



NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY
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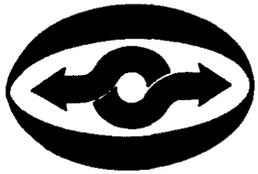
The Visible and the Invisible

MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY

EDITED BY CLAUDE LEFORT

TRANSLATED BY ALPHONSO LINGIS





Northwestern University
STUDIES IN *Phenomenology &*
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The Visible and the Invisible

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

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the Invisible

FOLLOWED BY WORKING NOTES

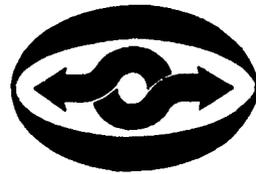
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Contents

Editor's Foreword / xi
Editorial Note / xxxiv
Translator's Preface / xl

THE VISIBLE AND THE INVISIBLE: PHILOSOPHICAL INTERROGATION

- 1 Reflection and Interrogation / 3
- 2 Interrogation and Dialectic / 50
- 3 Interrogation and Intuition / 105
- 4 The Intertwining—The Chiasm / 130
- 5 [APPENDIX] Preobjective Being: The Solipsist
World / 156

WORKING NOTES / 165

Index / 277

Chronological Index to Working Notes / 279

Editor's Foreword

HOWEVER EXPECTED it may sometimes be, the death of a relative or a friend opens an abyss before us. How much more so when it comes absolutely unannounced, when it can be ascribed neither to illness, nor to age, nor to a visible concourse of circumstances, when, moreover, he who dies is so alive that habitually we had come to relate our thoughts to his, to seek in him the strength we lacked, and to count him among the truest witnesses of our undertakings. Such was the sudden death of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and such was his personality, that all those who were bound to him by friendship knew the bitter truth of this affliction by the shock it sent into their lives. But now they have yet to hear the silence of a voice which, though it had always come to them charged with personal accents, seemed to them to have always spoken and to be destined to speak always.

It is a strange silence to which the interrupted conversation abandons us—where we forget the death of the writer only to return to it by another route. The work has come to an end, and, simply because everything in it is said, we are suddenly confronted with it. The term has come too soon, we think, but this regret does not affect the evidence that the work is born the moment it is closed. From now on it is what it says and nothing more, a complete word that refers only to itself, rests only on itself, and from which the memory of its origin fades away. The writer has disappeared; henceforth we read his work. To it—no longer to him—we turn with expectation. A profound change: for we doubt not that attention and patience will suffice for the meaning the work bears inscribed in itself to come to us. Now

everything induces this meaning, even the ideas we would judge most contestable, since in their own way they also teach us the truth of the discourse. Yesterday we still thought the writer was only responding to the questions we put to ourselves, or formulating those that arose from our common situation in the world. The things at the end of his look were the same as those we saw or could see from our place. His experience was, to be sure, singular, but it developed within the same horizons as our own, nourished itself with the same refusal of ancient truths and the same uncertainty of the future. Whatever was the prestige he enjoyed in our eyes, we knew well that his function invested him with no power, that he only took the risk of naming what in the present had no name, that the route was blazed under his steps as it opens under our own when we set out to advance. Thus we discovered his writings with the astonishment due to all that is new, without ever throwing off our reserve before what we admired most, so little sure were we of what thought they would bring or what consequences they would develop within us, and aware that the author himself did not know how far he would have to go. Without being his equal, we were close to him, because we were subject to the same rhythm of the world, participating in the same time, equally without support. Now that the work owes nothing more to its author, a new distance is established between it and us, and we become another reader. Not that our power to criticize will be diminished. It is possible that we will detect uncertainties, lacunae, discordances, even contradictions; in any case, the variety of the ideas and their genesis are palpable to us: for example, we measure the difference that separates the last writings from the early works. But the critique does not cast doubt on the existence of the work; it is still a means of rejoining it, for this very movement, these divergencies, these contradictions we observe belong to it as its own. The obscurity in which the work remains is no less essential than the luminous passages where its intention appears unveiled. More generally, there is nothing in the work that does not bespeak it and manifest its identity—what it states and what it passes over in silence, the content of its propositions and its style, the frank way it has to proceed to its goal, and its detours or its digressions. Everything that solicits the attention indicates a route that leads to it and is equally an overture to what it is.

Whence comes this shift of the reader's gaze, upon the disappearance of the writer? It is that, metamorphosed now into a work, the sole function of the writer's experience is no longer to render intelligible the reality before which it takes form. Doubtless the work remains a mediator—we seek in it a way of access to the present and past world, learn from it the measure of our own task of knowledge—but the peculiarity of this mediator is that it henceforth is a part of the world to which it leads. The work from which the writer has withdrawn has become a work among others, a part of our cultural milieu, and contributes to situate us in relation to it, since it finds its meaning only within the horizons of that culture and thus renders it present to us while drawing for us a singular figure of it. It is a thing that exists by itself, which, to be sure, would be nothing had it not its origin in the writer and would fall into oblivion if the reader ceased to interest himself in it; yet nevertheless the work does not depend entirely on either—both writer and reader also depend on it, inasmuch as it is true that the memory of what the writer was will survive only through the work and that men will discover the work only on condition that they let themselves be guided by it toward the domain of thought in which it once settled. And as we question after him this thing that has conquered a space of its own in the spiritual universe the writer questioned, it connects up to that spiritual universe in a thousand ways, radiating in all the directions of the past and the future, finally acquiring its true meaning only when it is acknowledged to be a modulation of a thought without origin nor term, an articulation within a discourse perpetually recommenced. The work therefore lives on the outside. Like things of nature, like facts of history, it is a being of the outside, awakening the same astonishment, requiring the same attention, the same exploration of the gaze, promising by its sole presence a meaning of an order other than the significations contained in its statements. It does not belong to the world like the rest, since it exists only in order to name what is and the bond that attaches us to what is. But, in naming, it exchanges its own presence for that of the things, borrows from them their objectivity: it imprints itself in what it expresses. We are compelled to see the world in it only because in the moment it converts all things into things thought, the thought compounds itself with the things,

ballasts itself with their weight, lets itself be caught up in their movement, their duration, their exteriority, and appropriates them to itself only by breaking with its own origins. Such a rupture is no doubt evinced by every work as soon as it is written but is not completely consummated until the thinker is no longer there. For, from then on, the events that marked his life, those of his personal history—the private history that the reader always knows something about, for the writer most discreet about himself never entirely succeeds in dissimulating it, or the history of his activities, his discoveries, his contentions with his contemporaries—and those of the public history, whose effects we undergo while they cede to it the efficacy we attributed to them, cease orientating our gaze and pass into the state of anecdotal references, to give place to the reality of the work which retains from them only their meaning. Deprived of their former figure and their former power, they are inscribed in a new temporality and come to serve a new history; metamorphosed into their meaning, they henceforth sustain an enigmatic correspondence with other events we know likewise to live in the depths of the past; changed into general powers, they hold under their dominion a domain of being to which neither dates nor places are assignable with precision.

Thus the withdrawal of the things from the world accompanies the withdrawal of him who thinks them, and the work exists completely only in virtue of this double absence, when, all things having become thoughts and all thoughts having become things, it suddenly seems to draw the whole of being to itself and to become, by itself alone, a source of meaning.

It is therefore not saying much to say that the work survives the writer, that, when its incompleteness will be forgotten, we will know only the plenitude of its meaning. This plenitude is *de jure*. The work alone seems to have a positive existence, for, even though its fate be suspended on the decision of future readers to let it speak, at least each time they will turn to it, it will come to interpose itself, as on the first day, between him who reads and the world to which he is present, compelling him to question that world in it and to relate his own thoughts to what it is.

Such is the fascination the finished work exercises on its reader that for a moment it renders vain all recrimination of the death of the writer. The writer disappears just when he was preparing for new beginnings, and the creation is interrupted,

forever beneath the expression it announced, from which it was to draw its final justification. But, whatever be the consternation of him who considers the absurd denouement—of him, in particular, to whom is given the sad privilege of entering the room where the writer worked, of measuring with his gaze the abandoned labor, the notes, the plans, the drafts which bear everywhere the palpable trace of a thought in effervescence, on the verge of finding its form—it is still associated with the memory of the man to whom, suddenly, to pursue his task was forbidden. Once this memory fades, it will be of little importance—one persuades oneself—to know when the author died, in what circumstances, and whether or not he still had the power to continue. For just as we cannot imagine, as we have no need to imagine, the movements of thought that accompany his creation, his interior disorder, his hesitations, the endeavors in which he gets bogged down and from which he returns after efforts spent in pure waste, the stammerings among which his language takes form, neither can we find in the ultimate defeat in which his enterprise sinks the matter for a reflection on his work.

But what does it mean that a work becomes foreign to the conditions of its creation? Do we not have to understand that it is beyond completion as well as incompleteness? And, indeed, how could a work ever be completed, in the ordinary sense of that word? To think that it were, one would have to suppose that its meaning were rigorously determined, that it one day would have been able to acquire, by the statement of certain propositions, such a coherence that any new word would have become superfluous; one would have to see in it a long chain of demonstrations destined to reach its term in a final proof. But the power we recognize in the work to solicit the reflection of future readers indefinitely, to join into one same interrogation the questions they put to the work and those that arise out of their own experience would forthwith become unintelligible. A completed work would be a work which the author would have entirely mastered and which, for this very reason, the reader would have only to take possession of in his turn; it would have, consequently, through all those who read it but one sole reader. Then we could not say that it would remain present to men, despite the time passed by since the moment of its creation; not because the truths discovered should cease to be valid as such, but because,

fixed once and for all in operations of cognition that could always be repeated, they would constitute a simple acquisition to which it would be useless to return.

The work, we said, fascinates; the moment the author disappears, it detaches us from him and compels us to see it as future readers will see it—but that does not mean that it has gained a definite identity outside of time. Far from withdrawing from our time, and from all time, it invades the field of the past and of the future under our eyes; it is present beforehand in what is not yet, and the meaning of this presence is in part hidden from us. We have no doubt that it will speak when we will no longer be there to hear it—as the works of the past remotely distant from their author and their first readers continue to speak—and we know likewise that others will read in it what we are not in a position to read, that the most well-founded interpretations will not exhaust its meaning. The new time it initiates, if it be different from the time of *real* history, is not foreign to it, for at every moment it exists in the triple dimension of present, past, and future, and, if it remains the same, it remains always in expectation of its own meaning. It is not only its image that is renewed; it itself endures, for its duration is essential, since it is made to accept the test of the changes of the world and of the thought of the others. Only from this point of view has it a positive existence—not because it is what it is once and for all, but because it provides for thought indefinitely, it will never be wanting to whomever questions it, and tomorrow as yesterday it will be involved with our relations with the world.

Whether the writer's labor seems to have come to its term or not is, therefore, of little importance: as soon as we are confronted with the work, we are faced with the same indetermination; and the more we penetrate into its domain, the more our knowledge increases, and the less we are capable of putting a limit to our questions. In the end we have to admit that we communicate with it only by reason of this indetermination. We truly welcome what thought it gives only because this gift has no name, because it does not sovereignly dispose of its own thoughts but remains under the dominion of the meaning it wishes to transmit.

We have then to reconsider the fate of the work. We thought we had exchanged the misfortune of the interrupted creation for the security and repose of the accomplished work. In it we found

plenitude of meaning and solidity of being. It is true that its presence is reassuring, since it has no limits, since it rightfully has its place among the works of the past and radiates as far as it pleases us to imagine in the direction of the future, since the very idea that it could one day fade out from the memory of men does not change the certitude that so long as literature will convey an interrogation of our relation with the world it will remain a living guidemark. Yet this presence presents an enigma, for the work evokes an attention to itself only to render palpable a certain impossibility of being. The work gives a singular figure to this impossibility but does not overcome it. It is essential to the work that it bear witness to it, remaining separated from itself as it remains separated from the world whose meaning it wishes to capture.

Thus again we discover death in the work, because its power is bound to its final impotency, because all the routes it opens and will always keep open are and will be without issue. In vain we try to brush aside the menace of this death: we imagine that what the work could not say others will say in the future, but what it has not said belongs properly to it, and the thoughts it awakens will be inscribed only far from it in a new work, by virtue of a new beginning. The meaning it dispenses always remains in suspense; the circle it traces circumscribes a certain void or a certain absence.

Such is, perhaps, the reason for our confusion before the uncompleted work; it brutally confronts us with an essential ambiguity from which more often than not we prefer to turn away. What is disconcerting is not that the last part of the discourse has been taken from us or that the goal the writer was approaching will be henceforth inaccessible (since it is a fact that that goal will never be attained); it is that we have discovered necessity inscribed in the work—the underlying movement by which it installs itself in speech so as to open itself to an inexhaustible commentary of the world, its advent to an order of existence in which it seems established for always—and that, in the same moment, this obscure decree which cuts it short of its intention throws it back to the *de facto* frontiers of its expression and suddenly makes doubt arise as to the legitimacy of its undertaking. We can, to be sure, convince ourselves that the uncertainty to which it abandons us motivates and supports our questioning concerning the world, that it still speaks when it is

silent by the power it has to designate what is and what will always be beyond the expressible; yet the fact remains that it was destined for the incessant unveiling of meaning, that all its truth was in that disclosure, and that it could not be terminated without the veil enshrouding it in its turn, and without its ways being lost in the dark.

He to whom these thoughts come is the less disposed to forget them before Maurice Merleau-Ponty's last writing as he knows that they were Merleau-Ponty's own thoughts, and he is still learning from him to see where they lead him. If we reread, for example, "The Philosopher and His Shadow," "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence," the texts written for *Les Philosophes célèbres*, or if we simply read the pages he left us after his death, we will see that he constantly questioned himself about the essence of the philosophical work. It was already a problem for him to understand the strange bond that connected his enterprise with that of his predecessors. Better than anyone, he has brought into the open the ambiguity of a relation that at the same time opens us and closes us to the truth of what was thought by another, disclosing the profusion of meaning behind us and simultaneously revealing an impassable distance from the present to the past in which the meaning of the philosophical tradition dies away and there arises the exigency to take up again in solitude, without exterior support, the labor of expression. And how could the questions he put to himself before the past have ceased to solicit him when he turned to the future of philosophy and sought to measure the import of his own words? It was the same thing to admit that, however rich in meaning they were, the works of the past were never entirely decipherable and did not deliver us from the necessity of thinking the world as if it had to be thought for the first time, and to admit to those who would come after us the right to see, in their turn, with a new view or, at least, to bear the center of the philosophical interrogation *elsewhere*. At the same time he contested the idea that the philosopher's enterprise had ever coincided with the construction of the system, and, for the same motive, he refused to raise his own experience to the absolute and seek in it the law of every possible experience. He was convinced that the work remains a source of meaning only because, in his own time, the writer was able to think what the present had provided for his

thought. He believed that it is in taking possession anew of the former present that we communicate with it, but that this communication is always impeded, necessitated as we are in our turn to conceive all things from the point of view at which we are. He was equally convinced of the legitimacy of his own research, of his power, certainly, to speak for others who would know nothing of his situation, but he was convinced also of his impotency to make that which gave his value to his questions and which depended essentially on his idea of the truth be maintained henceforth in the same light. Thus, he thought, our labor of expression rejoins that of the others only by ways we do not master, and we must always doubt that they come to seek in it what we seek in a movement that seems to us to be the very movement of philosophical truth. And, to be sure, such a doubt never destroyed in his mind the idea of a unity of philosophy. It is precisely because philosophy is, in his eyes, continual questioning, that it each time enjoins us to presuppose nothing, to neglect the acquired, and to run the risk of opening a route that leads nowhere. By virtue of the same necessity, each undertaking presents itself as irremediably solitary, yet akin to all those that have preceded it and will follow it. There is indeed, therefore, in spite of the appearances, a great conversation which develops, within which the words of each merge, for if they never compose a history articulated logically, at least they are caught up in the same thrust of language and destined to the same meaning. But the certitude that such a conversation sustains us could not efface the frontiers between the works and assure us of being true to it when we discover in our experience the summons to thought. The ambiguity is never settled, since at no moment can we detach completely the interrogation from the works in which it has found its form, since it is in penetrating into their enclosure that we are truly initiated into it, and since finally to question by ourselves is still to speak, to find the measure of our search in a language. Thus we always run up against the fact of the work and its obscurity, and all our questions concerning the world, those we think we discover by reading our predecessors and those we think we draw from ourselves, turn out necessarily to be doubled by a question regarding the *being* of language and of the work: a question that does not nullify the conviction that meaning is given to us, but which increases at the same time as that conviction, since the founda-

tion of this meaning and the relation of the work with what is remain obscure.

That we should, now that Merleau-Ponty is dead, look at his work as one work among others, as he himself looked and taught us to look at the work of the others, is in a sense of no help to us. It is not because he does not permit himself to reduce meaning to the thought the world provides him in the present and marks out in advance the place of our freedom that we can more easily assume it, determine what his task was, and what would be our own within philosophy. When the constitutive paradox of the work becomes palpable to us (the fact that it wants to name being as such and confesses that it repeats in its own being the enigma with which it is confronted, that it lays claim to the *whole* of interrogation without being able to do better than to open a route whose direction is for the others forever uncertain) and when the ambiguity of our relation with it is revealed (that is, that we learn to think in it and, in our inability to take possession of its domain, have to bear our thoughts *elsewhere*) our indecision only increases. But perhaps in recalling these questions, which were those of our philosopher, we are better disposed to receive his thought, in particular the last writing he was only able to begin, to weigh the event of this last beginning in which his enterprise was to find its term, and to understand how the meaning of his discourse is attested in the being of his work.

At the time of his death, Merleau-Ponty was preparing a work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, of which only the first part was written. It bears witness to his effort to give a new expression to his thought. A reading of some of the essays reassembled in *Signs*, the preface he wrote for them, and "The Eye and the Mind," all works that belong to the last period of his life, suffice to convince oneself that, far from constituting the definitive state of his philosophy, his first works, justly celebrated, had only laid down the foundations of his enterprise and created in him the necessity to go further.¹ But *The Visible and the Invisible* was to bring fully into the open the route traversed since the double critique of idealism and empiricism had brought him to a

1. *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston, Ill., 1964); "The Eye and the Mind," trans. Carleton Dallery, in *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston, Ill., 1964).

new continent. In the pages that remain for us and the working notes that accompany them, the intention becomes manifest to take up again the early analyses of the thing, the body, the relation between the seer and the visible, in order to dissipate their ambiguity and in order to show that they acquire their full meaning only outside of a psychological interpretation, when they are enveloped in a new ontology. It alone can now ground their legitimacy, as it alone will permit a connection of the criticisms addressed to the philosophy of reflection, dialectics, and phenomenology—criticisms hitherto dispersed and apparently tributary of the empirical descriptions—by disclosing the impossibility of further maintaining the *point of view of consciousness*.

When Merleau-Ponty undertakes this labor, he no doubt judges that he has his work before him, not behind him. He does not think of complementing or correcting his previous writings, making them more accessible to the public, or simply defending them against the attacks made against them as if they had in his eyes a defined identity. What he has already done counts only inasmuch as he discovers in it the finality of a task; his *acquisitions* have value only because they give the capacity to continue, which can be exercised only at the cost of an overturning of the prior work, its reorganization according to new dimensions. The certainty that his first attempts were not vain comes to him only from the necessity to which they commit him to turn back to them in order to think them through and do justice to what they demand.

To be sure, the reader could not entirely share this sentiment. For him, the things said have a weight that binds the writer to them and draws us to them. When he reads the first works of Merleau-Ponty, he discovers what is already a philosophy. While they do awaken in him a thousand questions which dispose him to await the continuation, and even while this expectancy situates him, as we said, in the same time as that of the author, still he perceives ideas, if not theses, of whose consistency he has no doubt. With these ideas he will henceforth confront the writer's words, to seek their confirmation, or, on the contrary, variations, even to see a repudiation. But, for the writer, the *said* weighs with another weight; it institutes a muffled pressure on speaking, it is what he must take charge of, what he will always have to count on—nowise a positive reality. The

ideas he has behind himself are hollow, the more efficacious in that they lack all the thought they call for, and it is this very determined void that supports his enterprise. And, no doubt, nothing can make the writer's perspective coincide with that of the reader, for their illusion arises from complementary motives. As has often been observed, the one cannot see what he writes and writes because he does not see, while the other can only see. The work which the author cannot look at is in his eyes as if it did not exist, and it is always in writing that he seeks to ascertain what it is to be, while, when addressed to our reader's view, the work tempts us to consider it as a thing among others, a thing that is since it is perceived, and of which only its properties have yet to be known. This distance from one perspective to the other suddenly increases infinitely with the death of the philosopher, for it is his whole work that is converted into something said and henceforth gives itself out with the appearance of an object. Even when, upon reading his personal papers, we discover the image of his future work which he formed for himself, it does not unsettle our certitude of being before a work; and the last writing—in spite of its incompleteness—furnishes again the occasion to size up that work, particularly inasmuch as it dispenses final information about its nature. And yet upon discovering this last writing our illusion wavers. Natural as it appears to us to seek in it, if not the final meaning, at least what will give their final meaning to the antecedent works, still it is equally difficult to recognize this completion under the strokes of an introduction where the questions multiply, where the answers are always deferred, where the thought constantly depends on a future discourse, henceforth prohibited.

And, in fact, such is the function of the hundred and fifty manuscript pages to which *The Visible and the Invisible* is reduced: to introduce. The intention is to direct the reader toward a domain which his habits of thought do not make immediately accessible to him. It is a question, in particular, of persuading him that the fundamental concepts of modern philosophy—for example, the distinctions between subject and object, essence and fact, being and nothingness, the notions of consciousness, image, thing, which are in constant use—already implicate a singular interpretation of the world and cannot lay claim to special dignity when our intention is precisely to go back to face

our experience, in order to seek in it the birth of meaning. The author endeavors to state first why it has become necessary to start anew, why we can no longer think within the framework of the former systems, nor even build on the ground in which we see them, different as they are in their orientation, to be enrooted. He calls for an examination of our condition such as it is before science and philosophy compose a translation of it according to the exigencies of their respective languages, and before we come to forget that they themselves have to account for their own origin. But this examination is not presented, it is only announced; only some guidemarks give an indication of what would be a description of experience faithful to the experience. The very form of the discourse is a caution. Constant reservations, allusions to what will be said later, the conditional form forbid enclosing the thought in the present statements. When the time comes, the writer is in effect saying, the true meaning of the exposition will disclose itself; the argument, he adds, would be more extensive were he not in a hurry to indicate first the main lines of his research. It would be wrong to take these precautions to be artifices; the pages left us have to be read as the author wished them to be read, with the thought that all that is said here is still provisional, and, since our waiting for the continuation cannot be satisfied, it is necessary to read them as they are, bound up with the missing pages: however strong may be our inclination to seek in the present field of discourse a meaning that suffices to itself, we cannot ignore the void it bears in its center. The work is the more lacunate in that it takes form before us only to designate what has become impossible for it to say. And no doubt the first justice to be done to it is to see it as it presents itself, to know the state of privation in which it puts us, to measure the loss it makes palpable, to know, finally, that this loss cannot be made good, and that no one could give expression to what has remained for it inexpressible.

But perhaps we err yet more seriously if, thus convincing ourselves that the first part of *The Visible and the Invisible* has the value of an introduction, we would wish to conclude that it does not reach the essential. That would already be a failure to recognize the nature of the work of thought, for in it the initiation is always decisive, the truth of the itinerary is always anticipated in the first step. Even more, at a moment of discourse there is created a relation between what has been said and what

is not yet said, which doubles every statement and brings to birth, beyond the succession of the ideas, a depth of meaning in which they coexist, prove to be consubstantial, and, without ceasing to be inscribed in time, are imprinted simultaneously in one same field—so that, once this dimension is opened, we are put in the presence of the work, and the work survives the amputation inflicted on it by fate. But, in this particular case, it would be especially a failure to recognize the intention of the writer, who, from the start of his work, strives to render palpable the bond between all the questions of philosophy, their reciprocal implication, the necessity of the interrogation whence they proceed, and, far from devoting himself to preliminary considerations, assembles in a first draft most of the themes he means to stir up again and again in the continuation. This first part does not offer us, for example, the exposition of a method: it contains rather a caution against what is commonly called method, that is, against undertaking to define an order of demonstration that would be valid of itself, independently of an effective development of thought. It demands that the meaning emerge from the description of experience and of the difficulties it harbors as soon as we want to think it in terms of the categories of the past philosophy—or think it, in general. It does not wish to state a principle or principles that would permit the reconstructing of experience but proposes to explore it in all directions, at the same time questioning our relation with the world as we think we live it naïvely as well as the cultural environment in which this relation is inscribed and acquires a determined status. But, for this project to take form, we must already have sized up our situation; we must (and this is indeed the task Merleau-Ponty assigns himself in the beginning) examine the movement that inclines us to give our adherence to things and to one another and the ambiguities to which it exposes us: why it is irresistible, and why, as soon as we wish to think it out, it transforms itself into an enigma. We must confront what the writer calls our “perceptual faith” with the truths of science, discover that this science, which appears to sovereignly dispose of its object inasmuch as it constructs it from its definitions and in conformity with its ideal of measurement, is unable to elucidate the experience of the world from which, without saying so, it draws, and, finally, that when in its operations it comes upon the trace of an involvement in the real of the subject of knowledge, it proves to

be as unable as is the common consciousness to give it a status. Finally we must traverse again the route of reflection which is that of modern philosophy—at whose term all the problems appear solved, since thought doubles now the perceptual life over its whole extension and bears into it the principle for a discrimination between the true and the false, the real and the imaginary—and see in what conditions this “solution” is reached, at the cost of what mutilation our situation is converted into a simple object of knowledge, our body into a thing like any other, perception into the thought of perceiving, speech into pure signification, by what artifices the philosopher succeeds in dissimulating to himself his inherence in the world, in history, and in language.

This first elucidation already implies a reciprocating motion between the description of experience and the critique of philosophical knowing, not that we ought to denounce the errors of theory in face of what is, but because, far from rejecting the past philosophy so as to edify a new system on a *tabula rasa*, we learn *in it* to see better, and, taking over its enterprise, seeking only to carry it out all the way, we clarify our own situation starting from what thought it gives us about the world. Thus we are cast into the middle of the research, already occupied in plowing the field of our questions, articulating them in relation to each other, and discovering the necessity that commands them, when we thought we were only beginning to move.

In a sense, there is indeed a beginning, but in another sense this image is misleading. For it is at the same time true that the author calls for a new start and that he nevertheless refuses to search for a point of origin that would permit the tracing out of the way of absolute knowledge. Perhaps in this his enterprise differs most profoundly from that of his predecessors. He was so convinced of the impossibility of philosophy establishing itself as a pure source of meaning that he wished first to denounce its illusion. Thus, in the first drafts for an introduction, he started with the observation that we cannot find an origin in God, in nature, or in man, that such attempts in fact converge in the myth of a total explicitation of the world, of a complete adequation between thought and being, which nowise takes into account our insertion in the being of which we speak; that, moreover, this myth no longer sustains any fruitful research in our time, and that to dissipate it is not to fall back into scepticism

and irrationalism but is to know for the first time the truth of our situation. This is an idea so constant in him that we find it again expressed in the last working note, written two months before his death:

[My plan] must be presented without any compromise with *humanism*, nor moreover with *naturalism*, nor finally with theology—Precisely what has to be done is to show that philosophy can no longer think according to this cleavage: God, man, creatures—which was Spinoza's division (p. 274).

If there is need of a recommencement, it is therefore in a wholly new sense. It is not a matter of clearing out ruins in order to lay a new foundation; it is rather a matter of recognizing that, whatever we may say about being, we inhabit it with our whole selves, our labor of expression is still an installation in it, finally our interrogation is, for the same reason, without origin and without termination, since our questions always arise from older questions and since no answer can dissipate the mystery of our relation with being.

Kafka already said that the things presented themselves to him "not by their roots, but by some point or other situated toward the middle of them." He doubtless said it to express his distress, but the philosopher who frees himself from the myth of the "root" resolutely accepts being situated in this midst and having to start from this "some point or other." This restraint is the sign of his attachment, and it is because he submits to it that the hope is given him of progressing from one domain to another, in the interior labyrinth where the frontiers of the visible fade, where every question about nature leads to a question about history, every question of this kind to a question about the philosophy of nature or of history, every question about being to a question about language. In such an enterprise one can see stages but cannot distinguish the preparations from the exploration itself. Speaking of his research, Merleau-Ponty says in one place that it is an "ascent on the spot"; very often he sees it describe a circle, bringing him to pass by the same stopping points again and again. Whatever the image is, it prevents us from thinking that we would not be at grips with the essential from the beginning. On the contrary, we have to admit that the introduction is the first traversing of the circle and that, brought to its term, the work would not thereby have exceeded the limits

or terminated the movement, inasmuch as it is certain that it is in *these* limits, by *this* movement that it discovers its power of expression.

Thus it is at the same time true that the hundred and fifty manuscript pages to which *The Visible and the Invisible* is now reduced comprise its beginning and still present themselves to us as an introduction, and that they are more than that, bearing the meaning of the work and calling upon us to discover it in them; that the continuation of the work would have been something very different from the illustration or commentary of the ideas stated in the first part, and that the first part anticipates the continuation, permits us to evoke it.

But perhaps this paradox would surprise us less if we saw how it is founded in the language of the work, in the labor of writing such as the writer conceived it. It is a noteworthy fact that should we wish to reconstitute the principal articulations of the work he was preparing, we would find it materially impossible to do so. To be sure, numerous working notes, early drafts, some rare indications of an outline of extreme brevity, all of which do not agree among themselves, give an indication of the amplitude of his research. But to know that it was to return at length to the problem of perception and in particular to devote a good deal of space to the recent works on experimental and Gestalt psychology, that the analysis of the concept of nature would have required a description of the human organism, animal behavior, and the examination of the phenomena of evolution, that these studies themselves would have commanded the critique of what the author called the "complex of Western philosophy," that this critique, in its turn, was to result in a new conception of history and of the nature-history relationship, and that finally (and this is the least dubious of all the hypotheses) the work was to conclude with a reflection on language and that particular form of language which is the philosophical discourse, returning thus at its term to the mystery of its origin—this yet leaves us ignorant of the route that would have been followed, the order of the stages, or the revolutions of the thought. How then could one think that Merleau-Ponty's reluctance to draw up plans, to prepare with schemata what he intended to say, and to hold himself to his projects was a matter of temperament? The truth is indeed rather that his experience as a man philosophiz-

ing coincided with his experience as a writer, prevented him from dominating his own work, as he for whom meaning can be once entirely possessed imagines he dominates his work. In this sense, he would have to test it in the writing. Convinced that there is no privileged point whence nature, history, and being itself, are unveiled, or, as he says so often, that high-altitude thinking detaches us from the truth of our situation, it was necessary at the same time that he forego the illusion of seeing his own work as a spectacle, oblige himself to make his way in semi-obscurity in order to discover the interior connection of his questions, and fully comply with what demands to be said here and now without ever giving himself over to the security of a meaning already traced out, already thought. Thus it is in the end for one sole and same reason that we are led to seek in what is written the essence of the work and prevented from imagining the sequence of the discourse as the simple prolongation of its beginning. The language of the philosopher teaches us a necessity that is not logical but ontological, such that we find in it more than a meaning, a meaning of meaning, and, as soon as it is wanting, we lose contact with what gave depth, movement, and life to the ideas. Attentive as we should be to the word of the writer, allowing it all its resonances in the space it inhabits, we are accordingly forbidden to cross the limits of this space and violate the zone of silence that envelops it. It is this speech and this silence that must be heard together—this silence which succeeds the speech, which is not nothing since it still depends on the speech and henceforth sustains it.

Merleau-Ponty already was meditating on the relation between speech and silence; in a note he writes:

There would be needed a silence that envelops the speech anew, after one has come to recognize that speech enveloped the alleged silence of the psychological coincidence. What will this silence be? As the reduction finally is not for Husserl a transcendental immanence, but the disclosing of the *Weltthesis*, this silence will not be the contrary of language (p. 179).

Thus we were to understand that speech is between two silences: it gives expression to an experience that is mute and ignorant of its own meaning, but only in order to make that experience appear in its purity; it does not break our contact with the things, but it draws us from our state of confusion with

all things only in order to awaken us to the truth of their presence and to render palpable their relief and the tie that binds us to them. At least such is the speech that speaks in conformity with its essence and, where philosophical discourse is concerned, that does not cede to the vertigo of eloquence, does not wish to suffice to itself or close in upon itself and upon its sense, but opens upon and leads to the outside. But if speech, which is born from silence, can seek its conclusion in silence and make that silence not be its contrary, this is because between experience and language there is, in principle, exchange; it is because experience is not something one could coincide with, because it bears a transcendence, since already, in itself, it is differentiation, articulation, structuration, and because in some way it calls for language; it is because language is also experience, because there is, as Merleau-Ponty writes so well, a *being* of language in which the enigma of being is repeated, because beyond the movement of the pure significations there remains the silent mass of the discourse, that which is not of the order of the sayable, and because the greatest merit of expression is to disclose this continuous passage from the word to being and from being to the word, or this double openness of the one upon the other. To think through this exchange is no doubt what *The Visible and the Invisible* was to devote itself to, at the end. But it is disconcerting to find it evoked in the last lines, in the writer's last words. Merleau-Ponty writes:

In a sense the whole of philosophy, as Husserl says, consists in restoring a power to signify, a birth of meaning, or a wild meaning, an expression of experience by experience, which in particular clarifies the special domain of language. And, in a sense, as Valéry said, language is everything, since it is the voice of no one, since it is the very voice of the things, the waves, and the forests. And what we have to understand is that there is no dialectical reversal from one of these views to the other; we do not have to reassemble them into a synthesis: they are two aspects of the reversibility which is ultimate truth (p. 155).

That chance seals the book on *ultimate truth*, that the book, still far from the term it aimed at, yet closes on a thought that is its prefiguration—in this the reader will not fail to see a sign—the trace of an admonition, as it were, that the work, in the absence of the man, was able to receive. But this sign could not make us forget the meaning, and we must also recognize that

what is said here, at the last moment, clarifies the problem of the philosophical work—of the work in general, and of this one we are reading. For in it is disclosed the reversibility of experience and language. It is because it brings or claims to bring the task of expression to its furthest limits, because it wishes to gather up the truth of experience such as it is before it is put into words, and, simultaneously, because it wishes to concentrate and exhaust in it all the powers of speech, that it discovers the impossibility of remaining in either intention, sees its movement reverse itself in both directions, and is finally obliged to declare this indetermination, which constitutes its existence. The reversibility of which the philosopher speaks is set forth before he names it in the form of his work. Better: in naming it he only expresses faithfully the meaning of his undertaking. For if it is not vain, it presupposes that we cannot find an absolute in experience nor make of language an absolute, that that anonymous power we call experience or language is not a positive reality that would suffice to itself alone, that there is in being a sort of need for speech and in speech a sort of need for being, indissociable from one another, that to speak and to live are equally the source of questions, and that these questions refer to one another. Thus the "ultimate truth" upon which *The Visible and the Invisible* comes to an end is also that from which the work draws its origin: this truth does not constitute a stopping point; it does not give rest to thought; it rather designates the point of passage which is for the work that of its continued foundation.

We asked: how are we to understand the silence that follows the word? But if we can do so, it is because the word never abolished the silence, that at each moment it leads beyond itself and forbids us to fall back to the limits of the immediately given meaning. The final silence is only made of those silences reassembled; it extends beyond the discourse because it constantly served as its ground. Hence it is one and the same thing to hear this discourse and this silence, to know where to stop at the frontier of the *said*, and to recognize that there is no frontier between language and the world.

Still it is true that if *The Visible and the Invisible* gives us the ability to listen, it is because the questions we put before the work and its incompleteness rejoin those the author put to himself when he obliged himself to write in such a way that a termina-

tion of his enterprise (let us not say a sudden and unforeseeable cessation of speech) was not contrary to it, a termination, whatever it would be, that was to be not only a termination, but was also to signify the absence of any termination. At a given moment he himself indicates the meaning of this task, when, in the course of the work, he asks what philosophical expression can be:

. . . the words most charged with philosophy are not necessarily those that contain what they say, but rather those that most energetically open upon being, because they more closely convey the life of the whole and make our habitual evidences vibrate until they disjoin. Hence it is a question whether philosophy as the reconquest of brute or wild being can be accomplished by the resources of the eloquent language, or whether it would not be necessary for philosophy to use language in a way that takes from it its power of immediate or direct signification in order to equal it with what it wishes all the same to say (pp. 102-3).

An enigmatic passage, no doubt. The answer does not accompany the question. It is not said what would be a work that would deprive itself of the resources of the eloquent language, what would be, to recall a formula used by the author in another circumstance, an "indirect language" of philosophy. We know only that he constantly claimed for it an original mode of expression and by no means thought of substituting for it the language of art or of poetry. However, when we read the writer, this confidence is clarified, for it turns out that his own words do not contain what they say, that their meaning always overflows immediate or direct signification, and that finally their power to open upon being is bound to the force of interrogation that animates them. Should we not understand that the philosophical language is precisely the interrogative language? If that cannot be affirmed in positive terms, it is because no formula can make understood what interrogation is. Merleau-Ponty can indeed, on several occasions, name it, say what it is not—the statement of questions which, like all the questions of cognition, are to disappear before answers—and why it is indefinitely renewed on contact with our experience. Yet every definition would turn us from it by making us forget that it is in life and in language that it unfolds itself, or, better, that it is only life and language, this life and this language, assumed. To do justice to inquiry, it is not enough for the philosopher to declare that it is interminable, that man is never done with asking questions about his situation in

the world, for, true as that may be, such an idea is too general to have consistency. He must also effectively conduct the questioning, provide a route for it, act in such a way that, in the work, the answers aroused by the questions nowhere terminate the reflection, that the passage from one domain of experience to another is always preserved, that meaning unveils itself in our impossibility to remain in any place, that the whole discourse is as one sole sentence where one can distinguish, certainly, moments, articulations, and pauses, but whose content, in each proposition, is never dissociable from the total movement.

And in fact, from start to finish, *The Visible and the Invisible* is an endeavor to keep the questioning open: not an exercise of a methodic and deliberate doubt from which the subject would draw the illusion of detaching himself from all things and which would prepare the reinstatement of a thought sure of its rights, but the continuous exploration of our perceptual life and of our life of knowledge; not the negation of the common certitudes, the destruction of our faith in the existence of the things and of the others, but the adherence to these certitudes, to this faith, to the extent that the very insistence to espouse them discloses that they are indissociably certitude and incertitude, faith and non-faith; a passage as it were through opinion in order to rejoin the ambiguities it harbors; not a refutation of the theories of philosophers, but a return to what was at their origin in order to discover that they lead beyond the answers they gave; an interrogation, finally, which constantly relates to itself, does not lose sight of the condition of the questioner, knows it is caught up in being while it devotes itself to its expression.

If philosophy finds by this language the means to "equal what it wishes all the same to say," it is because the secret of our temporality is expressed by that of the work, because the work teaches us to recognize the continuity, the indivision of an experience where each moment is caught up with all the others in the same propulsion of time, and, simultaneously, to recognize the movement that prevents the fixing of the meaning of the thing, visible or invisible, and makes arise indefinitely, beyond the present given, the latent content of the world.

But when the work reaches this self-consciousness, when it knows that it is and is only the place of interrogation, does it not then silently correspond with its term? For he who goes all the way to the end of interrogation can only discover and make us

discover the contingency of speech. It is one same thing, for him, to confront the obscure region from which his thoughts arise and that in which they are destined to undo themselves. And it is one same thing for us to read everywhere the signs of its presence and to feel its imminent absence. The true interrogation is a frequenting of death, and we are not surprised that the philosopher who rarely names it has nonetheless such great power, in his last writing, to turn us toward it.

CLAUDE LEFORT

Editorial Note

MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY died on May 3, 1961. A manuscript was found among his papers which contained the first part of a work whose composition he had begun two years earlier. It is entitled *The Visible and the Invisible*. We have found no trace of this title before March, 1959. Before then notes concerning this project bear the reference "Being and Meaning," or "Genealogy of the True," or, lastly, "The Origin of Truth."

THE MANUSCRIPT

THE MANUSCRIPT consists of a hundred and fifty large pages covered with a dense handwriting, bearing copious corrections. The text covers both sides of the page.

The date March, 1959 figures on the first page, and page 83 is dated June 1, 1959. Apparently the author composed a hundred and ten pages between spring and summer of the same year; then in the autumn of the following year he returned to the composition of his text, setting aside the last eight pages (pp. 103-10) which would have begun a second chapter. The date November, 1960 is written on the second page 103, above the title "Interrogation and Intuition."

STRUCTURE OF THE WORK

OUTLINES FOR THE WORK are few and do not agree exactly with one another. It is certain that the author was recast-

[xxxiv]

ing his project during the course of its execution. We can, however, presume that the work would have been of considerable length and that the text we possess constitutes only its first part, which was intended to serve as an introduction.¹

Here are the few schemata we found:

- a) March, 1959 (written at the head of the manuscript):
- Part I. Being and World
 - Chap. I. Reflection and interrogation.
 - Chap. II. Preobjective being: the solipsist world.
 - Chap. III. Preobjective being: intercorporeity.
 - Chap. IV. Preobjective being: the inter-world (*l'entremonde*).
 - Chap. V. Classical ontology and modern ontology.
 - Part II. Nature.
 - Part III. *Logos*.

b) May, 1960 (in a note on the first page):
Being and World.

- Part I:
- | | | |
|--------------------|----|-------------------------|
| The vertical world | or | the interrogative being |
| mute | | brute |
| | | wild |
- Part II will be: Wild being and classical ontology.

(and on the second page:)

- Chap. I. The flesh of the present or the "there is."
- Chap. II. The plot (*tracé*) of time, the movement of ontogenesis.
- Chap. III. The body, the natural light, and the word.
- Chap. IV. The chiasm.
- Chap. V. The inter-world and Being.
World and Being.

c) May, 1960 (in a note):

- I. Being and World
- Part I: The vertical World or wild Being.
- Part II: Wild Being and classical ontology.
- Nature
- Man
- God.

1. Cf. Editor's Foreword.

Conclusion: the fundamental thought—Passage to the differentiations of wild Being. Nature—*logos* history.
cultivated being.
The *Erzeugung*.

II. *Physis* and *Logos*.

d) October, 1960 (in a note):

I. Being and World.

Part I: Reflection and interrogation.

Part II: The vertical world and wild Being.

Part III: Wild Being and classical ontology.

e) November, 1960 (in a note):

I. The visible and nature.

1. Philosophical interrogation.

2. The visible.

3. The world of silence.

4. The visible and ontology (wild Being).

II. The word and the invisible.

f) (Undated, but probably of November or December, 1960, in a note:)

I. The visible and nature.

Philosophical interrogation:

interrogation and reflection;

interrogation and dialectic;

interrogation and intuition (what I am doing at the moment).

The visible.

Nature.

Classical ontology and modern ontology.

II. The invisible and *logos*.

These few indications do not permit us to imagine what the work would have been in its matter and in its form. The reader will form a better idea of it when he reads the working notes we are publishing after the text. But at least we can make use of the outlines in order to discern more clearly the organization of the manuscript itself.

For should we follow only the divisions marked out in the text, we would have to confine ourselves to mentioning a Part

One: "Being and World," and a first chapter: "Reflection and Interrogation," while all the other sections would be parallel, all being equally preceded in the notes by the sign §. But note *f*), which confirms and completes the preceding note and which has the interest of having been written at the same time as the chapter "Interrogation and Intuition" (the author specifies: "what I am doing at the moment"), shows that we cannot retain this division. For the title of the first part, "Being and World," has been abandoned and replaced by "The Visible and Nature," the sections preceded by the sign § have been regrouped in terms of their meaning, and it becomes clear that the last two sections do not have the same function as the prior ones.

We have therefore decided to restructure the text according to the last indications left by the author. We have first distinguished three chapters, setting them under the heading "Philosophical Interrogation." The first chapter, "Reflection and Interrogation," with three subdivisions, covers the critique of the perceptual faith, scientism, and the philosophy of reflection (*la philosophie réflexive*). The second, "Interrogation and Dialectic," divided into two parts, consists of the analysis of Sartrean thought and an elucidation of the relations between dialectics and interrogation. The third, "Interrogation and Intuition," contains essentially the critique of Phenomenology.

There remains the problem of situating the last section entitled "The Intertwining—the Chiasm," which note *f*) does not mention. We could make it either the final chapter of "Philosophical Interrogation" or the first chapter of the announced Part Two: "The Visible." Either decision, we believe, can be justified by serious arguments. But in the absence of express indication by the author, the arguments would never appear decisive. In this situation, we have preferred to adopt the solution that involved the least intervention on our part—that is, to let this chapter follow the others.

STATE OF THE TEXT

THE MANUSCRIPT of *The Visible and the Invisible* was worked over at length, as its numerous erasures and corrections show. Yet we cannot suppose that it had reached its definitive state. Certain repetitions would no doubt have been

eliminated; perhaps the manuscript would have been recast even more broadly. In particular, the definitiveness of the beginning of the text is open to doubt, since a note evokes the possibility of a new arrangement of the exposition. The author writes:

Perhaps redo pages 1-13, grouping together: 1. the certitudes (the thing) (the other) (the truth); 2. the incertitudes (the Pyrrhonian difficulties, the contradictions of thematization); 3. one can neither accept the antitheses, nor confine oneself to materialized certitudes→passage to reflection.

On the other hand, we note that the author twice uses the same text of Paul Claudel (cf. below, pp. 103 and 121) without advising the reader of this repetition. The function of the citation in the two passages is such that a broad recasting would have been necessary.

THE WORKING NOTES

WE HAVE THOUGHT IT WELL to include after the text of *The Visible and the Invisible* a certain number of working notes which clarify its meaning. The author was in the habit of jotting down ideas on paper, ordinarily without concerning himself with style nor even obliging himself to compose complete sentences. These notes, which sometimes contain but a few lines and sometimes extend over several pages, constitute drafts for developments that figure in the first part of the work or would have figured in its continuation. From the end of the year 1958 on, they were as a rule dated and labeled.

It was neither possible nor desirable to publish all of them. Their mass would have overshadowed the text, and moreover a good number of them were to be excluded either because they were too elliptical or because they had no direct bearing on the subject of the research.

As soon as a selection proved to be necessary, it posed some problems of interpretation, and we feared lest our judgment be mistaken. But, rather than renounce the project, we have taken on the risk of making a choice among them, convinced as we were that by reason of the variety of the themes taken up, the quality of the reflection, the abrupt but always rigorous expres-

sion of the thought, these notes could render the philosopher's work palpable to the reader.

EDITING OF THE MANUSCRIPT AND THE NOTES

AS FAR AS THE EDITING of the manuscript is concerned, we have limited ourselves in the text to clarifying the punctuation, in concern for facilitating its reading. But in the working notes we have transcribed the text without modification, so as to leave to the expression its first movement.²

Wherever we could, we have furnished the references the working notes required or completed those of the author.

When it was necessary to introduce or restore a term in order to give a sentence its meaning, we have put it between brackets and added an explanatory note at the bottom of the page.

Illegible or doubtful terms are indicated in the course of the text in the following way:

illegible: [?]

uncertain: [truth?].

2. In the English translation, too, we have attempted in the text to remain as faithful to the French as possible, though alterations in punctuation and wording have been made when necessary for clarity. The Working Notes, however, are reproduced exactly as they appeared in the French edition.

French words are given in parentheses when it is helpful to include them. Footnotes of the author, the editor, and the translator are numbered consecutively within each chapter; notes written by the editor or the translator are identified to distinguish them from those of Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty's marginal comments are preceded by an asterisk.

In the Working Notes, short dashes are used as standard punctuation and long dashes are used to separate sentences or quasi-sentences.

A number of mistakes in the French edition have been corrected upon consultation with M. Lefort.—A.L.

Translator's Preface

The Visible and the Invisible was to be MERLEAU-PONTY's phenomenological ontology. It required both a phenomenological inquiry into "the origin of truth" and a philosophy of Nature—of the "wild," uncultivated, preobjective Nature. Most of the manuscript his death interrupted is devoted to a critical examination of Kantian, Husserlian, Bergsonian, and Sartrean method; but one extraordinary constructive chapter—that entitled "The Intertwining—the Chiasm"—introduces the new concepts with which to explore the production of visibility and "the metaphysical structure of our flesh." This manuscript that we now present to the English-speaking public, along with a collection of Merleau-Ponty's working notes, prepares for an ontology of Nature and of truth that shall now come only from its readers. Each reader will find in the range of this thought his own motives to assume and discoveries to appropriate; perhaps this preface may aid him by indicating the central argument that was already forged in the work Merleau-Ponty leaves us.

METHODS

WHAT IS A VISIBLE THING? What is it that makes the visible a thing? And what is the visibility of the thing? These were the questions of a phenomenology of perception; across its long chapters devoted to the critical examination first of the philosophy interwoven in scientific research, then of transcendental philosophy, dialectical philosophy, and intuitionist philosophy, these are also the questions that command *The Visible*

[x]

and *the Invisible*. To endeavor once more to renew these questions is not simply the coquetry that, in fact only provisionally, tries to make seem questionable visibility itself, that is, the very clarity, the very patency of the real. "If the philosopher questions and hence feigns ignorance of the world and of the vision of the world which are operative and take form continually within him, he does so precisely in order to make them speak, because he believes in them and expects from them all his future science."¹

Empiricism was a sort of disbelief in the things, an underestimation of the coherence of the things. The sensible thing is not simply a "wandering troop of sensations" (p. 123); it holds together of itself and can be recognized when it returns. Intellectualism is the recognition of this immanent unity of the things: the constituent moments of the thing are not simply contingently contiguous to one another; they are internally, intentionally, or meaningfully related to one another. Only thus can sensuous data announce or manifest a thing—or, at least, that internal principle, that essence, by which it is one thing and by which it is recognizable. In the midst of the sensuous experience there is an intuition of an essence, a sense, a signification. The sensible thing is the place where the invisible is captured in the visible.

But can we really *understand* this conjuncture? How is this compound of the visible and the invisible possible, without undermining all our positive conceptions of what it means to be visible and what it means to be invisibly? How can there be a compound of the visible with the invisible, if to be invisible is to be essence or signification, to exist in universality, in intemporal and aspatial ideality, and if to be visible is to be opaque quale, existing in the here and the now, and in itself, without transcendence, "a message at the same time indecipherable and evident, which one has or has not received, but of which, if one has received it, one knows all there is to know, and about which in the end there is nothing to say" (p. 131)?

To seriously show how the sensible thing exists between the absolute opacity of the sensuous quale and the absolute transparency of the essence, between the particular and the universal, it would be necessary to show a sensible matter which, in its very

1. See below, p. 4. Hereafter all page references to *The Visible and the Invisible* will be placed in parentheses directly following the quotation.

manner of occupying space and time, presides over space and time. It would be necessary to show a sense that is sensuous and a sensible matter that transcends itself, that is dimensional. But transcendental philosophy, dialectical philosophy, and intuitionist philosophy have rather endeavored to compose the sensible thing with our unreformed ideas of the visible and the invisible.

Thus the philosophy of reflection seeks an intrinsic understanding of the conjuncture of the visible and the invisible in the thing by exhibiting its constitution in a signifying act of the understanding. The transcendental reflection shows how the sense that is intuited is constituted in an act transcending the sense-data. It understands the sense-data to be to the essence in the sensible thing in the relation of sign to signified; then the understanding that constitutes the signified meaning *ipso facto* constitutes the sense-data as signs.

But the reflective analysis thus gives us the explanation of how there is constituted not the coherence and cohesion—the very matter or *flesh*—of the visible, but a pure *passage* from the sign to the signified, from the particular to the universal, from the order of opaque qualia to the order of limpid ideality. The visible thing is not this passage; its coherence is a cohesion, and it makes visible and not only comprehensible a depth of latent being.

It is the claim of the philosophy of negativity² that it alone rigorously and radically grounds a method of direct scrutiny of the sensible thing itself. It is a philosophy not of reflection but of vision (pp. 75 ff, 99 ff), and it renounces in principle every attempt to reconstruct the thing out of constitutive mental acts. It declares that the sole contribution of the seer is to provide—by auto-nihilation—the clearing, the void, the free space in which the thing can be posited and op-posed to the seer, that is, exhibit itself in its own positivity and objectivity. The negativity of the seer and the invisibility of the eyes are essential, for visibility occurs as the event of a clearing in which the light plays, about which a system of faces of the world phosphoresce.

The description of the being of the thing as massive plenitude, absolute positivity, self-identity, objectivity, is the result of this thought that posits the thing upon the ground of the nothingness provided by the non-being of the seer. This method “describes our factual situation with more penetration than had

2. Cf. Sartre.

ever before been done—and yet one retains the impression that this situation is being surveyed from above, and indeed it is . . .” (p. 87). For the analysis does not begin with the sensible thing itself in its own visibility, arising in relief in a field of latent being spread out in distance and in horizons surrounding and even enveloping the seer; rather the analysis is commanded by the meaning of being and the meaning of nothingness. But the concepts of pure Being and pure Nothingness are *constructa*, they are idealizations, and their meaning is held before the thought only because it is fixed in the positivity of language (p. 88). “Is not the experience of the thing and of the world precisely the ground that we need in order to think nothingness in any way whatever?” (p. 162)

And in fact in seeking to make the openness upon being absolute, the philosophy of negativity makes it unintelligible. If the seer is nothingness, the visible forthwith occupies this void with absolute plenitude and positivity. The absolute ontological distance from nothingness to being produces an absolute presence of being to nothingness. But our openness upon being is not this absolute proximity; openness in being occurs in the form of a world, that is, a field, a topography, where nothing visible shows itself without therewith hiding most of itself, and hiding more of the visible behind itself. What makes the visible an openness is this essential explorability, this depth and horizon-structure; to make of openness a “lake of nothingness” is to over-positivize the visible (pp. 67–68, 76–77) and make unintelligible what is being in degrees, in distance, in depth, and in difference.

And if the openness in being is a horizon-structure and not the production of void, then the seer and the visible need no longer be ontological opposites; the horizon includes the seer,³ and the world remains horizon because “he who sees is of it and is in it” (p. 100). “The relation between what I see and I who see is not one of immediate or frontal contradiction; the things attract my look, my gaze caresses the things, it espouses their

3. “No more than are the sky or the earth is the horizon a collection of things held together, or a class name, or a logical possibility of conception, or a system of ‘potentiality of consciousness’: it is a new type of being, a being by porosity, pregnancy, or generality, and he before whom the horizon opens is caught up, included within it” (pp. 148–49).

contours and their reliefs, between it and them we catch sight of a complicity" (p. 76).

The extended critique of the philosophy of negativity, that is, of Sartre, may seem to occupy inordinately Merleau-Ponty's attention in the manuscript we have before us.⁴ But in fact the strange failure of the philosophy of negativity to produce an account of the visible is decisive for Merleau-Ponty's own conception of philosophy. "The real is to be described, and not constructed or constituted," the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Perception* had explained, with simplicity.⁵ But the philosophy that wanted only to empty out the subject of all constitutive power, to make of it a pure openness upon the thing, nonetheless deforms the thing and does not describe it. Positivism was not yet overcome when the *Phenomenology of Perception* showed that the sensible field cannot be reduced to the objective, as empiricism, as well as its intellectualist compensation, supposed; the positivist preconception of being recurs even in the philosophy of negativity, which, indeed, is its radical vindication (pp. 98–99). It is because the primordial sensible being lies definitively at a distance and is not a pure positivity that would come to obturate the gaze that philosophy cannot be pure intuition, pure openness. "The sensible is precisely that medium in which there can be *being* without it having to be posited; the sensible appearance of the sensible, the silent persuasion of the sensible is Being's unique way of manifesting itself without becoming positivity, without ceasing to be ambiguous and transcendent" (p. 214). Philosophy then is and remains interrogation⁶—"but

4. Merleau-Ponty here takes pains to correct some of the defects of his earlier reading of *Being and Nothingness* (cf. *Les Aventures de la dialectique* [Paris, 1955], Chap. V): the ontology of Sartre makes of the subject not a "nothingness in general," an unqualified spontaneity, a self-transparent constitutive freedom, but rather "determinate nothingness," qualified and replete with qualities, opaque to itself, lost in the things; what I *am* is a body and a situation (cf. especially pp. 52–57).

5. *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris, 1945), p. iv. [English translation by Colin Smith, *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York and London, 1962), p. x.]

6. Questioning is not an attitude first made possible on the judicative level with the inversion and negation that would come, into the untroubled positivity of the silent world, with language and grammar. On the contrary, "it is not only philosophy, it is first the gaze that questions the things" (p. 103).

neither expects nor receives an answer in the ordinary sense, because it is not the disclosing of a variable or of an unknown invariant that will satisfy this question, and *because the existing world exists in the interrogative mode*" (p. 103; italics added).

These conclusions are reinforced in the criticisms Merleau-Ponty addresses to intuitionist philosophy—Husserlian or Bergsonian. The one seeking an adequate apprehension of the essence, the other seeking the immediate presence of existence, in both cases being as horizon is excluded from consideration in advance: "These are two positivisms" (p. 127).

Philosophy conceived as essential insight is proclaimed to be a return to the things themselves. To study the thing itself would be to study *what it is*, that is, what structure the thing necessarily realizes when it is this thing. If the philosophy of negativity sought to intuit the thing against the abyss of nothingness, the philosophy of essences seeks to intuit the real as it is borne upon the positive structure of the possible. The intuition of this structure would bring the mind into possession of the essence as the pure ideal possibility which the existing thing accomplishes, or specifies, in a moment of time and at a spot of space.

In fact the "intuition" of essences is produced out of an imaginary variation performed on the primal topography of the visible. Precisely Being is visible as a theme for variation because the visible itself is not *in* time and *in* space, but not outside of them either, since it is what in the present announces and harbors an immense latent content of the past, the future, and the elsewhere (p. 114). The visible being that *occupies* the present does so then not with a plenary positivity, but with pregnancy and latency, caught up in "a system of equivalencies, a *Logos* of lines, lights, colors, reliefs, masses, a conceptless presentation of universal Being."⁷ This *Logos* is not the system of positive essences which will be produced from it by abstraction; and the visible it articulates by segregation, modulation, gradation, is not a multiplicity of individual facts each occupying a time and a place in a plenary and univocal fashion—which will be drawn from it by counter-abstraction.

But if the "intuition" of essences is in fact a second operation which aims to put the mind in plenary possession of the ideality

7. *L'Œil et l'esprit* (Paris, 1964), p. 71. [English translation by Carleton Dallery, *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston, Ill., 1964), p. 182.]

at the origin of the real, the Bergsonian intuition which seeks to come back into the immediate presence of the factual existences is equally second and expresses an equally positivist nostalgia for being. Being is occultated across the very spatio-temporal spread of its apparition, that is true; but what we need then to come into contact with its full spread is not a method of undoing the distances to achieve immediate presence and coincidence with it, but rather the "idea of proximity through distance, of intuition as auscultation or palpation in depth" (p. 128). We should need the theory of the Being that *is* in dehiscence. "The immediate is at the horizon, and must be thought as such; it is only by remaining at the distance that it remains itself" (p. 123).

THE VISIBLE

NOT AN ASSEMBLAGE OF PARTICULARS each univocally occupying its *hic et nunc*, not a wandering troop of sensations nor a system constituted by ephemeral judgments (p. 123), not a set of objects whose being is fixed in the norms for objectivity, the visible is a landscape, a topography yet to be explored, uncultivated being still, *wild being* still. "True philosophy is to learn again to see the world"⁸—and yet how sophisticated is the phenomenological naïveté! Already the phenomenology of perception could be elaborated only across the conflict of intellectualism and empiricism;⁹ now the new vision of the visible and the invisible is acquired not by avoiding the false paths of the philosophy of reflection, dialectical philosophy, and intuitionist philosophy, but rather by pursuing those very paths further still. There "we catch sight of the necessity of another operation besides the conversion to reflection, more fundamental than it, of a sort of *hyper-reflection* that would also take itself and the changes it introduces into the spectacle into account" (p. 38); likewise if the dialectic is "unstable" (p. 92), it is a *hyper-dialectic* we need, which recognizes that the statement of positive theses and negative antitheses does not yet yield a dialectical

8. *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. xvi. [Eng. trans., p. xx.]

9. Cf. J.-B. Pontalis, "Note sur le problème de l'inconscient chez Merleau-Ponty," in *Les Temps modernes*, No. 184-85 (Numéro spécial, 1961), p. 291, n. 9.

definition of being (p. 94); finally it is not intuition that the philosopher rejects—"On the contrary everything comes to pass as though he wished to put into words a certain silence he hearkens to within himself" (p. 125); beyond the naïve notion of intuition as the fulfillment of an empty intention by the plenary positivity of being, "we should have to return to this idea . . . of intuition as auscultation or palpation in depth . . ." (p. 128).

What being becomes visible about these paths of hyper-reflection, hyper-dialectic, intuition-palpation?

In his first work Merleau-Ponty had brought forward the notion of structure, of *Gestalt*, as a third notion between facticity and ideality, to name the manner of being proper to the sensible thing. But what, positively, is the *Gestalt*? To say that it is a whole that is not reducible to the sum of its constituent elements, a configuration that is more than the spatio-temporal juxtaposition of its parts, is to supply a negative, exterior designation (p. 204). And it is not yet to understand what makes of the *Gestalt* a sensible being: what makes the unity in it of sensuousness and sense.

"For me it is . . . transcendence that explains . . ." (p. 237). The sensible thing is transcendent: hitherto this has been taken to state the position of its being, but not the manner of its being: it would mean that the sensible thing is exterior to the being of the subject. Thus the account remains within a subject-object epistemology, and the sensible is assimilated to the objective. Merleau-Ponty, defining the thing as a "field being" and as a dimensional fact, unified with the unity of a style, seeks to exhibit transcendence as the manner of being of what becomes visible.¹⁰

The sensible thing is not *in* the here and *in* the now, but it is not intemporal and aspatial either, an ideality. It presides over a region, it is a field being.

When through the water's thickness I see the tiling at the bottom of a pool, I do not see it *despite* the water and the reflections there; I see it through them and because of them. If there were no distortions, no ripples of sunlight, if it were without this flesh that I saw the geometry of the tiles, then I would cease to see it *as it is*

10. "We have to pass from the thing (spatial or temporal) as identity, to the thing (spatial or temporal) as difference, i.e., as transcendence, i.e., as always 'behind,' beyond, far-off . . ." (p. 195)

and where it is—which is to say, beyond any identical, specific place. I cannot say that the water itself—the aqueous power, the sirupy and shimmering element—is *in* space; all this is not somewhere else either, but it is not in the pool. It inhabits it, it materializes itself there, yet it is not contained there; and if I raise my eyes toward the screen of cypresses where the web of reflections is playing, I cannot gainsay the fact that the water visits it, too, or at least sends into it, upon it, its active and living essence.¹¹

The sensible thing is not in space, but, like a direction, is at work across space, presides over a system of oppositional relationships. It is not inserted in a pre-existing locus of space; it organizes a space of planes and fields about itself. Likewise its presence presents a certain contracted trajectory of time. It is for this that it occupies our vision, that it is not transparent like a sign that effaces before the signified. The sensible thing “stops up my view, that is, time and space extend beyond the visible present, and at the same time they are *behind* it, in depth, in hiding” (p. 113).

The unity of the thing is not that of a contingent cluster of particles, nor that of the ideal foreign to spatial and temporal dispersion; its unity is that of “a certain style, a certain manner of managing the domain of space and time over which it has competency, of pronouncing, of articulating that domain, of radiating about a wholly virtual center—in short a certain manner of being, in the active sense, a certain *Wesen*, in the sense that, says Heidegger, this word has when it is used as a verb” (p. 115).

The moving body gives us the primary analogon of what a style or scheme is. Walking is not a “repeatedly-compensated-for falling”; from the first step already a style of walking, a gait, is initiated, a rhythm of movement that propagates itself. The gesture of the hand is not a simple succession of spasms; from its inaugural phase it is a movement commanded by its final phase. And each gesture which thus accomplishes an ordered system of changes of position across a determined trajectory of time launches itself into a new trajectory of time; every gesture is by essence repeatable, tends to prolong itself into a motor habit. This generation of schemes of unity across time and space, this “instability instituted by the organism itself,” this “*fluctuation organized by it, and consequently dominated*” (p.

11. *L'Oeil et l'esprit*, pp. 70–71. [Eng. trans., p. 182.]

230), this auto-schematizing is the very essence of the living body.

And the things too come into presence, come to command a field of presence, by their style. They hold together like the body holds together. Their unity is neither the unity of pure assemblage nor the unity of a law; it is produced and reproduced as the “bringing of a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being” (p. 139). The style is that interior animation of the color,¹² that interior rhythm that assembles the forms and shadows of the rose (p. 174), that organized fluctuation that makes the thing arise as a relief upon a depth of being.¹³ The thing is borne into presence by a scheme of contrasts that commands a constellation, that modulates a trajectory of time, and that makes it leave its place to come reverberate in the receptive sensitive flesh that perceives it. Its way of being is verbal, it is transcendence, its style is “nothing else than a brief, peremptory manner of giving in one sole something, in one sole tone of being, visions past, visions to come, by whole clusters.” The presence of the sensible thing is a presence by allusion (pp. 191–92, 200, 214, 229), and all perception is tele-perception (pp. 258, 273).¹⁴

Thus the “wild being,” the uncultivated and unconstituted being of the sensible, is not opacity, but dimensionality (p. 257). “What we call a visible is, we said, a quality pregnant with a texture, the surface of a depth, a cross-section upon a massive being, a grain or corpuscle borne by a wave of Being” (p. 136). Serial music, Merleau-Ponty points out (p. 218), discovers the ability of any tone in a series to function as an individual

12. “. . . a naked color, and in general a visible, is not a chunk of absolutely hard, indivisible being, offered all naked to a vision which would be only total or null, but it is rather a sort of straits between exterior horizons and interior horizons ever gaping open, something that comes to touch lightly and make resound at the distances diverse regions of the colored or visible world, a certain differentiation, an ephemeral modulation of this world—less a color or a thing, therefore, than a difference between things and colors, a momentary crystallization of colored being or of visibility” (p. 132).

13. “. . . this piece of wood is neither a collection of colors and tactile data, nor even their total *Gestalt*, but there emanates from it a sort of ligneous essence, these ‘sense-data’ modulate a certain theme or illustrate a certain style which is the wood itself.” *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 514. [Eng. trans., p. 450.]

14. Cf. *Signes* (Paris, 1960), p. 24. [English translation by Richard C. McLeary, *Signs* (Evanston, Ill., 1964), p. 16.]

sounded in a field and as the dominant, the field tone, the level at which the melody plays. In the very measure that a color occupies a here and a now it comes to command a field, begins to exist as dominant or color level. "With one sole movement it imposes itself as particular and ceases to be visible as particular" (pp. 217-18). "This becoming-neutral is not a change of the red into 'another color,' it is a modification of the red by its own duration (as the impact of a figure or a line on my vision tends to become dimensional, and to give it the value of an index of the curvature of space)" (p. 247). In the register of visibility every sensible thing is a universal-particular, every point is a pivot, every line a vector,¹⁵ every color a level, every plane a horizon by transparency, every fact a category (p. 218).

"Perception is not first perception of *things*, but perception of *elements* . . . , of *rays of the world*, things which are dimensions, which are worlds . . ." (p. 218). Once we have understood that the thing is a *dimensional this*, we have already understood that the vision of the rose is already an introduction into rose-ness, into the *species* rose, into a family of like beings (p. 174)—not by an intellectual operation of generalization, but because to be introduced into a style of visible being is already to be introduced to the pregnancy of that style. And pregnancy, Merleau-Ponty tells us, means not only typicality, but also productivity, or generativity (p. 208)—not only the establishing of a type by "a certain manner of managing the domain of space over which it has competency" (p. 115), but generative power, "the equivalent of the cause of itself" (p. 208).

THE INVISIBLE

IN RECOGNIZING TRANSCENDENCE, being-at-a-distance, being "always further on" (p. 217), as the very manner of being of the visible, we come to recognize that the visible is not a multitude of spatio-temporal individuals that would have to be connected and combined by a mind constitutive of relations; it is a field, a relief, a topography unfolding by differentiation, by segregation, which holds together not by laws, but "through the reflections, shadows, levels, and horizons between things (which

are not things and are not nothing, but on the contrary mark out by themselves the fields of possible variation in the same thing and in the same world)." ¹⁶ And once we conceive the "verbal essence" of the visible, the style it promotes across time and space and across all registers of sensoriality, then we understand that the visible holds together of itself, coheres into things. And we no longer need an ideal unity, intuited by and finally constituted by the mind, in order to account for the unity of sense that the sensible thing embodies.

Has Merleau-Ponty not then banished the ideal from the sensible? Is the ideal perhaps to be relegated to the cultural, the linguistic order only?

Certainly we cannot confine the ideal to the order of language and culture without destroying the very possibility of speaking of the visible, of brute being. If we speak about the *things*, it is because the ideal order expressed in language is already prefigured in the things themselves; but if we *speak* about the things it is because what we express is prefigured but not yet accomplished in their silence (pp. 4, 102-3, 125-27, 152-55). But surely it is true that the new morphology of the visible we acquire from Merleau-Ponty's work does implicate a new conception of the ideal, which cannot be defined by opposition to the sensible, nor taken as a second order of positive entities composed in the things (the "positivist bric-a-brac" of concepts, relations, essences . . . [p. 235]).

In the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty often invoked the immanent logic at work in the sensible field, which governs the relief of the things in sizes and shapes and their staggering out in depth, which commands the distribution of tone and texture and grain in the things and holds all things together in a system. This wild *Logos* was shown to be not a set of principles or laws, but rather a system of levels posited in the sensible field by our body in its primal assuming of position before the tasks of the world. Thus to understand the distribution of things in proximity and in distance, or the differentiation of color in the visible field, it was necessary to discern the spatial levels and the level of illumination. Like the light, these levels and dimensions, this system of lines of force, are not *what* we see; they are that *with which*, *according to which*, we see.

15. Cf. *L'Oeil et l'esprit*, pp. 72-77. [Eng. trans., pp. 182-84.]

16. *Signes*, p. 202. [Eng. trans., p. 160.]

This invisible piling upon which the visible is set is therefore not a set of representations or bonds constituted by a priori operations of a mind, nor even a set of positive configurations which would be apprehended, possessed by a mind, converted into "objects of thought." On the contrary to see is to see with, according to the invisible axes and pivots, levels and lines of force of the visible; we are guided by them, *possessed* by them (p. 151). Their authority, their fascinating, indestructible power (p. 150), is precisely due to the fact that here "to comprehend is not to constitute in intellectual immanence, that to comprehend is to apprehend by coexistence, laterally, *by the style*, and thereby to attain at once the far-off reaches of this style . . ." (p. 188).

For the discernment of this invisible filigree everywhere operative in the visible, for the description of this "carnal ideality" of light, of a melody, of relief, of physical voluptuousness, Merleau-Ponty sends us to Proust; but we could also turn to "Eye and Mind," where the "operative essence" of depth, of the line, of the contour, the movement, and the color are analyzed with incomparable virtuosity by Merleau-Ponty himself.

"To see is as a matter of principle to see further than one sees, to reach a being in latency."¹⁷ There is a prejudicative *Logos* that does not emerge into view before eidetic insight or abstraction—that does not emerge into view at all, that remains latent, even in language.

With the first vision, the first contact, the first pleasure, there is initiation, that is, not the positing of a content, but the opening of a dimension that can never again be closed, the establishment of a level in terms of which every other experience will henceforth be situated. The idea is this level, this dimension. It is therefore not a *de facto* invisible, like an object hidden behind another, and not an absolute invisible, that would have nothing to do with the visible. Rather it is the invisible *of* this world, that which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible, its own and interior possibility, the Being of this being (p. 151).

This *Logos*, which we do not constitute, which utters itself in us, is also what is at work in our language. Like the visible, language too is a system of differences, which, when cast into

17. *Signes*, p. 29. [Eng. trans., p. 20.]

operation, when it is operative speech, can capture in its own lines of force and movement something invisible, which is not positive thought content, but is rather an *unthought* (pp. 118–19). Merleau-Ponty was preparing a separate text, to be entitled *Introduction to the Prose of the World*,¹⁸ to explore the divergencies, the disequilibriums, the reverberations back over itself that initiate and animate speech. It would explore not the cultivated language that employs a system of explicit relations between signs and meanings, but the operative language, that of literature, of poetry, of conversation, and of philosophy, which possesses meaning less than it is possessed by it, does not speak of it, but speaks *it*, or speaks *according to it*, or lets it speak and be spoken within us, breaks through our present (p. 118). This language "is open upon the things, called forth by the voices of silence, and continues an effort of articulation which is the Being of every being" (pp. 126–27).

Merleau-Ponty believed that the study of this wild *Logos*, not constituted by a mind and not consisting of positive idealities, was destined to renew our understanding of the imaginary, which is not simply the production of mental images, but the "baroque" proliferation of generating axes for visibility in the duplicity of the real. ". . . [T]he 'great unpenetrated and discouraging night of our soul' is not empty, is not 'nothingness'; but these entities, these domains, these worlds that line it, people it, and whose presence it feels like the presence of someone in the dark, have been acquired only through its commerce with the visible, to which they remain attached" (p. 150). In "Eye and Mind" Merleau-Ponty showed how these axes and schemes for visibility, captured in our flesh, were at the origin of that productive and motor imagination that moves the hand of the painter;¹⁹ in the present text we find several working notes (pp. 180, 189–90, 232, 255, 262–63, 269–70) that claim that the invisible substructure of the visible is the key to the unconscious structure of consciousness.²⁰ "To see is as a matter of principle to see further than one sees, to reach a being in latency."

18. A fragment from this text was published in the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, LXXII, No. 2 (April–June, 1967), 139–53.

19. Cf. particularly pp. 22 ff. [Eng. trans., pp. 164 ff.]

20. For Merleau-Ponty's quite critical attitude with regard to his own earlier understanding of the unconscious in *The Structure of*

THE FLESH

THE CONCEPT OF FLESH emerges as the ultimate notion of Merleau-Ponty's thought; it is, he says, an uncomposed notion thinkable by itself (p. 140), and a prototype for Being universally.

The flesh, a concept of "what has no name in any philosophy" (pp. 139, 147), is not just a new term for what the *Phenomenology of Perception* (but already Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*) brought to light as the set of non-objective phenomena by which the subject's own corporeity is given to him as his "lived body" or "I-body," distinguished from his objective body, appearing publicly as a thing among things of the world. The flesh is the body inasmuch as it is the visible seer, the audible hearer, the tangible touch—the sensitive sensible: inasmuch as in it is accomplished an equivalence of sensibility and sensible thing.

The flesh is for itself the *exemplar sensible*. It is so because its manner of being is elemental: ²¹ "to designate it we should need the old term 'element' . . . in the sense of a *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being" (p. 139). This teaching was prepared in the *Phenomenology of Perception* especially in the analysis of the corporeal schema, or postural model. The body is able to move itself because it has an awareness of itself and of its situation in the world; this awareness is the postural schema. But the postural schema is not a particular image; it rather gives the body to itself as an "I can," as a system of powers organized according to transposable schemes for movement. The continual auto-production of schemes in the body's mobilizing of itself "gives our life the form of generality and prolongs our personal acts into stable dispositions."²² Thus "my body is to the

Behavior and Phenomenology of Perception, see his Preface to A. Hesnard, *L'Oeuvre de Freud* (Paris, 1960).

21. "The flesh is not matter, in the sense of corpuscles of being that would add up or continue on one another to form beings" (p. 139).

22. *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 171. [Eng. trans., p. 146.]

greatest extent what every thing is: a *dimensional this . . . a sensible that is dimensional of itself*" (p. 260).

It is in this elemental being of the flesh that the secret of sensibility is to be sought. The positivist conception of being, which preconceives being as objectivity posited before a subject, requires that the subject free a clearing in the density of being, about which the visible can be spread. Consequently the positivist conception of the visible implicates a negativist conception of the seer, which must be an incorporeal and nonsensorial knowing agency, an immaterial spirit, finally a pure clearing, a nothingness. In destroying the positivist conception of being we no longer think being posited against the ground of nothingness, and come to think the visible exhibited along the invisible dimensions, the levels, the pilings of the world; we discover a world in degrees, in distance, in depth, and in difference. "The perceived world . . . is the ensemble of my body's routes and not a multitude of spatio-temporal individuals" (p. 247). What makes then of the flesh a seer and of being a visibility is not the production of a clearing by nihilation but an elemental event by which the flesh captures the lines of force of the world, brings itself up to the levels about which visibility is modulated, rises upright before vertical being. This inaugural advent of sensibility in one sensible thing was already discerned, in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, in the study of the light that is not something seen but is that with which, or according to which, one sees: what inaugurates vision of things is the elemental alliance with the invisible light. In like manner what inaugurates touch in a tangible thing is not the production of the absolute untouchable void (for we cannot conceive of a being itself intangible that could touch, just as, after all, the only seer known to us is visible), but rather the capture in a hand of that movement and tempo that "effect the forming of tactile phenomena, as light delineates the configuration of a visible surface."²³

The things can solicit the flesh without leaving their places because they are transcendencies, rays of the world, each promoting a singular style of being across time and space; and the flesh can capture in itself the allusive, schematic presence of the things because it is itself elemental being, self-positing posture, self-moving motion adjusting itself to the routes and levels and

23. *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 364. [Eng. trans., p. 315.]

axes of the visible. This intertwining, this chiasm effected across the substance of the flesh is the inaugural event of visibility.

It is then no incomprehensible conjuncture that the only seer known to us is itself visible (p. 137), and no mystery that the body has two sides, one "phenomenal," the other "objective." For "he who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it, unless he *is of it* . . ." (pp. 134-35); "a mind could not be captured by its representations, it would rebel against this insertion into the visible which is essential to the seer" (p. 139). The seer is not a gap, a clearing, in the fabric of the visible; there is no hole in the weave of the visible where I am; the visible is one continuous fabric, since inside of me there are only "shadows stuffed with organs"—more of the visible" (p. 138). The manifest visibility of the world closes in over itself across the zone of latent visibility of my flesh. "There really is inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration in Being . . ." ²⁴

As translator of this book, I am indebted to Editions Gallimard for their permission to undertake this work. It is a pleasure to express my gratitude to Madame Merleau-Ponty for her kind encouragement and to M. Claude Lefort for his patient and generous help in the interpretation of the French manuscript.

ALPHONSO LINGIS

24. *L'Oeil et l'esprit*, pp. 31-32. [Eng. trans., p. 167. The translation has been slightly altered.]

The Visible and Nature: Philosophical Interrogation

4 / The Intertwining—The Chiasm

IF IT IS TRUE that as soon as philosophy declares itself to be reflection or coincidence it prejudices what it will find, then once again it must recommence everything, reject the instruments reflection and intuition had provided themselves, and install itself in a locus where they have not yet been distinguished, in experiences that have not yet been “worked over,” that offer us all at once, pell-mell, both “subject” and “object,” both existence and essence, and hence give philosophy resources to redefine them. Seeing, speaking, even thinking (with certain reservations, for as soon as we distinguish thought from speaking absolutely we are already in the order of reflection), are experiences of this kind, both irrecusable and enigmatic. They have a name in all languages, but a name which in all of them also conveys significations in tufts, thickets of proper meanings and figurative meanings, so that, unlike those of science, not one of these names clarifies by attributing to what is named a circumscribed signification. Rather, they are the repeated index, the insistent reminder of a mystery as familiar as it is unexplained, of a light which, illuminating the rest, remains at its source in obscurity. If we could rediscover within the exercise of seeing and speaking some of the living references that assign them such a destiny in a language, perhaps they would teach us how to form our new instruments, and first of all to understand our research, our interrogation, themselves.

The visible about us seems to rest in itself. It is as though our vision were formed in the heart of the visible, or as though there were between it and us an intimacy as close as between the sea

and the strand. And yet it is not possible that we blend into it, nor that it passes into us, for then the vision would vanish at the moment of formation, by disappearance of the seer or of the visible. What there is then are not things first identical with themselves, which would then offer themselves to the seer, nor is there a seer who is first empty and who, afterward, would open himself to them—but something to which we could not be closer than by palpating it with our look, things we could not dream of seeing “all naked” because the gaze itself envelops them, clothes them with its own flesh. Whence does it happen that in so doing it leaves them in their place, that the vision we acquire of them seems to us to come from them, and that to be seen is for them but a degradation of their eminent being? What is this talisman of color, this singular virtue of the visible that makes it, held at the end of the gaze, nonetheless much more than a correlative of my vision, such that it imposes my vision upon me as a continuation of its own sovereign existence? How does it happen that my look, enveloping them, does not hide them, and, finally, that, veiling them, it unveils them? ¹

We must first understand that this red under my eyes is not, as is always said, a *quale*, a pellicle of being without thickness, a message at the same time indecipherable and evident, which one has or has not received, but of which, if one has received it, one knows all there is to know, and of which in the end there is nothing to say. It requires a focusing, however brief; it emerges from a less precise, more general redness, in which my gaze was caught, into which it sank, before—as we put it so aptly—*fixing* it. And, now that I have fixed it, if my eyes penetrate into it, into

1. EDITOR: Here in the course of the text itself, these lines are inserted: “it is that the look is itself incorporation of the seer into the visible, quest for itself, which *is of it*, within the visible—it is that the visible of the world is not an envelope of *quale*, but what is between the qualia, a connective tissue of exterior and interior horizons—it is as flesh offered to flesh that the visible has its aseity, and that it is mine—The flesh as *Sichtigkeit* and generality. → whence vision is question and response. . . . The openness through flesh: the two leaves of my body and the leaves of the visible world. . . . It is between these intercalated leaves that there is visibility. . . . My body model of the things and the things model of my body: the body bound to the world through all its parts, up against it → all this means: the world, the flesh not as fact or sum of facts, but as the locus of an inscription of truth: the false crossed out, not nullified.”

its fixed structure, or if they start to wander round about again, the *quale* resumes its atmospheric existence. Its precise form is bound up with a certain woolly, metallic, or porous [?] configuration or texture, and the *quale* itself counts for very little compared with these participations. Claudel has a phrase saying that a certain blue of the sea is so blue that only blood would be more red. The color is yet a variant in another dimension of variation, that of its relations with the surroundings: this red is what it is only by connecting up from its place with other reds about it, with which it forms a constellation, or with other colors it dominates or that dominate it, that it attracts or that attract it, that it repels or that repel it. In short, it is a certain node in the woof of the simultaneous and the successive. It is a concretion of visibility, it is not an atom. The red dress a fortiori holds with all its fibers onto the fabric of the visible, and thereby onto a fabric of invisible being. A punctuation in the field of red things, which includes the tiles of roof tops, the flags of gatekeepers and of the Revolution, certain terrains near Aix or in Madagascar, it is also a punctuation in the field of red garments, which includes, along with the dresses of women, robes of professors, bishops, and advocate generals, and also in the field of adornments and that of uniforms. And its red literally is not the same as it appears in one constellation or in the other, as the pure essence of the Revolution of 1917 precipitates in it, or that of the eternal feminine, or that of the public prosecutor, or that of the gypsies dressed like hussars who reigned twenty-five years ago over an inn on the Champs-Élysées. A certain red is also a fossil drawn up from the depths of imaginary worlds. If we took all these participations into account, we would recognize that a naked color, and in general a visible, is not a chunk of absolutely hard, indivisible being, offered all naked to a vision which could be only total or null, but is rather a sort of straits between exterior horizons and interior horizons ever gaping open, something that comes to touch lightly and makes diverse regions of the colored or visible world resound at the distances, a certain differentiation, an ephemeral modulation of this world—less a color or a thing, therefore, than a difference between things and colors, a momentary crystallization of colored being or of visibility. Between the alleged colors and visibles, we would find anew the tissue that lines them, sustains them, nourishes them, and which

for its part is not a thing, but a possibility, a latency, and a *flesh* of things.

If we turn now to the seer, we will find that this is no analogy or vague comparison and must be taken literally. The look, we said, envelops, palpates, espouses the visible things. As though it were in a relation of pre-established harmony with them, as though it knew them before knowing them, it moves in its own way with its abrupt and imperious style, and yet the views taken are not desultory—I do not look at a chaos, but at things—so that finally one cannot say if it is the look or if it is the things that command. What is this prepossession of the visible, this art of interrogating it according to its own wishes, this inspired exegesis? We would perhaps find the answer in the tactile palpation where the questioner and the questioned are closer, and of which, after all, the palpation of the eye is a remarkable variant. How does it happen that I give to my hands, in particular, that degree, that rate, and that direction of movement that are capable of making me feel the textures of the sleek and the rough? Between the exploration and what it will teach me, between my movements and what I touch, there must exist some relationship by principle, some kinship, according to which they are not only, like the pseudopods of the amoeba, vague and ephemeral deformations of the corporeal space, but the initiation to and the opening upon a tactile world. This can happen only if my hand, while it is felt from within, is also accessible from without, itself tangible, for my other hand, for example, if it takes its place among the things it touches, is in a sense one of them, opens finally upon a tangible being of which it is also a part. Through this crisscrossing within it of the touching and the tangible, its own movements incorporate themselves into the universe they interrogate, are recorded on the same map as it; the two systems are applied upon one another, as the two halves of an orange. It is no different for the vision—except, it is said, that here the exploration and the information it gathers do not belong “to the same sense.” But this delimitation of the senses is crude. Already in the “touch” we have just found three distinct experiences which subtend one another, three dimensions which overlap but are distinct: a touching of the sleek and of the rough, a touching of the things—a passive sentiment of the body and of its space—and finally a veritable touching of the touch, when my right

hand touches my left hand while it is palpating the things, where the "touching subject" passes over to the rank of the touched, descends into the things, such that the touch is formed in the midst of the world and as it were in the things. Between the massive sentiment I have of the sack in which I am enclosed, and the control from without that my hand exercises over my hand, there is as much difference as between the movements of my eyes and the changes they produce in the visible. And as, conversely, every experience of the visible has always been given to me within the context of the movements of the look, the visible spectacle belongs to the touch neither more nor less than do the "tactile qualities." We must habituate ourselves to think that every visible is cut out in the tangible, every tactile being in some manner promised to visibility, and that there is encroachment, infringement, not only between the touched and the touching, but also between the tangible and the visible, which is encrusted in it, as, conversely, the tangible itself is not a nothingness of visibility, is not without visual existence. Since the same body sees and touches, visible and tangible belong to the same world. It is a marvel too little noticed that every movement of my eyes—even more, every displacement of my body—has its place in the same visible universe that I itemize and explore with them, as, conversely, every vision takes place somewhere in the tactile space. There is double and crossed situating of the visible in the tangible and of the tangible in the visible; the two maps are complete, and yet they do not merge into one. The two parts are total parts and yet are not superposable.

Hence, without even entering into the implications proper to the seer and the visible, we know that, since vision is a palpation with the look, it must also be inscribed in the order of being that it discloses to us; he who looks must not himself be foreign to the world that he looks at. As soon as I see, it is necessary that the vision (as is so well indicated by the double meaning of the word) be doubled with a complementary vision or with another vision: myself seen from without, such as another would see me, installed in the midst of the visible, occupied in considering it from a certain spot. For the moment we shall not examine how far this identity of the seer and the visible goes, if we have a complete experience of it, or if there is something missing, and what it is. It suffices for us for the moment to note that he who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it,

unless he *is of it*,* unless, by principle, according to what is required by the articulation of the look with the things, he is one of the visibles, capable, by a singular reversal, of seeing them—he who is one of them.†

We understand then why we see the things themselves, in their places, where they are, according to their being which is indeed more than their being-perceived—and why at the same time we are separated from them by all the thickness of the look and of the body; it is that this distance is not the contrary of this proximity, it is deeply consonant with it, it is synonymous with it. It is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication. It is for the same reason that I am at the heart of the visible and that I am far from it: because it has thickness and is thereby naturally destined to be seen by a body. What is indefinable in the *quale*, in the color, is nothing else than a brief, peremptory manner of giving in one sole something, in one sole tone of being, visions past, visions to come, by whole clusters. I who see have my own depth also, being backed up by this same visible which I see and which, I know very well, closes in behind me. The thickness of the body, far from rivaling that of the world, is on the contrary the sole means I have to go unto the heart of the things, by making myself a world and by making them flesh.

The body interposed is not itself a thing, an interstitial matter, a connective tissue, but a *sensible for itself*, which means, not that absurdity: color that sees itself, surface that touches itself—but this paradox [?]: a set of colors and surfaces inhabited by a touch, a vision, hence an *exemplar sensible*, which offers to him who inhabits it and senses it the wherewithal to sense everything that resembles himself on the outside, such that, caught up in the tissue of the things, it draws it entirely to itself, incorporates it, and, with the same movement, communicates to the things upon which it closes over that identity without superposition, that difference without contradiction, that divergence between the within and the without that constitutes its

* The *Uerpräsentierbarkeit* is the flesh.

† The visible is not a tangible zero, the tangible is not a zero of visibility (relation of encroachment).

natal secret.² The body unites us directly with the things through its own ontogenesis, by welding to one another the two outlines of which it is made, its two laps: the sensible mass it is and the mass of the sensible wherein it is born by segregation and upon which, as seer, it remains open. It is the body and it alone, because it is a two-dimensional being, that can bring us to the things themselves, which are themselves not flat beings but beings in depth, inaccessible to a subject that would survey them from above, open to him alone that, if it be possible, would coexist with them in the same world. When we speak of the flesh of the visible, we do not mean to do anthropology, to describe a world covered over with all our own projections, leaving aside what it can be under the human mask. Rather, we mean that carnal being, as a being of depths, of several leaves or several faces, a being in latency, and a presentation of a certain absence, is a prototype of Being, of which our body, the sensible sentient, is a very remarkable variant, but whose constitutive paradox already lies in every visible. For already the cube assembles within itself impossible *visibilia*, as my body is at once phenomenal body and objective body, and if finally it is, it, like my body, is by a tour de force. What we call a visible is, we said, a quality pregnant with a texture, the surface of a depth, a cross section upon a massive being, a grain or corpuscle borne by a wave of Being. Since the total visible is always behind, or after, or between the aspects we see of it, there is access to it only through an experience which, like it, is wholly outside of itself. It is thus, and not as the bearer of a knowing subject, that our body commands the visible for us, but it does not explain it, does not clarify it, it only concentrates the mystery of its scattered visibility; and it is indeed a paradox of Being, not a paradox of man, that we are dealing with here. To be sure, one can reply that, between the two "sides" of our body, the body as sensible and the body as sentient (what in the past we called objective body and phenomenal body), rather than a spread, there is the abyss that

2. EDITOR: Here, in the course of the text itself, between brackets, these lines are inserted: "One can say that we perceive the things themselves, that we are the world that thinks itself—or that the world is at the heart of our flesh. In any case, once a body-world relationship is recognized, there is a ramification of my body and a ramification of the world and a correspondence between its inside and my outside, between my inside and its outside."

separates the In Itself from the For Itself. It is a problem—and we will not avoid it—to determine how the sensible sentient can also be thought. But here, seeking to form our first concepts in such a way as to avoid the classical impasses, we do not have to honor the difficulties that they may present when confronted with a *cogito*, which itself has to be re-examined. Yes or no: do we have a body—that is, not a permanent object of thought, but a flesh that suffers when it is wounded, hands that touch? We know: hands do not suffice for touch—but to decide for this reason alone that our hands do not touch, and to relegate them to the world of objects or of instruments, would be, in acquiescing to the bifurcation of subject and object, to forego in advance the understanding of the sensible and to deprive ourselves of its lights. We propose on the contrary to take it literally to begin with. We say therefore that our body is a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees them and touches them; we say, because it is evident, that it unites these two properties within itself, and its double belongingness to the order of the "object" and to the order of the "subject" reveals to us quite unexpected relations between the two orders. It cannot be by incomprehensible accident that the body has this double reference; it teaches us that each calls for the other. For if the body is a thing among things, it is so in a stronger and deeper sense than they: in the sense that, we said, it *is of them*, and this means that it detaches itself upon them, and, accordingly, detaches itself from them. It is not simply a thing *seen* in fact (I do not see my back), it is visible by right, it falls under a vision that is both ineluctable and deferred. Conversely, if it touches and sees, this is not because it would have the visibles before itself as objects: they are about it, they even enter into its enclosure, they are within it, they line its looks and its hands inside and outside. If it touches them and sees them, this is only because, being of their family, itself visible and tangible, it uses its own being as a means to participate in theirs, because each of the two beings is an archetype for the other, because the body belongs to the order of the things as the world is universal flesh. One should not even say, as we did a moment ago, that the body is made up of two leaves, of which the one, that of the "sensible," is bound up with the rest of the world. There are not in it two leaves or two layers; fundamentally it is neither thing seen only nor seer only, it is Visibility sometimes

wandering and sometimes reassembled. And as such it is not in the world, it does not detain its view of the world as within a private garden: it sees the world itself, the world of everybody, and without having to leave "itself," because it is wholly—because its hands, its eyes, are nothing else than—this reference of a visible, a tangible-standard to all those whose resemblance it bears and whose evidence it gathers, by a magic that is the vision, the touch themselves. To speak of leaves or of layers is still to flatten and to juxtapose, under the reflective gaze, what coexists in the living and upright body. If one wants metaphors, it would be better to say that the body sensed and the body sentient are as the obverse and the reverse, or again, as two segments of one sole circular course which goes above from left to right and below from right to left, but which is but one sole movement in its two phases. And everything said about the sensed body pertains to the whole of the sensible of which it is a part, and to the world. If the body is one sole body in its two phases, it incorporates into itself the whole of the sensible and with the same movement incorporates itself into a "Sensible in itself." We have to reject the age-old assumptions that put the body in the world and the seer in the body, or, conversely, the world and the body in the seer as in a box. Where are we to put the limit between the body and the world, since the world is flesh? Where in the body are we to put the seer, since evidently there is in the body only "shadows stuffed with organs," that is, more of the visible? The world seen is not "in" my body, and my body is not "in" the visible world ultimately: as flesh applied to a flesh, the world neither surrounds it nor is surrounded by it. A participation in and kinship with the visible, the vision neither envelops it nor is enveloped by it definitively. The superficial pellicle of the visible is only for my vision and for my body. But the depth beneath this surface contains my body and hence contains my vision. My body as a visible thing is contained within the full spectacle. But my seeing body subtends this visible body, and all the visibles with it. There is reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other. Or rather, if, as once again we must, we eschew the thinking by planes and perspectives, there are two circles, or two vortexes, or two spheres, concentric when I live naïvely, and as soon as I question myself, the one slightly decentered with respect to the other. . . .

We have to ask ourselves what exactly we have found with

this strange adhesion of the seer and the visible. There is vision, touch, when a certain visible, a certain tangible, turns back upon the whole of the visible, the whole of the tangible, of which it is a part, or when suddenly it finds itself *surrounded* by them, or when between it and them, and through their commerce, is formed a Visibility, a Tangible in itself, which belong properly neither to the body qua fact nor to the world qua fact—as upon two mirrors facing one another where two indefinite series of images set in one another arise which belong really to neither of the two surfaces, since each is only the rejoinder of the other, and which therefore form a couple, a couple more real than either of them. Thus since the seer is caught up in what he sees, it is still himself he sees: there is a fundamental narcissism of all vision. And thus, for the same reason, the vision he exercises, he also undergoes from the things, such that, as many painters have said, I feel myself looked at by the things, my activity is equally passivity—which is the second and more profound sense of the narcissism: not to see in the outside, as the others see it, the contour of a body one inhabits, but especially to be seen by the outside, to exist within it, to emigrate into it, to be seduced, captivated, alienated by the phantom, so that the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen. It is this Visibility, this generality of the Sensible in itself, this anonymity innate to Myself that we have previously called flesh, and one knows there is no name in traditional philosophy to designate it. The flesh is not matter, in the sense of corpuscles of being which would add up or continue on one another to form beings. Nor is the visible (the things as well as my own body) some "psychic" material that would be—God knows how—brought into being by the things factually existing and acting on my factual body. In general, it is not a fact or a sum of facts "material" or "spiritual." Nor is it a representation for a mind: a mind could not be captured by its own representations; it would rebel against this insertion into the visible which is essential to the seer. The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term "element," in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an "element" of Being. Not a fact

or a sum of facts, and yet adherent to *location* and to the *now*. Much more: the inauguration of the *where* and the *when*, the possibility and exigency for the fact; in a word: facticity, what makes the fact be a fact. And, at the same time, what makes the facts have meaning, makes the fragmentary facts dispose themselves about "something." For if there is flesh, that is, if the hidden face of the cube radiates forth somewhere as well as does the face I have under my eyes, and coexists with it, and if I who see the cube also belong to the visible, I am visible from elsewhere, and if I and the cube are together caught up in one same "element" (should we say of the seer, or of the visible?), this cohesion, this visibility by principle, prevails over every momentary discordance. In advance every vision or very partial visible that would here definitively come to naught is not nullified (which would leave a gap in its place), but, what is better, it is replaced by a more exact vision and a more exact visible, according to the principle of visibility, which, as though through a sort of abhorrence of a vacuum, already invokes the true vision and the true visible, not only as substitutes for their errors, but also as their explanation, their relative justification, so that they are, as Husserl says so aptly, not erased, but "crossed out." . . . Such are the extravagant consequences to which we are led when we take seriously, when we question, vision. And it is, to be sure, possible to refrain from doing so and to move on, but we would simply find again, confused, indistinct, non-clarified, scraps of this ontology of the visible mixed up with all our theories of knowledge, and in particular with those that serve, desultorily, as vehicles of science. We are, to be sure, not finished ruminating over them. Our concern in this preliminary outline was only to catch sight of this strange domain to which interrogation, properly so-called, gives access. . . .

But this domain, one rapidly realizes, is unlimited. If we can show that the flesh is an ultimate notion, that it is not the union or compound of two substances, but thinkable by itself, if there is a relation of the visible with itself that traverses me and constitutes me as a seer, this circle which I do not form, which forms me, this coiling over of the visible upon the visible, can traverse, animate other bodies as well as my own. And if I was able to understand how this wave arises within me, how the visible which is yonder is simultaneously my landscape, I can understand a fortiori that elsewhere it also closes over upon

itself and that there are other landscapes besides my own. If it lets itself be captivated by one of its fragments, the principle of captation is established, the field open for other Narcissus, for an "intercorporeity." If my left hand can touch my right hand while it palpates the tangibles, can touch it touching, can turn its palpation back upon it, why, when touching the hand of another, would I not touch in it the same power to espouse the things that I have touched in my own? It is true that "the things" in question are my own, that the whole operation takes place (as we say) "in me," within my landscape, whereas the problem is to institute another landscape. When one of my hands touches the other, the world of each opens upon that of the other because the operation is reversible at will, because they both belong (as we say) to one sole space of consciousness, because one sole man touches one sole thing through both hands. But for my two hands to open upon one sole world, it does not suffice that they be given to one sole *consciousness*—or if that were the case the difficulty before us would disappear: since other bodies would be known by me in the same way as would be my own, they and I would still be dealing with the same world. No, my two hands touch the same things because they are the hands of one same body. And yet each of them has its own tactile experience. If nonetheless they have to do with one sole tangible, it is because there exists a very peculiar relation from one to the other, across the corporeal space—like that holding between my two eyes—making of my hands one sole organ of experience, as it makes of my two eyes the channels of one sole Cyclopean vision. A difficult relation to conceive—since one eye, one hand, are capable of vision, of touch, and since what has to be comprehended is that these visions, these touches, these little subjectivities, these "consciousnesses of . . .," could be assembled like flowers into a bouquet, when each being "consciousness of," being For Itself, reduces the others into objects. We will get out of the difficulty only by renouncing the bifurcation of the "consciousness of" and the object, by admitting that my synergic body is not an object, that it assembles into a cluster the "consciousnesses" adherent to its hands, to its eyes, by an operation that is in relation to them lateral, transversal; that "my consciousness" is not the synthetic, uncreated, centrifugal unity of a multitude of "consciousnesses of . . ." which would be centrifugal like it is, that it is sustained, subtended, by the prereflective and preobjective unity of my

body. This means that while each monocular vision, each touching with one sole hand has its own visible, its tactile, each is bound to every other vision, to every other touch; it is bound in such a way as to make up with them the experience of one sole body before one sole world, through a possibility for reversion, reconversion of its language into theirs, transfer, and reversal, according to which the little private world of each is not juxtaposed to the world of all the others, but surrounded by it, levied off from it, and all together are a Sentient in general before a Sensible in general. Now why would this generality, which constitutes the unity of my body, not open it to other bodies? The handshake too is reversible; I can feel myself touched as well and at the same time as touching, and surely there does not exist some huge animal whose organs our bodies would be, as, for each of our bodies, our hands, our eyes are the organs. Why would not the synergy exist among different organisms, if it is possible within each? Their landscapes interweave, their actions and their passions fit together exactly: this is possible as soon as we no longer make belongingness to one same "consciousness" the primordial definition of sensibility, and as soon as we rather understand it as the return of the visible upon itself, a carnal adherence of the sentient to the sensed and of the sensed to the sentient. For, as overlapping and fission, identity and difference, it brings to birth a ray of natural light that illuminates all flesh and not only my own. It is said that the colors, the tactile reliefs given to the other, are for me an absolute mystery, forever inaccessible. This is not completely true; for me to have not an idea, an image, nor a representation, but as it were the imminent experience of them, it suffices that I look at a landscape, that I speak of it with someone. Then, through the concordant operation of his body and my own, what I see passes into him, this individual green of the meadow under my eyes invades his vision without quitting my own, I recognize in my green his green, as the customs officer recognizes suddenly in a traveler the man whose description he had been given. There is here no problem of the *alter ego* because it is not *I* who sees, not *he* who sees, because an anonymous visibility inhabits both of us, a vision in general, in virtue of that primordial property that belongs to the flesh, being here and now, of radiating everywhere and forever, being an individual, of being also a dimension and a universal.

What is open to us, therefore, with the reversibility of the

visible and the tangible, is—if not yet the incorporeal—at least an intercorporeal being, a presumptive domain of the visible and the tangible, which extends further than the things I touch and see at present.

There is a circle of the touched and the touching, the touched takes hold of the touching; there is a circle of the visible and the seeing, the seeing is not without visible existence; ³ there is even an inscription of the touching in the visible, of the seeing in the tangible—and the converse; there is finally a propagation of these exchanges to all the bodies of the same type and of the same style which I see and touch—and this by virtue of the fundamental fission or segregation of the sentient and the sensible which, laterally, makes the organs of my body communicate and founds transitivity from one body to another.

As soon as we see other seers, we no longer have before us only the look without a pupil, the plate glass of the things with that feeble reflection, that phantom of ourselves they evoke by designating a place among themselves whence we see them: henceforth, through other eyes we are for ourselves fully visible; that lacuna where our eyes, our back, lie is filled, filled still by the visible, of which we are not the titulars. To believe that, to bring a vision that is not our own into account, it is to be sure inevitably, it is always from the unique treasury of our own vision that we draw, and experience therefore can teach us nothing that would not be outlined in our own vision. But what is proper to the visible is, we said, to be the surface of an inexhaustible depth: this is what makes it able to be open to visions other than our own. In being realized, they therefore bring out the limits of our factual vision, they betray the solipsist illusion that consists in thinking that every going beyond is a surpassing accomplished by oneself. For the first time, the seeing that I am is for me really visible; for the first time I appear to myself completely turned inside out under my own eyes. For the first time also, my movements no longer proceed unto the things to be seen, to be touched, or unto my own body occupied in seeing and touching them, but they address themselves to the body in general and for itself (whether it be my own or that of another),

3. EDITOR: Here is inserted between brackets, in the course of the text itself, the note: "what are these adhesions compared with those of the voice and the hearing?"

because for the first time, through the other body, I see that, in its coupling with the flesh of the world, the body contributes more than it receives, adding to the world that I see the treasure necessary for what the other body sees. For the first time, the body no longer couples itself up with the world, it clasps another body, applying [itself to it] ⁴ carefully with its whole extension, forming tirelessly with its hands the strange statue which in its turn gives everything it receives; the body is lost outside of the world and its goals, fascinated by the unique occupation of floating in Being with another life, of making itself the outside of its inside and the inside of its outside. And henceforth movement, touch, vision, applying themselves to the other and to themselves, return toward their source and, in the patient and silent labor of desire, begin the paradox of expression.

Yet this flesh that one sees and touches is not all there is to flesh, nor this massive corporeity all there is to the body. The reversibility that defines the flesh exists in other fields; it is even incomparably more agile there and capable of weaving relations between bodies that this time will not only enlarge, but will pass definitively beyond the circle of the visible. Among my movements, there are some that go nowhere—that do not even go find in the other body their resemblance or their archetype: these are the facial movements, many gestures, and especially those strange movements of the throat and mouth that form the cry and the voice. Those movements end in sounds and I hear them. Like crystal, like metal and many other substances, I am a sonorous being, but I hear my own vibration from within; as Malraux said, I hear myself with my throat. In this, as he also has said, I am incomparable; my voice is bound to the mass of my own life as is the voice of no one else. But if I am close enough to the other who speaks to hear his breath and feel his effervescence and his fatigue, I almost witness, in him as in myself, the awesome birth of vociferation. As there is a reflexivity of the touch, of sight, and of the touch-vision system, there is a reflexivity of the movements of phonation and of hearing; they have their sonorous inscription, the vociferations have in me their motor echo. This new reversibility and the emergence of

4. EDITOR: These words, which we reintroduce into the text, had been erased apparently by error.

the flesh as expression are the point of insertion of speaking and thinking in the world of silence.⁵

At the frontier of the mute or solipsist world where, in the presence of other seers, my visible is confirmed as an exemplar of a universal visibility, we reach a second or figurative meaning of vision, which will be the *intuitus mentis* or idea, a sublimation of the flesh, which will be mind or thought. But the factual presence of other bodies could not produce thought or the idea if its seed were not in my own body. Thought is a relationship with oneself and with the world as well as a relationship with the other; hence it is established in the three dimensions at the same time. And it must be brought to appear directly in the infrastructure of vision. Brought to appear, we say, and not brought to birth: for we are leaving in suspense for the moment the question whether it would not be already implicated there. Manifest as it is that feeling is dispersed in my body, that for example my hand touches, and that consequently we may not in advance ascribe feeling to a thought of which it would be but a mode—it yet would be absurd to conceive the touch as a colony of assembled tactile experiences. We are not here proposing any empiricist genesis of thought: we are asking precisely what is that central vision that joins the scattered visions, that unique touch that governs the whole tactile life of my body as a unit, that I *think* that must be able to accompany all our experiences. We are proceeding toward the center, we are seeking to comprehend how there is a center, what the unity consists of, we are not

5. EDITOR: Inserted here between brackets: “in what sense we have not yet introduced thinking: to be sure, we are not in the in itself. From the moment we said *seeing, visible*, and described the dehiscence of the sensible, we were, if one likes, in the order of thought. We were not in it in the sense that the thinking we have introduced was *there is*, and not *it appears to me that . . .* (appearing that would make up the whole of being, self-appearing). Our thesis is that this *there is* by inherence is necessary, and our problem to show that thought, in the restrictive sense (pure signification, thought of seeing and of feeling), is comprehensible only as the accomplishment by other means of the will of the *there is*, by sublimation of the *there is* and realization of an invisible that is exactly the reverse of the visible, the power of the visible. Thus between sound and meaning, speech and what it means to say, there is still the relation of reversibility, and no question of priority, since the exchange of words is exactly the differentiation of which the thought is the integral.”

saying that it is a sum or a result; and if we make the thought appear upon an infrastructure of vision, this is only in virtue of the uncontested evidence that one must see or feel in some way in order to think, that every thought known to us occurs to a flesh.

Once again, the flesh we are speaking of is not matter. It is the coiling over of the visible upon the seeing body, of the tangible upon the touching body, which is attested in particular when the body sees itself, touches itself seeing and touching the things, such that, simultaneously, *as* tangible it descends among them, *as* touching it dominates them all and draws this relationship and even this double relationship from itself, by dehiscence or fission of its own mass. This concentration of the visibles about one of them, or this bursting forth of the mass of the body toward the things, which makes a vibration of my skin become the sleek and the rough, makes me *follow with my eyes* the movements and the contours of the things themselves, this magical relation, this pact between them and me according to which I lend them my body in order that they inscribe upon it and give me their resemblance, this fold, this central cavity of the visible which is my vision, these two mirror arrangements of the seeing and the visible, the touching and the touched, form a close-bound system that I count on, define a vision in general and a constant style of visibility from which I cannot detach myself, even when a particular vision turns out to be illusory, for I remain certain in that case that in looking closer I would have had the true vision, and that in any case, whether it be this one or another, *there is a true vision*. The flesh (of the world or my own) is not contingency, chaos, but a texture that returns to itself and conforms to itself. I will never see my own retinas, but if one thing is certain for me it is that *one* would find at the bottom of my eyeballs those dull and secret membranes. And finally, I believe it—I believe that I have a man's senses, a human body—because the spectacle of the world that is my own, and which, to judge by our confrontations, does not notably differ from that of the others, with me as with them refers with evidence to typical dimensions of visibility, and finally to a virtual focus of vision, to a detector also typical, so that at the joints of the opaque body and the opaque world there is a ray of generality and of light. Conversely, when, starting from the body, I ask how it makes itself a seer, when I examine the critical

region of the aesthesiological body, everything comes to pass (as we have shown in an earlier work ⁶) as though the visible body remained incomplete, gaping open; as though the physiology of vision did not succeed in closing the nervous functioning in upon itself, since the movements of fixation, of convergence, are suspended upon the advent to the body of a visible world for which they were supposed to furnish the explanation; as though, therefore, the vision came suddenly to give to the material means and instruments left here and there in the working area a convergence which they were waiting for; as though, through all these channels, all these prepared but unemployed circuits, the current that will traverse them was rendered probable, in the long run inevitable: the current making of an embryo a newborn infant, of a visible a seer, and of a body a mind, or at least a flesh. In spite of all our substantialist ideas, the seer is being premeditated in counterpoint in the embryonic development; through a labor upon itself the visible body provides for the hollow whence a vision will come, inaugurates the long maturation at whose term suddenly it will see, that is, will be visible for itself, will institute the interminable gravitation, the indefatigable metamorphosis of the seeing and the visible whose principle is posed and which gets underway with the first vision. What we are calling flesh, this interiorly worked-over mass, has no name in any philosophy. As the formative medium of the object and the subject, it is not the atom of being, the hard in itself that resides in a unique place and moment: one can indeed say of my body that it is not *elsewhere*, but one cannot say that it is *here* or *now* in the sense that objects are; and yet my vision does not soar over them, it is not the being that is wholly knowing, for it has its own inertia, its ties. We must not think the flesh starting from substances, from body and spirit—for then it would be the union of contradictories—but we must think it, as we said, as an element, as the concrete emblem of a general manner of being. To begin with, we spoke summarily of a reversibility of the seeing and the visible, of the touching and the touched. It is time to emphasize that it is a reversibility always imminent and never realized in fact. My left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand touching the things, but I never reach coincidence; the coincidence eclipses at the moment of realization, and

6. *The Structure of Behavior* [trans. Alden L. Fisher (Boston, 1963)].

one of two things always occurs: either my right hand really passes over to the rank of touched, but then its hold on the world is interrupted; or it retains its hold on the world, but then I do not really touch *it*—my right hand touching, I palpate with my left hand only its outer covering. Likewise, I do not hear myself as I hear the others, the sonorous existence of my voice is for me as it were poorly exhibited; I have rather an echo of its articulated existence, it vibrates through my head rather than outside. I am always on the same side of my body; it presents itself to me in one invariable perspective. But this incessant escaping, this impotency to superpose exactly upon one another the touching of the things by my right hand and the touching of this same right hand by my left hand, or to superpose, in the exploratory movements of the hand, the tactile experience of a point and that of the “same” point a moment later, or the auditory experience of my own voice and that of other voices—this is not a failure. For if these experiences never exactly overlap, if they slip away at the very moment they are about to rejoin, if there is always a “shift,” a “spread,” between them, this is precisely because my two hands are part of the same body, because it moves itself in the world, because I hear myself both from within and from without. I experience—and as often as I wish—the transition and the metamorphosis of the one experience into the other, and it is only as though the hinge between them, solid, unshakeable, remained irremediably hidden from me. But this hiatus between my right hand touched and my right hand touching, between my voice heard and my voice uttered, between one moment of my tactile life and the following one, is not an ontological void, a non-being: it is spanned by the total being of my body, and by that of the world; it is the zero of pressure between two solids that makes them adhere to one another. My flesh and that of the world therefore involve clear zones, clearings, about which pivot their opaque zones, and the primary visibility, that of the *quale* and of the things, does not come without a second visibility, that of the lines of force and dimensions, the massive flesh without a rarefied flesh, the momentary body without a glorified body. When Husserl spoke of the horizon of the things—of their exterior horizon, which everybody knows, and of their “interior horizon,” that darkness stuffed with visibility of which their surface is but the limit—it is necessary to take the term seriously. No more than are the sky or the earth is the horizon a collection of

things held together, or a class name, or a logical possibility of conception, or a system of “potentiality of consciousness”: it is a new type of being, a being by porosity, pregnancy, or generality, and he before whom the horizon opens is caught up, included within it. His body and the distances participate in one same corporeity or visibility in general, which reigns between them and it, and even beyond the horizon, beneath his skin, unto the depths of being.

We touch here the most difficult point, that is, the bond between the flesh and the idea, between the visible and the interior armature which it manifests and which it conceals. No one has gone further than Proust in fixing the relations between the visible and the invisible, in describing an idea that is not the contrary of the sensible, that is its lining and its depth. For what he says of musical ideas he says of all cultural beings, such as *The Princess of Clèves* and *René*, and also of the essence of love which “the little phrase” not only makes present to Swann, but communicable to all who hear it, even though it is unbeknown to themselves, and even though later they do not know how to recognize it in the loves they only witness. He says it in general of many other notions which are, like music itself “without equivalents,” “the notions of light, of sound, of relief, of physical voluptuousness, which are the rich possessions with which our inward domain is diversified and adorned.”⁷ Literature, music, the passions, but also the experience of the visible world are—no less than is the science of Lavoisier and Ampère—the exploration of an invisible and the disclosure of a universe of ideas.⁸ The difference is simply that this invisible, these ideas, unlike those of that science, cannot be detached from the sensible appearances and be erected into a second positivity. The musical idea, the literary idea, the dialectic of love, and also the articulations of the light, the modes of exhibition of sound and of touch speak to us, have their logic, their coherence, their points of intersection, their concordances, and here also the appearances are the disguise of unknown “forces” and “laws.” But it is as though the secrecy wherein they lie and whence the literary expression draws them were their proper mode of existence. For these

7. *Du côté de chez Swann*, II (Paris, 1926), 190. [English translation by C. K. Scott Moncrieff, *Swann's Way* (New York, 1928), p. 503.]

8. *Ibid.*, p. 192. [Eng. trans., p. 505.]

truths are not only hidden like a physical reality which we have not been able to discover, invisible in fact but which we will one day be able to see facing us, which others, better situated, could already see, provided that the screen that masks it is lifted. Here, on the contrary, there is no vision without the screen: the ideas we are speaking of would not be better known to us if we had no body and no sensibility; it is then that they would be inaccessible to us. The "little phrase," the notion of the light, are not exhausted by their manifestations, any more than is an "idea of the intelligence"; they could not be given to us *as ideas* except in a carnal experience. It is not only that we would find in that carnal experience the *occasion* to think them; it is that they owe their authority, their fascinating, indestructible power, precisely to the fact that they are in transparency behind the sensible, or in its heart. Each time we want to get at it⁹ immediately, or lay hands on it, or circumscribe it, or see it unveiled, we do in fact feel that the attempt is misconceived, that it retreats in the measure that we approach. The explicitation does not give us the idea itself; it is but a second version of it, a more manageable derivative. Swann can of course close in the "little phrase" between the marks of musical notation, ascribe the "withdrawn and chilly tenderness" that makes up its essence or its sense to the narrow range of the five notes that compose it and to the constant recurrence of two of them: while he is thinking of these signs and this sense, he no longer has the "little phrase" itself, he has only "bare values substituted for the mysterious entity he had perceived, for the convenience of his understanding."¹⁰ Thus it is essential to this sort of ideas that they be "veiled with shadows," appear "under a disguise." They give us the assurance that the "great unpenetrated and discouraging night of our soul" is not empty, is not "nothingness"; but these entities, these domains, these worlds that line it, people it, and whose presence it feels like the presence of someone in the dark, have been acquired only through its commerce with the visible, to which they remain attached. As the secret blackness of milk, of which Valéry spoke, is accessible only through its whiteness, the idea of light or the musical idea doubles up the lights and sounds from beneath, is their other side or their depth. Their carnal texture presents to us

9. EDITOR: It: that is, the idea.

10. *Du côté de chez Swann*, II, 189. [Eng. trans., p. 503.]

what is absent from all flesh; it is a furrow that traces itself out magically under our eyes without a tracer, a certain hollow, a certain interior, a certain absence, a negativity that is not nothing, being limited very precisely to *these* five notes between which it is instituted, to that family of sensibles we call lights. We do not see, do not hear the ideas, and not even with the mind's eye or with the third ear: and yet they are there, behind the sounds or between them, behind the lights or between them, recognizable through their always special, always unique manner of entrenching themselves behind them, "perfectly distinct from one another, unequal among themselves in value and in significance."¹¹

With the first vision, the first contact, the first pleasure, there is initiation, that is, not the positing of a content, but the opening of a dimension that can never again be closed, the establishment of a level in terms of which every other experience will henceforth be situated. The idea is this level, this dimension. It is therefore not a *de facto* invisible, like an object hidden behind another, and not an absolute invisible, which would have nothing to do with the visible. Rather it is the invisible *of* this world, that which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible, its own and interior possibility, the Being of this being. At the moment one says "light," at the moment that the musicians reach the "little phrase," there is no lacuna in me; what I live is as "substantial," as "explicit," as a positive thought could be—even more so: a positive thought is what it is, but, precisely, is only what it is and accordingly cannot hold us. Already the mind's volubility takes it elsewhere. We do not possess the musical or sensible ideas, precisely because they are negativity or absence circumscribed; they possess us. The performer is no longer producing or reproducing the sonata: he feels himself, and the others feel him to be at the service of the sonata; the sonata sings through him or cries out so suddenly that he must "dash on his bow" to follow it. And these open vortexes in the sonorous world finally form one sole vortex in which the ideas fit in with one another. "Never was the spoken language so inflexibly necessitated, never did it know to such an extent the pertinence of the questions, the evidence of the responses."¹² The

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*, p. 192. [Eng. trans., p. 505.]

invisible and, as it were, weak being is alone capable of having this close texture. There is a strict ideality in experiences that are experiences of the flesh: the moments of the sonata, the fragments of the luminous field, adhere to one another with a cohesion without concept, which is of the same type as the cohesion of the parts of my body, or the cohesion of my body with the world. Is my body a thing, is it an idea? It is neither, being the measurant of the things. We will therefore have to recognize an ideality that is not alien to the flesh, that gives it its axes, its depth, its dimensions.

But once we have entered into this strange domain, one does not see how there could be any question of *leaving* it. If there is an animation of the body; if the vision and the body are tangled up in one another; if, correlatively, the thin pellicle of the *quale*, the surface of the visible, is doubled up over its whole extension with an invisible reserve; and if finally, in our flesh as in the flesh of things, the actual, empirical, ontic visible, by a sort of folding back, invagination, or padding, exhibits a visibility, a possibility that is not the shadow of the actual but is its principle, that is not the proper contribution of a "thought" but is its condition, a style, allusive and elliptical like every style, but like every style inimitable, inalienable, an interior horizon and an exterior horizon between which the actual visible is a provisional partitioning and which, nonetheless, open indefinitely only upon other visibles—then (the immediate and dualist distinction between the visible and the invisible, between extension and thought, being impugned, not that extension be thought or thought extension, but because they are the obverse and the reverse of one another, and the one forever behind the other) there is to be sure a question as to how the "ideas of the intelligence" are initiated over and beyond, how from the ideality of the horizon one passes to the "pure" ideality, and in particular by what miracle a created generality, a culture, a knowledge come to add to and recapture and rectify the natural generality of my body and of the world. But, however we finally have to understand it, the "pure" ideality already streams forth along the articulations of the aesthesiological body, along the contours of the sensible things, and, however new it is, it slips through ways it has not traced, transfigures horizons it did not open, it derives from the fundamental mystery of those notions "without equivalent," as Proust calls them, that lead their shadowy life in the

night of the mind only because they have been divined at the junctures of the visible world. It is too soon now to clarify this type of surpassing that does not leave its field of origin. Let us only say that the pure ideality is itself not without flesh nor freed from horizon structures: it lives of them, though they be another flesh and other horizons. It is as though the visibility that animates the sensible world were to emigrate, not outside of every body, but into another less heavy, more transparent body, as though it were to change flesh, abandoning the flesh of the body for that of language, and thereby would be emancipated but not freed from every condition. Why not admit—what Proust knew very well and said in another place—that language as well as music can sustain a sense by virtue of its own arrangement, catch a meaning in its own mesh, that it does so without exception each time it is conquering, active, creative language, each time something is, in the strong sense, said? Why not admit that, just as the musical notation is a *facsimile* made after the event, an abstract portrait of the musical entity, language as a system of explicit relations between signs and signified, sounds and meaning, is a result and a product of the operative language in which sense and sound are in the same relationship as the "little phrase" and the five notes found in it afterwards? This does not mean that musical notation and grammar and linguistics and the "ideas of the intelligence"—which are acquired, available, honorary ideas—are useless, or that, as Leibniz said, the donkey that goes straight to the fodder knows as much about the properties of the straight line as we do; it means that the system of objective relations, the acquired ideas, are themselves caught up in something like a second life and perception, which make the mathematician go straight to entities no one has yet seen, make the *operative* language and algorithm make use of a second visibility, and make ideas be the other side of language and calculus. When I think they animate my interior speech, they haunt it as the "little phrase" possesses the violinist, and they remain beyond the words as it remains beyond the notes—not in the sense that under the light of another sun hidden from us they would shine forth but because they are that certain divergence, that never-finished differentiation, that openness ever to be reopened between the sign and the sign, as the flesh is, we said, the dehiscence of the seeing into the visible and of the visible into the seeing. And just as my body sees only because it

is a part of the visible in which it opens forth, the sense upon which the arrangement of the sounds opens reflects back upon that arrangement. For the linguist language is an ideal system, a fragment of the intelligible world. But, just as for me to see it is not enough that my look be visible for X, it is necessary that it be visible for itself, through a sort of torsion, reversal, or specular phenomenon, which is given from the sole fact that I am born; so also, if my words have a meaning, it is not *because* they present the systematic organization the linguist will disclose, it is because that organization, like the look, refers back to itself: the operative Word is the obscure region whence comes the instituted light, as the muted reflection of the body upon itself is what we call natural light. As there is a reversibility of the seeing and the visible, and as at the point where the two metamorphoses cross what we call perception is born, so also there is a reversibility of the speech and what it signifies; the signification is what comes to seal, to close, to gather up the multiplicity of the physical, physiological, linguistic means of elocution, to contract them into one sole act, as the vision comes to complete the aesthesiological body. And, as the visible takes hold of the look which has unveiled it and which forms a part of it, the signification rebounds upon its own means, it annexes to itself the speech that becomes an object of science, it antedates itself by a retrograde movement which is never completely belied—because already, in opening the horizon of the nameable and of the sayable, the speech acknowledged that it has its place in that horizon; because no locutor speaks without making himself in advance allocutary, *be it only for himself*; because with one sole gesture he closes the circuit of his relation to himself and that of his relation to the others and, with the same stroke, also sets himself up as *delocutary*, speech of which one speaks: he offers himself and offers every word to a universal Word. We shall have to follow more closely this transition from the mute world to the speaking world. For the moment we want only to suggest that one can speak neither of a destruction nor of a conservation of silence (and still less of a destruction that conserves or of a realization that destroys—which is not to solve but to pose the problem). When the silent vision falls into speech, and when the speech in turn, opening up a field of the nameable and the sayable, inscribes itself in that field, in its place, according to its truth—in short, when it metamorphoses the structures of the visible world

and makes itself a gaze of the mind, *intuitus mentis*—this is always in virtue of the same fundamental phenomenon of reversibility which sustains both the mute perception and the speech and which manifests itself by an almost carnal existence of the idea, as well as by a sublimation of the flesh. In a sense, if we were to make completely explicit the architectonics of the human body, its ontological framework, and how it sees itself and hears itself, we would see that the structure of its mute world is such that all the possibilities of language are already given in it. Already our existence as seers (that is, we said, as beings who turn the world back upon itself and who pass over to the other side, and who catch sight of one another, who see one another with eyes) and especially our existence as sonorous beings for others and for ourselves contain everything required for there to be speech from the one to the other, speech about the world. And, in a sense, to understand a phrase is nothing else than to fully welcome it in its sonorous being, or, as we put it so well, to *hear what it says* (*l'entendre*). The meaning is not on the phrase like the butter on the bread, like a second layer of “psychic reality” spread over the sound: it is the totality of what is said, the integral of all the differentiations of the verbal chain; it is given with the words for those who have ears to hear. And conversely the whole landscape is overrun with words as with an invasion, it is henceforth but a variant of speech before our eyes, and to speak of its “style” is in our view to form a metaphor. In a sense the whole of philosophy, as Husserl says, consists in restoring a power to signify, a birth of meaning, or a wild meaning, an expression of experience by experience, which in particular clarifies the special domain of language. And in a sense, as Valéry said, language is everything, since it is the voice of no one, since it is the very voice of the things, the waves, and the forests. And what we have to understand is that there is no dialectical reversal from one of these views to the other; we do not have to reassemble them into a synthesis: they are two aspects of the reversibility which is the ultimate truth.

Index

- Alain, 104, 168
Ampère, 149
Aristotle, 123
- Bachelard, Gaston, 245, 267
Beauvoir, Simone de, 81 n
Being, meaning of, 7, 16, 17-18, 136, 151, 170, 184-85, 211, 252-53
Bergson, Henri, 57 n, 122, 123, 124, 125, 128, 189, 193, 194, 195, 196, 251
Blondel, Maurice, 166 n
Bresson, François, 252
Broglie, Louis de, 17 n
Brunschvicg, Léon, 225
Brunswik, Egon, 207, 212
- Causality, 21, 107, 227
Charbonnier, Georges, 208
Claudel, Paul, 103 n, 121 n, 132, 179, 218
- Descartes, René, 12, 17, 25, 26, 36, 37, 60, 98, 166, 167, 168, 170, 172, 174, 176, 177, 179, 183, 185, 186 n, 187, 188, 191, 198, 199, 202, 210, 216, 232, 234, 240, 242, 259, 272, 273, 274
Devreux, Georges, 245 n
Disillusionment, 40-41
Doubt, 5-7, 39, 95-96, 98, 106
- Eddington, Arthur, 25 n
Einstein, Albert, 18, 185
Ernst, Max, 208
- Feuerbach, Ludwig, 274
Fink, Eugen, 235, 243, 244
Flesh, 127, 133, 138, 139, 140, 142, 144, 146, 147, 148, 149, 152, 153, 205, 219, 248-51, 270, 272, 273-74
Freud, Sigmund, 181, 196, 232, 234, 240, 241, 243, 262, 268, 270
- Galileo, 108
Gestalt, 20, 181, 189, 192, 194, 195, 204-6, 212
Gouhier, Henri, 186, 199
Gueroult, Martial, 177, 187, 197, 198, 242
- Hamelin, Octave, 186 n
Hegel, G. W. F., 49, 93, 95, 199, 210, 249, 264, 275
Heidegger, Martin, 115 n, 168, 170, 171 n, 172, 173, 177 n, 180, 182, 185, 196, 203 n, 205, 216, 228, 247 n, 250, 265
Heraclitus, 91
Husserl, Edmund, 41, 45, 49 n, 116, 128, 129, 140, 148, 155, 165, 168, 179, 183, 185, 190, 191,

- 192, 194, 195, 196, 224, 226, 227, 228, 231, 235, 236, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 244, 259, 268
- Hyperdialectic, 94
- Hyper-reflection, 38, 46
- Imagination, 5, 6, 29, 38-41, 77, 245, 258, 262, 266-67
- Intermundane space, 48, 84
- Kant, Immanuel, 33 n, 34, 49 n 109, 173, 185, 216, 261, 264
- Kierkegaard, Søren, 183
- Klee, Paul, 210
- Lacan, Jacques, 126 n
- La Fayette, Mme. de, 187-88
- Language, 4, 12, 13, 96-97, 118-19, 125-27, 153-55, 171, 175-76, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 190, 191, 199, 201-2, 214, 224, 246, 268
- Lavoisier, Antoine L., 149
- Lefort, Claude, 186, 187, 200
- Leibniz, G. W., 153, 166, 169, 176, 177, 185, 206, 211, 222, 223, 228, 242
- Leprince-Ringuet, Louis, 184 n
- Leray, Jean, 184
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 13 n, 168, 188, 207
- Linguistic analysis, 96-97
- Machiavelli, 186, 187, 200
- Malebranche, N., 42, 194, 199, 242, 249
- Malraux, André, 211
- Martinet, André, 181 n
- Marx, Karl, 108, 120, 167, 274, 275
- Metzger, Wolfgang, 219
- Meyer, François, 230, 256
- Michaux, 246
- Michotte, 178, 200, 205, 257
- Millet, 211
- Montaigne, 128
- Myth, 18, 24, 187-88
- Narcissism, 139, 141, 256
- Negintuition, 53, 60, 61, 196
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, 179 n, 183, 246
- Ontology, 165, 166, 167, 179, 183, 210, 225
- Other, the, 9-11, 23-24, 30-31, 57-62, 70-73, 78-83, 140-44, 172, 180, 216, 220-21, 224, 225, 233, 263, 268
- Painting, 170, 207-8, 211, 223
- Péguy, Charles, 173, 196
- Piaget, Jean, 204, 209, 213, 243, 252 n
- Pingaud, Bernard, 187
- Plato, 73, 123
- Pregnancy, 207, 208-9, 212
- Proust, Marcel, 149, 152, 170, 177, 243
- Psychoanalysis, 114, 116, 189, 240, 241, 243, 245, 267, 269-70
- Pyrrhonism, 5, 6, 98
- Reduction, 178, 179
- Retention, 49 n, 191, 192, 194, 195
- Ruyer, Raymond, 174, 194 n
- St. Augustine, 3
- Sartre, Jean-Paul, 52, 53 n, 69, 71, 76 n, 85, 93, 171, 174, 181, 183, 191, 193, 196, 197, 235, 236, 237, 245, 254, 258, 266, 267, 268, 271, 272, 275
- Saussure, Ferdinand de, 201
- Scheler, Max, 182, 270
- Schilder, Paul, 220
- Silence, 39, 125, 171, 176, 179, 201, 213, 215, 216, 263
- Souriau, Etienne, 197
- Spinoza, B., 34, 98, 159, 169, 242, 274
- Time, 46, 184, 185, 190-91, 194-95
- Touching-touched reversibility, 9, 133, 137, 141, 146, 147, 148, 204, 249, 254-57, 261
- Valéry, Paul, 150, 155, 221
- Van Gogh, Vincent, 211
- Wahl, Jean, 114 n, 194
- Wertheimer, 192
- Wolff, Werner, 178

Chronological Index to Working Notes

JANUARY, 1959

Origin of Truth, 165

Origin of Truth, 166

First volume of the *Origin of Truth*, 168

Being and infinity, 169

The brute or wild Being (= perceived world) and its relation with the λόγος προφορικός as *Gebilde*, with the "Logic" that we produce, 170

Tacit Cogito, 170

FEBRUARY, 1959

Reduction—the true transcendental—the *Rätsel Erscheinungsweise*—world, 171

Einströmen—Reflection, 173

(Verbal) *Wesen*—*Wesen* of history, 174

Tacit Cogito and speaking subject, 175

Genealogy of logic, History of being, History of meaning, 176

Weltlichkeit of *Geist*—The "invisible world," non-being in the object-Being: *Seyn*, 180

Science and philosophy, 181

"Make Part One: first outline of ontology . . .," 183

Time, 184

MARCH, 1959

"Leray's report at the C.d.F. . . .," 184

MAY, 1959

Visible and invisible, 2d Part, 185

The visible and the invisible, 187

Perception—unconscious—One—retrograde movement of the true—sedimentation (of which the retrograde movement of the true is a part), 189

Husserl *Zeitbewusstsein*, 190

Transcendence of the thing and transcendence of the phantasm, 191

"Thought," "consciousness" and being at . . . , 192

The looks that cross = *eine Art der Reflexion*, 193
(Bergson) Transcendence—*forgetting*—time, 193

JUNE, 1959

Philosophy and literature, 197
Being and World, Chapter III, 198
Understanding and the implied—History of Philosophy, 198
"Hegel's expression: *an sich oder für uns . . .*," 199

JULY, 1959

Dualism—Philosophy, 200

AUGUST, 1959

"Show I. that the modern theory of perception . . .," 200

SEPTEMBER, 1959

Perceiving subject, speaking subject, thinking subject, 201
"Take up again the analysis of the cube . . .," 202
The problem of analysis, 203
Gestalt, 204
Pregnancy, transcendence, 206
Empirical pregnancy and geometrical pregnancy, 207
The principle of ontology: being in indivision, 208
"Finally one has to admit a sort of truth in the naïve descriptions of perception . . .," 209
"Descartes (*Dioptrics*) . . .," 210

OCTOBER, 1959

Ontology, 210
"Malraux asks why, how, one painter learns from another . . .," 211
Wild perception—The Immediate—Cultural perception—learning, 212
Perception and language, 213

NOVEMBER, 1959

The chiasm, 214
"Meaning is *invisible*, but the invisible is not the contradictory of the visible . . .," 215
The visible and the invisible, 217
The "senses"—dimensionality—Being, 217
Depth, 219
"Say that the things are structures, frameworks, the stars of our life . . .," 220
I—the other, an inadequate formula, 220
"Philosophy has never spoken—I do not say of *passivity* . . .," 221
"A 'direction' of thought—This is not a *metaphor* . . .," 221

DECEMBER, 1959

Leibniz, 222
"World," 223
Husserl *lebendige Gegenwart*, 224

JANUARY, 1960

Science and ontology, 225
Scale—Ontological significance of this notion. *Endo-ontology*. Cf. Husserl's phenomenological absolute, 226

The invisible, the negative, vertical Being, 227
"Husserl too thinks that one sole world is possible . . .," 228
Problematic of the visible and the invisible, 229
Perception—Movement—Primordial unity of the sensible field
—Transcendence synonym of incarnation—Endo-ontology—
Soul and body—Qualitative integration and differentiation, 229

FEBRUARY, 1960

Human body Descartes, 234
Husserl: the *Erwirken* of Thought and historicity, "Vertical" conception of Thought, 235
Essence—Negativity, 236
Problem of the negative and the concept, Gradient, 236
The "representational" acts and the others—Consciousness and existence, 238

MARCH, 1960

Philosophy of speech and malaise of culture, 239
Rays of past, of world, 240
Notion of "ray of the world" (Husserl—Unpublished texts) (or line of the universe), 241

APRIL, 1960

The visible and the invisible, 242
"Indestructible" past, and intentional analytic—and ontology, 243
Telepathy—Being for the other—Corporeity, 244
'Εγώ and οὐτως, 246

MAY, 1960

Visible—Invisible, 246
Blindness (*punctum caecum*) of the consciousness, 248
Flesh of the world—Flesh of the body—Being, 248
Metaphysics—Infinity, World—*Offenheit*, 251
The philosophy of the sensible as literature, 252
"Visual picture"—"representation of the world," *Todo y Nada*, 252
Touching—touching oneself—seeing—seeing oneself—the body, the flesh as *Self*, 254
Visible and invisible, 257
Visible invisible, 258

JUNE, 1960

History, Transcendental geology | Philosophy, 258
Historical time, historical space |
Flesh—Mind, 259

NOVEMBER, 1960

Visible-seer, 260
Dream, Imaginary, 262
Chiasm—Reversibility, 263
Activity: passivity—Teleology, 264
Politics—Philosophy—Literature, 266
The imaginary, 266
Nature, 267
Time and chiasm, 267

"The very pulp of the sensible, what is indefinable in it, is nothing else than the union in it of the 'inside' with the 'outside' . . . ," 268

Silence of Perception, Silent speech, without express signification and yet rich in meaning—language—thing, 268

"The other," 269

DECEMBER, 1960

Body and flesh—Eros—Philosophy of Freudianism, 323

The body in the world. The specular image—resemblance, 269

"Vertical" and existence, 271

MARCH, 1961

Descartes, 272

Descartes—*Intuitus mentis*, 273

Flesh, 273

My plan: I the visible—II Nature—III logos, 274

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PREFACE

The five essays collected here were all written after September 11, 2001, and in response to the conditions of heightened vulnerability and aggression that followed from those events. It was my sense in the fall of 2001 that the United States was missing an opportunity to redefine itself as part of a global community when, instead, it heightened nationalist discourse, extended surveillance mechanisms, suspended constitutional rights, and developed forms of explicit and implicit censorship. These events led public intellectuals to waver in their public commitment to principles of justice and prompted journalists to take leave of the time-honored tradition of investigative journalism. That US boundaries were breached, that an unbearable vulnerability was exposed, that a terrible toll on human life was taken, were, and are, cause for fear and for mourning; they are also instigations for patient political reflection. These events

posed the question, implicitly at least, as to what form political reflection and deliberation ought to take if we take injurability and aggression as two points of departure for political life.

That we can be injured, that others can be injured, that we are subject to death at the whim of another, are all reasons for both fear and grief. What is less certain, however, is whether the experiences of vulnerability and loss have to lead straightaway to military violence and retribution. There are other passages. If we are interested in arresting cycles of violence to produce less violent outcomes, it is no doubt important to ask what, politically, might be made of grief besides a cry for war.

One insight that injury affords is that there are others out there on whom my life depends, people I do not know and may never know. This fundamental dependency on anonymous others is not a condition that I can will away. No security measure will foreclose this dependency; no violent act of sovereignty will rid the world of this fact. What this means, concretely, will vary across the globe. There are ways of distributing vulnerability, differential forms of allocation that make some populations more subject to arbitrary violence than others. But in that order of things, it would not be possible to maintain that the US has greater security problems than some of the more contested and vulnerable nations and peoples of the world. To be injured means that one has the chance to reflect upon injury, to find out the mechanisms of its distribution, to find out who else suffers from permeable borders, unexpected violence, dispossession, and fear, and in what ways. If national sovereignty is challenged, that does not mean it must be shored up at all costs, if that results in suspending civil liberties and suppressing political dissent. Rather, the dislocation from First World privilege, however temporary, offers a chance to start to imagine a world in which that violence might be minimized, in which an inevitable interdependency becomes

acknowledged as the basis for global political community. I confess to not knowing how to theorize that interdependency. I would suggest, however, that both our political and ethical responsibilities are rooted in the recognition that radical forms of self-sufficiency and unbridled sovereignty are, by definition, disrupted by the larger global processes of which they are a part, that no final control can be secured, and that final control is not, cannot be, an ultimate value.

These essays begin the process of that imagining, although there are no grand utopian conclusions here. The first essay begins with the rise of censorship and anti-intellectualism that took hold in the fall of 2001 when anyone who sought to understand the “reasons” for the attack on the United States was regarded as someone who sought to “exonerate” those who conducted that attack. Editorials in the *New York Times* criticized “excuseniks,” exploiting the echoes of “peaceniks”—understood as naive and nostalgic political actors rooted in the frameworks of the sixties—and “refuseniks”—those who refused to comply with Soviet forms of censorship and control and often lost employment as a result. If the term was meant to disparage those who cautioned against war, it inadvertently produced the possibility of an identification of war resisters with courageous human rights activists. The effort at disparagement revealed the difficulty of maintaining a consistently negative view of those who sought a historical and political understanding of the events of September 11 much less of those who opposed war against Afghanistan as a legitimate response.

I argue that it is not a vagary of moral relativism to try to understand what might have led to the attacks on the United States. Further, one can—and ought to—abhor the attacks on ethical grounds (and enumerate those grounds), feel a full measure of grief for those

losses, but let neither moral outrage nor public mourning become the occasion for the muting of critical discourse and public debate on the meaning of historical events. One might still want to know what brought about these events, want to know how best to address those conditions so that the seeds are not sown for further events of this kind, find sites of intervention, help to plan strategies thoughtfully that will not beckon more violence in the future. One can even experience that abhorrence, mourning, anxiety, and fear, and have all of these emotional dispositions lead to a reflection on how others have suffered arbitrary violence at the hands of the US, but also endeavor to produce another public culture and another public policy in which suffering unexpected violence and loss and reactive aggression are not accepted as the norm of political life.

The second piece, "Violence, Mourning, Politics," takes up a psychoanalytic understanding of loss to see why aggression sometimes seems so quickly to follow. The essay pursues the problem of a primary vulnerability to others, one that one cannot will away without ceasing to be human. It suggests as well that contemporary forms of national sovereignty constitute efforts to overcome an impressionability and violability that are ineradicable dimensions of human dependency and sociality. I also consider there how certain forms of grief become nationally recognized and amplified, whereas other losses become unthinkable and ungrievable. I argue that a national melancholia, understood as a disavowed mourning, follows upon the erasure from public representations of the names, images, and narratives of those the US has killed. On the other hand, the US's own losses are consecrated in public obituaries that constitute so many acts of nation-building. Some lives are grievable, and others are not; the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary

conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as a livable life and a grievable death?

"Indefinite Detention" considers the political implications of those normative conceptions of the human that produce, through an exclusionary process, a host of "unlivable lives" whose legal and political status is suspended. The prisoners indefinitely detained in Guantanamo Bay are not considered "subjects" protected by international law, are not entitled to regular trials, to lawyers, to due process. The military tribunals that have, at this date, not been used, represent a breach of constitutional law that makes final judgments of life and death into the prerogative of the President. The decision to detain some, if not most, of the 680 inmates currently in Guantanamo is left to "officials" who will decide, on uncertain grounds, whether these individuals present a risk to US security. Bound by no legal guidelines except those fabricated for the occasion, these officials garner sovereign power unto themselves. Whereas Foucault argued that sovereignty and governmentality can and do coexist, the particular form of that coexistence in the contemporary war prison has yet to be charted. Governmentality designates a model for conceptualizing power in its diffuse and multivalent operations, focusing on the management of populations, and operating through state and non-state institutions and discourses. In the current war prison, officials of governmentality wield sovereign power, understood here as a lawless and unaccountable operation of power, once legal rule is effectively suspended and military codes take its place. Once again, a lost or injured sovereignty becomes reanimated through rules that allocate final decisions about life and death to the executive branch or to officials with no elected status and bound by no constitutional constraints.

These prisoners are not considered "prisoners" and receive no protection from international law. Although the US claims that its

imprisonment methods are consistent with the Geneva Convention, it does not consider itself bound to those accords, and offers none of the legal rights stipulated by that accord. As a result, the humans who are imprisoned in Guantanamo do not count as human; they are not subjects protected by international law. They are not subjects in any legal or normative sense. The dehumanization effected by “indefinite detention” makes use of an ethnic frame for conceiving who will be human, and who will not. Moreover, the policy of “indefinite detention” produces a sphere of imprisonment and punishment unfettered by any laws except those fabricated by the Department of State. The state itself thus attains a certain “indefinite” power to suspend the law and to fabricate the law, at which point the separation of powers is indefinitely set aside. The Patriot Act constitutes another effort to suspend civil liberties in the name of security, one that I do not consider in these pages, but hope to in a future article. In versions 1 and 2 of the Patriot Act, it is the public intellectual culture that is targeted for control and regulation, overriding long-standing claims to intellectual freedom and freedom of association that have been central to conceptions of democratic political life.

“The Charge of Anti-Semitism: Jews, Israel, and the Risks of Public Critique” considers one effort to quell public criticism and intellectual debate in the context of criticisms of Israeli state and military policy. The remark made by Harvard’s President, Lawrence Summers, that to criticize Israel is to engage in “effective” anti-Semitism is critically examined for its failure to distinguish between Jews and Israel, and for the importance of acknowledging publicly those progressive Jewish (Israeli and diasporic) efforts of resistance to the current Israeli state. I consider the consequential implications of his statement, one that expressed sentiments that many people and organizations share, for censoring certain kinds of critical speech by allying those who speak critically with anti-Semitic aims. Given how

heinous any identification with anti-Semitism is, especially for progressive Jews who wage their criticisms as Jews, it follows that those who might object to Israeli policy or, indeed, to the doctrine and practice of Zionism, find themselves in the situation of either muting critical speech or braving the unbearable stigma of anti-Semitism by virtue of speaking publicly about their views. This restriction on speaking is enforced through the regulation of psychic and public identifications, specifically, by the threat of having to live in a radically uninhabitable and unacceptable identification with anti-Semitism if one speaks against Israeli policy or, indeed, Israel itself. When the charge of anti-Semitism is used in this way to quell dissent on the matter of Israel, the charge becomes suspect, thereby depriving the charge of its meaning and importance in what surely must remain an active struggle against existing anti-Semitism.

The public sphere is constituted in part by what cannot be said and what cannot be shown. The limits of the sayable, the limits of what can appear, circumscribe the domain in which political speech operates and certain kinds of subjects appear as viable actors. In this instance, the identification of speech that is critical of Israel with anti-Semitism seeks to render it unsayable. It does this through the allocation of stigma, and seeks to preclude from viable discourse criticisms on the structure of the Israeli state, its preconditions of citizenship, its practices of occupation, and its long-standing violence. I argue in favor of the cessation of both Israeli and Palestinian violence, and suggest that opening up the space for a legitimate public debate, free of intimidation, on the political structure of Israel/Palestine is crucial to that project.

“Precarious Life” approaches the question of a non-violent ethics, one that is based upon an understanding of how easily human life is annulled. Emmanuel Levinas offers a conception of ethics that rests upon an apprehension of the precariousness of life, one that

begins with the precarious life of the Other. He makes use of the "face" as a figure that communicates both the precariousness of life and the interdiction on violence. He gives us a way of understanding how aggression is *not* eradicated in an ethics of non-violence; aggression forms the incessant matter for ethical struggles. Levinas considers the fear and anxiety that aggression seeks to quell, but argues that ethics is precisely a struggle to keep fear and anxiety from turning into murderous action. Although his theological view conjures a scene between two humans each of which bears a face that delivers an ethical demand from a seemingly divine source, his view is nevertheless useful for those cultural analyses that seek to understand how best to depict the human, human grief and suffering, and how best to admit the "faces" of those against whom war is waged into public representation.

The Levinasian face is not precisely or exclusively a human face, although it communicates what is human, what is precarious, what is injurable. The media representations of the faces of the "enemy" efface what is most human about the "face" for Levinas. Through a cultural transposition of his philosophy, it is possible to see how dominant forms of representation can and must be disrupted for something about the precariousness of life to be apprehended. This has implications, once again, for the boundaries that constitute what will and will not appear within public life, the limits of a publicly acknowledged field of appearance. Those who remain faceless or whose faces are presented to us as so many symbols of evil, authorize us to become senseless before those lives we have eradicated, and whose grievability is indefinitely postponed. Certain faces must be admitted into public view, must be seen and heard for some keener sense of the value of life, all life, to take hold. So, it is not that mourning is the goal of politics, but that without the capacity to mourn, we lose that keener sense of life we need in order to oppose

violence. And though for some, mourning can only be resolved through violence, it seems clear that violence only brings on more loss, and the failure to heed the claim of precarious life only leads, again and again, to the dry grief of an endless political rage. And whereas some forms of public mourning are protracted and ritualized, stoking nationalist fervor, reiterating the conditions of loss and victimization that come to justify a more or less permanent war, not all forms of mourning lead to that conclusion.

Dissent and debate depend upon the inclusion of those who maintain critical views of state policy and civic culture remaining part of a larger public discussion of the value of policies and politics. To charge those who voice critical views with treason, terrorist-sympathizing, anti-Semitism, moral relativism, postmodernism, juvenile behavior, collaboration, anachronistic Leftism, is to seek to destroy the credibility not of the views that are held, but of the persons who hold them. It produces the climate of fear in which to voice a certain view is to risk being branded and shamed with a heinous appellation. To continue to voice one's views under those conditions is not easy, since one must not only discount the truth of the appellation, but brave the stigma that seizes up from the public domain. Dissent is quelled, in part, through threatening the speaking subject with an uninhabitable identification. Because it would be heinous to identify as treasonous, as a collaborator, one fails to speak, or one speaks in throttled ways, in order to sidestep the terrorizing identification that threatens to take hold. This strategy for quelling dissent and limiting the reach of critical debate happens not only through a series of shaming tactics which have a certain psychological terrorization as their effect, but they work as well by producing what will and will not count as a viable speaking subject and a reasonable opinion within the public domain. It is precisely because one does not want to lose one's status as a viable speaking

being that one does not say what one thinks. Under social conditions that regulate identifications and the sense of viability to this degree, censorship operates implicitly and forcefully. The line that circumscribes what is speakable and what is livable also functions as an instrument of censorship.

To decide what views will count as reasonable within the public domain, however, is to decide what will and will not count as the public sphere of debate. And if someone holds views that are not in line with the nationalist norm, that person comes to lack credibility as a speaking person, and the media is not open to him or her (though the internet, interestingly, is). The foreclosure of critique empties the public domain of debate and democratic contestation itself, so that debate becomes the exchange of views among the like-minded, and criticism, which ought to be central to any democracy, becomes a fugitive and suspect activity.

Public policy, including foreign policy, often seeks to restrain the public sphere from being open to certain forms of debate and the circulation of media coverage. One way a hegemonic understanding of politics is achieved is through circumscribing what will and will not be admissible as part of the public sphere itself. Without disposing populations in such a way that war seems good and right and true, no war can claim popular consent, and no administration can maintain its popularity. To produce what will constitute the public sphere, however, it is necessary to control the way in which people see, how they hear, what they see. The constraints are not only on content—certain images of dead bodies in Iraq, for instance, are considered unacceptable for public visual consumption—but on what “can” be heard, read, seen, felt, and known. The public sphere is constituted in part by what can appear, and the regulation of the sphere of appearance is one way to establish what will count as reality, and what will not. It is also a way of establishing whose lives can be marked as

lives, and whose deaths will count as deaths. Our capacity to feel and to apprehend hangs in the balance. But so, too, does the fate of the reality of certain lives and deaths as well as the ability to think critically and publicly about the effects of war.

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on more sustaining grounds. This means, in part, hearing beyond what we are able to hear. And it means as well being open to narration that decenters us from our supremacy, in both its right- and left-wing forms. Can we hear that there were precedents for these events and even know that it is urgent to know and learn from these precedents as we seek to stop them from operating in the present, at the same time as we insist that these precedents do not “justify” the recent violent events? If the events are not understandable without that history, that does not mean that the historical understanding furnishes a moral justification for the events themselves. Only then do we reach the disposition to get to the “root” of violence, and begin to offer another vision of the future than that which perpetuates violence in the name of denying it, offering instead names for things that restrain us from thinking and acting radically and well about global options.

2

VIOLENCE, MOURNING, POLITICS

I propose to consider a dimension of political life that has to do with our exposure to violence and our complicity in it, with our vulnerability to loss and the task of mourning that follows, and with finding a basis for community in these conditions. We cannot precisely “argue against” these dimensions of human vulnerability, inasmuch as they function, in effect, as the limits of the arguable, even perhaps as the fecundity of the inarguable. It is not that my thesis survives any argument against it: surely there are various ways of regarding corporeal vulnerability and the task of mourning, and various ways of figuring these conditions within the sphere of politics. But if the opposition is to vulnerability and the task of mourning itself, regardless of its formulation, then it is probably best not to regard this opposition primarily as an “argument.” Indeed, if there were no opposition to this thesis, then there would be no reason

to write this essay. And, if the opposition to this thesis were not consequential, there would be no political reason for reimagining the possibility of community on the basis of vulnerability and loss.

Perhaps, then, it should come as no surprise that I propose to start, and to end, with the question of the human (as if there were any other way for us to start or end!). We start here not because there is a human condition that is universally shared—this is surely not yet the case. The question that preoccupies me in the light of recent global violence is, Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, What *makes for a grievable life*? Despite our differences in location and history, my guess is that it is possible to appeal to a “we,” for all of us have some notion of what it is to have lost somebody. Loss has made a tenuous “we” of us all. And if we have lost, then it follows that we have had, that we have desired and loved, that we have struggled to find the conditions for our desire. We have all lost in recent decades from AIDS, but there are other losses that afflict us, from illness and from global conflict; and there is the fact as well that women and minorities, including sexual minorities, are, as a community, subjected to violence, exposed to its possibility, if not its realization. This means that each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies—as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of a publicity at once assertive and exposed. Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure.

I am not sure I know when mourning is successful, or when one has fully mourned another human being. Freud changed his mind on this subject: he suggested that successful mourning meant being able to exchange one object for another;¹ he later claimed that incorporation, originally associated with melancholia, was essential to the

task of mourning.² Freud’s early hope that an attachment might be withdrawn and then given anew implied a certain interchangeability of objects as a sign of hopefulness, as if the prospect of entering life anew made use of a kind of promiscuity of libidinal aim.³ That might be true, but I do not think that successful grieving implies that one has forgotten another person or that something else has come along to take its place, as if full substitutability were something for which we might strive.

Perhaps, rather, one mourns when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly for ever. Perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say *submitting* to a transformation) the full result of which one cannot know in advance. There is losing, as we know, but there is also the transformative effect of loss, and this latter cannot be charted or planned. One can try to choose it, but it may be that this experience of transformation deconstitutes choice at some level. I do not think, for instance, that one can invoke the Protestant ethic when it comes to loss. One cannot say, “Oh, I’ll go through loss this way, and that will be the result, and I’ll apply myself to the task, and I’ll endeavor to achieve the resolution of grief that is before me.” I think one is hit by waves, and that one starts out the day with an aim, a project, a plan, and finds oneself foiled. One finds oneself fallen. One is exhausted but does not know why. Something is larger than one’s own deliberate plan, one’s own project, one’s own knowing and choosing.

Something takes hold of you: where does it come from? What sense does it make? What claims us at such moments, such that we are not the masters of ourselves? To what are we tied? And by what are we seized? Freud reminded us that when we lose someone, we do not always know what it is *in* that person that has been lost.⁴ So when one loses, one is also faced with something enigmatic: something is

hiding in the loss, something is lost within the recesses of loss. If mourning involves knowing what one has lost (and melancholia originally meant, to a certain extent, not knowing), then mourning would be maintained by its enigmatic dimension, by the experience of not knowing incited by losing what we cannot fully fathom.

When we lose certain people, or when we are dispossessed from a place, or a community, we may simply feel that we are undergoing something temporary, that mourning will be over and some restoration of prior order will be achieved. But maybe when we undergo what we do, something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us. 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 no ready 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.

Many people think that grief is privatizing, that it returns us to a solitary situation and is, in that sense, depoliticizing. But I think it furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order, and it does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility. If my fate is not originally or finally separable from yours, then the "we" is traversed by a relationality that we cannot

easily argue against; or, rather, we can argue against it, but we would be denying something fundamental about the social conditions of our very formation.

A consequential grammatical quandary follows. In the effort to explain these relations, I might be said to "have" them, but what does "having" imply? I might sit back and try to enumerate them to you. I might explain what this friendship means, what that lover meant or means to me. I would be constituting myself in such an instance as a detached narrator of my relations. Dramatizing my detachment, I might perhaps only be showing that the form of attachment I am demonstrating is trying to minimize its own relationality, is invoking it as an option, as something that does not touch on the question of what sustains me fundamentally.

What grief displays, in contrast, is the thrall in which our relations with others hold us, in ways that we cannot always recount or explain, in ways that often interrupt the self-conscious account of ourselves we might try to provide, in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control. I might try to tell a story here about what I am feeling, but it would have to be a story in which the very "I" who seeks to tell the story is stopped in the midst of the telling; the very "I" is called into question by its relation to the Other, a relation that does not precisely reduce me to speechlessness, but does nevertheless clutter my speech with signs of its undoing. I tell a story about the relations I choose, only to expose, somewhere along the way, the way I am gripped and undone by these very relations. My narrative falters, as it must.

Let's face it. We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something.

This seems so clearly the case with grief, but it can be so only because it was already the case with desire. One does not always stay intact. One may want to, or manage to for a while, but despite one's

best efforts, one is undone, in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of the touch, by the memory of the feel. And so, when we speak about “my sexuality” or “my gender,” as we do and as we must, we nevertheless mean something complicated that is partially concealed by our usage. As a mode of relation, neither gender nor sexuality is precisely a possession, but, rather, is a mode of being dispossessed, a way of being *for* another or *by virtue of* another. It won't even do to say that I am promoting a relational view of the self over an autonomous one or trying to redescribe autonomy in terms of relationality. Despite my affinity for the term relationality, we may need other language to approach the issue that concerns us, a way of thinking about how we are not only constituted by our relations but also dispossessed by them as well.

We tend to narrate the history of the feminist and lesbian/gay movement, for instance, in such a way that ecstasy figured prominently in the sixties and seventies and midway through the eighties. But maybe ecstasy is more persistent than that; maybe it is with us all along. To be ec-static means, literally, to be outside oneself, and thus can have several meanings: to be transported beyond oneself by a passion, but also to be *beside oneself* with rage or grief. I think that if I can still address a “we,” or include myself within its terms, I am speaking to those of us who are living in certain ways *beside ourselves*, whether in sexual passion, or emotional grief, or political rage.

I am arguing, if I am “arguing” at all, that we have an interesting political predicament; most of the time when we hear about “rights,” we understand them as pertaining to individuals. When we argue for protection against discrimination, we argue as a group or a class. And in that language and in that context, we have to present ourselves as bounded beings—distinct, recognizable, delineated, subjects before the law, a community defined by some shared features. Indeed, we

must be able to use that language to secure legal protections and entitlements. But perhaps we make a mistake if we take the definitions of who we are, legally, to be adequate descriptions of what we are about. Although this language may well establish our legitimacy within a legal framework ensconced in liberal versions of human ontology, it does not do justice to passion and grief and rage, all of which tear us from ourselves, bind us to others, transport us, undo us, implicate us in lives that are not our own, irreversibly, if not fatally.

It is not easy to understand how a political community is wrought from such ties. One speaks, and one speaks for another, to another, and yet there is no way to collapse the distinction between the Other and oneself. When we say “we” we do nothing more than designate this very problematic. We do not solve it. And perhaps it is, and ought to be, insoluble. This disposition of ourselves outside ourselves seems to follow from bodily life, from its vulnerability and its exposure.

At the same time, essential to so many political movements is the claim of bodily integrity and self-determination. It is important to claim that our bodies are in a sense *our own* and that we are entitled to claim rights of autonomy over our bodies. This assertion is as true for lesbian and gay rights claims to sexual freedom as it is for transsexual and transgender claims to self-determination, as it is to intersex claims to be free of coerced medical and psychiatric interventions. It is as true for all claims to be free from racist attacks, physical and verbal, as it is for feminism's claim to reproductive freedom, and as it surely is for those whose bodies labor under duress, economic and political, under conditions of colonization and occupation. It is difficult, if not impossible, to make these claims without recourse to autonomy. I am not suggesting that we cease to make these claims. We have to, we must. I also do not wish to imply that we have to make these claims reluctantly or strategically. Defined

within the broadest possible compass, they are part of any normative aspiration of a movement that seeks to maximize the protection and the freedoms of sexual and gender minorities, of women, and of racial and ethnic minorities, especially as they cut across all the other categories.

But is there another normative aspiration that we must also seek to articulate and to defend? Is there a way in which the place of the body, and the way in which it disposes us outside ourselves or sets us beside ourselves, opens up another kind of normative aspiration within the field of politics?

The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all these as well. Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own. The body has its invariably public dimension. Constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine. Given over from the start to the world of others, it bears their imprint, is formed within the crucible of social life; only later, and with some uncertainty, do I lay claim to my body as my own, if, in fact, I ever do. Indeed, if I deny that prior to the formation of my "will," my body related me to others whom I did not choose to have in proximity to myself, if I build a notion of "autonomy" on the basis of the denial of this sphere of a primary and unwillful physical proximity with others, then am I denying the social conditions of my embodiment in the name of autonomy?

At one level, this situation is literally familiar: there is bound to be some experience of humiliation for adults, who think that they are exercising judgment in matters of love, to reflect upon the fact that, as infants and young children, they loved their parents or other primary others in absolute and uncritical ways—and that something

of that pattern lives on in their adult relationships. I may wish to reconstitute my "self" as if it were there all along, a tacit ego with acumen from the start; but to do so would be to deny the various forms of rapture and subjection that formed the condition of my emergence as an individuated being and that continue to haunt my adult sense of self with whatever anxiety and longing I may now feel. Individuation is an accomplishment, not a presupposition, and certainly no guarantee.

Is there a reason to apprehend and affirm this condition of my formation within the sphere of politics, a sphere monopolized by adults? If I am struggling for autonomy, do I not need to be struggling for something else as well, a conception of myself as invariably in community, impressed upon by others, impinging upon them as well, and in ways that are not fully in my control or clearly predictable?

Is there a way that we might struggle for autonomy in many spheres, yet also consider the demands that are imposed upon us by living in a world of beings who are, by definition, physically dependent on one another, physically vulnerable to one another? Is this not another way of imagining community, one in which we are alike only in having this condition separately and so having in common a condition that cannot be thought without difference? This way of imagining community affirms relationality not only as a descriptive or historical fact of our formation, but also as an ongoing normative dimension of our social and political lives, one in which we are compelled to take stock of our interdependence. According to this latter view, it would become incumbent on us to consider the place of violence in any such relation, for violence is, always, an exploitation of that primary tie, that primary way in which we are, as bodies, outside ourselves and for one another.

We are something other than "autonomous" in such a condition, but that does not mean that we are merged or without boundaries. It

does mean, however, that when we think about who we “are” and seek to represent ourselves, we cannot represent ourselves as merely bounded beings, for the primary others who are past for me not only live on in the fiber of the boundary that contains me (one meaning of “incorporation”), but they also haunt the way I am, as it were, periodically undone and open to becoming unbounded.

Let us return to the issue of grief, to the moments in which one undergoes something outside one’s control and finds that one is beside oneself, not at one with oneself. Perhaps we can say that grief contains the possibility of apprehending a mode of dispossession that is fundamental to who I am. This possibility does not dispute the fact of my autonomy, but it does qualify that claim through recourse to the fundamental sociality of embodied life, the ways in which we are, from the start and by virtue of being a bodily being, already given over, beyond ourselves, implicated in lives that are not our own. If I do not always know what seizes me on such occasions, and if I do not always know what it is *in* another person that I have lost, it may be that this sphere of dispossession is precisely the one that exposes my unknowingness, the unconscious imprint of my primary sociality. Can this insight lead to a normative reorientation for politics? Can this situation of mourning—one that is so dramatic for those in social movements who have undergone innumerable losses—supply a perspective by which to begin to apprehend the contemporary global situation?

Mourning, fear, anxiety, rage. In the United States, we have been surrounded with violence, having perpetrated it and perpetrating it still, having suffered it, living in fear of it, planning more of it, if not an open future of infinite war in the name of a “war on terrorism.” Violence is surely a touch of the worst order, a way a primary human vulnerability to other humans is exposed in its most terrifying way, a way in which we are given over, without control, to the will of

another, a way in which life itself can be expunged by the willful action of another. To the extent that we commit violence, we are acting on another, putting the other at risk, causing the other damage, threatening to expunge the other. In a way, we all live with this particular vulnerability, a vulnerability to the other that is part of bodily life, a vulnerability to a sudden address from elsewhere that we cannot preempt. This vulnerability, however, becomes highly exacerbated under certain social and political conditions, especially those in which violence is a way of life and the means to secure self-defense are limited.

Mindfulness of this vulnerability can become the basis of claims for non-military political solutions, just as denial of this vulnerability through a fantasy of mastery (an institutionalized fantasy of mastery) can fuel the instruments of war. We cannot, however, will away this vulnerability. We must attend to it, even abide by it, as we begin to think about what politics might be implied by staying with the thought of corporeal vulnerability itself, a situation in which we can be vanquished or lose others. Is there something to be learned about the geopolitical distribution of corporeal vulnerability from our own brief and devastating exposure to this condition?

I think, for instance, that we have seen, are seeing, various ways of dealing with vulnerability and grief, so that, for instance, William Safire citing Milton writes we must “banish melancholy,”⁵ as if the repudiation of melancholy ever did anything other than fortify its affective structure under another name, since melancholy is already the repudiation of mourning; so that, for instance, President Bush announced on September 21 that we have finished grieving and that *now* it is time for resolute action to take the place of grief.⁶ When grieving is something to be feared, our fears can give rise to the impulse to resolve it quickly, to banish it in the name of an action invested with the power to restore the loss or return the world to a

former order, or to reinvigorate a fantasy that the world formerly was orderly.

Is there something to be gained from grieving, from tarrying with grief, from remaining exposed to its unbearability and not endeavoring to seek a resolution for grief through violence? Is there something to be gained in the political domain by maintaining grief as part of the framework within which we think our international ties? If we stay with the sense of loss, are we left feeling only passive and powerless, as some might fear? Or are we, rather, returned to a sense of human vulnerability, to our collective responsibility for the physical lives of one another? Could the experience of a dislocation of First World safety not condition the insight into the radically inequitable ways that corporeal vulnerability is distributed globally? To foreclose that vulnerability, to banish it, to make ourselves secure at the expense of every other human consideration is to eradicate one of the most important resources from which we must take our bearings and find our way.

To grieve, and to make grief itself into a resource for politics, is not to be resigned to inaction, but it may be understood as the slow process by which we develop a point of identification with suffering itself. The disorientation of grief—"Who have I become?" or, indeed, "What is left of me?" "What is it in the Other that I have lost?"—posits the "I" in the mode of unknowingness.

But this can be a point of departure for a new understanding if the narcissistic preoccupation of melancholia can be moved into a consideration of the vulnerability of others. Then we might critically evaluate and oppose the conditions under which certain human lives are more vulnerable than others, and thus certain human lives are more grievable than others. From where might a principle emerge by which we vow to protect others from the kinds of violence we have suffered, if not from an apprehension of a common human vulnerability? I do

not mean to deny that vulnerability is differentiated, that it is allocated differentially across the globe. I do not even mean to presume upon a common notion of the human, although to speak in its "name" is already (and perhaps only) to fathom its possibility.

I am referring to violence, vulnerability, and mourning, but there is a more general conception of the human with which I am trying to work here, one in which we are, from the start, given over to the other, one in which we are, from the start, even prior to individuation itself and, by virtue of bodily requirements, given over to some set of primary others: this conception means that we are vulnerable to those we are too young to know and to judge and, hence, vulnerable to violence; but also vulnerable to another range of touch, a range that includes the eradication of our being at the one end, and the physical support for our lives at the other.

Although I am insisting on referring to a common human vulnerability, one that emerges with life itself, I also insist that we cannot recover the source of this vulnerability: it precedes the formation of "I." This is a condition, a condition of being laid bare from the start and with which we cannot argue. I mean, we can argue with it, but we are perhaps foolish, if not dangerous, when we do. I do not mean to suggest that the necessary support for a newborn is always there. Clearly, it is not, and for some this primary scene is a scene of abandonment or violence or starvation, that theirs are bodies given over to nothing, or to brutality, or to no sustenance.

We cannot understand vulnerability as a deprivation, however, unless we understand the need that is thwarted. Such infants still must be apprehended as given over, as given over to no one or to some insufficient support, or to an abandonment. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to understand how humans suffer from oppression without seeing how this primary condition is exploited and exploitable, thwarted and denied. The condition of primary vulnerability, of

being given over to the touch of the other, even if there is no other there, and no support for our lives, signifies a primary helplessness and need, one to which any society must attend. Lives are supported and maintained differently, and there are radically different ways in which human physical vulnerability is distributed across the globe. Certain lives will be highly protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilize the forces of war. Other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as "grievable."

A hierarchy of grief could no doubt be enumerated. We have seen it already, in the genre of the obituary, where lives are quickly tidied up and summarized, humanized, usually married, or on the way to be, heterosexual, happy, monogamous. But this is just a sign of another differential relation to life, since we seldom, if ever, hear the names of the thousands of Palestinians who have died by the Israeli military with United States support, or any number of Afghan people, children and adults. Do they have names and faces, personal histories, family, favorite hobbies, slogans by which they live? What defense against the apprehension of loss is at work in the blithe way in which we accept deaths caused by military means with a shrug or with self-righteousness or with clear vindictiveness? To what extent have Arab peoples, predominantly practitioners of Islam, fallen outside the "human" as it has been naturalized in its "Western" mold by the contemporary workings of humanism? What are the cultural contours of the human at work here? How do our cultural frames for thinking the human set limits on the kinds of losses we can avow as loss? After all, if someone is lost, and that person is not someone, then what and where is the loss, and how does mourning take place?

This last is surely a question that lesbian, gay, and bi-studies have asked in relation to violence against sexual minorities; that transgendered people have asked as they are singled out for harassment

and sometimes murder; that intersexed people have asked, whose formative years are so often marked by unwanted violence against their bodies in the name of a normative notion of the human, a normative notion of what the body of a human must be. This question is no doubt, as well, the basis of a profound affinity between movements centering on gender and sexuality and efforts to counter the normative human morphologies and capacities that condemn or efface those who are physically challenged. It must also be part of the affinity with anti-racist struggles, given the racial differential that undergirds the culturally viable notions of the human, ones that we see acted out in dramatic and terrifying ways in the global arena at the present time.

I am referring not only to humans not regarded as humans, and thus to a restrictive conception of the human that is based upon their exclusion. It is not a matter of a simple entry of the excluded into an established ontology, but an insurrection at the level of ontology, a critical opening up of the questions, What is real? Whose lives are real? How might reality be remade? Those who are unreal have, in a sense, already suffered the violence of derealization. What, then, is the relation between violence and those lives considered as "unreal"? Does violence effect that unreality? Does violence take place on the condition of that unreality?

If violence is done against those who are unreal, then, from the perspective of violence, it fails to injure or negate those lives since those lives are already negated. But they have a strange way of remaining animated and so must be negated again (and again). They cannot be mourned because they are always already lost or, rather, never "were," and they must be killed, since they seem to live on, stubbornly, in this state of deadness. Violence renews itself in the face of the apparent inexhaustibility of its object. The derealization of the "Other" means that it is neither alive nor dead, but interminably

spectral. The infinite paranoia that imagines the war against terrorism as a war without end will be one that justifies itself endlessly in relation to the spectral infinity of its enemy, regardless of whether or not there are established grounds to suspect the continuing operation of terror cells with violent aims.

How do we understand this derealization? It is one thing to argue that first, on the level of discourse, certain lives are not considered lives at all, they cannot be humanized, that they fit no dominant frame for the human, and that their dehumanization occurs first, at this level, and that this level then gives rise to a physical violence that in some sense delivers the message of dehumanization that is already at work in the culture. It is another thing to say that discourse itself effects violence through omission. If 200,000 Iraqi children were killed during the Gulf War and its aftermath,⁷ do we have an image, a frame for any of those lives, singly or collectively? Is there a story we might find about those deaths in the media? Are there names attached to those children?

There are no obituaries for the war casualties that the United States inflicts, and there cannot be. If there were to be an obituary, there would have had to have been a life, a life worth noting, a life worth valuing and preserving, a life that qualifies for recognition. Although we might argue that it would be impractical to write obituaries for all those people, or for all people, I think we have to ask, again and again, how the obituary functions as the instrument by which grievability is publicly distributed. It is the means by which a life becomes, or fails to become, a publicly grievable life, an icon for national self-recognition, the means by which a life becomes noteworthy. As a result, we have to consider the obituary as an act of nation-building. The matter is not a simple one, for, if a life is not grievable, it is not quite a life; it does not qualify as a life and is not worth a note. It is already the unburied, if not the unburi-able.

It is not simply, then, that there is a “discourse” of dehumanization that produces these effects, but rather that there is a limit to discourse that establishes the limits of human intelligibility. It is not just that a death is poorly marked, but that it is unmarkable. Such a death vanishes, not into explicit discourse, but in the ellipses by which public discourse proceeds. The queer lives that vanished on September 11 were not publicly welcomed into the idea of national identity built in the obituary pages, and their closest relations were only belatedly and selectively (the marital norm holding sway once again) made eligible for benefits. But this should come as no surprise, when we think about how few deaths from AIDS were publicly grievable losses, and how, for instance, the extensive deaths now taking place in Africa are also, in the media, for the most part unmarkable and ungrievable.

A Palestinian citizen of the United States recently submitted to the *San Francisco Chronicle* obituaries for two Palestinian families who had been killed by Israeli troops, only to be told that the obituaries could not be accepted without proof of death.⁸ The staff of the *Chronicle* said that statements “in memoriam” could, however, be accepted, and so the obituaries were rewritten and resubmitted in the form of memorials. These memorials were then rejected, with the explanation that the newspaper did not wish to offend anyone. We have to wonder under what conditions public grieving constitutes an “offense” against the public itself, constituting an intolerable eruption within the terms of what is speakable in public? What might be “offensive” about the public avowal of sorrow and loss, such that memorials would function as offensive speech? Is it that we should not proclaim in public these deaths, for fear of offending those who ally themselves with the Israeli state or military? Is it that these deaths are not considered to be real deaths, and that these lives not grievable, because they are Palestinians, or because they are victims

of war? What is the relation between the violence by which these ungrievable lives were lost and the prohibition on their public grievability? Are the violence and the prohibition both permutations of the same violence? Does the prohibition on discourse relate to the dehumanization of the deaths—and the lives?

Dehumanization's relation to discourse is complex. It would be too simple to claim that violence simply implements what is already happening in discourse, such that a discourse on dehumanization produces treatment, including torture and murder, structured by the discourse. Here the dehumanization emerges at the limits of discursive life, limits established through prohibition and foreclosure. There is less a dehumanizing discourse at work here than a refusal of discourse that produces dehumanization as a result. Violence against those who are already not quite living, that is, living in a state of suspension between life and death, leaves a mark that is no mark. There will be no public act of grieving (said Creon in *Antigone*). If there is a "discourse," it is a silent and melancholic one in which there have been no lives, and no losses; there has been no common bodily condition, no vulnerability that serves as the basis for an apprehension of our commonality; and there has been no sundering of that commonality. None of this takes place on the order of the event. None of this takes place. In the silence of the newspaper, there was no event, no loss, and this failure of recognition is mandated through an identification with those who identify with the perpetrators of that violence.

This is made all the more apparent in United States journalism, in which, with some notable exceptions, one might have expected a public exposure and investigation of the bombing of civilian targets, the loss of lives in Afghanistan, the decimation of communities, infrastructures, religious centers. To the extent that journalists have accepted the charge to be part of the war effort itself, reporting itself

has become a speech act in the service of the military operations. Indeed, after the brutal and terrible murder of the *Wall Street Journal's* Daniel Pearl, several journalists started to write about themselves as working on the "front lines" of the war. Indeed, Daniel Pearl, "Danny" Pearl, is so familiar to me: he could be my brother or my cousin; he is so easily humanized; he fits the frame, his name has my father's name in it. His last name contains my Yiddish name.

But those lives in Afghanistan, or other United States targets, who were also snuffed out brutally and without recourse to any protection, will they ever be as human as Daniel Pearl? Will the names of the Palestinians stated in that memorial submitted to the *San Francisco Chronicle* ever be brought into public view? (Will we feel compelled to learn how to say these names and to remember them?) I do not say this to espouse a cynicism. I am in favor of the public obituary but mindful of who has access to it, and which deaths can be fairly mourned there. We should surely continue to grieve for Daniel Pearl, even though he is so much more easily humanized for most United States citizens than the nameless Afghans obliterated by United States and European violence. But we have to consider how the norm governing who will be a grievable human is circumscribed and produced in these acts of permissible and celebrated public grieving, how they sometimes operate in tandem with a prohibition on the public grieving of others' lives, and how this differential allocation of grief serves the derealizing aims of military violence. What follows as well from prohibitions on avowing grief in public is an effective mandate in favor of a generalized melancholia (and a derealization of loss) when it comes to considering *as dead* those the United States or its allies have killed.

Finally, it seems important to consider that the prohibition on certain forms of public grieving itself constitutes the public sphere on the basis of such a prohibition. The public will be created on the

condition that certain images do not appear in the media, certain names of the dead are not utterable, certain losses are not avowed as losses, and violence is derealized and diffused. Such prohibitions not only shore up a nationalism based on its military aims and practices, but they also suppress any internal dissent that would expose the concrete, human effects of its violence.

Similarly, the extensive reporting of the final moments of the lost lives in the World Trade Center are compelling and important stories. They fascinate, and they produce an intense identification by arousing feelings of fear and sorrow. One cannot help but wonder, however, what humanizing effect these narratives have. By this I do not mean simply that they humanize the lives that were lost along with those that narrowly escaped, but that they stage the scene and provide the narrative means by which "the human" in its grievability is established. We cannot find in the public media, apart from some reports posted on the internet and circulated mainly through email contacts, the narratives of Arab lives killed elsewhere by brutal means. In this sense, we have to ask about the conditions under which a grievable life is established and maintained, and through what logic of exclusion, what practice of effacement and denominalization.

Mourning Daniel Pearl presents no problem for me or for my family of origin. His is a familiar name, a familiar face, a story about education that I understand and share; his wife's education makes her language familiar, even moving, to me, a proximity of what is similar.⁹ In relation to him, I am not disturbed by the proximity of the unfamiliar, the proximity of difference that makes me work to forge new ties of identification and to reimagine what it is to belong to a human community in which common epistemological and cultural grounds cannot always be assumed. His story takes me home and tempts me to stay there. But at what cost do I establish the familiar as the criterion by which a human life is grievable?

Most Americans have probably experienced something like the loss of their First Worldism as a result of the events of September 11 and its aftermath. What kind of loss is this? It is the loss of the prerogative, only and always, to be the one who transgresses the sovereign boundaries of other states, but never to be in the position of having one's own boundaries transgressed. The United States was supposed to be the place that could not be attacked, where life was safe from violence initiated from abroad, where the only violence we knew was the kind that we inflicted on ourselves. The violence that we inflict on others is only—and always—selectively brought into public view. We now see that the national border was more permeable than we thought. Our general response is anxiety, rage; a radical desire for security, a shoring-up of the borders against what is perceived as alien; a heightened surveillance of Arab peoples and anyone who looks vaguely Arab in the dominant racial imaginary, anyone who looks like someone you once knew who was of Arab descent, or who you thought was—often citizens, it turns out, often Sikhs, often Hindus, even sometimes Israelis, especially Sephardim, often Arab-Americans, recent arrivals or those who have been in the US for decades.

Various terror alerts that go out over the media authorize and heighten racial hysteria in which fear is directed anywhere and nowhere, in which individuals are asked to be on guard but not told what to be on guard against; so everyone is free to imagine and identify the source of terror.

The result is that an amorphous racism abounds, rationalized by the claim of "self-defense." A generalized panic works in tandem with the shoring-up of the sovereign state and the suspension of civil liberties. Indeed, when the alert goes out, every member of the population is asked to become a "foot soldier" in Bush's army. The loss of First World presumption is the loss of a certain horizon of experience, a certain sense of the world itself as a national entitlement.

I condemn on several ethical bases the violence done against the United States and do not see it as “just punishment” for prior sins. At the same time, I consider our recent trauma to be an opportunity for a reconsideration of United States hubris and the importance of establishing more radically egalitarian international ties. Doing this involves a certain “loss” for the country as a whole: the notion of the world itself as a sovereign entitlement of the United States must be given up, lost, and mourned, as narcissistic and grandiose fantasies must be lost and mourned. From the subsequent experience of loss and fragility, however, the possibility of making different kinds of ties emerges. Such mourning might (or could) effect a transformation in our sense of international ties that would crucially rearticulate the possibility of democratic political culture here and elsewhere.

Unfortunately, the opposite reaction seems to be the case. The US asserts its own sovereignty precisely at a moment in which the sovereignty of the nation is bespeaking its own weakness, if not its growing status as an anachronism. It requires international support, but it insists on leading the way. It breaks its international contracts, and then asks whether other countries are with America or against it. It expresses its willingness to act consistently with the Geneva Convention, but it refuses to be bound to that accord, as is stipulated by its signatory status. On the contrary, the US decides whether it will act consistently with the doctrine, which parts of the doctrine apply, and will interpret that doctrine unilaterally. Indeed, in the very moment in which it claims to act consistently with the doctrine, as it does when it justifies its treatment of the Guantanamo Bay prisoners as “humane,” it decides unilaterally what will count as humane, and openly defies the stipulated definition of humane treatment that the Geneva Convention states in print. It bombs unilaterally, it says that it is time for Saddam Hussein to be removed, it decides when and

where to install democracy, for whom, by means dramatically anti-democratic, and without compunction.

Nations are not the same as individual psyches, but both can be described as “subjects,” albeit of different orders. When the United States acts, it establishes a conception of what it means to act as an American, establishes a norm by which that subject might be known. In recent months, a subject has been instated at the national level, a sovereign and extra-legal subject, a violent and self-centered subject; its actions constitute the building of a subject that seeks to restore and maintain its mastery through the systematic destruction of its multi-lateral relations, its ties to the international community. It shores itself up, seeks to reconstitute its imagined wholeness, but only at the price of denying its own vulnerability, its dependency, its exposure, where it exploits those very features in others, thereby making those features “other to” itself.

That this foreclosure of alterity takes place in the name of “feminism” is surely something to worry about. The sudden feminist conversion on the part of the Bush administration, which retroactively transformed the liberation of women into a rationale for its military actions against Afghanistan, is a sign of the extent to which feminism, as a trope, is deployed in the service of restoring the presumption of First World impermeability. Once again we see the spectacle of “white men, seeking to save brown women from brown men,” as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak once described the culturally imperialist exploitation of feminism.¹⁰ Feminism itself becomes, under these circumstances, unequivocally identified with the imposition of values on cultural contexts willfully unknown. It would surely be a mistake to gauge the progress of feminism by its success as a colonial project. It seems more crucial than ever to disengage feminism from its First World presumption and to use the resources of feminist theory, and activism, to rethink the meaning of the tie, the bond, the

alliance, the relation, as they are imagined and lived in the horizon of a counterimperialist egalitarianism.

Feminism surely could provide all kinds of responses to the following questions: How does a collective deal, finally, with its vulnerability to violence? At what price, and at whose expense, does it gain a purchase on "security," and in what ways has a chain of violence formed in which the aggression the United States has wrought returns to it in different forms? Can we think of the history of violence here without exonerating those who engage it against the United States in the present? Can we provide a knowledgeable explanation of events that is not confused with a moral exoneration of violence? What has happened to the value of critique as a democratic value? Under what conditions is critique itself censored, as if any reflexive criticism can only and always be construed as weakness and fallibility?

Negotiating a sudden and unprecedented vulnerability—what are the options? What are the long-term strategies? Women know this question well, have known it in nearly all times, and nothing about the triumph of colonial powers has made our exposure to this kind of violence any less clear. There is the possibility of appearing impermeable, of repudiating vulnerability itself. Nothing about being socially constituted as women restrains us from simply becoming violent ourselves. And then there is the other age-old option, the possibility of wishing for death or becoming dead, as a vain effort to preempt or deflect the next blow. But perhaps there is some other way to live such that one becomes neither affectively dead nor mimetically violent, a way out of the circle of violence altogether. This possibility has to do with demanding a world in which bodily vulnerability is protected without therefore being eradicated and with insisting on the line that must be walked between the two.

By insisting on a "common" corporeal vulnerability, I may seem to be positing a new basis for humanism. That might be true, but I am

prone to consider this differently. A vulnerability must be perceived and recognized in order to come into play in an ethical encounter, and there is no guarantee that this will happen. Not only is there always the possibility that a vulnerability will not be recognized and that it will be constituted as the "unrecognizable," but when a vulnerability *is* recognized, that recognition has the power to change the meaning and structure of the vulnerability itself. In this sense, if vulnerability is one precondition for humanization, and humanization takes place differently through variable norms of recognition, then it follows that vulnerability is fundamentally dependent on existing norms of recognition if it is to be attributed to any human subject.

So when we say that every infant is surely vulnerable, that is clearly true; but it is true, in part, precisely because our utterance enacts the very recognition of vulnerability and so shows the importance of recognition itself for sustaining vulnerability. We perform the recognition by making the claim, and that is surely a very good ethical reason to make the claim. We make the claim, however, precisely because it is not taken for granted, precisely because it is not, in every instance, honored. Vulnerability takes on another meaning at the moment it is recognized, and recognition wields the power to reconstitute vulnerability. We cannot posit this vulnerability prior to recognition without performing the very thesis that we oppose (our positing is itself a form of recognition and so manifests the constitutive power of the discourse). This framework, by which norms of recognition are essential to the constitution of vulnerability as a precondition of the "human," is important precisely for this reason, namely, that we need and want those norms to be in place, that we struggle for their establishment, and that we value their continuing and expanded operation.

Consider that the struggle for recognition in the Hegelian sense requires that each partner in the exchange recognize not only that the

other needs and deserves recognition, but also that each, in a different way, is compelled by the same need, the same requirement. This means that we are not separate identities in the struggle for recognition but are already involved in a reciprocal exchange, an exchange that dislocates us from our positions, our subject-positions, and allows us to see that community itself requires the recognition that we are all, in different ways, striving for recognition.

When we recognize another, or when we ask for recognition for ourselves, we are not asking for an Other to see us as we are, as we already are, as we have always been, as we were constituted prior to the encounter itself. Instead, in the asking, in the petition, we have already become something new, since we are constituted by virtue of the address, a need and desire for the Other that takes place in language in the broadest sense, one without which we could not be. To ask for recognition, or to offer it, is precisely not to ask for recognition for what one already is. It is to solicit a becoming, to instigate a transformation, to petition the future always in relation to the Other. It is also to stake one's own being, and one's own persistence in one's own being, in the struggle for recognition. This is perhaps a version of Hegel that I am offering, but it is also a departure, since I will not discover myself as the same as the "you" on which I depend in order to be.

I have moved in this essay perhaps too blithely among speculations on the body as the site of a common human vulnerability, even as I have insisted that this vulnerability is always articulated differently, that it cannot be properly thought of outside a differentiated field of power and, specifically, the differential operation of norms of recognition. At the same time, however, I would probably still insist that speculations on the formation of the subject are crucial to understanding the basis of non-violent responses to injury and, perhaps most important, to a theory of collective responsibility. I

realize that it is not possible to set up easy analogies between the formation of the individual and the formation, say, of state-centered political cultures, and I caution against the use of individual psychopathology to diagnose or even simply to read the kinds of violent formations in which state- and non-state-centered forms of power engage. But when we are speaking about the "subject" we are not always speaking about an individual: we are speaking about a model for agency and intelligibility, one that is very often based on notions of sovereign power. At the most intimate levels, we are social; we are comported toward a "you"; we are outside ourselves, constituted in cultural norms that precede and exceed us, given over to a set of cultural norms and a field of power that condition us fundamentally.

The task is doubtless to think through this primary impressionability and vulnerability with a theory of power and recognition. To do this would no doubt be one way a politically informed psychoanalytic feminism could proceed. The "I" who cannot come into being without a "you" is also fundamentally dependent on a set of norms of recognition that originated neither with the "I" nor with the "you." What is prematurely, or belatedly, called the "I" is, at the outset, enthralled, even if it is to a violence, an abandonment, a mechanism; doubtless it seems better at that point to be enthralled with what is impoverished or abusive than not to be enthralled at all and so to lose the condition of one's being and becoming. The bind of radically inadequate care consists of this, namely, that attachment is crucial to survival and that, when attachment takes place, it does so in relation to persons and institutional conditions that may well be violent, impoverishing, and inadequate. If an infant fails to attach, it is threatened with death, but, under some conditions, even if it does attach, it is threatened with non-survival from another direction. So the question of primary support for primary vulnerability is an ethical one for the infant and for the child. But there are broader ethical

consequences from this situation, ones that pertain not only to the adult world but to the sphere of politics and its implicit ethical dimension.

I find that my very formation implicates the other in me, that my own foreignness to myself is, paradoxically, the source of my ethical connection with others. I am not fully known to myself, because part of what I am is the enigmatic traces of others. In this sense, I cannot know myself perfectly or know my "difference" from others in an irreducible way. This unknowingness may seem, from a given perspective, a problem for ethics and politics. Don't I need to know myself in order to act responsibly in social relations? Surely, to a certain extent, yes. But is there an ethical valence to my unknowingness? I am wounded, and I find that the wound itself testifies to the fact that I am impressionable, given over to the Other in ways that I cannot fully predict or control. I cannot think the question of responsibility alone, in isolation from the Other; if I do, I have taken myself out of the relational bind that frames the problem of responsibility from the start.

If I understand myself on the model of the human, and if the kinds of public grieving that are available to me make clear the norms by which the "human" is constituted for me, then it would seem that I am as much constituted by those I do grieve for as by those whose deaths I disavow, whose nameless and faceless deaths form the melancholic background for my social world, if not my First Worldism. Antigone, risking death herself by burying her brother against the edict of Creon, exemplified the political risks in defying the ban against public grief during times of increased sovereign power and hegemonic national unity.¹¹ What are the cultural barriers against which we struggle when we try to find out about the losses that we are asked not to mourn, when we attempt to name, and so to bring under the rubric of the "human," those whom the United States and its allies have killed? Similarly, the cultural barriers that

feminism must negotiate have to take place with reference to the operation of power and the persistence of vulnerability.

A feminist opposition to militarism emerges from many sources, many cultural venues, in any number of idioms; it does not have to—and, finally, cannot—speak in a single political idiom, and no grand settling of epistemological accounts has to be required. This seems to be the theoretical commitment, for instance, of the organization Women in Black.¹² A desideratum comes from Chandra Mohanty's important essay "Under Western Eyes," in which she maintains that notions of progress within feminism cannot be equated with assimilation to so-called Western notions of agency and political mobilization.¹³ There she argues that the comparative framework in which First World feminists develop their critique of the conditions of oppression for Third World women on the basis of universal claims not only misreads the agency of Third World feminists, but also falsely produces a homogeneous conception of who they are and what they want. In her view, that framework also reproduces the First World as the site of authentic feminist agency and does so by producing a monolithic Third World against which to understand itself. Finally, she argues that the imposition of versions of agency onto Third World contexts, and focusing on the ostensible lack of agency signified by the veil or the burka, not only misunderstands the various cultural meanings that the burka might carry for women who wear it, but also denies the very idioms of agency that are relevant for such women.¹⁴ Mohanty's critique is thorough and right—and it was written more than a decade ago. It seems to me now that the possibility of international coalition has to be rethought on the basis of this critique and others. Such a coalition would have to be modeled on new modes of cultural translation and would be different from appreciating this or that position or asking for recognition in ways that assume that we are all fixed and frozen in our various locations and "subject-positions."

We could have several engaged intellectual debates going on at the same time and find ourselves joined in the fight against violence, without having to agree on many epistemological issues. We could disagree on the status and character of modernity and yet find ourselves joined in asserting and defending the rights of indigenous women to health care, reproductive technology, decent wages, physical protection, cultural rights, freedom of assembly. If you saw me on such a protest line, would you wonder how a postmodernist was able to muster the necessary “agency” to get there today? I doubt it. You would assume that I had walked or taken the subway! By the same token, various routes lead us into politics, various stories bring us onto the street, various kinds of reasoning and belief. We do not need to ground ourselves in a single model of communication, a single model of reason, a single notion of the subject before we are able to act. Indeed, an international coalition of feminist activists and thinkers—a coalition that affirms the thinking of activists and the activism of thinkers and refuses to put them into distinctive categories that deny the actual complexity of the lives in question—will have to accept the array of sometimes incommensurable epistemological and political beliefs and modes and means of agency that bring us into activism.

There will be differences among women, for instance, on what the role of reason is in contemporary politics. Spivak insists that it is not *reason* that politicizes the tribal women of India suffering exploitation by capitalist firms, but a set of values and a sense of the sacred that come through religion.¹⁵ And Adriana Cavarero claims that it is not because we are reasoning beings that we are connected to one another, but, rather, because we are *exposed* to one another, requiring a recognition that does not substitute the recognizer for the recognized.¹⁶ Do we want to say that it is our status as “subjects” that binds us all together even though, for many of us, the “subject” is

multiple or fractured? And does the insistence on the subject as a precondition of political agency not erase the more fundamental modes of dependency that do bind us and out of which emerge our thinking and affiliation, the basis of our vulnerability, affiliation, and collective resistance?

What allows us to encounter one another? What are the conditions of possibility for an international feminist coalition? My sense is that to answer these questions, we cannot look to the nature of “man,” or the a priori conditions of language, or the timeless conditions of communication. We have to consider the demands of cultural translation that we assume to be part of an ethical responsibility (over and above the explicit prohibitions against thinking the Other under the sign of the “human”) as we try to think the global dilemmas that women face. It is not possible to impose a language of politics developed within First World contexts on women who are facing the threat of imperialist economic exploitation and cultural obliteration. On the other hand, we would be wrong to think that the First World is *here* and the Third World is *there*, that a second world is *somewhere else*, that a subaltern subtends these divisions. These topographies have shifted, and what was once thought of as a border, that which delimits and bounds, is a highly populated site, if not the very definition of the nation, confounding identity in what may well become a very auspicious direction.

For if I am confounded by you, then you are already of me, and I am nowhere without you. I cannot muster the “we” except by finding the way in which I am tied to “you,” by trying to translate but finding that my own language must break up and yield if I am to know you. You are what I gain through this disorientation and loss. This is how the human comes into being, again and again, as that which we have yet to know.

PRECARIOUS LIFE

... the surplus of every sociality over every solitude.

Levinas

At a recent meeting, I listened to a university press director tell a story. It was unclear whether he identified with the point of view from which the story was told, or whether he was relaying the bad news reluctantly. But the story he told was about another meeting, where he was listening, and there a president of a university made the point that no one is reading humanities books anymore, that the humanities have nothing more to offer or, rather, nothing to offer for our times. I'm not sure whether he was saying that the university president was saying that the humanities had lost their moral authority, but it sounded like this was, in fact, someone's view, and

that it was a view to take seriously. There was an ensuing set of discussions at the same meeting in which it was not always possible to tell which view was owned by whom, or whether anyone really was willing to own a view. It was a discussion that turned on the question, Have the humanities undermined themselves, with all their relativism and questioning and "critique," or have the humanities been undermined by all those who *oppose* all that relativism and questioning and "critique"? Someone has undermined the humanities, or some group of people has, but it was unclear who, and it was unclear who thought this was true. I started to wonder whether I was not in the middle of the humanities quandary itself, the one in which no one knows who is speaking and in what voice, and with what intent. Does anyone stand by the words they utter? Can we still trace those words to a speaker or, indeed, a writer? And which message, exactly, was being sent?

Of course, it would be paradoxical if I were now to argue that what we really need is to tether discourse to authors, and in that way we will reestablish both authors and authority. I did my own bit of work, along with many of you, in trying to cut that tether. But what I do think is missing, and what I would like to see and hear return is a consideration of the structure of address itself. Because although I did not know in whose voice this person was speaking, whether the voice was his own or not, I did feel that I was being addressed, and that something called the humanities was being derided from some direction or another. To respond to this address seems an important obligation during these times. This obligation is something other than the rehabilitation of the author—subject *per se*. It is about a mode of response that follows upon having been addressed, a comportment toward the Other only after the Other has made a demand upon me, accused me of a failing, or asked me to assume a responsibility. This is an exchange that cannot be assimilated into the schema in which the

subject is over here as a topic to be reflexively interrogated, and the Other is over there, as a theme to be purveyed. The structure of address is important for understanding how moral authority is introduced and sustained if we accept not just that we address others when we speak, but that in some way we come to exist, as it were, in the moment of being addressed, and something about our existence proves precarious when that address fails. More emphatically, however, what binds us morally has to do with how we are addressed by others in ways that we cannot avert or avoid; this impingement by the other's address constitutes us first and foremost against our will or, perhaps put more appropriately, prior to the formation of our will. So if we think that moral authority is about finding one's will and standing by it, stamping one's name upon one's will, it may be that we miss the very mode by which moral demands are relayed. That is, we miss the situation of being addressed, the demand that comes from elsewhere, sometimes a nameless elsewhere, by which our obligations are articulated and pressed upon us.

Indeed, this conception of what is morally binding is not one that I give myself; it does not proceed from my autonomy or my reflexivity. It comes to me from elsewhere, unbidden, unexpected, and unplanned. In fact, it tends to ruin my plans, and if my plans are ruined, that may well be the sign that something is morally binding upon me. We think of presidents as wielding speech acts in willful ways, so when the director of a university press, or the president of a university speaks, we expect to know what they are saying, and to whom they are speaking, and with what intent. We expect the address to be authoritative and, in that sense, to be binding. But presidential speech is strange these days, and it would take a better rhetorician than I am to understand the mysteriousness of its ways. Why should it be, for instance, that Iraq is called a threat to the security of the "civilized world" while missiles flying from North Korea, and even

the attempted hostage-taking of US boats, are called "regional issues"? And if the US President was urged by the majority of the world to withdraw his threat of war, why does he not seem to feel obligated by this address? But given the shambles into which presidential address has fallen, perhaps we should think more seriously about the relation between modes of address and moral authority. This may help us to know what values the humanities have to offer, and what the situation of discourse is in which moral authority becomes binding.

I would like to consider the "face," the notion introduced by Emmanuel Levinas, to explain how it is that others make moral claims upon us, address moral demands to us, ones that we do not ask for, ones that we are not free to refuse. Levinas makes a preliminary demand upon me, but his is not the only demand that I am bound to follow these days. I will trace what seem to me the outlines of a possible Jewish ethic of non-violence. Then I will relate this to some of the more pressing questions of violence and ethics that are upon us now. The Levinasian notion of the "face" has caused critical consternation for a long time. It seems to be that the "face" of what he calls the "Other" makes an ethical demand upon me, and yet we do not know which demand it makes. The "face" of the other cannot be read for a secret meaning, and the imperative it delivers is not immediately translatable into a prescription that might be linguistically formulated and followed.

Levinas writes:

The approach to the face is the most basic mode of responsibility The face is not in front of me (*en face de moi*), but above me; it is the other before death, looking through and exposing death. Secondly, the face is the other who asks me not to let him die alone, as if to do so were to become an accomplice in his death. Thus the

face says to me: you shall not kill. In the relation to the face I am exposed as a usurper of the place of the other. The celebrated "right to existence" that Spinoza called the *conatus essendi* and defined as the basic principle of all intelligibility is challenged by the relation to the face. Accordingly, my duty to respond to the other suspends my natural right to self-survival, *le droit vitale*. My ethical relation of love for the other stems from the fact that the self cannot survive by itself alone, cannot find meaning within its own being-in-the-world To expose myself to the vulnerability of the face is to put my ontological right to existence into question. In ethics, the other's right to exist has primacy over my own, a primacy epitomized in the ethical edict: you shall not kill, you shall not jeopardize the life of the other.¹

Levinas writes further:

The face is what one cannot kill, or at least it is that whose meaning consists in saying, "thou shalt not kill." Murder, it is true, is a banal fact: one can kill the Other; the ethical exigency is not an ontological necessity It also appears in the Scriptures, to which the humanity of man is exposed inasmuch as it is engaged in the world. But to speak truly, the appearance in being of these "ethical peculiarities"—the humanity of man—is a rupture of being. It is significant, even if being resumes and recovers itself.²

So the face, strictly speaking, does not speak, but what the face means is nevertheless conveyed by the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." It conveys this commandment without precisely speaking it. It would seem that we can use this biblical command to understand something of the face's meaning, but something is missing here, since the "face" does not speak in the sense that the mouth does; the

face is neither reducible to the mouth nor, indeed, to anything the mouth has to utter. Someone or something else speaks when the face is likened to a certain kind of speech; it is a speech that does not come from a mouth or, if it does, has no ultimate origin or meaning there. In fact, in an essay entitled "Peace and Proximity," Levinas makes plain that "the face is not exclusively a human face."³ To explain this, he refers to Vassili Grossman's text *Life and Fate*, which he describes as:

the story ... of the families, wives, and parents of political detainees traveling to the Lubyanka in Moscow for the latest news. A line is formed at the counter, a line where one can see only the backs of others. A woman awaits her turn: [She] had never thought that the human back could be so expressive, and could convey states of mind in such a penetrating way. Persons approaching the counter had a particular way of craning their neck and their back, their raised shoulders with shoulder blades like springs, which seemed to cry, sob, and scream. (PP, 167)

Here the term "face" operates as a catachresis: "face" describes the human back, the craning of the neck, the raising of the shoulder blades like "springs." And these bodily parts, in turn, are said to cry and to sob and to scream, as if they were a face or, rather, a face with a mouth, a throat, or indeed, just a mouth and throat from which vocalizations emerge that do not settle into words. The face is to be found in the back and the neck, but it is not quite a face. The sounds that come from or through the face are agonized, suffering. So we can see already that the "face" seems to consist in a series of displacements such that a face is figured as a back which, in turn, is figured as a scene of agonized vocalization. And though there are many names strung in a row here, they end with a figure for what cannot be named, an utterance that is not, strictly speaking, linguistic. Thus the

face, the name for the face, and the words by which we are to understand its meaning—"Thou shalt not kill"—do not quite deliver the meaning of the face, since at the end of the line, it seems, it is precisely the wordless vocalization of suffering that marks the limits of linguistic translation here. The face, if we are to put words to its meaning, will be that for which no words really work; the face seems to be a kind of sound, the sound of language evacuating its sense, the sonorous substratum of vocalization that precedes and limits the delivery of any semantic sense.

At the end of this description, Levinas appends the following lines, which do not quite accomplish the sentence form: "The face as the extreme precariousness of the other. Peace as awakens to the precariousness of the other" (PP, 167). Both statements are similes, and they both avoid the verb, especially the copula. They do not say that the face *is* that precariousness, or that peace *is* the mode of being awake to an Other's precariousness. Both phrases are substitutions that refuse any commitment to the order of being. Levinas tells us, in fact, that "humanity is a rupture of being" and in the previous remarks he performs that suspension and rupture in an utterance that is both less and more than a sentence form. To respond to the face, to understand its meaning, means to be awake to what is precarious in another life or, rather, the precariousness of life itself. This cannot be an awakens, to use his word, to my own life, and then an extrapolation from an understanding of my own precariousness to an understanding of another's precarious life. It has to be an understanding of the precariousness of the Other. This is what makes the face belong to the sphere of ethics. Levinas writes, "the face of the other in its precariousness and defenselessness, is for me at once the temptation to kill and the call to peace, the 'You shall not kill'" (PP, 167). This last remark suggests something quite disarming in several senses. Why would it be that the very precariousness of the Other

would produce for me a temptation to kill? Or why would it produce the temptation to kill *at the same time* that it delivers a demand for peace? Is there something about my apprehension of the Other's precariousness that makes me want to kill the Other? Is it the simple vulnerability of the Other that becomes a murderous temptation for me? If the Other, the Other's face, which after all carries the meaning of this precariousness, at once tempts me with murder and prohibits me from acting upon it, then the face operates to produce a struggle for me, and establishes this struggle at the heart of ethics. It would seem that it is God's voice that is represented by the human voice, since it is God who says, through Moses, "Thou shalt not kill." The face that at once makes me murderous and prohibits me from murder is the one that speaks in a voice that is not its own, speaks in a voice that is no human voice.⁴ So the face makes various utterances at once: it bespeaks an agony, an injurability, at the same time that it bespeaks a divine prohibition against killing.⁵

Earlier in "Peace and Proximity," Levinas considers the vocation of Europe, and wonders whether the "Thou shalt not kill" is not precisely what one should hear in the very meaning of European culture. It is unclear where his Europe begins or ends, whether it has geographical boundaries, or whether it is produced every time the commandment is spoken or conveyed. This is, already, a curious Europe whose meaning is conjectured to consist in the words of the Hebrew God, whose civilizational status, as it were, depends upon the transmission of divine interdictions from the Bible. It is Europe in which Hebraism has taken the place of Hellenism, and Islam remains unspeakable. Perhaps Levinas is telling us that the only Europe that ought to be called Europe is the one that elevates the Old Testament over civil and secular law. In any case, he seems to be

returning to the primacy of interdiction to the meaning of civilization itself. And though we might be tempted to understand this as a nefarious Eurocentrism, it is probably also important to see that there is no recognizable Europe that can be derived from his view. In fact, it is not the existence of the interdiction against murder that makes Europe Europe, but the anxiety and the desire that the interdiction produces. As he continues to explain how this commandment works, he refers to Genesis, chapter 32, in which Jacob learns of his brother and rival Esau's imminent approach. Levinas writes, "Jacob is troubled by the news that his brother Esau—friend or foe—is marching to meet him 'at the head of four hundred men.' Verse 8 tells us: 'Jacob was greatly afraid and anxious.'" Levinas then turns to the commentator Rashi to understand "the difference between fright and anxiety," and concludes that "[Jacob] was frightened of his own death but was anxious he might have to kill" (PP, 164).

Of course, it is unclear still why Levinas would assume that one of the first or primary responses to another's precariousness is the desire to kill. Why would it be that the spring of the shoulder blades, the craning of the neck, the agonized vocalization conveying another's suffering would prompt in anyone a lust for violence? It must be that Esau over there, with his four hundred men, threatens to kill me, or looks like he will, and that in relation to that menacing Other or, indeed, the one whose face represents a menace, I must defend myself to preserve my life. Levinas explains, though, that murdering in the name of self-preservation is not justified, that self-preservation is never a sufficient condition for the ethical justification of violence. This seems, then, like an extreme pacifism, an absolute pacifism, and it may well be. We may or may not want to accept these consequences, but we should consider the dilemma they pose as constitutive of the ethical anxiety: "Frightened for his own life, but anxious he might have to kill." There is fear for one's own survival, and there is anxiety

about hurting the Other, and these two impulses are at war with each other, like siblings fighting. But they are at war with each other in order *not* to be at war, and this seems to be the point. For the non-violence that Levinas seems to promote does not come from a peaceful place, but rather from a constant tension between the fear of undergoing violence and the fear of inflicting violence. I could put an end to my fear of my own death by obliterating the other, although I would have to keep obliterating, especially if there are four hundred men behind him, and they all have families and friends, if not a nation or two behind them. I could put an end to my anxiety about becoming a murderer by reconciling myself to the ethical justification for inflicting violence and death under such conditions. I could bring out the utilitarian calculus, or appeal to the intrinsic rights of individuals to protect and preserve their own rights. We can imagine uses of both consequentialist and deontological justifications that would give me many opportunities to inflict violence righteously. A consequentialist might argue that it would be for the good of the many. A deontologist might appeal to the intrinsic worth of my own life. They could also be used to dispute the primacy of the interdiction on murder, an interdiction in the face of which I would continue to feel my anxiety.

Although Levinas counsels that self-preservation is not a good enough reason to kill, he also presumes that the desire to kill is primary to human beings. If the first impulse towards the other's vulnerability is the desire to kill, the ethical injunction is precisely to militate against that first impulse. In psychoanalytic terms, that would mean marshaling the desire to kill in the service of an internal desire to kill one's own aggression and sense of priority. The result would probably be neurotic, but it may be that psychoanalysis meets a limit here. For Levinas, it is the ethical itself that gets one out of the circuitry of bad conscience, the logic by which the prohibition against aggression becomes the internal conduit for aggression itself. Aggression is then

turned back upon oneself in the form of super-egoic cruelty. If the ethical moves us beyond bad conscience, it is because bad conscience is, after all, only a negative version of narcissism, and so still a form of narcissism. The face of the Other comes to me from outside, and interrupts that narcissistic circuit. The face of the Other calls me out of narcissism towards something finally more important.

Levinas writes:

The Other is the sole being I can wish to kill. I can wish. And yet this power is quite the contrary of power. The triumph of this power is its defeat as power. At the very moment when my power to kill realizes itself, the other has escaped me I have not looked at him in the face, I have not encountered his face. The temptation of total negation . . . this is the presence of the face. To be in relation with the other face to face is to be unable to kill. It is also the situation of discourse. (9)

It is also the situation of discourse . . .

. . . this last is no idle claim. Levinas explains in one interview that “face and discourse are tied. It speaks, it is in this that it renders possible and begins all discourse” (*EI*, 87). Since what the face “says” is “Thou shalt not kill,” it would appear that it is through this primary commandment that speaking first comes into being, so that speaking first comes into being against the backdrop of this possible murder. More generally, discourse makes an ethical claim upon us precisely because, prior to speaking, something is spoken to us. In a simple sense, and perhaps not quite as Levinas intended, we are first spoken to, addressed, by an Other, before we assume language for ourselves. And we can conclude further that it is only on the condition that we are addressed that we are able to make use of

language. It is in this sense that the Other is the condition of discourse. If the Other is obliterated, so too is language, since language cannot survive outside of the conditions of address.

But let us remember that Levinas has also told us that the face—which is the face of the Other, and so the ethical demand made by the Other—is that vocalization of agony that is not yet language or no longer language, the one by which we are wakened to the precariousness of the Other’s life, the one that rouses at once the temptation to murder and the interdiction against it. Why would it be that the inability to kill is the situation of discourse? Is it rather that the tension between fear for one’s own life and anxiety about becoming a murderer constitutes the ambivalence that is the situation of discourse? That situation is one in which we are addressed, in which the Other directs language towards us. That language communicates the precariousness of life that establishes the ongoing tension of a non-violent ethics. The situation of discourse is not the same as what is said or, indeed, what is sayable. For Levinas, the situation of discourse consists in the fact that language arrives as an address we do not will, and by which we are, in an original sense, captured, if not, in Levinas’s terms, held hostage. So there is a certain violence already in being addressed, given a name, subject to a set of impositions, compelled to respond to an exacting alterity. No one controls the terms by which one is addressed, at least not in the most fundamental way. To be addressed is to be, from the start, deprived of will, and to have that deprivation exist as the basis of one’s situation in discourse.

Within the ethical frame of the Levinasian position, we begin by positing a dyad. But the sphere of politics, in his terms, is one in which there are always more than two subjects at play in the scene. Indeed, I may decide *not* to invoke my own desire to preserve my life as a justification for violence, but what if violence is done to someone I love? What if there is an Other who does violence to another Other?

To which Other do I respond ethically? Which Other do I put before myself? Or do I then stand by? Derrida claims that to try and respond to every Other can only result in a situation of radical irresponsibility. And the Spinozists, the Nietzscheans, the utilitarians, and the Freudians all ask, "Can I invoke the imperative to preserve the life of the Other even if I cannot invoke this right of self-preservation for myself?" And is it really possible to sidestep self-preservation in the way that Levinas implies? Spinoza writes in *The Ethics* that the desire to live the right life requires the desire to live, to persist in one's own being, suggesting that ethics must always marshal some life drives, even if, as a super-egoic state, ethics threatens to become a pure culture of the death drive. It is possible, even easy, to read Levinas as an elevated masochist and it does not help us to avert that conclusion when we consider that, when asked what he thought of psychoanalysis, he is said to have responded, *is that not a form of pornography?*

But the reason to consider Levinas in the context of today is at least twofold. First, he gives us a way of thinking about the relationship between representation and humanization, a relationship that is not as straightforward as we might like to think. If critical thinking has something to say about or to the present situation, it may well be in the domain of representation where humanization and dehumanization occur ceaselessly. Second, he offers, within a tradition of Jewish philosophy, an account of the relationship between violence and ethics that has some important implications for thinking through what an ethic of Jewish non-violence might be. This strikes me as a timely and urgent question for many of us, especially those of us supporting the emergent moment of post-Zionism within Judaism. For now, I would like to reconsider first the problematic of humanization if we approach it through the figure of the face.

When we consider the ordinary ways that we think about humanization and dehumanization, we find the assumption that those who gain representation, especially self-representation, have a better chance of being humanized, and those who have no chance to represent themselves run a greater risk of being treated as less than human, regarded as less than human, or indeed, not regarded at all. We have a paradox before us because Levinas has made clear that the face is not exclusively a human face, and yet it is a condition for humanization.⁶ On the other hand, there is the use of the face, within the media, in order to effect a dehumanization. It would seem that personification does not always humanize. For Levinas, it may well evacuate the face that does humanize; and I hope to show, personification sometimes performs its own dehumanization. How do we come to know the difference between the inhuman but humanizing face, for Levinas, and the dehumanization that can also take place through the face?

We may have to think of different ways that violence can happen: one is precisely *through* the production of the face, the face of Osama bin Laden, the face of Yasser Arafat, the face of Saddam Hussein. What has been done with these faces in the media? They are framed, surely, but they are also playing to the frame. And the result is invariably tendentious. These are media portraits that are often marshaled in the service of war, as if bin Laden's face were the face of terror itself, as if Arafat were the face of deception, as if Hussein's face were the face of contemporary tyranny. And then there is the face of Colin Powell, as it is framed and circulated, seated before the shrouded canvas of Picasso's *Guernica*: a face that is foregrounded, we might say, against a background of effacement. Then there are the faces of the Afghan girls who stripped off, or let fall, their burkas. One week last winter, I visited a political theorist who proudly displayed these faces on his refrigerator door, right next to some apparently valuable super-market coupons, as a sign of the success of democracy. A few days

later, I attended a conference in which I heard a talk about the important cultural meanings of the burka, the way in which it signifies belonging-ness to a community and religion, a family, an extended history of kin relations, an exercise of modesty and pride, a protection against shame, and operates as well as a veil behind which, and through which, feminine agency can and does work.⁷ The fear of the speaker was that the destruction of the burka, as if it were a sign of repression, backwardness or, indeed, a resistance to cultural modernity itself, would result in a significant decimation of Islamic culture and the extension of US cultural assumptions about how sexuality and agency ought to be organized and represented. According to the triumphalist photos that dominated the front page of the *New York Times*, these young women bared their faces as an act of liberation, an act of gratitude to the US military, and an expression of a pleasure that had become suddenly and ecstatically permissible. The American viewer was ready, as it were, to see the face, and it was to the camera, and for the camera, after all, that the face was finally bared, where it became, in a flash, a symbol of successfully exported American cultural progress. It became bared to us, at that moment, and we were, as it were, in possession of the face; not only did our cameras capture it, but we arranged for the face to capture our triumph, and act as the rationale for our violence, the incursion on sovereignty, the deaths of civilians. Where is loss in that face? And where is the suffering over war? Indeed, the photographed face seemed to conceal or displace the face in the Levinasian sense, since we saw and heard through that face no vocalization of grief or agony, no sense of the precariousness of life.

So we seem to be charting a certain ambivalence. In a strange way, all of these faces humanize the events of the last year or so; they give a human face to Afghan women; they give a face to terror; they give a

face to evil. But is the face humanizing in each and every instance? And if it is humanizing in some instances, in what form does this humanization occur, and is there also a dehumanization performed in and through the face? Do we encounter those faces in the Levinasian sense, or are these, in various ways, images that, through their frame, produce the paradigmatically human, become the very cultural means through which the paradigmatically human is established? Although it is tempting to think that the images themselves establish the visual norm for the human, one that ought to be emulated or embodied, this would be a mistake, since in the case of bin Laden or Saddam Hussein the paradigmatically human is understood to reside outside the frame; this is the human face in its deformity and extremity, not the one with which you are asked to identify. Indeed, the disidentification is incited through the hyperbolic absorption of evil into the face itself, the eyes. And if we are to understand ourselves as interpellated anywhere in these images, it is precisely as the unrepresented viewer, the one who looks on, the one who is captured by no image at all, but whose charge it is to capture and subdue, if not eviscerate, the image at hand. Similarly, although we might want to champion the suddenly bared faces of the young Afghan women as the celebration of the human, we have to ask in what narrative function these images are mobilized, whether the incursion into Afghanistan was really in the name of feminism, and in what form of feminism did it belatedly clothe itself. Most importantly, though, it seems we have to ask what scenes of pain and grief these images cover over and derealize. Indeed, all of these images seem to suspend the precariousness of life; they either represent American triumph, or provide an incitement for American military triumph in the future. *They are the spoils of war or they are the targets of war.* And in this sense, we might say that the face is, in every instance, defaced, and that this is one of the representational and philosophical consequences of war itself.

It is important to distinguish among kinds of unrepresentability. In the first instance, there is the Levinasian view according to which there is a "face" which no face can fully exhaust, the face understood as human suffering, as the cry of human suffering, which can take no direct representation. Here the "face" is always a figure for something that is not literally a face. Other human expressions, however, seem to be figurable as a "face" even though they are not faces, but sounds or emissions of another order. The cry that is represented through the figure of the face is one that confounds the senses and produces a clearly improper comparison: that cannot be right, for the face is not a sound. And yet, the face can stand for the sound precisely because it is *not* the sound. In this sense, the figure underscores the incommensurability of the face with whatever it represents. Strictly speaking, then, the face does not represent anything, in the sense that it fails to capture and deliver that to which it refers.

For Levinas, then, the human is not *represented by* the face. Rather, the human is indirectly affirmed in that very disjunction that makes representation impossible, and this disjunction is conveyed in the impossible representation. For representation to convey the human, then, representation must not only fail, but it must *show* its failure. There is something unrepresentable that we nevertheless seek to represent, and that paradox must be retained in the representation we give.

In this sense, the human is not identified with what is represented but neither is it identified with the unrepresentable; it is, rather, that which limits the success of any representational practice. The face is not "effaced" in this failure of representation, but is constituted in that very possibility. Something altogether different happens, however, when the face operates in the service of a personification that claims

to "capture" the human being in question. For Levinas, the human cannot be captured through the representation, and we can see that some loss of the human takes place when it is "captured" by the image.⁸

An example of that kind of "capture" takes place when evil is personified through the face. A certain commensurability is asserted between that ostensible evil and the face. This face *is* evil, and the evil that the face *is* extends to the evil that belongs to humans in general—generalized evil. We personify the evil or military triumph through a face that is supposed to be, to capture, to contain the very idea for which it stands. In this case, we cannot hear the face through the face. The face here masks the sounds of human suffering and the proximity we might have to the precariousness of life itself.

The face over there, though, the one whose meaning is portrayed as captured by evil is precisely the one that is not human, not in the Levinasian sense. The "I" who sees that face is not identified with it: the face represents that for which no identification is possible, an accomplishment of dehumanization and a condition for violence.

Of course, a fuller elaboration of this topic would have to parse the various ways that representation works in relation to humanization and dehumanization. Sometimes there are triumphalist images that give us the idea of the human with whom we are to identify, for instance the patriotic hero who expands our own ego boundary ecstatically into that of the nation. No understanding of the relationship between the image and humanization can take place without a consideration of the conditions and meanings of identification and disidentification. It is worth noting, however, that identification always relies upon a difference that it seeks to overcome, and that its aim is accomplished only by reintroducing the difference it claims to have vanquished. The one with whom I identify is not me, and that "not being me" is the condition of the identification. Otherwise, as

Jacqueline Rose reminds us, identification collapses into identity, which spells the death of identification itself.⁹ This difference internal to identification is crucial, and, in a way, it shows us that dis-identification is part of the common practice of identification itself. The triumphalist image can communicate an impossible overcoming of this difference, a kind of identification that believes that it has overcome the difference that is the condition of its own possibility. The critical image, if we can speak that way, works this difference in the same way as the Levinasian image; it must not only fail to capture its referent, but *show* this failing.

The demand for a truer image, for more images, for images that convey the full horror and reality of the suffering has its place and importance. The erasure of that suffering through the prohibition of images and representations more generally circumscribes the sphere of appearance, what we can see and what we can know. But it would be a mistake to think that we only need to find the right and true images, and that a certain reality will then be conveyed. The reality is not conveyed by what is represented within the image, but through the challenge to representation that reality delivers.¹⁰

The media's evacuation of the human through the image has to be understood, though, in terms of the broader problem that normative schemes of intelligibility establish what will and will not be human, what will be a livable life, what will be a grievable death. These normative schemes operate not only by producing ideals of the human that differentiate among those who are more and less human. Sometimes they produce images of the less than human, in the guise of the human, to show how the less than human disguises itself, and threatens to deceive those of us who might think we recognize another human there, in that face. But sometimes these normative schemes work precisely through providing no image, no name, no narrative, so that there never was a life, and there never was a death.

These are two distinct forms of normative power: one operates through producing a symbolic identification of the face with the inhuman, foreclosing our apprehension of the human in the scene; the other works through radical effacement, so that there never was a human, there never was a life, and no murder has, therefore, ever taken place. In the first instance, something that has already emerged into the realm of appearance needs to be disputed as recognizably human; in the second instance, the public realm of appearance is itself constituted on the basis of the exclusion of that image. The task at hand is to establish modes of public seeing and hearing that might well respond to the cry of the human within the sphere of appearance, a sphere in which the trace of the cry has become hyperbolically inflated to rationalize a gluttonous nationalism, or fully obliterated, where both alternatives turn out to be the same. We might consider this as one of the philosophical and representational implications of war, because politics—and power—work in part through regulating what can appear, what can be heard.

Of course, these schemas of intelligibility are tacitly and forcefully mandated by those corporations that monopolize control over the mainstream media with strong interests in maintaining US military power. The war coverage has brought into relief the need for a broad de-monopolizing of media interests, legislation for which has been, predictably, highly contested on Capitol Hill. We think of these interests as controlling rights of ownership, but they are also, simultaneously, deciding what will and will not be publicly recognizable as reality. They do not show violence, but there is a violence in the frame in what is shown. That latter violence is the mechanism through which certain lives and deaths either remain unrepresentable or become represented in ways that effects their capture (once again) by the war effort. The first is an effacement through occlusion; the second is an effacement through representation itself.

What is the relation between the violence by which these ungrivable lives were lost and the prohibition on their public grievability? Is the prohibition on grieving the continuation of the violence itself? And does the prohibition on grieving demand a tight control on the reproduction of images and words? How does the prohibition on grieving emerge as a circumscription of representability, so that our national melancholia becomes tightly fitted into the frame for what can be said, what can be shown? Is this not the site where we can read, if we still read, the way that melancholia becomes inscribed as the limits of what can be thought? The derealization of loss—the insensitivity to human suffering and death—becomes the mechanism through which dehumanization is accomplished. This derealization takes place neither inside nor outside the image, but through the very framing by which the image is contained.

In the initial campaign of the war against Iraq, the US government advertised its military feats as an overwhelming visual phenomenon. That the US government and military called this a “shock and awe” strategy suggests that they were producing a visual spectacle that numbs the senses and, like the sublime itself, puts out of play the very capacity to think. This production takes place not only for the Iraqi population on the ground, whose senses are supposed to be done in by this spectacle, but also for the consumers of war who rely on CNN or Fox, the network that regularly interspersed its war coverage on television with the claim that it is the “most trustworthy” news source on the war. The “shock and awe” strategy seeks not only to produce an aesthetic dimension to war, but to exploit and instrumentalize the visual aesthetics as part of a war strategy itself. CNN has provided much of these visual aesthetics. And although the *New York Times* belatedly came out against the war, it also adorned its front pages on a daily basis with romantic images of military ordnance against the setting sun in Iraq or “bombs

bursting in air” above the streets and homes of Baghdad (which are not surprisingly occluded from view). Of course, it was the spectacular destruction of the World Trade Center that first made a claim upon the “shock and awe” effect, and the US recently displayed for all the world to see that it can and will be equally destructive. The media becomes entranced by the sublimity of destruction, and voices of dissent and opposition must find a way to intervene upon this desensitizing dream machine in which the massive destruction of lives and homes, sources of water, electricity, and heat, are produced as a delirious sign of a resuscitated US military power.

Indeed, the graphic photos of US soldiers dead and decapitated in Iraq, and then the photos of children maimed and killed by US bombs, were both refused by the mainstream media, supplanted with footage that always took the aerial view, an aerial view whose perspective is established and maintained by state power. And yet, the moment the bodies executed by the Hussein regime were uncovered, they made it to the front page of the *New York Times*, since those bodies must be grieved. The outrage over their deaths motivates the war effort, as it moves on to its managerial phase, which differs very little from what is commonly called “an occupation.”

Tragically, it seems that the US seeks to preempt violence against itself by waging violence first, but the violence it fears is the violence it engenders. I do not mean to suggest by this that the US is responsible in some causal way for the attacks on its citizens. And I do not exonerate Palestinian suicide bombers, regardless of the terrible conditions that animate their murderous acts. There is, however, some distance to be traveled between living in terrible conditions, suffering serious, even unbearable injuries, and resolving on murderous acts. President Bush traveled that distance quickly, calling for “an end to grief” after a mere ten days of flamboyant mourning. Suffering can yield an experience of humility, of vulnerability, of

impressionability and dependence, and these can become resources, if we do not "resolve" them too quickly; they can move us beyond and against the vocation of the paranoid victim who regenerates infinitely the justifications for war. It is as much a matter of wrestling ethically with one's own murderous impulses, impulses that seek to quell an overwhelming fear, as it is a matter of apprehending the suffering of others and taking stock of the suffering one has inflicted.

In the Vietnam War, it was the pictures of the children burning and dying from napalm that brought the US public to a sense of shock, outrage, remorse, and grief. These were precisely pictures we were not supposed to see, and they disrupted the visual field and the entire sense of public identity that was built upon that field. The images furnished a reality, but they also showed a reality that disrupted the hegemonic field of representation itself. Despite their graphic effectivity, the images pointed somewhere else, beyond themselves, to a life and to a precariousness that they could not show. It was from that apprehension of the precariousness of those lives we destroyed that many US citizens came to develop an important and vital consensus against the war. But if we continue to discount the words that deliver that message to us, and if the media will not run those pictures, and if those lives remain unnameable and ungrievable, if they do not appear in their precariousness and their destruction, we will not be moved. We will not return to a sense of ethical outrage that is, distinctively, for an Other, in the name of an Other. We cannot, under contemporary conditions of representation, hear the agonized cry or be compelled or commanded by the face. We have been turned away from the face, sometimes through the very image of the face, one that is meant to convey the inhuman, the already dead, that which is not precariousness and cannot, therefore, be killed; this is the face that we are nevertheless asked to kill, as if ridding the world of this face would return us to the human rather than

consummate our own inhumanity. One would need to hear the face as it speaks in something other than language to know the precariousness of life that is at stake. But what media will let us know and feel that frailty, know and feel at the limits of representation as it is currently cultivated and maintained? If the humanities has a future as cultural criticism, and cultural criticism has a task at the present moment, it is no doubt to return us to the human where we do not expect to find it, in its frailty and at the limits of its capacity to make sense. We would have to interrogate the emergence and vanishing of the human at the limits of what we can know, what we can hear, what we can see, what we can sense. This might prompt us, affectively, to reinvigorate the intellectual projects of critique, of questioning, of coming to understand the difficulties and demands of cultural translation and dissent, and to create a sense of the public in which oppositional voices are not feared, degraded or dismissed, but valued for the instigation to a sensate democracy they occasionally perform.

NOTES

1 EXPLANATION AND EXONERATION, OR WHAT WE CAN HEAR

1. *Guardian*, September 29, 2001.
2. Mary Kaldor, *The Nation*, November 5, 2001, p. 16.
3. Forbes.com, October 11, 2001.
4. *New York Times*, November 2, 2001.

2 VIOLENCE, MOURNING, POLITICS

1. Sigmund Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917) Standard Edition, 14: pp. 243–58, London: Hogarth Press, 1957.
2. Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (1923) Standard Edition, 19: pp. 12–66, London: Hogarth Press, 1961.

3. Sigmund Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia*.
4. Ibid.
5. William Safire, "All Is Not Changed", *New York Times*, September 27, 2001, p. A:21.
6. "A Nation Challenged; President Bush's Address on Terrorism before a Joint Meeting of Congress," *New York Times*, September 21, 2001, p. B:4.
7. Richard Garfield, "Morbidity and Mortality among Iraqi Children from 1990 through 1998: Assessing the Impact of the Gulf War and Economic Sanctions," in *Fourth Freedom Forum*, March, 2002. See www.fourthfreedom.org/php/p-index.php?hinc=garf.hinc.
8. The memorials read as follows: "In loving memory of Kamla Abu Sa'id, 42, and her daughter, Amna Abu-Sa'id, 13, both Palestinians from the El Bureij refugee camps. Kamla and her daughter were killed May 26, 2002 by Israeli troops, while working on a farm in the Gaza Strip. In loving memory of Ahmed Abu Seer, 7, a Palestinian child, he was killed in his home with bullets. Ahmed died of fatal shrapnel wounds to his heart and lung. Ahmed was a second-grader at Al-Sidaak elementary school in Nablus, he will be missed by all who knew him. In loving memory of Fatime Ibrahim Zakarna, 30, and her two children, Bassem, 4, and Suhair, 3 all Palestinian. Mother and children were killed May 6, 2002 by Israeli soldiers while picking grape leaves in a field in the Kabatiya village. They leave behind Mohammed Yussef Zukarneh, husband and father, and Yasmine, daughter and age 6." These memorials were submitted by the San Francisco chapter of Arab-American Christians for Peace. The *Chronicle* refused to run the memorials, even though these deaths were covered by, and verified by, the Israeli Press (private email).
9. Daniel Pearl's wife Marianne's statement in Felicity Barringer and Douglas Jehl, "US Says Video Shows Captors Killed Reporter," *New York Times*, February 22, 2002, p. A:1.

10. Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 303.
11. See Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.
12. Joan W. Scott, "Feminist Reverberations," unpublished paper presented at Twelfth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, June 2002, University of Connecticut at Storrs.
13. Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Chandra Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991, pp. 61-88.
14. See also Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?" paper presented at symposium "Responding to War," Columbia University, February 1, 2002; and "Interview with Nermeen Shaikh," *Asia Source*, March 20, 2002, http://www.asiasource.org/news/special_reports/lila.cfm. Lila Abu-Lughod, ed., *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998.
15. Mahasweta Devi, *Imaginary Maps: Three Stories*, trans. and intro. Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak, New York and London: Routledge, 1995, p. 199.
16. Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, trans. P. Kottman, New York: Routledge, 2000.

3 INDEFINITE DETENTION

1. "Detention, Treatment, and Trial of Certain Non-Citizens in the War Against Terrorism," Department of Defense, December 12, 2001. This statement clarifies the statement made on November

- 13 by President Bush announcing the creation of military tribunals for non-US citizens (or non-citizens) suspected of engaging in military terrorism.
2. "Governmentality," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, pp. 87–104.
 3. Foucault clearly said as much when, for instance, he remarked that "we need to see things not in terms of the replacement of a society of sovereignty by a disciplinary society and the subsequent replacement of a disciplinary society by a society of government; in reality, one has a triangle, sovereignty–discipline–government, which has as its primary target the population and as its essential mechanism the apparatuses of security." "Governmentality," p. 102.
 4. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, New York: Schocken, 1968, p. 263.
 5. Geoffrey Miller made these remarks in a May 24, 2003 interview with David Dennie of the *Daily Telegraph* in Australia. See news.com.au reports from May 26, 2003.
 6. "The Governmentality of Tolerance," in Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: A Critique of Tolerance in the Age of Identity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, forthcoming.
 7. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
 8. For a discussion of the "state of exception" as a paradigm for government see Giorgio Agamben, *État d'exception: Homo Sacer, II, 1*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2003, pp. 1–55. See also the section entitled "Life that Does Not Deserve to Live" in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, pp. 136–43.
 9. Department of Defense, March 21, 2002.

10. If the prisoners are being detained to protect them (and others) for their faulty mental functioning, then it is surely paradoxical that the mental health of prisoners deteriorated excessively during the first year and half of their incarceration. Two dozen prisoners reportedly attempted suicide through hanging or strangling themselves, and several engaged in hunger strikes. Apparently one man who attempted to kill himself remains in a coma at the time of this writing. And another is alleged by the *Guardian*, July 20, 2003, to have died in the course of an interrogation session whose tactics appear to conform to the definition of torture.
11. "Some Detainees Held on Guantanamo Are Young Foot Soldiers Caught Up in the Afghan War, US Officials Say," Associated Press, March 29, 2002.
12. For an excellent consideration of the criteria for determining human consideration and its applicability to the Guantanamo prisons, see *Human Rights Watch Backgrounder*, January 29, 2002.
13. The American Bar Association expressed its unwillingness (July, 2003) to encourage lawyers to take on the defense of six detainees marked for trials because they did not want their participation to be construed as an agreement that these tribunals are legitimate.

4 THE CHARGE OF ANTI-SEMITISM: JEWS, ISRAEL, AND THE RISKS OF PUBLIC CRITIQUE

1. David Gelles, "Summers Says Anti-Semitism Lurks Locally," *Harvard Crimson*, September 19, 2002. The full transcript can be found at www.yucommentator.com/v67i4/israelcorner/address.html.
2. Remarks reported in the *Boston Globe*, October 16, 2002.
3. For an extended discussion of how Zionism itself has come to rely upon and perpetuate the notion that Jews, and only Jews, can be

- victims, see Adi Ophir, "The Identity of the Victims and the Victims of Identity: A Critique of Zionist Ideology for a Post-Zionist Age," in Laurence Silberstein, ed., *Mapping Jewish Identities*, New York: New York University Press, 2000.
4. Robert Fisk writes, "The all-purpose slander of 'anti-semitism' is now being used with ever-increasing promiscuity against people who condemn the wickedness of Palestinian suicide bombings every bit as much as they do the cruelty of Israel's repeated killing of children in an effort to shut [those people] up." "How to Shut Up Your Critics With a Single Word," *The Independent*, October 21, 2002.
 5. Note in the full version of the statement offered as an epigraph to this essay how Summers couples anti-Semitism and anti-Israeli views: "Where anti-Semitism and views that are profoundly anti-Israel have traditionally been the primary reserve of poorly educated right-wing populists, profoundly anti-Israeli views are increasingly finding support in progressive intellectual communities." In this statement he begins by coupling anti-Semitism with anti-Israeli views, without precisely saying that they are the same. But by the end of the sentence, anti-Semitism is absorbed into and carried by the term "anti-Israeli" (rather than anti-*Israel*, as if it were the people who are opposed, rather than the state apparatus) so that we are given to understand not only that anti-Israeli positions, but anti-Semitism itself is finding support among progressive intellectual communities.
 6. One can see this letter and its signatories at www.peacemideast.org.
 7. See Adi Ophir's discussion of Uri Ram's vision of post-Zionism: "For the post-Zionist, nationality should not determine citizenship, but vice-versa: citizenship should determine the boundaries of the Israeli nation. Judaism would then be regarded as a religion, a community affair, or a matter of a particular ethnicity, one among many." Adi Ophir, "The Identity of the Victims and the Victims of

- Identity," p. 186. See also Uri Ram's contribution along with other pieces in Laurence Silberstein, *The Postzionist Debates: Knowledge and Power in Israeli Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1999.
8. AIPAC, the America Israel Public Affairs Committee, is the largest Jewish lobby in the US and is almost always supportive of Israel in its current form and practices.
 9. See www.britzedek.org.
 10. See www.ffipp.org.
 11. See <http://oasisofpeace.org>.
 12. See www.ipcri.org.
 13. See www.btselem.org and www.gush-shalom.org.
 14. See www.shministim.org for information on Yesh G'v'el. See also Ronit Chacham, *Breaking Ranks: Refusing to Serve in the West Bank and Gaza*, New York: The Other Press, 2003.
 15. See <http://taayush.tripod.com>. Citation quoted with the permission of the author.
 16. Yitzhak Ior, "Will the Circle Be Unbroken?" *Ha'aretz*, August 2, 2002.

5 PRECARIOUS LIFE

1. Emmanuel Levinas and Richard Kearney, "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," in *Face to Face with Levinas*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1986, pp. 23–4. Levinas develops this conception first in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969, pp. 187–203. I cull quotations from his later work because I believe they give a more mature and incisive formulation of the face.
2. Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. Richard A. Cohen, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985, p. 87. Cited in the text

as *EI*.

3. Emmanuel Levinas, "Peace and Proximity," in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996. p. 167. Cited in the text as PP.
4. The theological background of this can be found in Exodus. God makes clear to Moses that no one can see God's face, that is, that the divine face is not for seeing and not available to representation: "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live" (33: 20, *King James*); later, God makes plain that the back can and will substitute for the face: "And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts; but my face shall not be seen" (33: 23). Later, when Moses is carrying God's words in the form of the commandments, it is written, "And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him" (34: 30). But Moses' face, carrying the divine word, is also not to be represented. When Moses returns to his human place, he can show his face: "And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a veil on his face. But when Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he came out, and spake unto the children of Israel that which he was commanded. And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone: and Moses put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him." I thank Barbara Johnson for calling these passages to my attention.
5. Levinas writes, "But that face facing me, in its expression—in its mortality—summons me, demands me, requires me: as if the invisible death faced by the face of the other ... were 'my business.' As if, unknown by the other whom already, in the nakedness of his face, it concerns, it 'regarded me' before its confrontation with me, before being the death that stares me, myself, in the face. The death

- of the other man puts me on the spot, calls me into question, as if I, by my possible indifference, became the accomplice of that death, invisible to the other who is exposed to it; as if even before being condemned to it myself, I had to answer for that death of the other, and not leave the other alone to his deathly solitude," in Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, pp. 24–5.
6. Levinas distinguishes sometimes between the "countenance" understood as the face within perceptual experience, and the "face" whose coordinates are understood to transcend the perceptual field. He also speaks on occasion about "plastic" representations of the face that efface the face. For the face to operate as a face, it must vocalize or be understood as the workings of a voice.
 7. See Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Others," *American Anthropologist*, 104: 3, pp. 783–90.
 8. For an extended discussion of the relation between the media image and human suffering, see Susan Sontag's provocative *Regarding the Pain of Others*, New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002.
 9. For a discussion of "failure" as basic to a psychoanalytic conception of the psyche, see Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, London: Verso, 1986, pp. 91–3.
 10. Levinas writes, "one can say that the face is not 'seen.' It is what cannot become a content, which your thought would embrace; it is uncontainable, it leads you beyond" (*EI*, pp. 86–7).