown. This "tactic" of intentional consciousness is for the most part reliable, particularly in practical everyday experience, which does not require exhaustive knowledge of objects. Heidegger's account of *ready-to-hand* objects, in *Being and Time*, describes the seeming complicity of practical objects in our prereflective projects.[9] "Ready-to-hand" objects are the familiar points of engagement in our experience; they solicit our bodily

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[7] Husserl, <u>Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis</u>, 44.
[8] Husserl, <u>Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis</u>, 59.
[9] Martin Heidegger, <u>Being and Time</u>, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, 98-102.

responses without necessarily soliciting our attention, or requiring us to know them beyond their utility to us: I type on this keyboard, I pick up this cup, I write with this pen, I perform all of these actions with the corresponding objects without having to address each object to discern what it is. Heidegger contrasts ready-to-hand objects with present-at-hand objects, which confront us in their inaccessibility, requiring some kind of explicit engagement to account for what they are, and for what we are to do with them. In focusing on *readiness-to-hand* as primordial, that is, as more basic than *presence-at-hand* in our experience with objects, Heidegger's point is epistemological: we do not know the ready-to-hand objects explicitly, in detail, as a scientist might, but rather implicitly, in our adept and unscientific engagement with them. Interestingly, as Heidegger notes, their familiarity to us relegates them to remaining mostly unseen. For example, in reaching for my coffeepot, I do not look at it as I might look at an unexpected object on the table next to it, but rather accomplish grasping it and pouring my coffee in the familiar experience of feeling its handle in my palm and its weight in my wrist; the coffeepot seems to disappear in the reliability of its usefulness. Husserl's analysis of "prefiguring" sharpens, and extends the epistemological consequences of, Heidegger's point: what is familiar informs—one could say pervades—even that which is *in fact* unseen, overriding, as it were, the ineliminable unknown aspects in perceptual experience. While this insight undoubtedly has crucial implications for affective and, as I will argue in later chapters, intersubjective, life, it no less significantly expresses an important truth about the way we perceive, namely, that intentional consciousness privileges what it already knows in anticipating the appearance of what, at that particular moment, it cannot know explicitly.

Husserl's aim in making this point is not to advocate skepticism,[10] but to provide a careful, phenomenological account of how we experience perceptual objects—an account that differs from our prereflective presumptions regarding how and what we know in perception. His analysis is relevant to a problem that has been more recently taken up in both philosophy and the cognitive and visual sciences. Known as "perceptual completion" or "filling-in," this problem is concerned with how to account for the disparity between the experience of the perceiver and what is actually there for her to perceive—or, to put it in Husserl's terms, between the complete object we perceive and the incomplete profiles we have access to. More specifically, perceptual completion "refer[s] to situations where subjects report that something is present in a particular region of visual space when it is actually absent from that region, but present in the surrounding area."[11] There is a physiological basis for many cases of perceptual completion: each eye contains a blind spot where there are no photoreceptors in the retina;[12] anything that falls within this blind spot cannot be perceived in the visual field. However, because the blind spots in each eye are complementary—that is to say, "something that falls on the blind spot of one retina will fall outside the blind spot of the other"—we are unlikely to notice them.[13] But even if we were to shut one eye in order to prevent it from offsetting the blind spot of the other, we do not experience a discontinuity in our visual field.[14] Rather, our vision "completes" or "fills in" this perceptual absence. Thus, in the case of the blind spot, perceptual completion contributes to the

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[10] Husserl, Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis, 59.

[11] Evan Thompson, Alva Noë, and Luiz Pessoa, "Perceptual Completion: A Case Study in Phenomenology and Cognitive Science," in Naturalizing Phenomenology: Issues in Contemporary Phenomenology and Cognitive Science, eds. Jean Petitot, Francisco J. Varela, Bernard Pachoud, Jean-Michel Roy (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP) 1999, 162.

[12] Thompson, Noë, and Pessoa, "Perceptual Completion," 162.

[13] Thompson, Noë, and Pessoa, "Perceptual Completion," 162.

[14] Thompson, Noë, and Pessoa, "Perceptual Completion," 162.

coherence of our experience by functioning as a kind of compensation for the anatomy of the retina, overcoming any deficiencies in the visual data we receive.

However, perceptual completion does not always have an explicitly physiological basis. Of particular interest to Gestalt psychologists and phenomenologists are images such as the Kanizsa triangle (Fig. 1).[15] In the Kanizsa triangle, the viewer sees a triangle and three black disks overlaid by a second, inverted, triangle: the disks and the first triangle appear to be behind the second triangle. Thus, the visual suggestion is that one of
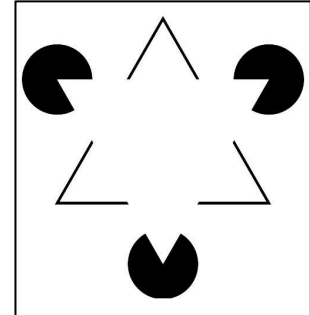
Figure 1: Kanizsa triangle

the triangles is in the foreground, while the other group of shapes is in the background, of the image. The Kanizsa triangle is an example of perceptual completion because the triangle in the foreground is not a defined shape. Rather, its outline is the result of "illusory contours"[16] formed by the interrupted lines of the background triangle which, seen together with the corresponding slices cut out of the black disks, create the appearance of a second, foregrounded, triangle. In addition, the "illusory contours" also create the visual suggestion of layers and depth (evident in my description of the figure, which relies on terms such as "behind," "overlaid," "foreground" and "background" to refer to the different shapes). The visual suggestion of layers and depth demonstrates one of the most important insights of Gestalt theory, taken up in the first few pages of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*: the "figure on a background […] is the very definition of the phenomenon of perception, that without which a phenomenon cannot be said to be perception at all."[17] Perceptual completion in the Kanizsa triangle depends on the figure-

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[15] Gaetano Kanizsa, Organization in Vision: Essays in Gestalt Perception (New York: Praeger Press) 1979, cited in Thompson, Noë, and Pessoa, "Perceptual Completion: A Case Study in Phenomenology and Cognitive Science," 175. Source of image (Figure 1): http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Kanizsa_triangle.svg.

[16] Thompson, Noë, and Pessoa, "Perceptual Completion," 175.

[17] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge) 2002, quoted in Thompson, Noë, and Pessoa, 189.

ground distinction, that is, on the viewer differentiating a foregrounded triangle from a background of other shapes.

Furthermore, and perhaps even more significant, perceptual completion in the Kanizsa triangle demonstrates the way in which the figure-ground distinction imparts meaning to our perceptual experience: we see two triangles and three disks, rather than a collection of lines and unnamable shapes. To be even more specific, we see *whole shapes* that have parts that are hidden from us by other *whole shapes*.[18] Our perception thus privileges a meaningful organization of these figures. However, in order to do so, it must also register that these figures remain somewhat beyond its scope: we "experience the presence of that which [we] perceive to be *out of view*."[19] Thus, perceptual completion not only concerns raw perceptions, but also informs the meanings (for example, "out of view") they inevitably bear for us.

Our consideration of the Kanizsa triangle thus demonstrates that *we directly perceive meaning*, even when what is "there" for us to perceive is not, on its own, sufficient to support that meaning. In his recent work on perception, Alva Noë refers to this phenomenon as "the problem of perceptual presence."[20] For Noë, the problem of perceptual presence describes those situations in which we perceive unattended or absent aspects of an object or scene.[21] In addition to the Kanizsa triangle, Noë gives the examples of holding a bottle without looking at it, or seeing a cat through a picket fence; in both cases, one perceives a whole bottle, a whole cat, even though one has only limited perceptual access to either.[22]

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[18] Alva Noë, Action in Perception (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press) 2004, 61.
[19] Noë, Action in Perception, 61.
[20] Noë, Action in Perception, 59-65.
[21] Noë, Action in Perception, 59-60.
[22] Noë, Action in Perception, 61.

Noë's problem of perceptual presence is consistent with the problem that motivates

Husserl's work on passive synthesis, in that it focuses on how we acquire a sense of meaningful

wholeness from the limited access we have to an object or scene. In the examples Noë gives, the

places where our fingers touch the bottle, and the wooden slats through which we see the cat,

afford us profiles of those objects (profiles that are much more limited than when we now have

an unobstructed view of the cat, or when we both hold and look at the bottle in our hand).

According to Noë, we perceive whole objects when we only encounter profiles because we

possess sensorimotor capabilities that could provide us access to other aspects of the object that

are currently outside our perceptual reach: we can walk up to the fence and peer through the

slats, and we can turn the bottle in our hand.[23] In this way our sensorimotor skills make the

complete world of our experience "*virtually* present" to us.[24]

Noë's argument thus focuses on the embodied character of perception in order to account

for the disparity between the actually limited and the "virtually" unlimited nature of experience.

It resolves the problem of perceptual presence by pointing to the way in which our bodily

capacities to interact with the world necessarily inform our perception of that world. Thus,

according to Noë's account, perceptual completion attests to the prominence of our powers of

further engagement, which "give" us our current experience, but only as it is contextualized by

the various avenues of expansion made possible by our bodily capabilities.[25]

As our work thus far has shown, both the figure-ground distinction and the embodied

character of perception help account for what motivates perceptual completion. More

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[23] Noë, Action in Perception, 63.

[24] Noë, Action in Perception, 63, emphasis in original.

[25] Aristotle similarly attributes prominence to potency—capability—in perception (cf. his contention, in On the Soul, that the perceptive power is capable of being-at-work only insofar as its potency is *preserved* in the being-at-work). This understanding of perception—shared by Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Noë—emphasizes the way in which possible perceptual futures contextualize the subject's perceptual present. It will be the aim of the next section of this chapter to consider the temporal character of perceptual experience.

significantly, our consideration of both has underscored the nature of perceptual completion and, in turn, the nature of perceptual experience in general, by demonstrating that even as what we perceive maintains a compelling fullness, there persist dimensions of our experience that are indeterminate. That is to say, perceptual completion does not yield a "complete" perceptual experience, in which all possible perceptual details are "filled in." There will always be elements of the background, or aspects of objects, that we do, in an important sense, perceive, but that are not given fully to us. They are, as Husserl puts it, "pre-figured" or, as Noë puts it, "virtually present." As a result, our experience does not have edges sharply defining what is "here" and what is "not here." Or, to put it differently, what we see in our experience is not like what we see in watching a film in a movie theatre, in which the content of the scene is brightly distinguished from the black nothingness that frames it. Rather, my experience always has an undeniable indeterminacy to it that reflects both the limits to my perceptual access to objects and, as I will go on to discuss in the following section, the objects' openness to qualification in future moments.

Moreover, as our consideration of Husserl's account of pre-figuring suggests, the more familiar dimensions of our experience inform what is indeterminate within it. That is, the familiar or known aspects of an object override its unknown aspects, effectively forecasting it as complete. This is the "pretension" of perception: we directly perceive meanings that outstrip our perception of the objects that bear those meanings. Despite the coherence of our experience, however, the object itself always retains a dimension of unfamiliarity. Indeed, this is what Matisse and Picasso's paintings show us: they reconfigure the familiar, exposing its strange aspects by changing the way we approach it, by restricting this "pretension." The indeterminacy

of our experience always leaves open this possibility of revealing the unfamiliar in the familiar and, moreover, of correcting what we initially took to be complete.

II.   The Temporality of Perception: Retroactive crossing out and the Mutability of Meaning

So far we have focused on accounting for why our perceptual experience is incomplete, and why it does not seem incomplete to us. Yet our analysis has not made explicit what, for Husserl, is most significant for understanding the coherence of perceptual experience, namely, its temporality. Certainly, a temporal understanding of perception is implicit throughout the preceding discussion. For instance, Noë's account of how our bodily capabilities inform our perception of whole objects relies on the potential for deploying these capabilities in future interactions with that object (and also, perhaps, on the successful deployment of these capabilities in the past, a factor which will be taken up later in our consideration of habit). In addition, in my observation of the tree in the park, I noted that were I to take time-lapse photographs of the tree, it would appear different in each. However, my actual experience of the tree does not resemble time-lapse photography precisely because each moment within it overlaps the previous and the next. Thus, my perceptual experience is, as Husserl puts it, "a process of streaming from phase to phase; in its own way each one of the phases is a perception, but these phases are continuously harmonized in the unity of a synthesis, in the unity of a consciousness of one and the same perceptual object that is constituted here originally."[26] This section will consider the temporality of this "streaming," first by giving a brief overview of Husserl's account of the temporal structure of perception, and then by focusing more closely on a

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[26] Husserl, <u>Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis</u>, 107.

particularly interesting dimension of his account of passive synthesis, retroactive crossing out, in order to examine how the coherence of perception is sustained and continually preserved.

The problem of temporal coherence is, for Husserl, the same as the problem of the unified sense of an object, which we considered in the previous section. Just as an object claims a unified sense across our encounters of it in diverse profiles, so does it maintain its meaningful integrity throughout the duration of our experience of it. Indeed, some perceptual objects, such as melodies and things physically moving across space, directly depend on duration, on our experiencing them as continuous over a stretch of time. For Husserl, a temporal object maintains its meaningful integrity over time because our present perception of it—the *primal impression*— is connected to its recent past—in *retention*—and its approaching future—in *protention*. That is, the current perception of any object is never just that—strictly current—but includes both its immediate perception in the past and its potential for being perceived in the future. Consider again our musician busking in the city park. Whether or not the listeners are familiar with the melody of "My Favorite Things," their perception of it as a melody relies on the relationship each note has with the previous and impending notes: their retention of what has come before, and their protention of the further progression of the tune, inform their experience of the song. Even the spontaneity of the musician's improvisation, which departs from the familiar, established melody, depends on the listener's perceiving the notes as a temporal, relational unit. This point may also be illustrated in the case of a moving object. When I follow the trajectory of a frisbee from the hand of one friend to that of another, the scene is coherent because the retention of my perception of the frisbee's position as it is released is part of my perception of it in flight. This is apparent even when the frisbee finds a gust of air, and then seems to rise supernaturally above my friend's waiting hand: I catch myself having to readjust my vision

because my anticipation of the frisbee's trajectory—in protention—was, in fact, guiding my perception of it.

The examples of the melody and the moving frisbee demonstrate that retention and protention are integral parts of any perceptual moment—that both are constitutive of the present. In this sense, retention is different from memory, and protention from prediction or explicit anticipation of an event. Both memory and prediction include intentional objects that may be wholly independent of the current moment—for instance, they may be imaginary or simply past; in either case, they are not necessary to one's experience of the present.[27] In contrast, our experience of a single object as present is dependent on its continuity in retention and protention. Thus, we could say that retention is the object's possession of its presence in the immediate past, protention the claim the object has on its presence in the future, both of which contribute to the coherence of our present perception of it.

While both retention and protention are necessary to our experience of an object as present, there would seem to be an important distinction between them, namely, that the contents of retention reflect, and thus have had some confirmation in, our experience of the object, whereas the contents of protention are aimed at, but still lack, that confirmation; or, to put it more simply, that the contents of retention are settled, or "closed," whereas the contents of protention are "open" to the findings of future interactions with the object. Husserl's work on passive synthesis provides insight into this apparent distinction, which hinges on, yet is ultimately challenged by, the openness of our experience towards its future.

As our consideration of perceptual completion suggests, perception is oriented towards a future, but only as that future is outlined in the present and immediate past. Husserl's notions of

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[27] Dan Zahavi, Husserl's Phenomenology (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP) 2003, 83.

intentionality, fulfillment and prefiguring describe the continuity and the *expectation* of continuity that inform our experience of whole objects: "in the normal case of perception, all fulfillment progresses as the fulfillment of expectations"[28]—expectations that the object appear in *this particular way*. But as my example of the errant frisbee suggests, our expectations may sometimes be disappointed. That our expectations are susceptible to disappointment, and then correction, even *after* the current perceptual moment has passed, and that this correction then goes on to inform the *past* perceptual experience, to alter it in an essential way, constitutes an important dimension of Husserl's account of passive synthesis, and demonstrates that the openness of perception towards the future extends even to the past.

Husserl uses the phrase "retroactive crossing out" to describe the way in which these modifications are made to our recent past—in the contents of retention—in light of a new perceptual experience. Retroactive crossing out occurs when empty intentions are not filled as expected. Husserl calls this experience "disappointment," or "determining otherwise" in contrast to the "determining more closely" of fulfillment.[29] As our discussion of prefiguring made clear, "disappointment essentially presupposes partial fulfillment"[30] of the network of intentions that frame the object's sense—its meaning[31]—as it is initially given in appearance: there must be some grounded or warranted "expectation" for "disappointment" to take place.

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[28] Husserl, <u>Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis</u>, 64.

[29] Husserl, <u>Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis</u>, 63, 122.

[30] Husserl, <u>Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis</u>, 64.

[31] At the beginning of his <u>Analyses Concerning Passive Synthesis</u>, Husserl defines "sense" as the appearing of the object as such (39). Later in the text, he refers to sense as "an accomplishment of consciousness" (57), which qualifies the meaning of the quotation with which we began this chapter: perception is the pretension to accomplish the *sense* of an object. Significantly, then, sense is more the object of intentionality than is the transcendent object itself, because it gives the object its meaning for consciousness. Thus, throughout this section, "sense" should be understood as the meaning of the object for consciousness.

To illustrate a case of disappointment and retroactive crossing out, Husserl gives the example of encountering a round, red ball.[32] Though only one side of the ball is visible to us, we nevertheless perceive the whole object as we would expect it to look—specifically, we expect its opposite side to be round and red as well. Upon a closer perceptual encounter with the object, however, we discover its opposite side to be green and indented: our original sense of it is "disappointed." When I encounter the object as "otherwise" than my expectations described it, I encounter the basic fallibility of my empty intentions: the object is not as I expected it to be. This experience of disappointment is not isolated to the current moment of "otherwise," but is coincident with the *negation* of those prior expectations, the "crossing out" of what was prefigured and what is now held in retention. Thus, the effects of this disappointment reach back into the moments preceding my unexpected discovery. If I were to trace my experience of the round red ball in the moments preceding my discovery of its green indented side, I could recall my perception of the ball's roundness and redness, but only as it is "layered beneath"[33] the subsequent "correction"—"green and indented." Interestingly, then, my empty intention of the ball's roundness and redness is now permanently informed by my fulfilled intention of its indented-ness and greenness: ""It is different" also means: "it was different.""[34] Thus, in retroactive crossing out there is an adjustment of the contents of retention to accord with the disappointment of the expectant, empty intentions.[35]

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[32] Husserl, <u>Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis</u>, 64-65.

[33] Husserl, <u>Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis</u>, 65.

[34] Husserl, <u>Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis</u>, 427.

[35] Husserl also describes a "disappointment of a regular style" that does not effect a break in unity because it is "prefigured in the empty horizon" (64). From Husserl's account, it seems like this kind of disappointment would characterize those situations in which the changing aspects of an object are anticipated—*that* the object will change—even if the appearances of the changes are not. This "regular disappointment" would seem to apply to cases in which objects undergo elemental changes due to burning, melting or freezing. It is the change itself that is the focus here, and that provokes the *expected* disappointment of the intentions that originally described the object.

In our encounter with the ball, its meaning as "round and red" changed when we discovered its indented and green side. But as Husserl is quick to point out, a comparison between the initial sense of the object with the later altered sense reveals that "the objective sense itself remains identical."[36] The identity of sense that Husserl refers to here is the original objective sense maintained *as crossed out*.[37] While we can no longer recall the sense of the ball as "red and round" without also incorporating the corrected sense of "green and indented," as noted above, the former sense nevertheless *remains*, lending a continuity between the conflicting appearances of the object. Indeed, it is the "general framework of sense" that accommodates this conflict, and that admits of the introduction of a newer framework that reflects the modifications of the disappointed intentions.[38] And, most significantly, the object itself remains unified in our perceptual experience because its sense contains *both* the original anticipation, now negated, and its current givenness in the flesh.[39]

Our analyses of retroactive crossing out have hitherto focused on the structure of intentionality as the site of both met and disappointed expectations, and thus as the site of the preservation of an object's sense, the meaning it has for us. But necessary to an understanding of this structure is Husserl's notion of retention and its complex role in experience. In our preliminary discussion of retention and protention, we briefly alluded to the important distinction between the contents of retention and the contents of memory. Here, I would like to examine further Husserl's notion of retention, in particular its distinction from protention, in light of his account of retroactive crossing out.

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[36] Husserl, <u>Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis</u>, 71.
[37] Husserl, <u>Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis</u>, 71.
[38] Husserl, <u>Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis</u>, 65.
[39] Husserl, <u>Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis</u>, 363.

In an early section of *Analyses Concerning Passive Synthesis*, Husserl describes retention as functioning to put intentional objects of the recent past at our "disposal."[40] These now-empty intentions of objects in retention "can be freely filled up at any time" in a reenactment of the original perception.[41] But as Husserl points out in a subsequent lecture, the contents of retention are likewise at the "disposal" of modification according to new perceptions, *if* the original constitution of the object in consciousness was the result of partially full intentions.[42] As our previous discussion made clear, most objects constituted in lived experience are comprised of both filled and partially filled intentions, thus giving rise to occasions of disappointment and retroactive crossing out.

However, though the contents of retention are at the disposal of consciousness, they must "lie in wait" for its attention. Even in an experience of retroactive crossing out, the altered contents are not brought to the attention of consciousness until it explicitly turns toward their previous sense, to find it underlying its more recent modification. This "lying in wait" displays the lack of intentionality—or, more simply, the lack of directedness—in retention, marking its essential contrast from protention, which describes consciousness's expectant directedness towards the future.[43] However, that the contents of retention are not only at the "disposal" of consciousness, but are also susceptible to modification, reveals a significant parallel between retention and protention, despite this basic difference. This parallel is grounded in the like openness of both to the possibilities implicit in empty horizons—an openness that is often overshadowed in perception's "pretension to accomplish what it is not in a position to accomplish." Both the openness of protention to the future, and the qualified openness of

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[40] Husserl, Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis, 47.
[41] Husserl, Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis, 47.
[42] Husserl, Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis, 114.
[43] Husserl, Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis, 116.

retention to modifications that are brought to light in the present, show the essential alterability

of objective sense, which consciousness constantly seeks to discern in its perceptual interaction

with the world: the meanings it anticipates, finds and contributes to in perception are malleable,

and ultimately receptive to the unfolding of the temporal course of experience. Even so, though

the contents of retention must lie in wait for the directions of intentionality, they nevertheless

inform the maintenance of objective sense that contributes to the unity of perceptual experience.

In this way, the role of retention is revealed to be quite complex in Husserl's account of

retroactive crossing out: even outside acts of fulfillment, in their lack of intentionality, the

contents of retention are both susceptible to modification and yet supportive of the concordant

structure of experience.

The preceding discussion has been largely exegetical and technical, yet it describes the

most fundamental elements of our perceptual experience. With these elements in mind, I would

like to draw out the important implications Husserl's ideas have for our situation in the world,

specifically, the way we take up and relate to meaning. Perhaps the most apparent of these

implications—evident in Husserl's basic account of perception as comprised of primal

impression, protention and retention—is that our experience of meaning is always temporal; it is

always rooted in the immediate past and directed towards a future, and thus no object is

experienced independent of its temporal horizon. That our experience is temporal is another way

of saying that it is limited, that meanings are never experienced "all at once."

Because our experience of meaning is temporal and limited, it is open to revision and

transformation. As Husserl's account of retroactive crossing out demonstrates, even those

meanings that seem established in the recent past, "settled," are nevertheless susceptible to

change. Moreover, these changes are incorporated into the "streaming" of perceptual

experience. Even if my expectations prove drastically wrong, my experience remains coherent.

Husserl supplies a vivid example from his own experience to illustrate this point. He recounts

looking at a painting in a museum, while also being aware of a woman standing next to him.

After some time has passed, he realizes that he is not in the presence of another person, but of a

mannequin.[44] As was the case with the "red roundness" of the ball, Husserl's original sense of

the presence next to him as a "woman" is crossed out, and replaced by "wooden mannequin."

The sense of the intentional object as "woman" remains, but as "not-existing" rather than as

"existing."[45] Thus, despite the substantial difference between what Husserl originally perceives

to be next to him, and what he discovers is actually there, the continuity of his perceptual

experience is preserved. This coherence attests to the constant yet revisable role that

expectations play in our experience.

One of the distinctive insights of this work on passive synthesis—and, indeed, why it,

along with other a few other texts, is often cited to challenge the claim that Husserl's work on

perception (over) emphasizes the activity of intentional consciousness[46]—is that the temporal

structure of our experience provides a framework that informs the meaning that things have for

us, and opens it to transformation. It demonstrates that within this framework of meaning, our

experience is guided by expectations and shaped according to whether and how they are filled,

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[44] Husserl, Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis, 431.

[45] Husserl presents this example to demonstrate the separability of sense and modality; that is, the meaning of an object can persist, even if it is determined that the object doesn't exist. This example shows that, like sense, the modality of being of objective sense is "intentionally constituted" (Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis, 66). In the case described here, Husserl's empty intentions defined both the sense of the figure as "woman," and its modality of being as "existing." Upon recognition of the figure as a mannequin, however, the original sense is negated, and, in this negation, its modality of being is changed to "not-existing." It is evident from this example that intentions—full, empty and partially full—confer not only the sense, but also the modality of being of an object. Thus, fulfilled intentions may, interestingly enough, preserve the original sense of an object *by* registering a change in modality. In turn, this preservation contributes to the unity of the perceptual object in that it allows the object to maintain conflicting senses by differentiating between their modalities.

[46] Cf. Victor Biceaga, The Concept of Passivity in Husserl's Phenomenology (New York: Springer Dordrecht, 2010) xviii-xxi.

and that disappointed expectations are passively corrected in such a way as to preserve the fundamental coherence of perceptual experience. Thus, there is an important sense in which perceptual meanings happen to us, rather than being always initiated and sustained by us, and understanding this passivity is critical for understanding the way in which our experience is meaningful.

At least since Aristotle, many philosophers have refused to characterize perception as a strictly passive or active process. According to Aristotle, earlier philosophers' ways of speaking about perception that emphasize the perceiver's passivity, such as "being acted upon" and "being altered" by the environment, are inadequate descriptions of perception because they obscure its dependence on the perceiver's activity, specifically the capabilities and movements that make perception possible.[47] But as Husserl's work here shows, it is equally inaccurate to consider perceptual experience, and the meanings that accumulate within it, wholly active, that is, wholly dependent on the perceiver's capabilities, attention and movements, because the perceiver is always situated within a temporal horizon that both frames perceptual meaning and opens it to transformation. In the course of experience, meanings happen that revise their predecessors and give a new direction to perceptual consciousness that, as the examples of retroactive crossing out demonstrate, may only be apparent in retrospect. These new meanings inform the temporal shape of our experience in ways that are not immediately obvious, but, as such, contribute to its coherence. Thus, Husserl's work on passive synthesis does not so much characterize perceiving consciousness as ultimately passive than as subject to the temporal transformation of perceptual meaning.[48] Moreover, it makes a more general point that extends beyond the study of

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[47] Aristotle, On the Soul, Trans. Joe Sachs (New York: Green Lion Press, 2004) ll. 416b32-33, p. 96.
[48] Cf. Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 250 [279]: "Perception does not enact the synthesis of its object at present, but this is not because it receives its object passively in the empiricist manner, but rather because the unity of the object appears through time, and because time escapes to the precise extent that it is grasped."

perception, namely, that the shape of our experience, and the meanings that comprise it, are never fully available to us in the present, even if they do provide a preliminary outline of the future.

The significance of this tension between the belated birth of meaning within experience and the determinate effect it has on the future is perhaps most evident in habits, which we often develop without noticing, but which nevertheless inform the kind of future that is available to us. In the first section of this chapter, on "Perceptual Incompletion," we observed that what is familiar to us in perceptual experience often overrides what is unknown. The second section, on "The Temporality of Perceptual Experience," has now provided us with tools for discerning the temporal structure of this epistemological preference for the familiar. In the next section on "Habit" we will use these tools to analyze habit, both as a challenge to and yet supportive of the insights of Husserl's work on passive synthesis.

III.   Reconsidering the Temporality of Perception: Habit and Learning

Habits reflect the accumulating and developing familiarities we have in and with the world. Moreover, they project—or "pre-figure," once again—the kind of future that is available to the person in possession of them: they open certain avenues of experience while at the same time closing others. When we speak of habits, we most often speak of discernable patterns of bodily movement that are learned over time. For example, both driving a car and playing a sport demand a set of motor skills that, once acquired, can be deployed effortlessly, even unreflectively. These skills allow the driver or the athlete to accomplish a task that was previously difficult, if not impossible. But, as Merleau-Ponty suggests in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, perception itself is also a motor habit: while we are, in a sense, "given" capabilities

that give us access to the sensual world, we must grow into them, develop them, in order to gain access to the richer world of meanings they make available to us.[49] In this sense, then, habits influence both how and what we perceive, in addition to shaping the bodily movements we enact in our daily lives, or in performing specialized tasks. Thus, in establishing a habit, I effectively establish a mode—or, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, a "style"[50]—of experience, according to which things are meaningful to me. In this section, I will examine habits as frameworks of meaning that bring together and flesh out the insights of our work in the two previous sections. I will focus on how habits support and elaborate our analysis of the temporal structure of meaning in Husserl's account of passive synthesis. I will go on to consider how this structure, as it is revealed in habit, accommodates a preference for familiarity in the unity and coherence of our experience. Lastly, I will draw on this temporal analysis to give support to Merleau-Ponty's claim that perception is a motor-habit, and I will draw out the significant implications this claim has for the relationship between meaning and learning in our experience.

Because they provide general frameworks of meaning, habits often require explicit effort on our part to change, unlike the revisions that take place in passive synthesis. There is, then, an important difference between the disappointment of an empty intention and the disappointment of an habituated expectation. In Husserl's account of passive synthesis, disappointment occurs when we encounter an object—or, more specifically, a profile of an object—that is inconsistent with how we expected it to be, based on our developing perceptual relationship with it. Husserl's examples of the green, indented ball and the mannequin in the museum demonstrate how disappointed expectations are effortlessly integrated into the coherent flow of experience. Retroactive crossing out, which contributes to this coherence, is implicit: it is not something I

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[49] Cf. Merleau-Ponty, <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, 154-55 [176-77].
[50] Merleau-Ponty, <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, 155 [177].

actively undertake. Rather, I notice only that it has already taken place, and only if I direct my attention towards the contrast between initial and subsequent perceptions of an object.

Thus, in contrast to the disappointment Husserl describes in his account of passive synthesis, the disappointment of an habituated expectation may be persistently disruptive, such that only by an active, conscious effort can I align my expectations with my experience. Take, for example, a change in a familiar environment, such as the re-hinging of my office door to its opposite side. In the weeks following the change, I may continue to reach for the right side of the door to open it, though the doorknob is now on the left side. As a result, my reach is "disappointed," and I must make a conscious effort to correct my behavior. In its contrast to Husserl's account of disappointment, this example brings to light an important point regarding the former: the empty intentions of a *novel* object precipitate "crossing out," primarily because crossing out occurs in retention, not in more deeply sedimented memory. The network of partially full and empty intentions that motivates my reach towards the right side of the door is remembered *in my body*, rather than merely preserved in retention; it reflects an established motor habit that articulates the object—in this example, the door—in a particular way. The door is familiar to me in its particularity, and unlike the ball and mannequin in Husserl's examples, I have established concrete bodily ways of relating to it. That I continue to reach for its right side demonstrates that "retroactive crossing out" has not taken place, either implicitly or explicitly, and it is likely that only a conscious (and repeated) readjustment of my sense of the door will help me readjust the intentional network—i.e., the motor habit—that outlines my experience of it.

While the "crossing out" that takes place in passive synthesis differs in an important way from the kind of correction that is necessary to change a habit, both demonstrate a fundamental

similarity between the way we encounter objects, namely, that our experience is always guided and shaped by expectation, by a directedness towards the future that nevertheless reflects a determinate past. Whether these expectations are grounded in what we perceive in our initial moments with the object—in retention—or in our repeated interactions with it—in embodied memory, or habit—they demonstrate the role of the perceptual past in supporting the coherence of the present and anticipating its extension in the future.

Let us consider some of the features of habit that elaborate this temporal structure. Firstly, as the similarity between passive synthesis and habit suggest, a habit is, in an important sense, historical; it reenacts a past, even as it aims to accomplish a present task. More specifically, in this reenactment it relies on a previous course of development that took time and, often, effort, and that was necessary for the habit to come into being. Most habits, even the most basic ones, such as walking, were developed in the face of some kind of resistance, be it bodily, psychological or otherwise.[51] In this sense, then, a habit enacts a past insofar as it performs its own past opposition to the initial difficulty in its development, even once the difficulty has been overcome. However, it enacts its past regardless of whether the habituated movements were purposively acquired (with or without difficulty), such as in the case of an athlete, or obtained implicitly, such as when I reach for my office door. In either case, the habit has been established in response to a past demand, and reenacts that response, regardless of whether the demand remains in place.

Significantly, though, even as it testifies to its past, a habit effectively conceals it in its directedness towards an accomplishment, towards the futures it makes possible. As we saw in Husserl's account of retroactive crossing out, once a correction to the recent past has been made,

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[51] Cf. Victor Biceaga, The Concept of Passivity in Husserl's Phenomenology, 68.

it is impossible to recall a time when the object was experienced differently: I do not remember the ball as uniformly red, even when I recall the moments before I saw its opposite side as green and indented. Similarly, in the course of normal experience, I cannot return to a time when I did not know how to walk, or how to drive: these sets of skills are sedimented in my bodily habits and, in their capabilities and the future they outline, refuse to admit, or show evidence of, their development out of a past that was resistant to them.[52]

Secondly, in relation to the past it has developed out of, a habit is interpretive. Indeed, to claim that a habit is historical is to give one way in which it is interpretive: it has developed as a particular response, or resistance, to a situation. But as a response, a given habit is one approach to a situation in which other, different approaches are also possible (hence our frequent colloquial references to "good" and "bad" habits). Furthermore, as in the case of its relation to its own past, a habit effaces its distinctiveness—in comparison with other approaches—by effectively precluding the possibility of those other approaches: once it has been established, it becomes exclusive, and reigns as the primary and preferred way of relating to the world. Thus, it is in the nature of habit to conceal both its development and its singularity as an approach to the world. However, it is only in this concealment that habits render the world increasingly accessible: were I to have to re-learn to drive everyday, that would occupy all of my time and effort, and I would not be able to focus on other tasks that driving makes possible.

Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, a habit not only reflects the development of a set of motor skills, but also enacts the world that has given rise to those skills. Take, for example, the professional tennis player at the height of her career. She has developed a particular set of

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[52] Indeed, one could say that in the case of the amputee whose past capabilities inform his present experience of a "phantom limb," it is the habit-body that "refuses" to acknowledge the amputation that has removed these capabilities. Cf. Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, pp. 78-88 [87-99], pp. 83-84 [94] in particular. I will explore this feature of habit in more detail in the next chapter.

strokes that circumscribe a world that extends well beyond the bodily motions required in the execution of those strokes. As a result, the motor-habit provides her access to the various dimensions of meaning this world contains. It is a world of specific sensations, in which the tennis ball and racquet each have a certain feel and weight in her hand, and in which her shoes have a certain tightness around her feet. It is a world of determinate measurements: while she may not be able to cite the exact dimensions of the tennis court or the height of the net, both are manifest in the calibration of her groundstrokes, serves and volleys. Moreover, it is a world founded on a level of physical fitness and health, of a tried ability to move the body in this way, at this speed, for this length of time. All of these worldly features are enacted in the habits that guide her body when she is playing tennis. The world responds to, and reinforces, the habits, in keeping with the expectations that inform them. In consequence, a change in any one of these features—such as an injury, a new racquet, a gust of wind—can prevent the effectiveness of the habituated movements. Thus, a habit is as much a reflection of a world as it is a bodily movement.

However, even as a habit creates and provides access to a world and the various dimensions of meaning it contains, it does not determine how these meanings will ultimately be taken up. Or, to put it another way, while a habit makes possible a future, it does not determine that future; rather, it opens new dimensions of meaning founded on what can now be taken for granted. In turn, these new possibilities entail futures that open still further possibilities. For example, once I have learned to walk, running, sprinting, and playing tennis are all possibilities for me and, in addition to transforming my current situation, allow my initiation into entire worlds of further possibilities.

Thus, in outlining a world, and in making available the meaningfulness of that world to us, habits determine what is familiar, what is known, and display our reliance on expectations informed by these familiar relations within our experience. As expectantly directed towards a future grounded in a past, habits thus provide an important insight into the temporal structure of experience, namely, that its full significance is available *only in retrospect*. It is *as past*, as accomplished, that the development of a habit has its full significance, but it nevertheless shapes the present even before its significance is realized. That is to say, a habit may endow one with capabilities before she is able to recognize them as capabilities, and thus before she can recognize what they make available to her. As I will go on to show, this temporal structure supplies the template for any educational process, any experience of learning, in which one must be open to something—an object, a person, an experience—before realizing the consequences of this openness. Learning always depends on dimensions of meaning that the one learning is not yet in a position to access.

The temporal structure of learning informs Merleau-Ponty's axiomatic claim that perception is a motor habit.[53] Like other motor-habits that are learned or acquired over time, perception gives us access to things whose full significance will be realized only later. Indeed, we "have" perceptual powers before we are fully able to use them—before we are properly "in possession of them"—and thus before we are fully able to recognize everything they will make available to us. They place us on the cusp of the perceptual world, and as we develop them we negotiate our situation in this world—we determine what is meaningful to us within it. According to Merleau-Ponty, this negotiation is reflected in even our most basic, and earliest, perceptual experiences: "With the gaze we have available a natural instrument comparable to the

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[53] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 153-55 [175-77].

blind man's cane. The gaze obtains more or less from things according to the manner in which it interrogates them, in which it glances over them or rests upon them. Learning to see colors is the acquisition of a certain style of vision, a new use of one's own body [. . .]."[54] Merleau-Ponty here draws on an image of what has become a substitute for sight in order to show the way in which conventional sight, just like the movements of the blind man's cane, is equally a motor-habit that reflects how the body is put to use. His analogy seeks to demonstrate that the way we perceive—in this example, the way we see—displays a process of development that makes possible both a new facility and a new perceptual world. To learn to see color is to enter a dimension of meaning and to define oneself—in "acquiring a certain style"—in relation to it.[55] In short, the development of perceptual ability is concurrent with the development of perceptual meaning.

Merleau-Ponty's point is more clearly evident in the case of more complex perceptual skills. For example, the city street appears differently to the bicycle messenger and the sanitation truck driver: landmarks, space, obstacles, other vehicles, moving and stationary—all are specific to the development of their ways of seeing according to the skills their respective tasks demand, and thus these features of the cityscape appear quite differently to each, just as they appear differently to the sight-seeing pedestrian. While it may be the case that neither learning to see color nor learning to navigate city streets are ways of seeing that one might initially resist— though, for someone from a rural environment, the latter may be especially difficult, and provoke some degree of resistance—each displays a meaningful relationship between seeing and seen that testifies to its own development. Moreover, once developed they preclude other ways of seeing

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[54] Merleau-Ponty, <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, 154-55 [177].

[55] Cf. Merleau-Ponty's remarks on this same topic in the chapter on "The Thing and the Natural World": "As painters have observed, there are very few colors in nature. The perception of colors comes late for the child, and in every case it comes well after the constitution of the world" (319 [355]).

insofar as the perceiver now inhabits a meaningful world whose meanings he will continually reinforce in his perceptual experience. Thus, in the course of normal experience, we never leave the world of color; we cannot look at the sky without saying "blue," just as the bicycle messenger sees a passageway through what is an obstacle to the sanitation truck. As a motor-habit, perception is learned and, as such, is historical, interpretive and worldly, only insofar as it establishes a meaningful relationship between perceiver and object.

It is in this sense that learning to distinguish colors is analogous to learning to look at art, and to learning in general: once this meaningful relationship has been established, it opens further dimensions of meaning that transform those initial, initiating, experiences. Even once we have developed our perceptual capabilities, there is not an endpoint to what they make available to us. Rather, they serve as preparation for more specialized or more complex ways of perceiving that retrospectively inform their initial development as significant. In the same way, it is only after repeated visits to the museum to look at the painting by Matisse that it begins to reveal itself to me, and that I gained a perspective that was impossible the first time, even the second, third and fourth times, I looked at it. As in the cultivation of any other motor-habit, learning to look at this painting requires an effort, the full significance of which may only be apparent in retrospect. The same can be said about learning to read Plato, or any other rich philosophical text: it is only after years of study that the benefits of one's earlier efforts are fully redeemed. Thus in taking up a new habit, perceptual or otherwise, we implicitly trust that initial experience to begin to make available something we cannot access at the present moment; we endow it with a significance we will be able to recognize only later.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the taking up of a habit promises more than it initially delivers. Our consideration of habit thus reveals the way in which our experience often obscures the belatedness of its significance. Thus, we prematurely experience meaning as complete, in the fullness of a present that denies its essential temporal limits. Our work in the first two sections of this chapter demonstrates that this is no less true of perception as a motor-habit than it is of the other motor-habits that shape and define our world. Examples of perceptual completion show that we often perceive objects as if we know them fully, from all sides, even when our perspective actually limits our access to them. These instances of perceptual completion are not reducible to matters of retinal physiology, but rather are telling demonstrations of our experience of the world as inherently coherent.

This coherence is critically informed by the temporality of our perceptual experience. As we have seen, an object's incompleteness is not only spatial, but also temporal, insofar as its fullness in any one moment depends on that moment's contiguousness with the previous and the next. Husserl's account of retention and protention and, in particular, his demonstration of their comparable openness to the future, explicates the way in which this coherence is sustained even in the face of challenges to it: retroactive crossing out preserves an object's meaning even as it is implicitly altered in novel perceptual experience. Furthermore, retroactive crossing out demonstrates the expectant nature of perception, which outlines not only the object itself, but also our future relations with that object, which in turn inform the completeness of its appearance.

Thus, the coherence of our perceptual experience exposes a temporal infrastructure of meaning that often privileges what is familiar and known over what is indeterminate or

unknown. This temporal privilege for what is familiar effectively imposes a future on our experience of the present—a future in which the meanings it promises in outline are already fully realized. In this sense, the apparent completeness of our present experience of any object takes for granted a future in which no part of the object remains unknown. Thus, even though perception is shaped by and reflects our expectations, and so is oriented towards a future, in this orientation it implicates its own *past* as one in which all is known and familiar.[56] In this sense, perception implicitly draws on the presumed comprehensiveness of retrospect. In presenting us with full, complete objects, perception is partial to a future past in which these objects are fully familiar and known.

However, *there is no future past* in which an object will have been perceived exhaustively. Just as any learned skill, or habit, does not determine the future of its possessor, but rather opens it to possibilities that are founded on that skill or habit, so is it equally impossible for our perceptual experience of an object to fully satisfy our expectations of it, particularly our expectation that we will know it comprehensively: its future will always remain open, regardless of how it is cast in the present. Thus, because of the temporal structure of perceptual experience, perceptual objects remain inexhaustible and perhaps even unfamiliar to us, in spite of our seemingly "complete" experience of them: this is the basis of Merleau-Ponty's argument for the essential indeterminacy of perception, and explicates the point Husserl makes in the epigraph to this chapter: "what is constantly familiar is constantly unfamiliar."[57]

The open-endedness of our perceptual powers, and of habits more generally, renders our experience indeterminate and, as Husserl's account of passive synthesis suggests, opens even our past to transformation: further determinations may transform the significance it ultimately has for

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[56] Alia Al-Saji, "A Past Which Has Never Been Present," *Research in Phenomenology* 38 (2008) 67.

[57] Husserl, <u>Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis</u>, 59.

us. Yet as our work throughout this chapter, on both passive synthesis and habit, has shown, our experience often conceals this openness in its directedness towards a specific future that is grounded in a determinate past. Our expectations reflect this directedness, and privilege what is already known, what is already familiar to us, in informing what we see—and even what we do not, and cannot, see. As a result, our perceptual experience has a temporal coherence, a unity that supports our continually forming new expectations. Moreover, this coherence relies on processes that we take for granted, or, to put it more precisely, relies on the taking-for-granted itself—our not noticing the "pretension" that characterizes our perceptual experience.

In the following chapter, I will examine the way in which the temporal structure we have explicated here shapes our experience of ourselves. I will look more closely at habit as a force that brings us into possession of worlds and yet, at the same time, disengages us from the present. Thus, we will see how the "pretension" of completeness that characterizes our perceptual experience likewise characterizes our experience of ourselves.

Chapter Two.   The Temporality of Self-Possession and the Limits of Self-Knowledge:
                    Anonymity, Reflection, and Locating the Expressive "I" in the World.

The penumbra in which we remain becomes so natural for us that it is no longer even perceived as penumbra.

--- Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 324[58]

We learn to know consciousness just like everything else.

--- Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 352

Introduction

In our close study of perception in Chapter 1, we examined how the temporal horizon of our experience lends it both its coherence and its pretension of completeness. Merleau-Ponty's claim that perception is a motor-habit led us to further consider how habits inform this temporal horizon and in turn shape how and what we perceive. Our focus has mostly been on everyday objects and the familiar environments where we encounter them, which, in their very intimacy, often escape our explicit notice in our interactions with them. In this sense, habits circumscribe both the depths of intimacy and the commonplace of routine.

Uniting both the intimate and the routine is the subject in possession of the habit, for whom these objects and environments are, somewhat paradoxically, expressive in their

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[58] I have modified Landes' translation of "pénombre" as "shadowy light." Following Smith's translation, I have rendered it "penumbra" (Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith (New York, NY: Routledge Classics, 2002) 362). I give my reasons for this modification following my discussion of the passage, in fn. 53, on p. 69 of this chapter.

inconspicuousness: they are familiar calls to action, and she responds to them implicitly and adeptly. According to Merleau-Ponty, it is the *habitual body* that makes possible the implicit facility of this response.[59] As we saw in Chapter One, it is by virtue of the habitual body that we answer the demands of our experience, from the most basic—chewing, swallowing, walking—to the more complex—typing, navigating, playing tennis. Thus, our habits enable us to come into possession of worlds, but they equally enable us to come into possession of ourselves as comfortable inhabitants of these worlds—as walkers, typists, tennis players.[60] As comfortable inhabitants, however, we just as easily lose ourselves in these habits; assured of the capabilities they afford us, we can direct our attention elsewhere. For example, on my daily morning drives to school I could attend to thoughts of the previous day or the upcoming tasks rather than to the turns and traffic signals required in the route; I would often leave the house on weekends with the intention of driving elsewhere, but after taking the familiar course out of the neighborhood, and becoming absorbed in thoughts of other matters, I would suddenly recover myself making one of the final turns towards the school. It is in this sense, then, that our reliance on the habitual body disengages us from ourselves, from our active involvement in the present.[61]

Merleau-Ponty focuses on the lived predominance of the habitual body to demonstrate what it reveals more generally about the temporality of self-presence. He contends that habits contribute to our development of an "anonymous body," that is, an impersonal existence that operates implicitly, beneath, as it were, the active projects we take up. Merleau-Ponty claims that the anonymous body establishes the temporal structure of our experience, more specifically,

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[59] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012) 84 [95].

[60] Cf. John Russon, "Embodiment and responsibility: Merleau-Ponty and the ontology of nature," *Man and World* 27 (1994) 295.

[61] Cf. John Russon, "Embodiment and responsibility: Merleau-Ponty and the ontology of nature," *Man and World* 27 (1994) 299.

the expectations that determine what, and how, things are meaningful to us. As my example of driving to school suggests, however, the anonymous body is not always responsive to the demands of the present; the temporality it lives may be at odds with reality. It is in this sense, then, that though we rely on its functioning to accomplish both basic and complex tasks, we are never fully coincident with our anonymous body. It precludes self-possession in so far as it enables our belongingness to, and participation in, the complex worlds of everyday experience; thus it directs us away from ourselves and towards the world.

Habits, and the anonymous body they contribute to, constitute our pre-reflective life, which we do not normally attend to, nor expect to attend to. But, Merleau-Ponty argues, even reflection, in which we may claim our most intimate knowledge of ourselves, unfolds in the same temporal structure revealed in the habitual body. In one of the final chapters of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, the "Cogito," Merleau-Ponty examines Descartes's claim to self-certainty in order to "restor[e] a temporal thickness to the *Cogito*."[62] However, this "restoration" argues against understanding self-possession as the foundation of knowledge. As we saw in Chapter One, our knowledge of objects is always in some sense provisional because it is situated within a temporal horizon. In his analysis of the *cogito*, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates that even the subject reflecting on herself does not know herself, or coincide with herself, completely because she, like the objects of her world, is always situated within a temporal horizon that both frames and opens the meaningfulness of even her most intimate experience of herself. He goes on to argue that it is not in reflection but in active engagement in the world that the subject reveals and discovers herself.

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[62] Merleau-Ponty, <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, 420 [464].

In this chapter, I will examine two aspects of Merleau-Ponty's account of our experience of ourselves—the habitual body and the reflective subject—in order to argue that, like our perception of objects in the world, our perception of ourselves is incomplete. I will begin by reviewing Merleau-Ponty's account of the anonymous body, focusing in particular on his study of the phantom limb in order to show how our lived temporality may conflict with the present terms of reality. I will go on to consider how a similar temporal dissonance affects even our perception of ourselves in reflection. Drawing on his extensive and rich discussion of Descartes's *cogito*, in the eponymous chapter in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, I will argue that Merleau-Ponty's account of self-knowledge demonstrates the impossibility of understanding the subject—or of the subject understanding herself—apart from her active engagement in the world. In the third and final section of this chapter, I will consider what implications these limits to self-knowledge have for a theory of meaning that situates the "I" in the world.

I.   The Temporality of Self-Perception: The Anonymous Body and the Phantom Limb

The "I can"

Habits enact their development out of a determinate past. In performing a habit, I am in a continual relationship with this past. But this relationship is not an explicit one, as it would be in the case of memory. When I think of the past, as I do when I remember, I remove myself from my current involvements and recreate the terms that lent significance to the past event; I align myself with a separate world. These terms and the world they outline may anticipate or be identical with those that define my current situation, or they may oppose it altogether.

Regardless of how my memory compares to the present it interrupts, however, its distinction from this present is essential to what it is: in the course of normal experience, the affective timbre of a memory does not rival the claims of the present to define the terms of my situation.

In contrast, the habitual body integrates the past into, rather than distinguishes it from, the present. It demonstrates both its own development and the world that made this development possible, or even necessary. In this way, the habitual body applies the terms of its past to the present. For example, each time the professional tennis player begins her service motion, she reenacts her experience and training in the world that has proven that motion effective. Thus, the habitual body applies the terms of the past to the present, but it does so with the assurance of its capabilities and what they make available to it. That is, rather than reflect on each object I encounter, or each impending task, my body approaches them as an implicitly intelligent "I can"[63] that takes for granted the applicability of the past to the present—"*I can* hit the ball into the corner of the service box," "*I can* pick up the glass," "*I can* walk across the room." My sense of capability and implicit know-how is rooted in my history of interactions with my environment. However, this history informs the "I can" as a power of adept, and adaptable, engagement rather than as a specific guide for action.[64] In other words, I do not "consult" the past as a precedent for action; it is manifest in the action itself.

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[63] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 139 [159]. Husserl first coined this phrase in Ideas II (Edmund Husserl, Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution, trans. R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer, Boston: Kluwer, 1989. See pp. 13-17, 159-69, 226-31, 266-80).

[64] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 143 [164-65]: "[T]he subject [who has acquired a habit] does not weld individual movements to individual stimuli, but rather acquires the power of responding with a certain type of solution to a certain form of situation. The situations may differ widely from case to case, the responding movements may be entrusted sometimes to one effector organ and sometimes to another, and situations and responses resemble each other in the different cases much less through the partial identity of elements than by the community of their sense."

Merleau-Ponty sets the "I can" in contrast to Descartes' "I think."[65] For Descartes, it is

the activity of thinking—the performance of the "I think"—that dispels doubt about the existence

of the "I." Moreover, this activity is generally renewable and atemporal; any "I" can undertake

the project Descartes details in his *Meditations* at any time—in part because this "I" is not

defined beyond the activity of its thinking. However, while "I think" secures my existence every

time I perform it, it cannot do the same for the objects I am thinking of. Recall that in Husserl's

account of intentional consciousness, "intentions" of objects—in thought or in our experience of

them—may be "full," "empty," or any gradation between the two.[66] "Full" intentions are those

that are confirmed in our experience of the object, whereas "empty" intentions are unconfirmed.

An example of an empty intention is the side of a house that I cannot see; it is an object for

intentional consciousness—which is to say, it is, in a certain sense, "there" for me, I experience

it—but because it is not within view, my experience of it is "empty." According to the terms of

Husserl's account, Descartes' methodical skepticism and its resolution in the *cogito* designates

all intentional objects—apart from the thinking "I"—as empty: all objects are objects of the "I

think," and as such, they cannot be confirmed outside the sphere of this activity.[67] Thus, all

objects depend on the "I think": it is because "I think" that I experience these objects.

　　While Descartes's *cogito* separates the thinking subject from the objects of her

experience, the "I can" unites them. For both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, while objects can be

objects of the "I think"—objects represented in thought—that is not how we primarily

experience them. As we saw in our discussion of Alva Noë's account of the problem of

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[65] Merleau-Ponty, <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, 139 [159].
[66] This discussion occurs on pp. 6-7 of Chapter One.
[67] Cf. Husserl, <u>Ideas II</u>, 229-30.

perceptual presence,[68] our bodily capabilities always inform our perceptual experience: the

unseen side of the house is "there" for me—an object of intentional consciousness—because I

can walk around it, not because I represent it in thought.[69] Thus, perception reflects my

sensorimotor skills and the access to the world they afford me. Anticipating Noë's argument,

Merleau-Ponty uses the phrase "motor intentionality" to refer to the way one's bodily

capabilities are actively engaged—integrated, even—in the world and the objects that comprise

it.[70] The intentional relationship between subject and object is not merely or primarily thought,

but enacted in the current and potential paths for movement in and interaction with the

environment; thus, according to Merleau-Ponty's notion of "motor intentionality," "subject" and

"object" lose their strict distinction in the motor possibilities that involve both. It is in this sense,

then, that neither the ball nor the court are objects of thought for the professional tennis player,

but rather features of the possible movements in the game she is playing.[71] In much the same

way, a doorknob is not an object of thought for me, but a dimension of capability within my

experience, a means of leaving the room or inviting someone in.[72]

    As a result, the "I can" is as much an expression of my environment, and of the objects

within my environment, as it is of my bodily capabilities. Once I have been initiated into the

world the "I can" makes available, all of my subsequent interactions within it call forth the

capabilities founded in that initiation; the objects themselves speak to me of what I can do. For

example, once I learn that gripping the doorknob and turning it towards the left will enable me to

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[68] This discussion occurs on pp. 11-12 of Chapter One.

[69] Noë, Action in Perception, 63.

[70] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 113 [127].

[71] Cf. Merleau-Ponty, The Structure of Behavior, trans. Alden Fisher (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1963), 168-69.

[72] For an excellent discussion of "motor intentionality," see Evan Thompson, Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 247-49 and pp. 312-17.

pull it open, I do not have to calculate my movements in each new encounter, but can rely on the implicit knowledge of my habitual body to accomplish what is required in the interaction. The established "I can" dictates the pressure of my grip on the doorknob, the distance of my body from the door, the weight I invest in pulling the door towards me. Moreover, all of these delicate adjustments that take place in my body are elicited by the doorknob itself. In his discussion of how the "I can" animates objects in the world, Husserl writes

> The subject is subject of an undergoing or of a being-active, is
> passive or active in relation to the Objects present to it
> noematically, and correlatively we have *"effects" on the subject*
> emanating *from the Objects*. The Object "intrudes on the subject"
> and exercises stimulation on it (theoretical, aesthetic, practical
> stimulation). The Object, as it were, wants to be an Object of
> advertence, it knocks at the door of consciousness [. . .], it attracts,
> and the subject is summoned until finally the object is noticed. Or
> else it attracts on the practical level; it, as it were, wants to be taken
> up. . .[73]

As Husserl so evocatively describes here, objects can exert a coercive force, drawing our attention and prompting our engagement with them. Merleau-Ponty's notion of motor intentionality accounts for how our bodily capabilities are implicated in these coercive objects; the motor-habits we develop in our interactions with them inhere in, and as a result are elicited by, the objects themselves.

The anonymous body

That subject and object are united in this account of motor intentionality informs Merleau-Ponty's claim that the world circumscribed by the "I can" is "impersonal" or "pre-personal," as is my body in its familiar engagement with it. To put it slightly differently, it is not a world I must constantly invest myself in (it is not a world I must "think"); rather, I find myself already invested in it. Thus, as we described in our study of Merleau-Ponty's notion of motor

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[73] Husserl, <u>Ideas II</u>, 231, emphasis in original.

intentionality, I respond to its solicitations implicitly; I do not self-consciously narrate my

performance of each task. Moreover, my capabilities are equally solicited by novel

environments and novel objects; they are not limited to the environments in which they were

originally cultivated. Thus, I have a familiar way with the world; I am attuned to it, in my habits

and in the capabilities they reinforce. Merleau-Ponty refers to this attunement as the

"impersonal," "pre-personal," or "anonymous" relationship the body has with the world:

> Insofar as I inhabit a "physical world," where consistent "stimuli"
> and typical situations are discovered—and not merely the historical
> world in which situations are never comparable—my life is made
> up of rhythms that do not have their *reason* in what I have chosen
> to be, but rather have their *condition* in the banal milieu that
> surrounds me. A margin of *almost* impersonal existence thus
> appears around our personal existence, which, so to speak, is taken
> for granted, and to which I entrust the care of keeping me alive.
> Around the human world that each of us has fashioned, there
> appears a general world to which we must first belong in order to
> be able to enclose ourselves within a particular milieu of a love or
> an ambition. [. . .M]y organism—as a pre-personal adhesion to the
> general form of the world, as an anonymous and general
> existence—plays the role of an *innate complex* beneath the level of
> my personal life.[74]

As Merleau-Ponty describes it here, the "impersonal," "general," and "anonymous" existence the

body has in the world is that which is made possible by its determinacy—the physical parameters

of its material life in effect join it to the world. As a biological organism, my body functions

"anonymously," without my attention or consent, in the physical processes necessary for life,

such as breathing, blinking, and digestion. However, Merleau-Ponty contends that it is equally

"anonymous" in its perceptual capabilities: "Perception is always in the impersonal mode of the

'One.'"[75] As Descartes demonstrated, "I see" lacks the affirmation of "I think"; I am not as

present in "I see" as I am in "I think." If there is light, and my eyes are working properly, I see;

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[74] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 86 [96-97], emphasis in original.

[75] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 249 [279]. Thus he refers elsewhere to the "anonymous vigilance of the senses" (167 [190]).

if there is sound, I hear. In both cases, it is my general power of sentience that delivers me to the perceptual world. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, I "belong" to this world, which thereby subscribes me to its array—of physiological laws, but also of seemingly infinite perceptual possibilities. Moreover, I belong to it before, and regardless of, the more personal worlds I may also belong to. While it is certainly the case that how I meet the basic physical demands of my biological life, such as eating and sleeping, and what I perceive may reflect a personal style I have developed, this style is but a variation on the general rhythms of my basic and necessary existence as a prepersonal and anonymous body with determinate needs and determinate capabilities.

Merleau-Ponty's notion of the "anonymous" body of physical life is consistent with Evan Thompson's notion of the *living body*. In his recent work, *Mind in Life*, one of the central ideas that Thompson borrows from Husserl is the distinction between the *Körper*—the *living body*, or the body as physical object—and the *Leib*—the *lived body*, the body as it is lived in experience, in all its capabilities, by the subject. Thompson extends Husserl's notion of *Körper*—which suggests the lifelessness of a corpse—to refer to the body as a living system that is actively engaged with and responsive to its physical environment.[76] According to this distinction, it is by and through my experience of my body as lived [*Leib*] that I engage with the world, while it is the living body [*Körper*] that is the necessary precondition for this engagement.

I introduce Thompson's explication of *Körper* and *Leib* here because both notions are relevant to Merleau-Ponty's account of the anonymous body. While it may be more readily apparent that the living body—our physical organism that, for the most part, functions independently of our explicit attention—maintains an anonymous existence, it is important to

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[76] Thompson, <u>Mind in Life</u>, 231.

note that within Merleau-Ponty's account, the lived body, in its habits and capabilities, accumulates a sense of anonymity as well. The lived body, according to the phenomenological tradition beginning in Husserl and continued in Thompson's work, is our means of active integration in the world; it informs the "I can" of motor-intentionality and finds in its environment the complement to its powers. In this sense, the lived body is synonymous with Merleau-Ponty's notion of the habitual body: it is how we approach the world as meaningful to us. But once it has developed its powers, it does not need to continually re-activate them; rather, it is always already coordinated with the course of meanings that define its world. Habits demonstrate the way in which we respond to these meanings pre-reflectively and implicitly. For example, once we develop the proper motor-skills and coordination, walking becomes "second nature," like blinking and breathing. The same can be said about playing sports and driving a car. It is in this sense that the habit body—the lived body—assumes anonymity in its discourse with the world. It maintains an anonymous existence not merely because it implicitly responds to the world its capabilities circumscribe, but because, through its habits, it belongs to this world, just as the living body belongs to a physical world that supports it metabolic processes.

The anonymity of the lived body expresses a belongingness to its world that belies a strict separation between subject and object. As our discussion of motor intentionality sought to make clear, the meaningfulness of the world is not confined to the "I" of the "I can," but inheres in the things themselves, and is activated in my relationship to them. As a result, the "I" recedes into an impersonal facility with the world in its habitual responses to familiar objects. Our habits incorporate us into the world of our routines, not as an explicit affirmation—not as an "I"—but as a more general, and generalizable, "I can" that finds its capabilities in the objects that evoke them. Thus, according to Merleau-Ponty, in the habitual body's discourse with the world, "[the

manipulable] must have ceased being something *manipulable for me* and have become

something *manipulable in itself*."[77] As a result, the anonymous body—the lived body—is not

experienced solely within the physical parameters of the living body, but, in its capabilities,

pervades its environment.

The phantom limb

The phenomenon of the phantom limb exposes the anonymous body's investment in its

environment. A "phantom limb" describes the experience of someone who is missing a body

part, but who still experiences the possibility of function and movement, or even pain, in the

missing part. According to Merleau-Ponty, the phenomenon of the phantom limb makes

apparent a conflict between the habitual body and the "body at this moment."[78] For the patient

with the phantom limb, his body *as it is* cannot take up the possibilities offered to it by its

environment, yet he nevertheless experiences them *as* possibilities because they inhere in the

environment, in the familiar solicitations of objects with which he has an established rapport.

Thus, to experience a phantom limb is to experience all of the capabilities the environment itself

seems to promise in its solicitations. The habitual body continues to belong to the world in

which it developed and exercised those capabilities, such that they became "second nature."

Because the patient's "I can" is not rooted in a self-reflective "I," but in his relationship with

familiar objects, in encountering these objects he does not take account of the real physical

limitations that now determine the possibilities of his experience—just as he would not take

account of his capabilities before he lost his limb. The patient with the phantom limb

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[77] Merleau-Ponty, <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, 84-85 [95].

[78] Merleau-Ponty, <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, trans. Colin Smith, 95 [Landes, 84]. I use Smith's translation here because it emphasizes the temporal contrast between the *corps habituel* and the *corps actuel*: "[. . .] l'ambiguïté du savoir se ramène à ceci que notre corps comporte comme deux couches distinctes, celle du corps habituel et celle du corps actuel" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Gallimard, 1945) 111.

demonstrates that the "I can" is "impersonal" or "anonymous," according to Merleau-Ponty, because he experiences it even when those capabilities no longer belong to him.

Merleau-Ponty's account of the phantom limb reveals the temporal implications of the anonymous dimensions of lived experience.[79] The conflict between the habitual body and the body at this moment, apparent in the case of the phantom limb, demonstrates an inconsistency between the patient's experience of the present and its reality. This inconsistency arises because the patient experiences the present in terms of the past; he brings those terms to bear on a reality

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[79] Recent work in both phenomenology and neuroscience has endeavored to trace the roots of the phantom limb to a neural mapping of the *body schema* in the brain. The body schema roughly corresponds to the implicit capabilities of the lived body, that is, the preconscious motor habits that inform movement as well as more basic bodily positions, such as posture (see Shaun Gallagher and Jonathan Cole, "Body Image and Body Schema in a Deafferented Subject," Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader, ed. Donn Welton (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998) 132; see also Shaun Gallagher and Andrew Meltzoff, "The Earliest Sense of Self and Others: Merleau-Ponty and Recent Developmental Studies," *Philosophical Psychology* 9.2 (June 1996) 211-33). Body schema is usually set in contrast to *body images*, that is, more explicit understandings we have of our body based on perceptual experience, scientific or mythical accounts, and emotional attitudes (Gallagher and Cole, 132); thus, the *Körper*, or as Thompson describes it, the living body as a dynamic system in constant interaction with its environment, is an example of a body image. In his recent book, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, Shaun Gallagher contends that the body schema is not developed gradually over time, as Merleau-Ponty claims, but is innate, part of our genetic make-up that is first realized in fetal development (95). The phenomenon of the phantom limb has direct bearing on Gallagher's claim because it occurs in both amputees and in aplasic patients, that is, in individuals born without limbs. Thus, aplasic subjects, though they never had the opportunity to develop function and motor habits, nevertheless still sometimes experience phantom limbs. Aplasic phantom limbs occur less frequently than those in amputees (100), yet, if the body schema is developed over time, how can their occurrence be accounted for at all?

In *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, Gallagher draws on recent research in neuroscience to put forward two hypotheses to explain aplasic phantoms (95-99). He also entertains the suggestion, attributed to Peter Brugger, that mirror neurons might be responsible for aplasic phantoms (102). Setting aside the particular virtues and weaknesses of Gallagher's hypotheses and Brugger's mirror-neuron theory, their work more generally focuses on the phantom limb as the consequence of an inconsistency between brain and body, more specifically, between the neural mappings of functions and the bodily possibilities of exercising these functions. Gallagher opposes his work to Merleau-Ponty's account of the phantom limb in the *Phenomenology of Perception* because he claims that these neural mappings determine an *innate* body schema, rather than one that is strictly developed in motor experience (87). According to the terms of the account of bodily experience we have given thus far, however, these neural mappings and mirror neurons, and the body schema both ultimately contribute to, constitute the pre-personal, anonymous life of our body (regardless of whether it begins in fetal or infant experience). Even if the body schema is innate—even if its range of possibilities is determined by neuronal mapping—it is nevertheless enacted in temporal experience. That is, while Gallagher's work identifies a deeper source—in the sense of genetic make-up— of bodily possibilities than Merleau-Ponty's account acknowledges, it does not address how these possibilities are taken up, how they are lived. According to the terms of Merleau-Ponty's account, for both the aplasic patient and the amputee, the phantom limb is lived as an impeded "I can," and the "I can" is always situated within, and informed by, a temporal framework. My discussion here focuses on this temporal framework rather than on the etiology of the phantom limb; while Merleau-Ponty's account of the phantom limb does not consider the possibility of a neuronal foundation of the amputee's experience—though, arguably, one could consistently incorporate such a possibility into his account—it nevertheless provides significant insight into the temporality of the amputee's lived experience, which in turn provides more general insight into how the present reflects and refracts the past that informs it.

that can no longer accommodate them. As a result, the patient's lived experience—his

participation in a world that continually speaks to him of his involvement in it—continually

renews this conflict rather than simply resolving it.[80] This "paradoxical"[81] nature of the phantom

limb motivates Merleau-Ponty to describe it as a form of repression.[82] According to Freud's

early articulation of his theory, "the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away,

and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious."[83] By "keeping it at a distance," by relegating

to the unconscious a desire that would be unacceptable in conscious life, one is thus able to

sustain it. For Merleau-Ponty, however, the distance is not that between the conscious and the

unconscious, but between the past present as it is lived in one's present experience, and the

current present that stands in opposition to this lived experience. In the case of the phantom

limb, the current present is cast in an established way of being—specifically, in the habitual

body—that determines what is meaningful, similar to the way, Merleau-Ponty argues, that a

traumatic event reconfigures the life that follows it: "One present among all of them thus

acquires an exceptional value. It displaces the others and relieves them of their value as

authentic present moments. [. . .] Impersonal time continues to flow, but personal time is

arrested."[84] For both the patient with the phantom limb and the person whose life is transformed

by a traumatic event, "impersonal" time passes in spite of and alongside "personal" time, and in

doing so, it remains insensitive to the privileged framework of meaning that continues to honor

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[80] This conflict could occur even in the face of actions the patient has never performed, in so far as his body is responsive—in its formulation of gestures, even those it lacks the means to express—to the expressiveness of the world. Cf. Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," in The Primacy of Perception, trans. William Cobb (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2000) p. 146, in particular, where Merleau-Ponty discusses the way in which our bodies may be stimulated by other bodies—even non-human bodies—to perform foreign gestures or actions: "I [as the performer of the novel action] see unfolding the different phases of the process [I am observing], and this perception is of such a nature as to arouse in me the preparation of a motor activity related to it."

[81] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 84 [95].

[82] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 85 [95].

[83] Sigmund Freud, "Repression," The Freud Reader, ed. Peter Gay (New York: W. W. Norton & Company) 569-70.

[84] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 85 [95-96].

the habitual body or the trauma. The past present is thus preserved, however inconsistently, in the current present.

As our study has made clear, both our relationship to our familiar world, and our sense of self as capable within it, accumulate anonymity, or participate in impersonality, insofar as we take for granted this familiarity, and our capability, in much the same way we take for granted inhaling and exhaling. But just as inhaling and exhaling establish an implicit rhythm within our experience, so does the framework of meaning set in our familiar relationship with our environment reflect a personal, or personalized, time. Indeed, the temporality of my experience can only be personal, because it is based on my own patterns of engagement and the significant moments that structure all of my future encounters. Often, personal time is coherent with, or follows, impersonal time, as I develop along with my projects, and the framework of meaning I bring to bear continually suits the world I apply it to. But in so far as I live it—live in and through it—"personal" time becomes, paradoxically, "anonymous."[85] Though founded in my engagements in the world, I fail to claim it as originating in me, and instead live it as the general setting of the world: it is determined by, and then goes on to determine, how I meaningfully situate myself in my environment. Merleau-Ponty's focus on the phantom limb as a form of repression highlights the personal roots of this anonymous dimension of our experience: "All repression is [. . .] the passage from first person existence to a sort of scholastic view of this existence, which is sustained by a previous experience, or rather by the memory of having had this experience, and then by the memory of having had this memory, and so on, to the point that

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[85] Cf. Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith, 362 [Landes, 324]: "The penumbra in which we are becomes so natural that it is no longer even perceived as penumbra." Merleau-Ponty here describes our relation to the conditions of the visual field, but as I hope to show, it can equally be applied to the temporal frame of our experience.

in the end it only retains its essential form."[86] Merleau-Ponty takes pains to distinguish

repression from memory because, as noted at the opening of the chapter, memory is explicitly

separate from our current experience, whereas repression supports that experience as its invisible

structure. Moreover, as "form" rather than memory—or, as Merleau-Ponty has it here, so many

stages removed from memory that only its form remains—this past present that I continue to live

may eventually fail to resemble the present that is its source; in other words, it may become

something other than what it originally was. Thus the grieving widow may inhabit a world that

speaks to her of her partner, but in ways foreign to how he actually was in their life together, just

as the patient may experience a phantom limb in the face of tasks he never actually performed.

In this way, the present that is past, but that nevertheless is lived as present, may be transformed

in experience, perhaps in order that it be preserved: the grief is preserved, or the limb is

preserved. The widow or the patient may not actively enforce this transformation, though it

nevertheless shapes the world they inhabit.

Anonymous temporality

This theme of the transformation of the past in the present reflects the temporal structure

we first identified in Chapter One, in our study of the passive synthesis of perception. There we

saw that the transformation of the immediate past, in cases of retroactive crossing out,

contributes to the unity and coherence of the phenomenal field in the present. Here, however,

the accomplished temporal unity is that of subject and world, more specifically, a "privileged

world"—privileged in that it is also a personal world. In continuing to inhabit this world,

Merleau-Ponty writes that "I relinquish my perpetual power of giving myself "worlds" to the

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[86] Merleau-Ponty, <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, 85 [96].

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benefit of one of them and thereby even this privileged world loses its substance […]."[87] It

becomes the constant and general setting of my experience—the ongoing, repetitive present—

resistant to challenges, and opportunities, posed by reality; in this sense, it is closed off, and thus

lacks the temporal frame of openness to the past and to the future.

Merleau-Ponty's contention that the privileged world of the past "loses its substance"—

that, as we have suggested, it changes in order that it may be preserved—provides some insight

into his enigmatic reference, at the end of the chapter on "Sensing," in the *Phenomenology of

Perception*, to "a past which has never been present."[88] Scholars have interpreted this phrase in

light of Bergson's influence on Merleau-Ponty,[89] and also in the context of the latter's remarks

on reflection, which close the chapter.[90] More recently, Alia Al-Saji has claimed that "a past

which has never been present" draws on the temporal structure of perception, specifically, the

way in which we are always somewhat ahead of ourselves in anticipating things we have not

actually perceived, and that the "completeness" of objects forecasts a past in which they *will

have been* fully known.[91] Moreover, she claims, this structure relies on a "prepersonal"

attunement to sensory life[92]—that is, the development of the anonymous body in our powers of

perception and in our habits. Following Al-Saji, I would like to interpret this phrase according to

the temporal structure of perception—explicated in Chapter One, and developed further here—

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[87] Merleau-Ponty, <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, 85 [96].

[88] Merleau-Ponty, <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, 252 [282].

[89] See, for example, Leonard Lawlor, <u>Thinking Through French Philosophy: The Being of the Question</u>
(Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003) 89; and, more recently, Alia Al-Saji, ""A Past Which Has Never
Been Present": Bergsonian Dimensions in Merleau-Ponty's Theory of the Prepersonal," *Research in
Phenomenology* 38 (2008) 50-52.

[90] See M. C. Dillon, "The Unconscious: Language and World," in <u>Merleau-Ponty in Contemporary Perspectives</u>, ed.
P. Burke and J. Van der Veken (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993) 69-83.

[91] Alia Al-Saji, ""A Past Which Has Never Been Present": Bergsonian Dimensions in Merleau-Ponty's Theory of
the Prepersonal," *Research in Phenomenology* 38 (2008) 67.

[92] Alia Al-Saji, ""A Past Which Has Never Been Present": Bergsonian Dimensions in Merleau-Ponty's Theory of
the Prepersonal," *Research in Phenomenology* 38 (2008) 48.

and in terms of its sedimentation into the anonymous dimensions of our experience. Phenomena such as the phantom limb demonstrate that we live through an anonymous temporality—one that is both uniquely our own and yet, once established, seemingly beyond our explicit control—that is grounded in the anonymity of our own body. I will show how the reference to "a past which has never been present" elaborates the temporality of self-perception that is first laid out in Merleau-Ponty's account of the phantom limb, and further suggests that the falsity of the "fullness" of the present necessarily undermines our comprehensive experience of ourselves.

Though Merleau-Ponty makes this remark in referring to "the prereflective fund [reflection] presupposes,"[93] it occurs at the end of a discussion on the synthesis and apparent completeness of the perceptual field. As we saw in Chapter One, the temporality of perception that makes synthesis possible also renders perceptual objects open to further modification and revision, and thus renders objective knowledge an impossible ideal. Yet this ideal is maintained in the subject who adds "depth" to an object in forecasting its completeness.[94] This forecasted past made manifest in the completeness of the present object I perceive—in other words, a past that will have been made complete in a future present—is, in this sense, "a past which has never been present." In the same way, the past that informs the "privileged world" is an ideal that cannot be lived in reality. This ideal is created out of standards that no longer apply to reality, such as movement and function in the phantom limb, but that persist because they project themselves in the habits that shape my experience ahead of my actual engagement in it. It is "a past which has never been present" because the ideal that is lived as the present "fills in" what reality itself does not supply, pretending to a completeness that is false not only because the

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[93] Merleau-Ponty, <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, 252 [282].
[94] Merleau-Ponty, <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, 250 [279].

experience itself is open-ended—just as the perceptual object is inexhaustible—but because, in

this case, it fails to adhere to the terms set by reality, terms that dictate limits to my possibilities.

As we saw in Chapter One, this is the risk inherent in our perception of objects, but as a

function of our temporal situation, it also pertains to our experience of ourselves in the world. In

my anonymous absorption in the worlds I inhabit—both at the biological level of my living

body, as well as in my lived body, in my habits and personal style—I do not fully coincide with

the present; I live at a remove from myself, though it is this distance—such as the anonymity of

my digestive system, or that which is developed in habits—that makes my participation in these

worlds possible, and thus that, somewhat paradoxically, gives me the illusion of self-possession

in my capable participation in familiar environments. I develop a history that supports this

illusion but, as Merleau-Ponty points out, it is always subject to the open-endedness of the novel

present, its refusal to stay in one place so that I can firmly situate myself within it:

> I certainly have, thanks to time, an interlocking and a taking up of
> previous experiences in later experiences, but I never have an
> absolute possession of myself by myself, since the hollow of the
> future is always filled by a new present.[95]

The temporal structure of my experience dispossesses me of myself, and though this is most

evident in phenomena such as the phantom limb, it is no less true of my grasp of myself in any

single moment.[96]

As I live it, each moment fully absorbs me and creates the standard for the "present":

"each present can claim to solidify our life, this is what defines it as present."[97] Yet, as we saw

in our study of perception, this standard is a pretension that ultimately can never be fulfilled.

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[95] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 250 [279].

[96] Cf. Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 400 [443]: "In general, it is impossible to deny that I have much to learn about myself, or to place in advance at my core a self-knowledge that contains everything that I will later know about myself, after having read books and lived through the events of which I at present have no inkling." I will discuss this claim at length in section II of this chapter.

[97] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 87 [98].

Each moment, even as it wholly absorbs us, is necessarily open at both ends; indeed, it requires that openness for its pretension of fullness. Thus, "insofar as [the present] presents itself as the totality of being and fills up an instant of consciousness, we never actually break free of it; time never actually closes it off and it remains like a wound through which our strength seeps away."[98] Merleau-Ponty evocatively describes how we may experience any one moment as definitive—as the present, as "now"—but how, in our conviction (which is the conviction of every "present") we acknowledge and undermine the previous moment, and the next moment, both of which make the same exclusive claim: thus "time never actually closes it off." The present is both utterly compelling, absorbing, and at the same time deceptive, in that its fullness relies on open temporal dimensions excluded by it.

As we saw in the cases of the phantom limb and the grieving widow, it is possible for us to carry one moment—one present—forward as continually definitive. This implicit possibility is explicit in the structure of the promise: we promise that the future will fulfill the image we have created of it in the present moment. If I break my promise, or if the present fails to live up to the created ideal, the forecasted future turns out to be inconsistent with what has actually come to pass. But because the body *is* its past, it is equally this inconsistency or, in Merleau-Ponty's term, this "ambiguity." The motor-habits that make possible my participation in the present— my presence in particular worlds—are also committed to a past, even when that past is no longer viable in the present. Thus Merleau-Ponty contends that "the anonymity of our body is inseparably both freedom and servitude";[99] it is both the ground of our commitments, which open worlds of engagement, and the commitments themselves, which remove the contingency in

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[98] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 87 [98].
[99] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 87 [98].

our approach to these worlds and, as in the case of the phantom limb, may persist even when their ground in the reality of the physical body has been removed.

Thus the body itself may bear "a past which has never been present," in so far as it may commit itself to a future it cannot accommodate. Such is the situation of the amputee with the phantom limb, but it is equally the situation of all bodies: all bodies rely on habits to engage in their worlds, and thus rely on the tacit functioning of their anonymous dimensions that subscribe them to these worlds. In doing so, the body orients itself as finished, as settled, in a finished future that has, in reality, yet to come to pass. To be more specific, then, it is not that the past misinforms the present because that past is no longer viable. Rather, the present appropriates the future as if it were already (in the form of the) past.

Thus, the temporality of the anonymous body determines both our participation in the present and the impossibility of our full engagement in it. The biological rhythms of physical life, along with the necessity for, and the personal commitments that lead to the establishing of, habits, provide the temporal structure of experience, which we rely on, and thus implicitly reinforce, in taking up new projects. However, in doing so, we orient ourselves towards a decided future, one that denies the openness, and contingency, of the present. This is apparent in the case of the patient with the phantom limb, which demonstrates that the body does not always tell the truth about itself—at the very least, it does not tell the whole truth. But as our account of the anonymous body has endeavored to show, that is because it is not in possession of the whole truth to tell. Its commitments precede it; it "has already sided with the world."[100]

Our adept engagement in the complex worlds of everyday experience, our skillful "I can," fosters an illusion of self-possession. Merleau-Ponty's study of the phantom limb, and the

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[100] Merleau-Ponty, <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, 224 [251].

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account of temporality it contributes to, makes apparent the motivation behind this illusion even as it challenges it. This challenge depends on the "ambiguity" of the body, its ability to situate itself inconsistently in the present. But as the *Phenomenology of Perception* demonstrates, this ambiguity, though rooted in the body, is not limited to it, but pervades every meaningful dimension of our experience. In the following section, I will turn to one of the final chapters in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, on the "Cogito," in order to consider how inner life takes up, develops, and challenges the ideal of settledness, or permanence, that is enacted, and ultimately contradicted, in the temporality of embodied life.

II.   Reflection and Inner Life

Situating the "I think"

In section I, we considered the contrast between Descartes's account of the "I think" and Merleau-Ponty's account of the "I can" as a contrast between an atemporal first-person narration of self-conscious, reflective experience and a third-person being-in-the-world, an active engagement in habits and familiar activities that is always meaningfully situated within a temporal framework. While we focused on the phenomenological insight of the "I can," its contrast from the "I think" does not diminish what is compelling in Descartes's *cogito*: in the *cogito* I locate myself most certainly and most intimately in my thoughts; "I" am invulnerable to even the most penetrating doubt. This is the virtue of Descartes' account: it speaks to the exclusivity of our private thought—exclusive of doubt, but also, more commonly, of others— that is a definitive feature of mature human experience. "I" center my perspective on the world; "I" confirm my perceptions, my thoughts and my feelings.

Thus, our experience of ourselves is very different from our experience of things in the world. As we saw in Chapter One, in perceptual experience we encounter objects only in "profiles," determined by the limited (spatial and temporal) reach of the senses. As we saw in the previous section, even my own body is an object I have limited access to: I cannot see all of it at once, and both what is seen and unseen of it operate according to the rhythms of the physical world. My mind, in contrast, seems independent of these rhythms, and also of the limitations that distinguish my perceptual capabilities. This is especially true in reflection, which I undertake by removing myself from the physical, or "external," world. In reflection I seem to have comprehensive and exclusive access to my "internal" landscape, to the thoughts and feelings that make up its distinctive geography. Moreover, this access affords me knowledge of myself that is different from my knowledge of the things in the world. The "I can" pervades the environment, and its anonymity enables and defines its participation in its familiar worlds; in contrast, the "I think" claims exclusive possession of its experience in reflection. In other words, while my perceptual experience is fundamentally pre-personal, reflective experience is fundamentally personal.[101]

Thus, not only do I perceive, feel, and think, but I can reflect upon these perceptions, feelings, and thoughts, claim them as mine and, moreover, evaluate them. Indeed, it is often only upon reflection that I realize the falsity of a perception, the frivolity of a feeling, or the misguidedness of a way of thinking. It is this evaluative aspect of reflection—this capacity of the mind—that informs Descartes' recognition, in the *Meditations*, of the identity of the wax.[102] The mind mitigates the illusions the senses are subject to in perceptual experience: it

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[101] Cf. M. C. Dillon, "The Unconscious: Language and World," <u>Merleau-Ponty in Contemporary Perspective</u>, eds. Patrick Burke and Jan Van Der Veken (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993) 71-72.

[102] Rene Descartes, "Second Meditation," *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in <u>The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Volume II</u>, trans. by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (New York: Cambridge UP, 1984) 20-21.

distinguishes between appearance and reality. Inner reality, however, seems to admit of no such

distinction, and thus my perspective on my own inner life seems, relative to my perceptual

experience, infallible: "Within me, appearance is reality, and the being of consciousness consists

in appearing to itself."[103] Thus when I take myself as an object, I have access to all of its—my—

dimensions. This seems especially apparent in the case of feelings [*sentiments*], Merleau-Ponty

points out, which "create their objects and it is clear that by doing so they can turn away from the

real and, in this sense, they can trick us. And yet it seems impossible that they trick us with

regard to themselves [. . .]."[104] Even if my anger, or my love, is misguided, *that* I am angry, or

that I love, cannot be disputed.

Merleau-Ponty's work in the "Cogito" chapter challenges the claim that our inner life is

transparent to us.[105] His challenge to this self-certainty follows the critique of self-possession we

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[103] Merleau-Ponty, <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, 396 [439].

[104] Merleau-Ponty, <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, 396 [439].

[105] In the Working Notes of *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty writes: "The Cogito of Descartes is an operation on significations, a statement of relations between them (and the significations themselves sedimented in acts of expression). It presupposes a prereflective contact of self with self (the non-thetic consciousness [of] self Sartre) or a tacit cogito (being close by oneself)—this is how I reasoned in *Ph.P.* Is this correct? What I call the tacit cogito is impossible. To have the idea of "thinking" (in the sense of the "thought of seeing and of feeling") [. . .] it is necessary to have words" (170-71). And, some pages later: "The problems posed in *Ph.P.* are insoluble because I start there from the "consciousness" – "object" distinction [. . .]" (200). These remarks have motivated some scholars to consider Merleau-Ponty's notes in *The Visible and the Invisible* to be a criticism, and revision, of the general project of the *Phenomenology of Perception* and, in particular, of the notion of the "tacit *cogito*," as it is presented in the "Cogito" chapter (see, for example, Wai-Shun Hung, "Perception and Self-Awareness in Merleau-Ponty: The Problem of the Tacit Cogito in the Phenomenology of Perception," *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* 5 (2005) 211-24). In this section, I do not explicitly discuss Merleau-Ponty's notion of the "tacit *cogito*," which he defines in the *Phenomenology* as the "presence of oneself to oneself" (470). Moreover, my discussions of feelings, and of the difficulty of sincerity (see pp. 73-80, below), draw on the narrative—that is to say, linguistic—nature of our experience of ourselves. Nevertheless, my study begins with the premise that my experience of myself is different from my experience of anything else, a premise that, I would argue, is articulated in Merleau-Ponty's notion of the tacit *cogito*; as M. C. Dillon puts it, "The presencing of a phenomenon requires a distantiation, a space between the here of perception and the there of the phenomenon; and there has to be an awareness, albeit tacit, of the here for the there to appear as such" (M. C. Dillon, "Merleau-Ponty's Transcendence of Immanence: Overcoming the Ontology of Consciousness," *Man and World* 19 (1986) 399). Following Dillon, I do not consider Merleau-Ponty's remarks in *The Visible and the Invisible* to be a repudiation of his work in the "Cogito" chapter, which, I hope to demonstrate, contains compelling insights into the nature of our experience of ourselves. While my self-conscious experience is different from my perceptual experience, it does not thereby remove me from the world, nor does it reinstate the opposition between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. In this sense, the tacit *cogito* is analogous to the anonymous body, which maintains an implicit confidence in its facility in familiar environments (cf. Dillon, "Merleau-Ponty's Transcendence in Immanence,"

discerned in the temporality of the habitual body, specifically in our continual openness to change. There will never be a single moment in which I know myself exhaustively because I am always directed towards new projects that will continue to shape who I am, and thus how, and what, I know of myself. According to Merleau-Ponty, however, the Cartesian "I" not only lacks a "temporal thickness,"[106] but, as a result, claims a sense of certainty that is removed from the world it is most concerned with, most intimately involved in—the world of objects and, still more significantly, of others. The "I" that is circumscribed in the "cogito," as we saw earlier, excludes the worlds that define it; as such, it is as "empty" as the intentional objects of the "I think." Though it establishes an indubitable certainty of its existence, *what it exists as* cannot be defined beyond "thinking thing," and so, according to the terms of Descartes' account, in order to know the "I" as it exists in the world—thus, in order to know the "I" *as it is*—we must sacrifice the certainty established in the "I think."

Thus, as in the case of the habitual body, Merleau-Ponty's critique of the self-possessed "I think" is not based solely on our inherent temporal unfinishedness. Rather, as we have seen, it is in light of this unfinishedness that we develop the habits that give shape to a future we have yet to experience. Our anonymous bodily life establishes the temporal setting that we inhabit and continually reinforce, and that makes meaningful our engagement in our everyday worlds. However, this is no less true of our inner life, and of the significance it instills in these worlds, than it is of our bodily routines. We are always immersed in *situations*, which are not limited to the habitual activities of embodied life, but which extend to the personal history, the relationships, the predilections and prior commitments that shape our experience and the

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398); the tacit *cogito* likewise belongs to the world, and to its pre-reflective dimensions of meaning that lend our experience its coherence. For an excellent analysis of the continuity between Merleau-Ponty's work in the *Phenomenology of Perception* and his work in *The Visible and the Invisible*, see M. C. Dillon, "Merleau-Ponty's Transcendence of Immanence: Overcoming the Ontology of Consciousness," *Man and World* 19 (1986) 395-412.
[106] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 420 [464].

possibilities inherent in it. Thus we are always living through the particular situations we

inhabit—as we participate in the meanings inherent in them—even as we fail to recognize them

as situations, that is, as contingent rather than as essential to reality.[107] While this situatedness is

not taken up as an explicit theme in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty mentions

it a number of times, most notably in the "Cogito" chapter,[108] in order to challenge the claim that

our experience of ourselves is transparent and comprehensive. He argues that even "reflection

never transports itself outside of all situations [. . .],"[109] which is to say that even our most

personal or our most analytical evaluations of our experience do not generate their meaning

independent of an already-meaningful world. It is this fundamental situatedness that precludes

the possibility of transparency when I take myself as an object, and moreover renders me

incomplete as an object apart from my embeddedness in a situation. In other words, I do not

discern the formula according to which my world is meaningful to me, just as I do not properly

see the lenses resting on the bridge of my nose: each is effective only in so far as I can see

through it.

While Merleau-Ponty briefly mentions feelings [*sentiments*]—which I will consider in

more detail below—to help illustrate one of the ways in which we are situated, such that we are

not transparent to ourselves, the situations that frame and inform one's life, that determine what

one is moved towards, or moved by, are more intimate and more deeply-set than moods. They

do not simply cast a color over, or resonate as the tone of, our experience; rather, they provide its

essential organizing structure, which is perhaps why they have always been subject to

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[107] Cf. Sartre's discussion of "situation" in <u>Being and Nothingness</u>, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992) 348. For Sartre, as for Merleau-Ponty, I will never be able to see my situation because I am living it and, significantly for Sartre, because I move outside of it, exceed it, any time I make it an object for myself: "I escape this provisional definition of myself by means of all my transcendence" (346).

[108] See Merleau-Ponty, <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, 401 [444].

[109] Merleau-Ponty, <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, 45 [49].

philosophical investigation. For example, the Platonic dialogues provide numerous illustrations of individuals' embeddedness in, and implicit commitments to, the situations that define their experience: it is the situations of his interlocutors that are most vulnerable to being dismantled by Socrates' questions and which, by and large, are most jealously, sometimes angrily, protected by them. While Socrates is concerned with exposing and examining what his interlocutors are otherwise blindly committed to, Merleau-Ponty is concerned with showing how this blindness is an inherent feature of our experience of ourselves.

In one of the passages I have chosen as an epithet to this chapter, Merleau-Ponty describes the way in which we fail to see that which makes visual perception possible—light. He writes: "Lighting is not on the side of the object, it is what we take up, what we adopt as a norm, whereas the illuminated thing stands in front of us and confronts us. Lighting is in itself neither color nor even light, it is prior to the distinction between colors and lights. And this is why it always tends to become "neutral" for us. The penumbra in which we remain becomes so natural for us that it is no longer even perceived as penumbra."[110] He makes this point near the beginning of "The Thing and the Natural World," in the midst of an extensive discussion on light and color that aims to explicate the constancy and objective reality of visual experience. Our situatedness, as Merleau-Ponty describes it, is comparable to the light that makes sight possible: it is that according to which we experience everything else, and, like the penumbra, it maintains a paradoxical invisibility.

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[110] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 324 [362]. I have altered Landes' translation in the final sentence of this passage, using "penumbra" for "pénombre," rather than "shadowy light," as Landes has it, because I think the cognate provides a more evocative image of the way in which the means of our being able to see is not only invisible, but is also the reason for our blindness beyond these means. In *Phénoménologie de la perception*, the sentence reads: "La pénombre où nous demeurons nous deviant à ce point naturelle qu'elle n'est plus même perçue comme pénombre" (365).

It is in this way that our inner life, the life of the "I think," has an anonymity analogous to that found in the habitual body. In the "Cogito" chapter, Merleau-Ponty discusses feelings [*sentiments*] in order to reveal the ambiguous grasp we have of ourselves as a result of our embeddedness in a situation.[111] While he notes that feelings are temporal occurrences, and thus are subject to re-evaluation in retrospect,[112] he is more interested in their complicity with illusion and imagination. I would like to show how this complicity reflects the same tendency we discovered in our study of the habitual body, namely, the way in which our life accumulates a dimension of unreflective anonymity, to which we implicitly defer. Here, however, it is paradoxically our inner life—which, by definition, is personal—that develops a kind of "anonymity."

Illusion

As Merleau-Ponty points out, however, inner life is not unrelated, or impervious, to external life: "Our natural attitude is not to experience our own feelings or to adhere to our own pleasures, but rather to live according to the emotional categories of our milieu."[113] While he mentions that certain situations may induce certain feelings—"[many people are] joyful or sad depending upon the landscape, and beneath these emotions they are indifferent and empty"[114]— Merleau-Ponty's more general focus here is on how even one of the most intimate dimensions of our experience reflects impersonal values or narratives that we have taken up as significant to and descriptive of us. His claim echoes his account of the habitual body, specifically its exposition of the anonymity that characterizes our everyday perceptual life, and that is made

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[111] Merleau-Ponty's discussion in the "Cogito" chapter refers to "feelings"—*sentiments*—and does not claim to provide an account of emotion. His discussion here is concerned with one's general sense of oneself, and one's confidence in this sense that distinguishes inner life.

[112] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 399 [442]: "It is the truth of these future feelings that will bring to light the falsity of her present ones."

[113] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 399 [442].

[114] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 399 [441].

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manifest in our ready responsiveness to familiar environments. It challenges the claim to self-possession that seems to distinguish the domain of reflection—of our inner life, in which we seem to experience ourselves most closely, most immediately—in so far as the influence of the impersonal "emotional categories of our milieu" extends to the very heart of who we think ourselves to be. While our feelings may seem to reveal to us our distinctive way of responding to the world, they are not always distinctive to us, but rather express a vision of the world we have taken up, and reflect how we situate ourselves within this vision. The example Merleau-Ponty cites to illustrate this point is the adolescent whose first experience of love is wholly shaped by love stories. He does not deny that she truly experiences these feelings, but rather that the feelings themselves do not originate in her, and in this sense are not authentic to who she truly is.[115]

Yet these feelings nevertheless describe to her who she is and sometimes even who she must be. The anonymous dimension of the habitual body, as we have seen, is often conditioned by necessity—that is, biological demands—and it is on the basis of this necessity that its functioning is taken for granted, yet shapes the world we will inhabit. Even in those cases in which our anonymous bodily life is not strictly conditioned by some biological necessity—for instance, in the idiosyncratic movements of the athlete, or the tics in the musician's face during a performance—it is equally expressive of our tendency to assume a particular approach to the world that we are by and large ignorant of, in so far as it facilitates our participation in that world. And so it is in the case of one's inner life: how we situate ourselves, the narratives we take up as definitive, what is meaningful and compelling to us, acquire a pretense of permanence, of irreversibility, and in this sense functions as an invisible and influential dimension of our

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[115] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 399 [442].

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experience. Moreover, though we assume them as definitive for us, we are not always authors of these narratives. Thus, there is an analogous impersonality, or anonymity, in our reflective experience, in the perspective we have on ourselves, even though it may seem to us to be more intimate, more exhaustive, than our relations with objects in the perceptual world.

It is perhaps clearer in the case of inner life, however, that this developed anonymity assumes a normative force. While how we feel is more contingent than, say, how we digest our food, it is as resistant to challenges to its preeminence as a way of engaging with the world. It is for this reason that Emma Bovary is both a terrible and a terribly sympathetic character in Gustave Flaubert's great novel, *Madame Bovary*.[116] Dissatisfied with the contrast between her life and the romantic stories in the novels she reads, and what she perceives as their real-life counterparts in the decadence of upper class French society, the ambivalent protagonist engages in two extra-marital affairs and accumulates a great deal of debt in her attempt to emulate this experience she idealizes. This emulation extends even to the romantic feelings she has for her lovers, which, as the novel progresses, betray the self-deception at their root. Madame Bovary embodies the essential tendency to remain committed to a vision of the world, and to the intimate romantic feelings that vision entails, even when it is false and ultimately destructive. Indeed, the price of preserving this illusion is its destructiveness, which she succumbs to rather than dispense with the pretense of romance and glamour the illusion gives her life.

While her situation is certainly an extreme and tragic case, her story brings into sharp relief the ways in which our abiding illusions are sustained even in their conflict with reality. Emma Bovary's absorption in novels—an image in Flaubert's novel in which the reader may catch a reflection of herself—reveals that this kind of illusion is possible because our relationship

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[116] Gustave Flaubert, <u>Madame Bovary</u>, trans. Lydia Davis (New York, NY: Viking, 2010).

to ourselves has a structure similar to our relation to fictional narratives. That is, our perspective on our own experience can pretend to an absorbing omniscience in its seclusion from external reality and, if unchecked, is, like Madame Bovary, vulnerable to the risks of becoming dangerously absorbed in its own fictions, of being unable to reconcile illusion with reality. Outside the individual's experience of herself, this is the danger of gossip, which, though proliferated within a community, can sediment an individual's view of an issue, or another person. Thus Socrates' claim in the *Apology* that it is the "first false charges"—all of those things that have been said about him in Athens over the many years he has spent talking with people—not the "later charges"—for which he is explicitly being tried—that will lead to his conviction.[117] The first false charges are authorless, and are taken up unreflectively by the people of Athens. Like gossip, and also like Emma Bovary's obsession with romance novels, they exert an anonymous authority to which people do not realize they are deferring in their assessment of their own experience. Our inner life may thus harbor hidden influences that compromise our presumed comprehensive grasp on ourselves.

Thus, contrary to its pretense of comprehension in its contrast with my relation to perceptual objects, my relation to myself is not insusceptible to illusion. Even in reflection, I am an object for myself that, like any perceptual object, retains dimensions of incomprehensibility. As we discussed above, our feelings bring this incomprehensibility to light in their incompatibility with the standards of insight they seem to attest to in their intimate association with who we think ourselves to be. In André Gide's novel, *The Counterfeiters*, Edouard describes how his perspective on himself seemingly undermines sincerity: "Psychological

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[117] Plato, *Apology*, in Four Texts on Socrates, revised edition, trans. Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998) 64-65, ll. 18a-e. For an excellent discussion of the role of "collective prejudice" in Socrates' conviction, and Socrates' attitude towards collective prejudice as fundamental to personal development, see John Russon, "The (Childish) Nature of the Soul in Plato's *Apology*," in Reexamining Socrates in the *Apology*, eds. Patricia Fagan and John Russon (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009) 191-205.

analysis lost all interest for me from the moment that I became aware that men feel what they imagine they feel. From that to thinking that they imagine they feel what they feel was a very short step…! I see it clearly in the case of my love for Laura: between loving her and imagining I love her—between imagining I love her less and loving her less—what God could tell the difference? In the domain of feeling, what is real is indistinguishable from what is imaginary."[118] Edouard's pessimism is directed at what he perceives as his inability to accurately evaluate his inner life—he keeps getting in the way of himself, as it were. For him, sincerity is impossible because we cannot escape the effects of our assessment of our own experience—an assessment that inevitably changes that experience.[119] Thus, according to Edouard, deception—or, at the very least, the impossibility of fully escaping deception—is inherent in self-conscious experience. While Merleau-Ponty's work does not share this pessimism, as I shall go on to show, it does acknowledge that this remove between ourselves and our experience, enacted in our perspective when we take ourselves as an object, precludes rather than guarantees self-possession. Rather than resolving doubt about one's own experience, then, the "I think"—or, more generally, reflection—opens a new dimension of doubt.

Like Edouard's analysis of the impossibility of sincerity, Merleau-Ponty's discussion of feelings is not strictly focused on the emotional content of our lives, but rather on the way in which feelings reveal the possibility of deception, even in our most intimate experiences of ourselves. Merleau-Ponty's account of feelings is thus less about feelings themselves than about

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[118] André Gide, The Counterfeiters, trans. Dorothy Bussy (New York: Modern Library, 1955), 65.

[119] Cf. Roquentin's discussion of the impossibility of lived beginnings, in Jean-Paul Sartre's novel, Nausea: "There are no beginnings. Days are tacked on to days without rhyme or reason, an interminable, monotonous addition. From time to time you make a semi-total. . .That's living. But everything changes when you tell about life; it's a change no one notices: the proof is that people talk about true stories. As if there could possibly be true stories; things happen one way and we tell about them in the opposite sense. You seem to start at the beginning. . .And in reality you have started at the end. It was there, invisible and present, it is the one which gives to words the pomp and value of a beginning. . .But the end is there transforming everything." Jean-Paul Sartre, Nausea, trans. Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1964) 39-40.

the grounds of self-knowledge, as the subject of the chapter—the "Cogito"—might suggest.

Feelings reveal to us most clearly the difficulty of taking ourselves as an object and, as a result,

qualify the possibilities of knowledge when we do; they provide a venue, as it were, for

ambiguity, for the essential role of ambiguity in our experience of ourselves. As we saw earlier,

even though I discern my feelings in reflection, I am always doing so within a situation that may

itself turn out to be deceptive. This deception is possible both because I am continually open to

further revelation about myself—my situation is fundamentally temporal—and because, like my

habitual body, I inhabit this situation anonymously, and in taking it for granted, I am blind to it

as the determining structure of my experience. Thus, while it is true that reflection provides me

with a privileged knowledge of myself—I am certainly a different kind of object than those that I

encounter in my bodily experience—it is not a means of omniscience. As in the case of

perceptual experience, then, knowledge—in this case, self-knowledge—is not equivalent to

comprehensive objectivity, but rather must involve some recognition of the "penumbra" or, in

other words, the limits, that render its object beyond reach.[120]

The "I" in the world

Our discussion of the complicity of feeling with illusion seems to insinuate the possibility

of deception into any experience we have of ourselves—hence Edouard's pessimism. This

pessimism seems supported by the fact that even if it were possible to wrest ourselves from the

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[120] Cf. Klaus Held's evocative explication of Husserl's account of the synthesis of inner-time consciousness: "I slip away from myself into the past in every moment of my conscious life, and yet at the same time, I am constantly retentionally aware of myself. This primordial retention is the most original synthesis. In this synthesis I have always already identified myself with myself—prior to any type of objectification—and, simultaneously, I have also always already gained the first distance from myself. Through this pre-objective self-identification, my primordial ego, on the one hand, is something unchanging, that is, it is standing and remaining; on the other hand, through this pre-objective self-distancing, it is something living and streaming, that is, something that can become something different in comparison to what it was before. Thus my ego, in its deepest dimension, is a living being, wherein "standing and "streaming" are one." Klaus, Held, "Husserl's Phenomenology of the Life-World," trans. Lanei Rodemeyer, in The New Husserl: A Critical Reader, ed. Donn Welton (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 32-62.

penumbra of situations in which we lose our transparency to ourselves, the form of reflection itself—that is, self-conscious experience—seems to render us vulnerable to uncertainty at best, even apart from the content of our feelings. This is because any experience we have can be enclosed in our perspective on that experience, which itself may be enclosed in the perspective we take on that perspective, and so on. As Edouard points out, these layers of self-consciousness seem to offer exponential opportunities for self-deception; more seriously, however, they also undermine the existence of a substantial self to be deceived. Thus, the inherent possibility of illusion in the "I think" introduces a new form of skepticism, one that is more penetrating than the Cartesian doubt resolved in the "I think." Merleau-Ponty acknowledges this: "If illusion is sometimes possible in consciousness, will it not always be possible? [. . .] If we define the subject through existence, that is, through a movement in which it transcends itself, do we not simultaneously destine the subject to illusion, since it will never be able *to be* anything?"[121] Because I can take myself as an object, self-conscious experience paradoxically sets me at a remove from myself. Any "thinking thing" thus has at least these two parts, or two orders, the acknowledgement of which risks an infinite regress that seems to preclude authenticity, or sincerity.[122] I "will never be able *to be* anything" because whatever I *am* is qualified by my perspective on it, which necessarily transcends it.[123]

Following Descartes, Merleau-Ponty resolves this regress in the activity of thinking, but, departing from him, he argues that thinking is always grounded in the world that affirms the reality of the thinker. For Descartes, the "I think" comprehends and confirms the "I am," but its performance is independent of the world that still remains in doubt. For Merleau-Ponty, in

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[121] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 401 [444], emphasis in original.
[122] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 402 [445].
[123] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 402-03 [446].

contrast, I am not a "thinking thing," capable of doubt, unless I am already engaged in a world, am already defined by this engagement before I doubt it:

> "I doubt": the only way of ending all doubt with regard to this claim is actually to doubt, to engage in the experience of doubt, and thereby to make this doubt exist as the certainty of doubting. To doubt is always to doubt something, even if one "doubts everything." I am certain of doubting because I take up this or that thing, or even everything including my own existence, precisely as doubtful. I know myself in my relation to "things," inner perception comes later, and it would not be possible if I had not made contact with my doubt by in fact experiencing it in its object.[124]

For Merleau-Ponty, thinking cannot be removed from the world; it is indebted to it, and thoughts are themselves demonstrations of this debt. Even one's most private reflections are, as he claims here, reflections of or upon the things one is involved with. Thus doubt, and more generally, thinking, are testaments to a prior relationship with the world.[125] We have described this relationship in the "I can" that defines our capable engagement in the world; thinking is no less a function of the "I can," and, as such, it, like walking, typing, or playing tennis, demonstrates a responsiveness to the possibilities inherent in the world.[126]

As a means of self-knowledge, then, reflection may not only be one-sided—in refusing to recognize that it has "already sided with the world"[127]—but also, as a result, it risks belatedly arriving at, and thus misconstruing, its object. In doing so, reflection is a turning-inwards that, as Merleau-Ponty claims in his critique of Descartes, turns away from the world in which its object is continually discovered, defined and re-defined. In this sense, then, it is falsely retrospective;

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[124] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 402 [445].

[125] Cf. Renaud Barbaras, Desire and Distance: Introduction to a Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Paul B. Milan (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2006): "Even if it [perceptual experience] is denounced after the fact as illusory, it can be denounced only *after the fact*, so that the reflection that brings forth a significant relationship at the heart of experience takes everything into account except the fact that the something is *given* to me and that this significant relationship was first ignorant of itself" (2).

[126] M. C. Dillon, "Merleau-Ponty's Transcendence of Immanence," 408.

[127] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 224 [251].

like the habitual body, it confers the completeness of the past onto the open experience of its object in the present. But unlike the objects of perception, the object of reflection, the "I," is always in the process of transforming its own reality. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, "Every inner perception is inadequate because I am not an object that one could perceive, because I make my reality and I only meet up with myself only in the act."[128] As active creators of, and participants in, reality, we place ourselves beyond our own grasp in the very activities that define us: "It is neither true that my existence possesses itself, nor that it is foreign to itself, because it is an act or a doing, and because an act, by definition, is the violent passage from what I have to what I aim at, or from what I am to what I have the intention of being."[129] Who I am, or what I am, cannot be settled or circumscribed in the isolated "I think" because it always involves the "violence" of actively creating and transforming the reality in which I live—"violent" because its course is temporal, and so open and unpredictable, and perhaps irreverent towards, or even destructive of, what has been established. We cannot fully *know* ourselves in reflection that turns away from the world because we *are* not fully ourselves in it, not yet and not ever. But it may equally be said that we cannot know ourselves—as determinate, as complete and fully formed objects—in the actions that mark the "passage [. . .] from what I am to what I have the intention of being," because they are equally open and unfinished. Thus, to return to the difficulties introduced by Descartes and Edouard, we cannot resolve doubt on a philosophical scale or avoid insincerity on a personal scale by further reflection because it removes those actions from their necessarily temporal performance in the world. Rather, by locating the "I" in the world, we acknowledge the openness inherent to, and the consequent limits of, self-perception. Thus, "We can say of

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[128] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 402 [445].
[129] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 401 [444-45].

inner perception what we said of external perception: it includes the infinite, or it is a never completed synthesis that, though never completed, is nevertheless self-affirming."[130]

Merleau-Ponty's aim here is not merely to reverse the hierarchy in Descartes' *cogito* by reaffirming the *being* of the world that makes possible our knowing it, but rather, in determining the shortcomings of the *cogito* as a means of *knowing* oneself, to discern more clearly what kind of a thing I *am*. His account mirrors and develops the account we identified in his analysis of the phantom limb. There, we considered the temporal implications of the anonymous dimensions of experience, as illustrated in habits, which place us in a present that pretends to the completeness of the past. As a result, we experience more than what is given, both of the world itself and even of our own bodies, the capabilities of which we take for granted in our everyday involvements. But in experiencing more than what is given, we also sometimes fail to see all that is there— whether because it differs from our expectations, or because it is beyond our perceptual reach.

Merleau-Ponty's work in the "Cogito" chapter points to a similar structure in inner perception. As we have seen, his discussion of feelings demonstrates the ways in which we mistake ourselves as fully described in our adolescent passions, or in the situations to which we are currently, if somewhat ignorantly, committed. In both cases, we deny the open-endedness of the present and, in doing so, our own openness to being transformed. In other words, we deny that we are incomplete. This incompleteness places real, if indeterminate, bounds on self-knowledge: I cannot be a fully comprehensible object, even in my private, exclusive experience of myself, because, like the perceptual objects I encounter, there are dimensions of myself that will only be revealed in the future. Unlike many perceptual objects, however, I also have dimensions that will only be formed in the future. Merleau-Ponty's claim, then, is not that there

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[130] Merleau-Ponty, <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, 402 [445].

are inner recesses of ourselves that even reflection cannot plumb, but rather that the world is the only venue in which we create, discover and transform who we are; and, unlike reflection, our participation in it accommodates the "temporal thickness" of our experience.[131]

III.   Expression and the Illusion of Self-Possession

Our discussion in the previous two sections has focused on the incompleteness of our perception of ourselves, both in embodied life, in our capable engagement in the world, and in reflection, in our private and exclusive experience of ourselves. Merleau-Ponty's work in the *Phenomenology of Perception* challenges the notion of self-possession by providing an analysis of the temporality of experience, which, as we have seen, situates the "I" in the world. This analysis demonstrates the "I" to be an inadequate ground of self-knowledge because it is indebted to the world and open to continual transformation. As a result, the "I" remains, to a certain extent, incomprehensible, even under the scrutiny of its own privileged powers of investigation, because it is incomplete. By the same token, however, it will always exceed any attempt to fix it within a settled definition.

Merleau-Ponty's account of the impossibility of self-possession has significant implications for a theory of meaning. If I am not the self-contained and ultimate source of knowledge about myself, if the world is the place where I determine who I am and am likewise determined, then my means of participating in the world, of taking up and transforming its meanings—in short, expression itself—is critical to this ongoing, and open-ended, project of self-knowledge. While an earlier chapter in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, "The Body as Expression, and Speech," deals explicitly with the theme of expression, Merleau-Ponty returns to

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[131] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 420 [464].

this rich subject towards the end of the "Cogito" chapter in order to demonstrate its relevance to

his discussion of self-possession. Because, as we have seen, his work in this later chapter draws

heavily on Descartes, the *Meditations* in particular, thinking, and its relevance to self-knowledge,

is a central theme. Our study has focused mainly on Merleau-Ponty's critique of thinking as a

means of self-knowledge. However, this critique also develops a theory of meaning that pertains

both to thinking as an expression of self, and to language as an expression of thought. Merleau-

Ponty's work in the earlier chapter focuses mainly on the latter; in the "Cogito" chapter,

however, he shows how the relation between thought and self is mirrored in that between

language and thought, and is likewise characterized by an incompleteness and a surplus that

challenge any claim to strict self-possession.

In the previous section, we examined the *cogito*'s indebtedness to the world. For

Merleau-Ponty, thinking is not merely a performance of our being, but also, necessarily, a

performance of our being *in the world*, which, unlike the isolated "I think," provides further

determination of what we are, even as it limits what we can know. Yet, as I have argued here, it

is this openness to the world that makes what I am ultimately indefinite; I can never fully grasp

myself because I am always open to further transformation. Thus thinking is one of the means

by which I know myself, but it is not, Merleau-Ponty claims, a demonstration of self-possession:

> [S]elf-possession or the coincidence with the self is not the
> definition of thought: this is rather a product of expression and is
> always an illusion to the extent that the clarity of the acquired rests
> upon the fundamentally obscure operation by which we have
> eternalized a moment of fleeting life within ourselves.
> [. . .T]houghts in their actuality [have] never themselves been
> "pure" thoughts [. . .], there was already in them an excess of the
> signified over the signifying, the same effort of thought already
> thought to equal thinking thought, and the same provisional joining
> of the two that makes up the entire mystery of expression.[132]

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[132] Merleau-Ponty, <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, 409-10 [453].

As Merleau-Ponty describes it here, thinking is always situated within the rich complex of the world and history that precedes it and that, as a result, magnifies its potential meanings. Thus, it does not provide us with a mirror-image of ourselves—a perfect "reflection"—but is rather a means of expression, an activity through which we discover, and further complicate, who we are. Even our most intimate thought contains recesses of meaning that we cannot access, not because we are unconscious of those meanings, nor because we repress them, but because the thought itself exceeds *us*, even as we think it. Its meaning exceeds both the impulse towards meaning that motivated the "obscure operation" that produced the thought, as well as any meaning inaugurated in that thought.[133]

Thus, thought as expression does not issue from a substantial foundation—that is, a determinate self—that could be cited as its source and then consulted for its meaning. Rather, it demonstrates the openness of the self to novel and unanticipated meanings that originate in its own creative capacity. In other words, thought as expression reveals our fundamental indeterminacy, in the sense that, as we seek to define ourselves in the expression of our thoughts, we also, by the same token, render ourselves open to defining ourselves differently, to discovering more in the expression than what originally motivated it. Arguably, then, it is as creators of meaning that we are open to being transformed by these meanings, more specifically, by their unanticipated productivity and complexity. In the final chapter of this project, I will argue that it is in our relations with others that this openness and transformation are realized. It is important to recognize here, however, in the context of Merleau-Ponty's discussion in the

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[133] For an excellent discussion of the dependence of thought and, in turn, of the self of the "I think," on expression in Merleau-Ponty's "Cogito" chapter, see Scott L. Marratto, The Intercorporeal Self: Merleau-Ponty on Subjectivity (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012), 169-72. Marratto writes that "For there to be a cogito, there must be expression" (172).

"Cogito" chapter, that the expressive possibilities of the self, realized in thought, dispossess it of itself, and render it open to the world of meaning in which it participates.

Merleau-Ponty's work in the "Cogito" chapter thus argues against any theory of expression that would attempt to determine meaning by seeking out its proper source. There is no determinate source of meaning that settles that meaning once and for all, because there is no determinate self that could serve as a means of concordance for every thought. His account pertains not only to the relationship between self and thought, however, but also to that between thought and language, which has more traditionally been construed as a relationship between the source of meaning and its variously adequate representations. But language, for Merleau-Ponty, is not a more or less adequate translation of thought, but rather its *body*, the means by which it comes to life.[134] As such, it relies upon already established meanings in order to work its way towards expressing something new, just as our lived body relies on habits and pre-personal physical processes in order to meet the everyday demands upon which our distinctive personal life is built.

Merleau-Ponty's distinction between first-order speech, in which meaning is inaugurated, and second-order speech, which relies on sedimented meaning, captures the productive interdependence between determinate, established meaning and the infinite capacity of original, and originating, expression that characterizes language.[135] First-order speech describes those instances in which language serves as its own source, insofar as it founds meaning, and thus demonstrates its transcendence of both thought and, ultimately, itself: it is its own limited

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[134] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 187 [211].

[135] See Merleau-Ponty's discussion of "first-order" or "authentic" speech in Phenomenology of Perception, 183-185, as well as his remarks in fn. 5 and fn. 6, p. 530 [206-07].

means.[136] It is by virtue of the productive and transcending power of language that we discern

and create—that is, make determinate—who we are, both for ourselves and for others:

"[. . .A]nalysis shows not that there is a transcendent thought behind language, but that thought

transcends itself in speech, that speech itself *establishes* the concordance of myself with myself

and of myself with others, upon which the attempt was made to ground speech."[137] In its

inexhaustible openness to new meaning, language embodies the impossibility of self-

possession—"it transcends itself"—and thus mirrors the temporal openness that renders our

experience incomplete. But by the same token it makes something new appear.

Thus, language makes explicit that which remains implicit in our perception of both

objects and ourselves, namely, its meaning always moves beyond what is given to include the

nuances of context, the idiosyncratic associations of readers and listeners, and whatever else it

may invoke in the moment of its expression, such that any text or utterance has an unending

surplus of meaning. While, in our everyday experience, we may deny this surplus in the habits

that describe our involvement in a decided future, or in disavowing the contingency of the

situations in which we live, in language we come into our own, however precariously, by turning

ourselves out into the world.

Conclusion

Our work in this chapter has demonstrated how our experience of ourselves, like our

experience of the perceptual world, conceals its fundamental incompleteness. We have seen how

our lived temporality, as it is established in both our habitual, embodied experience, and in the "I

think" of our reflective life, may set us at odds with the reality of the world. I analyzed the

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[136] I am indebted to Ed Casey for suggesting this phrase.

[137] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 412, emphasis in original [456].

similarity between the habitual body and the "I think" in terms of our anonymity. Merleau-Ponty's account of the anonymous body describes the way in which we belong to worlds without actively investing ourselves in them. This is apparent in perceptual experience, in which our capabilities deliver us to the world they are automatically responsive to. However, the habitual body is also an anonymous body, in the sense that it delivers us to the world that its capabilities make available. The habitual body enacts its "I can" in its capable engagement with the world, but in doing so it also establishes a temporality that, as we saw in our study of the phantom limb, can become resistant to the terms of its current reality. That is, the facility that enables one's participation in a world also enables one's detachment from it, and informs one's consequent inability to respond to the new demands it makes. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's critique of Descartes' *cogito*, I showed how the "I think" may be equally anonymous in its failure to respond to the reality of the shared world. Like Emma Bovary, one may inhabit narratives about one's experience rather than the world itself. In this sense, both the "I can" of the habitual body and the "I think" of reflective life may be detached from reality because it no longer resembles (or perhaps never resembled) the world in which they developed. Thus I argued that while our anonymity makes possible our involvement in worlds, and our access to the meanings inherent in them, it can also render us unresponsive to new meanings, and thus preclude our involvement in new worlds.

In this sense, then, our anonymity demonstrates our indebtedness to the world in our development of an "I can" or an "I think" that contributes to our sense of ourselves. As indebted to the world, however, we cannot define ourselves apart from it, or apart from the surplus of meanings that inhere in it. Thus, in the third and final section of this chapter, I discussed how even in our reflective lives, in which we may claim to possess ourselves fully in our thoughts, we

are nevertheless open to the world and its unanticipated reserve of meanings, which we are always drawing on and being transformed by.

Before giving a fuller account of this openness and potential for transformation, however, in the following chapter, on "Anonymity and Incompleteness: Seeing Oneself Through Others," I will demonstrate that our anonymous sense of self not only reflects the world in which it develops but, more significantly, always involves and defers to the others who comprise that world and who thus, in turn, inform who we are.

Chapter Three.   Anonymity and Incompleteness: Seeing Oneself Through Others

> *"When you look at people's lives [. . .] it gives you such a peculiar impression. You begin wondering how yours would look if you could see it from the outside."*
>
> --- Francoise
> Simone de Beauvoir, *She Came to Stay*, 158

Introduction

Much of our experience is lived anonymously. Our perception of color and sound, the organic rhythms of our bodies, the routine performances of our daily habits—all take place apart from any active or explicit efforts on our part to gain admission to the worlds they make available to us, and thus demonstrate the generality of our belonging to these worlds rather than our particular or individual situation within them. Even the political protections I enjoy as a citizen are offered to me as an anonymous member of a modern democracy.[138] Thus my anonymity—in my perceptual and physiological capabilities, in my habituated skills, in my political rights—makes possible my participation in worlds that would otherwise be inaccessible to me. It is in this sense, then, that our entry into these worlds *as* anonymous is an accomplishment. This is especially clear in the rights I enjoy as a citizen, but it is also the case in the bodily habits that inform my ability to ride a bicycle, and no less so in the refraction of light by the cornea and lens of the eye that allows me to see. Our experience is subject to, and shaped by, these anonymous accomplishments, and more often than not we take for granted their contingency—both that they provide us access to these worlds, and that they are the only way of

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[138] Cf. Gail Weiss's very good discussion of Merleau-Ponty's account of anonymity in her article, "The Anonymous Intentions of Transactional Bodies," *Hypatia* 17.4 (Fall 2002), especially pp. 194-96.

accessing those worlds. Thus, in each of our anonymous involvements we implicitly defer to one way of inhabiting a world. In the case of perception and other bodily functions such as breathing and metabolizing food, this one way may be the most effective, but in many of the dimensions of our lives that we live anonymously, there are other possible ways—other habituated movements, other political institutions—that could provide us access to our familiar worlds, or open different worlds.[139]

Our work in the previous chapter aimed to reveal the paradoxical normative force of anonymity, particularly as it affects our reflective life—paradoxical because we inhabit these dimensions of our lives anonymously in so far as we inhabit them *un*reflectively. Yet, as we saw, we develop a sense of anonymity that obscures its own development, and thus its own contingency. More specifically, it obscures the essential limits, imposed by our temporality, of our perspective on perceptual objects and on ourselves; in short, our anonymity obscures the incompleteness of our access to the world.

The significant role of anonymity in our perceptual and reflective lives thus reveals a tendency essential to the structure of our experience: we inhabit the world knowingly, which is to say presumptively, and in doing so—in our facility in a familiar world—conceal what is unknown. Habits provide a concrete illustration of this point. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle acknowledges the deep and lasting influence of habit on moral character, and describes the way in which the habits we develop determine the possibilities available to us in the world. The compelling insight underlying his account is that it is *because* we have a tendency to develop habits that they are so crucial in determining moral character. In the course of everyday

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[139] Cf. Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012) 363 [405]: "Now, even if it is not surprising that sensory and perceptual functions—given that they are pre-personal— deposit a natural world in front of themselves, one might still be surprised that the spontaneous acts through which man has articulated his life themselves become sedimented on the outside and thereby lead an anonymous existence as things. The civilization in which I participate exists for me with an evidentness in the tools that it adopts."

experience, habits are effective because we are not constantly confronted with novel objects and situations. Even when we are, however, we implicitly defer to habits—that is, the determinate patterns of engagement that we have already established—that, in effect, render those objects and situations familiar. Thus, the sense of anonymity we develop in our habits characterizes our knowing engagement with the world, and serves to conceal both our own limitations in accessing the world, as well as its unknown dimensions.

Our analysis in the previous two chapters focused on our perception of objects and our perception of ourselves—more specifically, our perception of our own sense of capability in the world—and showed how both conceal their essential incompleteness, and thus conceal what remains unknown in their perceived objects. As a result, we, for the most part, inhabit a coherent and comprehensible world as coherent and comprehensible selves. Others play a significant, if ambiguous, role in this world, and in our sense of coherence and comprehensibility. They are implicated in our anonymity, in so far as it speaks to the general accessibility of the world. As we have seen, my anonymous engagement in the world reflects my capabilities—my impersonal "I can"—rather than my particular sense of self—my distinctive "I think." Because these capabilities inhere in the environment, they are not exclusive to me. Indeed, they often require the participation of others. For instance, on my routine drive to school, my passage through each intersection requires the complicity of other drivers abiding by the same traffic laws as I am. Moreover, in doing so it implicitly incorporates their perspectives into my own: in making this left turn, I not only perceive my own course, but also that of the cars that move alongside me, and the oncoming traffic that is slowing in response to my turn. Even if I am not looking at either, even if they are beyond my current field of vision, I see them, just as I see my own trajectory from their perspective. In my responsiveness to the established traffic laws, I am part

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of a larger whole that functions smoothly so long as the other drivers are responsive as well.

Even in those situations in which others are absent, however, their perspectives are nevertheless

incorporated into mine, as supplements, as it were, to aspects of objects that are beyond my

reach, thus contributing to the fullness of my experience. This is a central focus of much of

Husserl's work on intersubjectivity,[140] which Merleau-Ponty also acknowledges and develops in

his chapter on "Others and the Human World," in *Phenomenology of Perception*: "the other is

not enclosed in my perspective on the world because this perspective itself has no definite limits,

because it spontaneously slips into the other's perspective, and because they are gathered

together in a single world in which we all participate as anonymous subjects of perception."[141]

Thus our anonymity—as perceiving subjects, as traffic law-abiding citizens—unites us with

others in a single world. The fullness of this world reflects the versatility of my perspective—its

seeming limitlessness, as Merleau-Ponty describes it here—which is informed by the

perspectives of others who contribute to its breadth and depth.

But as others participate in, and even foster, our sense of anonymity, they also pose a

fundamental challenge to it as the ground of the security of our engagement with the world. In

Sartre's famous account of "the look" in *Being and Nothingness*, he describes the way in which

the appearance of another person orients my environment away from me.[142] The person who

suddenly appears in the park shows the falsity of my exclusive claim to this place; for example,

the bench that I had considered as a resting spot I now see relative to the lengths of his strides

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[140] Dan Zahavi, Husserl's Phenomenology (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2003) 110-11. Cf. Sartre, Being and Nothingness, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992) 316. Husserl's discussion of the necessity of intersubjectivity to objectivity occurs in Cartesian Meditations. See Edmund Husserl, Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology, trans. Dorion Cairns (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999) 120-28, 156.

[141] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012) 369 [411].

[142] Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992) 340-400. See p. 342 for Sartre's description of how the appearance of the other creates "an orientation *which flees from me*" (emphasis in original).

rather than mine.[143] The perspectives of others thus not only inform aspects of objects I cannot see but, for Sartre, stake claims on their primacy as perspectives that rival my own. Still more significantly, they expose an essential truth about my experience that is concealed in my anonymity, namely, that I am seen in ways I do not and cannot see myself, that my perspective is not only rivaled by, but exposed in its concreteness to, the perspectives of others. Thus, in so far as my capabilities come into determinate conflict with others', illuminating what I had been able to take for granted before their appearance, and also illuminating me, my particular appearance according to their perspectives, my anonymity is impossible.

In this chapter, I will argue that others expose the fundamental tension between our limits as singular, temporally-situated perspectives on the world, and our comfortable facility in the anonymous dimensions of our experience, which, as previous chapters have shown, obscures these limits. Others both complement and challenge the sense of self we develop in our anonymous involvements; they foster our capabilities and also rival our claims to exclusively determine the meaning of our experience. I will examine these ambiguous roles in light of the account of anonymity I have developed in the previous chapter. I will demonstrate that this account of anonymity is critically relevant to understanding our relations with others because it describes the primary and essential way they are incorporated in our experience.[144] Thus, while others may pose a challenge to our own understanding of ourselves, the nature of this challenge can only be explicated with reference to the background against which it takes place, namely, our implicit belonging to the world of others.

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[143] Sartre, Being and Nothingness, 341-42: "Perceiving him as a *man* [. . .] is not to apprehend an additive relation between the chair and him; it is to register an organization *without distance* of the things in my universe around that privileged object. [. . .] Instead of the two terms of the distance being indifferent, interchangeable, and in a reciprocal relation, the distance *is unfolded starting from* the man whom I see and *extending up to* the lawn as the synthetic upsurge of a univocal relation."

[144] Cf. Dan Zahavi, "Beyond Empathy: Phenomenological Approaches to Intersubjectivity," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 8.5-7 (2001), especially pp. 153-54.

I will begin by examining the original and formative role of others in the experience of the infant, drawing on Merleau-Ponty's writings in developmental psychology, as well as more recent analyses, in order to show how our developing sense of self is bound up with, and thus deeply dependent on, others. While I will make reference to some empirical studies, my focus will be on how the basis of both one's relations with others and one's developing sense of self is a shared world that cultivates and supports a more primordial anonymity that precedes our developed anonymity in the involvements that characterize adult life. In the second section, I will provide a concrete analysis of how this developed anonymity, like the anonymity of the infant, incorporates the perspectives of others. I will demonstrate how our bodies and, more specifically, our capabilities and our impairments, testify to the influence of others, even in our most routine activities. The work in these first two sections will support my argument that our anonymous existence is developed out of and thus reflects our relations with others and, as a result, is not "neutral," but is charged by these relations, which continually inform the shape of our experience. In the final section, I will consider how others challenge the primacy of our individual perspective on the world, thus making impossible our anonymity. I will argue that our experience always demands the reconciliation of our anonymous sense of self with the sense of self that is reflected in our relations with others. In order to illustrate and analyze in more detail the difficulty of this demand, I will turn to Simone de Beauvoir's novel, *She Came to Stay*, which documents one character's struggle, and ultimate refusal, to accept another's determination of who she is. The conflict between these two characters starkly outlines the basic conflict between the presumptions that give our experience its fullness and its meaningfulness, and the necessary incompleteness of this experience that is revealed in our relations with others.

I.   Anonymity and the Developing Sense of Self

The anonymity of our participation in perceptual, social and political worlds is definitive of adult experience. What may be for the child unmanageable or even impossible is for the adult automatic and unremarkable in the patterns of engagement that she has developed, and that continually shape the expectations that render her experience coherent and meaningful. In this way, the adult often lives at a distance from the particular demands of her experience, which are answered unreflectively. This distance speaks to anonymity as an accomplishment of adult experience—it frees one for more complex engagements in the world—and as such, betrays the falsity of self-possession. This is one of the central insights of our close study of the account of anonymity in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. However, Merleau-Ponty's later work in developmental psychology identifies a deeper and more primary anonymity in human experience, out of which we develop a sense of ourselves as individuals. In "The Child's Relations with Others," Merleau-Ponty uses the phrase "anonymous collectivity" to refer to a primordial identification with others that precedes our "distinction" as individuals.[145] Originally given as a lecture course, this lengthy essay is a careful and detailed presentation of empirical studies in developmental psychology, along with psychoanalytic theory, that support some of Merleau-Ponty's most important philosophical claims about intersubjective experience. I would like to examine some of these claims as they emerge in this work, focusing on Merleau-Ponty's account of what I have referred to here as "primordial anonymity" in the infant's bodily identification with others. I will show how the infant's experience of others informs her developing sense of self, and moreover how it anticipates some of the difficulties of intersubjective experience that are features of adult life.

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[145] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," trans. William Cobb, in The Primacy of Perception, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 119.

Infantile experience of body and world

Melanie Klein, a psychoanalyst writing in the mid-twentieth century, whose pioneering work in the psychoanalysis of children serves as an important reference for Merleau-Ponty in "The Child's Relations with Others,"[146] describes the way in which the infant's experience of her bodily needs motivates and informs her relationship to the world.[147] However, Klein argues that it is not strictly the bodily experience of her needs, but rather the mother's responsiveness to these needs—whether and how they are answered—that determines the affective charge of the infant's world.[148] For example, the hungry child who is frequently left crying in her crib may soon regard her crib, the place of her unanswered hunger, as hostile and uncomfortable; likewise, the child who is wrapped in a particular blanket while he is being fed may invest his warm and sleepy feelings of satiation in the blanket, which may then provoke those feelings, even in the absence of his mother.[149] In both of these examples, it is the child's interaction with the

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[146] See Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 102-07.

[147] Klein was one of the founders of the post-Freudian school of psychoanalysis known as object relations theory, which emphasizes the fundamental significance of the relationship between the mother and infant as establishing the terms according to which the infant will later interact with the world. Klein's account of "symbol formation," which my work here draws upon, describes how the infant first begins to relate to the external world. She argues that symbol formation occurs when the infant responds to the absence of her mother's breast by investing objects in her external environment with her anxiety; according to Klein, the objects become symbols when the infant hallucinates the absent breast in them. Through this process of symbol formation, the infant copes with the ambivalence toward (and of) her mother's body—specifically the pleasure and comfort provided by the giving breast, and the pain and hatred caused by the absent breast. As Hanna Segal, one of Klein's most prominent students, points out, these phantasies have a bodily significance for the infant: "The view that phantasy is operative from the beginning, at the most primitive stages of development, implies that this phantasy is to begin with physical: the hallucinated breast is not to begin with a visual experience, but a bodily one. [. . .] Physical experiences are interpreted as phantasy object relationships, giving them emotional meaning. A baby in pain may feel itself as being hated. But also, conversely, the phantasies are so close to the somatic that they affect physical functioning. It is well known that an emotionally upset baby often develops digestive and other physical symptoms" (Hanna Segal, Dream, Phantasy and Art (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 1991), 20-21). Klein's account of symbol formation thus emphasizes the significance of the child's bodily relationship with her mother in motivating her developing relationship with the external world. See Melanie Klein, "The Importance of Symbol Formation in the Development of the Ego," Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945 (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1975), 219-32.

[148] See Melanie Klein, "The Importance of Symbol Formation in the Development of the Ego," Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945 (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1975), especially pp. 220-21.

[149] Cf. D. W. Winnicott's account of "transitional objects" in Playing and Reality (New York: Routledge, 2008) pp. 1-34. Winnicott argues that objects such as the child's blanket serve as "transitional phenomena," which aid the child in reconciling her inner reality with the demands of the shared interpersonal world. For an excellent discussion

mother's body—as responsive or unresponsive to his body—that determines his relationship to his environment and the objects that comprise it. Moreover, this interaction determines his relationship to his own body as well: the satiated child experiences his body as safe—he can settle into it, accept its demands—whereas the hungry child may experience her body as something that issues demands beyond her control, and thus as foreign. In both cases, however, it is the experience of the mother's body that informs the child's experience of his or her own body and of the world.

Merleau-Ponty's work in "The Child's Relations with Others" supports Klein's central thesis that the child's experience is affectively charged by others.[150] However, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates a basis for this affective openness to others in the developmental course of the child's perceptual capabilities. He focuses on the period between birth and six months. Citing the work of French child psychologist Henri Wallon, Merleau-Ponty maintains that the infant does not first encounter the world in external perception, but rather introceptively[151]: that is, her experience is immediately centered in her body, and thus is focused on its needs and structured by the limits of its perceptual capacities. Myelinization of nerves will take place between the third and sixth months, enabling the infant to begin to correlate her bodily experience with her perception of the external world[152]; for example, at the age of four months, she will begin reaching for and grasping objects.[153] Thus, it is also during this time that she begins to develop

of Winnicott's account of transitional objects and their role in the development of the distinction between self and other, see Kirsten Jacobson, "Heidegger, Winnicott, and *The Velveteen Rabbit*: Anxiety, Toys, and the Drama of Metaphysics," in *Philosophy in Children's Literature*, ed. Peter Costello (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 1-20.

[150] Merleau-Ponty explicitly cites Klein in his discussion of "psychological rigidity" on pp. 100-08, which I discuss below.

[151] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 121-22.

[152] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 122.

[153] Kym Maclaren, "Embodied Perceptions of Others as a Condition of Selfhood? Empirical and Phenomenological Considerations," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 15.8 (2008) 71.

the ability to control her body.[154] Bodily motility determines what and how one perceives, from

the rapid movements of the eyes to the more global situation of the body itself.[155] Coherent

perceptual experience takes these constant movements for granted, most of which are within our

implicit control. Without a "minimal bodily equilibrium" and the ability to control her own

movements, however, the infant is unable to clearly distinguish her own body parts from objects

in the world.[156] Moreover, according to Merleau-Ponty, she has no experience of the distinction

"between the body as seen and the body as felt [. . .]."[157] All experience is, for the infant, felt,[158]

and as such, even the external world reflects her inchoate experience of her own body.[159]

Without developed perceptual capabilities, the child's experience thus lacks the rich

perceptual details of the adult's experience; her world is less complex. Her sense of self in

relation to this world is also less complex: it is wholly felt, and thus wholly determined by her

bodily needs. It is also, as a result, less individualized, according to Merleau-Ponty. He argues

that prior to the development of the perceptual capabilities that will aid in the definition of the

world and in the child's sense of self, "the child is unaware of himself and the other as different

beings."[160] Similar to Klein's work, Merleau-Ponty's argument has its foundation in the physical

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[154] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 122-23.

[155] Kym Maclaren, "Embodied Perceptions of Others as a Condition of Selfhood? Empirical and Phenomenological Considerations," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 15.8 (2008) 73. Merleau-Ponty discusses the importance of movement to perception in the chapter on "The Spatiality of One's Own Body and Motricity" in the Phenomenology of Perception, pp. 100-48.

[156] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 122-23.

[157] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 123.

[158] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 116: "The child's visual experience of his own body is altogether insignificant in relation to the kinesthetic, cenesthesic, or tactile feeling he can have of it."

[159] Cf. D. W. Winnicott, "The Concept of a Healthy Individual," Home is Where We Start From: Essays by a Psychoanalyst (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1990) 23: "It is at the beginning, when the baby is living in a subjective world, that health cannot be described in terms of the individual alone. Later it becomes possible for us to think of a healthy child in an unhealthy environment, but these words make no sense at the beginning, till the baby has become able to make an objective assessment of actuality, and has become able to be clear about the not-me as distinct from the me, and between the shared *actual* and the phenomena of personal psychical reality, and has something of an internal environment."

[160] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 119.

demands of the child, who cannot answer these demands by himself. Thus, the child's

experience conceals the distinction between self and other because it is an experience that, for

the most part, and under the best circumstances, is focused on providing him with a bodily sense

of well-being: the child is cleaned, fed, and comforted by the bodies of others—usually one or

two primary others—whose physical closeness is essential to this sense of well-being.[161]

Because the presence of others is intimately associated with these needs as they are felt and

satisfied in the child, others are, for him, inseparable from them, and thus indistinguishable from

his most basic experience of himself.[162]

Thus, along with the child's own bodily needs, others are felt to be internal to his

experience, and thus internal even to his own bodily sense of self.[163] Merleau-Ponty cites

Wallon's evocative description of the way in which the child experiences the absence of others

as an absence in himself: "Up to the age of three months, according to Wallon, there is no

external perception of others by the child, and what ought to be concluded when, for example,

the child is seen to cry because someone goes away is that he has an "impression of

incompleteness." Rather than truly perceiving those who are there, he feels incomplete when

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[161] Cf. D. W. Winnicott, "The Concept of a Healthy Individual," <u>Home is Where We Start From: Essays by a Psychoanalyst</u> (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1990), 29: "Much of the physical part of infant care—holding, handling, bathing, feeding, and so on—is designed to facilitate the baby's achievement of a psyche-soma that lives and works in harmony with itself."

[162] Thus, according to Merleau-Ponty's analysis here, the bodily presence of others is as significant as the satisfaction of the child's basic needs. His argument is consistent with the findings of psychoanalyst René A. Spitz, who studied children placed in foundling homes during World War II. Though the infants' basic bodily needs were met—they were kept clean and well-fed—they failed to develop; more than one third of them died. Spitz attributed the developmental problems and the high morbidity rate to the deprivation of physical contact. See René A. Spitz, *Psychogenic Disease in Infancy*, produced by the Psychoanalytic Research Project on Problems of Infancy (1952; New York, NY: New York University Film Library), http://www.archive.org/details/PsychogenicD.

[163] "Internal" is a somewhat problematic word-choice here, because, as we have described it, the child's experience lacks the distinction between internal and external. However, I use the word "internal" to emphasize the child's experience as felt in her body, which serves as the primary reference for all meaning for her. For an excellent account of the child's developing ability to reconcile inner reality with the external world, see D. W. Winnicott, <u>Playing and Reality</u> (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), in particular his discussion of the "transitional object" on pp. 1-34, and his discussion of the "subjective object" on pp. 175-76.

someone goes away."[164] Wallon's description echoes Klein's work, in that it demonstrates that

the child encounters meaning affectively—that is, in her own bodily sense of self—rather than

perceptually—occurring in the external world—and this affectivity is rooted in the child's

experience of other people. Thus, according to Wallon, the child does not perceive the departure

of another person as an absence in the world, but rather as an absence felt in himself.

But as Wallon points out, and as Merleau-Ponty goes on to claim, in so far as others are

internal to the child's experience, the child does not actually perceive them.[165] Merleau-Ponty

thus proposes a fundamental connection between the child's developing perceptual capabilities

and her developing intersubjective and subjective life. Moreover, he argues that there is an

important correlation between the child's inability to perceive others and her inability to perceive

herself:

> The first *me* is [. . .] virtual or latent, i.e., unaware of itself in its
> absolute difference. Consciousness of oneself as a unique
> individual, whose place can be taken by no one else, comes later
> and is not primitive. Since the primordial *me* is virtual or latent,
> egocentrism is not at all the attitude of a *me* that expressly grasps
> itself (as the term "egocentrism" might lead us to believe). Rather,
> it is the attitude of a *me* which is unaware of itself and lives as
> easily in others as it does in itself—but which, being unaware of
> others in their own separateness as well, in truth is no more
> conscious of them than of itself.[166]

In Merleau-Ponty's description here, the child's sense of self—"the attitude of a *me*"—reflects

the limits of her perceptual development. The infant lacks an insular, individual perspective on

her own experience because that experience lacks the complexity of distinctions that are

available once her perceptual capacities are more fully developed. Without the perceptual

capacities that both reveal the world to her and reveal that world as external to her, she is

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[164] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 124.
[165] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 119.
[166] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 119.

unaware of her own interiority. She is thus unaware of the implications of her own interiority,

the most basic of which is that her perspective on the world is distinctive to her and thus

exclusive of others' perspectives. As Merleau-Ponty's work in this essay seeks to demonstrate,

this is both a perceptual and an existential truth: only I occupy this particular position, and it is

the particularity of this position that provides the determinacy of my perspective, for example,

the qualities of light and sound that characterize my visual and aural experience. I am more than

the sum of these qualities, however: my perspective includes how these qualities affect me, how

they inform and are informed by my interior sense of self. Without the distinction between self

and world afforded by developed perceptual capabilities, the child's experience also lacks the

existential distinction of an interior sense of self. As a result, Merleau-Ponty argues, the child's

experience is unreflectively inclusive of others.[167]

"False belief" experiments in developmental psychology seem to provide some support

for this claim.[168] While there are a wide variety of these experiments, many take the same basic

form: a child is presented with a situation in which a fictional character observes a certain state

of affairs, for example, that there is a piece of chocolate in the cupboard.[169] The character then

leaves the room, and the child is told, or observes herself, a change in the state of affairs: the

chocolate is removed from the cupboard and placed in a drawer. The character then returns to

the room, and the child is asked where this character believes the chocolate is. The experiments

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[167] Cf. Merleau-Ponty's remarks in his chapter on "Others and the Human World" in Phenomenology of Perception, p. 371 [413]: "The child lives in a world that he believes is immediately accessible to everyone around him. He is unaware of himself and, for that matter, of others as private subjectivities. He does not suspect that all of us, including himself, are limited to a certain point of view upon the world. [. . .] He does not have the knowledge of points of view."

[168] See Heinz Wimmer and Josef Perner, "Beliefs about beliefs: Representation and constraining function of wrong beliefs in young children's understanding of deception," Cognition 13 (1983) 103-28. Wimmer and Perner's article provides one of the first presentations and analyses of "false belief" experiments.

[169] More recent studies have shown that the conclusions remain the same if the child is asked to attribute a false belief to a real person rather than a fictional character. See Henry M. Wellman, David Cross and Julanne Watson, "Meta-Analysis of Theory-of-Mind Development: The Truth about False Belief," Child Development 72.3 (May/June 2001) 664-65.

found that children under the age of four always attributed their knowledge of the change in the state of affairs to the character who, under the circumstances of the experiment, could not have witnessed the change.[170] However, the older the child, the more likely he or she was to attribute a false belief to the character, that is, a belief different from their own.[171] These findings suggest that children under the age of four *generalize* their perspective, and thus do not distinguish between it and that of another person, even when, as in the case of these experiments, that other person is not continually present in their experience. The child's perspective "permeates," as it were, the perspectives of others, such that her experience includes them—or, more accurately, takes for granted their sameness—as it fails to recognize their separateness and, consequently, their difference from her. The child who covers her eyes and claims that others cannot see her exercises the same kind of generalization.[172] In both cases, the child's perspective claims a general bearing on reality that obscures its fundamental limits, though not as an explicit denial of them, but rather as way of inhabiting and understanding that reality, which, for the child, lacks these internal delineations.[173]

The aim of the original "false belief" experiments was to gauge whether the child has a "theory of mind," that is, an understanding of the insular, mental processes of other people, by

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[170] Wimmer and Perner, "Beliefs about beliefs: Representation and constraining function of wrong beliefs in young children's understanding of deception," in particular pp. 108-10, 114-15.

[171] A meta-analysis of the data from 77 reports or articles on 178 separate studies of children's ability to attribute false beliefs to others confirmed Wimmer and Perner's original conclusions: there is a definitive correlation between age and performance on false belief tests, and thus a clear developmental pattern. See Henry M. Wellman, David Cross and Julanne Watson, "Meta-Analysis of Theory-of-Mind Development: The Truth about False Belief." *Child Development* 72.3 (May/June 2001) 655-84, in particular pp. 662-63, 671.

[172] Cf. Beata Stawarska, "Mutual gaze and social cognition," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 5 (2006) 25.

[173] Cf. Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 120: "[. . .] at first the *me* is both entirely unaware of itself and at the same time all the more demanding for being unaware of its own limits. The adult *me*, on the contrary, is a *me* that knows its own limits yet possesses the power to cross them by a genuine sympathy that is at least *relatively* distinct from the initial form of sympathy. The initial sympathy rests on the ignorance of oneself rather than on the perception of others, while adult sympathy occurs between "other" and "other"; it does not abolish the differences between myself and the other."

testing her ability to contrast her own knowledge of a situation with someone else's lack of knowledge regarding the same situation.[174] Thus, two of the basic premises of these experiments are that adults operate with a "theory of mind" that they utilize in their interactions with and assessments of others, and that this "theory of mind" is acquired and developed in the child's experience. Before evaluating these premises in light of the phenomenology of intersubjectivity that Merleau-Ponty articulates in "The Child's Relations with Others" (which I will do near the end of this section) I would first like to point out the relevance of Merleau-Ponty's work to the conclusions of these experiments. While the subjects of the "false belief" experiments are older, and thus have more developed perceptual capabilities, than the children Merleau-Ponty discusses in his essay, their behavior supports his central argument. The youngest children in the experiments—those under the age of four—exhibit an understanding of reality that is consistent with that described by Merleau-Ponty of infants: that is, they fail to recognize the insularity of their experience, and thus fail to recognize the distinction between their perspectives and others'.[175] This failure has consequences in both perceptual and interpersonal life: as we have seen, recognizing the insularity of one's experience entails recognizing its particularity and its limits—in short, recognizing that it may have a reality independent of the world of others. This recognition informs the adult's ability to make sense of perceptual indeterminacy and illusion and, still more significantly, to take account of the possible differences between their evaluations of situations and those of others. Both Merleau-Ponty's work and these experiments suggest that the ability to recognize one's limits—perceptual and interpersonal—is continually developed in experience, even beyond infancy and throughout adult life. It will be the aim of the next chapter to consider in more detail the consequences of the development or, alternately, the failure, of this

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[174] Wimmer and Perner, "Beliefs about beliefs: Representation and constraining function of wrong beliefs in young children's understanding of deception," 104-5.

[175] Cf. Merleau-Ponty's discussion of "transitivism" in "The Child's Relations with Others," 148.

recognition. Here, however, it is important to see that both Merleau-Ponty's work and these experiments suggest that the developing child's sense of herself is not initially individualized, but is embedded in, and thus inclusive of, others. This embeddedness is her immediate, unreflective reality, and thus when she is asked to contrast her own perspective with that of others, she lacks the basis for the comparison.

Affective anonymity

In so far as the child generalizes her perspective, and lacks a sense of herself as distinct from others, her experience has an anonymity that is comparable to that of the habit-body, one that—as the "false belief" experiments seem to suggest—even endures beyond the first six months as the foundation for how she understands her relation to others. Thus Merleau-Ponty refers to "a first phase [of development], which we call pre-communication, in which there is not one individual over against another but rather an *anonymous* collectivity, an undifferentiated group life [*vie á plusieurs*]."[176] While he makes it explicit in this particular passage, Merleau-Ponty's characterization of the child's early sense of herself throughout "The Child's Relations with Others" attributes a kind of primordial anonymity to the child's experience, which, as we have seen, assumes an unreflective generality. This anonymity is rooted in the child's perceptual and existential indistinction from others who constitute even her bodily sense of self. It is in this sense that the primordial anonymity of the child's experience is similar to the anonymity of the habit-body, which pervades its environment in implicitly designating potential regions for movement and engagement, rather than standing against it as a singular perspective. The child's experience is similarly unreflective and decentralized, according to Merleau-Ponty, and thus similarly general and anonymous, in its failure to distinguish between self and other.

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[176] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 119, my italics.

Thus, this primordial anonymity is deeply embedded in, and contingent, upon relations with others. As a result, however, it is not "neutral"; it has an affective charge that is determined by these relations, and that in turn determines how the child perceives her own body and the external world. Melanie Klein's account of the hungry or satiated infant who projects his experience of his mother's responsiveness onto his body and environment provides an example of how the affective charge of the child's experience is informed by her relations with others. The child's inability to distinguish herself from others—her primordial anonymity—opens her experience to their affective influence, which shapes her relationship to herself and the world.

Merleau-Ponty's account of "psychological rigidity," which he presents at the beginning of the essay "The Child's Relations with Others," demonstrates how this "affective anonymity" continues to shape the experience of the adolescent. Drawing on the work of child psychologist Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Merleau-Ponty describes the "psychologically rigid" subject as someone who has very defined and categorical evaluations of her experience; she resists ambiguity: people and things are either wholly "good" or wholly "bad."[177] Frenkel-Brunswik suggests that this rigidity has its source in the child's early relations with her parents, who initiate the child into a world of values.[178] If the parents are especially authoritarian, the child is more likely to develop psychological rigidity because she is consistently faced with the contrast between the idealized image of her parents as loving and the rival image of them as punitive and disciplinarian.[179] In response to this contrast, she internalizes—and thus conceals from herself—

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[177] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 101-03. The entire discussion of "psychological rigidity" occurs on pp. 100-08.

[178] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 102.

[179] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 102. Merleau-Ponty's discussion draws heavily from Klein's work on ambivalence.

her aggression towards the punitive parents, and explicitly identifies only the image of them as loving.[180]

Merleau-Ponty's interest in psychologically rigid subjects is in showing how their inability to reconcile ambiguity in others—which requires recognizing that others can be both a source of satisfaction and a source of denial of their desires—informs their inability to perceive "the phenomenon of transition."[181] In one of the experiments Merleau-Ponty cites, the subjects "were shown films in which the images gradually changed, e.g., the image of a dog transformed little by little into a cat. Members of the strongly prejudiced group [i.e., the psychologically rigid subjects] held more firmly, in general, to their antecedent mode of perception and saw no appreciable change in the figure which was presented to them, even when the changes were already objectively noticeable."[182] Merleau-Ponty cites this experiment in order to demonstrate how "the type of personality and of interpersonal relations designated by the term "psychological rigidity" express themselves in the anonymous functions of external perception."[183] In other words, one's anonymity in perception is significantly informed by the affective charge of their interpersonal relations, more specifically, in the case of the psychologically rigid subject, by the subject's inability to reconcile the contradictory images of their parents. Merleau-Ponty's work demonstrates that the anonymous functions of our experience, which take place implicitly, are expressive of our most basic relations with others.

I have endeavored to show here how this affective anonymity has its roots in the child's primordial anonymity, in which she perceives others as integral to her sense of self. I will now turn to Merleau-Ponty's account of the body schema, the development of which, he argues, is

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[180] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 102.
[181] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 105.
[182] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 105.
[183] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 104.

necessary for external perception and, correlatively, for the child to begin to perceive herself as separate from others.

The developing body schema

Merleau-Ponty argues that the child only begins to regard herself as distinct from others once she has developed a "body schema," which he roughly defines in "The Child's Relations with Others" as a capable orientation in one's environment that incorporates and integrates introception and external perception.[184] According to Merleau-Ponty, the body schema is fundamental to the distinction between self and other because it informs the developing child's recognition of the other's body as comparably capable and engaged in the world. His claim may initially seem paradoxical: in this new ability to "transfer [. . .] my intentions to the other's body and [. . .] his intentions to my own"—in other words, in my ability to identify with the movements of others—I develop the distinction between myself and others.[185] In other words, in this apparent identification with others, I become more defined in my own bodily capabilities: the latter become visible to me as a means of self-presentation within my experience. Thus, the development of the body schema is integral to the transition in the child's experience from *felt* to *seen*, more specifically, to seen *by others*, whose perspectives distinguish one's exterior appearance from internal life.

Merleau-Ponty's claim that the development of this distinction is coincident with the development of the body schema is consistent with his account, in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, of how our developed capabilities initiate us into new and more complex worlds. Recognizing the gesture or movement of another person as meaningful requires my being able to

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[184] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 117. In order to maintain consistency with my earlier discussion of the body schema in Chapter Two, here and in subsequent uses of the phrase in this essay I have modified the translation from "corporeal schema" to "body schema."
[185] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 118.

live its meaning, to acknowledge the particular world that it circumscribes.[186] Thus, the

development of a body schema that, in effect, communicates with the movements of others, is

my initiation into a shared world. The development of my bodily capabilities allow me to

inhabit the gestures of others, and in inhabiting their gestures, and in recognizing their ability to

inhabit mine, I define my sense of what I can do—my "I can"—in this shared world.[187] My

possibilities are brought into distinct relief against the background of the world that renders them

meaningful, namely, the world of others. It is in these capabilities that I come to see myself in

this world. Thus, for Merleau-Ponty, the development of the body schema contributes to the

child's emerging recognition of images of herself, in which she can begin to see an objectified

sense of her body as "insular" and thus as separate from other objects in the world.[188] Her bodily

capabilities inform her developing sense of self as an active creator of and participant in the

meaning of her experience, but they simultaneously demonstrate this meaning to be

contextualized by others' bodies.

Thus, the development of the body schema involves both the recognition of the bodily

distinction between self and others, and the demand to reconcile this distinction[189]: we determine

who we are, but always in deference to others, who, in an important sense, must ratify this self-

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[186] It does not, however, require that I be able to actually perform the gesture or movement. For example, with little or no technical knowledge of dance, I can appreciate the complicated moves of the professional dancer.

[187] Cf. Merleau-Ponty's discussion of understanding gestures, The Phenomenology of Perception, pp. 190-91 [214-16].

[188] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 118-19.

[189] Cf. M. C. Dillon, "Merleau-Ponty and the Psychogenesis of the Self," *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 9.1-2 (1978) 95: "The corporeal schema, once objectified, becomes the body image, the phenomenal body on parade in the public domain and as constituted privately in periods of self-awareness. The child's self is more than his body (as that might be regarded from the reductionist standpoint of physicalism), it is the meaning his bodily behavior acquires in the dialectic of intersubjective encounter and reflective reprise. The notion of self or body image must be understood as dynamic, as integra*ting* rather than integra*ted*. The process of integration which begins as the infant learns to incorporate his hands and feet into his corporeal schema continues throughout the individual's life as he confronts the on-going problem of bringing diverse aspects of his life which may be initially fragmented into the unity of a vital identity. Special problems of integration occur during different stages on life's way, but, in all cases, the abiding locus of integration and self-identity is the phenomenal body as lived and as object of reflective awareness."

determination in order that it may have a reality outside ourselves—one that is shared. This shared reality speaks more broadly to the most significant point of contrast between the anonymity of the child's experience and the anonymity that characterizes multiple dimensions of adult life: the latter is an accomplishment, not only of a certain level of bodily skillfulness, as previously discussed, but of a bodily assuredness *with others as others*. Ultimately, how we see ourselves must be compatible with how others see us, and the development of the body schema, as Merleau-Ponty suggests in "The Child's Relations with Others," initiates us into the shared reality in which this compatibility—or, alternately, conflict—becomes manifest.

It will be the aim of the following two sections to consider further both how the anonymous dimensions of adult experience reflect our experience of others' perspectives on us (section II), and our struggle to reconcile these perspectives with our own developed sense of self (section III). Here, however, I would like to address some of the challenges posed by more recent work in phenomenology and developmental psychology to Merleau-Ponty's account of the child's developing sense of self. While I will focus on the challenges themselves, many of which are supported by empirical studies, I will also draw out the philosophical claims about intersubjectivity that I see underlying these challenges.

Bodily complementarity

In their essay, "The Earliest Sense of Self and Others: Merleau-Ponty and Recent Developmental Studies," Shaun Gallagher and Andrew Meltzoff argue against Merleau-Ponty's claim that the infant develops a sense of self out of a more primordial—and, as demonstrated above, anonymous—identification with others.[190] Their critique focuses on Merleau-Ponty's account of the body schema, as it is presented in "The Child's Relations with Others" and in the

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[190] Shaun Gallagher and Andrew Meltzoff, "The Earliest Sense of Self and Others: Merleau-Ponty and Recent Developmental Studies," *Philosophical Psychology* 9.2 (June 1996) 211-33.

Phenomenology of Perception. Gallagher and Meltzoff cite a number of empirical studies of

infants, ranging in ages from less than one hour to six weeks, who are able to imitate various

facial and head movements of adults engaging with them.[191] They present these studies to

support their claim that infants have a "proprioceptive awareness"—that is, an implicit sense of

their own bodies and capabilities—that enables them to enact a bodily performance of the

movements that they encounter in their visual experience of others. This awareness is not

developed in experience, Gallagher and Meltzoff maintain, but is informed by a primitive body

schema and a primitive body image, both of which are innate.[192]

Gallagher and Meltzoff refer to a couple of passages in "The Child's Relations with

Others" in order to characterize Merleau-Ponty's account of imitation in early infancy. Quoting

from the essay, they claim that, according to his account, "it would be necessary for me to

translate my visual image of the other's [gesture] into a motor language. The child would have

to set his facial muscles in motion in such a way as to reproduce [the visible gesture of the other]

. . . If my body is to appropriate the conducts given to me visually and make them its own, it

must itself be given to me not as a mass of utterly private sensations but instead by what has

been called a "postural" or "corporeal schema.""[193] Gallagher and Meltzoff go on to write in

their own words that "for the same reason that the traditional view denies the notion of an aplasic

phantom limb, that is, because of the absence of a developed body schema, the traditional view

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[191] Gallagher and Meltzoff, "The Earliest Sense of Self and Others: Merleau-Ponty and Recent Development Studies," section 3 of html text.

[192] Gallagher and Meltzoff, "The Earliest Sense of Self and Others: Merleau-Ponty and Recent Development Studies," section 3 of html text. See footnote 22 on p. 55 of Chapter Two, for my discussion of the distinction between body schema and body image.

[193] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 116-17, presented as it is quoted in Gallagher and Meltzoff, "The Earliest Sense of Self and Others: Merleau-Ponty and Recent Developmental Studies," section 3 of html text.

also denies the possibility of invisible imitation in early infancy."[194] Merleau-Ponty's argument

in "The Child's Relations with Others" is based on the empirical work of Piaget and Guillaume,

the conclusions of which, Gallagher and Meltzoff acknowledge, Merleau-Ponty "had no reason

to doubt."[195] However, while Merleau-Ponty draws on the empirical work of various child

psychologists, and generally agrees with their conclusions, he does not present this work in

support of the claim that imitation in early infancy is impossible. In this essay, he mentions

infant imitation only once, and he does not specify at what stage of development it first begins to

occur.[196] Rather, as we have seen, his focus is on how the child's developing perceptual

capabilities inform her relations with others and, ultimately, her recognition of her individual

presence in a shared world.

Thus, for Merleau-Ponty, imitation is evidence of the child's engagement in the shared

world rather than an exercise of her individualized bodily powers. This engagement

demonstrates her essential compatibility with, and embeddedness in, the intersubjective world

that will serve as the context of her own bodily development. By virtue of her body, she is at

grips with the shared world before she is at grips with the particular others who create and take

up these meanings: "[T]he child imitates not persons but conducts. And the problem of knowing

how conduct can be transferred from another to me is infinitely less difficult to solve than the

problem of knowing how I can present to myself a psyche that is radically foreign to me."[197]

The gestures of others demonstrate to the child her own capabilities before she realizes them as

her own: they introduce her to the expressive possibilities of her body. Some of these

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[194] Gallagher and Meltzoff, "The Earliest Sense of Self and Others: Merleau-Ponty and Recent Developmental Studies," section 3 of html text.

[195] Gallagher and Meltzoff, "The Earliest Sense of Self and Others: Merleau-Ponty and Recent Developmental Studies," section 3 of html text.

[196] See Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 116-17.

[197] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 117.

possibilities are present from birth: as the studies cited by Gallagher and Meltzoff's make clear, even very young newborns are capable of imitation.[198] However, Merleau-Ponty maintains that before the child is capable of explicitly controlling her body, she is unable to take up these possibilities as belonging to her—*as her own*. Rather, they are features of her body's compatibility with the intersubjective world. Thus Merleau-Ponty claims that "there is initially a state of pre-communication [. . .] wherein the other's intentions somehow play *across* my body while my intentions play across his."[199] His description highlights the passivity of this "play" of intentions, which is consistent with the account of primordial anonymity we have developed here. The infant's anonymous body commits her to an intersubjective world, in which her movements are meaningful prior to her ability to initiate them or take them up as such.[200]

The issue of imitation speaks more broadly to how we relate to the gestures of others. This issue is, for Gallagher and Meltzoff, an issue of "translation": how the child who imitates the facial movements of the adult "translates [the] visual image of the other's smile into a motor language."[201] In their discussion of "The Child's Relations with Others," they focus on passages that pertain to this issue (such as the one quoted above), which they cite in order to support their claim that, for Merleau-Ponty, "the central problem is a translation problem, and the sine qua non of translation is that there be, metaphorically speaking, two languages—in this case a visual

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[198] Gallagher and Meltzoff, "The Earliest Sense of Self and Others: Merleau-Ponty and Recent Developmental Studies," section 3 of html text.

[199] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 119, emphasis in original.

[200] In her article, "Embodied Perceptions of Others as a Condition of Selfhood? Empirical and Phenomenological Considerations," Kym Maclaren points out that many of the demands of interpersonal engagement, such as eye contact and eye movement, fall within the infant's limited range of motor capabilities (84-5). Thus, even very young infants are able to "inhabit the other's intentionality," even if they are unable to perceptually distinguish their bodies from others'.

[201] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 116.

language and a motor/proprioceptive one."[202] However, immediately following the passage they

cite, Merleau-Ponty goes on to suggest that "translation" is impossible, and that "if we want to

solve the problem of the transfer of the other's conduct to me, we can in no way rest on the

supposed analogy between the other's face and that of the child."[203] Thus, Merleau-Ponty's

argument is that the problem of translation is actually *created* by the traditional understanding of

imitation as requiring the infant to "translate" an understanding of his own body into an

understanding of others' bodies. This problem is avoided if we understand others as constitutive

of the infant's experience of herself—in her "primordial anonymity," as I have tried to show

here—and if we understand her relations with their bodily intentionality as her introduction to

her own bodily capabilities as productive of meaning.

Gallagher and Meltzoff's misreading of Merleau-Ponty's stance on translation

emphasizes the significance of the broader task of understanding his account of how we

experience others and, more specifically in terms of this particular essay, how we experience

ourselves in light of others. While their argument asserts the prominent and capable role of the

infant's body in her development of a sense of self—and, in this sense, is situated within the

phenomenological tradition initiated in Merleau-Ponty's work—it corrects minor discrepancies

in the empirical studies he presents at the expense of his larger philosophical project—

discrepancies that arguably do not, in effect, undermine this larger project.[204] While Merleau-

Ponty (and Wallon, whose work he was drawing on) underestimates how early the child

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[202] Gallagher and Meltzoff, "The Earliest Sense of Self and Others: Merleau-Ponty and Recent Developmental Studies," section 4 of html text.

[203] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 116.

[204] Cf. Kym Maclaren's critique of recent philosophical work that argues that infants have a rudimentary perceptual distinction between self and other. Maclaren argues that "[. . .] while the idea that the very young infant has a perceptual sense of herself as distinct from otherness moves away from the modern, Cartesian, mentalistic conception of subjectivity and towards an embodied understanding of subjectivity, it nonetheless holds uncritically, I fear, to a Cartesian assumption that this subjectivity is from the beginning self-sufficient, self-possessed, and self-governing." Kym Maclaren, "Embodied Perceptions of Others as a Condition of Selfhood? Empirical and Phenomenological Considerations," 88.

develops the ability to distinguish and integrate different sensory domains,[205] the greater

philosophical aim of this essay is not to give a strict developmental account of the child's

capabilities, but rather to demonstrate that others are constitutive of the child's experience, and

play a formative role in her developing relationship with the world and her developing sense of

self.

In arguing that the child does not initially distinguish between herself and others, and that

she begins to do so only when she acquires the perceptual capabilities that inform the

development of a body schema, Merleau-Ponty challenges the philosophical tradition that

considers others to be a persistent enigma within subjective experience. This tradition claims

that because we cannot access the inner life of others in the same way we access our own, we

cannot be certain that they have an inner life comparable to our own. This "problem of other

minds" poses a fundamental barrier between others and me; it posits the "I think" as necessary

mediator between their actions and my understanding of them.[206] As our account of the habit-

body made clear, however, the "I think" is not our primary way of engaging with the world, nor

is it the primary means by which we define ourselves. In focusing on the child's development of

the body schema, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the presence of others at the genesis of the child's

bodily (perceptual) and existential sense of self. According to Merleau-Ponty, in developing the

body schema, the child realizes herself as separate from others yet as capable in ways that are

comparable to their capabilities. Thus, the child does not encounter another person as a

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[205] Gallagher and Meltzoff, "The Earliest Sense of Self and Others: Merleau-Ponty and Recent Developmental Studies," section 4 of html text.

[206] "[. . .] if I look out of the window and see men crossing the square, as I just happen to have done, I normally say that I see the men themselves, just as I say that I see the wax. Yet do I see any more than hats and coats which could conceal automatons? I *judge* that they are men. And so something which I thought I was seeing with my eyes is in fact grasped solely by the faculty of judgement which is in my mind." Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, vol. II, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (New York: Cambridge UP, 2008) 21, emphasis in original.

phenomenon that needs to be interpreted—as "a psyche that is radically foreign"—but rather as already interpreted in her experience of her own body, in its perceptual and motor capabilities.

The adult's experience of the other's body is no different, according to Merleau-Ponty: "[J]ust as the parts of my body together form a system, the other's body and my own are a single whole, two sides of a single phenomenon, and the anonymous existence, of which my body is continuously the trace, henceforth inhabits these two bodies simultaneously."[207] The continuity between Merleau-Ponty's account of the child's developing body schema and his account of the anonymous body is apparent in their complementary challenges to self-possession. As we saw in Chapter Two, the anonymous body demonstrates how the subject's complicity with, and investment in, the world, belies self-possession. In "The Child's Relations with Others," Merleau-Ponty shows the ways in which this complicity is developed in and continually informed by the experience of others, both in the child's early life, and throughout adulthood. Thus, his critique of an account of our primary experience of others as foreign or enigmatic is simultaneously a critique of self-possession: it is neither the case that others are absolutely foreign and inaccessible, nor that our experience of them poses a significant contrast to our experience of ourselves. Rather, others introduce to us our undeveloped, undiscovered, or unnoticed dimensions of ourselves, both for the child who is just learning the capabilities of her body, and for the adult whose possibilities precede and influence her concrete engagements in the world. Thus, others present alternative and equally compelling possibilities of engagement that I do not "think" my way through, but inhabit unreflectively[208]: for example, my body tenses in anticipation of the dancer's climactic movements in the ballet in a responsiveness that is

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[207] Merleau-Ponty, The Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Donald A. Landes, 370 [412].

[208] Cf. Donald Landes' remark in his translator's introduction to the Phenomenology of Perception: "I do not experience others through an analogy, but rather by the fact that my potential action *gears into* these tools and these landscapes, and this emerges first thanks to the overlapping of embodied perceptual consciousness" (my emphasis, The Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Donald A. Landes, xliv).

similar to the way that I automatically reach to prevent my friend's cup of coffee from falling off the café table. In both cases, the other's body, and the objects that comprise a meaningful "orbit" around it, include my potential for movement, even apart from my explicit acknowledgment of this potential. I am thus turned towards the world that others' gestures circumscribe as one that I have a share in.[209]

This account of bodily complementarity has significant implications for how we understand studies such as the "false belief" experiments, which attempt to discern when children first develop a "theory of mind" that enables them to understand the behavior of others. As we noted earlier, the basic premises of these studies are that adults operate with a "theory of mind" that they utilize in their interactions with and assessments of others, and that it is acquired and developed in the child's experience. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological account of intersubjectivity challenges these basic premises, in so far as it emphasizes the ongoing significance of the child's bodily experience of others, and thus denies that this experience relies on, or ultimately contributes to the development of, a "theory of mind." Gallagher and Meltzoff's work provides a similar challenge by showing that infants do not first encounter the "minds" of others, but rather their bodies, and by demonstrating that they encounter them as relevant to and indicative of their own nascent capabilities. Thus, following the tradition of Merleau-Ponty, their work seeks to demonstrate the significance of the body in the child's early experience—a significance that goes on to inform how she understands others, not as "minds," but as expressive of meaningful conducts that speak to her of her own capabilities. However, in emphasizing the infant's bodily capabilities as defining a sense of self that is distinct from others,

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[209] Cf. Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 117: "My consciousness is turned primarily towards the world, turned toward things; it is above all a relation to the world. The other's consciousness as well is chiefly a certain way of comporting himself toward the world. Thus it is in his conduct, in the manner in which the other deals with the world, that I will be able to discover his consciousness."

rather than embedded within the possibilities that their bodies present, Gallagher and Meltzoff attribute to the infant a degree of self-possession that obscures the extent to which her sense of self is dependent upon, and developed in, her engagement with others.[210]

Our focus on anonymity, as it characterizes both the experience of the developing child and that of the adult, has offered a different approach. In his emphasis on anonymity, Merleau-Ponty shifts his account of subjectivity and intersubjectivity away from the "problem of other minds" and towards the world that is vividly constituted by others. While the problem of other minds speaks to the real mystery—or, indeterminacy—of other people, which is an irrefutable feature of our experience of them, it does not accurately describe how we primarily experience them, nor does it allow for the formative role that others play in our perception of the world and ourselves. Others are not wholly "foreign," neither to the child nor to the adult. Rather, they are the most important and influential dimensions of the world in which we develop and exercise our capabilities. Moreover, they are the most familiar, and it is out of the child's early engagement with them that she develops an individual, bodily sense of self.

II.   The Individuated Self and its Anonymous Body: Others and the "I can"

It is not insignificant that, in "The Child's Relations with Others," Merleau-Ponty presents the child's experience as philosophically relevant to human experience more generally. This is because, as he frequently claims, the developmental challenges and accomplishments that characterize childhood are not sealed within the past, but have continuing significance for the adult. Indeed, this early form of intersubjectivity not only prefigures the structure of our later relationships but, as we have seen in Merleau-Ponty's account of "psychological rigidity," it also

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[210] Cf. Kym Maclaren, "Embodied Perceptions of Others as a Condition of Selfhood? Empirical and Phenomenological Considerations," 88.

informs our more general engagement with the world. Thus, these early relations with others are continually constitutive of our experience. Our focus has been on the role that others play in the child's developing bodily sense of self, which involves the realization of both perceptual and kinetic capabilities and the separation from others that the development of these capabilities entails. This separation has an existential significance that, according to Merleau-Ponty, continues to inform one's experience throughout adult life: "[T]he objectification of one's own body and the constitution of the other in his difference, [marks] a segregation, a distinction of individuals—a process which [. . .] is never completely finished."[211] He goes on to write near the end of the essay that "[t]his state of indistinction from others, this mutual impingement of the other and myself at the heart of a situation in which we are confused, this presence of the same subject in several roles—all are met with again in adult life."[212] Merleau-Ponty's evocative claim has important implications for how we perceive others in our interpersonal life, which I will explore in the following chapter. In this section, however, I will focus on how this "indistinction" and "mutual impingement" pertains to the anonymous body in its implicit responsiveness to the world.

For the child, as we have seen, others introduce her to her individual bodily capabilities. To borrow an example from Gallagher and Meltzoff's work, even infants less than an hour old will stick out their tongues in response to an adult who is displaying the same facial gesture.[213] Thus, before the infant is aware of the existence—much less the kinetic potential—of her body parts, she identifies their expressive coherence with the other's body. In this sense, the infant's bodily engagement with others fosters her individual capabilities at the same time that it reveals

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[211] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 119.
[212] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 153-54.
[213] Gallagher and Meltzoff, "The Earliest Sense of Self and Others: Merleau-Ponty and Recent Developmental Studies," section 3 of html text.

her bodily embeddedness in an intersubjective world. This is apparent later in childhood, and even in adulthood, when, often with the help of an instructor, one learns more specialized movements such as riding a bike, shooting a basketball, or playing the violin. These activities demand an adjustment of the body schema in accordance with my instructor's movements: I may incorporate them awkwardly at first, but in their repeated performance, I ultimately surpass my need for instruction.[214] My body acquires its own sense of responsiveness, its autonomous facility in the movements. In the accomplishments of these more specialized activities, I develop a more defined identity that is rooted in the possibilities afforded by my body, but that nevertheless defers to the instructor or community of others that introduced these possibilities to me, and thus initiated me into the meaningful world they circumscribe.

As we saw in the previous section, however, it is the more fundamental movements of bodily experience—such as turning, reaching and walking, as well as the felt experience of these movements (in proprioception) and their effect on the body's relation to the spatial environment—that inform Merleau-Ponty's claim that the development of the body schema contributes to the child's individuation from others. This is because it is in these more fundamental movements that the child first comes to grips with the world—not only because it is through them that she actively engages with her environment, but also because they determine the content and organization of her perceptual experience. Thus, as Merleau-Ponty points out, it is not insignificant that the development of these motor capabilities corresponds with the

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[214] In his essay, "The Ghost of Embodiment: on Bodily Habitudes and Schemata," Edward Casey contends that "it is precisely because the teacher is not able to be continually present that the schema plays such a critical role" (212). Thus even in adulthood, the development of a body schema—in more specialized movements—marks a transition from dependence on others to an independence that nevertheless testifies to the instruction from others that made it possible. See Edward Casey, "The Ghost of Embodiment: on Bodily Habitudes and Schemata," in Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader, ed. Donn Welton (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1998), 207-25.

development of perceptual capabilities, most notably, vision.[215] Around the same time that the

child gains control over her body, she is also better able to make sense of the world visually. In

her book, The Roots of Power: Animate Form and Gendered Bodies, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone

contends that it is on the basis of visual experience, rather than tactile experience, that we have a

bodily sense of self that is distinct from others:

> Touch—like movement—is a self-reflexive sense. We adults have
> a firm sense of our own body boundaries not because of brain
> maturation but because of our *visual* experiences. In other words,
> we do not have a firm sense of our body boundaries in our
> everyday tactile contact with things in the world any more than an
> infant does. When we pick up a glass, we do not know *tactilely* in
> any precise sense where the glass ends and our hand begins. The
> space of each is "undifferentiated," i.e., unclear. The same may be
> said of the experience of bumping into another person. Where in
> the bump does my body begin and the other person's body end?
> "Object-relations" in the realm of tactility are by their very nature
> vague. [. . .] Whether practically or sensuously oriented—steering
> a car or rubbing one's hand along a velvet cloth—the act of
> touching for adults is typically unilluminated by an awareness of
> the fundamentally undifferentiated self/other reflexive nature of
> touch.[216]

Sheets-Johnstone makes an important point about the relation between perceptual experience and

the distinction between self and other, namely that the different sensory modalities do not

equally contribute to differentiation.[217] More specifically, she contends that touch is an

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[215] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 122.

[216] Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, The Roots of Power: Animate Form and Gendered Bodies (Peru, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1994), 249-50.

[217] In "The Child's Relations with Others," Merleau-Ponty draws on the work of Lacan to make a similar point, namely, that the child's identification of her specular image in the mirror contributes to her realization of the separation between self and other (see pp. 135-38, in particular): "If the child under six months of age does not yet have a visual notion of his own body (that is, a notion that locates his body at a certain point in visible space), that is all the more reason why, during this same period, he will not know enough to limit his own life to himself. To the extent that he lacks this visual consciousness of his body, he cannot separate what *he* lives from what *others* live as well as what he sees them living" (135). Elsewhere in The Roots of Power, Sheets-Johnstone criticizes Merleau-Ponty for unreflectively appropriating Lacan's "*sexist-adultist*" characterization of the infant as "a totally inept, nondiscriminating, uncoordinated, unintelligent piece of protoplasm" (245, emphasis in original). Like Gallagher and Meltzoff, however, in focusing on the limited empirical and psychoanalytic studies he relied on, she overlooks Merleau-Ponty's overarching claim about the foundational significance of the infant's intersubjective life.

inadequate means of differentiation, for both the child and the adult, because in bringing us into contact with something, it occludes rather than defines "body boundaries." Indeed, the experience of touch even seems to privilege that which is touched over that which is touching: the object touched is foregrounded, but the background—the body touching—is not neutral, but seems to efface its own positive qualities in order to bring into focus more clearly those that belong to the object touched, such as in Sheets-Johnstone's example of the hand rubbing the velvet cloth. It is also apparent in those instances in which the body actually takes on the qualities of the objects it touches: such is the case when one holds one's hands under very warm or very cold running water, which in turn affects the temperature of one's skin. Thus, touch underscores the body's impressionability to objects other than itself, rather than its definition in contrast from them. Interestingly, then, Sheets-Johnstone's point reiterates the formative significance of the child's affectivity and its contribution to her anonymous sense of self: the infant's early experience is centered in her bodily needs, which are satisfied by others, specifically, by their touching her. As Sheets-Johnstone points out, for the child as for the adult, the experience of being held or touched does not precisely define where one's body ends and the other's begins; rather, it reinforces a bodily indistinction from others.[218]

Sheets-Johnstone argues that in contrast to touch, vision, as the prominent sensory modality, shapes our individuated sense of self: we are separate from and thus perceptible to others *as visual objects*. She goes on to claim, however, that it is not only as visible, but also as kinetically capable, that we come to define ourselves as individually distinct: "We come to

Nevertheless, however, her point about *which* sensory modalities contribute to the development of a distinction between self and other is not wholly inconsistent with his account. See Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, The Roots of Power: Animate Form and Gendered Bodies (Peru, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1994) pp. 242-57, in particular.

[218] Indeed, this point seems to be borne out in speech, in the figurative expression "I am touched," which describes the experience of being emotionally transformed by something. It attests to one's susceptibility, porousness, even, to an action, person or event and, consistent with Sheets-Johnstone's argument here, contrasts with the more definitive "I see," which expresses a more resolved understanding of "how things stand."

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individuate ourselves by *seeing* other bodies as separate from our own and by *kinetically establishing ourselves as separate from others*, that is, by standing and moving by ourselves. The mastery of these latter acts categorically sets us apart. In standing up and moving by ourselves, we claim a space entirely our own, a space independent of others. Our repertoire of 'I can's' is radically augmented as are our potential powers."[219] In its capabilities, the body outlines its place in the world as separate from others. As suggested earlier, the recognition of the spatial exclusivity of one's bodily position—which, as Sheets-Johnstone argues here, is informed by both visual and kinetic experience—has significant implications for my experience of others' perspectives on me[220]: the visibility of my body equally entails the invisibility of other defining aspects of my self, such as my interior life—my thoughts, attitudes, emotions. As a result, to experience oneself as visibly separate from others introduces the possibility of also experiencing a sense of the limitation of this exposure.[221]

Because Sheets-Johnstone's focus in this discussion is almost exclusively on how to understand the infant's developing sense of her body in light of her perceptual capabilities, she does not examine the relationship between visibility and bodily capability. As we have seen, our bodily capability in our skillful movements often testifies to the significant role of others, such as instructors, in shaping our bodily experience. However, in looking more closely at how our sense of ourselves as visual objects for others may affect our sense of our own kinetic potential, we can see the more subtle ways in which others contribute to fundamental functions of the body

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[219] Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, The Roots of Power: Animate Form and Gendered Bodies (Peru, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1994), 250, emphasis in original.

[220] Cf. my discussion on pp. 91-92 of this chapter.

[221] Cf. Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 136: "At the same time that the image of oneself makes possible the knowledge of oneself, it makes possible a sort of alienation. I am no longer what I felt myself, immediately, to be; I am that image that is offered by the mirror. [. . .] In this sense I am torn from myself, and the image in the mirror prepares me for another still more serious alienation, which will be the alienation by others. For others have only an exterior image of me, which is analogous to the one seen in the mirror. Consequently others will tear me away from my immediate inwardness much more surely than will the mirror."

schema, such as turning, reaching and walking, and to bodily comportment more generally. These movements are, for the most part, implicit in adult bodily experience, and thus performed by the anonymous body. As we saw in the previous section, Merleau-Ponty's work in "The Child's Relations with Others" demonstrates that for the child, the anonymous dimensions of experience are significantly informed by others because the child has not developed the perceptual capabilities that define her as distinct. In the case of the adult, however, anonymity indicates a cultivated bodily assuredness in the performance of its tasks: the habit-body is anonymous insofar as it is competent, and thus relatively autonomous, separate from others. Yet because this separation entails recognition of our visibility, even the anonymous body assumes a shape—in its gestures and general comportment—that reflects the presence and influence of others—and thus goes on to shape experience more generally, in the world it outlines for itself.

In her now classic essay, "Throwing Like a Girl," Iris Marion Young gives a well known example of how even the most basic bodily movements are shaped by others.[222] Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's account of the lived body in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Young analyzes "feminine" styles of comportment and movement in purpose-driven tasks, in order to demonstrate that these styles do not reflect real physical limitations of the female body itself, but rather the effects of its situation in a patriarchal society that emphasizes its objectivity over its autonomy.[223] More specifically, she argues that the feminine body described in these styles enacts the lived contradiction between a subject free to transcend and define her situation for herself, and an object defined by others' perspectives.

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[222] Iris Marion Young, "Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Bodily Comportment, Motility and Spatiality," *Human Studies* 3 (1980), 137-56. This essay has been reprinted in a number of collected volumes. My page citations refer to Iris Young, "Throwing Like a Girl," Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader, ed. Donn Welton (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 259-73.
[223] Young, "Throwing Like a Girl," Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader, 261.

Young's analysis focuses on feminine comportment and motility, and then on feminine

spatiality, in order to demonstrate how this contradiction is reflected in everyday bodily

existence.[224] In its comportment and motility, the body expresses its sense of "I can," that is, its

relationship to itself and its capabilities. As we saw in Chapter Two, in our discussion of

Merleau-Ponty's account of the lived body, the "I can" is not only reflected in active gestures

and movements, but is also more generally expressive of one's attitude towards the possibilities

inherent in bodily experience. Young argues that feminine motility is characterized by an

inhibition that undermines the movement towards taking up these possibilities—an "I cannot"

that opposes the "I can."[225] Young claims that this sense of inhibition is informed by the

recognition of the feminine body as an object for others: "A source of these contradictory

modalities [of feminine motility] is the bodily self-reference of feminine comportment, which

derives from the woman's experience of her body as a *thing* at the same time that she

experiences it as a capacity."[226] The adeptness of movements, and their effectiveness in

accomplishing the task towards which they are directed, are compromised by the woman's

awareness of the appearance of her body. Thus, what is otherwise implicit and unreflective in

anonymous bodily experience—the body as the means of accomplishing a task—becomes, in

feminine comportment and motility, explicit in its visibility before others.

Young's analysis of feminine spatiality emphasizes how this self-reference transforms the

woman's spatial environment. As we saw in Chapter Two, the "I can" organizes the

environment according to one's intentional capacities. Thus, the contradiction between the "I

can" and the "I cannot" that is inherent in feminine motility is also present in the woman's

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[224] On pp. 264-67 and pp. 267-69, respectively.
[225] Young, "Throwing Like a Girl," 265.
[226] Young, "Throwing Like a Girl," 264.

environment. Young writes that, as a result, "In feminine existence there is a *double spatiality*, as the space of the "here" is distinct from the space of the "yonder." [. . .] The space of the "yonder" is a space in which feminine existence projects possibilities in the sense of understanding that "someone" could move within it, but not I. Thus the space of the "yonder" exists for feminine existence, but only as that which she is looking into, rather than moving in."[227] Young's analysis in this passage is especially interesting because in it she describes a fissure in anonymity that is particular to feminine existence: that is, the woman perceives "yonder" as a space in which "someone" other than herself could move. Thus, in its hesitance and constrained sense of capability, her anonymous bodily existence acknowledges the more capable potential of a body that does not belong to her, that she does not identify with.

Thus, according to Young's account, both feminine motility and feminine spatiality attest to how the woman's sense of her body as an object visible to others constrains her sense of its capabilities and hinders her access to her spatial environment. However, it is important to emphasize that the woman's awareness of her visibility does not simply overlay her lived experience, but rather constitutes it:

> An essential part of the situation of being a woman is that of living the ever-present possibility that one will be gazed upon as a mere body, as shape and flesh that presents itself as the potential object of another subject's intentions and manipulations, rather than as a living manifestation of action and intention. The source of this objectified bodily existence is in the attitude of others regarding her, but the woman herself often actively takes up her body as a mere thing. She gazes at it in the mirror, worries about how it looks to others, prunes it, shapes it, molds and decorates it.[228]

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[227] Young, "Throwing Like a Girl," 268, emphasis in original.
[228] Young, "Throwing Like a Girl," 270.

In other words, the woman's anonymous body—her implicit, bodily sense of self—incorporates the gaze of others, and thus incorporates the transformations in comportment, motility and spatiality that this gaze entails.

Young's essay was originally published over thirty years ago, and thus the socio-cultural world she describes as producing these particular feminine modalities of comportment, motility and spatiality has changed, as she herself acknowledges in a later essay.[229] My point in deferring to her analysis is not to suggest that all features of our bodily comportment are socially and culturally determined, nor that our biological and anatomical material has no bearing on our kinetic or kinesthetic reality. Rather, it is to give a concrete analysis of one way in which bodies implicitly testify to the presence and influence of others, individual others as well as, in the case of Young's essay, the cultural community of others that comprises our social reality. To this end, Young's analysis of feminine bodily existence provides a compelling demonstration of how anonymous bodily experience is informed by others. While Merleau-Ponty has been criticized by feminists who claim that his account of the anonymous body generalizes a masculine body,[230] our reading of Young's essay in light of his work demonstrates how anonymity can actually testify to the effects of socio-cultural conceptions of what is properly "masculine" and what is properly "feminine." According to Merleau-Ponty's account, the anonymous body is developed out of concrete relations with others and with the world, and thus even though it is anonymous, it will differ among those whose experiences are differently defined in those relations. We can see,

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[229] Iris Young, ""Throwing Like a Girl": Twenty Years Later," in <u>Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader</u>, ed. Donn Welton (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 286.

[230] See, for example, Shannon Sullivan, <u>Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism</u> (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), especially pp. 65-87. For a critique of Sullivan's position, see Gail Weiss, "The Anonymous Intentions of Transactional Bodies," *Hypatia* 17.4 (Fall 2002) 187-200.

then, that, as in the case of the child's experience, anonymity is not equivalent to neutrality, but has an intersubjective depth that gives it its particular shape.

Thus, what we live as general and implicit in our anonymous bodily existence is actually a reflection of our particular situation in the world and the relations with others that have contributed to defining this situation. Our study of anonymity in this section has thus borne out the significance of the development of the body schema, discussed in the first section. For Merleau-Ponty, as we have seen, the development of the body schema is critical to our individuation from others, in so far as it makes possible our defining ourselves—kinetically, in comportment and movement, and kinesthetically, in the bodily sense of self that underlies these basic movements—within a well-defined perceptual reality. At the same time, however, it initiates an intersubjective reality with which we continue to reckon as adults: it is in our early relations with others that we develop the capabilities that inform our individual self-possession, but as capable individuals, we will always be at risk of being dis-possessed by others, that is, of finding ourselves defined by them. This is because the perceptual reality established in the developed body schema will always be intersubjective, not only in the sense that the coherence of our perceptual experience depends on its inclusion of others' perspectives—for instance, on objects, or profiles of objects, that are outside our visual field—but, still more significantly, in the sense that we are necessarily part of others' perceptual landscapes. This insight provides an important supplement to Sheets-Johnstone's claim that we define ourselves as separate from others visually and kinetically because, as we saw in Young's essay, the implications of the former can affect the latter: our visual capabilities entail our own visibility, and thus our susceptibility, to others. Thus, the anonymous body of our unreflective experience may take its shape from our reflection in the gaze of others.

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There is, then, an apparent conflict between one's unreflective anonymity and one's recognition of another's perspective. The experience of being unable to perform a task in front of an audience clearly demonstrates this conflict: movements that are fluid and effortless in private become disrupted by the potential scrutiny of others' awareness of them. While the anonymous body may incorporate the influence of others' perspectives on it—such as in Young's example of feminine motility and spatiality—it does so implicitly. But our experience also always includes our explicit reckoning with others, with the challenges they pose to our understanding of ourselves and our engagement with the world. These challenges ultimately render anonymity impossible: they distinguish *me* as a singular presence whose situation is defined both by the capabilities that inform my anonymous life, and by the perceptual and epistemological limits that are otherwise obscured within it. As we saw in Chapter Two, the facility of our anonymous bodily experience conceals these limits, which are necessary features of our temporality. In the following section, I will consider the way in which others deny, rather than contribute to, our anonymous sense of self, and thus expose the essential incompleteness of our experience.

III.   Others and the Impossibility of Anonymity

Our work in the previous two sections has focused on how the anonymous body includes, or defers to, relations with others. In an important sense, others constitute our unreflective life and, in doing so, make substantial contributions to who we take ourselves to be and how we engage with the world. For the most part, these contributions escape our notice, and in our implicit accession to them—in our anonymity—we remain in the background of our own experience.

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But others equally deny me anonymity: they expose my exteriority, and recall me to the fore of my experience. In his chapter on "The Existence of Others" in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre vividly illustrates the transition from anonymity to exposure in his description of being caught looking through a keyhole.[231] He imagines himself motivated by jealousy, pressed against a door in order to surreptitiously listen to and watch what is happening on its other side. He characterizes himself as fully absorbed in this action and the end it is directed towards: "My attitude [. . .] has no "outside"; it is a pure process of relating the instrument (the keyhole) to the end to be attained (the spectacle to be seen), a pure mode of losing myself in the world, of causing myself to be drunk in by things as ink is by a blotter [. . .]."[232] Sartre's description echoes our account of the person performing routinized daily tasks, or the athlete involved in the practiced movements of her sport: in each case, one's engagement in the demands of the task or situation conceals the means of its accomplishment or realization, including even one's own body. We can see, then, how the anonymity of perceptual experience informs the anonymity of the habit-body: the "I" gives way to what my body makes available to me, in the perceptual details of my experience, and also in the developed skills that bring me into effortless contact with these details. Thus Merleau-Ponty writes that "It is I who bring into being this world which seemed to exist without me, to surround and surpass me. [. . .] I am not this particular person or face, this finite being: I am a pure witness, placeless and ageless, equal in power to the world's infinity."[233] Merleau-Ponty claims here that the absence of the "I" in perceptual experience makes possible the presumption of authority—power, even—over the meaning of what is encountered. This presumption of power is apparent in Sartre's example, in the specific effect

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[231] Sartre, <u>Being and Nothingness</u>, 347-54.

[232] Sartre, <u>Being and Nothingness</u>, 348.

[233] Merleau-Ponty, "Metaphysics and the Novel," <u>Sense and Non-Sense</u>, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 29.

his attitude has on the situation that is unfolding before him. His jealous attitude—manifest in his directed focus on what is on the other side of the door—organizes the entire situation such that he—as a determinate, embodied perspective, motivated by jealousy—is absent from it, even as he determines its meaning.[234] Sartre thus identifies the paradox of his invisibility crouched at the keyhole: he remains wholly undefined within the situation that is itself defined by his jealousy.[235]

However, at the sound of approaching footsteps, both the general fact of his body and its particularly incriminating appearance in this scene are abruptly presented to him.[236] The other's look outlines him, returns him his determinate visibility. But, as Sartre points out, in this moment he does not see himself in the intimacy and complexity that characterize his experience of himself, that is, that characterize him *as a subject*. Rather, he sees himself in his outward appearance. The other's look identifies him as he is described in his mundane, unreflective existence[237]—in this particular example, in the behavior of his presumed privacy; it thus identifies him *as an object*.[238]

While, according to Sartre, "only the reflective consciousness has the self directly for an object,"[239] here the other's look transforms him into an object for himself. More specifically, the other's perspective is insinuated into a situation that is otherwise defined by its lack of

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[234] "I escape this provisional definition of myself [as being in the process of listening at doors] by means of all my transcendence." Sartre, Being and Nothingness, 348.

[235] This "paradox" crudely summarizes Sartre's account of "bad faith." In bad faith, we mistake ourselves as defined absolutely by terms we have in fact created or acceded to, though we could have done otherwise. Thus, bad faith describes our relation to our own freedom as one of denial. For Sartre's full account of "bad faith," see pp. 86-112.

[236] Sartre, Being and Nothingness, 349.

[237] "The unreflective consciousness does not apprehend the *person* directly or as *its* object; the person is presented to consciousness *in so far as the person is an object for the Other*." Sartre, Being and Nothingness, 349, italics in original.

[238] Sartre, Being and Nothingness, 349.

[239] Sartre, Being and Nothingness, 349.

perspective. The transformative effect of this experience thus belies its seeming impossibility.

His perspective on himself, as it is informed by the other's look, is unfamiliar, foreign, because

he sees himself as an object defined by the limited terms of his current situation. The other, as

subject, constitutes the meaning of these terms. Thus Sartre argues that subject and object are

mutually exclusive: "we can not perceive the world and at the same time apprehend a look

fastened upon us; it must be either one or the other."[240]

The scene described by Sartre to make this point is especially instructive. Crouched at

the keyhole, his perspective on the other side of the door is necessarily limited: his view occupies

a tiny frame, and he is privy to what is audible only through the thickness of the walls and door.

Moreover, the physical limits of his perspective are emblematic of what can be disclosed to him

in this position, namely, the partial details of a scene or conversation which serve only to allay or

augment his jealousy. In other words, the significance of whatever he may glean from his

restricted access to this scene is prefigured in his jealousy. Though he is merely an observer, he

constitutes every object within his view. However, the unexpected appearance of the person in

the hallway transforms him into the equally limited details of his appearance as crouched at the

keyhole and, in effect, robs him of his role as subject. Thus, according to Sartre's analysis of this

scene, I am either the subject, that is, the transcendent perspective on my own experience, and as

such I escape every definition of myself—what Sartre elsewhere terms *being-for-itself*—or I am

the object of others' perspectives, described conclusively in what they see of me, and thus

deprived of my essential indeterminacy—*being-in-itself*.[241] In his example of the jealous person

peering through the keyhole who, in effect, loses his claim of transcendence to the appearance of

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[240] Sartre, <u>Being and Nothingness</u>, 347.

[241] Sartre's account of "bad faith" (in <u>Being and Nothingness</u>, pp. 86-116) describes the way in which the tension
between *being-for-itself* and *being-in-itself* is played out within our own experience of ourselves as either free or
defined by the conditions of our situations. For his more general elucidation of the distinction between *being-for-
itself* and *being-in-itself*, see Sartre, <u>Being and Nothingness</u>, pp. 24-30, 119-298.

the other in the hallway, Sartre gives two evocative illustrations of his argument that others are rivals to the authority of my perspective, and that this rivalry is never resolved, but rather defines the condition of our intersubjectivity. He describes this condition from its "inside" and its "outside," and how the look of the other instigates the transition from one to the other and thus demonstrates their mutual exclusion.

Sartre gives a compelling phenomenological account of the jarring and disruptive effect that another's perspective can have on the flow of experience: caught in another's gaze, the decentered invisibility of my perspective is now hotly centered in my physical body. Sartre's analysis of this transition reveals the presumed omnipotence of our anonymous existence, which does not explicitly defer to the conditions of our bodies or to the affective timbre of our attitudes, even as it utilizes and realizes them in our involvements in the world. According to Sartre's account, the presumptions of anonymity are exposed and denied in the other's look, which reduces the false omnipotence of the subject to the narrow determinacy of an object.

As our work in the previous two sections has shown, Merleau-Ponty's account of the anonymous body also emphasizes its pretension, its seeming comprehensiveness. However, in his chapter on "Others and the Human World" in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty is critical of the view, often attributed to Sartre, that the other's look is an objectifying force. Without specifically citing *Being and Nothingness*, however, he writes:

> It is said that the other transforms me into an object and negates me, and that I transform the other into an object and negate him. But in fact, the other's gaze does not transform me into an object, and my gaze does not transform him into an object, unless both gazes draw us back into the background of our thinking nature, unless we both establish an inhuman gaze, and unless each senses his actions, not as taken up and understood, but rather as observed like the actions of an insect. This is what happens, for example, when I suffer the gaze of a stranger. But even then the

> objectification of each by the other's gaze is only harmful because
> it takes the place of a possible communication.[242]

Merleau-Ponty argues that what the look of the other most often discovers is not something

wholly foreign, and thus it does not circumscribe what it sees in absolute terms. Rather, the

other finds in me what I find in her, namely, a familiar reckoning with the world that we share.

Even if the terms of her engagement are unfamiliar to me—for example, if she speaks a language

I do not know, or if she uses a tool I do not recognize—the reckoning itself is apparent—I hear a

language, or I see mechanical skills at work. More generally, I recognize that the other is

meaningfully engaged with the world and, according to Merleau-Ponty, it is my engagement in

this same world that, in effect, guarantees that the other encounter my actions as imbued with

human meaning rather than as wholly uninterpretable.

Merleau-Ponty's claim that one can never fully be an object for another can be read in

light of our study of the role of others in anonymous experience. We saw in section I, in our

close reading of "The Child's Relations with Others," that the child's sense of self, in particular,

the "mineness" of her body, emerges out of an initial physical and affective dependence on, and

identification with, others. Merleau-Ponty argues that it is only in developing her perceptual

capabilities that she realizes her separateness. However, this early "affective anonymity"—this

unreflective inclusion of others in one's self-perception—is mirrored in the developed anonymity

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[242] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 378 [420]. See also his remark in "The Battle over Existentialism," in Sense and Non-Sense, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 72: "In our opinion the book [*Being and Nothingness*] remains too exclusively antithetic: the antithesis of my view of myself and another's view of me and the antithesis of the *for itself* and the *in itself* often seem to be alternatives instead of being described as the living bond and communication between one term and the other." In his discussion of Merleau-Ponty's critique of Sartre on this point, M. C. Dillon writes in his book, Merleau-Ponty's Ontology, that "In the context of Sartre's ontology, the other's body can only be an object for me, hence cannot function to reveal his subjectivity. [. . .] For Sartre, then, there is no possibility of syncretism and no residue in adult life of the indistinction of perspectives characteristic of infantile experience: the other is aboriginally an alien and alienating presence" (141-42). See M. C. Dillon, Merleau-Ponty's Ontology (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), 139-50. See also Renaud Barbaras, The Being of the Phenomenon: Merleau-Ponty's Ontology, trans. Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 129-36.

of the adult which, in its facility, takes into account the virtual and actual presence of others. As we saw in section II, one's capabilities, even one's most mundane movements, reflect others' contributions. Thus, both before and after I have developed the skills that make the world accessible to me, my body is "mine" equivocally, rather than exclusively, and inevitably refers to others as the concordance of its meanings. In an important sense, then, our bodies are always communicative, even if we are not explicitly engaged with others, and our anonymous bodily life is a continuous testament to this implicit communicativeness. Arguably, it is this fundamental basis for communication in the anonymity of our bodies that motivates Merleau-Ponty's criticism of the claim that the other's look objectifies me. While I may feel myself scrutinized or misapprehended by another person—and while I may actually be scrutinized or misapprehended by them—it is nevertheless the case that the context of our interaction, regardless of the particular form it takes, is the world of human meanings rooted in our bodies, and it is only by removing ourselves from this world, by "draw[ing ourselves] back into the background of our thinking nature,"[243] that we lose this common bodily ground, and in doing so, feel ourselves alienated from others. Indeed, this is why we are not beset by "the look" of others at all times: our basic and accumulated familiarity with them mitigates our own bodily presence, such that it is only when this familiarity is unexpectedly broken, or denied, that we become aware of our visibility and, more specifically, of its comparatively limited means of depicting who we are to others.

Thus my body is both the means of my accessibility to others as well as my exposure to them; it is the foundation of any possible communication or denial of communication. Sartre's description of the way in which the other's look transforms me into an object is

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[243] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 378 [420].

phenomenologically accurate in so far as it captures my recognition of my self as static in the perspective of another; I feel objectified in so far as I am apprehended incompletely. However, this incompleteness is the condition of my experience rather than an exception that disrupts its normal course. What the other's look discovers—or, more specifically, what I discover in myself by means of the other's look—are limits otherwise concealed by my anonymous facility in the world. These limits apply not only to the other's access to me, but also to my access to myself. The truth in the look of the other is that I am neither self-same nor alien, but ambiguously situated in a world of human meaning that is not completely or resolutely determined by me.

A phenomenological study of intersubjectivity that begins in the anonymity of the body, in the implicit comprehensiveness of our facility in the world, rather than in the mutually exclusive rivalry between subject and object, thus provides a more accurate account of the way in which we experience others and, in particular, of the way in which we experience ourselves through others. While others inevitably pose challenges to how we see ourselves, they are challenges articulated in terms of the reality of the shared world: "I am not *merely* this body peering through the keyhole, but I am *nevertheless* this body peering through the keyhole." Others do not deprive us of our transcendence, of our freedom to define ourselves beyond what is available to their perspectives, but they illuminate the necessary limits of this freedom. Or, to put it in the terms of our study of anonymity, others make explicit our otherwise implicit, presumed omnipotence in the apparent comprehensiveness of our perspective on our own experience.

However, grounding intersubjective experience in a world of shared—and thus negotiated—meanings does not obviate the task of reconciling one's own sense of reality with

that of others. The opposition of others' perspectives to our own, punctuated in situations such as that described in Sartre's account of "the look," is an ongoing feature of our experience, and is felt most strongly when it concerns our sense of ourselves. Merleau-Ponty points out that it is often under the gaze of a stranger that we feel ourselves confined as an object by another's subjectivity. But while these instances illuminate limits otherwise concealed in our anonymous life, they do not bear reflections of ourselves that we reckon with as seriously as we do those that emerge out of our relationships with more familiar others. For example, the jealousy that motivates my position at the keyhole would be much more meaningful—it would have definite content and context—to my friend or lover than it would to the stranger who sees me in the hallway. Indeed, in an important sense, I always maintain some sense of anonymity among strangers, even when we explicitly engage with one another: I am "the customer" or "the patient" or the "crossing guard." I can be anonymous even as a "peeping Tom," if there is nothing further revealed about myself. These one-dimensional reflections of myself in unfamiliar others are provisionally meaningful for both them and me. While they may provoke me out of the unreflective anonymity of my basic bodily engagement with the world, I maintain a distance from them that preserves my sense of authority over who I am. But in my relationships with others with whom I share a more intimate world, my anonymity—and thus my constant sense of authority—is impossible. Similar to the way in which the child's early relationships provide the dynamic context out of which she develops and learns to recognize herself as an individual, the relationships we have as adults frame and reflect even our most basic sense of ourselves. However, as a result, it is also in these relationships that we may face the most relevant challenges to who we take ourselves to be.

Simone de Beauvoir's novel, *She Came to Stay*, examines the potentially destructive nature of this challenge. It traces the development and dissolution of a trio of relationships, but focuses in particular on the central character's responses to the shifting reflections of herself in the perspectives of those who are closest to her. In doing so, it deftly illustrates the themes that have shaped the trajectory of this chapter, namely, the presumptions of anonymity and their denial in concrete relationships with other people. De Beauvoir's treatment of this definitive feature of interpersonal life provides rich insight into our developing account of the struggle between an individual's presumption of the exhaustive determination of meaning in her experience, and its situation within a world of others who have access to, and thus also have a share in determining, this meaning. Thus, this novel can be read as an insightful complement to our study of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of intersubjectivity. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty's admiration of the novel is apparent in an essay he wrote shortly after the publication of *Phenomenology of Perception*, "Metaphysics and the Novel," which we will occasionally refer to here to supplement our own reading.[244]

The central character of the novel is Françoise, a writer living in Paris shortly before the outbreak of World War II. The novel is written in the third person, but follows Françoise's inner life very closely. Thus the reader is privy to her most intimate anxieties, along with the details of her daily experience, but nevertheless maintains a distance from her that would otherwise be denied in a first-person narration. That is, as readers, we do not live through Françoise's experience as she does, but we are close by, and are occasionally given impressions of her through the perspectives of other characters. In this way, we have access, albeit limited, to dimensions of her that she herself lacks; thus, the structural design of the novel enacts one of its

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[244] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Metaphysics and the Novel," in <u>Sense and Non-Sense</u>, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 26-40.

most important themes, namely, that our experience always occludes parts of ourselves, even from our own perspective.

Our study of anonymity revealed how this occlusion extends even to one's own body: we see our projects in the world and the perceptual landscapes they open up for us rather than our determinate situation within these landscapes. This point is illustrated early in the novel, in de Beauvoir's descriptions of Françoise as turned outwards towards the world, yet as unaware of her own outward appearance: "Françoise smiled. She was not beautiful, yet she was quite pleased with her face. Whenever she caught a glimpse of it in a mirror, she always felt a pleasant surprise. For most of the time, she was not even aware that she had a face."[245] The contents of the mirror are surprising because Françoise herself remains undefined, even as the world itself—including even the behavior of others—reflects her power to constitute its presence and to determine its meaning[246]: "Each one of these men, each one of these women here tonight was completely absorbed in living a moment of his or her little individual existence. [. . .] *And I—I am here in the middle of this dance hall—impersonal and free, watching all these lives and all these faces. If I turned away from them, they would disintegrate at once into a deserted landscape.*"[247] Thus the novel's early portrait of Françoise emphasizes her security in the omnipotence of her perspective. As we have seen in our study of anonymity, this security most often distinguishes our unreflective life, in which we find in the world the ready complement to our capabilities.

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[245] Simone de Beauvoir, She Came to Stay (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 22. Merleau-Ponty cites this passage to make a similar point in his essay, "Metaphysics and the Novel," in Sense and Non-Sense, 29-30.
[246] Cf. Merleau-Ponty, "Metaphysics and the Novel," Sense and Non-Sense, 29-30: "Everything that happens is only a spectacle for this indestructible, impartial, and generous spectator. Everything exists just for her. Not that she uses people and things for her private satisfaction; quite the contrary, because she has no private life: all other people and the whole world coexist in her."
[247] Simone de Beauvoir, She Came to Stay, 29, italics in original. Quoted in Merleau-Ponty, "Metaphysics and the Novel," Sense and Non-Sense, 30.

However, even when Françoise turns away from events in the world and towards herself, she finds nothing to contradict her assurance in the omnipotence of her perspective. This is in part because for her, who she is is continually reinforced by Pierre. Thus, when she turns toward herself, she finds him as a reflection of who she takes herself to be, rather than as a distinct, separate presence. Their relationship is the foundation of her perspective of the world, which is, she maintains, coextensive with, and thus indistinguishable from, Pierre's:

> [T]here was but one life between them and at its core one entity, which could be termed neither he nor she but they. [. . .] They did not always see it from the same angle, for through their individual desires, moods, or pleasures, each discovered a different aspect. But it was, for all that, the same life. Neither time nor distance could divide them. There were, of course, streets, ideas, faces, that came into existence first for Pierre, and others first for Françoise; but they would faithfully embody these scattered moments into a single whole, in which "yours" and "mine" became indistinguishable.[248]

According to Françoise, her and Pierre's perspectives are profiles of the same object, the same world. Neither experiences the other as a challenge; rather, Pierre reinforces her perspective and, in this sense, contributes to Françoise's effective self-effacement in her experience, and thus to her implicit authority over its meaning. Her complicity with him is absolute: "A misunderstanding with Pierre was impossible; no act would ever be irreparable."[249] Every object, person, action and behavior exists within the context of their shared evaluations and judgments; should they experience something separately, or disagree on a matter, they can rely on their "machine of language"[250] to recast or resolve it according to the terms of their world.

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[248] Simone de Beauvoir, She Came to Stay, 51-52.
[249] Simone de Beauvoir, She Came to Stay, 32.
[250] Merleau-Ponty, "Metaphysics and the Novel," Sense and Non-Sense, 30.

The seeming invincibility of their relationship is a consequence of its comprehensiveness; neither Pierre nor Françoise reserve parts of themselves outside of it.[251]

However, Françoise's security in her perspective, and its foundation in her relationship with Pierre, are disrupted by their attempt to integrate Xavière into their shared life. Xavière is younger and less worldly than Françoise, who is nonetheless charmed by having "a young, completely new companion, with her unreasonable demands, her reticent smiles and unexpected reactions," and takes a generous interest in enriching her life. She invites Xavière to move to Paris, and offers the financial support to make this move possible.[252] However, Xavière's initial rejection of the offer immediately distinguishes her as a challenge to Françoise's presumption of authority over her: "Xavière's resistance was real, and Françoise now wanted to break it down. It was outrageous; she had felt so completely that she had dominated Xavière, possessing her even in her past and in the still unknown meanderings of her future. And yet there was still this obstinate will, against which her own will was foundering."[253] Xavière's refusal is not a matter of simple disagreement, but threatens Françoise's sense of her role in the latter's life and, still more significantly, her sense of determining this role according to her own terms. Thus, her triumph over Xavière's initial resistance preserves her sense of her omnipotence: "Xavière looked at her, her eyes shining, her lips parted, soft, yielding; she had surrendered herself completely. Henceforth Françoise would lead her through life. *I shall make her happy*, she decided with conviction."[254] Even Xavière's happiness is a matter of decision for Françoise.

When Pierre takes a special interest in her, he and Françoise alter their relationship to accommodate Xavière's inclusion. However, their newly-formed trio yields three separate

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[251] "Neither one nor the other ever withheld the slightest fragment. That would have been the worst, the only possible betrayal." Simone de Beauvoir, She Came to Stay, 52.
[252] Simone de Beauvoir, She Came to Stay, 33-38.
[253] Simone de Beauvoir, She Came to Stay, 34.
[254] Simone de Beauvoir, She Came to Stay, 38.

couples, and Françoise's exclusion from the alliance of the other two reveals the impossibility of her absolute complicity with Pierre. The "machine of language" that had guaranteed their unity breaks down: "*We are one*. This convenient fallacy had always served her as an excuse for not worrying about Pierre—but they were only words: they were two separate entities."[255] Françoise's recognition of the inadequacy of language exposes the illusion of her secure and exclusive world with Pierre. Language always points to a realm of meaning that exceeds any single utterance; yet the determinate meaning of the utterance depends on this greater, excessive realm, even as it excludes the other possible meanings contained within it. While Pierre and Françoise have established a distinctive relationship that informs their social world, it is nevertheless still situated within this world that includes others and the possibilities they introduce. The "fallacy" of their relationship is not a fault in the strength of their conversation, but rather a denial of the nature of interpersonal relations—a nature that is reflected in the nature of language as well. In recognizing her exclusion from Xavière and Pierre's relationship, Françoise realizes that it is impossible to reserve oneself wholly for another person, just as it is impossible to reserve a world of meaning, or even a piece of meaning, for oneself.

Thus, in analyzing the difficulty of the trio, Merleau-Ponty notes that "a couple is hardly less impossible, since each partner remains in complicity with himself, and the love one receives is not the same as the love one gives."[256] As Merleau-Ponty points out here, even the closest relationship is not a static, irreducible unit, but is comprised of individual desires and actions, which constitute its strength, but also contribute to its essential dynamism. In denying this "complicity with oneself," Françoise had also denied the distinctness of her perspective and, in turn, its fallibility or, at the very least, the impossibility of its comprehensiveness. Thus, Pierre's

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[255] Simone de Beauvoir, She Came to Stay, 135, italics in original.
[256] Merleau-Ponty, "Metaphysics and the Novel," Sense and Non-Sense, 35.

separateness from Françoise, enacted in his relationship with Xavière, decenters the world that she formerly took for granted as originating in, and being meaningfully constituted by, herself: "Françoise [. . .] had the painful impression of being in exile. Ordinarily, the center of Paris was wherever she happened to be. Today, everything had changed. The center of Paris was the café where Pierre and Xavière were sitting, and Françoise felt as if she were wandering about in some vague suburb."[257] Pierre and Xavière's relationship demonstrates to Françoise that there is meaning happening outside her, giving shape to a world that she is not part of, much less anchoring as its center.

However, not only is there meaning happening outside her, but Françoise herself is "outside": her exclusion from the alliance of the other two makes apparent her susceptibility to others' perspectives on her and, more specifically and more poignantly, others' determinations of who she is. Her relationship with Pierre and her engagement in the world through the lens of this relationship effectively shielded Françoise from the valuations of others. For the most part she lived an anonymous—"faceless," even—existence in the security of her world. Her anonymity remained undisturbed in so far as she was fully defined in her familiar relationship, and in so far as her experience reflected this defined sense of self.

But Françoise cannot see herself in Xavière and Pierre's relationship; her exclusion from it reorganizes her world and her sense of self. However, even once that relationship has ended, and Françoise then resumes separate lives with Xavière and Pierre, her world is not restored to her. Xavière remains a defiant presence who does not reflect Françoise's familiar sense of herself, but continues to displace her: "[Françoise] was witnessing the course of her own life like an indifferent spectator, without ever daring to assert herself, whereas Xavière, from head to

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[257] De Beauvoir, <u>She Came to Stay</u>, 119.

foot, was nothing but a living assertion of herself."[258] While Françoise's description of her battle

for self-assertion evokes Sartre's account of "the look," the categorical reckoning of this battle is

attenuated in the larger context of the novel's plot, which demonstrates that Françoise is not

reducible to either her own or Xavière's assessment of her. Françoise, however, considers

herself trapped in this dichotomy. Thus when Xavière discovers her affair with Gerbert,

Xavière's lover, by reading their private correspondence, Françoise identifies a finality in

Xavière's judgment of her betrayal: "*This is what I am forever*. There would be a dawn. There

would be a tomorrow. Xavière would return to Rouen, and each morning wake up in a bleak

provincial house with this despair in her heart. Each morning this abhorred woman, who would

henceforth be Françoise, would be reborn. She recalled Xavière's face, contorted with pain. *My*

crime. It would exist forever."[259] Françoise now sees herself from the "outside," displaced from

herself, and she attributes permanence to Xavière's assessment of her: it identifies her *forever*.

Paradoxically, however, the permanence of her crime emphasizes the determinate limits to her

powers of self-definition and, in turn, the role of an other in demonstrating these limits to her.

Our experience always maintains a temporal openness that renders its meaning susceptible to re-

definition. Though each new moment is a testament to this openness, for the most part we do not

live it; rather, like Françoise, we live the course pre-figured in our experience, that which reflects

our expectations and presumptions. However, as Françoise observes in Xavière's judgment of

her, this temporal openness is multiplied beyond our reckoning in others' perspectives that can,

in effect, preserve images of ourselves that we have not created. Thus, they mark the significant

counter to this temporal openness, namely, our inability to circumscribe limits to our own self-

images.

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[258] De Beauvoir, <u>She Came to Stay</u>, 292.

[259] De Beauvoir, <u>She Came to Stay</u>, 401, emphasis in original.

Even if Françoise cannot recognize herself in Xavière's definition of her, she is

nevertheless possessed by it: "Isn't that I?" She had often hesitated, spellbound. [. . .] Jealous,

traitorous, guilty. She could not defend herself with timid words and furtive deeds. Xavière

existed; the betrayal existed. *My guilty face exists in the flesh*."[260] Xavière faces Françoise as

her own reflection, a living condemnation of her desires and actions.[261] She denies her all the

presumptions of her anonymous existence, particularly her own indeterminacy: she outlines her

definitively, she gives her a face. Thus, in an important sense, her actions and any account she

would give of them belong to Xavière, whose severe and uncharitable interpretation of them is

nevertheless rooted in their reality, that is, in what Françoise actually did. This is perhaps the

novel's most poignant and, for Françoise, impossible claim, that we are, perpetually and

incontrovertibly, what others hold us to be.[262] Apart from Françoise's intentions—for example,

the depth of her relationship to Gerbert and her genuinely protective interest in Xavière's

feelings—and even in spite of her efforts to retain privacy, the meaning of her decisions and

actions is inevitably open to the evaluations of others. In Xavière Françoise encounters both the

impossibility of influencing or altering others' images of her and the validity of these images,

which testify to her exteriority. These images are valid in part because they cannot be confined

to Xavière, but extend to Pierre and Gerbert as well. While their estimations of Francoise,

though outside her control, are consistent with her own sense of herself, she fears their

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[260] De Beauvoir, She Came to Stay, 402.

[261] Cf. Sartre, Being and Nothingness, 302: "Thus the Other has not only revealed to me what I was; he has established me in a new type of being which can support new qualifications."

[262] Merleau-Ponty, "Metaphysics and the Novel," 37: "It is simply that all of our actions have several meanings, especially as seen from the outside by others, and all these meanings are assumed in our actions because others are the permanent coordinates of our lives. Once we are aware of the existence of others, we commit ourselves to being, among other things, what they think of us, since we recognize in them the exorbitant power to *see us*. As long as Xavière exists, Françoise cannot help being what Xavière thinks she is."

encountering, and perhaps accepting some dimension of, this foreign version.[263] Thus the relationships themselves, which are otherwise supportive of Françoise's sense of self, are at risk in Xavière's assessment of her, and could uncontrollably refract these unfavorable images of her.[264]

Françoise's murder of Xavière in the dramatic conclusion of the novel is more than a repudiation of Xavière's uncharitable reflection of her; it is a rejection of her own exteriority, of her exposure to others and its unmanageable consequences. She Came to Stay chronicles the struggle—in Françoise's case, the impossible struggle—to reconcile one's interior sense of self, which is continually reinforced in the anonymous dimensions of experience as constant yet indeterminate, with one's exteriority, which is always vulnerable to others' uncontrollable yet determinate evaluations. This is the basic struggle of interpersonal relations but, insofar as it is in these relations that we come to define ourselves, it is the basic struggle of our sense of our own experience, our grasp on what things mean and our authority to determine this meaning for ourselves. As Sartre argues, others pose a constant challenge to this authority. But this challenge is not settled in the victory of self over other, or other over self. Rather, it constitutes the fundamental condition of our experience. Others illuminate every anonymous claim we make and, in doing so, they illuminate the illegitimacy of these claims as absolute. They demonstrate to us our own finitude in our susceptibility to their evaluations, their determinations

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[263] De Beauvoir, She Came to Stay, 393: "The blood rushed to Francoise's cheeks. My story! Within that blonde head, Françoise's thoughts had assumed an unalterable and unknown form, and it was in this alien form that Gerbert had had them confided to him."

[264] Cf. Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 144: "Our relation with another is also always a relation with the other persons whom that other knows; our feelings toward another are interdependent with his feelings toward a third, and blend with them. Relations between two people are in reality more extensive relations, since they extend across the second person to those with whom the second person is vitally related."

of meaning. Thus, even if others introduce a rivalry into the foundation of our experience, it is

not a rivalry that has resolution, not even in murder.[265]

Conclusion

Marie Howe's poem, "After the Movie," cleverly illuminates the insoluble nature of this

conflict for self-determination. Apropos of the climactic ending of *She Came to Stay*, the

speaker in the poem argues with a friend, Michael, about whether or not love can accommodate

murder. The speaker claims it cannot, whereas Michael argues that "a person can love someone /

and still be able to murder that person." As the friends are parting ways, Michael asks the

speaker a question, and the thoughts she has in response echo their earlier debate:

> What are you doing tomorrow? Michael says.
> But what I think he's saying is "You are too strict.
>   You are a nun."
>
> Then I think, Do I love Michael enough to allow him
>   to think these things of me even if he's not
>   thinking them?[266]

The speaker does not mention murder in her thoughts, but the conflict of their earlier

conversation is revived in the question she poses to herself: according to her own position, if she

loves Michael, she can tolerate the version of herself he embodies; she can allow that it exist,

that it survive her in spite of her. But the insightful irony of the poem is that this version does

not exist. In fact, its existence is equivocal in so far as it is up to Michael. This is always the

case in our relations with others, which always accommodate both true and false versions of

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[265] Cf. Merleau-Ponty, "Metaphysics and the Novel," 37: "We have no other resource at any moment than to act according to the judgments we have made as honestly and as intelligently as possible, as if these judgments were incontestable. But it would be dishonest and foolish ever to feel acquitted by the judgment of others. One moment of time cannot blot out another. Xavière's avowal could never obliterate her hatred, just as Pierre's return to Françoise does not annul the moments when he loved Xavière more than anything else."
[266] Marie Howe, "After the Movie," The Kingdom of Ordinary Time (New York, NY: W. W. Norton Limited, 2009).

ourselves. Our actions may shape or undermine these versions, but they are ultimately outside our control.

Our recognition of this truth of intersubjective reality alters our world. This alteration has guided the trajectory of our work in this chapter, which reflects and develops the trajectory of this project as a whole. A close study of perceptual experience reveals that its coherence always implicates others, whose perspectives supplement the limits of our own. For the most part, however, we take for granted its completeness and, in doing so, we take for granted others' complicity in our point of view (like the children in the false belief experiments). However, recognizing others' contributions to and potential to diverge from our perspective entails recognizing our separation from them as distinct individuals. Consequently, it entails recognizing that the significance of the world does not issue solely from me; its complexity and richness implicate others and the incompleteness and indeterminacy of my access to them. Thus the world, which has all along and implicitly involved others, is returned to me incomplete once I recognize their distinct participation in it. As a result, there are parts of the world that exclude me, and that will maintain their distance from me, in spite of my best efforts. This exclusion extends even to reflections of myself—it is this truth of reality with which Françoise refuses to comply.

Thus others constitute and reveal to me the complexity and mystery of my world and of myself, not by explicitly questioning me, but by demonstrating that I am a question before them. Indeed, "who am I?" is a question I constantly and implicitly pose in my relations with others, though I more or less presume their answer in my anonymous existence. To a certain extent, this question has already been answered in our formative relations with others, which have shaped our anonymity, and thus our implicit relationship to our bodies and to the world. However, we

nevertheless continue to realize this question in our relations with others—and, more specifically, we realize its determinate answerability—when they give us an answer concretely, perhaps one that opposes our own answer. In this way, others demonstrate to us both the indeterminacy of our experience—its open and questionable nature—and its inherent limits.

Chapter Four.   Anonymity, Ambivalence, and the Creative Potential of Ambiguity:
                     A Phenomenological Account of the Incompleteness of Our Relations
                     with Others

> "*For nothing is simply one thing.*"
> --- James
> Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 189

Introduction

For the most part, our perceptual experience of objects follows an unexceptional course of expectation and fulfillment. Its coherence is fundamentally temporal: the perceptual content of each moment implicitly draws upon the content of the previous moment, and directs us towards what we can expect in the next.[267] As a result, there is a certain degree of familiarity in our perceptual experience, even in our encounters with novel objects, which, much of the time, reveal themselves as we would expect them to. Works of art, in contrast, often deny this course of expectation and fulfillment. The art object promises more than can be outlined in our expectations. Indeed, the audience may not immediately discern *what* it promises. Thus, the art object challenges—and in doing so, illuminates—the limits of the temporal synthesis of our perceptual experience, which we implicitly rely upon to determine the meaning of perceptual objects. In this way, the art object also challenges the ready familiarity we have with the world, in so far as it demands that we relate to it differently than we do the objects of our everyday perceptual experience.

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[267] I provide a fuller account of the temporality of perception and, in particular, of retention and protention, which I only allude to here, in Chapter One.

This contrast between the perceptual object and the art object is significant because it summarizes the relationship between meaning and the temporal course of experience: it demonstrates the temporal conditions of meaning, but also that these conditions are presumptive rather than exhaustive. Thus, the art object reveals that the implicit standards of our encounters with perceptual objects are inappropriate to other dimensions of reality, which have their own emergent standards. This is especially true of intersubjective life. While other people are objects of our perceptual experience, they are exceptional objects: they retain dimensions of mystery, of indeterminacy, that exceed those of even the most complex thing. Because of this mystery and indeterminacy, the standards of perception that privilege coherence and completeness fail to capture the reality of our encounters with others, who are always characterized by their basic inaccessibility: I will never know another person—their thoughts and feelings—as I know myself; even what I do know of them is circumscribed by the limits of our relationship. In this sense, others make demands on us that are similar to those of the art object: they always have the potential to challenge our expectations, and thus continually demonstrate our fundamentally incomplete grasp of them.

However, much of our experience is characterized by an implicit denial of the fundamental incompleteness of our intersubjective life. This denial is often practical: our everyday interactions with others rely on the fulfillment of expectations inherent to particular social roles, and do not require—indeed, sometimes actively discourage—considerations of others outside those roles. In this way, the basic demands of social life often attribute to others an anonymity analogous to that we experience ourselves, in our habits and routine behaviors, which serves as a summary of our expectations. While these expectations may be appropriate to simple social exchanges, they obscure the fundamentally indeterminate nature of our experience

of another person. This misapprehension can have problematic consequences even in mundane exchanges, but it has still more significant implications in our intimate relationships, in which we develop and define ourselves as individuals, and furthermore shape the kind of world we inhabit. Indeed, it is often in intimate relationships, such as friendships and romantic partnerships, that we fail to recognize the incompleteness of our experience of another person because we do know them well; thus our expectations are supported by a shared history, and perhaps also by our own desire to see ourselves consistently in their eyes and our own.[268] However, while these more intimate others are less indeterminate than the strangers with whom I inhabit a common social world, they are no more bound by my expectations than are the less familiar others. To deny the inherent limits of my experience of them is to deny their freedom to define themselves outside my expectations, and thus to deny the fundamentally incomplete nature of intersubjective reality itself.

In this chapter, I will argue that it is in our relations with others that we see most clearly and resist most strongly the fundamental structure of incompleteness that I have identified in my close studies of perception and self-perception in the previous chapters. Others constitute the deepest and most prevalent dimension of indeterminacy in our experience; yet we often perceive them as familiar and easily recognizable and, in doing so, we presume a comprehensive knowledge of them. However, the limits we encounter in our understanding of others are not the proper measure of who they are, but rather the incomplete foundation of our potential relations with them. This is no less true of perceptual objects, in so far as we are always situated within a temporal horizon that informs their meaning and yet opens it to transformation. But the horizons of our intersubjective life extend beyond the other's past and future; they include even that which

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[268] This is Françoise's great difficulty in <u>She Came to Stay</u>. See my discussion of this on pp. 134-43 in Chapter Three of this work.

excludes us. Thus, in others we directly engage the reality of our own limits. In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which we deny these limits, and thus deny the incompleteness of our experience of others, and I will offer a phenomenological analysis of why we are motivated to do so. I will go on to argue that, as the foundation for further development and self-transformation, this incompleteness informs the inherently creative nature of intersubjective reality.

I will begin by explicating Merleau-Ponty's work in the chapter on "Others and the Human World" in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. In this chapter, Merleau-Ponty does not give a systematic phenomenology of our experience of others, nor does he explicitly address and attempt to resolve solipsism, one of the most prominent problems of traditional philosophical accounts of intersubjectivity. Rather, Merleau-Ponty's account of how we experience others is situated within the greater project of his phenomenology of perception, which, as we have seen, challenges the basic premises of traditional philosophical accounts of experience. It demonstrates the fundamentally temporal, and thus necessarily incomplete, nature of our access to the perceptual world, which is mirrored in the incomplete nature of our experience of ourselves. Merleau-Ponty's account of our experience of "Others and the Human World" takes the latter as its starting point in order to characterize our experience of the incompleteness of others as comparable to our experience of ourselves, rather than as a compromised approximation of it. As we have seen, however, our own incompleteness is obscured in everyday experience, perhaps most significantly in the anonymous body that facilitates our integration in the world. In much the same way—perhaps even more easily—we perceive others as determinate parts of this world, taking for granted their accessibility to us.

In perceiving others as familiar and determinate, however, we avoid their ambiguity, and thus any conflict between our ideas of them and their reality. Thus, in the second section of the

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chapter, I will consider how Merleau-Ponty's notion of ambiguity is related to the psychoanalytic notion of "ambivalence," particularly as the latter is developed in the work of Melanie Klein. I will argue that in the categorical evaluations of others that characterize ambivalence, we attempt to preserve the desires of inner life in the face of a reality that is inconsistent with and inhospitable to those desires. In doing so, however, we fail to experience others *as* others, and in turn we fail to experience the creative potential inherent to intersubjective reality.

In the third and final section of this chapter, I will focus on what I have referred to as the creative potential inherent to intersubjective reality. I will argue that this potential is grounded in our determinate commitments to others. Whether we make these commitments explicitly, or find ourselves to have made them implicitly, in the patterns of interaction that define our relations with others, they demonstrate our continually constructive role in intersubjective reality. But just as we contribute to the creation of this reality, so too are we created by it. Thus, others reveal the depth of indeterminacy in our experience, and in doing so, reveal our own indeterminacy as the ground of development and transformation. The creative potential inherent to intersubjective reality is thus based on our continual openness to others, and to the transformation our relations with them make possible.

I.   Anonymity and the Limits of Our Experience of Others

Merleau-Ponty's chapter on "Others and the Human World" in the *Phenomenology of Perception* begins with a temporal analysis of the impossibility of a fully-disclosed self-knowledge.[269] Merleau-Ponty accounts for this impossibility in terms of the inconsistency between natural and historical time. He claims that "natural time is always there": it is the

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[269] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012), 361-63 [403-05].

impersonal record of our lives, according to which we may measure the passage of days, months, years.[270] Its measure is invariable, yet as such, it equally includes aspects of my life that are beyond my experience of them, such as the early years of childhood that I cannot remember, or the fullness of the present that I will only be able to account for in retrospect.[271] In this sense, natural time always exceeds me.

Historical time, in contrast, is constituted by my experience; it is my lived sense of who I am, and thus reflects the significance of moments and events that have determined how I have developed. While natural time is insensitive to historical time—its measure is not altered by the latter—historical time is always subject to and shaped by natural time.[272] Thus Merleau-Ponty writes that "to catch sight of this formless existence [i.e., natural time] that precedes my history and that will draw it to a close, all I have to do is see, in myself, this time that functions by itself and that my personal life makes use of without ever fully concealing."[273] Here he alludes to the inevitable—if for the most part unrecognized or unacknowledged—effect of natural time on historical time. This effect is apparent, for instance, in aging, in which impersonal biological processes determine our possibilities—for example, in our vision and mobility—and thus determine how we take up our situation in the world. Yet we often fail to recognize or acknowledge this effect because our lives are for the most part lived in historical time, and thus according to the measures of significance that issue from us. Nevertheless, as Merleau-Ponty argues here, what is impersonal or anonymous informs or, as he puts it, is "made use of" in,

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[270] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012) 362 [404].

[271] These are both Merleau-Ponty's examples, p. 362 [404].

[272] Cf. my discussion of the relationship between personal and impersonal time in Chapter Two, pp. 55-58.

[273] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012) 362 [404].

personal life. As a result, however, "I am never at one with myself"[274]: who I am always

includes these impersonal or anonymous forces that I may fail to take up or claim as my own.

However, it is equally the case that what is personal may become anonymous.[275] Thus

Merleau-Ponty goes on to describe how cultural life accumulates an anonymity that informs the

objects and environments that comprise its culture:

> Now, even if it is not surprising that sensory and perceptual
> functions—given that they are pre-personal—deposit a natural
> world in front of themselves, one might still be surprised that the
> spontaneous acts through which man has articulated his life
> themselves become sedimented on the outside and thereby lead an
> anonymous existence as things. The civilization in which I
> participate exists for me with an evidentness in the tools that it
> adopts. When it comes to an unknown or foreign civilization,
> several ways of being or living can fit over the ruins or the broken
> instruments that I find, or the landscape that I travel across. The
> cultural world is thus ambiguous, although it is already present.[276]

In this passage, Merleau-Ponty draws an analogy between the natural and cultural worlds based

on their similar ambiguity, more specifically, on the variety of possibilities inherent in their

determinacy. This ambiguity often settles into anonymity in the cultural world because we take

for granted the particular human contingencies that motivated the establishment of that world.

Thus, like the blue of the sky and the green of the grass, cultural objects often do not distinguish

themselves as especially remarkable in the course of everyday experience: the fountain and stone

arch in the park, the bicycles propped against benches, the quartet and the music they are

playing—all are pieces of the familiar cultural world of Washington Square Park, and as such are

no less "sedimented" than the trees and grass (and it could equally be argued that trees and grass

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[274] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012) 362 [404].
[275] I argue this point more fully with regard to temporality in Chapter Two, on pp. 57-64.
[276] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012) 363 [405].

in this city space are also cultural objects). Moreover, these objects do not evoke their origin in

human creativity; rather, they exist as a given dimension of my experience.

In both Merleau-Ponty's discussions of temporality and cultural objects, his emphasis is

on the dimensions of anonymity they reveal in our lives, and on the consequent distance this

anonymity introduces between our experience and ourselves. Indeed, "natural time" is just one

example of a way in which anonymity measures this distance. These discussions are relevant to

the express topic of this chapter on "Others" because, as Merleau-Ponty goes on to show, our

anonymity founds and continually informs our relations with others, whom we also encounter

anonymously in our experience. This is apparent in the cultural object, which always speaks to

us of others, whether as belonging to them or as available for their use[277]—the bike in the park,

the coffee mug on the desk, each expresses its general accessibility to others. But how is others'

anonymous appearance in the object possible, Merleau-Ponty asks, if our own experience of it is

centered in our engagement with it as an "I"? Merleau-Ponty entertains the response of

traditional philosophical accounts of intersubjectivity, which claim that the object suggests that

another may interact with it *as* I do: in other words, it presents others as analogues of me. But,

according to Merleau-Ponty (who is here drawing on Max Scheler), the problem with this

"reasoning by analogy"—employed in Descartes' account of intersubjectivity, for example—is

that it "presupposes what it is meant to explain,"[278] namely, how is the visibility of

consciousness possible, when I know of it—mine—only from the inside?[279] Thus, reasoning by

analogy takes for granted the coherence between consciousness as it is experienced from the

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[277] Merleau-Ponty, <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, 363 [406].

[278] Merleau-Ponty, <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, 368 [410].

[279] Cf. M. C. Dillon's discussion of "reasoning by analogy," as it is presented in Husserl's <u>Cartesian Meditations</u>, and its relation to Merleau-Ponty's account of intersubjectivity, in the chapter on "Intersubjectivity: The Primordiality of Pre-Personal Communication" in <u>Merleau-Ponty's Ontology</u> (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), 113-129.

"inside" and consciousness as it is experienced from the outside when it is charged with accounting for this coherence.[280] It is able to take this coherence for granted, Merleau-Ponty argues, because our experience of others precedes, and is no more transparent than, our experience of ourselves.[281] In other words, I do not engage with the object as an "I," but rather, as we saw in Chapter Two, in the anonymous facility of my habit-body, and thus it is my anonymity, rather than my explicit self-consciousness, that shapes my experience of objects, including my experience of others I encounter in these objects.

Thus, for Merleau-Ponty, any answer to the question of how we experience others—whether in objects, or in our more immediate encounters with them—must begin with a more accurate account of consciousness as it is experienced from the "inside," more specifically, an account that recognizes my own inaccessibility to myself. Merleau-Ponty further illustrates this inaccessibility in the contrast between my experience as it is lived and my experience as I observe it in reflection: the latter reveals elements of the former to which I am necessarily blind and yet which I nevertheless recognize as myself. Thus he writes that: "If reflection reveals me to myself as an infinite subject, we must also recognize, at least in terms of appearances, my previous ignorance of this myself, which is more truly myself than I am."[282] Reflection, like historical time, is never comprehensive: my existence always includes dimensions I do not think of myself as inhabiting. Rather, I inhabit them *un*reflectively, and they shape my life as definitively as any decision or choice I make. Merleau-Ponty's point here accounts for why he

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[280] Cf. Renaud Barbaras, The Being of the Phenomenon: Merleau-Ponty's Ontology, trans. Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 22: "[T]he presupposition that motivates the recourse to analogical inference—namely, the duality between the other's consciousness, which is closed in on itself, and the sensible content—makes this inference fail. If what was really at issue were to infer *conclusively* that there is an other, nothing would be sufficient to convince me of its presence; no sign could lead me to this meaning once separated from it, that is, as soon as the sign is not given to me from the start as the very presence of the other. In other words, every theory of projection assumes what it claims to demonstrate: we would not be able to project our own lived experiences into a sensible appearance if something in the appearance did not suggest it to us."
[281] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 368 [410].
[282] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 375 [418].

begins his chapter on "Others" as he does, with a discussion of temporality, because it similarly emphasizes the indeterminacy, or incompleteness, of self that precedes, and thus grounds, any encounter with others.[283]

Thus, Merleau-Ponty devotes a significant portion of his chapter on "Others" to an analysis of the limits inherent in our experience of ourselves, in reflection and in the discontinuity between natural time and historical time, in order to show these limits as equally fundamental to our experience of others. As our work in previous chapters has shown, however, our own limits are often obscured in everyday experience, perhaps most significantly in the anonymous body that facilitates our integration in the world. It is here, then, that we can begin to discern the relationship between the incompleteness of self, obscured in the anonymous dimensions of our experience, and the incompleteness of our experience of others.[284] Indeed, Merleau-Ponty explicitly refers to the impersonal or anonymous self—that is, the self that exceeds our experience—as the condition for our experience of others:

> Another person is never fully a personal being if I am fully one myself, that is, if I grasp myself through an apodictic evidentness. But if, through reflection, I find in myself, along with the perceiving subject, a pre-personal subject given to itself, if my perceptions remain eccentric in relation to myself as the center of initiatives and judgments, or if the perceived world remains in a neutral state, neither verified as an object nor identified as a dream, then not everything that appears in the world is immediately spread out in front of me and the other's behavior can have its place in the world. This world can remain undivided between my perception

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[283] Cf. Dan Zahavi, "Beyond Empathy: Phenomenological Approaches to Intersubjectivity," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 8.5-7 (2001): "[Merleau-Ponty] claims that the self-experience of subjectivity *must* contain a dimension of otherness. Otherwise, intersubjectivity would be impossible. Thus, [. . .] Merleau-Ponty takes self-coincidence and the relation with an other to be mutually incompatible determinations. Or to rephrase his point in a more familiar terminology: Had subjectivity been an exclusive first-person phenomenon, were it only present in the form of an immediate and unique inwardness, I would only know one case of it—my own—and would never get to know any other" (162).

[284] Cf. Merleau-Ponty's remark in the preface to the Phenomenology of Perception: "In order for the word "other" not to be meaningless, my existence must never reduce itself to the consciousness that I have of existing; it must in fact encompass the consciousness that *one* might have of it, and so also encompass my embodiment in a nature and at least the possibility of an historical situation" (lxxvi [xiv]).

and his, the perceiving self enjoys no particular privilege that renders a perceived self impossible, these two are not *cogitationes* enclosed in their immanence, but beings who are transcended by their world and who, consequently, can surely be transcended by each other.[285]

Merleau-Ponty argues here, as elsewhere, that my perceptual body shapes my anonymous sense of self—its facility in the world determines the "eccentricity" of perceptions "in relation to myself as the center of initiatives and judgments"—and commits me to a general existence that always exceeds my explicit grasp of it. In emphasizing the presence of an anonymous self outside the awareness of our existence, Merleau-Ponty removes the "particular privilege" of the "I"—a privilege that, as we saw above, introduces the problem of solipsism, and the consequent circularity of reasoning by analogy as an account of our experience of others.

Without this privilege, then, we encounter others in the worlds that exceed us—the natural world to which the capabilities of our perceptual bodies commit us, and the cultural worlds to which our historical situations likewise commit us—but that also obscure our own limits. Moreover, we encounter others as equally committed, such that even in their absence, we perceive them in the objects and environments, or in the ideas and traditions, that comprise these worlds. Thus, the object speaks to me of others because it appeals to my anonymous, and thus inclusive, commitments rather than to my exclusive "I." The "transcendence" of these worlds—their exceeding our individual experience of them, in their givenness, and also in their availability to others—makes apparent our fundamentally incomplete grasp of them. However, our implicit commitment to them obscures this incompleteness, for example, as we saw in Chapter Two, in the anonymous "I can" that facilitates our unreflective engagement in the world. The competence of the anonymous body, its familiarity with objects and with its own

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[285] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 368-69 [411].

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capabilities, takes for granted its seamless integration in the world; more specifically, it takes for

granted that the objects and its capabilities will fulfill the expectations that outline its familiar

projects. Thus, in our implicit reliance on the anonymous body, we take for granted the decided

determinacy of reality—of perceptual objects in the world, and even of ourselves—when both

are, as we have seen in previous chapters, fundamentally indeterminate and open to

transformation.

Merleau-Ponty's claim that our anonymous self is the condition of our experience of

others suggests that this experience often takes the same form: we assume their determinacy—

that is, we assume to know who they are, more often than not as they are circumscribed in their

particular relation to us—and in doing so, we deny both the incompleteness of our access to them

and their fundamental incompleteness as individuals in possession of worlds and possibilities

that transcend us. Merleau-Ponty makes explicit this analogous structure between our perceptual

experience of an object and our experience of others:

> [W]hen I say that I see the ashtray and that it is over there, I
> presuppose a complete unfolding of the experience that would
> have to go on indefinitely, and I open up an entire perceptual
> future. Likewise, when I say that I know someone or that I like
> him, I am aiming at an inexhaustible background beyond his
> qualities that indeed might one day shatter the image that I adopt of
> him. This is the price for there to be things and "others" for us, not
> through some illusion, but rather through a violent act that is
> perception itself.[286]

While illusion is defined by its opposition to reality, "the violent act that is perception itself" is

required by it: we will always perceive more than is there. Thus, this violence is, as Merleau-

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[286] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 379 [421]. Cf. his remark near the end of his essay, "The Child's
Relations with Others": "As Alain has said, to love someone is to swear and affirm more than one knows about what
the other will be. In a certain measure, it is to relinquish one's freedom of judgment. The experience of the other
does not leave us at rest within ourselves, and this is why it can always be the occasion for doubt" (Merleau-Ponty,
"The Child's Relations with Others," trans. William Cobb, in The Primacy of Perception, ed. James M. Edie
(Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 155).

Ponty has it here, the condition of our experience. It makes possible the appearance of both our perceptual and social worlds. But it is nevertheless "violent" in so far as there is an inescapable distinction between the ultimately incomprehensible reality of another person and our experience of her, just as there is an inescapable distinction between the ultimately incomprehensible reality of any perceptual object and our experience of it.

But this violence, and thus the distinction between reality and our experience of it, is concealed in the anonymous body's familiarity with the world. Just as our anonymous body opens us to the perceptual world and shapes our engagement with it, so too does an analogous anonymity ground and inform our relations with others. Not only do others comprise the anonymous dimensions of our experience—in *our* capabilities, and in the familiar objects that likewise evoke *their* capabilities—but our experience of them is moreover shaped by the presumptiveness inherent in this anonymity. And, as Merleau-Ponty argues, necessarily so—the reality of "others" requires the "violence" of our attributing them a presence beyond what is immediately available to us. Thus, in the commerce of everyday life, we assume and attribute to others roles with accompanying expectations that determine the trajectory of our interactions. My own or others' failure to comply with these expectations is tantamount to a failure to inhabit the social world they outline.

However, our social world is comprised of much more than the commerce of everyday life. Arguably, its real richness and complexity has its source in the familial relationships, the friendships, and in the romantic partnerships that continually give us a secure yet dynamic sense of who we are. These relationships provide the context for our development as distinct individuals, as well as for our development as anonymous participants in the greater social world. Yet, in an important sense, these more intimate relationships are no less defined by roles

and expectations than are our more cursory exchanges in the commerce of everyday life. Indeed, it is often within the defined confines of roles that we learn and experiment with identities that inform our personal development, but that, as a result of this development, we may later dispense with.

For example, an individual's unreflective obedience as "daughter" may contribute to her early success as "student" because it encourages a respect for authority, and thus motivates her willingness to accept the directives, and general guidance, of authority figures. Eventually, however, success as a student will require that she make good decisions without this same degree of guidance. As a college student, she will have to decide which course of study to pursue, and within that course, she will have to determine her own projects; even if she does not have to determine her own projects, however, she will nevertheless have to manage her time and produce satisfactory work in order to complete her degree. In doing so, she may develop skills and interests, and a general sense of self-sufficiency, that outline a future that conflicts with that outlined in the expectations of her family. Thus she may discover that the unreflective obedience of being a "daughter" is inconsistent with the person she has become—even if the development of that person depended on the initial fulfillment of the role of "daughter," which, as defined by her family, required unreflective obedience.[287]

This example illustrates the contingent demands of roles that shape intimate relationships—such as those between child and parents—and moreover illuminates the fundamental conflict between the strict adherence to such demands and the incomplete nature of

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[287] My example draws on John Russon's discussion of the significance of the family to individual development in his book, Human Experience: Philosophy, Neurosis, and the Elements of Everyday Life (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2006), in particular pp. 61-68. See also his discussion in Bearing Witness to Epiphany: Persons, Things, and the Nature of Erotic Life (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2009), p. 58.

our relations with others.[288] "Daughter," like "student" or "parent," is a role that does not exhaust the reality of the individual who occupies it; even as it shapes the possibilities available to her, she may still refuse to take them up and live them as her own. Moreover, while her role as "daughter" reflects the particular dynamics of her family, it is nevertheless anonymous in so far as it remains insensitive to the evolving conditions of her situation. Thus, the anonymity of roles, like the anonymity of the habit-body, compensates for and obscures the essential incompleteness of our relations with others because it provides determinate definitions of who we are and of who others are—definitions that project a determinate future onto our relations with them. While it is true that we look to the world and to others—and thus to the roles that organize our relationships—to answer the question of who we are, this question cannot be answered definitively, conclusively, because our engagement in the world, and our relations with others, are continually transforming the terms of any possible answer; to put it more generally, "natural time is always there,"[289] exceeding our participation in its accumulated meanings, and thus our inherence in it remains open.

It is a challenge for our relations with others to accommodate this openness, and consequent incompleteness, because, as we have suggested above, they often inform the pretension of constancy of any account of who we or who others are. But while our experience in our own personal development may motivate us to doubt this constancy with respect to our own sense of self, we do not have a comparable experience of others: "I am certain to never live the presence of another to himself," Merleau-Ponty writes near the end of his chapter on "Others."[290] In both the mundane commerce of everyday life and our engagement in more

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[288] Cf. John Russon's discussion of responsibility in caring for our bonds with others in Bearing Witness to Epiphany (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2009), 90-94.
[289] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 362 [404].
[290] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 382 [424].

intimate relationships, roles circumscribe others' possibilities; they offer these possibilities to us as transparent and comprehensive of an other's reality. But the role itself, and the relationship that provides the context for that role, can never fully account for the reality of another person, and thus the other's reality will always confront me as something of a mystery, regardless of its appearance within a particular role. While my engagement with this person—our relationship— will provide some resolution to this mystery, it will not remove it altogether. The incompleteness of the other's development—their analogous situation in "natural time"—is compounded by the necessary incompleteness of my experience of them, my inability to live through their "historical time."

Even though it is a challenge *for* our relations with others to accommodate their—and our own—incompleteness, in so far as these relations often begin in the determinacy of roles and tend toward subscribing to their demands, it is nevertheless a challenge *that is inherent in* these relations, in so far as they establish a shared reality, the demands of which are not strictly determined by only one of its participants, nor by the anonymity of social roles.[291] Rather, the demands of our shared reality with others arise in the specificity of our relations with them, which always includes dimensions that are unavailable to us, both temporally and epistemologically. Recall Merleau-Ponty's central claim in the essay "The Child's Relations with Others" that the child's realization of the individuality of her body, and thus of her self, entails recognition of others' separateness from her.[292] This recognition initiates a world that requires our responsiveness to others as a condition of our potential for transformation. Others are thus essential to the realization of our own incompleteness, in so far as they make apparent to

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[291] Cf. Russon's discussion of "Honesty and Betrayal" in Bearing Witness to Epiphany, pp. 88-94.

[292] See Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," in The Primacy of Perception, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 96-155. See also my discussion of his argument in this essay in Chapter Three of this work, pp. 93-114.

us the limits of our understanding of them, as well as of ourselves, and thus the openness of our shared reality.

Explications of the temporal and epistemological limits to our experience of ourselves frame Merleau-Ponty's account of intersubjectivity in his chapter on "Others" in the *Phenomenology of Perception,* in order that the reader understand these limits as the conditions of our relations with others.[293] In the following section, I will examine in more detail our motivations for denying these limits, and thus for claiming a comprehensive experience of others. I will turn to a psychoanalytic account of our relations with others, and will demonstrate its coherence with the phenomenological account of incompleteness that we have developed in this section.

II.   Ambivalence and Claims of Authority in Relations with Others

Social roles are one example of the way in which anonymity informs our intersubjective life and obscures the extent to which others escape our comprehensive experience of them. More specifically, anonymity obscures the temporal openness that renders undecided any evaluation or understanding we have of another person because they may change in the course of our relationship with them. This temporal openness also points to the possibility of other aspects of

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[293] In his remarks on the inaccessibility of one's own death, Merleau-Ponty ends the chapter with a reiteration of the themes of temporality with which it opened. See <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, 381-82 [424-25]: "Established within life, propped up by my own thinking nature, placed within that transcendental field that opened with my first perception and in which every absence is merely the other side of a presence, or every silence a modality of sonorous being, I have a sort of theoretical ubiquity and eternity, I feel destined to a flow of inexhaustible life whose beginning and whose end I cannot think, since it is still my living self who thinks them, and since my life always precedes itself and always survives itself. Nevertheless, this same thinking nature that fills me within being opens the world to me through a perspective, I receive along with it the feeling of my contingency, the anxiety of being transcended, such that, even if I do not think of my death, I still live within an atmosphere of death in general, there is something of an essence of death that is always on the horizon of my thoughts. Finally, just as the instant of my death is an inaccessible future for me, I am certain to never live the presence of another to himself. And nevertheless, every other person exists for me as an irrecusable style or milieu of coexistence, and my life has a social atmosphere just as it has a flavor of mortality."

them that are unknown to us: others belong to worlds that exclude us, that make available to them possibilities that are not available to us, and that define them beyond our experience of them. Thus, to a certain yet indeterminate extent, the reality of another person always eludes us.

The fundamental incompleteness of our grasp of others has two, related consequences that shape our intersubjective life. The first is that "the violent act that is perception itself,"[294] discussed above, creates an inevitable distinction between the reality of another person and our experience of her. This distinction persists in the ideas we have of others, who we think they are and how we characterize their relation to us; in short, it speaks to others' presence in our inner life. The second, and related, consequence is that in so far as our relations with others are incomplete, and our experience of them does not exhaust their reality, it will always be vulnerable to ambiguity. The ambiguity of our experience is one of the central themes of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, which emphasizes the essential indeterminacy of our relation to the world, and thus the impossibility of reducing to a singular finality the infinite ways in which we take up this relation to the determinacy of our existence. For instance, our experience of objects is grounded in the perceptual capabilities of our bodies, but what we experience in perceiving an object is much more than what is outlined in these capabilities. Both an object's physical three-dimensionality and its affective charge exceed what is given in our perceptual experience of it. Rather, what is given takes its shape in our relation to it. But, for Merleau-Ponty, while the ambiguity of our experience reflects the distinction between reality and our grasp of it, it is nevertheless the condition of this experience and, moreover, the source of its meaning. While this is as true of perceptual life as it is of interpersonal life, it is only in the latter that we encounter—and can actively take up—the inherent creativity of ambiguity, grounded in

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[294] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 379 [421].

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the incompleteness of our relations with others. For this reason anonymity in interpersonal life is opposed to—indeed, is a transgression of—the essential ambiguity of our experience.

Nevertheless, however, ambiguity often motivates recourse to anonymity. Because we know another person incompletely, there is always the possibility that what we do know will be contradicted by what we later discover. Thus, the ambiguity of interpersonal life may threaten the security of our sense of reality and our sense of ourselves. As a result, then, we may resist this ambiguity: we may defer to roles or, more extremely, we may reduce others to our categorical evaluations of them, in order to mitigate the challenge this ambiguity poses to our sense of reality. In this way, we privilege our inner life over the reality it has been created from, and the distinction between the two becomes more pronounced.

In this section, I will consider the work of object-relations theorist Melanie Klein, who gives a developmental account of our ambiguous experience of, and resistance to, the reality of other people. As noted in the previous chapter, Klein's work focuses on infantile experience and, in particular, on the development of the child's relation to reality according to the terms of his or her bodily dependence on the mother. I will begin by summarizing Klein's account of the stages necessary to this development, but my focus will be on how these stages, and the child's struggles in them, are relevant to our relations with others in adult intersubjective life. I will show that Klein's treatment of our experience of the conflict between reality and inner life, and the necessary ambiguity of our experience of another person, is consonant with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological account of intersubjectivity, and develops in more detail the central insights of this account.

From part to whole

According to Klein, the most significant object in the child's formative experience is the mother's breast, which provides him with both physical nourishment and emotional comfort.[295] Because the first few months of the child's life are focused on the satisfaction of his basic bodily needs, he relates to the breast—the source of the satisfaction or denial of those needs—as a partial-object.[296] That is, his mother is not yet a "whole" person for him. Rather, the child's experience of her is divided between the "good" and the "bad" breast. Thus, according to Klein, his feelings of gratification and security are inseparable from and, as a result, projected onto, the breast itself: when it answers his needs, it is a "good" breast.[297] But there are also times when the child is hungry or upset, and the breast fails to respond to his needs. In these cases, it is the source of painful and unpleasant feelings—the absent or "bad" breast.

Thus, in Klein's account, the child's inner, felt world impinges upon external reality by means of projection and introjection.[298] According to Klein, the child introjects both the "good" and "bad" breasts, such that they are part of his inner, felt world. However, once installed in his inner world, the objects are transformed by his desires: "it is because the baby projects its own aggression on to these objects that it feels them to be 'bad' and not only in that they frustrate its desires: the child conceives of them as actually dangerous."[299] In this way, the internalized "bad" object becomes even worse. Similarly, and partly as a defense against the "bad" object,

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[295] Melanie Klein, "Love, Guilt and Reparation," in <u>Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945</u> (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1975), 307-8. Cf. her remark towards the end of this same essay that: "The satisfaction of our self-preservative needs and the gratification of our desire for love are forever linked up with each other, because they are first derived from one and the same source" (336). While Klein's account describes the situation of the breast-fed child, she maintains that it is equally applicable to bottle-feeding as well. On this point, see Klein, "Love, Guilt and Reparation," 307, fn. 1.

[296] Melanie Klein, "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," in <u>Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945</u> (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1975), 262.

[297] Klein, "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," 262.

[298] Klein, "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," 262.

[299] Klein, "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," 262.

the child idealizes and identifies with the internalized "good" object, and with the feelings of

well-being and security that it affords him.[300] Thus, both "good" and "bad" objects are part of,

and also more extreme versions of, the child himself, and manifest his own desires and impulses.

Having introjected both "good" and "bad" objects, and having projected his own

conflicting feelings of well-being and aggression onto these objects, the child occupies what

Klein refers to as the "paranoid-schizoid position."[301] The paranoid-schizoid position is

characterized by a strict separation of "good" from "bad" objects—which Klein sometimes refers

to as "splitting"[302]—and also by the child's desire for gratification by the former and his intense

fear of persecution by the latter.[303] However, the child cannot confirm the accuracy of his inner

world without some recourse to external reality, and thus his uncertainty regarding the

internalized "good" and "bad" objects—for example, whether they are consistently as "good" or

as "bad" as he takes them to be—in part motivates his relationship to the external object-

world.[304]

But in becoming more familiar with the external world, the child realizes that the "good

breast" and the "bad breast" are parts of the same whole object, the mother.[305] This realization

illuminates the continuity between the polarized part objects, and also between the internal and

external worlds: "[The child] is thus made to realize that the loved object is at the same time the

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[300] Klein, "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," 264, 268-69.

[301] In her earlier work, which I am mainly drawing on in my discussion here, Klein is inconsistent in her terminology for the stages of development, and has not yet labeled this first stage the "paranoid-schizoid position." For the sake of clarity, however, I will refer to it as such, in order to distinguish it from the "depressive position," which I will discuss next, and of which Klein gives a fuller and more developed account even in these earlier essays.

[302] Klein, "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," 287-88.

[303] Klein, "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," 272, 285, 287. See also Hanna Segal, Dream, Phantasy and Art (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 1991), 27-28.

[304] Melanie Klein, "Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States," in Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945 (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1975), 346.

[305] Klein claims that this realization occurs when the child is around four or five months old. See Klein, "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," 285.

hated one; and, in addition to this, that the real objects and the imaginary figures, both external and internal, are bound up with each other."[306] Klein refers to this stage of development as the "depressive position," which is based on—and, indeed, derives from—the paranoid-schizoid position.[307] However, in the depressive position, the child confronts the ambivalence of the object, rather than enacting it by "splitting" the object into mutually exclusive good and bad parts. The transition to the depressive position thus involves the child's recognition of the mother as a whole object, containing both good and bad parts, and also as wholly separate from him. This recognition of separation further promotes the differentiation between internal and external worlds. However, this differentiation arouses fear because if the object is not solely "inside" the child, permanently installed as part of his inner world, if, rather, it exists in the external world, then it is beyond his control and capable of being lost. In addition, the child maintains aggressive feelings towards the "bad" parts of the object. But any attacks on, or feelings of aggression towards, the "bad" part of the object harm the "good" part as well. As a result of the realization of his own fears and desires, then, and of the reality of the external world as distinguished from his internal world, the child begins to fear the loss of the loved object. Thus, one of the critical, developmental differences between the paranoid-schizoid position and the depressive position is the child's protective concern in the latter for the *whole* object—rather than merely for himself—and thus for the reconciliation in the whole object of his conflicting feelings towards it.[308]

The depressive position is thus characterized by reconciliation of the ambivalence of the loved object, and by the consequent struggle for reconciliation of the conflicting feelings

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[306] Klein, "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," 285.

[307] Klein, "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," 275.

[308] Klein, "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," 272; Klein, "Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States," 348.

produced by its ambivalence. Klein contends that the realization of the depressive position, and success in answering its demands for reconciliation of ambivalence, are necessary to the child's development of healthy relations with other people, more specifically, relations that accurately represent and correspond to reality.[309] But this development requires acceptance of the actual loss of the object, in so far as it is realized to be separate from the child, and thus no longer controlled by his desires.

Mourning and authority

For Klein, experiences of loss in adulthood reenact this primary loss of the idealized loved object, the mother.[310] Thus, much of her work focuses on processes of mourning and, in particular, on how difficulties in mourning reflect the basic developmental struggles of the child in the depressive position. According to Klein, successful mourning indicates recognition of the wholeness, and thus reconciliation of the ambivalence, of the lost loved object.[311] She writes that "Not until the object is loved *as a whole* can its loss be felt as a whole."[312]

Much of Klein's work on mourning focuses on how individuals respond to death as the final and most significant loss of an object. But in our interpersonal life we also cope with other forms of loss that emphasize our separation from others and their ambivalence in relation to us. Thus Klein's work on mourning, most notably, her characterization of the depressive position, provides insight into basic structural features of our interpersonal experience. In the most

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[309] Klein, "Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," 288-89. Cf. Melanie Klein, "Symbol-formation in Ego Development," in Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945 (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1975), 221.

[310] Klein, "Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States," 344, 353.

[311] Klein, "Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States," 353-54.

[312] Klein, "Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," 264. Cf. D. W. Winnicott, "*Sum*, I Am," in Home is Where We Start From: Essays by a Psychoanalyst (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), 61-62: "There is no death except of a totality. Put the other way round, the wholeness of personal integration brings with it the *possibility* and indeed the *certainty of death*; and with the acceptance of death there can come a great relief, relief from fear of the alternatives, such as disintegration [. . .]." Thus like Klein, Winnicott considers recognition of wholeness to be necessary for the acknowledgement of loss.

general terms of Klein's analysis, we experience the incompleteness of our relations with others as a loss that we continually mourn. In order to understand the relevance of Klein's theory to the account of intersubjectivity we are developing here, however, it is important to consider *what* precisely is lost in this experience, and also the forms that mourning takes in response to this loss.

Often we experience loss when others fail to fulfill their familiar roles in our lives; relationships end, or otherwise change, and as a result, the expectations that outline these roles are no longer relevant to our current situation. In cases such as this, we may consider ourselves to have lost a friend or a partner—that is, the object itself. Moreover, however, we may experience this loss as a betrayal, in so far as the friend has failed to meet—and thus betrayed— the expectations and terms of our relationship.[313] However, this betrayal may more accurately serve as a reflection of one's own ambivalence towards the choices of one's friend, rather than as an evaluation of the friendship itself. In this sense, betrayal is a response to loss that reduces the object—in this example, one's friend—to their resistance to one's expectations. Similarly, I may feel betrayed by my partner's close friendships with others. What is lost in this case, however, is not my partner—not the object itself—but rather my partner's unequivocal and undivided affection, which I may consider to be required by the terms of our relationship.

To feel betrayed in this case, however, and also in the example of having lost a friend due to their failure to meet the expectations that formerly outlined their presence in our life, is to mistake oneself as sole authority over the terms of the relationship. Consistent with Klein's analysis of the child in the depressive position, what is more accurately lost in cases of felt betrayal, such as those described in the examples cited above, is not the actual person or that

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[313] In this sense, death may also be perceived as a betrayal.

person's affection, but rather a sense of security in the relationship, and also a sense of self that was felt to be supported by and protected in the relationship. However, both this sense of security and this sense of self are false—that is, they fail to acknowledge their own reality—in so far as they avoid taking into account the reality of the other person, and thus the reality of the relationship upon which they are based. Still more accurately, then, what is lost in the felt betrayal is a claim to authority over one's own experience and over the relationships that comprise this experience. Others always confront us with alternative claims of authority, and thus confront us as limits to our own claims.[314] To deny these limits, and to attempt to maintain my authority, is to deny the reality that I share with them.

In doing so, however, I also deny the inherent openness of this reality. Our relations with others are always incomplete, unfinished. Because of their incomplete nature, to defer to established roles, or to our own individual expectations, in order to justify the rigidity of the terms of our relationship is thus to deny the shared, and necessarily unfinished, reality that they enact.

Thus, in terms of both Klein's analysis and the account of intersubjectivity that we are developing here, loss—as we experience it in another's failure to fulfill our expectations—is a disillusionment of the presumption that one's own experience provides the authoritative terms of shared reality. This understanding of loss, however, transforms what is betrayed. Feeling betrayed in the examples cited above is itself a betrayal of the reality of our relations with others.[315] In these examples, just as what is *lost* is not the other person, what is *betrayed* is not

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[314] Cf. John Russon, <u>Bearing Witness to Epiphany</u>: "[I]n the very enacting of my personality, I arrogate to myself the authority to decide the disposition of the various shared dimensions of my reality, yet I do so in possible (and, ultimately, necessary) opposition to the preferences and trajectories of the others who legitimately share those realities" (92).

[315] My discussion in this section draws on Russon's account of betrayal in <u>Bearing Witness to Epiphany</u>. See in particular pp. 88-94.

me, the person who feels the betrayal, but rather my false understanding of the reality I share with them.[316]

However, feeling betrayed is not in every case a reflection of a false understanding of the reality I share with others. For instance, I could feel betrayed in response to another's assumption of unequivocal authority over the terms of our shared reality.[317] That is, I could feel betrayed by *their* false understanding of our shared reality. Betrayal in this sense testifies to the determinate commitments that always constitute our relations with others. These commitments are often formalized in anonymous roles, sometimes falsely, as I have argued above. However, they are no less the substance of our relations with others, in so far as they distinguish their nature, for example, as friendship, as marriage, as business partnership. Moreover, our commitments to others distinguish the variety within these relationships, for example, the particular character of the business partnership, the degree of intimacy of the friendship. Thus, while our relations with others are always unfinished, and so incomplete, they are nevertheless founded on the commitments that give them their particular reality. I will discuss the significance of determinate commitments in the final section of this chapter. It is important to mention them here, however, because feelings of betrayal are always contextualized within, and thus measured by, the reality these commitments establish, and thus by the extent to which we acknowledge them as the substance of our relations with others.

In terms of Klein's analysis, to feel betrayed because I mistake the nature of this reality summarizes the basic conflict at the root of the depressive position, namely, the conflict between

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[316] This false understanding of reality is *betrayed* in both senses of the word: it is betrayed by the reality of my relations with others, in the sense that this reality is disloyal to it, and it is also betrayed by the reality of my relations with others, in the sense that this reality exposes it for what it is, namely, false.

[317] In Bearing Witness to Epiphany, Russon refers to this sense of betrayal as "theft or disavowal" of the bonds that comprise our shared reality with others (93). He writes that "betrayal in this deeper sense is found in the denial of the bond that it is a bond, that is, in the pretense that the bond is simply a self-identity, something not realized as decisive, performative, personal appropriation" (93).

the individual's inner world and the world shared with others. For Klein, as we have seen, we live through this conflict in processes of mourning, in which we confront others as separate from us, and thus as challenges to our individual claims of authority. Mourning is thus a response to a shared reality that resists these individual claims and as such, it describes some of the most prevalent difficulties of intersubjective life. Jealousy, for example, expresses a person's desire to occupy, and perhaps also control, parts of another's life that he or she feels excluded from. Moreover, it often attempts to deny this exclusion by casting the other as "good" or "bad" relative to their compliance with one's desires. Outside the realms of friendships and romantic partnerships, we can find other examples that concretely demonstrate the insights of Klein's account of mourning. In work life, for instance, or even in the more basic projects of daily life, in consistently failing to acknowledge others' equal competence in performing tasks, one fails to find measures of reality outside oneself. If I see in others only obstacles to or perversions of my projects in the world, I deny the intersubjective, and necessarily incomplete, nature of this world.

These examples illustrate situations in which we are challenged to reconcile our sense of reality with the inherent contingency that others make explicit in it. Klein's notion of mourning is useful in analyzing these challenges because it emphasizes the way in which one's static, individual claims of authority fail to accommodate the dynamism of intersubjective life. Thus mourning, according to Klein's account, is successful only to the extent that we acknowledge that the trajectory of our interpersonal life is not solely governed by our own, individual claims of authority. In this sense, then, mourning is potentially a process of self-transformation as much as it is a response to loss. Moreover, it is an inevitable and recurrent process, one that characterizes our earliest relations as well as those that define our mature adult life. This is because our relations with others will continually challenge us to acknowledge claims outside

our own and thus, moreover, will continually reveal the incomplete nature of intersubjective reality.

Nevertheless, however, even as processes of mourning reveal an essential dynamism in our intersubjective life, our relations with others are borne out of determinate commitments that give a particular shape and character to these relations. The final section of this chapter will consider how these commitments ground what I am referring to as the inherent creativity of our relations with others. First, however, I will demonstrate the relevance of Klein's notion of ambivalence to Merleau-Ponty's notion of ambiguity. It is in light of Merleau-Ponty's account of the essential ambiguity of our relation with the world that we can develop an account of the inherent creativity of our relations with others.

Ambivalence and ambiguity

As we have seen, according to Klein's analysis, mourning is not strictly a response to loss, but is more accurately a response to the fundamentally incomplete nature of intersubjective reality. It involves confronting the indeterminacy of our relations with others and thus realizing our own indeterminacy,[318] more specifically, realizing that we continually look to others to give us a sense of who we are, as well as a sense of the shared reality we inhabit. Thus, it unmoors us from an idiosyncratic reality that issues only from our individual claims of authority. As a result, however, others are also "unmoored," which is to say, their reality is not determined by us. For the child in the depressive position, experiencing the object as "unmoored," as separate, entails acknowledging the object's ambivalence, that is, acknowledging it as the source of both the

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[318] Cf. Judith Butler, "Violence, Mourning, Politics," in <u>Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence</u> (New York: Verso, 2006): "It is not as if an "I" exists independently over here and then simply loses a "you" over there, especially if the attachment to "you" is part of what composes who "I" am. If I lose you, under these conditions, then I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself. Who am "I," without you? When we lose some of these ties by which we are constituted, we do not know who we are or what to do. On one level, I think I have lost "you" only to discover that "I" have gone missing as well. At another level, perhaps what I have lost "in" you, that for which I have not vocabulary, is a relationality that is composed neither exclusively of myself nor you, but is to be conceived as *the tie* by which those terms are differentiated and related" (22).

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satisfaction and the frustration of her desires. Klein's account of mourning is relevant to adult experience because this accomplishment of the depressive position—specifically, the confrontation with ambivalence—is continually renewed in our relations with others. That we inhabit worlds with others—in school, in the workplace, and more generally in our friendships—does not preclude their involvement in worlds that exclude us. Even in our more intimate relationships, others maintain a fundamental separateness. Moreover, they may make decisions and engage in actions that conflict with our understanding of them, and of the reality we share. Thus, we are frequently faced with the concrete distinction between our ideas of others—or, in terms of Klein's account, their roles in our inner reality—and their existence in the external world, which always includes their relations with others and engagements in projects that define them beyond their relation to me.

To deny this distinction is to define others only in their relation to me. It is thus to preserve their ambivalence: they are "good" in so far as their behavior is coherent with my inner reality, and "bad" in so far as it contradicts it. However, the complexity of interpersonal life is often such that we fail to recognize this ambivalence as such. That is, we consider our feelings to be responses to others rather than responses to their relation to the ideas we have of them. For example, a parent may want her child to be successful and happy in her career. But if her definition of her child's success and happiness is limited to a career in business, she may disparage her decision to pursue a career in social work. In this case, she fails to recognize that she is measuring her daughter's life against the limited idea she has of it. Thus even for the adult, it is possible to confuse the distinction between our experience of others and their reality outside this experience.

Attitudes of ambivalence are rooted in, but ultimately resist, the ambiguity inherent in our experience of others by divorcing the moments in which they meet our expectations from those in which they do not. Merleau-Ponty distinguishes ambivalence from ambiguity in his discussion of Klein in his essay, "The Child's Relations with Others." He writes

> Ambivalence consists in having two alternative images of the same object, the same person, without making any effort to connect them or to notice that in reality they relate to the same object and the same person. [. . .] As opposed to ambivalence, ambiguity is an adult phenomenon, a phenomenon of maturity, which has nothing pathological about it. It consists in admitting that the same being who is good and generous can also be annoying and imperfect. Ambiguity is ambivalence that one dares to look at face to face.[319]

The ambiguity of our interpersonal experience will always introduce occasions for ambivalence, for distinguishing and keeping separate aspects of others that are coherent with our own sense of reality from aspects of them that are not. Consistent with Klein's account, then, ambivalence is a protective defense against opposition to oneself, but also, ultimately, against indeterminacy. It preserves an inner and perhaps idiosyncratic reality, and the expectations outlined in that reality, at the expense of the external world that is its source. Deference to established roles, as we have seen, is a similar form of defense, in so far as roles demonstrate our attempts to "fill in" the incompleteness of our experience of others, and thus to ward off what is indeterminate or unknown.

Similar to the structure of perceptual experience, then, intersubjective life may avoid ambiguity in its preference for determinate, comprehensible objects. However, unlike perceptual experience, intersubjective life is always affectively charged by our vulnerability to others, which is equally our openness to development and transformation. Thus, to avoid ambiguity in our relations with others by relying on the expectations of one's inner reality, or by deferring to

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[319] Merleau-Ponty, "The Child's Relations with Others," 102-03.

anonymous roles, is to deny the essential productivity and transformative potential of intersubjective life, more specifically, its introduction of new terms of relations and, in turn, new terms for defining oneself and others. In the final section of the chapter, I will develop an account of this productivity, and will consider how the acknowledgement of the ambiguity of our relations with others activates the possibilities inherent in our intersubjective experience.

III.   Recognizing the Inherent Creativity of Our Relations with Others

To return to the example with which we opened this chapter, just as the art object confronts us as something not immediately interpretable, something that is distinctive in its appearance from our everyday perceptual experience, yet capable of revealing to us aspects of this experience that are unnoticed in their very familiarity, so do others demonstrate to us the inadequacy of our individual perspective, even to that to which it seems closest, namely, our sense of ourselves. But just as the art object is given to us in the same way as any other perceptual object is given within our experience, such that we may equally encounter it as such, so do we often encounter others as fully described by their familiar, anonymous roles, or by their resistance or conformity to our ideas of them. Thus their essential unfamiliarity is concealed in our everyday understanding of who they are in relation to us. But to reduce our experience of others to the anonymity of roles, or to separate the categorical "good" from "bad" in that experience, is not only to deny the dynamic reality of intersubjective life, but it is equally to fail to recognize and take advantage of its potential for development and creativity.

Drawing on what is perhaps the definitive theme of Merleau-Ponty's work in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, I suggested at the opening of section two that this potential is inherent in the ambiguity of our experience of others. In the remainder of that section, I focused

on the ways in which we deny this ambiguity, and the reasons for why we do so. In this final section, I will develop a positive account of this ambiguity and its creative potential, focusing in particular on its critical role in self-development. To do so, however, I will first discuss our commitments to others, and others' commitments to us, as the necessary foundation for this development and, ultimately, for the creative potential of our intersubjective reality.

Determinate commitments

Others tell us who we are before we come to recognize ourselves as posing this question of identity to them. As our study of Merleau-Ponty's essay, "The Child's Relations with Others," demonstrated, others make apparent to us our bodily capabilities and, in doing so, they inform our affective register and continually shape our engagement with the world. Thus, our relations with others play a constitutive role in our experience, yet they do so before we are able to take them up as such. Moreover, and still more significantly, when we do recognize their critical role, it is more often than not belatedly: we see patterns of interaction once they have already been established, and thus we identify the particular significance of our relations with others after they have already assumed a determinate shape. It is in this sense that we often find ourselves committed to others—and also to modes of relation with them—rather than explicitly making, and thus acknowledging, these commitments as the forces that shape our intersubjective lives.

However, even when we do make explicit commitments to others, or acknowledge them as such—in friendships, in romantic partnerships, in marriage—we nevertheless may still fail to take them up as bearing significance that emerges from our engagement in the relationships themselves. As we have seen, we may defer to the formality of the commitment as an authority regarding the form our relationship takes. For example, one may consider marriage an institution

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that requires leadership from one partner and obedience from the other, with no flexibility regarding who assumes which role. Our discussion of anonymity emphasized the risk of this deferral as mistaking the formality of a role for the substance of the relationship itself. More specifically, those who have such an understanding of their relationship regard its significance as being conferred upon it strictly from without, and thus in a way that is potentially insensitive to its emergent dynamics. While this understanding is an extreme, and perhaps rare, example of the way in which one may take up their relations with others, it nevertheless speaks to an apparent tension between the formality of a commitment and the way in which it is realized in any particular relationship. Thus, even explicit commitments may lack recognition of the other, and thus lack recognition of their constitutive role *as* commitments in realizing the distinctive significance of the relationship.

Our earlier discussion of betrayal illuminated a similar tension between one's individual understanding of their relationship with another and the reality of the other, as in the case of the parent who continues to expect unreflective obedience from her mature child. In cases such as this, as we have seen, to feel betrayed by the other exposes a false understanding of shared reality. These feelings of betrayal may defer to the formality of a commitment or, more specifically in the example I have presented here, to one's individual regard for that formality. Thus, the rigidity that these feelings make apparent, like that of the anonymity of roles, is unable to accommodate the reality of the other and, in turn, precludes a relationship that is founded on that reality.

These considerations reveal that, if our commitments are to accommodate the reality of others, they must also accommodate the incompleteness of our relations with others. This incompleteness, as we have seen, is necessarily temporal, as it is in our experience of the

perceptual world and of ourselves, both of which are always opening onto an indeterminate and unknown future. However, others contribute to this indeterminacy: they are themselves indeterminate, in so far as they always, to some extent, exceed our grasp of them. Even in my most intimate relationships, I will never inhabit others' experience as I inhabit my own, and thus I will always encounter them incompletely.[320] Moreover, as we noted earlier, others participate in worlds that exclude us; in this sense, they are themselves openings onto indeterminate and unknown realms. As such, however, they may deprive us of what we take to be determinate and known, including even our own sense of ourselves. Thus, the temporal incompleteness of our relations with others is magnified by their persistent indeterminacy, and thus by the inherent incompleteness of our experience of them.

Moreover, this incompleteness distinguishes both our implicit and explicit commitments to others, as well as their implicit and explicit commitments to us. While, for example, the promises we make, like all other vows, are enacted in their performative utterance, their reality is nevertheless lived—and so continually made real—in their determinate enactment in our shared experience. Thus, our relations with others always take determinate forms, but only against a background of indeterminacy. However, this fundamental indeterminacy does not undermine them, nor does it undermine the commitments that constitute them. Rather, it brings into relief the contingency of these commitments, more specifically, their dependence on our actively taking them up, or participating in them, for their meaning. Arguably, this is no less the case for the implicit patterns of interaction that characterize our relations with others than it is for the explicit commitments that formalize them, in so far as the former equally depend on our adhering to their established terms, even if we fail to notice that we are doing so. Both are commitments,

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[320] Cf. John Russon, Bearing Witness to Epiphany: "I can never simply "be" you, and so our bond, as much as it is a shared reality, also is necessarily a site of distance and nonidentity" (93).

as I am describing them here, in so far as both define and continually shape our relations with others, and thus make them determinate.

Yet even as determinate, our commitments are nevertheless qualified by their fundamental incompleteness. Thus, in order to accommodate this incompleteness, our commitments must acknowledge the indeterminacy of others, rather than avoiding it in deference to anonymous roles or to formalities that confer meaning from without. In other words, they must not lose sight of others, which is to say, they must recognize their inevitable blind spots as well as their responsibility for making our relations with others meaningful. In the final section of this chapter, I will consider in more detail the relationship between responsibility and meaning in our intersubjective life. First, however, I will examine the way in which determinate commitments paradoxically realize our indeterminacy, in continually making possible self-development and transformation.

Passive transformation

In Chapter Three, we examined the way in which our bodily sense of self is implicitly developed in our relations with others, who demonstrate to us our capabilities before these capabilities properly belong to us. This fundamental openness to others does not end with infancy, however, but continually informs our potential to be transformed in our relations with others. That we depend on others to show us who we are is often affirmed in our commitments, which demonstrate the way in which we explicitly take up, or implicitly are susceptible to, the roles that others play in shaping our lives. Thus, it is within the dynamic context of our commitments to others, and others' commitments to us, that we realize the transformative potential of the incompleteness that defines our intersubjective experience.

This transformative potential is often brought into relief in accounts of dramatic moments in our intersubjective lives, such as falling in love, or studying under an inspirational teacher, or experiencing the death of a close friend. We often measure the significance of such experiences in the shifts they initiate in one's identity and in one's orientation towards the world. As a result of such shifts, not only is one different, but the world one inhabits is also different.

Outside these dramatic events, however, others constantly and consistently shape who we are, often beneath our notice. Aristotle's study of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, for example, can be read as a careful analysis of the way in which we are passively transformed by others. For Aristotle, friendships both reflect and cultivate moral character, and thus play a critical role in one's personal development. In this sense, friendships are not neutral associations with others, but are influential forces in shaping our future possibilities.[321] Consistent with Aristotle's account, Melanie Klein argues in her essay, "Love, Guilt and Reparation," that others not only determine our future possibilities, but also have the potential to counter the effect of earlier, formative experiences. Thus Klein describes the way in which current relations with others can mitigate and perhaps even repair the harms of earlier relations and, in doing so, transform one's otherwise sedimented orientation towards the world. She writes:

> Some children are, as we know, incapable of making friends at
> school, and this is because they carry their early conflicts into a
> new environment. With others who can detach themselves
> sufficiently from their first emotional entanglements and can make
> friends with schoolmates, it is often found that the actual relation
> to brothers and sisters then improves. The new companionships
> prove to the child that he is able to love and is lovable, that love
> and goodness *exist,* and this is unconsciously felt also as a proof
> that he can repair harm which he has done to others in his
> imagination or in actual fact. Thus new friendships help in the
> solution of earlier emotional difficulties, without the person being

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[321] See Books VIII-IX of Aristotle's <u>Nicomachean Ethics</u>, trans. Joe Sachs (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2002) 143-80.

aware either of the exact nature of those early troubles or of the
way in which they are being solved.[322]

Klein describes what we, echoing Husserl, could refer to as emotional or interpersonal passive synthesis: analogous to the way in which a novel perceptual experience may correct and thus transform an understanding that was established in an earlier experience—such as in Husserl's example of the red and green ball that was first perceived as red[323]—and in turn reveal the openness of that past experience, so may our relations with others transform our earlier, implicit understanding of ourselves by giving us new terms for engaging with them and with the world. Indeed, in this way others are themselves openings onto the indeterminate and unknown realms of our own possibilities.

Thus, while others make apparent the indeterminacy of our experience, and the limits to both our understanding of them and of ourselves, they also reveal these limits as horizons onto further possibilities. In other words, they reveal our indeterminacy as potential for further development. In this way, our commitments to others—both explicit and implicit—provide the determinate context in which these possibilities can be realized. Whether we find ourselves committed to others, or make an explicit commitment that will continually inform our relationship, we can discern in these commitments the terms for our future relations with others and with the world.

Commitments to openness

The account of intersubjectivity we have developed here articulates a challenge to the tendency we described in our account of perceptual experience, namely, to privilege what is familiar over what is indeterminate in our engagement with the world. Our temporal analysis of

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[322] Klein, "Love, Guilt and Reparation," 328, emphasis in original.

[323] Husserl presents this example in <u>Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis</u> to illustrate retroactive crossing out (64-65), which I discuss on pp. 17-19 of Chapter One of this work.

perception demonstrated that we often preemptively encounter objects as known and comprehensible, such that our experience is coherent and complete. Our analysis of intersubjective life reveals a similar tendency, namely, to perceive others as fully described in terms of their familiar roles, or in the categorical terms that measure their resemblance to the ideas we have of them. However, this analysis has also revealed the ways in which our experience of others refuses to be reduced to, or strictly contained within, these terms. Thus, intersubjective reality challenges us to recognize the essential indeterminacy of our experience— of ourselves and of others.

As we have seen, this indeterminacy is the ground of development and transformation because it renders us open to others, who likewise offer us possibilities and futures that we cannot discern or realize on our own. While the commitments that emerge in our relations with others outline these possibilities, they can neither permanently realize them nor exhaust them. As a result, the reality we share is always unfinished, incomplete. Thus, if they are to be consistent with the nature of intersubjective reality, these commitments must likewise be commitments to openness. Even as they take determinate forms, and offer us terms according to which we may come to define ourselves and others, what binds these terms is our continually enacting them, taking them up as true to our shared reality. Thus, if we take up our commitments to others as commitments to openness, then our relations with them will not only transform us according to the particular terms of these relations, but they will transform us by rendering us open to further transformation.[324]

It is in this sense, then, that our relations with others are inherently creative. As we have seen, they are creative of who we are, and also of who others are to us, but they are more

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[324] Cf. John Russon, Bearing Witness to Epiphany, 117: "Openness is not simply being open to having new experiences "added" to one's life but is rather openness to be challenged by the open. Self-transformation [. . .] necessarily involves a dimension of self-criticism which, most importantly, requires the breaking of habits."

fundamentally creative in the sense of offering us inexhaustible resources for reimagining and re-engaging with the world. These resources are distinctive to the ambiguity of intersubjective life and, in turn, the ambiguity of our situation within it, because it is in our relations with others that we encounter limits, which otherwise render our experience incomplete, as horizons onto possible futures. Thus, intersubjective reality is creative to the extent that it produces new, unanticipated meanings in our experience. Like the art object that makes new terms of engagement out of the familiar material of our perceptual experience, and thus alters our perceptual reality, others are infinite sources of unfamiliarity, and thus resources for transformation.

However, as a result of the ambiguity of this reality, and the ambiguity of our situation in it, we may fail to see these resources, or fail to take them up. More specifically, we may relate to others as determinate, and to our commitments to them as static. In addition, the resources others offer us may not support transformation, or they may transform us in ways that inhibit our further development and that severely limit our possibilities for engaging with the world. Thus, the persistent indeterminacy of others, and the inherent creativity of the reality we share with them, renders us vulnerable in our incompleteness. That our relations with others are creative means that we are not the sole authors of our experience. We are vulnerable because we may find ourselves in commitments that have minimized the possibilities of our shared reality. The creativity of our intersubjective life, and its consequent richness or insufficiency, is dependent upon the determinate materials that are available to it.

But just as the indeterminacy of our intersubjective reality renders us susceptible to others, it equally makes us responsible for our participation in its creation. More specifically, we are responsible for the ways in which we take up, respond to, and create the meaningfulness of

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our relations with others. Thus, even in our implicit commitments, in which we find ourselves succumbing to familiar patterns of interaction, we are responsible for the meaning they enact. It is in this sense that a phenomenological account of the creativity of our relations with others bears an implicit ethics. To recognize the incompleteness of intersubjective experience is to recognize that one is continually making contributions to this experience, participating in it, and thus creating, as well as precluding, further possibilities of engagement with others and with the world.

Conclusion

Thus, it is in discerning more clearly the nature of our intersubjective reality that we are able to answer its inherent ethical demand. While others reveal to us that we are both active creators within *and* passive inheritors of our intersubjective reality, to acknowledge the indeterminate nature of this reality is to acknowledge the primacy of our active, creative role. More specifically, it is to acknowledge that the incompleteness of our relations with others makes us responsible for how we take them up, and for what meanings we create in them. To discern the nature of intersubjective reality, then, is to discern its incompleteness, and thus to understand our participation in it as always in response to this incompleteness.

Moreover, its ethical demand entails acknowledging others as indeterminate, and thus admitting the fundamental limits inherent to our experience of them. However, as we saw in our study of Melanie Klein's work, to recognize others' indeterminacy is equally to recognize their ambiguity, which poses a persistent challenge throughout our childhood and adult life. Often we prefer that others, like the objects of our perceptual experience, be "simply one thing," in accordance with our understanding of reality. However, they continually demonstrate to us the

truth of the epigraph of this chapter, that "nothing is simply one thing," and that our experience of them will always retain dimensions of indeterminacy, and thus ambiguity.

But, as we have seen, it is this indeterminacy, and the possibilities inherent in ambiguity, that not only inform the ethical demands inherent to intersubjective reality, but also make possible opportunities for development and self-transformation. Thus, our relations with others reveal the creativity that is essential to our engagement with incompleteness. In our commitments to openness in intersubjective reality, we activate this creativity, along with the possibilities it offers us for further development and continually richer engagement with the world.

Conclusion

This project has given a phenomenological account of the incomplete, and thus indeterminate, nature of our experience, focusing in particular on our experience of others. It has shown that only *as* indeterminate are our relations with others inherently creative—creative of the various, determinate forms they may take, but equally and, as significantly, creative of who we become in these relations. As such, they are the foundation of our developed orientation towards the world. Indeed, others make the world present for us: they inform the capabilities that make possible our inhabiting the world, as well as the meaning of the objects that comprise it. Moreover, they reveal to us aspects of the world, and of ourselves, that we are blind to on our own. It is in this sense that, as I have alluded to in various places in this work, our relations with others are analogous to our relation to a work of art: others effect in us a new way of encountering the world that cannot be fully anticipated, and that extends beyond its significance in any single moment to shape our possible future encounters and, in turn, the possible worlds we could inhabit. Thus, as I have argued, our relations with others may not only transform us, but they may transform us by opening us to further transformation. The indeterminate is the ground of this transformation, the material out of which we create and re-create our intersubjective life.

Thus, in our relations with others we take up a relation to what is indeterminate in our experience. Throughout this work I have argued more generally that how we relate to what is indeterminate fundamentally shapes our experience. I have shown that, for the most part, we relate to what is indeterminate negatively, that is, in our failure to notice it as such. As a result, our experience pretends to a coherence and a completeness that it can never actually

accomplish.[325] To illustrate this pretension, I turned to perception, which offers innumerable

examples of the way in which our experience introduces a contrast between what it presents to us

and what is actually there. In Chapter One, my analysis of the temporal nature of perceptual

meaning—namely, its directedness towards its objects, and its reliance on what is retained of

previous moments in its anticipation of future moments—demonstrated its privilege of

determinacy over indeterminacy, and its deference to what is familiar and known in its

encounters with what is unfamiliar and unknown. Moreover, I argued that the temporality of

perceptual meaning demonstrates our own passivity in relation to its development and

maintenance in the normal course of our experience—an insight further supported by Husserl's

account of retroactive crossing out. Thus, even as our perceptual life provides us with moments

of indeterminacy and ambiguity, we also discern in it our own tendency to resolve them and to

make them determinate according to what is already familiar to us.

Our passivity in relation to the meaning of our experience is thematized in Merleau-

Ponty's notion of "anonymity," the significance of which I analyzed in terms of both our

perceptual and intersubjective lives. As the term suggests, anonymity describes the way in

which we are, in an important sense, absent from our own experience; it thus demonstrates an

important consequence of the temporality of meaning. In Chapter Two, I demonstrated that in

our anonymous absorption in the worlds we inhabit—both at the biological level of the living

body, as well as in the lived body, in habits and personal style—we do not fully coincide with the

present; we live at a remove from ourselves, though it is this distance—such as the anonymity of

the digestive system, or that which is developed in habits—that makes our participation in these

worlds possible, and thus that, somewhat paradoxically, gives the illusion of self-possession in

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[325] Edmund Husserl, Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis, trans. Anthony J. Steinbock (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers) 2001, 39: "[Perception is] a constant pretension to accomplish something that, by its very nature, it is not in a position to accomplish."

our capable participation in familiar environments. This illusion is challenged by the reality of a world inconsistent with that which our anonymity subscribes us to. As I demonstrated in my analysis of the anonymous body of perceptual experience, anonymity expresses our concrete relation to the determinate conditions of our lives: if I open my eyes and there is light, I see. Outside perceptual experience, it expresses our relation to what we take to be the determinate conditions of our lives. But, as our study of the phantom limb made clear, these conditions may change. Thus, while anonymity makes possible our inclusion in certain worlds, it also forecloses our entry into others. In this sense, then—more specifically, in its inability to accommodate or respond to indeterminacy—anonymity can hinder our relation to unforeseen possibilities.

Thus, I have argued that there is a fundamental opposition between anonymity and the nature of intersubjective reality. Indeed, as I demonstrated in Chapter Three, our relations with others challenge our sense of anonymity: we may find ourselves defined absolutely by them, and our acceptance of or resistance to their definitions of us attest to the reality they have for us and, moreover, the impossibility of defining ourselves absolutely apart from them. Nevertheless, in analyzing the anonymous body we were able to see the significant ways in which our experience implicitly assumes its shape, without our consent or resistance. The role of the implicit is equally, if not more, significant in our relations with others, in so far as we often fail to notice the ways in which who we are is shaped by others and, still more significantly, the ways in which who others are to us is shaped by our implicit deference to patterns of engagement we have never chosen—and perhaps would never choose—to take up. Thus, our intersubjective life, like our perceptual life and our habitual life, may be governed by anonymity, and, more specifically, by our passively assuming its meaning as determinate rather than by acknowledging our creative role in its establishment out of indeterminacy.

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This work has focused on the fundamental tension of perceptual experience: perception brings us into contact with the world and, in particular, with others, whose fundamental incompleteness, as we have seen, makes possible our further development and transformation. Yet it is in the very nature of perception to obscure this incompleteness, and thus to conceal the dimensions of indeterminacy that others introduce in our experience. By exposing this inherent tension in perception, however, we discern the ethical imperative that emerges in our relations with others, namely, to acknowledge this incompleteness, and thus to acknowledge the consequent ambiguity of our experience. It is only in doing so that we may activate its inherent creative potential. Thus, it is in our relations with others that we can recognize the conflict between the prevalence of anonymity—both its necessity and its developed predominance, even when it is not necessary—and our distinctive capacity to create and continually transform the meaningfulness of our experience.

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