

**Merleau-Ponty on Veridical Perception and the  
Paradox of the Flesh: a Reading of *The Visible and  
Invisible***

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I, Tasnim Ismail, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

### ***Abstract***

In this thesis, I shall draw attention to how the account of veridical perception in *The Visible and the Invisible* resembles direct realism, while Merleau-Ponty deals with cases of 'extraordinary' veridical perception, such as hallucinations and illusions, in the same way as disjunctivism. I will clarify how the French philosopher ultimately goes beyond the literature that is disjunctivist and direct realist, since he stresses the role of the body's changing integration with the world during veridical perception, and also the intuition of reality that necessarily accompanies that perceptual experience. I will also highlight why, for Merleau-Ponty, the perceptual experience is deeply paradoxical, before exploring his philosophical response to this, as enshrined in the ontology of 'Flesh'.

### ***Impact Statement***

My thesis is impactful insofar as it contributes to the secondary literature on *The Visible and the Invisible*.

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## ***Introduction***

This thesis focuses on Merleau-Ponty's final, unfinished book, *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968; hereby referred to as 'VI'), aiming to provide a critical examination of its account of veridical perception, and also its ontology of 'Flesh' (*la chair*). While the former will be found to continue themes already explored by the philosopher in his earlier work, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1962; hereby referred to as 'PP'), I will highlight how the notion of Flesh is entirely unique, and perhaps even groundbreaking - though it necessarily needs further development.

In Chapter I, I shall examine the account of veridical perception to be found in VI. To do this, I shall compare it with the contemporary, anglophone movement of 'disjunctive direct realism'. While the comparison is certainly anachronistic, my exegetic strategy will reveal it to be conceptually apt. In I.1, I will firstly draw attention to how Merleau-Ponty foreshadows the direct realist paradigm that veridical perception is constituted by a direct relation with reality. In I. 2, after having argued that Merleau-Ponty *does* make conceptual room for there to be cases of hallucinatory perception that are experientially equivalent to veridical perception, I will highlight how he deals with the former in the basic disjunctivist fashion of metaphysically distinguishing the cases of perception that are hallucinatory from the cases of perception that are veridical; similarly, he elucidates illusory strands of veridical perception by invoking the perspectival variability of veridical perception, which is a prevalent theme in the anglophone literature. Having found these parallels, I will stress that Merleau-Ponty ultimately goes beyond disjunctivism, since he emphasises the dynamic integration of the (perceiving) body with the world, while also positing the intuitive apprehension of veridical perception, which is supposed to accompany that very perceptual experience by virtue of its direct relation with reality.

In Chapter II, I shall illuminate why veridical perception is paradoxical for Merleau-Ponty. Though he does not make the distinction himself, there seems to be two, closely related paradoxes at play in VI. The first paradox is 'The Phenomenological Paradox' that veridical perception involves both pre-reflective intimacy with, and cognitive estrangement from, the world. The second paradox is 'The Metaphysical Paradox' that the perspectival variability of veridical

perception sits uncomfortably with its relational constitution. Thus, having examined what I shall call 'The Double-Paradox of Veridical Perception', I will highlight how Merleau-Ponty advocates a philosophy of 'hyper-reflection' that would stay faithful to it. Rather than trying to explain away the paradoxical nature of veridical perception, hyper-reflection would aim express the ontology that grounds it. We shall see that, for Merleau-Ponty, it is only the innovation of metaphorical meaning that can accomplish this philosophical feat.

In Chapter III, the final chapter of this thesis, I shall examine Merleau-Ponty's ontology of Flesh, which marks his implementation of hyper-reflection. Emphasising how the Flesh is an expansive, ontological notion that encompasses both the perceiving body and the rest of the sensible world, I will draw attention to how the perceiving body is a 'sensible-sentient' (*sentant-sensible*), that mirrors the world at the level of sensibility, but deviates from the world at the level of sentience. Having illuminated why, for Merleau-Ponty, the perceptual relation is experienced as a 'coiling up' (*enroulement*) against the world, I will draw attention to how this concept ultimately allows us to grasp The Double-Paradox of Veridical Perception, while delivering a picture of ontological reality that is thoroughly relational, and bound for discursive development.

## ***1. Veridical Perception in The Visible and the Invisible: a Comparison with Disjunctive Direct Realism***

### ***1.1. The Relational Structure of Veridical Perception***

VI begins with a principle that may seem modest, or self-evident: 'We see the things themselves, the world is what we see.' (VI, 3). With its lyrical rhythm and simplistic turn of phrase, the line could easily be lifted from a children's book. However, to the reader familiar with the contemporary, anglophone literature on the philosophy of perception, the statement is hardly trivial: it is emblazoned with a bold commitment to the possibility of *veridical* perception. While Merleau-Ponty himself uses neither the technical language of 'veridicality', nor the equivalent in his original French, we can look to some other philosophical literature for a gloss on the term. For instance, Crane and French portray the perception that is 'veridical' as the kind where you perceive something 'for what it is' (2016). Expanding on the visual type of perception, Soteriou suggests that 'veridical' visual perception involves 'really seeing an object' (2014). Similarly, Searle

describes a first-hand case of it, where 'there really is a computer screen and I really am seeing it...' (2015, 15). Clearly then, 'veridical' perception is supposed to involve the perception of reality - or rather, the perception of 'the things themselves', and 'the world', to echo Merleau-Ponty's own turn of phrase (VI, 3).

Before examining VI more closely, I will briefly outline how a commitment to the possibility of veridical perception figures in the analytic movement of 'naive realism': veridical perception is supposed to be constituted by a relation that necessarily holds between the perceiving agent, and the thing that is really perceived. While 'indirect realism' leaves theoretical room for this relation to be mediated by further, intermediate states of that agent, 'direct realism' stipulates that the relation is direct (see Genone 2016, 3 on the direct realist analysis that, when I have a veridical perception of something x, this perception does not 'depend on perceiving some other object'; see also Nudds 2013, and Allen 2019, 5 for a similar exposition).

Turning our attention back to VI, we can find what looks like a precursor to the direct realist analysis of veridical perception: early on in the text, Merleau-Ponty suggests, 'I have in (veridical) perception the thing itself, and not a representation...' (VI, 7; my parentheses). Speaking as a perceptual agent, Merleau-Ponty asserts that veridical perception grants him access to 'the thing itself' - i.e. the thing as it really is - thus echoing the opening principle that 'we see the things themselves...' (VI, 3). Having stressed his theoretical commitment to veridical perception, Merleau-Ponty denies that the perceptual experience delivers a mere 'representation' of the thing perceived, which would be one place removed from the thing itself. Building on this point, he claims that veridical perception 'is not a matter of another layer or a veil that would have come to pose itself between them (the things perceived) and me', thereby utterly refusing to complicate veridical perception with any kind of bridge that would mediate the perceptual agent with the thing perceived (VI, 7; my parentheses). To the contemporary reader, this position arguably rings of direct realism. Strengthening this interpretation, Merleau-Ponty adds that 'the thing (veridically perceived) is at the end of my gaze, at the end of my exploration...' and that 'the table before me sustains a singular relation with my eyes and my body', thus bringing to the foreground a relational picture of veridical perception that seems to illustrate the direct realist theory he predates (VI, 7; my parentheses). So, because Merleau-Ponty is surely no psychic, it seems reasonable to interpret the beginning of VI as an

anachronistic testimony to the direct realist analysis of veridical perception. Through the straightforward principle that 'we see the things themselves', we are given a guiding light to inform the rest of our reading, and enrich our understanding of the text in its entirety, however fragmentary that text becomes, and however incomplete it unfortunately is (VI, 3).

Aside from interpreting shades of direct realism in Merleau-Ponty's final book, it is important to situate his thought in the history of philosophy as a reaction to Kantian metaphysics. In the concluding chapter of the 'Analytic of Principles' in his *Critique of Pure Reasons*, Kant posits a distinction between 'phenomena' and 'noumena'. 'Phenomena' is supposed to refer to 'everything intuited in space or in time, hence all objects of an experience possible for us', which are purely idealistic, insofar as they are 'nothing but appearances, i.e., mere representations, which, as they are represented, as extended beings or series of alterations, have outside our thoughts no existence grounded in itself' (A490–1/B518–9). Whereas, 'noumena' is supposed to refer to a transcendent realm of things that exists beyond our perceptual experience: it is 'independent of sensibility' (A251-2). Back to the claim in VI quoted above, we can see Merleau-Ponty contradict Kant's metaphysical picture: he claims that 'I have in perception the thing itself' (VI, 7), thereby defying (1) the idea that our perceptual experience is limited to the way things appear, and (2) the related idea that we are estranged from the way things really are. In the spirit we now know as direct realism, Merleau-Ponty closes the Kantian gap between that which is perceived, and that which exists in reality.

It is arguably unsurprising to see VI form a reaction to Kant that resembles direct realism, since the anglophone movement seems to be prefigured throughout the phenomenologist tradition that Merleau-Ponty inherits. Supporting this interpretation of historical phenomenology, Kelly suggests that 'the phenomenologists are sympathetic to at least some form of naive realism' (2007, 24). Lending credence to this claim, there is (at least) some academic agreement that the early phenomenologist, Husserl, espoused a 'view on perception (that) is best characterized as a sophisticated version of direct... realism' (Beyer, 2016; my parentheses; also see Ameriks 1977, and Jansen 2014 for their similar interpretations). Furthermore, we can find in Husserl's phenomenologist successor, Heidegger, the observation that veridical perception involves 'the

entity itself and not, let us say, a mere “representation” of it...’ (1962, 196).

Keeping up with the phenomenological tradition of his predecessors, there are elements of direct realism resonating throughout Merleau-Ponty's whole body of work. In *The Structure of Behaviour* (1963; hereby referred to as ‘SB’), he writes that veridical perception grants us access to the ‘thing itself... and not some inner double, some subjective reproduction...’ (186). This idea is continuous with PP. As Allen discerns, Merleau-Ponty in PP ‘accepts that perceptual experience is relational in the strong sense’ - the ‘strong sense’ being that the perceptual experience is supposed to be *constituted* by a relation with reality (2019, 2). To support this interpretation, Allen cites Merleau-Ponty in PP: ‘perception and the perceived necessarily have the same existential modality’ (PP, 393; quoted in Allen 2019, 3). Here, it seems that Merleau-Ponty is referring to veridical perception specifically: veridical perception and that which is veridically perceived are supposed to necessarily coexist. As Merleau-Ponty continues in PP, this is because veridical perception ‘reach(es)... the thing (that is veridically perceived) itself’, with the language of ‘reach(ing)’ arguably connoting the *directness* of the perceptual relation (PP, 393; my parentheses). So, because Merleau-Ponty in SB and PP seems to continue the trend of the phenomenological tradition to foreshadow the direct realist paradigm for veridical perception, it seems not at all farfetched to suppose that VI does the same.

## ***1.2. ‘Extraordinary’ Perceptual Experiences***

Taking its account of veridical perception as a fortuitous blueprint for direct realism, we shall now examine how VI deals with ‘extraordinary’ perceptual experiences. Extraordinary perceptual experiences can be either hallucinatory, or illusory, so I shall address each type of extraordinary perceptual experience in turn.

### ***1.2a. Hallucinations***

In the philosophy of perception, it is typical to talk about hallucinations as a type of perceptual experience that seems like veridical perception, though it is not veridical perception (see Macpherson 2013, 10, on the ‘traditional’ conception of hallucination, and Nudds 2013, 280: ‘When I hallucinate a red cube, my experience seems to present me with a red cube even when there is no

red cube to present.').<sup>1</sup> The precise extent to which a hallucination can 'seem like' veridical perception is, however, a matter of debate (Farkas 2013, 399). On the one hand, there is a wealth of contemporary philosophical literature that puts forward the 'subjective indistinguishability' of hallucinations and veridical perception: it is thought that the perceptual experiences cannot be told apart by the perceptual agent purely on the basis of her introspection over them (see Slade and Bentall 1988, 23, who suggest that hallucinations have 'the full force or impact of corresponding actual (real) perception'; original parentheses; see also Robinson, 1994, and Martin, 2002, and Crane and French 2015 for similar views). On the other hand, there is prevailing doubt about whether it is actually phenomenologically possible for hallucinations to be subjectively indistinguishable from veridical perception (see Austin 1962, for example).

The difficulty over what it means for a hallucination to 'seem like' veridical perception is arguably reflected in VI. While Merleau-Ponty refers to 'all the observable differences' between a hallucination of something and the veridical perception of it, thereby implying that the two experiences can be distinguished by the perceiving agent, he also recognises how 'the rags of the dream can, before the dreamer, be worth the close-woven fabric of the true world', thereby implying that hallucinations are not always distinguished from veridical perception (VI, 5-6). The ambivalence that we find in VI about what it means for a hallucination to 'seem like' veridical perception is continuous with PP. At one moment, Merleau-Ponty posits that hallucinations lack 'the mark of reality' to the effect that the perceiving

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<sup>1</sup> Note that, while I refer to hallucinations as a type of 'perceptual experience', I will refrain from referring to them as 'perceptions', since the term 'perception' is often used as a short-hand for 'veridical perception' throughout the philosophical literature on the subject, while a 'perceptual experience' is more broadly understood as a sensory experience, be it veridical or non-veridical. See Farkas 2013, 407, and Macpherson 2013, 1, for further elaboration on these distinctions.

Also note that it is technically possible for a hallucination to be accidentally 'veridical' - i.e. veridical in the unusual sense that what is hallucinated just so happens to coincide with what is really there. It is important to recognise that, in such cases of so-called 'veridical hallucination', the perceptual experience is only *accidentally* veridical - it is not *necessarily* veridical. So, for the sake of simplicity, I will limit my discussion to the usual kind of hallucinations that are not accidentally veridical, without this limitation impairing my argument. However, by grouping hallucinations and illusions under the rubric of 'extraordinary perceptual experiences', I implicitly accommodate the possibility of the unusually 'veridical' hallucinations. See Lewis 1980, 239-240, and Macpherson 2013, 6 for further discussion on the kind of hallucination that is accidentally 'veridical'.

agent can distinguish it from veridical perception (PP, 359). Whereas, at another moment in the same text, Merleau-Ponty acknowledges how hallucinations can possess 'the value of reality' - i.e. they can be experientially equivalent to veridical perception - and, to this extent, hallucinations can achieve 'deception' by masquerading as veridical perception (PP 358, original italics).

While I shall elaborate further in I.2aii as to why, for Merleau-Ponty, the perceiving agent *can* distinguish hallucinations from veridical perception, it will suffice for now to flag his acknowledgement that the perceiving agent *does not always* manage to distinguish hallucinations from veridical perception (see again VI, 5-6: '...the rags of the dream can, before the dreamer, be worth the close-woven fabric of the true world...'; also see Romdenh-Romluc 2009, 77 on how Merleau-Ponty in PP acknowledges the 'existence of hallucinatory deception'). So, while the analytic literature tends to put forward the subjective indistinguishability between hallucinations and veridical perception as a matter of principle, Merleau-Ponty is more modest: he puts forward their experiential equivalence as a phenomenological possibility that can, in certain contingent cases, happen to preclude their discrimination.<sup>2</sup>

### ***I.2ai. The Metaphysical Problem***

Having made conceptual room for the possibility of a hallucination that is experientially equivalent to veridical perception, Merleau-Ponty observes how this possibility poses a problem for veridical perception: it can be invoked to 'disqualify' the characterisation of the latter as constitutively involving a direct relation with reality, and thereby cast it 'pell-mell back into our "interior life" along with our dreams' (VI, 6). This follows insofar as (1) hallucinations lack a direct relation with reality, and (2) the experiential equivalence between hallucinations and veridical perception guarantees their metaphysical equivalence. In contemporary literature, Martin similarly reconstructs this problem: he shows how the possibility of a hallucination that is experientially equivalent to veridical perception is supposed to

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<sup>2</sup> While the analytic literature tends to use the language of 'subjective indistinguishability', it is arguably more appropriate to talk about 'experiential equivalence' in reference to Merleau-Ponty in order to avoid convoluting the discussion with the object/subject distinction. Nevertheless, for the purpose of comparing the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty with the analytic literature, 'experiential equivalence' captures the crucial idea behind 'subjective indistinguishability' - i.e. that multiple perceptual experiences seem alike for the perceptual agent.

'screen off' the direct realist exposition of veridical perception as constitutively involving a direct relation with reality, insofar as their experiential equivalence necessarily seals them together in metaphysical terms, as a singular 'common kind' (2004, 360; see also Allen 2019, 18).

While there are several disjunctivist strands of direct realism concerned with the metaphysics of perception (hereby simply referred to as 'disjunctivism', or the 'disjunctivist' view etc.), the crux of the movement is to theoretically block the idea that veridical perception and hallucinations can share metaphysical equivalence, rather than concede that such equivalence follows from their experiential equivalence (see Haddock and Macpherson 2008, and Byrne and Logue 2009 for comprehensive taxonomies on various disjunctivist theories). So, across the disjunctivist metaphysical movement, veridical perception is delineated as a kind of perceptual experience that is necessarily constituted by a direct relation with reality, while a hallucination is delineated as a kind of perceptual experience that necessarily lacks this constitution (see Snowdon 2005, 13, and Martin 2004, and Hinton 1967 for their metaphysical refinements of the basic disjunctivist idea).

VI can be interpreted to foreshadow the basic disjunctivist paradigm for the metaphysical structure of hallucination: in the same way that the contemporary movement formulates disjunctive types of perceptual experiences, Merleau-Ponty identifies 'a difference in structure' between hallucinations and veridical perception (VI, 5). He suggests that veridical perception and hallucinations have distinct 'ontological value(s)' (VI, 5). And this idea is continuous with PP, where he refers to the 'essential difference' between the two (352). Presumably, for Merleau-Ponty, this metaphysical distinction derives from the direct relation with reality that necessarily constitutes veridical perception, while necessarily failing to constitute hallucinations.

It seems fair to say that, having unwittingly followed Merleau-Ponty in positing a metaphysical discrepancy between hallucinations and veridical perception, contemporary disjunctivists proceed to largely neglect the issue of how the two can be experientially equivalent, all the while remaining metaphysically distinct. As Soteriou observes, 'Some disjunctivists say relatively little about the nature of hallucination...' (2004; see the contemporary disjunctivists McDowell 1994, Campbell 2002 and Brewer 2000 for their omissions on the

issue). Meanwhile, in the disjunctivist philosophy of Martin, we find only a negative account of hallucinations: he conceptualises hallucinations as those perceptual experiences that simply cannot be told apart from the metaphysically distinct cases of veridical perception (see 2004, 72: 'So the essence of hallucination - what distinguishes hallucinations as a class from other mental states - lies in their being indistinguishable from veridical perceptions, not in some antecedently identifiable feature of the state.'). According to Dancy, a more positive account of hallucination should be possible (1995). Smith echoes this objection against Martin: he asserts that 'the sensory features of the situation need to be accounted for' (2002, 225).

In VI, we can find a promising, though undeveloped, strategy to account for the experiential equivalence that can hold between hallucinations and veridical perceptions, since Merleau-Ponty refers to the former as drawing from the 'void of the imaginary' (6). The role of the imagination in producing hallucinations is a theme reflected in PP, where Merleau-Ponty suggests that the hallucinating agent 'fabricates for himself... an artificial milieu' (357). Albeit vague, the notion of fabrication arguably signals the kind of imaginative process that could theoretically account for a hallucination that is experientially equivalent to veridical perception. Though largely undeveloped by Merleau-Ponty, this seems like a promising line of inquiry. Having emerged recently in contemporary epistemology (see Currie 2000), the view that hallucinations involve the imagination enjoys popularity in psychopathological literature (see, for example, Bentall 1990 and Allen 2015). However, insofar as this line of inquiry stretches beyond the scope of this thesis, it suffices to promote the imagination as a valuable point of departure for contemporary disjunctivists wishing to offer a more robust metaphysical explanation as to how hallucinations can be experientially equivalent to veridical perception, all the while lacking the same constitution.

Leaving aside considerations as to how hallucinations can share experiential equivalence with veridical perception, do we have any reason to suppose that this equivalence engenders their metaphysical equivalence? Neurological considerations proceed as follows: any experiential equivalence between a hallucination and veridical perception signifies a common proximate neural cause that recent brain imaging confirms (see Ffytche 2013, 45 on how brain activity reveals 'specialized functional units serving both normal perception and hallucinations'). Insofar as the same proximate cause

leads to the same immediate effect, it follows that veridical perception and the hallucination that shares its proximate neural cause are of the same metaphysical kind (see Genone 2016, 4, and Robinson 1994, 151).

In VI, Merleau-Ponty has the theoretical tools to resist the neurological considerations motivating a metaphysical equivalence between veridical perception and the hallucination that is experientially equivalent to it. It is important to note that Merleau-Ponty does *not* deny the neural conditions enabling perceptual experience. In VI, he refers to the 'conditions on which in fact such and such a perceptual realisation... depend' (20), while recognising that 'a perceived world would not appear to a man if these conditions were not given in his body' (22; for the same reading, see Low 2000, 12: 'Merleau-Ponty of course does not claim that perception can occur without the body.') What Merleau-Ponty *does* deny is that the neural conditions enabling perceptual experience can explanatorily exhaust that experience (see VI, 22 on how the neural conditions do not satisfactorily 'explain' what is perceived, and also 225 on how scientific explanation generally fails to be explanatorily 'exhausting'). This viewpoint is consistent across Merleau-Ponty's entire body of work. In SB, he suggests that 'we cannot understand the sum of the nerve events which are produced in each point of the cortex as the cause of experience...' (206). In PP, he similarly advocates against the assumption that 'through the effect of certain physiological causes, such as the irritation of the nervous centres, sensible givens would appear as they appear in perception, through the action of physical stimuli upon the same nervous centres' (351). For Merleau-Ponty, such an assumption would be misguided. By attaching explanatory power exclusively to the neural conditions that enable perceptual experience, we would yield an incomplete metaphysical account of that experience.

According to Merleau-Ponty, a complete metaphysical account of a perceptual experience would necessarily involve reference to the body as whole, and its integration with the world. This can be inferred from the 'strict correlation' posited 'between my exploration of the world and the sensorial responses it arouses' (VI, 29). Since 'my exploration of the world' presupposes my embodiment - it is after all (as Merleau-Ponty says elsewhere in the text) an 'exploring body' (38) - it follows that embodiment must play a role in a complete explanation of perceptual experience. Emphasising this point, Merleau-Ponty suggests:

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... (VI, 136)

By emphasising the dimensionality of the body and the 'depth' of the things in the world, Merleau-Ponty draws attention to the body's integration with the world. According to him, it is crucially this that can 'bring us to the things themselves' - i.e. it is the integration of the body with the world that enables veridical perception. This idea also runs through PP, where Merleau-Ponty says, for example, that 'there is a logic of the world to which my body in its entirety conforms, and through which things of inter-sensory significance become possible for us' (380).

Since Merleau-Ponty stipulates that a complete metaphysical account of a perceptual experience would necessarily involve reference to the body as a whole and its integration with the world, he has the theoretical tools to dismiss the neurological considerations that motivate a metaphysical equivalence between veridical perception and the hallucination that is experientially equivalent to it. While the two perceptual experiences may well share a proximate neural cause, they are supposed to integrate the body with the world differently. In the case of veridical perception, which is constituted by a direct relation with reality, the body is *necessarily* occasioned with a perceptual field that is unified: Merleau-Ponty describes it as a 'system' (VI, 22) that demonstrates its own 'perceptual logic' (VI, 247), rather than consisting in a chaotic 'pile of spatio-temporal individuals' (VI, 247; see also 133: 'I do not look at a chaos, but at things...'). This perceptual field is also supposed to be multi-sensory: it 'gives rise to an open series of concordant explorations' (VI, 5), rather than involving a 'wandering troop of sensations' (VI, 123) (i.e. as I veridically perceive the ocean waves, I can hear the corresponding splash of the water against the sand; see VI, 217 on how one sense is 'open upon the world of the other senses'). Whereas, in the case of a hallucination that fails to be constituted by a direct relation with reality, the body is *not necessarily* occasioned with a unified, multi-sensory perceptual field. Instead, it is given 'almost nothing but blanks' (VI, 5); it is given mere 'phantoms that... have no place of their own' (VI, 30).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Note that the hallucination, like all perceptual experiences, is still supposed to start 'from the body', and it therefore involves the bare fact of 'being in the world', though it does not necessarily occasion the body with a unified, multi-sensory perceptual field (VI, 262).

So, for Merleau-Ponty, bodily integration with the world works differently during veridical perception and the hallucination that is experientially equivalent to it, and this view can be taken to extend the disjunctivist paradigm that the two perceptual experiences are of different metaphysical types. This idea is continuous with PP, where Merleau-Ponty writes that, during veridical perception, 'my body is geared into the world' (310); whereas, during a hallucination, 'my body is not geared into the world' (361). Note that, in the contemporary disjunctivist philosophy that addresses the neurological considerations undercutting it, there is no analogous appeal to the body's disjunctive integration with the world (e.g. see Snowdon 2005, and Martin 2004 for their omissions).<sup>4</sup>

To summarise I.2ai., Merleau-Ponty handles the metaphysical problem posed by the hallucinations that are experientially equivalent to veridical perception in a way that foreshadows the basic disjunctivist view: he posits a metaphysical distinction between the two perceptual states. While further conceptualisation is needed to explain how a hallucination can actually share experiential equivalence with veridical perception, Merleau-Ponty sketches out a promising explanatory route that appeals to the imagination, which contemporary disjunctivists may find instructive. Finally, taking up a strategy that is presently omitted by the contemporary disjunctivist movement, Merleau-Ponty has the theoretical tools needed to resist the neurological considerations that motivate a metaphysical equivalence between veridical perception and the hallucination that is experientially equivalent to it: he suggests that veridical perception integrates the body with the world in such a way that it is necessarily occasioned with a unified and multi-sensory perceptual field, while hallucinations fail to necessarily accomplish this metaphysical state of affairs.

### ***1.2aii. The Epistemic Problem***

Turning our attention to the epistemic problem for veridical perception posed by their experientially equivalent hallucinatory counterparts, we can find its reconstruction in VI as follows:

... if we can lose our reference marks unbeknown to ourselves (it follows that) we are never sure of having them when we think we

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<sup>4</sup> Relatedly, see Grosz 1994, 5 on the 'somatophobia' of traditional philosophy, and 8-10 on the sustained misrepresentation of the body by contemporary analytic literature.

have them; if we can withdraw from the world of (veridical) perception without knowing it, nothing proves to us that we are ever in it, nor that the observable is ever entirely observable, nor that it is made of another fabric than the dream... (6; original italics; my parentheses)

In this passage, Merleau-Ponty sets out the skeptical argument that, because a hallucination can masquerade as veridical perception on account of their experiential equivalence - i.e. we can 'lose our reference marks' and 'withdraw from the world of (veridical) perception without knowing it' - it follows that we cannot distinguish the two experiences; in which case, it seems that we cannot know when, if ever, we experience veridical perception. In contemporary literature, we find the skeptical conclusion similarly framed by Burge: 'every perceptual state... could in principle have been in circumstances in which it was prone to error' (2003, 535).

McDowell puts forward a disjunctivist strand of direct realism that is explicitly concerned with the epistemology of perception.<sup>5</sup> According to McDowell, we can cognitively recognise cases of veridical perception, since its epistemic status is special (2009, 238-9; note that McDowell fails to ever justify this claim - see Berendzen 2013, 23 for a similar objection: 'McDowell's view is left wanting...'). While McDowell does not deny that veridical perception and hallucinations can share experiential equivalence (see 1998, 386-7: '... an appearance that such-and-such is the case can be either a mere appearance or the fact that such and such is the case making itself perceptually manifest to someone...'), he does deny that this possibility is enough to block the special epistemic status of veridical perception. For McDowell, it remains the case that 'I *can* tell a green thing when I see one', even though a hallucination of 'a green thing' could be experientially equivalent to the veridical perception of it (2011, 32; my italics). As Berendzen helpfully reconstructs the logic behind the argument: 'the fact of not knowing one is fooled when one is fooled does not prove that one does not know one is not fooled when one is not fooled' (2013, 12).

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<sup>5</sup> See Berendzen 2013, 7 on McDowell: '...his view is usually distinguished as 'epistemological disjunctivism'...', and Byrne and Logue 2009 for the same strong classification. While Gomes 2010 resists the idea that McDowell's disjunctivism is limited to the epistemology of perception, I will leave aside this issue for now, and assume a more relaxed interpretation of the disjunctivist as having an explicitly epistemic focus, as opposed to an exclusively epistemic one.

While McDowell suggests that veridical perception can be cognitively recognised on the basis of its special epistemic status, we find in VI the idea that veridical perception *just is* pre-reflectively experienced. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

... it (veridical perception) is our experience, prior to every opinion, of inhabiting the world by our body, of inhabiting the truth by our whole selves, without there being need to choose nor even to distinguish between the assurance of seeing and the assurance of seeing the true... (VI, 28; my parentheses)

By describing veridical perception as an 'experience... of inhabiting the world by our body', Merleau-Ponty highlights the phenomenological ramifications of the metaphysical principle that veridical perception integrates the body with the world in a special way. Continuing his description of veridical perception, Merleau-Ponty says that it is an 'experience... of inhabiting the truth by our whole selves'. By suggesting that veridical perception involves a sense of 'inhabiting the truth', Merleau-Ponty reveals how it is patently manifest as such: veridical perception is just obviously veridical (i.e. it obviously concerns 'truth', or reality etc.). By juxtaposing the sense of 'inhabiting the world by our body' with the sense of 'inhabiting the truth', Merleau-Ponty seems to suggest that the recognition of veridical perception goes hand in hand with the phenomenology it derives by integrating the body with the world in a special way. This interpretation of Merleau-Ponty is strengthened by his reference to 'inhabiting the truth by our whole selves', since the term 'whole selves' arguably picks out the holistic body, thereby emphasising how it is the body's integration with the world that makes veridical perception so palpably experienced (see also VI, 27, on how the body is our 'living bond with nature', and also 37: 'It is the perceptual life of my body... that accomplishes the primary openness to the world.')

So, for Merleau-Ponty, it is not the case that we *can* recognise veridical perception as a mere cognitive possibility; instead, it is the case that we *just do* recognise veridical perception: as a pre-reflective necessity, the recognition of veridical perception is phenomenologically built into veridical perception itself, owing to special way the body is integrated with the world. Very shortly, we shall see how Merleau-Ponty conceptualises the pre-reflective recognition of veridical perception as a kind of 'perceptual faith'. For now, to avoid the oxymoronic slant of the phrase 'a pre-reflective

recognition of veridical perception', I shall refer to the concept as an 'intuition', or an 'intuitive apprehension'.

Going back to the contemporary disjunctivist, who puts forward the recognition of veridical perception as a cognitive possibility, we can see McDowell concede to the distinct possibility that we can mistake a hallucination for veridical perception. As he acknowledges, 'It is true that we could not establish that we are open to facts in any given case.' (1996, 113). So, while McDowell secures the bare cognitive possibility that we can recognise veridical perception - i.e. he defends the 'sheer intelligibility of the idea' (1996, 113) - he fails to show the skeptic that we ever truly do. Accepting this, McDowell suggests that 'a determined skeptic... can always insist on exploiting fallibility to give bite to the question how we know the present case is one of the non-misleading ones' (1996, 113). In this way, the contemporary disjunctivist and the skeptic seem to reach a philosophical impasse.

Though Merleau-Ponty diverges from McDowell insofar as he puts forward the recognition of veridical perception as a matter of necessary intuition, Merleau-Ponty is like McDowell insofar as he grants the skeptic the possibility that we can mistake a hallucination for veridical perception. For the French philosopher, it remains the case that a hallucination can be experientially equivalent to veridical perception, while being metaphysically distinct from it: it can seem to integrate the body with the world in the same way as veridical perception, thereby *ostensibly* occasioning the body with a unified, and multi-sensory perceptual field - though it does not actually accomplish this metaphysical state of affairs. As Merleau-Ponty suggests, a hallucination can be 'well-regulated' (VI, 95). So, on the basis of their experiential equivalence, it follows that we can mistake hallucinations for veridical perception: we can 'withdraw from the world without knowing it' (VI, 6).

Having granted the skeptic the possibility that we can mistake hallucinations for veridical perception, Merleau-Ponty makes theoretical room in our perceptual life for a cognitive process that allows us to rectify our perceptual mistakes by properly distinguishing hallucinations from veridical perception. In VI, he writes that we can learn to 'see well' - i.e. we can learn to discriminate cases of hallucination from cases of veridical perception (VI, 37). This process of discrimination is enabled by the flow of perceptual life (see VI, 41 for a picture of perceptual life where 'each perception envelops the possibility of its own replacement by another'). The continual

succession of perceptual experiences means that, when a perceptual experience 'dissipates... it is always for the profit of a new appearance which takes up again for its own account the ontological function of the first' (40). In other words, we can compare different perceptual experiences against each other, weighing up how they integrate the body with the world. Veridical perception can therefore set a standard by which hallucinations can be judged (see VI, 4, on how 'the "falsity" of dreams... appears only relative to perceptions' and note the continuity with PP, 309: 'We only know that there are errors because we have truths, through which we correct the errors and recognize them as such.').

So, in the case of a hallucination that only *ostensibly* occasions the body with a unified, multi-sensory perceptual field, it can be told apart from veridical perception, which *really does* occasion the body with a unified, multi-sensory perceptual field. This is because hallucinations can falter, momentarily failing to contrive a perfectly unified, multi-sensory perceptual field for the body, while veridical perception cannot - i.e. my hallucination of the ocean can involve the sight of the waves lapping against the sand, but not the corresponding splashing sound that I would expect; whereas, my veridical perception cannot admit of any such sensory lacunae - assuming my sensory modes are all functioning properly. Thus, there is potential for the experiential equivalence between the two perceptual experiences to unravel over time, thereby giving way to their 'observable differences' (VI, 5). So, for Merleau-Ponty, we can - in principle - distinguish hallucinations from veridical perception.

While Merleau-Ponty makes theoretical room in our perceptual life for us to cognitively distinguish hallucinations and veridical perception, the more radical skeptic could characterise our *entire* perceptual life as a hallucinatory experience, where the absence of veridical perception makes it impossible to compare - and ultimately distinguish - the perceptual experiences. In the first of Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*, reprinted in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (1984), we see him put forward the radically skeptical hypothesis that 'some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive me' (2:15): he draws attention to how our entire perceptual life could be a single hallucinatory experience, orchestrated by some evil demon that completely deprives us of veridical perception. This radically skeptical hypothesis is motivated by methodic doubt, which Descartes expresses as the epistemic enterprise 'to demolish

everything completely' (2:12) - i.e. to systematically throw doubt on everything that we ordinarily take for granted.

Faced with the radically skeptical hypothesis that our entire perceptual life is a single hallucinatory experience, Merleau-Ponty characterises the methodic doubt motivating this hypothesis as a pathological project: he suggests that it is 'no longer a fluidification of the certitudes but a deliberate withdrawal, a refusal to embody them' (106). While the notion of 'certitudes' recalls the intuition of veridical perception that is necessarily built into that perceptual experience, Merleau-Ponty highlights how the radical skeptic does take the intuition of veridical perception to be an ordinary part of life - which, indeed, marks its 'fluidification' (VI, 106). Only when the radical skeptic takes the steps of methodic doubt is her intuitive apprehension of veridical perception supposed to be intellectually stifled: it is made 'no longer' (VI, 106). Emphasising that this is a 'deliberate withdrawal' from what is ordinary, Merleau-Ponty writes that the radical skeptic operates 'within the voluntary zone', actively making 'the decision to tacitly presuppose nothing' (VI, 106).

It is arguably fair of Merleau-Ponty to accuse the radical skeptic of voluntarily rejecting her intuition of veridical perception: in his *Meditations*, Descartes asserts, 'I can convince myself that I have a natural disposition to go wrong... in matters which I think I perceive as evidently as can be.' (2:48). While 'matters which I think I perceive as evidently as can be' refer to his everyday cases of veridical perception that are necessarily intuited as such, Descartes strives to actively 'convince' himself that his intuitive faculty is fallible when it comes to apprehending veridical perception. For Merleau-Ponty, the radical skeptic consequently '*represses* an involuntary truth which it acknowledges to be already there' (VI, 106, my italics): he chooses to engage in an intellectual enterprise that is excessively revisionary, pathologically effacing the intuition of veridical perception that necessarily accompanies the perceptual experience in everyday life.

Having characterised methodic doubt as a pathological project, Merleau-Ponty shows how it adheres to an ideal of absolute 'rigorism' that departs from, and thereby ultimately enlightens, the intuition of veridical perception that necessarily accompanies the perceptual experience (VI, 106). Insofar as we are radical skeptics, we are susceptible to his analysis that

as passive beings, we feel ourselves caught up in a mass of Being that escapes us, or even maneuvered by an evil agent, and we

oppose to this adversity the desire for an absolute evidence, delivered from all facticity. (VI, 106)

From the midst of a perceptual life where veridical perception is always intuited - i.e. it is apprehended in a way that precedes our judgement, thereby rendering us 'passive', and 'caught up...' etc. - the radical skeptic fetishises an ideal of 'absolute evidence, delivered from all facticity'. The intuition of veridical perception is therefore what 'inspires the very project of seeking evidence which would be absolute' (VI, 106): it is the point of departure for methodic doubt (see Sacrini 2013, 731 for a similar reconstruction of Merleau-Ponty's point: 'It is only in opposition to this pre-reflective insertion into the world that the voluntary project of searching for absolute rational justifications makes sense.'). So, by attempting to hold our intuition of veridical perception 'in suspense' in the name of absolute rigour, the radical skeptic effectively enlightens the fact that it is necessarily operational, 'our own, caught up in the flux of our life' (VI, 106).

Against the ideal of absolute rigour, Merleau-Ponty enshrines the principle that we always intuit veridical perception through the concept of 'perceptual faith'. Revisiting the very beginning of VI, we are told:

We see the things themselves, the world is what we see: formulae of this kind express a faith common to the natural man and the philosopher - the moment he opens his eyes; they refer to a deep-seated set of mute 'opinions' implicated in our lives... (VI, 3).

While the claim that 'we see the things themselves, the world is what we see' straightforwardly articulates the metaphysics of veridical perception, it can also be taken to voice the intuitive apprehension of veridical perception, which holds necessarily. As Merleau-Ponty says, the intuitive apprehension of veridical perception is 'a faith common to the natural man and the philosopher - the moment he opens his eyes'. By conceptualising the intuition of veridical perception as a kind of perceptual 'faith', Merleau-Ponty emphasises its pre-reflective quality. Since the perceptual faith is supposed to hold 'the moment' that any perceiving agent 'opens his eyes', this draws attention to how it is phenomenologically built into the perceptual experience of veridical perception, immediately arising from the body's special integration with the world.

Later in the VI, Merleau-Ponty stresses the immediacy of perceptual faith when he describes the experience of veridical perception: 'It is

as though there were between it (the world perceived) and us an intimacy as close as between the sea and the strand' (VI, 130-121; my parentheses). The perceptual faith is thus crucially unlike James's 'leap of faith', that always treads on the heels of deliberation (1896): as Merleau-Ponty indicates in his notes, 'It is not faith in the sense of decision but in the sense of what is before any position...' - i.e. the perceptual faith takes hold prior to any intellectual process that aims to posit the reality of x, y or z (VI, p3, fn1). The perceptual faith thus also diverges from Husserl's 'natural attitude': while the 'natural attitude' is supposed to be a disposition that characterises our everyday lives and which treats the world as immutably there, or as just given, it is also supposed to actively posit that the world is present and real (Husserl, 1962 [1913], §§27-28, 91-93). By contrast, the perceptual faith is more fundamental: it is 'deep-seated' and 'mute', irrevocably woven into our perceptual life, independent of rational activity on our part (VI, 3). So, by enshrining it through the concept of perceptual faith, Merleau-Ponty highlights how the intuition of veridical perception is entirely orthogonal to the ideal of absolute rigour: after all, 'the perceptual faith is, precisely because it is a faith... an adherence that knows itself to be beyond proofs' (VI, 28); it is an 'unjustifiable certitude' (VI, 11).

So should we be *convinced* that we necessarily intuit veridical perception? While Merleau-Ponty himself makes no general argument for this, I suggest that the idea is a powerful one: it is compelling in the light of the most mundane observations of human life. Ordinary human behaviour - i.e. visiting the supermarket, or strolling in the park etc. - seems to suggest an intuitive apprehension of veridical perception that makes interaction with the world a practical possibility. To block this inference, you would need to provide a convincing psychological story about how everyday life would be possible *without* the background intuition that your perception of the world is veridical. Would you be able to get dressed in the morning if you didn't have the intuition that your jeans are *really there*? For Merleau-Ponty, you intuit the reality of your jeans insofar as you see them. If this intuition failed to hold, it seems absurd to suppose you could still get changed.

Interestingly, Merleau-Ponty does suggest that the intuition of veridical perception is foundational for scientific theorising. We are told that 'the pure operation of science takes up for its own profit our certitude, which is much older than it... of having access "to the things themselves"' (VI, p16), since the enabling conditions for

science begin in the realm of lived experience: scientific discourse derives meaning 'when tallied with observations and inserted into a life of cognitions which, for their part, are always situated...' (VI, p15). This view arguably aligns Merleau-Ponty with Hempel, who writes that science relies on observation reports which *themselves* consist of 'sensations, perceptions, and similar phenomena of immediate experience' (1952, p673). However, here it may be objected that the observation of empirical phenomena does not always consist in a perceptual process: some empirical events are so minute or situated in such a way that they cannot register in our perceptual lives - in which case, artificial methods of observation are required (Feyerabend, 1969, p132–137). Special equipment must be used to produce data, recording the empirical events that are immediately hidden from our senses, which can then be analysed in turn. For Merleau-Ponty, however, this is not enough to unfetter scientific theory from the intuition of veridical perception, since it remains the case that 'science moves within and presupposes the world' (VI, p27): even if the scientist uses an artificial method of observation that *by itself* excludes a perceptual process, she is irrevocably locked in her perceptual life. Any analysis of the data reaped by an artificial method of observation would itself implicate a perceptual process, and there is no way to avoid this. Thus, even for the scientist, it reasonably follows that 'we are within life', where the intuition of veridical perception is operational (VI, p116).

To summarise I.2a<sup>ii</sup>, Merleau-Ponty preempts the idea put forward by the contemporary disjunctivist McDowell, that veridical perception can be recognised. However, while this is a contingent, cognitive possibility for McDowell, it is a pre-reflective necessity for Merleau-Ponty: the intuition of veridical perception is supposed to be phenomenologically built into that perceptual experience in virtue of the special way it integrates the body with the world. Like McDowell, Merleau-Ponty concedes that it is possible to mistake a hallucination for veridical perception on the basis of their experiential equivalence. But, striving further than the anglophone philosopher, Merleau-Ponty makes room in our perceptual lives for us to examine the body's varying integration with the world, and consequently distinguish hallucinations from veridical perception. While a more radical skeptic may well cling to the possibility that our entire perceptual life is hallucinatory, Merleau-Ponty characterises this position as a kind of pathology that undercuts our native intuition of veridical perception, which - as I have finally shown - the concept of perceptual faith universally and powerfully enshrines.

## ***1.2b- Illusions***

It is typical to talk about illusory perception as a variant of veridical perception where you perceive something in a way that it isn't 'really' - i.e. seeing a straight stick as though it is bent when submerged underwater (see Genone 2016, 4: '... illusions are typically thought to involve successfully perceiving an object, though experiencing it as possessing properties it lacks...'; also see Smith 2002, 23, for his definition of an illusion as 'any perceptual situation in which a physical object is actually perceived, but in which that object perceptually appears other than it really is').

Illusions are supposed to undermine the direct realist paradigm that veridical perception is constituted by a direct relation with reality. In contemporary, anglophone literature, the argument proceeds by setting out the following analysis of illusory perception: when I perceive something *x* as though it is something else *y*, I am not directly related to *x*; instead, I am directly aware of *y*. This analysis rests on the principle that 'if there sensibly appears to a subject to be something which possesses a particular sensible quality then there is something of which the subject is aware which does possess that sensible quality' (Robinson, 1994, 32): so, insofar as I perceive *x* as though it is *y* during an illusory case of veridical perception, it follows that *y* must exist, and I am directly aware of it. For Price, this principle obviously holds: he suggests that, 'when I say "this table appears brown to me" it is quite plain that I am acquainted with an actual instance of brownness' (1932, 63). In Broad, we find the principle defended on the basis that it explains why, during an illusion, you perceive *x* as though it is *y* (see 1923, 240: '...if, in fact, nothing elliptical is before my mind, it is very hard to understand why the penny should seem elliptical rather than of any other shape...'). Insofar as the same analysis applies to the cases of veridical perception that are illusory and the cases of veridical perception that are non-illusory, we can extrapolate the following conclusion: when I have a veridical perception of something *x*, I am not directly aware of *x*; instead, I am aware of something else (see Ayer 1963, 3-11 for the conclusion that 'what we are directly aware of in perception is never the real, physical object'; also see Crane and French 2015 for their reconstruction of the argument). Insofar as awareness constitutes a relation, it follows that this principle undermines the direct realist view that, during veridical perception of something *x*, I am directly related to *x*.

To reassert the direct realist paradigm for veridical perception, it is typical of disjunctivists to resist the analysis that, when I perceive something *x* as though it is something else *y*, I am not directly aware of *x*, and I am instead directly aware of *y*. Instead, disjunctivists maintain that the illusory variant of veridical perception is metaphysically equivalent to its non-illusory counterpart: when I see *x* as though it is something else *y*, I am directly aware of *x* - and so, it follows that I do bear a direct relation towards reality; it just so happens to be the case that veridical perception can vary according to perspective, thereby allowing me to see *x* as though it is *y*. Brewer helpfully articulates the matter of perspective, highlighting how you can perceive something 'head-on versus wide-angle, or edge-on... Bright lights versus dim light viewings...' (2004). There are innumerable perspectival circumstances that shape veridical perception. Similarly, in Logue 2012, we are told that variations in the perceiver relatum can make for qualitative variations in the perceptual experience (see Crane and French 2015 for this reading). So, it broadly follows on the disjunctivist account that, when I experience the type of veridical perception that is illusory, its illusory nature can be explained away by my perspective - i.e. when I see a huge oak tree as though it is tiny, this can be explained by my distance from the tree; similarly, when I see a straight stick as though it is bent underwater, this can be explained by my position above the waterline.

In VI, Merleau-Ponty arguably puts forward the principle that we find in contemporary disjunctivism - that veridical perception varies according to perspective. He writes:

... my movements and the movements of my eyes make the world vibrate... With each flutter of my eyelashes a curtain lowers and rises... with each movement of my eyes that sweep the space before me the things suffer a brief torsion... and when I walk in the street with eyes fixed on the horizon of the houses, the whole of the setting near at hand quivers with each footfall on the asphalt, then settles down in its place. (VI, 7)

Throughout this description, Merleau-Ponty draws attention to the perspectival circumstances arising from the specific way the body is integrated with the world. So, while it is true that veridical perception always integrates the body with the world in a special way that occasions it with a unified and multi-sensory perceptual field, this integration is not supposed to be static, as though we were motionless rocks, forever fixed at certain points in the landscape; as

Merleau-Ponty clarifies, 'I am... not shut up in one sector of the visible world...' (VI, 100). Instead, we can move! The integration of the body with the world can change dynamically throughout veridical perception, thereby delivering different, limited perspectives on the world (though the perceptual field always remains perfectly unified and multi-sensory). Reminiscent of the Husserlian view that 'of necessity a physical thing can be given only 'one-sidedly' - i.e. from a certain, limited angle (Husserl, 1962 [1913]) - Merleau-Ponty highlights how 'we can only displace our look, that is, transfer its limits elsewhere. But it is necessary that there be always a limit; what is won on one side must be lost from the other...' (VI, 100; see also VI, 219: '... there is a point whence I see...').

To clarify the idea that different, limited perspectives on the world are generated by the body's ever-changing integration with the world, we can look elsewhere in VI, where Merleau-Ponty refers to 'the perspective views I have... which are bound to the position of my body' (57). By referring to the 'position of my body', Merleau-Ponty stresses how the body can only integrate with the world in a limited, or particular, way: it is always shifting into a specific 'position' - and it is this dynamic particularity that delimits 'perspective views' (see also VI, 37 - where Merleau-Ponty refers 'the functioning of my body' as a 'possibility for changing point of view'). In this way, Merleau-Ponty foreshadows the disjunctivist principle that veridical perception varies according to perspective, while cashing out perspective in terms of the body's ever-changing integration with the world.

Having postulated in the disjunctivist fashion that veridical perception varies according to perspective, Merleau-Ponty emphasises the compatibility of this move with the view that veridical perception is constituted by a direct relation with reality. Discussing a case of veridical perception in VI, he says:

... when I walk in the street with eyes fixed on the horizon of the houses, the whole of the setting near at hand quivers with each footfall on the asphalt, then settles down in its place. I would express what takes place badly indeed in saying that here a 'subjective component' or a 'corporeal constituent' comes to cover over the things themselves... (VI, 7)

To highlight the idea that veridical perception varies according to perspective, Merleau-Ponty links the fact that he is 'walk(ing) in the street' with the 'quiver(ing)' motion of the landscape ahead. Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty emphasises how veridical perception

necessarily marks a direct relation with reality: we are told that there is no 'subjective component' or 'corporeal constituent' forming an interim between himself, and 'the things themselves'. In this way, Merleau-Ponty effectively anticipates the disjunctivist position that veridical perception varies according to perspective, all the while remaining constituted by a direct relation with reality. As he clarifies elsewhere in VI, it is that direct 'relation between the things and my body' which 'produces the buzzing of appearances' (VI, 8) - i.e. it is the direct relation with reality that constitutes veridical perception in all its perspectival variability. In Chapter II, we shall see how Merleau-Ponty grapples further than the disjunctivist on this point. For now, however, it suffices to emphasise the following: for Merleau-Ponty, it is always the case that veridical perception varies according to perspective without this in any way disturbing the direct relation with reality that constitutes it.

Since veridical perception varies according to perspective, it follows that it is fundamentally indeterminate. Merleau-Ponty gives an example of veridical perception where

I see it only if it is within their radius of action (i.e. the radius of action of my eyes); above it there is the dark mass of my forehead, beneath it the more indecisive contour of my cheeks - both of these visible at the limit and capable of hiding the table... (VI, 7, my parentheses)

Throughout this description, Merleau-Ponty draws attention to how perspectival limitations result in an indeterminate perceptual field - a 'dark mass', and an 'indecisive contour' etc. - where things are perceived indeterminately. This idea is also underpins the passage quoted earlier, where my perspectival limitations - e.g. 'my movements and the movements of my eyes', 'each flutter of my eyelashes', 'each footfall on the asphalt' etc. - make veridical perception indeterminate, insofar as the world seems to 'vibrate', 'quiver', and 'settle', though it does not as a matter of fact (VI, 7). The fundamental indeterminacy of veridical perception is clarified elsewhere in VI, where Merleau-Ponty describes the 'figured enigmas' of veridical perception (VI, 4), and the 'ambiguous order of perceived being' (VI, 22), while the perceptual field is portrayed as a 'ambiguous field of horizons and distances' (VI, 23).<sup>6</sup> So, because

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<sup>6</sup> Note the continuity with PP, where Merleau-Ponty writes that 'the perceived, by its nature, admits of the ambiguous' (13), thereby positing the fundamental indeterminacy of veridical perception. See Romdenh-Romluc 2009, 86 for this reading of PP: '... perception, for Merleau-Ponty, always has indeterminate aspects...'

veridical perception invites us to see the world indeterminately, this gives it the power to mislead us about reality, thereby arguably accounting for the phenomenon of illusions, where something *x* is perceived as something it is not, *y*.

However, as already touched on, Merleau-Ponty posits that you can learn to 'see well' (VI, 37). For our purposes here, this principle can be elaborated in the following way: you can familiarise yourself with the way veridical perception works, inferring how it varies according to perspective. So, for example, I can learn the perceptual trends that 'my movements and the movements of my eyes make the world vibrate... With each flutter of my eyelashes a curtain lowers and rises...' etc. (VI, p7); similarly, I can learn that a straight stick looks bent when submerged underwater, and a big tree looks small from a great distance. Thus, by grasping the 'perceptual logic' that governs veridical perception (VI, 247), I can anticipate how it will be indeterminate, and thereby avoid being misled by it. As Merleau-Ponty says, I will not 'think for an instant of imputing... (the visual effect) to the things themselves'; I will instead 'ascribe (them) to myself' (VI, 7, my parentheses), understanding how they result from my perspectival limitations. So, although veridical perception is fundamentally indeterminate, we can grow familiar with the way it works in order to avoid being misled about reality.

In summary of Chapter I, we have seen VI foreshadow the contemporary, anglophone movement of direct realist disjunctivism insofar as it postulates a direct relation with reality that constitutes veridical perception, a metaphysical distinction between veridical perception and the hallucinations that are experientially equivalent to it, and the perspectival variability of veridical perception. However, VI ultimately goes beyond that contemporary literature, since we see Merleau-Ponty place heavy theoretical weight on the body's integration with the world, which is a theme continued from PP. During different perceptual experiences, the body's integration with the world is supposed to vary, thereby explaining why veridical perception is metaphysically disjunctive from the hallucination that is experientially equivalent to it, why veridical perception is accompanied by the intuition of it (i.e. 'perceptual faith'), why veridical perception and hallucinations can be told apart, and lastly how the perspectival variability of veridical perception makes it fundamentally indeterminate, and thereby potentially misleading about reality.

## ***II. The Double-Paradox of Veridical Perception, and the Role of Philosophy***

In this chapter, I shall draw attention to 'The Double-Paradox of Veridical Perception' that can be inferred from VI, before clarifying the role that Merleau-Ponty envisions for philosophy.

### ***II.1. The Double-Paradox***

In VI, Merleau-Ponty highlights how veridical perception is twofold:

Everything comes to pass as though my power to reach the world and my power to entrench myself in phantasms only came one with the other (VI, 8).

While 'my power to reach the world' is enabled by the direct relation with reality that (intuitively) constitutes veridical perception, 'my power to entrench myself in phantasms' is enabled by its perspectival variability, which makes it fundamentally indeterminate, and therefore potentially misleading about reality. The twin powers of perception thus reflect its central aspects: its direct relation with reality, and its perspectival variability. For Merleau-Ponty, these twin powers seem to come 'one with the other'. In this way, he foreshadows the disjunctivist position that veridical perception varies according to perspective without this in any way undermining the direct relation with reality that constitutes it.

Having highlighted (1) the perspectival variability of veridical perception and (2) the direct relation with reality that constitutes it, Merleau-Ponty draws attention to how this metaphysical picture yields a phenomenological kind of paradox upon reflection:

The world is what I perceive, but as soon as we examine and express its absolute proximity, it also becomes inexplicably, irremediable distance (VI, 8).

In this quotation, Merleau-Ponty uses our spatial relationship with the world as a metaphor for our attitude towards it. When he refers to our 'absolute proximity' with the world, he means our sense of raw intimacy with the world, which derives from the intuitively direct relation with reality that constitutes veridical perception. In his discussion of perceptual faith, Merleau-Ponty explicitly refers to the 'intimacy' that the perceptual agent feels towards the thing perceiving, describing it 'as close as between the sea and the strand' (VI, 130-131). Our intimacy with the world is thus linked to our

conviction that we see the world itself, as it really is. Back to the passage quoted above, we can see that when we 'examine and express' this pre-reflection intimacy with the world, it is supposed to 'become' its opposite: estrangement from the world, which Merleau-Ponty captures as 'irremediable distance' from it.

For Merleau-Ponty, our pre-reflective intimacy with the world paradoxically crumbles into estrangement from it when we take into account the perspectival variability of veridical perception. Tracing these reflective steps, Merleau-Ponty writes:

The 'natural' man holds on to both ends of the chain, thinks at the same time that his perception enters into the things and that it is formed this side of his body. Yet coexist as the two convictions do without difficulty in the exercise of life, once reduced to theses and to propositions they destroy one another and leave us in confusion... (VI, 8; original italics)

While the conviction that our 'perception enters into the things' articulates the relational constitution of veridical perception that sparks a raw sense of intimacy with the world, the idea that veridical perception 'is formed this side of... (our) body' links to its quality of perspectival variability. Merleau-Ponty observes that we implicitly accept both aspects of veridical perception in a pre-philosophical context - i.e. in 'the exercise of life', where they seem to 'come one with the other' (VI, 8). However, in a philosophical context, where these aspects of veridical perception are 'reduced to theses and to propositions', it is more difficult to reconcile the two. The perspectival variability of veridical perception seems to 'destroy' or 'shatter' our pre-reflective intimacy with the world: we wonder, how can we be *intimate* with the world, when veridical perception is sometimes misleading about it? So, on account of the perspectival variability of veridical perception, we plunge into a sense of cognitive estrangement from the world, and this conflicts with the pre-reflective intimacy we felt towards it, thus making the perceptual experience phenomenologically paradoxical as a whole. We can thus set out The Phenomenological Paradox of Perception as follows:

*'The Phenomenological Paradox of Veridical Perception' is that veridical perception involves pre-reflective intimacy with the world that cognitively crumbles into estrangement from it.*

While veridical perception is phenomenologically paradoxical in the light of philosophy, Merleau-Ponty also calls into question the coherence of the metaphysical framework that grounds its

phenomenology: he compels us to consider how the intuitively direct 'relation between the things and my body... produces the buzzing of appearances' (VI, 8)? While the disjunctivist is arguably quick to assume that the perspectival variability of veridical perception sits comfortably with its relational constitution, Merleau-Ponty stresses how the two aspects of veridical perception seem to 'shatter' each other (VI, 8). While his elegiac language arguably reinforces the phenomenological paradox that arises from their conjunction, Merleau-Ponty brings to the surface an additional, closely related paradox to do with the perceptual experience, which we shall refer to as The Metaphysical Paradox of Veridical Perception.<sup>7</sup> As Merleau-Ponty himself constructs the paradox, the 'conviction of going to the things themselves... is incompatible with the fact of illusion' (VI, 30). We can clarify the paradox as follows:

*'The Metaphysical Paradox of Veridical Perception' is that the perspectival variability of veridical perception lies in tension with the intuitively direct relation with reality that constitutes it.*<sup>8</sup>

Confusion over how the perspectival variability of veridical perception metaphysically coheres with its relational constitution is compounded by the phenomenon of different perceiving agents: 'the other men who see "as we do", whom we see seeing and who see us seeing' (VI, 9). Veridical perception is supposed to vary according to the perspective of each perceptual agent, thus making each perceptual experience insular, or self-contained to the extent that 'it is indeed impossible to grant access to the world to the others' perception' (VI, 9). And yet, because veridical perception grants each perceptual agent access to the same world, every perceptual experience seems to converge, or correlate with one another: it is true that 'I can count on what I see, which is in close correspondence with what the other sees (everything attests to this, in fact: we really do see the same thing and the thing itself)...' (VI, fn10; original

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<sup>7</sup> While Merleau-Ponty seems to conflate the two paradoxes, the distinction is helpful for this exegesis, though I will refer to the two together as 'the double-paradox'.

<sup>8</sup> While you could arguably arrive at The Metaphysical Paradox of Veridical Perception independently of The Phenomenological Paradox, the latter seems to be helpful in granting an understanding of the former. Once the perceptual agent experiences her pre-reflective intimacy with the world cognitively crumble into estrangement from it, it would be arguably natural to consider the metaphysical incoherence grounding that inconsistent phenomenology. It is important to note, however, that while The Phenomenological Paradox only arises in a philosophical context, The Metaphysical Paradox holds prior to philosophy, though it is discoverable through philosophy.

parentheses). The Double-Paradox of Veridical Perception thus finds an 'amplification' in the phenomenon of the other (VI, 9): while we are all able to grasp The Phenomenological Paradox through philosophical inquiry into our individual perceptual lives, we are also compelled to wonder how our bodies collectively 'opened us to the world only by sealing us up in the succession of our private events' (VI, 30) - i.e. how The Metaphysical Paradox works, allowing every individual to be intuitively directed to the same reality during veridical perception, though each perceptual experience varies according to that individual's perspective.

## **II.2. The Role of Philosophy**

Under the rubric of 'the movement of reflection' (VI, 31), Merleau-Ponty characterises Kantian idealism as a response to The Metaphysical Paradox of Veridical Perception: he portrays 'the passage to ideality as a solution of the antinomies' (VI, 30, fn). As Merleau-Ponty understands him, Kant reconciles the perspectival variability of veridical perception with the intuitively direct relation with reality that constitutes it by limiting veridical perception to the phenomenal realm. As already noted, the 'phenomenal realm' is Kant's term for 'everything intuited in space or in time, hence all objects of an experience possible for us', which are purely idealistic, insofar as they are 'nothing but appearances, i.e., mere representations, which, as they are represented, as extended beings or series of alterations, have outside our thoughts no existence grounded in itself' (A490–1/B518–9). Insofar as veridical perception is limited to the phenomenal realm, its perspectival variability sits comfortably with the intuitively direct relation with reality that constitutes it - but only if 'reality' is here taken to refer to that which is purely phenomenal. Merleau-Ponty observes that, on this model, it follows that veridical perception certainly 'reaches the thing itself... without this being a contradiction... because the thing is henceforth exactly what we think we see— *cogitatum* or *noema*' (VI, 29-30; original italics): the perspectival variability of veridical perception is coherent with the intuitively direct relation with phenomenal reality that constitutes it. Idealism also elucidates how multiple agents of perception can perceive the same thing, though their respective perceptions vary according to their individual perspectives, since 'the world is numerically one with my *cogitatum* and with that of the others insofar as it is ideal (ideal identity, beneath the several and the one)' (VI, 30, fn; original italics and parentheses); similarly, we see Merleau-Ponty reformulate the idealist logic that 'we all reach the

world, and the same world, and it belongs wholly to each of us, without division or loss, because it is *that which* we think we perceive, the undivided object of all our thoughts' (VI, 31; original italics).

Having shown how Kantian idealism reconciles the perspectival variability of veridical perception with the intuitively direct relation with reality that constitutes it by limiting that reality to what is purely phenomenal, Merleau-Ponty criticises this idealist move on the basis that it presupposes and then distorts our intuitively direct relation with reality itself. As Somers-Hall observes, 'Merleau-Ponty argues that Kant's approach presupposes our perceptual relationship to the world' (2019, 117), and this reading is supported by the following passage in VI:

... the reflection at each instant draws its inspiration from the prior presence of the world, of which it is tributary, from which it derives all its energy. When Kant justifies each step of his Analytic with the famous refrain 'if a world is to be possible,' he emphasizes the fact that his guideline is furnished [...] by the unreflected image of the world, that the necessity of the steps taken by the reflection is suspended upon the hypothesis 'world,' and that the thought of the world which the Analytic is charged with disclosing is not so much the foundation as the second expression of the fact that for me there has been an experience of a world— in other words, that the intrinsic of the world as a thought rests upon the fact that I can see the world... (VI, 34)

While 'the reflection' refers to Kantian philosophy, Merleau-Ponty understands its point of departure to be 'the prior presence of the world' - i.e. the intuitively direct relation with reality that constitutes veridical perception. Merleau-Ponty justifies this reading of Kant by citing the hypothesis that motivates his philosophy: 'if a world is to be possible...'. For Merleau-Ponty, this hypothesis implicitly smuggles in with it the 'unreflected image of the world' - i.e. veridical perception - since 'the intrinsic possibility of the world as a thought rests upon the fact that I can see the world': our experience of the world is prior to our capacity to hypothesise its existence. Hence, Merleau-Ponty characterises Kant's skepticism as a 'clandestine positivism' (VI, 120).

By accusing Kant of presupposing the truth of veridical perception by even making the skeptical move to doubt it, Merleau-Ponty continues a line of thought that runs through his earlier work, *The Primacy of Perception* (1964; hereby referred to as 'PrP'), where he writes that Kant hypothesises the existence of the world, 'as if he were thinking

before the origin of the world, as if he were assisting at its genesis and could pose its a priori conditions' (16-17). In this way, Merleau-Ponty draws attention to how Kant hypothesises the existence of the world only from *within* the world itself. Thus, it is clear that VI revives the accusation against Kant set up in PrP. Emphatically marking this revival, Merleau-Ponty writes in VI that Kant presupposes 'our natal bond with the world' - i.e. our intuitively direct relation with reality - by hypothesising the world's existence in order to get his philosophy started; the German philosopher subsequently distorts that relation by limiting it to the phenomenal realm, thus effectively 'undoing it in order to remake it... fabricating it' (VI, 32; original italics; see Alloa 2017, 32 for the same reading of Merleau-Ponty on Kant in VI).

Striving further than the movement of reflection, Merleau-Ponty advocates a philosophical method of '*hyper-reflection*' (*sur-réflexion*) - which he explicitly introduces on Page 38 of VI (original italics). The method is characterised by reflexivity, since it is intended to 'take itself and the changes it introduces into the spectacle into account' (VI, 38) - i.e. it is supposed to be wary of the transformative role of reflection. In Kant's philosophy - as Merleau-Ponty takes it - this crucial element of reflexivity is missing from his methodology (see VI, 33 on how it 'recuperates everything except itself as an effort of recuperation, it clarifies everything except its own role'). Meanwhile, in Husserl, we find the idea that you can reflect on unreflected lived experience without this in any way impinging on the latter. Husserl writes,

[W]hen a lived-experience, that at some particular time is actually being lived, comes into the reflective regard it becomes given as actually being lived, as existing 'now'... it becomes given as having just now been and, insofar as it was unregarded, precisely as not having been reflected on. (*Ideas I*, 145)

For Husserl, it seems that we can, via reflection, perfectly apprehend the lived experience that was unreflected. For Merleau-Ponty, however, it is the case that reflection inevitably modifies that which is being reflected on (see VI, 38 on how '... there was there a thing perceived and an openness upon this thing which the reflection has neutralized and transformed into perception-reflected-on and thing-perceived-within-a-perception-reflected-on.'). So, because it reflexively grasps the transformative role of reflection, the method of hyper-reflection is better equipped to 'not lose sight of the brute thing and the brute perception... not finally efface them' (VI, 38). By referring to the 'thing' and 'perception' as 'brute', Merleau-Ponty

articulates that pre-reflective sense of intimacy with the world, which derives from its relational constitution. Though that intimacy paradoxically crumbles into cognitive estrangement from the world when we take into account the perspectival variability of veridical perception, thus generating The Phenomenological Paradox of Veridical Perception, Merleau-Ponty advocates that we do not 'efface' and 'lose sight of' it.

Building on the idea that hyper-reflection should strive to stay true to our lived experience of veridical perception, Merleau-Ponty writes:

If philosophy is... to understand this initial openness upon the world which does not exclude a possible occultation, it cannot be content with describing it; it must tell us how there is openness without the occultation of the world being excluded, how the occultation remains at each instant possible even though we be naturally endowed with light. The philosopher must understand how it is that these two possibilities, which the perceptual... (experience) keeps side by side within itself, do not nullify one another... (VI, 28; my parentheses)

Though Merleau-Ponty does not explicitly refer to the method of hyper-reflection at this place in the text, it is arguably reasonable to attribute that method to the model philosophy he envisions in this early passage of the VI. While our 'initial openness upon the world' refers to our pre-reflective intimacy with the world, the paradoxical idea that this 'openness... does not exclude a possible occultation' ties into The Phenomenological Paradox of Veridical Perception. Connoting the kind of astronomical event where one heavenly body is hidden behind another, Merleau-Ponty uses the notion of an 'occultation' as a metaphor for our cognitive estrangement from the world. So, by imploring the philosopher to explain 'how there is openness without the occultation of the world being excluded', Merleau-Ponty compels us to make sense of The Phenomenological Paradox of Veridical Perception: we must grasp how our pre-reflective intimacy with the world 'keeps side by side' with our cognitive estrangement from the world, rather than explaining the inconsistent phenomenology away.

Continuing the passage quoted above, Merleau-Ponty suggests that the philosopher 'will not succeed' by 'saying in turn that my vision is at the thing itself and that my vision is my own or "in me"' (VI, 28). Here, Merleau-Ponty's discussion seems to shift to The Metaphysical Paradox of Veridical Perception. While the claim that 'my vision is at the thing itself' would express the relational constitution of veridical

perception, the claim that 'my vision is my own or "in me"' would express its perspectival variability. Though the two aspects of veridical perception are at odds with each other, Merleau-Ponty wants us to move beyond the kind of limited, mutually exclusive thinking that would try to explain the paradox away. As he says elsewhere in VI, we must know 'what motivates... (it) from within' (VI, 29; my parentheses). So, while hyper-reflection is supposed to stay faithful to The Phenomenological Paradox of Veridical Perception, it is also a distinctly ontological project. This characterisation of hyper-reflection is implicit early on in VI, where Merleau-Ponty suggests that 'it is for philosophy the only way to conform itself with... the paradoxes of which that vision is made...' (VI, 4). Again, taking the model 'philosophy' envisioned here to indicate the method of hyper-reflection that Merleau-Ponty explicitly introduces only pages later in the text, we can infer that hyper-reflection (qua 'philosophy') aims to do ontological justice to veridical perception, rather than strip it of its metaphysical paradox. Hyper-reflection is thus

a thought that... is capable of reaching truth because it envisages without restriction the plurality of the relationships and what has been called ambiguity... (VI, 94)

Hyper-reflection carves out conceptual room for phenomenological and metaphysical paradox.

Insofar as it aims to grasp the (doubly) paradoxical nature of veridical perception, the method of hyper-reflection cannot simply analyse or rehearse the conventions of language: we cannot 'reduce philosophy to a linguistic analysis' of how we use the terms that are relevant to veridical perception, such as 'world' or 'thing' (VI, 96). Merleau-Ponty elaborates:

... it (philosophy *qua* hyper-reflection) asks of our experience of the world what the world is before it is a thing one speaks of and which is taken for granted, before it has been reduced to a set of manageable, disposable significations; it directs this question to our mute life, it addresses itself to that compound of the world and of ourselves that precedes reflection, because the examination of the significations in themselves would give us the world reduced to our idealizations and our syntax... (VI, 102; my parentheses)

Here, Merleau-Ponty characterises the ideal mode of philosophy - i.e. hyper-reflection - as an inquiry into our pre-linguistic experience of veridical perception, as opposed to an inquiry into the meanings of words that are historically established in relation to it. According to Merleau-Ponty, the latter kind of inquiry would only reaffirm our

prejudicial conceptions about veridical perception (it would 'give us the world reduced to our idealizations and our syntax'), rather than evoking how veridical perception of the world features 'before it (the world) is a thing one speaks of and which is taken for granted, before it has been reduced to a set of manageable, disposable significations' (my parentheses).<sup>9</sup>

Clarifying that hyper-reflection, as the ideal mode of philosophy, should aim to express our pre-linguistic experience of veridical perception, Merleau-Ponty writes early on in VI that 'it is the things themselves, from the depths of their *silence*, that it (philosophy *qua* hyper-reflection) wishes to bring to expression' (4, my italics; my parentheses). Similarly, a few pages later, Merleau-Ponty declares that philosophy must 'make it (the world) say, finally, what in its silence *it means to say*. . .' (VI, 39; my parentheses; original italics). Again, it seems that the method of hyper-reflection is supposed to capture that which is pre-linguistic - i.e. our unarticulated experience of veridical perception, which Merleau-Ponty also characterises as something 'wild', or 'brute' (VI, 102, 110 etc.). Faced with the seemingly impossible task of expressing what is pre-linguistic, the philosopher must make an 'absurd effort' (VI, 125): he must 'put into words a certain silence he hearkens to within himself' (VI, 125).

Exploring the relationship between language and reality in another unfinished work, entitled *The Prose of the World* (1973; hereby referred to as 'PW'), Merleau-Ponty puts forward a technical distinction that is arguably implicit in VI, and therefore helpful in illuminating the role of language in the ontological project of hyper-reflection. He distinguishes between two kinds of language: (1) 'sedimented language', and (2) 'speech' (PW, 10). 'Sedimented language' is supposed to be historically established: it is 'language as an institution' (PW, 10); it marks 'the stock of accepted relations between signs and familiar significations' (PW, 13). Meanwhile, 'speech' is supposed to refer to 'the operation through which a certain arrangement of already available signs and significations alters and then transfigures each of them, so that in the end a new

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<sup>9</sup> See PP, 214 for a similar advocacy of returning to what is pre-linguistic: 'Our view of man will remain superficial so long as we fail to go back to that origin, so long as we fail to find, beneath the chatter of words, the primordial silence...' See Daly, 2016, 8 for further discussion.

signification is secreted' (PW, 13).<sup>10</sup> This linguistic distinction is arguably implicit in VI, where Merleau-Ponty suggests that  
the univocal signification is but one part of the signification of the word, that beyond it there is always a halo of signification that manifests itself in new and unexpected modes of use... (VI, 96)

While we can attribute the 'univocal signification' of a word to 'sedimented language', we can attribute the 'halo' of possible signification that surrounds a word to 'speech' - the creative act that invents new meaning, and which is 'sustained by the thousands of ideal relations of the particular language' (VI, 118). Similarly, on Page 102 of VI, we see Merleau-Ponty suggest that language is 'not only the depository of fixed and acquired significations' - i.e. there is more to language than what has been historically established. Honing in on the technical concept of 'speech', as formulated more explicitly in PW, Merleau-Ponty also suggests on Page 102 of VI that 'one speaks not only of what one knows, so as to set out a display of it— but also of what one does not know, in order to know it', thereby drawing on the possibility for linguistic innovation that illuminates what 'one does not know' - i.e. that which was pre-linguistic.

The distinction technically formulated in PW between 'speech' and 'sedimented language' can thus enrich our understanding of what Merleau-Ponty intends for the method of hyper-reflection. Back to the passage from Page 102 of VI quoted above, we can infer that it is a pure investigation into 'sedimented language' that would 'give us the world reduced to our idealizations and our syntax' (VI, 102). So, in order to express our 'mute life' (VI, 102) - or rather, our pre-linguistic experience of veridical perception - hyper-reflection should make 'the things themselves *speak*', as Merleau-Ponty suggests only pages later (VI, 125; my italics). In this way, Merleau-Ponty clarifies how hyper-reflection requires the cultivation of new meanings - i.e. 'speech', which 'removes from' language 'its power of immediate or direct signification in order to match it with what it wishes all the same to say' (VI, 102-103; modified translation, courtesy of my supervisor, Richmond). The idea that hyper-reflection should innovate meaning is arguably implicit earlier in VI, where Merleau-

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, note the parallel with Saussure (1916), who distinguishes between (1) *langue*, a socially shared system of abstract conventions, and (2) *parole*, the active choices made by the speaker who deploys a language. See VI, 118, for Merleau-Ponty's employment of this terminology: 'speech (*la parole*) — which is sustained by the thousands of ideal relations of the particular language (*la langue...*); see Chipere (2013) for further discussion on Saussure.

Ponty advocates using 'the significations of words to express, beyond themselves, our mute contact with the things...' (VI, 38).

Envisioning the kind of meaning that would be relevant to the hyper-reflective project of expressing our pre-linguistic perceptual life, Merleau-Ponty writes:

It would be a language... that would combine through him (the philosopher) by virtue of a natural intertwining of their meaning, through the occult trading of the metaphor— where what counts is no longer the manifest meaning of each word and of each image, but the lateral relations, the kinships that are implicated in their transfers and their exchanges... (VI, 125; my parentheses)

Here, Merleau-Ponty advocates innovating the kind of meaning that would stretch beyond the literal use of words - i.e. the 'manifest meaning of each word' - and centre instead around what is more evocatively connoted through 'the occult trading of the metaphor'. Though Merleau-Ponty does not offer a comprehensive account of what a metaphor exactly is (i.e. it is 'occult'), and he mentions the literary device very scarcely in VI, its relevance to the method of hyper-reflection is widely agreed upon across the secondary literature on VI (see, for example, Vanzago 2005, Sellheim 2010, and Gill 1991).

Without delving too much into the philosophy of language, it seems reasonable to understand metaphorical language as that which is figurative - i.e. it departs from the literal use of words in order to generate some other meaning. Following the trend of secondary literature on VI, we can say that metaphor plays a necessary role in the hyper-reflective enterprise of expressing what has not been expressed before. As we have seen, Merleau-Ponty captures our pre-linguistic perceptual life as our 'mute life' (VI, 102), or as simply 'silence' (VI, 3, 39, 125, etc.). Clarifying how 'silence' evades standard expression, Merleau-Ponty writes in a working note the following principle: 'Silence = absence of the word due' (VI, 263). Vanzago is therefore right to observe that, for Merleau-Ponty, hyper-reflection is a philosophy that 'needs to recur to the power of metaphorical expressions in order to communicate what cannot otherwise be adequately expressed' (2005, 429). Similarly, Sellheim seems right to suggest that, for Merleau-Ponty, 'the philosopher... must become a poet' (2010, 261).

In summary of Chapter II - The Phenomenological Paradox of Veridical Perception is that veridical perception involves a sense of pre-reflective intimacy with the world that cognitively crumbles into estrangement from it. Closely related, The Metaphysical Paradox of Veridical Perception is that the perspectival variability of veridical perception lies in tension with its relational constitution. While Kant responds to The Metaphysical Paradox of Veridical Perception by trying to correct our intuition about veridical perception so that it is constituted by a direct relation with phenomenal reality, rather than reality itself, Merleau-Ponty finds this idealist move problematic, since it distorts our lived experience so drastically. Instead, Merleau-Ponty advocates a philosophical method of hyper-reflection that respects the (doubly) paradoxical nature of veridical perception by innovating metaphorical meaning to give it novel expression.

### ***III. The Ontology of the Flesh***

In this Chapter, we will see how Merleau-Ponty implements the ontological project of hyper-reflection with the motif of the Flesh.<sup>11</sup>

The word 'flesh' first appears in VI on Page 9, for the moment unencumbered by the technical, metaphysical meaning that comes to imbue it. Merleau-Ponty refers to 'the experience of my flesh', thereby pointing to the phenomenology of embodiment (VI, 9). 'Flesh' is thus used in the ordinary sense here, denoting the muscle and fat between skin and bones, or your corporeal being more loosely. Gradually, however, the word 'flesh' starts to be used in a more novel and esoteric way. On Page 84, we see Merleau-Ponty enigmatically refer to the 'flesh of the world'. Pages later, he refers to 'the flesh of being and the flesh of the seer' as that which is to be 'rediscover(ed) behind the vision, as immediate presence to being' (VI, 88). Clearly, the word 'flesh' is being used in an extraordinary sense here: a greater meaning has sidled into the picture, however cryptically: it seems to be an expansive, ontological concept that encompasses everything - 'world' (VI, 84), 'being' and 'seer' (VI, 88). As Dastur similarly understands, it is a 'name for being as a whole' (2000, 37).

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<sup>11</sup> See Muller (2017) for a discussion on how the ontology of the Flesh relates to Merleau-Ponty's earlier work. My own view, developed here, is that the ontology of the Flesh, under that special rubric of 'Flesh', is entirely new, finding direct explication in VI alone.

So, to distinguish it from the ordinary sense of 'flesh', I shall capitalise the word as 'Flesh' henceforth.<sup>12</sup>

Developing the Flesh as a technical concept, Merleau-Ponty writes:

What makes the weight, the thickness, the flesh of each color, of each sound, of each tactile texture, of the present, and of the world is the fact that he who grasps them feels himself emerge from them by a sort of coiling up or redoubling... (VI, 113-114)

By referring to 'the flesh of each colour... sound... texture', Merleau-Ponty highlights the sensible features of the world, while associating them with the all-encompassing 'flesh'. For Merleau-Ponty, the sensible features of the world are supposed to come into existence as a 'fact' by being perceived, when 'he (the perceiving agent)... grasps them' (my parentheses). Consistent with the hyper-reflective enterprise of focusing on the lived experience of veridical perception, Merleau-Ponty describes this moment of perception from what is supposed to be the point of view of the perceptive agent: he 'feels himself emerge from them (the sensible things perceived) by a sort of coiling up or redoubling' (my parentheses). According to Merleau-Ponty, veridical perception unravels as a relation between the perceptual agent and the (perceived) sensible things perceived in a way that has phenomenological import. So, while we saw that Merleau-Ponty analyses veridical perception as having a relational constitution, we now have that same view, resurfacing more vividly as a 'sort of coiling up or redoubling' that is supposed to (1) be experienced by the perceptual agent, and (2) have ontological ramifications (i.e. it is 'what makes the... flesh of... the world'). In this chapter, we shall explore both of these points in turn.

### ***III.1 - Sensibility and Sentience***

We can grasp why, for Merleau-Ponty, the perceptual agent experiences the perceptual relation as a sort of 'coiling up' against the world she inhabits by examining the two salient, metaphysical principles that ground the perceptual relation: firstly, there is supposed to be symmetry between the perceptual agent and the world at the level of sensibility; secondly, there is supposed to be asymmetry between the perceptual agent and the world she inhabits at the level of the former being sentient, and the latter being otherwise. I shall explore each principle in turn before clarifying how

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<sup>12</sup> Note that this marker is omitted in the original text of VI, and correspondingly in any excerpts reproduced in this thesis.

their co-existence ultimately enlightens The Double-Paradox of Veridical Perception.

### ***III.1a - Principle of Symmetry***

Throughout VI, Merleau-Ponty makes repeated references to that which is 'sensible'. While there are different sense-modalities, he expands on that which is specifically visible when he writes:

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... (VI, 36)

Representative of our sense modalities, the visible is supposed to have a qualitative feel to it. Furthermore, it is supposed to involve dimensionality. Throughout VI, Merleau-Ponty also refers to that which is 'tangible', or 'tactile'. For the sake of this thesis, however, I shall refer to what is sensible more generally. According to Merleau-Ponty, symmetry strikes between the perceptual agent and the world at the level of their sensibility. Speaking as a perceptual agent, Merleau-Ponty asserts, 'I am among them (the sensible things)' (VI, 114; my parentheses). This seems reasonable, since Merleau-Ponty - as a perceptual agent - is a perceiving body, and the body is 'one of the visibles' (VI, 118); it is 'a thing among things' (VI, 137). On the basis of the body's sensibility, he suggests that 'my body is made of the same flesh as the world (it is a perceived)...' (VI, p248; original parentheses).

Insofar as it thematises the mutual sensibility of the body and the world it inhabits, the ontology of Flesh is criticised by Merleau-Ponty's student and editor, Lefort, as lacking conceptual room for alterity (1990). On his interpretation of VI, it is 'the body (that) communicates to the things its own divergence' (1990, 5; my parentheses). Discussing Lefort's reading of Merleau-Ponty, Dillon writes that 'otherness becomes a meaning constituted by the body, and genuine alterity is lost in the selfsameness of the flesh' (1990, 18-19; my parentheses; see Daly 2016, 4 for support that Lefort interprets the Flesh as 'an intractable, indivisible, uniform substance'). While Lefort's objection seems to be motivated by the ethical consideration that the ontology of Flesh precludes intersubjectivity (see Evink 2013 for further discussion, and III.2 of this thesis), let us focus for now on the more limited, metaphysical dimension to this objection: Lefort seems to be accusing Merleau-

Ponty of monism, as though his ontology inadequately accounts for the diversity amongst phenomena.

To defend Merleau-Ponty, I will draw attention to how it is the *meaningfulness* of what is sensible that is supposed to reflect the diversity amongst it. On Page 114 of VI, Merleau-Ponty characterises the sensible world as a 'whole architecture... differentiated by the coiling up of the visible and the universal'. This suggests that the diversity of the sensible world is reflected by the 'the depository of fixed and acquired significations' that are historically established about it (VI, 102). Similarly, Merleau-Ponty suggests that 'there is no individual that would not be representative of a species or of a family of beings...' (VI, 114-5), thereby emphatically linking the diversity amongst sensible things to their sedimented meanings - i.e. the way they are historically taken to represent 'a species or... a family of beings', or rather, a concept that is a 'universal' (VI, 114).<sup>13</sup>

Clarifying how it is sedimented language that reflects the diversity of things in the sensible world, Merleau-Ponty writes,

If they (various sensible things) are to subsist as individuals... they have to exhibit a certain number of properties that are in some way nuclear, that derive from one another, and, all together, emanate from this individual pebble, from this individual shell, or, in general, from every individual of the same name. When we say therefore, that there is here a pebble, a shell, and even this pebble, this shell, we mean that it fulfills these exigencies... this unique foundation of the nuclear properties... manifests itself unimpeded... (VI, 161; my parentheses)

A sensible thing belongs to a type in virtue of the collection of properties it 'emanate(s)', and what kind of identification, or 'name' that standardly warrants. A sensible thing thus answers to a fixed name, such as 'a pebble' or 'a shell', insofar as we are directly related to it during veridical perception: the pebble or shell must 'manifest... itself unimpeded' in order to 'exhibit' the properties that are relevant to its designation. Daly is therefore right to interpret VI as suggesting that 'things, the world and others are meaningful in-themselves' (2016, 6), since we see the things, the world and others as 'the locus' of their meanings (2016, 6). Similarly, as on Toadvine's reading of Merleau-Ponty, it is the case that 'perceived meaning is ontologically basic' (2009, 131). In III.3, we shall see how Merleau-

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<sup>13</sup> See James (2007), and Seip (2009) for a discussion on Merleau-Ponty's apparent anthropocentrism.

Ponty appeals to the notion of the 'chiasm' in order to substantiate the relationship between what is sensible and what is meaningful. For now, it suffices to say that Merleau-Ponty does make theoretical room for diversity amongst what is sensible, since it is supposed to be its various sedimented meanings that reflect this. Emphasising this idea, Merleau-Ponty refers to 'an ideality that is not alien to the flesh, that gives it its axes, its depth, its dimensions' (VI, 152).

Insofar as the diversity of things in the sensible world is reflected by its sedimented meanings, should we follow Lefort in saying that the pre-linguistic - or 'wild' - aspect to life is undermined insofar as it is always already 'tamed' with the meaning that is historically established about it (1990, 11)? Resisting this interpretation, Merleau-Ponty insists on 'the wild region wherein they (sedimented meanings) all have originated' (VI, 115; my parentheses). Clarifying this point, Merleau-Ponty suggests that meaning is always 'first mute, then uttered' (VI, 119): there is a pre-linguistic dimension that is characterised as a 'depth' (VI, 126), or a 'great mute land' (VI, 126). And it is from this pre-linguistic dimension that new meanings are supposed to spring: Merleau-Ponty describes 'the birth of speech as bubbling up at the bottom of... mute experience' (VI, 126), while characterising 'silence' as simply 'the absence of the word *due*' (VI, 263; my italics). So, while it is true that sedimented meanings reflect the diversity of the sensible world, 'the process of sedimentation' cannot 'exhaust Merleau-Ponty's promiscuous "wild being"', as Daly observes (2016, 8). Eloquently emphasising the point himself, Merleau-Ponty acknowledges that

while ideality already streams forth along the articulations of the aesthesiological body, along the contours of the sensible things, however new it is, it slips through ways it has not traced, transfigures horizons it did not open (VI, 152).

Though sedimented language accounts for diversity amongst what is sensible - it 'streams forth along... (its) contours' - the sensible world awaits the cultivation of new meanings, as though beckoning the method of hyper-reflection to begin.

In summary, we can say that (for Merleau-Ponty) there is symmetry between the body and world at the level of sensibility. While the diversity of the sensible world is reflected in its various sedimented meanings, there remains a pre-linguistic dimension to reality, wherein new meanings can spring forth.

### **III.1b - Principle of Asymmetry**

In addition to the symmetry arising from their sensibility, there is supposed to be asymmetry between the perceptual agent and the sensible world, since the former is supposed to be sentient in a way that the latter is not (for the same reading of VI, see Bannon 2001, 332; Dillon 1998, 167, and Clarke 2002, 215). On Page 116, in italicised font, Merleau-Ponty clarifies that we, as agents of perception, are '*sensible-sentients*' (*sentants-sensibles*): we are sensible bodies that can perceive the world we inhabit, as well as our own bodies (from certain perspectives).<sup>14</sup> By contrast, the sensible world that we inhabit is '*not self-sensing (se sentir) ... not sentient*' (VI, 250; original italics).

Merleau-Ponty's characterisation of the sentient-sensible existence is rich, and ambitious. On the one hand, he suggests that it involves 'divergence' (*ecart*) between what is sensible and what is sentient. Speaking metaphorically, he refers to 'the segregation of the 'within' and the 'without' (VI, 188), and similarly: 'that divergence between the within and the without' (VI, 135), where the 'within' captures sentience, while the 'without' captures sensibility. More directly, he refers to a 'fundamental fission or segregation of the sentient and the sensible' (VI, 146), before repeating the language of 'fission' on Page 146, when he refers to 'dehiscence or fission'. While the notion of 'fission' connotes 'divergence' quite simply, the notion of 'dehiscence' introduces further depth. In the medical sense, 'dehiscence' refers to a rupture in the body, like a surgical wound, that allows a discharge of the fluid inside. In botanical terms, it refers to the splitting of a plant structure that releases the seed(s) inside. There is thus something productive, or revelatory about dehiscence, and this lends another dimension as to how a sensible-sentient existence involves divergence. Rather than merely splitting open, that which is sensible and that which is sentient split into a division that is productive, or revelatory. Presumably, this is because it allows perception: there is a 'bursting forth of the mass of the body toward the things' (VI, 146) So, by introducing the notion of dehiscence, Merleau-Ponty adds complexity to the way that a sensible-sentient existence involves divergence: it is a divergence that is supposed to allow perception of the world.

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<sup>14</sup> It is a related, though distinct, question what makes the *human* agent of perception special. See Crowther (2015), 15-16 and Toadvine (2009) 86-96 for further discussion. For the sake of this thesis, however, I will limit my discussion to the perceptual agent who is human.

In addition to divergence, a sentient-sensible existence is supposed to involve an 'intertwining' (*entrelacs*). Merleau-Ponty suggests that 'there is reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other' (VI, 138), also characterising this phenomenon as a 'crisscrossing' within the body of 'the touching and the tangible' (VI, 133). Relatedly, he also suggests that a sentient-sensible existence involves 'encroachment' (*empiéter*). He suggests that, between 'my body touched and my body touching, there is overlapping or encroachment' (VI, 123). On my reading, all of these notions characterise the sensible and the sentient as entangled at the site of the body, though the notions of mutual 'encroachment' and 'insertion' perhaps imply a greater level of amalgamation between the two. Leaving this nuance aside for now, the intertwining of the sensible and the sentient is supposed to be exemplified in an instance of self-perception, where:

my body— which is visible, tangible like a thing— acquires this view upon itself, this contact with itself, where it doubles itself up, unifies itself, in such a way that the objective body and the phenomenal body turn about one another or encroach upon one another... (VI, 117)

While the idea that my body is 'visible, tangible like a thing' highlights the quality of sensibility that it shares with the world, the fact that it can 'acquire... this view upon itself' picks out the power for self-perception that goes along with a sentient-sensible existence. In all her sentience, the perceptual agent can make 'contact' with her body, in all its sensibility. For Merleau-Ponty, this moment of self-perception demonstrates how the body entangles sensibility and sentience: we are told that the 'objective body and the phenomenal body turn about one another or encroach upon one another', with these terms denoting the body in its sensibility and the body in its sentience respectively (note how Merleau-Ponty clarifies these associations himself on Page 136 of VI). And, insofar as the body intertwines what is sensible with what is sentient, it is supposed to form a unity: back to the quote above, we are told that the body 'unifies itself'. As Merleau-Ponty clarifies elsewhere in VI, '...my body is *at once* phenomenal body and objective body...' (VI, p136; my italics). Gallagher and Zahavi are therefore right to observe that 'the notion of an embodied mind or a minded body' is central to VI, (2012, 153), and the interchangeability of these terms underlines the idea that, for Merleau-Ponty, sentience and sensibility are supposed to be tangled

together at the site of the body in such a way that forms a single entity.

So does the intertwining of the body give Merleau-Ponty the theoretical tools to overcome the kind of dualistic paradigm that would posit a breach between the sentient and the sensible? In his *Sixth Meditation*, Descartes holds that the mind is thinking and unextended, while matter is extended and unthinking (7:78), thus generating a 'real distinction' between them (see *Principles*, part I, section 60). It seems reasonable to associate the mind, insofar as Descartes conceives of it, with sentience: he defines 'a thing that thinks' as 'a thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, and which also imagines and *senses*.' (1980, 63; my italics). Furthermore, it seems reasonable to associate matter, insofar as Descartes conceives of it, with what is sensible: in his *Fifth Meditation*, he suggests that matter can be ascribed (by the perceptual agent) 'certain sizes, shapes, positions' etc. (1980, 85). In Classical philosophy, we can find a parallel to Cartesian dualism in Plato's *Phaedrus*, where he suggests that 'we are imprisoned (by the body) like an oyster in its shell' (250c; my parentheses): the body is supposed to house, or enclose, the discrete mind. Contemporarily speaking, the dualistic framework has been satirised by Ryle as involving a 'ghost in the machine': it commits the metaphysical fallacy of jumbling together two discrete categories (1949).

It is clear that Merleau-Ponty wants to distance his philosophy from Cartesian dualism. In a working note from June 1960, he explicitly contrasts his ontology with Descartes when he writes that the Flesh 'is not the objective body, nor the body thought by the soul as its own (Descartes)' (VI, 250; original parentheses). Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty seems to reject the analogy that Plato postulates between the body and a shell: Merleau-Ponty suggests that 'we have to reject the age-old assumptions that put... the seer in the body... as in a box' (VI, 137). And, as though trying to evade falling into Ryle's satirical trap, he insists that 'the flesh is an ultimate notion, that it is not the union or compound of two substances, but thinkable by itself' (VI, 140), and similarly: 'We must not think the flesh starting from substances, from body and spirit— for then it would be the union of contradictories.' (VI, 147).

While there is textual evidence strongly indicative of Merleau-Ponty's desire to distance his philosophy from dualism, it remains difficult to provide a positive account as to how exactly the intertwining of the

body is supposed to form a unity between what is sentient and what is sensible. Since a sensible-sentient existence is also supposed to involve divergence, Merleau-Ponty is arguably vulnerable to the criticism that he engenders dualism, however unintentionally, and he remains vulnerable to this criticism even when we take into account the notion of dehiscence. While the notion adds complexity to the way a sensible-sentient existence involves divergence - since it seems to suggest that the body splits open in such a way that allows perception of the world, like a seed bursting forth from a plant - the binary between what is sentient and what is sensible still seems to be operative, and thus problematic to the extent that it is arguably resembles dualism. Before seeing how Merleau-Ponty overcomes this problem, it is important to note that, pervading the VI, is an awareness of the difficulty in conceptualising the body: Merleau-Ponty acknowledges that 'it is a problem... to determine how the sensible sentient can also be thought', while making the promise that 'we will not avoid it' (VI, 137).

To see how Merleau-Ponty conceptualises a sentient-sensible existence as a unified existence - without its apparent divergence smuggling in dualism! - we should pay attention to his concept of the 'chiasm', and the related concept of 'reversibility'. As Toadvine helpfully elucidates:

Chiasm has two senses in French and English that are both relevant to Merleau-Ponty's project: a physiological sense that refers to anatomical or genetic structures with a crossed arrangement (such as the optic nerves), and a literary sense referring to figures of speech that repeat structures in reverse order (AB:BA). (Toadvine 2016; original parentheses; also see 2012, 336, 339)

We can see that Merleau-Ponty appeals to the chiasm in its physiological sense to inform how the body intertwines sentience and sensibility in a way that retains their divergence, while generating unity: he describes it as 'one sole movement in its two phases' (VI 138). Showing how this structure is relevant to the body, Merleau-Ponty suggests that, during self-touch, '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*' (VI, 148; original italics; see also VI, 9: 'the moment I feel my left hand with my right hand, I correspondingly cease touching my right hand with my left hand'): sentience lapses into sensibility at the cusp of self-perception, rather than the two coinciding, or overriding, in the locus of the body. Since the body goes back and forth between

sentience and sensibility during self-perception, this illuminates why Merleau-Ponty portrays the intertwining as a 'crisscrossing' movement that repeats within the body (VI, 133), while this language also reinforces the physiological sense of the chiasm. Similarly, we can see that Merleau-Ponty appeals to the chiasm in its literary sense to characterise the body, since he suggests that 'there is a body of the mind, and a mind of the body, and a chiasm between them' (VI, 259), with the first two clauses of this sentence clearly reproducing the reversible 'AB:BA' structure that is linked to the literary chiasm. Emphasising how the body is reversibly both sentient and sensible, Merleau-Ponty refers to 'the cohesion of the obverse and the reverse of my body' (VI, 117), while clarifying later that 'the body sensed and the body sentient are as the obverse and the reverse' (VI, 138).

So, because the body is supposed to repeat and reverse sentience and sensibility in a chiastic pattern, we yield a complex picture of the body that arguably leaves behind the more simplistic images of it as a shell, machine, or box, while allowing a sensible-sentient existence to be divergent. Lending weight to this sophisticated characterisation, Merleau-Ponty asks whether 'we have a body - that is, not a permanent object of thought, but a flesh that suffers when it is wounded, hands that touch?' (VI, 137). While the language of 'flesh' has a double-meaning here, connoting both our carnal existence and his technical ontology of the Flesh, Merleau-Ponty denies that the body is a mere 'object of thought', thereby again distancing himself from Descartes, for whom the body is extended and unthinking, and postulated by the distinct, thinking mind. For Merleau-Ponty, the body 'suffers when... wounded'; it has 'hands that touch': it chiastically intertwines sensibility and sentience in such a way that is orthogonally opposed to dualism, though the two remain divergent. Rendering an intricate image of the body, he writes that

the other side of *the body overflows* into it... encroaches upon it, is hidden in it— and at the same time needs it, terminates in it, is *anchored* in it... (VI, 259; original italics).

While the language of 'sides' picks out the body's divergent nature, it would be a misnomer to associate this with simplistic dualism, since we are also told that sentience and sensibility simultaneously 'overflow' into and 'encroach' upon each other, with this language arguably reinforcing their chiastic unity. Caught in this complex structure, the sensible and the sentient are 'hidden' into and '*anchored*' within each other (VI, 259).

Now, while Merleau-Ponty does offer rich imagery to substantiate how the body intertwines sentience and sensibility in a way that is coherent with their divergence, and yet resistant to dualism, we can nevertheless ask whether this is *philosophically* substantial enough. Rather than offering a precise metaphysical account as to how the body, in all its sentience and sensibility, forms a complex unity, does the concept of a chiasm deliver mere 'poetry', as Crowther suggests - a 'poetic expression' that lacks 'explanatory power in ontological terms' (2015, 22)? Similarly, Barbaras considers the concept problematic, wherein 'the difficulties, if not the impossibility, of Merleau-Ponty's last ontology are concentrated' (2002, 21). Writing about this criticism, Sellheim identifies that, for Barbaras, the chiasm of the sensible and the sentient is 'fundamentally unresolvable, remaining too metaphorical' (2010, 263).

Here, however, we should recall the methodological axis of hyper-reflection to express what is pre-linguistic via new metaphorical meaning. While the concept of the body chiastically intertwining the sensible and sentient is certainly avant-garde, it is arguably this kind of semantic nuance that has the power to evoke 'a new conceptual space', as Sellheim suggests; 'such a new space requires a new means of expression, a new name — flesh is such a name.' (2010, 263). Under the rubric of *Flesh*, the body 'is not matter, is not mind, is not substance' (VI, 139). The body is instead something that has never been articulated before. Overcoming a linguistic lacuna that was ripe for philosophical expression - or, as Merleau-Ponty calls it, that 'fecund negative' (VI, 263) - the body is portrayed as a complex entity that chiastically repeats and reverses sentience and sensibility, thereby intertwining what is divergent.

Acknowledging that the body *qua* *Flesh* 'push(es) philosophy in the direction of quasi-poetic discourse', Crowther sees this as a problem: 'its practical effect has been to close-off the possibility of further systematic/analytic investigation' (2015, 32). By making this point, Crowther invites us to consider the relationship between language, and academic Philosophy: he raises the issue of whether Philosophy should conform to the stylistic ideal that, taking inspiration from Science, prevails throughout the analytic tradition - or whether there is room for the discipline to embrace non-figurative language. While a full exploration of this matter stretches beyond the scope of this thesis, it suffices to point out that Crowther is begging the question as to how philosophy should proceed. As already seen, Merleau-

Ponty puts forward the idea that some things evade literal expression - in which case, it is only metaphor that can do the trick. So, although metaphor may well introduce a level of indeterminacy to philosophy (see VI, 222 for Merleau-Ponty's admission: '*metaphor* is too much or too little'; original italics; also recall VI, 125 on the '*occult* trading of the metaphor'; my italics), it remains necessary for expressing that which is otherwise elusive - which, in this case, is the Flesh (VI, 125). As Vanzago highlights, 'the role of the metaphor is that of an effective door through which the access to a proper understanding of the ontology of the flesh is provided' (2005, 463). So, rather than taking Merleau-Ponty's indirect language to detract from the quality of his philosophy, his project is arguably enabled. As Sellheim suggests, '... in the stretching of language there is a concomitant stretching of ideas, and with it, an emergent capacity to generate valuable new conceptual ground.' (2010, 265). Understood this way, Merleau-Ponty's metaphorical exposition of the body *qua* Flesh marks a philosophical step forward, away from the dualistic convention of the mental estranged from the material, and towards the expression of something previously untold: a sentient-sensible existence that is unified under the symbol of the chiasm, and which 'has no name in any philosophy' beyond that of Merleau-Ponty's ontology of Flesh (VI, 147).

In summary - there is symmetry between the perceptual agent and the world on account of their mutual sensibility, while there is asymmetry between them, since it is only the perceptual agent who is sentient. A sensible-sentient existence has been elaborated as involving both divergence and an intertwining. Put forward as a rival to dualism, the body *qua* Flesh is substantiated by novel, non-figurative language under the motif of the chiasm.

### **III.1c - Body Against World**

Next, I shall elucidate why 'he (the perceptual agent) who grasps them (the things perceived) feels himself emerge from them by a sort of coiling up or redoubling' in a way that ultimately enlightens The Double-Paradox of Veridical Perception (VI, 114; my parentheses).

Firstly, on account of their mutual sensibility, the perceptual agent 'feels himself emerge' from the world in the sense that - as Merleau-Ponty writes just prior to this phrase - he is 'fundamentally homogenous with them (the things in the world perceived)' (VI, 114; my parentheses). Furthermore, we are told that the perceptual agent

feels that 'the sensible is in his eyes as it were his double or an extension of his own flesh' (VI, 114): there is a sense in which the perceptual agent and the world seem to reflect each other, or form a kinship between them. This idea arguably marks a continuation of the perceptual agent's pre-reflective intimacy with the world, which is grounded in the intuitively direct relation with reality that constitutes veridical perception. Merleau-Ponty describes

Being (as) no longer being *before me* (the perceptual agent), but surrounding me and in a sense traversing me, and my vision of Being not forming itself from elsewhere, but from the midst of Being (VI, 114; original italics; my parentheses).

By characterising the perceptual agent as enmeshed, or even suffused, with 'Being', Merleau-Ponty paints a vivid picture of what it means to experience pre-reflective intimacy with the world, and this is juxtaposed with the idea that the perceptual experience is formed 'from the midst of Being', thereby honing in on how the perceptual agent feels akin to the world when she emerges from it.

Secondly, on account of the perceptual agent's sentience, the perceptual agent arguably also feels herself emerge from the world in an additional sense that encompasses a distinction between the two (i.e. the distinction between what is emergent ( $x$ ), and where it emerges from ( $y$ )). After all, Merleau-Ponty writes with regards to the perceptual agent that 'the sensible is in his eyes *as it were his double*' (VI; 114; my italics), thereby leaving room for the idea that the two are distinct. Explicitly positing this distinction, he claims, 'I (the perceptual agent) am of the world and... I am not it' (VI, p127; my parentheses). So, although the perceptual agent shares the sensibility of the world, she is set apart from it: there is no 'fusion or coinciding of me (the perceptual agent) with it (the sensible world)' (VI, 123; my parentheses). And this seems to thematically continue the perceptual agent's cognitive estrangement from the world, which arises on account of the perspectival variability shaping veridical perception. Merleau-Ponty writes that 'it is not possible that we blend into it (the world), 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' (VI, 131; my parentheses), thereby emphasising how the perceptual agent is set apart from the world in such a way that she has a perspective on the world which demands consideration.

Having shown how the perceptual agent feels herself emerge from the world in a double-sense of the word, I will now emphasise how Merleau-Ponty dramatises the perceptual agent's two-edged emergence from the world as a sort of 'coiling up' (VI, 114) - a turbulent unfurling, or unravelling - which he arguably also captures as 'the flux of perceptual life... which beats unceasingly from morning to night' (VI, 35). This experiential effect arguably underpins The Phenomenological Paradox of Veridical Perception: insofar as the perceptual agent 'coils' against the world as akin to and separate from it, she can find herself 'oscillating... from the one to the other, saying in turn that my vision is at the thing itself and that my vision is my own or 'in me'" (VI, 29): she can go back and forth between pre-reflective intimacy with the world, and cognitive estrangement from it. To see why this paradox holds, however, we need to analyse the ontological foundations for it.

On Page 113-4, we are told that the agent 'coils' against the world in such a way that 'makes... the thickness... of the world' (VI, 113-114). As a highly enigmatic notion, I take Merleau-Ponty's technical notion of 'thickness' to delineate the boundary between the body and the world, the threshold at which the body 'coils' against the world - i.e. it emerges from the world as akin to that world (sensible), and yet separate from it (sentient). Hence - Merleau-Ponty refers to 'this thickness of flesh between us and the 'hard core' of Being' (VI, 127). Under the rubric of 'thickness', the boundary between the body and the world is not negative space (see VI, 272: 'this divergence (between the body and the world) is not a *void*...' (original italics; my parentheses). Instead, the two seem to be glued together: there is 'the presence of its (the world's) flesh to my flesh' (VI, 127). Similarly, we are told that 'flesh (is) applied to a flesh' (VI, 138; my parentheses); there is a 'strange adhesion of the seer and the visible' (VI, 139), and likewise: 'a carnal adherence of the sentient to the sensed and of the sensed to the sentient' (VI, 142).

The thickness of Flesh gives us the theoretical tools to illuminate The Phenomenological Paradox of Veridical Perception. Insofar as it is the parameter between the body and the world that marks the adhesion of two sensible things, the thickness of Flesh sheds light as to why the perceptual agent has a sense of pre-reflective intimacy with the world. Whereas, insofar as it is the parameter between the perceiving body and the world that marks where the sensible world ends and a sensible-sentient person begins, the thickness of the Flesh reveals why the perceptual agent's sense of pre-reflective

intimacy towards the world can crumble into cognitive estrangement from it, once she takes into account the way she is set apart from it. As Merleau-Ponty proclaims, 'I am at the heart of the visible and I am far from it: because it has thickness...' (VI, 135), thus reviving the spatial metaphor for our paradoxical attitude towards the world (remember VI, 8: 'The world is what I perceive, but as soon as we examine and express its absolute proximity, it also becomes inexplicably, irremediable distance.')

While the thickness of Flesh illuminates the inconsistent phenomenology of veridical perception, it does more theoretical work for Merleau-Ponty than this, since it is also supposed to enable veridical perception itself, thereby allowing us to grasp The Metaphysical Paradox of Veridical Perception. Merleau-Ponty clarifies this explanatory force behind the 'thickness' of the flesh when he writes:

We understand then why we see the things themselves... 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 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... (VI, 135)

While the principle that 'we see the things themselves' expresses the intuitively direct relation with reality that constitutes veridical perception and which grounds our pre-reflective intimacy with the world, the idea that we are 'separated from them (the things perceived)' derives from the perspectival variability of veridical perception. Though the two can be found to sit uncomfortably with each other, thereby generating The Metaphysical Paradox of Veridical Perception, we are told that 'the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing' actually enables veridical perception: as opposed to a '*void*', the parameter between the perceiving body and the world is 'the place of emergence of a vision' (VI, 272; original italics). The world is thus 'naturally destined to be seen', and veridical perception is born into the metaphysical paradox of varying according to perspective all the while having a relational constitution, just because the perceptual agent 'coils' against the world - as both akin to and separate from that world - in the thickness of Flesh (VI,

135; see also Ibid. on how it is 'the sole means I have to go unto the heart of the things').<sup>15</sup>

Expanding on how exactly the thickness of Flesh enables veridical perception, Merleau-Ponty suggests that

each (the perceiving body and the rest of the sensible world) borrows from the other, takes from or encroaches upon the other, intersects with the other, is in chiasm with the other... (VI, 261; my parentheses)

So, while we saw that the body chiastically unifies what is sensible and what is sentient, the boundary between the body and the world is elaborated as involving another chiasm. For Merleau-Ponty, this chiasm enables veridical perception: we are told that 'the (chiastic) divergence between the exterior visible and the body forms the upholstering (*capitonnage*) of the world" (VI, 272; my parentheses). Now, while this could be simply taken as a metaphor for the generation of veridical perception (VI, 272), it also also seems to imply the configuration of reality itself. This interpretation is reinforced by the quote from Page 261: we are told that the perceiving body and the rest of the sensible world 'borrow', 'take from', and 'encroach... upon the other'. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty refers to 'the chiasm truth of the pre-established harmony' between them (VI, 262): the perceiving body and the world seem to enjoy a reciprocal relationship in such a way that makes veridical perception *possible*, but also *crucial* to reality itself.

Reinforcing the idea that veridical perception is crucial to reality, Merleau-Ponty writes:

When I find again the actual world such as it is, under my hands, under my eyes, up against my body, I find much more than an object: a Being of which my vision is a part... (VI, p123)

Here, Merleau-Ponty highlights the parameter that holds between himself, as a perceptual agent, and the world: the world is supposed to be 'under' his 'hands' and 'eyes', altogether 'up against' his body in a such a way that produces veridical perception. Thus nested in the chiastic thickness of flesh, veridical perception is supposed to be

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<sup>15</sup> Gaining the same insight from Merleau-Ponty, Low writes:

... it is because... the human body is in the world like other objects, that it has access to them. Yet it is also because the human body is different from the things, because it is the thing that gives access to other things, that it is separate from them. It is a separation that nevertheless carries us to the things themselves... (2000, 16)

integral to reality, thereby making the subject/object distinction theoretically obsolete: we are told that the perceptual agent discovers 'more than an object' during the perceptual experience; instead, she finds 'a Being of which' her 'vision is a part' (VI, 123). While the subject/object distinction would be relevant to veridical perception insofar as there are 'things first identical with themselves, which would then offer themselves to the seer' (VI, 131), Merleau-Ponty gives us a different picture of reality, where the things themselves cannot be stripped of their being perceived: they cannot be 'all naked' (VI, 132). Toadvine is therefore right to characterise reality *qua* Flesh as a 'third dimension' that makes subject/object distinction problematic (2009; 122). No a longer a realm of objects awaiting veridical perception by a subject, reality is supposed to be 'always clothed' by the gaze of the perceptual agent (VI, 112).

Insofar as veridical perception is crucial to reality, does it follow that reality is transformed by the perceptual experience, thereby engendering the ontology of Flesh with the transcendentalist doctrine that the things themselves exist beyond our perceptual experience? As Barbaras understands Merleau-Ponty, veridical perception is supposed to depend on the perceptual constitution of a perceiving body; the perceptual experience must therefore do some transformative work that prevents the perceptual agent from directly reaching the thing that is perceived itself (2002, 20; see Bannon 2011, 334 for the same reading of Barbaras). However, here we can emphasise how the perceiving body is, for Merleau-Ponty, a sentient-sensible that belongs to the Flesh as a whole. So, although veridical perception does depend on the perceptual constitution of a perceiving body, it still ultimately belongs to the Flesh, which is why Merleau-Ponty suggests that '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' (VI, 139). So, on Merleau-Ponty's theory, there is no conceptual room for the perceptual experience to transform reality, thus removing the perceptual agent from what is perceived. As he writes:

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. (VI, 136)

In this passage, Merleau-Ponty emphasises how the Flesh resists transcendentalism: the reality perceived is not supposed to be the residue of our 'projections', which would leave a prior reality, hidden

beneath the 'human mask'. As he clarifies elsewhere, the things perceived are not 'brought into being by the things factually existing and acting on my factual body', which would introduce a transcendentalist chasm between the things perceived and the things themselves (VI, 139).

Though the perceptual experience is not supposed to *transform* reality, would Merleau-Ponty allow that it *informs* reality? In which case, his ontology of the Flesh would arguably engender the idealist doctrine that reality is limited to our perceptual experience. As Barbaras interprets Merleau-Ponty, 'we must give up the distinction between perception and perceived object' (2002, 25), since the reality of the perceived thing is tied to the perception of it. However, Merleau-Ponty explicitly insists that 'we do not have a consciousness constitutive of the things, as idealism believes' (VI, 103). Similarly, he writes that, 'we have with our body, our senses, our look... *measurants (mesurants)* for Being... but not a relation of adequation or of immanence' (VI, 103; original parentheses and italics): while we can perceive reality, our perceptual experiences are not supposed to equal, or exhaust, reality. Emphasising this point, Merleau-Ponty asserts, 'The flesh.... is not mind... ' (VI, 139).

Insofar as the perceptual experience does not either transcendently *transform* or idealistically *inform* reality, how should we understand the idea that veridical perception is crucial to reality? Offering some guidance, Merleau-Ponty refers to reality - *qua* Flesh - as 'that carnal being, as a being of depths, of several leaves or several faces, a being in latency', thereby highlighting its potential to be perceived from different perspectives (VI, 136). For Merleau-Ponty, this potentiality is implicit in every case of veridical perception. Referring to his experience as a perceptual agent, he suggests that 'each landscape of my life (is) pregnant with many other visions besides my own' (VI, 123; my parentheses), and that reality is given to him as 'ready to be seen, pregnant— in principle as well as in fact— with all the visions one can have of it' (VI, 124). So, rather than transforming or informing reality, an individual case of veridical perception is supposed to disclose reality *in all its potentiality*.<sup>16</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, it is this potentiality that characterises reality: Flesh is defined as a '*pregnancy of possibles*' (VI, 250; original italics), and a

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<sup>16</sup> See VI, 181 on how the veridical perception engenders a distinct kind of 'transcendence' to the one discussed above, since it points to 'being at a distance' - i.e. Flesh in all its potential to be perceived in innumerable other ways.

'possibility, a latency' etc. (VI, 133). More explicitly, the Flesh is identified throughout VI as simply that which is 'sensible': it is supposed to be 'a *visibility* older than my operations or my acts' alone (VI, 123; my italics); it is a '*visibility* by principle' (VI, 140; my italics). So, while we saw that it is the chiasmic 'thickness' of Flesh that enables actual cases of veridical perception, we now realise that it is the sheer possibility of veridical perception that characterises Flesh as a whole, thus making it crucial to reality to that extent.

Having shown how it is the possibility of veridical perception that characterises reality - *qua* Flesh - we can now examine how this view sits with the direct realist attitude that seems to pervade the beginning of VI. While we are told on Page 3 of the book that 'we see the things themselves', VI also seems to characterise 'the things themselves' according to their potential to be perceived. While it is arguable that the orthodox direct-realist would be dissatisfied by characterising reality as 'that which can be perceived' in conjunction with her traditional analysis that veridical perception is constituted by a direct relation with reality itself, Merleau-Ponty seems more sympathetic to this kind of circularity. In his working-notes, he writes the sparse, though arguably telling, group of words:

... seeing-being seen, perceiving-being perceived circularity... (VI, 265; original parentheses)

Veridical perception and reality happily come to a full circle for Merleau-Ponty: while it is true that 'we see the things themselves', it turns out that the things *are* themselves on the condition that they can be perceived in the thickness of Flesh. This arguably illuminates the full sense in which 'we see the things themselves, the world is what we see' (VI, 3). With this principle mirroring the 'AB:BA' structure of the chiasm in its literary sense, it seems to juxtapose direct realism with a picture of reality that depends on its being perceived - it is simply 'what we see'. So, by cashing out the thickness of Flesh under the symbol of the chiasm, Merleau-Ponty evocatively demonstrates how the perceiving body and reality are necessarily interrelated, thereby giving us the conceptual tools to reconcile the direct-realist principle that we 'see the things themselves' with an ontology that understands 'the things themselves' in terms of their being perceived. His apparent direct realism is thus lent a unique flavour that may be of interest to philosophers of perception and metaphysics. In a way that arguably resists the departmentalisation of philosophy, he offers a profound vision of reality that illuminates it and veridical perception together.

It follows that we can postulate multiple chiasms, corresponding between each perceiving agent and the rest of the sensible world. As Barbaras rightly observes, "It is necessary... to picture the universe as intuited by Merleau-Ponty as a proliferation of chiasms..." (2004: 307). We are thus given a complex picture of reality. Characterised by the sheer potential for veridical perception, reality rests on the possibility of manifold chiastic structures that hold between each perceiving body and the world, before ultimately converging on that 'one sole world' (VI, 8; see Toadvine 2011 for a similar exposition of what he calls 'the intersubjective chiasm'). Merleau-Ponty suggests that

if there is a relation of the visible with itself that traverses me and constitutes me as a seer... 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... (VI, 140-1)

So, returning to the ethically-driven objection to Merleau-Ponty put forward by Lefort - that the ontology *Flesh* fails to accommodate a genuine *otherness* that would ground intersubjective relations - we can emphasise how the thickness of *Flesh* does the theoretical work for Merleau-Ponty: it is supposed to involve a plurality of chiastic structures that tie multiple bodies to the rest of the sensible world. And, as we shall see next, it is the intelligibility of that world which enables 'intersubjective' discussion.

To summarise this discussion, we can say the following: the perceptual agent feels herself 'emerge' from the world (VI, 114) in a double-sense of the word - as both akin to that world on account of their sensibility, and distinct from it on account of her sentience. The twofold way in which the perceptual agent emerges from the world is dramatised as a kind of 'coiling' movement that occurs in the thickness of *Flesh* - i.e. in the parameter between body and world, which has a chiastic structure. This gives us the theoretical tools to illuminate The Double-Paradox of Veridical Perception, thereby fulfilling the hyper-reflective principle to stay faithful to it.

### ***III.2 - Discursive Reality***

As already seen, the diversity of the sensible world is reflected by the meaning that is historically established about it, though there remains

a pre-linguistic aspect to it: in short, the sensible world is intelligible. An additional chiasm thus emerges, this time between the world in its sensibility and the world in all its intelligibility (i.e. between 'the visible and the invisible'). Arguably alluding to this chiasm, Merleau-Ponty refers to 'the bond between the flesh and the idea' (VI, 149), and similarly, he refers to 'this world, this Being, facticity and ideality undividedly' (VI, 117). Offering an analogy to make the case, he suggests that, 'as the nervure bears the leaf from within, from the depths of its flesh, the ideas are the texture of experience, its style...' (VI, 119). By comparing the relationship between what is sensible (*qua* 'flesh') and what is intelligible to the relationship between a leaf and the web of veins that sustains it, Merleau-Ponty highlights how the two are inextricably bound together: they are thought to exhibit 'reversibility' (VI, 155). To clarify how this chiasm works, Merleau-Ponty suggests that 'life becomes ideas and the ideas return to life' (VI, 119). Framed in a sentence that recreates the 'AB:BA' structure relevant to the chiasm in its literary sense, this principle highlights how the sensibility of the world and the intelligibility of the world mutually reinforce each other. While recalling how it is sedimented language that reflects the diversity of the sensible world, this also gestures at the possibility for the innovation of further meanings: there is 'the folding over within him (the speaker) of the visible and the lived experience upon language, and of language upon the visible and the lived experience' (VI, 126; my parentheses). Thus, insofar as the thickness of Flesh enables veridical perception, we can say that it also allows for conceptualisation and reconceptualisation: 'there is a strict ideality in experiences that are experiences of the flesh' (VI, 152).

In the light of the chiasmic structure that holds between the world in all its sensibility and the world in all its intelligibility, it follows that 'it is in the world that we communicate, through what, in our life, is articulate' (VI, 11): insofar as reality can be perceived and thereby conceptualised, it can also be *discussed*. As Merleau-Ponty emphasises, language is 'coextensive with the thinkable' (VI, 118), while the body is a 'sonorous being' (VI, 145). Thus, it follows that we are able to vocalise meaningful thoughts about reality through the 'totality of what is said' (VI, 155). So, while the thickness of Flesh holds together a multiplicity of chiasmic structures, spanning between each body and the world, it is *discourse* that offers an effective bridge between chiasms: we are told that 'our existence as sonorous beings for others and for ourselves contain everything required for there to be (verbal) speech from the one to the other, (verbal) speech about

the world' (VI, 151; my parentheses to distinguish it from the technical concept of 'speech' explicitly formulated in PW). Insofar as we can speak about reality, we can speak to each other: 'weaving relations between bodies', we can discuss what is aesthetic, or ethical, or political etc. (VI, 144). With reality up for collective discussion, Merleau-Ponty emphasises that

... each (speaker) is caught up in the vortex in which he first committed only measured stakes, each is led on by what he said and the response he received, led on by his own thought of which he is no longer the sole thinker. (VI, 119; my parentheses)

In this passage, Merleau-Ponty offers us a picture of conceptual progress that is arguably reminiscent of the Hegelian dialectic, where conflicting ideas find synthesis. Meaning seems to evolve through collective discourse in such a way that we are not limited to the sedimented meanings that reflect the diversity of the sensible world. Recalling the technical idea of 'speech' explicitly given in PW, the innovation of meaning is possible. So, while it is true that language is 'coextensive with the thinkable' (VI, 118), it follows that linguistic *innovation* is too.

Since the world in all its sensibility forms a chiasm with the world in all its meaning, and reality is up for discussion in such a way that meaning can evolve, it follows that semantic change engenders ontological change: the landscape can face a fresh 'invasion' of meaning (VI, 155). Hence, Merleau-Ponty suggests that 'language in forming itself expresses, at least laterally, an ontogenesis of which it is a part' (VI, 102): the metamorphosis of meaning is matched by a shift in the scope of reality - i.e. a shift in the scope of what can be perceived in the thickness of Flesh between body and world, and what can be discussed about the world across the thickness of Flesh by various bodies. This illuminates the full sense in which 'the ideas return to life' (VI, 119).

Since the innovation of meaning has direct ontological significance, the method of hyper-reflection takes on greater depth: it empowers the philosopher to play a role in sculpting reality in all its potentiality. As Merleau-Ponty suggests, 'speech is a relation to Being through a being' (VI, 118): by innovating meaning, the philosopher enters a special relationship with reality as a whole. But rather than taking on some grand, directive power, like Plato's 'philosopher-kings', Merleau-Ponty characterises the philosopher who engages in hyper-

reflection as strangely *passive*.<sup>17</sup> The innovation of meaning is supposed to be 'possessed' by reality in such a way that 'lets' reality itself speak (VI, 188). Creating an air of mysticism around the hyper-reflective enterprise, the philosopher is characterised as channeling reality itself. Emphasising this idea, Merleau-Ponty insists that the philosopher should employ a 'language of which he (the philosopher) would not be the organizer, words he would not assemble, that would combine through him by virtue of a natural intertwining of their meaning' (VI, 125; my parentheses).

To demystify Merleau-Ponty's portrayal of the ideal philosopher as channelling reality itself, we should recall how the hyper-reflective innovation of meaning seeks to express what is pre-linguistic - i.e. reality in all its silence, or latent possibility, prior to sedimented conceptualisation: the philosopher is supposed to be 'called forth by the voices of silence' (VI, 127). So, by innovating meaning that gives novel expression to our pre-linguistic life, it follows that the philosopher acts as a vehicle for the expansion of reality itself - i.e. the expansion of what it is possible to think about, and thereby perceive, insofar as those 'ideas return to life' (VI, 119). So, by reconverting 'silence and speech into one another' (VI, 129), the philosopher is a catalyst for the ultimate chiasm that holds and unfolds between what is sensible and what is intelligible. The epistemic value of hyper-reflection to express what is pre-linguistic is thus matched by its ontological power to expand the horizons of reality.

Insofar as hyper-reflection drives forward the chiasm that unifies the world in all its sensibility and the world in all its intelligibility, it is a process that is necessarily ongoing. Merleau-Ponty writes that hyper-reflection

cannot reconstruct the thing and the world by condensing in them, in the form of implication, everything we have subsequently been able to think and say of them; rather, it remains a question, it interrogates the world and the thing, it revives, repeats, or imitates their crystallization before us. For this crystallization which is partly given to us ready-made is in other respects never terminated, and thereby we can see how the world comes about... (VI, 100)

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<sup>17</sup> To examine Merleau-Ponty's increasing interest in the dimension of passivity, refer to his Merleau-Ponty's *Institution and Passivity: Course Notes From the Collège de France (1954-1955)*, published in 2010.

So, having anticipated the direct realist analysis of veridical perception, and having raised the ontological implications of the perceptual relation, Merleau-Ponty is not satisfied for philosophy to stop there. Rather than 'condensing' reality through a reductive, single expression, the method of hyper-reflection is supposed to be open-ended: it 'remains a question', insofar as reality remains characterised by potentiality. While 'partly given to us ready-made', reality is 'never-terminated': the scope of what can be perceived and what can be thought is continually growing as the chiasm between them mounts. Hyper-reflection therefore necessarily stands in need of further development: we must continue to make reality say 'what in its silence *it means to say*' (VI, 39; original italics).<sup>18</sup>

In summary - 'Flesh' is a powerful, multifaceted motif, capturing reality in its thoroughly relational and progressive nature. While reality is characterised as that which can be perceived, it is the 'thickness' of Flesh that chiastically intertwines body and world, thereby generating veridical perception in such a way that implicitly contains every possible perceptual relation. Merleau-Ponty's direct realist analysis of veridical perception thus acquires ontological significance, making his philosophy arguably visionary. Having understood reality as that what can be perceived, it follows that reality can be discussed, and this, too, has ontological significance, for Merleau-Ponty: there is a chiasm between what is sensible and what is intelligible. Driving this chiasm forward, hyper-reflection becomes a continual enterprise of both epistemic and ontological import: ripe for development, it is supposed to 'continue... an effort of articulation which is the Being of every being' (VI, 127). In this way, VI ultimately compels us to keep innovating meaning that expresses what has not been expressed before, thus allowing reality to blossom. Going forward, the Flesh provides a fertile metaphysical framework for aesthetic, ethical, and political discourse.

### **Conclusion**

The VI offers a rich, and unique account of veridical perception and reality. While Merleau-Ponty's relational characterisation of veridical perception foreshadows direct realism, he sheds light on its deeply paradoxical nature. Advocating a method of philosophy that stays

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<sup>18</sup> The original French makes the point in a more linguistically effective way, by exploiting the phrase 'vouloir dire' (which means 'to mean' but literally means 'to want to say').

faithful to our perceptual life, as opposed to explaining its paradoxes away, Merleau-Ponty presents us with Flesh - a profound metaphor that marries veridical perception and reality to the bone, while awaiting further articulation that would 'energetically open upon Being' (VI, 102).

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