

‘A Direction of Thought’: Speech, Reversibility and the World in Merleau-
Ponty’s Late Philosophy of Language

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Abstract

‘A Direction of Thought’: Speech, Reversibility and the World in Merleau-Ponty’s
Late Philosophy of Language

Martin Goldstein

The central question of this thesis is: what is the relationship between speech and the world?

I address this question through Merleau-Ponty’s late philosophy of language, specifically as it is elaborated in his posthumously published work *The Visible and the Invisible*. I draw upon his notions of invariance, the visible and the invisible, and reversibility. Using these notions, I posit that the sense of the situation in which we speak, both precedes and makes sense of what is said.

In responding to this central question, I draw upon the interpretations of both Martin C. Dillon and Renaud Barbaras. I employ the work of Dillon in order to make sense of the notion of reversibility and, in order to give weight to the idea that the relationship between speech and the world is characterized by reversibility, I consider Merleau-Ponty’s view of metaphor, as it is interpreted by Barbaras. This exploration illustrates that reversibility is operative even in our mundane use of metaphoric language.

In sum, in this work, I consider the relationship between speech and the world. I argue that speech cannot be properly understood in absence of its worldly situation. In that, it is the situation in which one speaks that makes the sense of an expression intelligible and I demonstrate that this understanding of sense is articulated by Merleau-Ponty through his notion of reversibility.

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with love.

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Introduction

In his lifetime, Merleau-Ponty sought to describe being ontically in a way that would not dissolve the “opaqueness of the world” [EM 159]. He thought that attempts to dismantle this opaqueness were misguided and do not speak to our experience of the world. This belief is reflective of his commitment to developing a philosophy that would resist completeness and closure. As if his own attempts were not enough, his premature death ensured that his philosophy would remain forever incomplete. However, regardless of the incomplete nature of his philosophy, Merleau-Ponty left behind some rich indications of how we might begin to understand the place of language in our lives.

In this work, I will consider Merleau-Ponty’s late philosophy of language through a consideration of the question: *what is the relationship between speech and the world?* This question is addressed by Merleau-Ponty in a variety of works including *Phenomenology of Perception*, *Signs, Eye and Mind*, and *The Visible and the Invisible*. The significance of this question is identified in both Martin C. Dillon’s *Merleau-Ponty’s Ontology* and Renaud Barbaras’ *The Being of the Phenomenon*.¹ Throughout his work, Merleau-Ponty shows, contrary to conventional understanding, that human speech and language cannot be understood as existing in a realm apart from the world in which we live with others; he also refutes the idea that the truth of speech resides in a relationship of direct reference to the world. In opposition to these traditional claims, Merleau-Ponty attempts to understand language - and specifically the phenomenon of speech- as an incarnate, worldly phenomenon into which we are initiated and which we practice. Rather than considering speech and language as existing in a realm apart, Merleau-Ponty

seeks to show that speech is *of this world*; therefore, he extrapolates, speech and the world cannot be understood separately, as each is intelligible only in relation to the other.

In order to address our over-riding question, we must first consider the question of how Merleau-Ponty works to overcome consciousness-centred philosophy. This consideration will set the stage for our response to the question that is central to this work: what is the relationship between speech and the world? Our responses to these questions will centre around Merleau-Ponty's description of reversibility as it is developed, principally, in *Eye and Mind* and *The Visible and the Invisible*. It should also be noted that, in formulating a response to this question, I will draw upon the work of Dillon and Barbaras. I will use Dillon's work to help render the notion of reversibility intelligible, and I will draw upon Barbaras' work in order to consider the phenomenon of metaphor in light of the idea of reversibility. In employing the work of both Dillon and Barbaras, I hope to ground my discussion of reversibility in two of the most in-depth interpretations of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. Let us now consider the responses to these questions in detail.

The answer to the question "what is the relationship between speech and the world?" is found in Merleau-Ponty's description of the phenomena of reversibility. This description is developed in his posthumously published work *The Visible and the Invisible*, wherein it is described as a way of understanding perception and language. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty writes that language "is everything" (a) because no one can be said to be the originator of it and, (b) because it simultaneously seems to be a product of the world to which language is always addressed. Merleau-Ponty makes this idea clear when he writes, alluding to the work of Paul Valéry,

“[I]anguage is everything, since it is the voice of no one, since it is the very voice of the things, the waves, the forests.” [VI 155] At a glance, this idea that language is simultaneously the voice of no one and the voice of every thing, seems counterintuitive. After all, it is people that speak, not things. However, Merleau-Ponty indicates that this claim can be understood only if we appreciate that this idea names the “two aspects of reversibility which is the ultimate truth.” [Ibid.] Given this indication, I propose that a response to the question, “what is the relationship between speech and the world,” can be formulated through consideration of the phenomena of reversibility.

Structurally, this work is divided into three parts. In the first chapter, there is a consideration of Merleau-Ponty’s critical engagement with the work of René Descartes, insofar as it affects the focus of this work. Briefly, for Descartes, the world can be understood to be bifurcated into two distinct orders of Being: the active, unextended order of the *res cogito* and the passive, extended, order of the *res extensa*. For Descartes, the distinct orders can be said to be causally related, insofar as the clear and distinct ideas generated by the Cartesian cogito are said to guarantee the truth of the world. Throughout his work, Merleau-Ponty critically engages with the Cartesian position. He posits that to bifurcate the world into two orders of Being, and to ballast truth onto the side of the *res cogito*, is a mistake; he observes that such a formulation does not respect our experience of living in, and according to, the world. In order to understand Merleau-Ponty’s description of the relationship between speech and the world, we will begin by posing the question: “How does Merleau-Ponty’s thought overcome consciousness-centred philosophy?” I will argue that Merleau-Ponty overcomes consciousness-centred philosophy through his description of the reversibilities proper to perception. I will argue

that through the description of reversibility, Merleau-Ponty overcomes the position that Being is strictly bifurcated into two determinate orders. He is successful in overcoming this position by recognizing that consciousness should not be considered to be at the centre of a description of Being; this recognition results from the fact that it is not possible, given reversibility, to identify a centre at all.

Having established, in chapter one, an understanding of reversibility in relation to the question of the centrality of consciousness, we turn to the main question of this work in chapter two: what is the relationship between speech and reversibility? Once again, we will use Merleau-Ponty's engagement with Descartes to frame the question, insofar as we will consider the ontological status of clear and distinct ideas. We will begin by considering Merleau-Ponty's description of the relationship between the visible world and the invisible world of meaning. We also explore Merleau-Ponty's description of "the visible" and "the invisible," seeing it as highly nuanced, and examining how it acts as a further challenge to the notion of Being as strictly bifurcated into distinct orders.

Having come to terms with Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the ontological status of the visible and the invisible, we will be in a good position to understand the reversibility proper to speech. In considering the reversibility proper to speech, we will demonstrate that speech need not be understood to be radically distinct from the world, because speech and the world exist in a relationship of reversibility. We will come to understand that speech should not be considered to be radically distinct from the world in which it originates, because reversibility ensures that speech both reflects and illuminates the world in which we live.

In chapter three, having identified the reversibility proper to speech, we will illustrate this reversibility indirectly, through a consideration of metaphor. A consideration of the phenomenon of metaphor is particularly appropriate to our subject, given that Merleau-Ponty seems to have held that metaphor is a prominent and important modality of linguistic expressivity.² Metaphor should both be understandable in light of the notion of reversibility, as well as help to elucidate this notion. Furthermore, the phenomenon of metaphor seems particularly important to further discussion of our question: “what is the relationship between ideality and the world,” in that, while metaphors *are* truth-bearing, the truth of a metaphoric expression is not grasped on the basis of an apodictic relationship between the content of the metaphor and the material world. Metaphors are, in this regard, mysterious and it is precisely this mystery that Merleau-Ponty wishes to restore to the whole of speech and language. Merleau-Ponty specifically addresses the phenomenon of metaphor when he writes:

A “direction” of thought- This is not a *metaphor*- There is no *metaphor* between the visible and the invisible... *metaphor* is too much or too little: too much if the invisible is really invisible, too little if it lends itself for transposition... [VI 221-222]

At first glance, Merleau-Ponty seems to be claiming that the phenomenon of metaphor does not exist. However, following Barbaras’ interpretation, we will come to understand that he is not so much denying the existence of metaphor, as he is actually denying that metaphor should be understood in its conventional sense.³ Merleau-Ponty, we will see, is arguing against the conception of metaphor as a *transfer* of sense between circumscribed terms. We will come to see that, instead of understanding the phenomenon of metaphor as a transfer, Merleau-Ponty understands it to be a result of the tension that is at the very heart of Being. In sum, in this chapter, I will argue that the reversibility proper to speech

consists of a kind of reflection. Speech and the world reflect each other and this reflection, I will argue, can be indirectly revealed in the phenomenon of metaphor

In sum, in this work, I will argue that the question of the relationship between speech and the world can be addressed through Merleau-Ponty's notion of reversibility. It is through this notion that Merleau-Ponty denies, as we shall consider in chapter one, the primacy of consciousness to philosophical description. Furthermore, as we shall consider in chapter two, it is with his notion of reversibility that Merleau-Ponty characterizes the relationship between speech and the world. After establishing the importance of reversibility in light of these questions, we will turn to the phenomenon of metaphoric speech in order to ground our description of reversibility in a mundane example.

1 The Reversibilities of the Perception

In this Chapter, we will consider the following question: How does Merleau-Ponty's thought overcome consciousness-centred philosophy? The problem can be understood as follows. Cartesian dualism bifurcates the world into two distinct orders: the immanent order of the *res cogitans* and the transcendental order of the *res extensa*. These two orders are exclusive, but there is thought to be a causal relation between them. This causal relationship is guaranteed by the clarity and distinctness of the ideations of the *res cogitans*. The world is thus reduced to an object that can be grasped by a subject; it is reduced to an object *for* consciousness. The question that is consequently raised is: should consciousness be understood as a "determinate subject" that takes intellectual possession of a "determinate object"? While Merleau-Ponty's answer to this question is highly nuanced, it is an emphatic no. In order to move away from a consciousness-centred description, Merleau-Ponty describes perception according to the reversibilities of the situated body. In order to understand this notion, we will first consider the invariance of the human body, and then consider the reversibilities of this body.

1.1 The Invariant Body

As incarnate, perceiving beings, we open upon the world that we share with others, but this opening is not an act of constitution. We neither hold the world before us as a determinate object, nor soar over it, as though our body were not situated within the inexhaustible depth of the world. The world surrounds us, and our perceptual experience is not a representation; rather, it is the experience of a dynamic flux, *from within that flux*. Perceptual experience opens up a field that unfolds concentrically around it. This field is not limitless, it is bordered on all sides by horizons that are ever-present and ever-changing. Our horizon is an intertwining of nature and culture. As such, it is always

irrevocably *there*, but it is nonetheless not a determinate object. A horizon is certainly not of our own making, and our horizon is highly contingent.⁴

In addition, our five senses are united in a single mobile, perceiving, and affective body; as such, our perceptual experience is indivisible at the level of experience. For instance, we do not experience vision as distinct from tactility, or tactility as distinct from audition. Our senses “fit” the world’s sensibility.⁵ Our perceptual abilities are united in a single body, and the dimensions that are opened upon by our abilities correspond to the unified dimensions of the perceived world. The tangible is visible and the visible is tangible.

As Merleau-Ponty recognizes, our access to being is our experience itself.⁶ Within the continuous flux, one’s perceptual experience is invariant: “I am always on the same side of my body; it presents itself to me *in one invariable perspective*.” [VI 147-148; emphasis added] My experience is consistently *mine* and not *yours*; however, both of our perspectives open upon “a single polymorphous being” in which we are both intertwined.⁷ [EM 174] The invariance of experience can be understood through the phenomena of perspective. I see this table before my eyes from a certain angle and against a certain background that is dictated by the position of *my* body. Simultaneously, your perception of the same table is dictated by the position of *your* body. The two perspectives are discontinuous, and yet they open upon the same table- that is, the same world. Renaud Barbaras makes this idea clear when he writes that the manifestation of a single perspective is inscribed in a world that is subject to “an infinite series of other possible manifestations.”⁸ In this sense, situatedness “is all-encompassing yet multiple in its articulations.”⁹ We should note that our sense of the unity of the world is

ineradicable and yet only ever presumptive, insofar as the totality of the world is not an object of perception and we cannot assume a point of view that would grasp this unity from the outside.

One's body is incarnated in the midst of the thickness of the world¹⁰, but we will misunderstand the phenomena of perception if we conceive it as the manifestation of an absolute coincidence between perception and the world. One's body is worldly, and yet it is invariably one's own. We are included within the world, but our perceptual experience does not merge with the things, we do not coincide with them, things remain at a distance. I am situated at the chiasm of an inexhaustible depth; for example, looking out my window, I see a large oak tree and beyond it there is a church steeple and, behind it, the grey sky. None of the things before me appear- nor can appear- in isolation. Things appear as figures on a background, and nothing can appear without the buttress of other things. A thing does not appear in isolation, but rather within a field that includes people and things with which it forms a constellation of inclusion and exclusion, sameness and difference. A thing appears within a field, but its identity is a result of a complex process of differentiation. (The appearance of the church steeple depends on the complex process of differentiation that characterizes a perceptual field.) When we perceive we do not identify the content of our field as though we perceive it for the first time. Whenever we can be said to perceive, our sedimented knowledge of the world is operative. (I see neither the tree nor the church steeple in its entirety, I see only part of each, and yet from the disparate parts that I do see, I know that before me is a tree and a steeple.¹¹) Perception is not the intellectual possession of a determinate object, because

the appearance of an object is only ever partial and disjointed, as well as historically and culturally determined.

Painters recognize that the world is a differential unity, and it is for this reason that much of *Eye and Mind* is devoted to a discussion of painting. The painter's work is produced by the living actual body, using no other technique than what [the painter's] eyes and hands discover in seeing and painting" [EM 161]. One of the things that interests Merleau-Ponty is the ability of painters to inscribe dimensions, which are invisible, onto canvas. This is quite apparent in the pictorial depiction of light, and equally, if less obviously, in the representation of any thing. Consider, as Merleau-Ponty does in *Eye and Mind*, Rembrandt's *The Night Watch*. The hand of the central figure, Captain Frans Banning Cocq, only becomes a human hand in relation to the dark silhouette formed across the abdomen of Lieutenant Willem van Ruytenburch. The hand and its silhouette form a *dimension* without which the Captain's hand would not be visible: "the spatiality of the captain lies at the meeting place of two lines of sight which are impossible and yet together. [EM 167] In order to see the Captain's hand it is necessary that we perceive the total field of *The Nightwatch*, because each thing depicted in it is identifiable only in relation to the entire situation represented- to the totality of the painting. The Captain's hand depends on the dimension established by "the play of shadows and light around it." [*Ibid*] The hand and the shadow are mutually implicated insofar as there is a distance between them established by the play of light. The appearance of any one thing is contingent upon the things with which it forms a field. In a sense, we may say that anything that is, *is* only insofar as it *is not* something else.¹²

Perceptual experience is invariant. Our eyes open upon a place and a time that we are clearly implicated in, but which is subject to the invariance of perspective. Our perceptual field is included within the unity of the world-horizon; and, as such, it is historically contingent, not of our own making, and not thematizable *in toto*, but it is invariably one's own. One's perspective is invariant, however it opens upon a unified dimension that admits of an infinite manifestation of variations. Being is unique, experience is multiple, and *I* surely cannot access Being through *your* experience.

It follows from this recognition, that our perception of other people, things and artefacts, is only ever a *partial* experience. Things do not appear as determinate objects, their visibility is incomplete. I do not see things in isolation, but only against a background that is forever unfolding. The coherence of our perception depends, not on the clarity and distinctness of ideas, but rather on the relation of everything within the whole. In this sense, Being can be described as a unity, which is implied in the interconnectedness of everything within it. In this sense, Being is singular precisely because it is polymorphous. [VI 174]

We can see how these notions mount an initial challenge to the Cartesian view. If our perceptual field is invariant, then all perceptual experience is only a partial experience of the world. Nevertheless, experience is *situated* within the world, it is a manifestation in a dimension of infinite variation. Thus, we cannot strictly bifurcate, as the Cartesian framework would have it, between the world and our experience of it, because our experience is of the world. However, this recognition does not erase the fact that experience unfolds at a distance.

Thus far, we have seen that human experience is situated in the world and that this situatedness is a challenge to the Cartesian bifurcation. We will now consider Merleau-Ponty's description of the initial moments of reversibility, so that we may understand further how he attempts to undermine the dualist position.

1.2 The Reversibilities of Perception

In initially considering Merleau-Ponty's response to the problem that arises from Cartesian dualism, we have seen that he argues against the notion of a strict bifurcation between experience and the world. His argument is based in the fundamental intertwining of the human body and the world. In order to understand in greater detail how this intertwining undermines Cartesian dualism, we will now consider the notion of *reversibility*. As we shall see, the notion of reversibility presents us with the initial outline of an alternative to the Cartesian description. In this section, we begin by considering the first three moments of reversibility identified by Merleau-Ponty, and then we consider how reversibility undermines and partially overcomes the dualist position.

The reversibility that Merleau-Ponty describes as emblematic of our experience of being in the world is not a single specific notion. Merleau-Ponty identifies several moments of reversibility that are characteristic of our experience of the world. These reversibilities obtain between the human body and itself, the human body and the world, the human body and other bodies, as well as between speech/thought and the world. In this section, we will consider the first three moments of reversibility, and we will consider the latter two moments, with specific attention to speech, in chapter two. We should note that our intention in this chapter is not to understand the three initial moments of reversibility as causally related. No such relation, in my opinion, can be

established. Instead, we are seeking to show that these three moments of reversibility are, in principle, possible wherever human perception occurs.

The working, actual body, Merleau-Ponty writes, is both sensible and sentient due to the “inherence of the one who sees in that which he sees.” [EM 163] The human body is capable of vision because it is part of the visible world. Drawing upon a cartographical metaphor, Merleau-Ponty describes our inherence in the following way:

In principle all my changes of place figure in a corner of my landscape; they are recorded on the map of the visible. Everything I see is in principle within my reach, at least within reach of my sight, and is marked upon the map of the “I can.” Each of the two maps is complete. The visible world and the world of my motor projects are each total parts of the same being. [EM 162]

Our body is a chiasmic intertwining of sentience and sensibility. This intertwining is a result of the fact that any movement of one’s body unfolds in the sensible world. One’s body is visible and, simultaneously, one’s body opens upon the world through our capacity to perceive- one’s body is capable of vision. What we see is the world, and this seeing is a result of the worldliness of our body. Yet, the intertwining of sentience and sensibility should not be understood as a complete coincidence. Consider the metaphor of “intertwining.” The threads that make up a complexly woven fabric do not coincide absolutely. They are woven together, intertwined, to form a single fabric, and yet the threads are not absorbed by one another. Similarly, sentience is not absorbed absolutely into the sensed, it does not coincide absolutely with it. The sensible and the sensed are woven together to form a single fabric of Being, but there is no utter coincidence.

As Dillon maintains, the notion of reversibility appears- *avant la lettre*- in *Phenomenology of Perception*, in which it is discussed in light of the phenomena of double sensations.¹³ Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of double sensations draws upon the

well known example formulated by Edmund Husserl in *Ideas II*. Husserl uses the experience of both hands touching as an example. When I touch my left hand with my right, the right hand feels the left in its tactility; I feel it as supple, smooth, etc. In addition, Husserl writes:

when I touch the left hand I also find in it, too, series of touch-sensations, which are “*localized*” in it, though these are not constitutive properties (such as roughness or smoothness of the hand, of this physical thing). If I speak of the *physical* thing, “left hand,” then I am abstracting from these sensations (a ball of lead has nothing like them and likewise for every “merely” physical thing, every thing that is not my body). If I do include them, then it is not that the physical thing is now richer, but instead *it becomes flesh, it senses*.¹⁴

One hand touches and the other is touched. We feel the touched hand in its physicality. The hand that is touched does not appear to the hand that touches as inanimate or foreign, there is a trace of sentience. If we attend to the experience of one hand touching the other, we notice that there is unity (both hands belong to the same body) but also an insurmountable non-coincidence (the experience of touching and being touched cannot ultimately coincide). Drawing upon Husserl’s example, Merleau-Ponty elaborates

[m]y body....is recognized by its power to give me ‘double sensations’: when I touch my right hand with my left, my right hand, as an object, has the strange property of being able to feel too....the two hands are never simultaneously in the relationship of touched and touching to each other. When I press my two hands together, it is not a matter of two sensations felt together as one perceives two objects placed side by side, but of an ambiguous set-up in which both hands can alternate the roles of touching and being touched...I can identify the hand touched as the same one which will in a moment be touching. In other words, in this bundle of bones and muscles which my right hand presents to my left, I can anticipate for an instant the integument of incarnation of that other right hand, alive and mobile, which I thrust towards things in order to explore them. [*PhP* 93]

The key term, for our purposes, is “alternation,” which, according to Dillon, foreshadows the notion of reversibility.¹⁵ When we touch our hands together, we do not experience both sensations simultaneously, but our experience *alternates* between the sensation of touching and the sensation of being touched. My two hands do not entirely coincide, but there is nonetheless the possibility of alternating from one position to the other. In this

way, the intertwining of my two hands is ambiguous. Later, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty writes:

If my left hand is touching my right hand, and if I should suddenly wish to apprehend with my right hand the work of my left hand as it touches, *this reflection of the body upon itself* always miscarries at the last moment: the moment I feel my left hand with my right hand, I correspondingly cease touching my right with my left hand. [VI 9; emphasis added]

This passage introduces the notion of reversibility as “the reflection of the body upon itself.” When I am pressing my two hands together, my hands can alternate between being sentient and sensed, because both belong to the same body; my two hands close the circuit of sensibility. My hands can alternate between experiences; however, the experience of sensing and being sensed do not coincide. I cannot be simultaneously sentient and sensed because one of the experiences always eclipses the other. Therefore, my two hands reflect each other and the experiences are reversible; the two experiences are the obverse and reverse of the other, but they do not coincide. In a sense, we may say that each hand may experience the other, *but never fully*, insofar as it is not the other hand.

Let us look specifically at the first moment of reversibility. The first moment of reversibility consists in the human body’s ability to reflect itself back to itself. The experience of my hands touching is reversible because both experiences belong to the same body. When I press my two hands together, my body acts as a mirror for itself. As we know, a mirror reflects only what is in front of it; it reflects the world in which it is present. The first moment of reversibility reveals an incarnated self-mediation: the body can reflect itself to itself because both belong to the same body- the same world.

Reversibility is the name given to this reflection.

We should notice that Merleau-Ponty's description of the first moment of reversibility is not the description of an act of self-possession. This is because there is an essential non-coincidence between sentience and being sensed. Reversibility is only possible because of the difference between sentience and sensibility. Because of this difference, the idea of self-possession seems impossible, as self-possession would involve a total coincidence between sentience and the sensible- an obvious impossibility. If self-possession were possible, if sentience and the sensed were each reducible to the other, then self-reflection would be neither necessary nor possible.

The second moment of reversibility obtains between my body and objects. As we shall see, this experience is similar to the experience of touching my hands together, but with an important difference. If I press my hands against the surface of a table, I feel that it is flat, hard, and cool, and I also feel that as I touch the table, the table also touches. The experience of an object depends upon the fact that my hands and the object are of the same tangible world, but nevertheless do not coincide.

Thus far, we have considered the notion of reversibility in terms of our experience of touch. However, Merleau-Ponty held that reversibility occurs wherever there is human perception. How, then, can reversibility be understood in light of our experience of vision? As we have seen, that which is visible is also tangible and that which is tangible is also visible; as such, one's body is also visible and tangible. [EM 163] Furthermore, we have seen that tactility and visibility are reversible: the visible is touchable and the touchable is visible. Drawing upon the cartographical metaphor employed in *Eye and Mind*, Merleau-Ponty writes "[t]here is a double and crossed situating of the visible in the tangible and of the tangible in the visible; the two maps are complete, and yet they do not

merge into one.” [VI 134] Thus, we can understand that my body can touch and see *precisely because* it is tangible and visible. I can touch the table because I, like the table, am tangible. Likewise, I am able to see the table due to my being visible.

Notice that there is a fundamental asymmetry between the first and the second moments of reversibility.¹⁶ When we considered the experience of two hands pressed together, we noticed that this experience admits of reversibility insofar as my hands can alternate between being sentient and being sensible. However, no such reversibility is manifested in our experience of objects. When we touch worldly objects they do not touch us as a sentient being would. There is a fundamental asymmetry between these experiences, brought about by the fact that things are not sentient like I am. Why then does Merleau-Ponty write that “the painter can reverse roles with the visible...There really is inspiration and expiration of Being, action and passion so slightly discernable that it becomes impossible to distinguish between what sees and what is seen, what paints and what is painted”? [EM 167] Why does he insist that vision is reversible?

The answer to this question, as Dillon maintains, lies in the idea of reversibility as mirroring.¹⁷ We are capable of vision, precisely because we are visible; we are made of the same stuff as the world. However, we cannot literally reverse positions with the objects that we see and touch; the impossibility of such a reversal is clear because doing so would require that I leave the singularity of my body and my experience behind in order to take up the position of the things. However, I am visible and therefore I am, in principle, visible from any spatiotemporal point; my body is visible from any position in the world that I do not occupy. In addition, consider that we are invisible to ourselves- I cannot see my body as others see it. However, a mirror allows us to see ourselves; it

makes the invisible visible for the one who is reflected in it.¹⁸ As Dillon brings to our attention, when Merleau-Ponty writes of the reversibility of the sentience and sensibility he is deploying a simile.¹⁹ We cannot literally reverse positions with things, but we do have a vague sense of how we must appear from the outside. This vague sense stems from finding ourselves reflected in the common world in which we live. The painter, thus, cannot distinguish between “what sees and what is seen” because the sentient and the sensed are intertwined in the unity of the visible-tangible world.

We may now specifically address the second moment of reversibility. The human body is situated within the horizons of the world. Because it is visible and tactile, it is capable of seeing and touching. For the situated body, the visible and the tactile is the reverse of its power of seeing and touching; the dimensions of our body open upon the dimensions of the world. From considering the first moment of reversibility, we understand that our experience of self-reflectivity is characterised by the possibility of alternating which hand assumes the role of touching and vice versa. We have also seen that there is an essential asymmetry between tactility-visibility and the tactile-visible world. I have a hazy sense of how I must appear “from over there,” but I do not have a determinate idea of how I appear. The second moment of reversibility can thus be summarized in the following way. I am a worldly being and I am capable of seeing and touching; simultaneously, the world is sensible, but not sentient. However, although there is an asymmetry between the sentient and the sensed, both are made of the same visible-tangible stuff. As such, the second moment of reversibility also reveals a profound self-mediation: vision is the visibility of the world “turned back upon itself.”

[VI 9] Vision is the world reflecting itself. This mediation is made possible by the fact

that, while my experience is continuous with the world in which we live, it is also different from the world in which we live- it unfolds at a distance.

We understood that the reversibility proper to the human body is revealed in its ability to reflect itself. This reflection cannot be conceived of as an act of self-possession, because this moment of reversibility involves the turning back of the body's sensibility upon itself. An act of self-possession would involve perceiving this closed circuit from the outside, which is an obvious impossibility. Likewise, we understood that there is a form of reversibility which is proper to the sensible world. Sense is able to reflect the sensible world precisely because it is intertwined with it. We will now consider the third moment of reversibility, which obtains between human bodies. Our focus, in this third description, will be on the reflection that obtains *between* human bodies that are sensible and sentient. Obviously, human bodies are not merely tangible and visible, but are also audible and vociferous. For reasons of clarity, we will leave the central question of the phenomena of speech in abeyance until chapter two. We now turn our attention to the reversibility between sentient bodies.

The third moment of reversibility occurs between human bodies that inhabit a common, sensible world. While one's vision is invariant, it takes place in the flux that is the common world. Within this flux, other sentient beings become sensible. When I see another person, I recognize that their body is sentient like mine. However, my vision and other people's vision do not coincide, and our experience of others is forever at a distance. There is fission between myself and others and it is in this very fission that, Merleau-Ponty claims, we can- in principle- reverse perspectives. He writes:

Vision is not a certain mode of thought or presence to self; it is the means given me for being absent to myself, for being present at the fission of being from the inside- the fission at whose termination, and not before, I come back to myself.” [EM 186]

As we have seen, vision and touch are bound to the visible and the tangible world, they are intertwined, but simultaneously there is difference. The sentient and the sensed are simultaneously unified (both are made of the same worldly stuff) and unique (there is no absolute coincidence between what senses and what is sensed). Vision is not a “presence to self”; rather, it must be understood as originating in the fission of the sentient-sensed.

Consider that human bodies are, in principle, structured in the same way, that they are sentient in the same way, and that they interrogate the world in similar ways.²⁰ When I see a person standing *over there*, I recognize that he or she has a body like mine- a body that is mobile, sentient, and sensible. In principle, I recognize that the other’s experience of my body is similar to my experience of his or hers. Between my body and the body of the other, there is identification, insofar as we identify that the other’s body is incarnate like our own, but is not- in fact- our own.

Based on this identification, we can articulate the reversibility that obtains between human bodies. As we know, our body is invisible to itself and we cannot leave our invariance behind to view our body from the outside. However, other people do see my body from the outside. Because of my identification with them, and the way they treat me, I develop a sense of how I must appear from *over there*. I can develop this sense because I know what it is like to see, and respond to, other people’s bodies. Therefore, the other person, like my body and all things, acts as a mirror for me; the other person’s body reflects that which I cannot experience- my own body. This reflection is not

grounded in the structure of our minds; rather, it is based in the fact that human bodies inhere in a common, sensible world. Merleau-Ponty writes:

[t]he synchronism of the consciousnesses is given by their common belongingness to a Being to which no one has the key and whose law they all observe- or rather, *let us no longer say that there is synchronization*: each experiences himself as involved with others; *there is a meeting ground which is Being itself inasmuch as each of us inheres in it through his situation.* [VI 63; emphasis added.]

At this point, it is imperative that we qualify the third moment of reversibility.

Recall that when we considered the reversibility that obtains between one's body and worldly things, we said that there is an insurmountable asymmetry between the two experiences. We must now recognize that there is a similar asymmetry between my body and the bodies of others. While I have a nebulous sense of what their experience must be like, I do not have an apodictic sense of their experience. In this way, I can figuratively reverse positions with the other person, but I cannot literally do so; I cannot leave the singularity of my perspective behind for hers, I cannot coincide with her experience.

Merleau-Ponty makes this idea clear when he writes:

[w]e spoke summarily of a reversibility of the seeing and the visible, of the touching and the touched. It is time to emphasize that it is a reversibility *always imminent and never realized in fact*. My left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand touching the things, but I never reach coincidence." [VI 147-148; emphasis added.]

There is no absolute coincidence between my hands, my body and the things; likewise, there is no coincidence between my incarnate experience and those of other people. My body and the body of the other participate in an inexhaustible and irreducible depth.²¹ As such, the reversibility proper to incarnate beings is "always imminent and never realized in fact." However, the experience of others is significantly more asymmetrical than the experience of one's own hands touching. We can understand this if we consider, as Dillon does, the experience of shaking another person's hand. The experience of shaking

another's hand is not the same as when I press my hands together, "because [the other's] experience of my right hand as an object is inaccessible to me in a way that my left hand's experience of my right is not."²² Given that, reversibility is "always imminent and never realized in fact," why then does Merleau-Ponty insist on nominating the experience of others as reversible? The reason is that he, in part, wishes to emphasize the fact that experience takes place in the world - that it occurs within the complex intertwining of sensibility and the sensible. In referring to the experience of others as figuratively (but not literally) reversible, Merleau-Ponty seeks to emphasize the fact that what we have in common is the sensible world which grounds the manifold of perspectives. It is the world that we have in common, not the structure of our minds.

Let us specify the third moment of reversibility. This third moment obtains between human bodies that can see each other and touch each other. Although all perspective is invariant, to some degree I can acquire a sense what it is like for another to set eyes on the world, for him or her to see the same world that I do. In addition, because I cannot perceive myself from the outside, I rely on the perspective of others in order to have a sense of how my body appears. In this sense, human bodies are reflective: each reveals to the other what is invisible to them - their own body. In sum, the third moment of reversibility is revealed in our attempt to see ourselves as others see us.

Given that my body and the things are made of the same visible-tangible stuff, we understand that vision is the "visible world turned back upon itself." The reversibility of other bodies reveals an even more profound sense of this turning back. As we have seen, perspective is invariant, and yet it opens upon a dimension that admits of infinite variations. While my experience is singularly my own, I recognize that the perceptual

experience of other people is of the same world upon which my vision opens. Thus, we may understand that the visible world's reflection of itself is not the act of an isolated consciousness, but rather the reflection of the multiplicity of perspectives that open upon it. In this sense, the world is self-mediating insofar as it is reflected in the manifold of perspectives that are, in principle, reversible because of the fact that they open upon a common, sensible world. The reality of the world is guaranteed by the common, elementary "adherence of the sentient to the sensed and the sensed to the sentient." [VI 142] The perspective of other people haunts my own perspective and maintains the truth of the world. In the end, the presence of other people repudiates the idea that coherence is a possibility for a solipsistic mind.

We have considered the first three moments of reversibility, and we have left the question of the reversibility proper to language for chapter two. We have seen that there is a reversibility proper to the experience of two hands touching, where one hand can reflect the experience of the other, and the hands can reverse positions. We also saw that there is, in principle, a reversibility proper to the sensible world, insofar as sensibility is the sensible world "turned back upon itself" - reflecting itself. In addition, we have considered that there is a reversibility proper to human bodies that is exemplified in our attempts to see ourselves as others see us. At the same time, we considered that each of these moments of reversibility is "always imminent and never realized in fact." [VI 148] When we stand before a mirror, we do not coincide absolutely with our reflection. There is a distance, a difference, between my body and its reflection and it is this distance that makes my reflection possible. Therefore, inasmuch as one's body, the things, and other people maintain a relationship of reflectibility, these reflections are only ever imminent

because our experience of living in the world is characterized by non-coincidence and difference. We cannot leave the invariance of our perspectives behind, but we *can* arrive at a nebulous impression of how one must seem from positions that one does not occupy. The world is a unified dimension that manifests infinite variations, and this dimension appears for us in the unity of sensible and sensed. Sense is the sensible world reflecting itself.

In section one, we considered that human experience is invariant and that it is rooted in the visible-tangible world. My presence implies that I am inaccessible to myself; I cannot experience myself as others do. In section two, we saw that human experience admits of the possibility of reversibility, but that this possibility is never completely realized. My presence implies that the experiences of others are absent from my own. Thus, we can see, in opposition to Cartesian dualism, that I have neither a clear and distinct idea of myself as a cogito, nor a clear and distinct idea of the world. I cannot leave the singularity of my experience behind, and nor can I perceive either myself or the world from outside of it. My experience is thus rooted in a constitutive absence; my experience would not be possible, would not in fact be *my* experience a) if it were not invariant and b) if I could perceive myself from without, as others do. This constitutive absence ensures that we cannot really possess clear and distinct ideas about ourselves or the world.

Furthermore, in his articulation of the possibility of reversibility, we find the answer to the question: How does Merleau-Ponty decentre his philosophy? As we know, Descartes' articulation of dualism is consciousness-centred insofar as he conceives of human experience as grounded in clear and distinct ideas that guarantee the truth of the

world. For Merleau-Ponty there are no such guarantors, human beings live in a visible and tangible world and are thus capable of vision and touch. Because I cannot perceive myself from the outside, I rely on the world to see my reflection. For Merleau-Ponty, I am a mirror for others just as others are a mirror for me, and the world of things and artefacts is a mirror for both of us. Interestingly, when two or more mirrors are placed in front of each other, the images that occur are reflected infinitely. If *the world* is an infinite possibility of reflection, is it not a misconception to posit consciousness as the centre of this reflection?

If the world is characterised by inexhaustible depth and infinite reflectibility, how can we claim that there is a centre at all? Merleau-Ponty's thought overcomes a consciousness-centred approach, not by claiming that the centre is to be found in the *res extensa* rather than a *res cogitans*, but by recognizing that there is no centre at all. The time and place in which we live is as much a reflection of us, as we are reflections of the time and place in which we live. To identify a centre in the intertwining in which we find ourselves seems like an impossibility.

In chapter one, we have seen that incarnate perceptual experience is invariably one's own and that it admits of the possibility of reversibility. Putting these two ideas together, we may say that my experience *is* my own precisely insofar as it *is not* the experience of another. My presence implies that the experiences of others are absent. Reversibility, thus conceived, reveals that human being cannot be characterized by an absolute coincidence or an absolute bifurcation of Being. Rather, it characterizes perceptual experience as being singularly one's own, only insofar as it finds its place among a multiplicity of other perspectives.

As we have already stated, the reversibility that Merleau-Ponty describes as emblematic of our experience of being in the world is not a single specific notion. For the purposes of this chapter, we have left the reversibility proper to speech in abeyance. In chapter two, we will specifically consider the phenomenon of speech by considering the question: how can we understand the relationship between speech and the world? This endeavour will give us a fuller understanding of what it is to share and inhabit a common world.

2 The Reversibilities of Speech

In chapter two, we will consider the question that is central to this thesis: what is the relationship between speech and the world? We will argue that this relationship can be characterized through the notion of reversibility. In order to understand the reversibility of speech, we will first explore Merleau-Ponty's notions of the "visible" and "invisible." Having considered these notions, we will return to the notion of reversibility that we began to develop in chapter one. We will develop an understanding of how reversibility, according to Merleau-Ponty, is manifested in speech. This will set the stage for chapter three, where through exploration of Merleau-Ponty's comments on the phenomenon of metaphor, we will attempt to indicate how the visible and the invisible are intertwined. For now, let us turn to our initial examination of Merleau-Ponty's notions of the visible and the invisible.

2.1 The Visible and the Invisible

In chapter one, we saw that, for Descartes, Being is radically bifurcated into two distinct orders. On the one hand, there is the immanent order of the *res cogitans* and, on the other hand, the transcendental order of the *res extensa*. For Descartes, this bifurcation is determinable on the basis of clear and distinct ideas. We have, he claims, a clear and distinct idea of the mind as an active, unextended thing, while the body and material world are conceived to be passive and extended; Descartes writes

I have a body with which I am very closely united, nevertheless, since on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself in so far as I am only a thinking and not an extended being, and since on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body in so far as it is only an extended being which does not think, it is certain that this "I" is entirely distinct from my body and that it can exist without it.²³

For Merleau-Ponty, Descartes' mistake is to reify and bifurcate the *cogito* and the world and, consequently, to reduce the world to an object *for* consciousness. In describing the world as simultaneously a thinking *thing* and an extended *thing*, Descartes makes the mistake of understanding consciousness and the world in a thoroughly determinate fashion. By beginning his description of Being with the radical bifurcation of the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa*, Descartes is obliged to demonstrate how there can be a mediation between the two orders. However, for Merleau-Ponty, the very possibility of a mediation between the components of the Cartesian bifurcation seems questionable. After all, if there is a *strict* bifurcation between the immanent and the transcendental order, then one must question how mediation is possible at all. If there is in fact a strict bifurcation between the immanent order of the *res cogitans* and the transcendental order of the *res extensa*, it becomes difficult to understand how these orders of Being can be considered to be causally related. In addition, we should notice that while this bifurcation seems to make sense for the purposes of analytic reflection, our experience of the world as a presumptive unity seems to disqualify this assertion. If the world is a unity, it is difficult to understand how a strict bifurcation could be possible in the first place. These confusions are a result of Descartes' attempt (a) to understand consciousness and the world as determinate objects and, consequently, (b) to position truth as reducible to clear and distinct ideas. For Merleau-Ponty, it seems impossible to understand the ontological status of ideas and the world starting from the Cartesian framework. This impossibility is due to the recognition that such a framework is "thrice untrue to what it means to elucidate: untrue to the visible world, to him who sees it, and to his relations with other

“visionaries.”” [VI 39] In critically addressing the Cartesian view, Merleau-Ponty attempts to undermine the two sources of this bifurcated view: reification and reduction.

In his attempt to move philosophy beyond the Cartesian bifurcation, Merleau-Ponty seeks to investigate the phenomenality of the visible and the invisible. We have already seen that Merleau-Ponty is striving to move his ontology in a direction that is not consciousness-centred. This direction is heralded in his discussion of the sensing-sensed relation (which we considered in chapter 1). In order to understand what Merleau-Ponty attempts to bring to the fore with his description of the visible and the invisible, we must come to understand the complex intertwining of the world and its ideas. We must come to understand that things and ideas are not determinate objects, and that ideality and the world are manifestations of a univocal Being that “encompasses them without contradiction.”²⁴

For Merleau-Ponty, it is an error to attempt to *construct* an ontology.²⁵ It is an even greater error to construct one that begins with the strict bifurcation of ideas and the world, only to seek their reconciliation. Rather, we must allow the mundane world - in all of its opaqueness - to guide our description of being situated in the world. Our thought must accord with our experience of living in and according to the world, rather than forcing our experience to conform to our reflection. The guiding principles of Merleau-Ponty’s interrogation of the visible and the invisible are:

[n]ot to consider the invisible as an *other visible* “possible,” or a “possible” visible for an other: that would be to destroy the inner framework that joins us to it...the invisible is there without being an *object*, it is pure transcendence, without an ontic mask. And the “visible” themselves, in the last analysis, they too are only centered on a nucleus of absence— [VI 229]

The visible world is not an absolute positivity, nor is the invisible world of meaning the “manifestation” of absolute negativity. The visible has its invisible and the invisible has its visible. The world is *there*, and it is always about the world that we speak and think. A view that begins with the strict bifurcation between extended and unextended things misses this peculiar character of the relationship between ideality and the world. Instead, we should understand that the visible is *invisible* and that the invisible is the invisible *of this world*. [VI 257] We can understand this by considering that if “the *visible* is not an *objective* positive, invisible cannot be a negation in the logical sense.” [VI 257] Let us look further into this claim of ambiguity.

When considering the visible, Merleau-Ponty writes that it is “a total philosophical error to think the visible as an objective presence (or the idea of this presence).” [VI 258] He admits that this claim may seem to be counter-intuitive; after all, we seem to live in a world surrounded by objectively present things that seem to be composed of determinate atomic qualities and which apparently “emanate from this individual pebble, from this individual shell, or, in general, from every individual of the same name.” [VI 161] Things seem to appear as “a node of properties such that each is given if one is; it is a principle of identity.” [Ibid.] As such, he claims, a so-called ‘spatiotemporal individual’ seems to give the impression that it is “an ob-ject, that is, it spreads itself out before us by its own efficacy and does so precisely because it is gathered up in itself.” [Ibid.] However, while things may appear this way for one who is concerned only with utilization and instrumentalization, it does not, in Merleau-Ponty’s view, characterize the way things actually appear. As we shall now illustrate, a thing is not a determinate or objective presence; rather it is a modulation in a dimension of variation.

We have already begun to explore the phenomenon of dimensionality in a different context (see chapter 1, section 1.1). Consider that, because the world is an inexhaustible depth, every thing appears as a figure on a ground. As we saw in chapter one, a figure appears only against a background that is inexhaustible, and neither the figure, nor the background, can be grasped *in toto*. Parts of a figure are always obscured and the background is never completely thematizable. When we say ‘a thing is there,’ we apprehend that thing in relation to those other things that overlap, surround, and envelop it. Far from an absolute manifestation of positivity, the visible is “centred on a nucleus of absence.” [VI 229] A visible thing *is*, only insofar as it *is not* something else. In order to comprehend this further, let us consider Merleau-Ponty’s interrogation of the phenomenality of colour.

A thing is thought to be composed of determinate properties. Things are, for instance, coloured and textured. Colour is proper to the visible. However, Merleau-Ponty asks, “What is this talisman of colour, this singular virtue of the visible that makes it, held at the end of my gaze, nonetheless much more than a correlate of my vision, such that it imposes my vision upon me as a continuation of its own sovereign existence?” [VI 131] Merleau-Ponty’s answer begins with the idea that a colour should not be understood strictly as a *quale*, as a “pellicle of being *without* thickness.” [Ibid; emphasis added.] Colours are not detachable from the things that they colour. Consider, for instance, the colour ‘red.’ Red emerges, Merleau-Ponty writes, “from a less precise, more general redness” that is established in a *lateral relation* with other red things. [Ibid.] There is no such thing as the colour red in itself, there is only the red of a fire truck, a football jersey, or a Valentine’s card; the colour red, like all colours, is “a dimension of variation.” [VI

132] Let us consider this “dimension of variation” in detail, as it is significant to our discussion.

A colour appears only as a manifestation in a dimension of infinite variation. Red appears as a manifestation in a dimension that consists of the entire spectrum of coloured things. ‘Red’ exists only in relation to the totality of the dimension of colour, a totality which never appears *in-itself* but towards which each thing “points.” A colour wheel, which contains the possibility of all of the colours to which the human eye is potentially sensitive, is only a metric; it is a way of reifying for the eye what it, in a sense, already knows: that our world is coloured, that colours differ and blend together, that they attract and repel one another, and that they have their time and their place. [VI 132] We need look only to the experiences of blind or colour-blind people, who know through absence that colour is a dimension of the world, a dimension which is characterized by variation.

The diacriticality that is characteristic of the appearance of a colour is twofold. First, the redness of a thing appears in relation to other coloured things. For instance, a red traffic signal is different from the yellow and green signal, and can only be identified in a differential relation with other colours. Likewise, the red of a football jersey is different from a white one, or the black of mourning clothes. Second, there are many hues of red from which this red before our eyes must be distinguished and which may or may not even be present in the conventional sense. Consider that the red of a football jersey is that *specific* red insofar as it is not the red of a fire truck, a Valentine’s card or, as Merleau-Ponty writes, the red that is “the pure essence of the Revolution of 1917.” [VI 132] A red football jersey carves out a place in the universe of similarly and differently

coloured things. A red football jersey *is* thus and so, precisely insofar as it *is not* something else.

We came upon a similar notion in our consideration of *The Nightwatch*. Recall that the hand of Captain Frans Banning Coq appears only in relation to the total visibility of the painting. Similarly, a colour appears in relation to the totality of coloured things - “with which it forms a constellation”- even though these things are not perceivable or thematizable *in toto*. [Ibid.] This constellation is formed by those colours that “it [dominates] or that dominate it, that it attracts or that attract it, that it repels or that repel it.” [Ibid.] Hence, a colour is not a “node of properties” [VI 161]; rather, it is a “node in the woof of the simultaneous and the successive.” [VI 132] Let us specifically consider this significant shift in description.

The term “node” is borrowed from the language of botany; it refers to a knob on a root or branch, or to the joint between a branch and the stem of a leaf. We can thus understand what a “node of properties” means. This is a group of properties that are joined together, as attributes, to form a thing. This is the conceptualization that Merleau-Ponty wishes to invalidate, because he wants to overcome the notion that a thing is a spatio-temporal individual, which is composed of strictly determinable and circumscribable properties. What, then, does Merleau-Ponty’s description of “a node in the woof of the simultaneous and the successive” mean? A woof refers to the threads that run laterally in a woven fabric, at right angles in relation to the horizontal warp threads. This metaphor implies that colour appears at the intersection of the simultaneous (those colours that appear along side of it, and with which it forms a constellation) and the successive (the historicity of colour). It finds its place within a dimension of variation in

which the simultaneous and the successive are undifferentiated; an instance of red can appear only in relation to the totality that is the dimension of colour. This constitutive influence of the totality is what Merleau-Ponty seeks to bring to the fore in his well known allusion in *The Visible and the Invisible*. He refers to a phrase of Paul Claudel's, who writes, "a certain blue of the sea is so blue that only blood would be more red." [VI 132] The blue of the sea is not a determinate quality any more than is the red of blood. Each colour is born in the lateral, diacritical, relation with other colours. The colour red *is* red, precisely insofar as it *is not* blue. Merleau-Ponty is pointing to the fact that the colour red is not a so much a *quale*, as it is a texture, a fabric woven together of the differences and similarities between it and other coloured things. We may say that the appearance of a colour involves a constitutive dimension of *absence*, insofar as the difference established between colours is a necessary condition for the appearance of a colour - yet it is important to note that the difference *as such* does not appear. For this reason, Merleau-Ponty writes that a colour is a concretion of visibility, it is not an atom.

[*ibid.*] Given this, we should understand that

[a] naked colour, and in general a visible, is not a chunk of hard indivisible being, offered all naked to a vision which could be total or null, but is rather a sort of straits between exterior horizons and interior horizons ever gaping open, something that comes to touch lightly and makes diverse regions of the coloured or visible world resound at distances, a certain differentiation, an ephemeral modulation of the world - less a colour or a thing, therefore, than a difference between things and colours, *a momentary crystallization* of coloured being or of visibility. [VI 132; emphasis added.]

The colour red is a texture, a fabric woven out of variation. It is a product of the differences and similarities between it and other crystallizations of colour. Colour is not a determinate property of a thing, because the concretization of a colour is the outcome of variation. However, even with this recognition of colour as existing in and because of its relations to other variations of colour, we can never fully grasp the totality of this

dimension; it is not determinable, due to the fact that we can never perceive the differences *as such*.

If a colour is not a determinate property, how might we understand the constitution of a thing? Barbaras writes that a thing should be understood similarly to a colour, as a modulation in a dimension of variation. He writes

[f]or Merleau-Ponty, “thing” does not designate what one usually means with this term, namely, a being of delimited and determinate reality based in itself - an object, in short. By thing one must understand the “something” [...] He calls “thing” the phenomenal reality as it is given originally and, in precise terms, the goal of his analysis is to show that it is never given in the form of a completed, circumscribed, fully determinate thing...there are not things but divergences, accents, “ephemeral modulations of the world.”²⁶

A thing is not fully determinate or circumscribed, because the appearance of a thing, like the appearance of a colour, involves a constitutive dimension of absence, divergence, differentiation. A thing appears as a hinge, or as a punctuation, between things. Like the hand at the centre of *The Nightwatch*, the identity of a thing depends on all the other things with which it forms a constellation. A thing *is*, in relation to those things which it *is not*.

To understand the ontological status of the visible world, Merleau-Ponty writes, we must understand that the visible world has its own divergent logic and, that it is “a system of equivalencies, not a pile of spatio-temporal individuals.” [VI 247] Its appearance is constituted diacritically, and the diacriticality of the visible world “is neither *produced* by our psychophysical constitution, nor produced by our categorial equipment, but lifted from a *world* whose inner framework our categories, our constitution, our subjectivity render explicit--”. [VI 247-48] In sum, the visible world is not a fully determinate, circumscribed, objective presence. It cannot be construed that way because it is

constituted by dimensions that are absent. Merleau-Ponty summarizes his discussion of the visible in the following way:

I describe perception as a diacritical, relative, oppositional system - the primordial space as topological (that is, cut out in a total volumosity which surrounds me, in which I am, which is behind me as well as before me...) [...] there is all the same this difference between perception and language, that I *see* the perceived things and that the significations on the contrary are invisible. [VI 214]

We will now turn to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the "invisible." It is fundamental that we understand of the "invisible" two elements: (a) that it is not an object and (b) that, despite not being an object, it is bound to the visible world - it is "the invisible *of this world*." [VI 151; emphasis added.] We have seen that the appearance of the visible involves a constitutive absence. This constitutive absence is a result of the fact that a thing is a modulation in a dimension of variation. Until now, we have attempted to hold the phenomena of speech and meaning in abeyance. We have attempted to give a description of the perceived world that respects its opacity, its indeterminacy, a sense that it cannot be grasped *in toto* because it forever recedes before attempts to grasp it. [VI 150] In order to understand what is meant by "the invisible," how it functions as the "inner framework" of the visible world, we must turn specifically to the phenomena of speech and meaning. [VI 229] Our task will be to understand that the invisible is not the logical opposite of the visible, it is not the visible world stripped bare. Instead, Merleau-Ponty writes that we must understand that

[m]eaning is *invisible*, but the invisible is not the contradictory of the visible: the visible itself has an invisible framework (*membrure*), and the in-visible is the secret counterpart of the visible, it appears only within it...one cannot see it there and every effort to *see it there* makes it disappear, but it is *in the line* of the visible, it is its virtual focus, it is inscribed within it (in filigree)—[*ibid.*]

We have seen that the visible world is constituted by absence. We must now understand that the invisible world of meaning can seemingly detach itself from the visible world

without objectivation, and yet remain bound to it. We can clearly understand that the mode of being of meaning is not that of an object. In fact, we could only ever conceive that the invisible is an object through an act of reification, through the attempt to grasp it from the impossible perspective of an absolute overview. [VI 19]

When we consider speech and meaning, we are considering something that is highly abstract. If we understand speech to be a thing, then we are reifying an abstraction. After all, linguistic meaning is not a determinate object, it is not a result of the sum total of words or grammatical rules that govern it or of speakers who use it; it is, actually, a modulation in a dimension of variation. Central to Merleau-Ponty's thought is the recognition that ideality is not the contradiction of the material world; rather, it is bound to it, and it is of it. The invisible is not a thing, and is not radically separable from the visible world, but rather is a dimension of Being. We may understand the invisible by way of two analogies. The invisible may be understood as *reflection*, and as *illumination*. Let us turn to these analogies.

The invisible, that is the dimension of meaning, can be understood as analogous to a kind of reflection in the sense of 'mirroring.' When we speak, we necessarily speak of and about the world. However, speaking is not, anymore than seeing, the action of a constituting consciousness on the visible world. The visible world, of which we are a part, gives rise to ideality, which turns back upon the visible and, thus, comes to reflect the world. Our speech is addressed either towards others, or towards ourselves taking the form of thought. Speech finds its meaning in the world that we co-inhabit alongside those with whom we live and speak. The truth of spoken language is that meaning depends on sense - and it is other people, with whom we share the world, that are the

guarantors of this sense. Seeing others as the guarantors of our understanding provides a strong blow to Descartes' conception of truth. Indeed, in *our* conceptualization, coherence is not guaranteed by a manifestation of Cartesian clarity and distinctness, but rather by other people. Ideas are a second skin, or counterpart, of the visible. The truth of our experience of speech is that it reflects the world, rather than re-presenting it.

Dillon makes this explicit when he writes:

“Mirrors do not re-present the world or replicate it in a domain apart; they reflect what is before them in the same world in which they are, themselves located and visible. Language does not duplicate or copy the world; it is rather, the manner in which the world’s intelligibility/meaning/sense (*sens*) unfolds.”²⁷

Speech, like a mirror, reflects the world in which we live, and which is its well-spring; and speech, simultaneously, renders this shared world intelligible. The analogy with mirroring is not merely rhetorical. Consider for what purposes we use mirrors. We use them to render visible that which is invisible to us. I stand before the mirror to check the knot of my tie because it is invisible to me - I cannot see it without looking in a mirror. Yet, recall that a mirror does not lay the entire visible world bare before us; it reflects a portion of the visible world that would otherwise remain invisible. Again, a reflection is not a representation, it is not a clear and distinct idea, but rather it is the rendering of a portion of the world sensible.

Consider that the world appears, as Merleau-Ponty teaches us, in an “interrogative mode.” [VI 103] It appears before us opaquely and in need of clarification, even though a total clarification is impossible. The world gives rise to questions and observations that we articulate through speech. Thus, speech arises from, and responds to, the world. If we are attentive to our experience of living in and according to the world, we notice that

our experience is directed towards understanding, and it is here that we come to our second analogy.

Speech, the invisible world of meaning, is - at heart - an illumination of the visible world. The world is never visible *in toto*; as we have discussed, our gaze is intrinsically partial. The fact that there are others who see the world from a different position, according to their own “coherent deformation,” is enough to provoke an infinite number of questions. These questions, as we have just mentioned, take the form of speech - a seeking for sense through linguistic engagement with the world and others. In this way, spoken language is analogous with our experience of light: it illuminates the visible, sharpens our perception of it, and yet it is invisible. We need not understand the mechanics of light in order to understand its power. The visible world stands, irrefutably, before us, but we know that the amount of light that engulfs it can alter its character. Reading in a dark room, we turn on a light, or open the blinds, in order to enhance the visibility of the words on the page. Painters, as Dillon remarks, know this well; they recognize that even the faintest glimmer of light can change the character of a painting.²⁸ Analogously, speech and meaning sharpen our sense of the visible world, allowing questions to arise and supporting our attempts to respond to these questions. As such, speech is dynamic and not static, it is always open and never complete. We speak of the world, we hear our own voice and the voices of others. As we listen to what others say, we come to approximate an understanding of their perspective. This approximation is the *closest* understanding that we can arrive at, because the process of seeking understanding is contingent, dynamic, and never fully realized. For us, the world appears in constant need of illumination, and we respond to this need through speech.

In addition, we must look at speech, in terms of the relation of its parts to its entirety. In our characterization of Merleau-Ponty's notion of the visible, we described it as a series of modulations in a dimension of variation; the identity of a thing is firmly rooted in an inexhaustible and open system of differences. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty claims, the "whole is immanent in its parts." [S 41] The appearance of any one thing necessarily "points" towards the totality. However, we should remember that while each thing "points" to the totality, this totality is not intelligible except from the false perspective of *la pensée de survol*. Similarly, any expressive act also invokes the whole.

Furthermore, there is a kind of difference between speech and the world that is revealed in the quasi-detachability of significations. Just as the coherent appearance of the perceived world is a result of the fact that our perceptual field is organized according to a logic of differentiation, speech also makes sense, in part, according to its own logic - that is - according to the systematic organization of signs. Words and expressions make sense in relation to the whole of language, and its wholeness is immanent in its parts. Like the world, language cannot be grasped *in toto* - and yet it depends on the whole of language for its coherence. Speech always points towards this whole, but can never completely thematize it.

Merleau-Ponty's development of the notion of the visible and the invisible gives rise to an interesting problem. On the one hand, his discussion of the invisible leads us to believe that the invisible depends, for its coherence, on the existence of other people and the world. At the same time, his discussion of sense (*sens*) as dependant on the differential chain of signifiers seems to lead us to believe that the sense of an expressive act is internal to language itself. The problem, then, is that language seems to be made

possible by a double referentiality: its sense depends on its relation with the world as well as with its own arrangement. Dillon is extremely sensitive to this problem, and he notes that we will not easily find a response in either Merleau-Ponty's published or posthumously published works.²⁹ I agree with Dillon that a response to this dilemma must be worked out in light of the thesis of reversibility. This will be discussed in the next section in relation to infra-referentiality and extra-referentiality.

Before concluding this section, let us briefly consider the implications of the notions of "visible" and "invisible," for the Cartesian bifurcation. We explicated that the Cartesian bifurcation of Being into two strict and distinct orders is a result of reification and reduction. As we have seen, for Merleau-Ponty, it is a mistake to reify the world according to the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa*, because neither is truly a determinate or circumscribed object in our experience of the world. Furthermore, because neither the visible nor the invisible is intelligible outside of its relation to the other, the idea that the one is reducible to the other is illogical. However, in order to further understand the idea that neither the visible nor the invisible is intelligible outside of its relationship with the other, we will have to deal with the issues raised by Merleau-Ponty's insistence on the reversibility of speech. In the following section, we will look at how this form of reversibility plays a role in Merleau-Ponty's work.

In this section, we have attempted to understand Merleau-Ponty's notions of visibility and invisibility separately, so that we may understand both how they differ, and in part how they are related. As we have seen, the appearance of the visible involves a constitutive dimension of absence. Simultaneously, we have seen that the invisible is *not* the contradiction of the visible, but is in partnership with it. The invisible remains

situated, it is the “invisible *of this world*” [VI 151]. We have also seen that the invisible depends on an inexhaustible system of differences. Our next step is to develop an understanding of the reversibility proper to speech. While we have glimpsed how the visible and the invisible might be related, we must now focus our attention more directly on the manner in which the visible and the invisible are inherently bound together by reversibility. We will develop an understanding that speech both (a) belongs to no one, as it is diacritical and self-mediating, and (b) is simultaneously the voice of the things, as it is always of and about the world. [VI 155]

2.2 Speech and Reversibility

In this section, we will come to understand the reversibility that is proper to speech. First, we will consider how it is that people learn to speak. We will also reflect on the fact that speech is governed by rules, becomes sedimented as established meanings, and is always about the world. Secondly, through drawing upon certain analogies between music and speech that are identified and discussed by Merleau-Ponty, we find space to introduce and explore an idea that is developed by Dillon. In *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, Dillon asserts that language is simultaneously infra-referential (sense is a result of the rules that govern its arrangement) and extra-referential (sense is a result of the fact that language refers to the world).³⁰ Thirdly, in this section, we are able to specify the reversibility that is characteristic of the visible and the invisible. Because the visible and the invisible are not determinate, circumscribed entities, *and* are not ultimately coincidental, their relationship can be understood to be characterized by difference and *simultaneously* continuity.³¹ We will explore this characterization of the relation between the visible and the invisible. In sum, in this section, we consider speech as the result of a

complex reversibility, understood as a kind of *recursivity*, between the world and the sedimented meanings and rules that govern speech, which together form a circuit in which speech becomes possible. In coming to this understanding, we will be able to explicitly state Merleau-Ponty's critique of Descartes' dualism.

It is important to note why, in this section, we are focused on speech. While it is clear that language can be written as well as spoken, we will mostly limit our consideration of language to speech because this phenomenon comes closest to our experience of language as an incarnate power. Speech, and concomitantly our ability to hear, clearly admit of a kind of reversibility, because audition is the other side of vociferation and vice versa. Speech is, in a sense, the closest we come to realizing the possibility of reversibility with other people; however, like the vision of another, we can never experience what it is like to speak in a voice that is not our own. While vociferation and audition admit of a form of reversibility, Merleau-Ponty's aim is to understand how the sense of an utterance is a product of the fact that sense arises through infra-referentiality (it refers to its own arrangement) and extra-referentiality (it refers to the arrangement of the world).³²

Merleau-Ponty's only overt discussion of reversibility and speech appears in the final pages of the chapter, "The Intertwining-The Chiasm," in *The Visible and the Invisible*. His discussion of this subject is brief, but extremely rich and nuanced. In it, Merleau-Ponty claims that linguistic expressivity is a carnal activity that also admits of the possibility of reversibility.

As we have seen, sensibility and sense are reversible; the world is what we see, precisely because we are visible. Perception is invariantly on the side of one's body, but is, nevertheless, of the world. Perceiving is a product of the "I can" and not the "I think", it is an ability rather than a product of intellectual reflection. In addition, we saw that the visible world is arranged diacritically, and that the visible is not an absolute positivity; rather, the visible is a result of the differences and similarities *between* things. Furthermore, we saw that the visible admits of a "second skin," the invisible realm of meaning. Let us now consider the process of acquiring the ability to speak.

We learn to speak with, and from, others. Like perception, the ability to speak is not a result of intellectual reflection, it is not an "I think." Rather, it is an ability that we acquire, it is an "I can." When we speak, we use our tongue, our lips, and other speech organs; however, acquiring the ability to speak is not merely an initiation into the use of our tongues, lips and other speech organs (although it is necessary to develop the ability to use them in order to speak). Acquiring the power of speech involves, in part, initiation into the established or sedimented meanings of the language that one is taught. While a young child may learn to use her body to speak, a child does not initially *know* the meaning of many of the words that she is using. When we speak, we are employing significations that are already established. However, the acquisition of the ability to speak is not the establishment of a one-to-one correspondence between words and things in the world. Rather, language is the way in which human beings come to inhabit a world that makes *sense*. Learning to speak is learning to rearrange and reconfigure the world according to speech in such a way that it makes sense for other people. Meanings are not acquired through the determination of how a word corresponds to a thing in the world,

but rather they are acquired in clusters, in thickets - we come to understand words as we use them, with others, in situations. We can notice the movement of reversibility in the fact that, for a child, speech is learned in situations, and speech simultaneously establishes a situation for the child. [*PhP* 401]

Consider also the experiences of adults who are learning to speak a second language, insofar as the initial learning is often slow. They have difficulty understanding how to use the second language in a lived-situation. These learners find putting sentences together according to a formula easy, but find the active, creative use of speech difficult. As they learn to use the language, their ability begins to grow exponentially. Often times, the recognition of only a few words will allow them to infer the meaning of an entire expression. Established meanings are acquired for an adult, like a child, in thickets that make sense *in*, and *of*, situations.

We can understand that the process of learning to speak involves the acquiring of a sense (*sens*) of the situation of which one is a part. Perhaps this can be elucidated by considering language as a dimension. Once we have been initiated into the ability to speak, there opens before us a dimension that cannot be closed and in which we are necessarily situated; once we have been initiated into speech, there is no question of going back to a world that is void of meaning. Merleau-Ponty writes:

“With the first vision, the first contact, the first pleasure, there is initiation, that is, not the positing of a content, but the opening of a dimension that can never again be closed, the establishment of a level in terms of which every other experience will henceforth be situated. The idea is this level, this dimension. [*VI* 151]

Like our ability to perceive, which opens upon the dimensions of the phenomenal world, linguistic expressivity opens upon an invisible dimension of meaning. The establishment

of this dimension is a result of our initiation into the ability to speak, and it is from within this dimension that all subsequent experiences will be articulated.

We must further recognize that established meanings do not come into being *ex nihilo*. Words and expressions are sedimented, or established. They have their complex histories, which are established over time in societies and cultures. However, as much as words are sedimented, the history of a word need not be known by the speaker or hearer in order for it to be used in a meaningful way. Even though words have their history, they must be used in a situation in order to attain their true function as significations. Words are *only* comprehensible within the pre-given horizon in which they find their place; the meaning of a word is intertwined with the world in which we live with others. As such, speech only ever makes sense, either to the one who speaks or the one who listens, in relation to a situation that is, in fact, never thematizable *in toto*. Sedimented meanings have their history, but they must be used in order to be meaningful. As such, we may not understand the invisible to be a completely circumscribed, determinate thing. While the established meaning of a word can certainly be found in a dictionary, the fact remains that the meanings of words are not absolute. As we know, words and expressions often have multiple meanings, and - as such - a word only assumes its true significance in relation to the situation in which it is expressed. Furthermore, inasmuch as we may attempt to take hold of the meaning of a word, it always recedes beneath our attempts. Merleau-Ponty writes, “[e]ach time we want to get at it immediately, or lay hands on it, or circumscribe it, or see it unveiled, we do in fact feel that the attempt is misconceived, that it retreats in the measure that we approach.” [VI 150] Meaning is diaphanous, evanescent, invisible, and it is only between people that a linguistic

expression comes to have a sense. As such, we do not possess the invisible absolutely. We use speech to express the world of which we are a part, but that we *use* speech does not mean that we possess it. Indeed, it is not something that we can possess, because words and meanings “are negativity or absence circumscribed; they possess us.” [VI 151] Meaning exists in-between people who share a common world; it is not a thing, rather it is in “filigree” across space. [VI 215] While speech seems to be quasi-detachable from empirical reality (it is diaphanous and evanescent), it in fact remains forever bound to the world in which it originates.³³ Merleau-Ponty writes:

[i]t is as though the visibility that animates the sensible world were to emigrate, not outside of every body, but into another less heavy, more transparent body, as though it were to change flesh, abandoning the flesh of the body for that of language, and thereby would be emancipated but not freed from every condition.” [VI 153]

Although speech exhibits a quasi-detachability, it is never - *in fact*- liberated from its bonds with the world. Speech, like perception, is a worldly phenomenon; all speech is *of* the world, and all speech is *about* the world. In this sense, just as vision is the visible world turned back upon itself, and thus reflecting itself, speech is the world both reflecting and illuminating itself.

Furthermore, we must understand that meaning simultaneously depends upon the arrangement of signs. Words, taken individually, are not meaningful. The arrangement of what is said depends, as does the arrangement of the visible world, on differences - in this case, the difference is between words. However, their arrangement is not one of “pure” differentiation. Indeed, the arrangement of what is said is governed by the rules that govern language: syntax and grammar. In this way, the sense of what is said, in part, depends upon the arrangement of what is said.

Notice also that the rules governing language need not be thematized in order to be operative. Just as one need not know the history of a word in order to use it, one need not be able to explicate the rules of a language in order to speak it coherently. A child's initiation into language does not necessarily involve teaching her about the rules of language; in fact, many adult English speakers may not be able to explicate the rules that govern the English language. We simply speak to children and, gradually, the sounds that they make begin to sound like ours. Whereas the sounds that they make were once mere babble, over time their sounds begin to make sense. They make mistakes, and we repeat their sentences back to them correctly. Learning a language is this mimesis, this back and forth. At first, we do not learn to form coherent sentences on the basis of learning the rules explicitly. Rather, we learn the rules by using them, by mimicking other speakers. As such, the rules that render language coherent, and that govern language's variation, are not a product of the "I think" (of intellectual reflection), but rather of the "I can," in that the rules that govern language are *operative* whenever something is said. In this regard, it matters very little whether one is speaking English, Russian or Korean; whether or not one can thematize the rules of a language cannot change the fact that the rules of that language are operative.

Given these considerations, we may now begin to understand the interplay of infra-referentiality and extra-referentiality. Speech is infra-referential insofar as the arrangement of sounds is organized with reference to the rules that govern language. At the same time, speech is always about a world that we share with other people and speech is composed of already established significations.³⁴ In this way, speech is simultaneously extra-referential, it always refers to the world from which it originates. The interplay of

infra-referentiality and extra-referentiality can be better understood if we consider, as Merleau-Ponty does, an analogy between speech and the performance of a piece of music.

The sounds that make up Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* have been established, they are transcribed and accessible to all who can read music, and the sounds are governed by rules (for instance, the time signature). However, a piece of music is essentially sonorous, insofar as it has to be taken up by musicians in order to be truly heard. A musician who performs a piece of music does not think the music, he gives it life, gives it a body through the performance of his body. The sonata is not "taken up" through an intellectual process, but through the musician's abilities. Merleau-Ponty writes:

The performer is no longer producing or reproducing the sonata: he feels himself and others feel him to be at the service of the sonata; the sonata sings through him or cries out so suddenly that he must "dash on his bow" to follow it. And these open vortexes in the sonorous world finally form one sole vortex in which the ideas fit with each other." [VI 151]

Similarly, when we speak or hear a linguistic phrase we do not take full possession of the meaning of this phrase. The sounds fill us with their sonority, they animate our tongues, our ears - our whole body. Like the musician who, in performing the *Moonlight Sonata*, must "dash on his bow," we take up the movement of speech, in that we hear and speak according to what has been said. Just as the *Moonlight Sonata* is not found in each musical note, the meaning of an expression is not found in each word. When we speak, each word comes after the other, each supersedes the other. The meaning of the expression is found in the spaces between the words, and in the whole arrangement of words.³⁵ The meaning of a word, or the sound of a musical note *is* what it is, only insofar as it *is not* some other word or note. The *Moonlight Sonata* is founded between the notes,

and it is in this in-between that a unity is formed, albeit a unity which cannot be seized or thematized *in toto*. Merleau-Ponty writes:

“Why not admit...that language as well as music can sustain a sense by virtue of its own arrangement, catch a meaning in its own mesh, that it does so without exception each time it is conquering, active, creative language, each time something is in the strong sense said.” [VI 153]

Speech, like music, is organized vis a vis the arrangement of sounds. But like speech, a piece of music is not reducible to the arrangement of sounds. Musical notes, like words, must be used, incarnated, in order to assume their true significance. Considering the *Moonlight Sonata*, we may say that it is complexly arranged according to the rules that govern music and the notes that compose it have been established as the “*Moonlight Sonata*,” and not some other piece of music. Furthermore, in order to be heard, in order for the notes to be more than simply signs on a page, the piece of music must be taken up by performers.

Let us specifically consider extra-referentiality and infra-referentiality. When we speak, our words are organized according to the open matrix of differences, as well as the rules, that govern the arrangement of anything that can be said. In this way, speech is *infra-referential*, its sense is a result of the way in which it reflects its own arrangement. However, if linguistic sense were only founded in infra-referentiality, then everything that a person said would make sense as long as it conformed to the rules of language. Consider the statement: “It is too hot outside.” This sentence makes perfect sense on the plane of infra-referentiality, as it is arranged in accordance with the rules that govern the English language. In addition, it is composed of words whose meanings have long been established. However, if this phrase were uttered, for example, during the winter months at a weather station located in Antarctica, this statement, on the plane of *extra-*

referentiality, makes very little sense. What this illustrates is that the arrangement of signs alone is not enough to guarantee that something that is said makes sense. To understand the sense of an expression, it is necessary to consider how that expression refers to the situation in which it is spoken. Therefore, we must recognize that even if a statement is meaningful vis-a-vis infra-referentiality, the plane of extra-referentiality remains forever open. Even if a phrase is coherent and seemingly true, we still never arrive at a completely determinate meaning.³⁶

Consider, as we did in chapter one, that because perspective unfolds as a modulation in a dimension of variation, a complete thematization of our situation or the world is impossible. Like perspective, which is always on the side of one's body but is nonetheless *of* a world that is numerically the same for everyone, we speak from our own invariant perspective about a world that we co-belong to. Expressions draw forth questions and requests for clarification, as we interrogate each other and the world in order to understand what has been said. The world exists for us, as Merleau-Ponty writes, "in an interrogative mode." [VI 103] Nothing that can be said will completely thematize our situation or the world, nothing will put an end to further interrogation and, therefore, the possibility of further clarification, of further thematization, is never closed.

We can understand with Dillon, that speech makes sense insofar as it simultaneously refers to (a) its own arrangement (it is infra-referential) and (b) to the situation *in* and *about* which we speak (it is extra-referential). Both of these elements must be satisfied in order for something that is said to make sense. In this way, we may understand the claim that "[l]anguage is everything, since it is the voice of no one, since it is the very voice of the things, the waves, the forests." [VI 155] As Dillon makes clear,

language is the voice of no one because the established meanings of a language and the rules that govern it are neither produced nor possessed by anyone. While words have complex etymologies and the rules that govern a language evolve and change over time, it is nevertheless the case that no one can be said to be its originator. At the same time, language always refers to the world that we share with others, and in this way it is “the very voice of the things.” The world, in other words, is expressed through speech. Therefore, we may say that language is the voice of no one insofar as it is infra-referential and it is the voice of the things insofar as it is extra-referential.

In addition, Merleau-Ponty claims that we need not synthesize these two views of referentiality because they name “two aspects of the same reversibility which is the ultimate truth.” [Ibid.] But, how can we understand this form of reversibility? I think that it can be understood through the consideration of the following passage:

“[Ideas] are that certain divergence, that never-finished differentiation, that openness never to be reopened between the sign and the sign, as the flesh is, we said, the dehiscence of the seeing into the visible and of the visible into seeing. And just as my body sees only because it is a part of the visible in which it opens forth, *the sense upon which the arrangement of the sounds opens back upon the arrangement.*”³⁷ [VI 153-154; emphasis added.]

As we have seen, the perceiving body is capable of vision because it is visible. Vision, in this way, opens back upon the situation in which it originates. Analogously, speech is possible precisely because the situation reflects, or echoes [*se répercute*], what is said. Reversibility allows the arrangement of words to make sense, and then this sense ricochets back upon the situation and further illuminates it. In other words, as Merleau-Ponty writes, “the sense upon which the arrangement of the sounds opens back upon the arrangement” Notice what Merleau-Ponty is claiming in the passage cited above. The sense of an expression is not only a result of the arrangement of sounds. Rather, it is our

sense of the situation that we are in that renders the arrangement of words coherent, and the arrangement reflects back upon the situation in which it is uttered. The truth that is revealed here is that an expression makes sense only insofar as the meaning of an expression rests, not in the arrangement of words only, but in the way in which the world is reflected, or echoed, in that expression. In this way, we may again see that meaning comes in thickets and all at once. Dillon makes this clear when he writes:

The words makes sense when the words make sense. This is not a mere tautology: it is the function of words to *make* sense and they succeed in this function only when that signification returns to illumine the organization of the chain of signifiers that brought it to light.³⁸

As we can see, there is indeed a circuit of infra-referentiality and extra-referentiality.

However, Merleau-Ponty seems to also think that, in order for something said to make sense, extra-referentiality must precede infra-referentiality.

As we have already considered, the human body is capable of perception because it is perceivable. In addition, we have seen that perception is reversible in relation to one's own body, to things and to other people, but this reversibility is "always imminent, but never realized in fact." [VI 147-48] In much the same way, we may say that the reversibility of speech is similarly "always imminent and never realized in fact." Speech reflects the world, but this reflection is asymmetrical. We can no more speak in another's voice than speak in such a way as to completely thematize our situation or the world. Like a mirror, speech thematizes only that which is before it and, like the phenomenon of light, it renders some aspects of our situation intelligible while it obscures other aspects of it. On the basis of our recognition of this consistently murky interplay of what is perceivable to us, and sayable by us, we may say that there is also a reversibility, or recursivity, of perception and language. Merleau-Ponty writes:

[a]s the visible takes hold of the look which has unveiled it and which forms part of it, the signification *rebounds* upon its own means, it annexes itself to itself the speech that becomes an object of science, it antedates itself by a retrograde movement which is never completely belied - because already, in opening the horizon of the nameable and the sayable, the speech acknowledged that it has its place in the horizon." [VI 154; emphasis added.]

Speech, Merleau-Ponty shows us, is the metamorphosis of the seeable into the sayable, and this metamorphosis is simultaneously governed by rules. However, as we have seen, the arrangement of sounds only makes sense once it finds its proper place in the situation in which it is uttered; in this way "the signification rebounds upon its own means", the situation and the world in which it originates.

However, we must recognize that, inasmuch as there is a reversibility that is analogous to perception and language, there is also a difference between them.³⁹ After all, unlike vision which is characterized by sensitivity to light, speech can be understood as a kind of light, as a form of illumination. There is the world that is taken up by vision, and there is also the world *according* to humans - the latter is the world that is illuminated through speech. There is a metamorphosis of vision into speech, but there is nevertheless a difference. As Barbaras writes:

There is certainly a distinction to be made between language and perception...which depends on the fact that speech works with already signified entities, that is engenders new significations on the basis of established significations, while perception is the givenness of the originary sense.⁴⁰

The world that is opened upon by perception is not identical to the world that is illuminated by language - there is an asymmetry. We cannot *absolutely* equate perception and language, because language is the metamorphosis of the seeable *into* the sayable. The visible world overflows with sense and, as such, it is the ground of all possible signification, but it is up to people, who see and hear, to imbue a situation with a new significance. As Merleau-Ponty writes, "thought thinks," "glances glance," and

“speech speaks,” but we must recognize that “between the two identical words there is the whole spread one straddles in order to think, speak, and see.” [S 21]

As paradoxical as it may at first sound, we must also recognize that, in a sense, the difference between perception and language is only part of the story. This recognition is a result of the fact that while vision and speech are not *absolutely* coincidental, vision and speech are also not *absolutely* distinct. There is a *difference* between perception and language, and this difference is nothing more than that which makes the *intertwining* of the seeable and the sayable possible. This will become more apparent as we consider the visible and the invisible in light of this formulation.

We can understand the intertwining of perception and language better if we consider again the notion of the “visible *and* the invisible.” We should not consider them as words written on this page, but as they appear in lived experience. Merleau-Ponty describes the visible as that which, “centred on a nucleus of absence,” imposes itself on vision. [VI 229] Perception is invariant, vision depends on *this* experience but, as Barbaras writes, “the visible gives itself as owing nothing to it.”⁴¹ The visible world offers itself to vision, which is, in turn, reconfigured in speech. However, we obviously cannot reconfigure the world at will. Rather, the world offers itself to speech through perception, and extra-referentiality ensures that what we say, if it is to make sense, conforms to the world from which it originates. There is a difference between the visible and the invisible, but the invisible is forever *bound* to the world which it *rebounds* upon.

Let us consider the visible and the invisible further, specifically paying attention to the conventional idea of the invisible (speech) as disconnected from the visible. We may

argue that if we were to posit a radical bifurcation between the visible and the invisible, then we would be merely reproducing the problems that arise from Cartesian dualism, insofar as we would reify the visible and the invisible by assuming that each can appear in a way that is completely determinate and thematizable (as we have asserted, this is an impossibility). How, if such a claim of radical distinction is correct, can the invisible be the “invisible of this world?” How, in other words, can speech be understood to be extra-referential if there is such a strict bifurcation?

At the same time, if we conceive of the visible and the invisible as ultimately coincidental, then have we not merely reduced language to perception, thus eliminating the fact that the world appears in an interrogative mode, as in need of clarification? If there is no boundary between the visible and the invisible, then how are we to understand the commerce of truth and falsity, or the demands of plurality and human dialogue? In other words, if there is no distinction between the “visible” and the “invisible,” then the invisible seems rather superfluous.

Understood another way, we have seen that Merleau-Ponty’s exploration of the reversibilities of perception led him to understand that there is a certain measure of asymmetry between one’s perception, the perceptions of others, and the world. Reversibility on the perceptual level is “always imminent but never realized in fact.” [VI 147-48] Similarly, there is an asymmetrical relationship between the visible and the invisible, the invisible is not a complete reproduction of the visible. The invisible is a reflection of the visible, but a reflection that is characterized simultaneously by both difference *and* continuity.⁴² The reversibility of speech is, in part, grounded in extra-referentiality, but it does not re-produce or re-present the world. In other words, the

meaning that is incarnated in speech, the invisible, is not an exact copy of the visible, nor is it absolutely different; rather, it is intertwined with the visible.

An alternative, Barbaras writes, to understanding the visible and the invisible as radically circumscribed and bifurcated, is to comprehend that

[t]he field of the visible cannot, then, be rigorously circumscribed. As soon as the visible attests to an invisible, the visible could never be definitively fixed as the sole mode by which the intelligible is given; it slips beyond itself as pure visible and is articulated as another “visibility” of the invisible, which is *sayability*.⁴³

If we conceive of the visible and the invisible as radically circumscribed entities, we miss the fact that each is only intelligible in relation to the other, we miss the fact that they function as a unity (that, for us, is only ever presumptive). The visible and the invisible are neither radically bifurcated, nor are they absolutely coincidental. There is simultaneously a *difference* (the visible is not reducible to the invisible) and *continuity* (there is no invisible in absence of the visible). Each invariant vision, like each invariant act of speech, is a “coherent deformation,” a reconfiguration of the world in which we live with others. The human ability to configure and reconfigure *one and the same world* through speech entails that expressive meaning can be, *at the same time*, “singular and multiple.”⁴⁴ The value of articulating the relationship of the visible and the invisible, according to the possibility of reversibility, is that it destabilizes that which is reduced and reified by reflective consciousness. The result of naming this relationship “reversible” is that emphasis is placed precisely on the fact that this relationship is characterized by difference and continuity.

Before his death, Merleau-Ponty composed a remarkable description of the reversibility of speech, which is included in the working notes of *The Visible and the Invisible*:

The taxi driver at Manchester saying to me (I understood only a few seconds later, so briskly were the words “struck off”): I will ask the police where *Brixton Avenue* is.—Likewise in the tobacco shop, the woman’s phrase: *Shall I wrap them together?* which I understood only after a few seconds—and *all at once*....once the meaning is given the signs take on the full value of “signs.” But first the meaning must be given. But then *how* is it given? Probably a chunk of the verbal chain is identified, projects the meaning which returns upon the signs....It is *gestaltung and Rückgestaltung*... [VI 189]

Here we find Merleau-Ponty, in a rare instance, writing in the first person and describing the movement of reversibility that is proper to speech. The taxi driver says, “I will ask the police where *Brixton Avenue* is,” and the shopkeeper asks, “Shall I wrap them together?” In both examples, for the expression to be understood, “first the meaning must be given.” The situation is reflected in the arrangement of the verbal chain, which illuminates the situation before us and simultaneously renders the signs properly significant. The understanding of the meaning comes in an instant and “all at once,” it is *perceived*, and only then becomes a *perception* in speech. [Ibid.] We can understand this if we consider that the meaning is perceived in an instant and that “perception is *of itself* an openness upon a field of *Gestalten*.” [VI 189] This openness to form and reformation is further assurance that “perception is unconscious,” it is a product not of the “I think,” but of the “I can.” [Ibid.] We can clearly see this in Merleau-Ponty’s experience at the tobacco shop. The woman says, “Shall I wrap these together?” When he hears the woman ask him this question, it makes sense to him in terms of the situation that he and the shopkeeper share. The sense of the situation established between Merleau-Ponty and the shopkeeper *rebounds* upon, or is *echoed* in, the phrase, thus reconfiguring the situation. The moment of extra-referentiality precedes the moment of infra-referentiality,

but both must be in play for the sense to be given. Notice that between the visible and the invisible reversibility is neither completely obtained, nor is it outlawed entirely. There is a coherent deformation of the visible into the invisible and, through this coherent deformation, something is said and heard.

We have argued that Merleau-Ponty's thought can be understood through his opposition to Cartesian dualism. We may now specify how his late philosophy responds to this issue. He writes:

The immediate and dualist distinction between the visible and the invisible, between extension and thought, being impugned, not that extension be thought or thought extension, because they are the obverse and the reverse of one another, and the one forever behind the other. [VI 152]

Here we find the crux of Merleau-Ponty's critique of Descartes. There is no *strict* bifurcation between what Descartes termed *the res cogitans* and the *res extensa*, because neither is intelligible outside of its relation to the other. Like the mirror image, they are the other side of each other. We may say that the dualist bifurcation is overcome by Merleau-Ponty in the phenomena of speech. Yet, as Dillon maintains, this does not mean that Merleau-Ponty has merely multiplied entities, adding language to the Cartesian bifurcation as a third entity. Speech is not an entity, is not a thing; it is, rather, diaphanous and comes into being in filigree across space. It is the very means of the in-between, because, Merleau-Ponty tells us, the world and being "hold together only in movement; it is only in this way that all things can be together." [S 22] In sum, there is no strict bifurcation between the visible world, the one who sees it, and other "visionaries." [VI 39] Such a bifurcation would be false because the distance between these three elements is not collapsed, but traversed, by speech. The world in which we

live with others is rendered intelligible through speech. Like the phenomenon of light, language illuminates, but is not a circumscribable thing.

Unlike Descartes, Merleau-Ponty does not begin with a radical bifurcation of Being into distinct and determinate orders; he chooses, rather, to begin with their intertwining. We can see that it is in beginning with the intertwining of the visible and invisible that Merleau-Ponty tries to leave the world's "opaqueness" intact. [EM 159] In so doing, he refuses to allow us to "ignore the strangeness of the world." [S 22] It is not that the visible and the invisible exist as mere opposites, rather their relation is both differential *and* continuous. Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of language is an attempt to think the visible and the invisible not ambivalently, but *ambiguously*.

In this section, we have attempted to identify the reversibility that is proper to speech. This reversibility can be summarized as follows. The visible and the invisible are not radically bifurcated or circumscribed. There is a difference between the visible and the invisible, and this difference is what makes their continuity possible. The invisible is a metamorphosis of the visible world, which returns upon the visible world and further illuminates it, but this metamorphosis is governed by both infra-referentiality and extra-referentiality. The arrangement of sounds must satisfy the rules that govern its arrangement, but the sense of the arrangement is only understandable in relation to the way in which what is said reflects the situation in which it is uttered. As such, "first the sense must be given" in order for an expression to make sense, but this sense is not deduced from the arrangement of signifiers; rather, "the sense upon which the arrangement of the sounds opens back upon the arrangement." [VI 154] In the following chapter, we will attempt to better understand the reversibility of speech and the visible

and the invisible through consideration of Merleau-Ponty's understanding of metaphor, as it is interpreted by Barbaras.

In sum, the question of the relationship between speech and the world can be addressed through the notion of reversibility. Speech and the world exist in a relationship whereby the world is reflected in what is said, and this reflection returns upon the world and illuminates it. This reflection is not an exact copy of the world, but rather a reconfiguration of it. In the following chapter, we will attempt to give an example of the notion of reversibility as it appears through the mundane example of metaphor. Drawing upon Barbaras' interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's thoughts on metaphor, we will be able to demonstrate the primacy of the world in the establishment of the sense of an expression.

3 Metaphor and Reversibility

In this chapter, we turn our attention to the important question of how to identify the movement of reversibility. Such an identification is difficult to make because we cannot identify this movement from a perspective that is outside of the movement. We have seen that the visible and the invisible are not radically bifurcated or circumscribed; we have also seen that they are not completely thematizable, because we cannot perceive them from without (we cannot lay the visible and the invisible bare before us, and we cannot soar over them). How are we to understand the appearance of the visible and the invisible, particularly with regard to the reversibility of speech? The answer, I think, seems to be found in Merleau-Ponty's comments on metaphor, as they are interpreted by Barbaras. Understanding Merleau-Ponty's remarks about metaphor will allow us to indirectly reveal the appearance of the visible and the invisible, and the movement of the reversibility of speech. In order to understand this, we will first consider the traditional view of metaphor as *transfer*, a view that Merleau-Ponty is critical of. Secondly, we will consider Merleau-Ponty's comments about metaphor as they are interpreted by Barbaras. This will allow us to understand that the visible and invisible are neither completely circumscribed or reducible to each other. Finally, we will return to our discussion of reversibility in order to understand how metaphor indirectly reveals this movement. In engaging with this line of thought, we will be able to develop a deeper sense of the relationship between speech and the common world.

As Jerry H. Gill claims, “[i]n simple terms, the crucial feature of the metaphoric mode is the effort to comprehend an unfamiliar, frequently intangible aspect of reality in terms of, or in relation to, more familiar, tangible aspects.”⁴⁵ For instance, the expression

'life is a journey,' makes sense of "life" through the notion of a "journey," which has a beginning and an end and that traverses time and space. In this metaphor, the familiar term "journey," is used to describe the entirety of a human life (which is rather intangible and mysterious). Metaphor is commonly understood as "a figure of speech in which a name or descriptive word or phrase is *transferred* to an object or action different from, but analogous to, that to which it is literally applicable."⁴⁶ According to this definition, the metaphor 'life is a journey' is made possible by the transfer of the sense of the term "journey," to the term "life." However, what is fundamental to understand about metaphor is the interplay of literal and metaphoric sense. We can see this interplay in the metaphor 'life is a journey.' This metaphor cannot be literally true because, if it were, then it would not be a metaphor, but rather a literal description. When we say that 'life *is* a journey,' the literal sense of the expression is that 'life *is not* a journey.' From this literal 'is not,' we derive the metaphoric sense of a metaphor, in that life is not literally like a journey, and yet the metaphor makes sense to us and reveals something to us. There is a sense, a metaphoric sense, in which life *can be* described as a journey, and this metaphoric sense is - in principle - understandable to anyone who may hear it.

Take Merleau-Ponty's example of the metaphor 'a direction of thought.' In this metaphor, thought is said to be *like* spatial direction. However, in reality, thought does not admit of a direction in any literal sense. Thus, on the literal plane, we may say that thought *is not* a direction. However, it is here, from the wreckage of the literal sense of the metaphor, that the metaphoric sense of the expression is born. It is important to notice that this metaphor cannot be made sense of through the identification of literal commonalities between spatial direction and "intellectual direction." This cannot be

done because neither spatial direction nor thought admit of positive qualities, and thus it is difficult to understand how commonalities may be identified. Recognizing this difficulty leads us to an interesting problem. If neither spatial direction nor thought admit of positive qualities, then how can our sense of ‘spatial direction’ be *transferred* to ‘thought’? This last question is at the heart of Merleau-Ponty’s remarks about metaphor, which we shall now turn to.

In a working note, composed in November 1959, which is included in *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty makes the following comment about the phenomenon of metaphor:

A “direction” of thought - This is not a *metaphor* - There is no *metaphor* between the visible and the invisible...*metaphor* is too much or too little: too much if the invisible is really invisible, too little if it lends itself to transposition...[VI 221-22]

As Barbaras remarks, in this passage Merleau-Ponty does not reject the possibility of metaphor, he rather rejects an understanding of it that is characterised by the notion of transfer.⁴⁷ As we shall see, Barbaras interprets Merleau-Ponty’s comments to mean that understanding metaphor as transfer fails to acknowledge that the terms of the metaphor, in this case ‘a direction of thought,’ are neither highly circumscribed nor entities.

Barbaras’ interpretation intends to make explicit that, for Merleau-Ponty, metaphors are possible precisely insofar as the terms of the relation are not related on the basis of an axis of identity, but rather come into being through their difference.⁴⁸ As we shall see, metaphors are possible because they arise as a modulation in a dimension of variation, in which anything that is, is only insofar as it *is not* something else. Thus, Barbaras claims, metaphor is not the result of the addition of a term of comparison, but rather is a modality of the copula.⁴⁹ Let us consider Barbaras’ interpretation in detail.

Barbaras claims that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy can be understood "as the response to a question (that Merleau-Ponty does not explicitly ask but which clearly drives him): under what conditions, *from the side of the world*, is metaphor possible?"⁵⁰ Notice that, if Barbaras' interpretation is correct, Merleau-Ponty is considering the conditions of the world in which we live that make metaphor a *dynamic* and - at the same time - *meaningful* modality of language. As we can see in the working note under consideration, Merleau-Ponty does not try to lay the phenomenon of metaphor out before us, to remove its depth and opaqueness. Rather, he attempts to let it appear "in its strangeness, in order to draw from it consequences for the ontological plane."⁵¹

Consider the metaphor 'a direction of thought.' In Barbaras' estimation, if we understand this metaphor according to the traditional view, then we must consider spatial direction (visible) and thought (invisible) as circumscribed entities "in the objective world to then relate them on the basis of properties or aspects that they have in common[.]"⁵² This poses a problem for the traditional view of metaphor as transfer. If neither of the terms of the relation admit of positive qualities, and are not rigidly circumscribed, then how is a transfer possible? The answer, in Barbaras' opinion, can be found in the recognition that "rather than posit beings carrying these properties and consequently defining the latter as attributes, we must conceive them on the basis of the possibility of establishing a relation between them, *of figuring each one by the other*."⁵³ We have already seen that the visible world appears only as and through the figuration of every thing by every other thing. This figuration is what makes metaphor, on the side of the world, possible. As such, the possibility of metaphoric speech "attests to an ontological mode that is irreducible to that of the determinate individual, the subject of

predicates; it is based on the dimension, proceeds from this axis around which things are constituted as variants.»⁵⁴

The heart of Barbaras' interpretation of this passage from the working notes, is that the terms that compose the metaphor ('a direction of thought') cannot be understood as rigidly circumscribed entities and thus do not admit of the possibility of transfer.

Barbaras writes:

As soon as the terms of the relation (the visible and the invisible, spatial direction and intellectual direction) are understood as circumscribed beings...the idea of a transfer indeed expresses too much or too little. Too much, because if it is truly the case that the two terms are radically separated, one cannot even begin to see how a relation could be established; if the invisible is conceived as negation of the visible, nothing in it would ever be signified by the visible.⁵⁵

In the first place, the notion of transfer expresses "too much." If the terms that are related in the metaphor are radically circumscribed, then a transfer must somehow occur between terms that are seemingly so bifurcated that it is difficult to understand how a transfer would even be possible. If the relation between the terms "does not enter into the definition of the terms," then what basis is there for a transfer?⁵⁶ Put another way, if the invisible is the negation of the visible, then it is difficult to understand how the invisible could signify the visible.⁵⁷ In addition, we should note that if we attempt to understand this metaphor as a transfer between circumscribed entities "on the basis of properties or aspects that they have in common," then we do not take into consideration the literal 'is not' of the metaphor.⁵⁸ We overlook the literal sense of the metaphor, in favour of the metaphorical sense.⁵⁹ However, as we have seen, both the literal and the metaphorical sense of a metaphor must be in play for a metaphor to make sense. For these reasons, it seems as though understanding metaphor as transfer seems unfounded.

In the second place, if we understand the metaphor ('a direction of thought') as a transfer, then the idea of a transfer seems to also express "too little." If a transfer is possible, then there must already be some commonality between the terms, causing it to seem unnecessary; Barbaras writes that the term transfer expresses

[t]oo little, because if the terms consent to transposition, *one could no longer speak solely of transposition*. The visible and the invisible can signify each other only because it is not a question of two radically separate worlds, because a deeper unity, an ontological complicity crosses them. The notion of metaphor as transposition is thus inadequate due to the lack of distinct terms.⁶⁰

Barbaras' claim can be understood as follows. As we have already discussed, if the terms are strictly circumscribed, and admit of a transfer, then it becomes difficult to understand how a transfer is possible or even necessary. Furthermore, if we understand that there is a transfer between the terms of the relation, then we have posited that there is "an axis of identity between the terms - *their adherence to the same dimension* - which contests the existence of distinct entities and then, because it lacks a divergence, *the possibility of a transfer*."⁶¹ The idea is, if we posit that the "qualities" of a spatial dimension can be transferred to the level of thought, then we have posited that spatial direction and thought adhere to the same dimension; consequently, to claim that the terms are radically circumscribed seems erroneous. Put another way, if the visible and the invisible are not highly circumscribed (the condition that allows for the possibility of transfer), then it seems as though there is, in fact, no need for a transfer because there is an "axis of identity" between the terms. Therefore, metaphor cannot be understood to be the result of a transfer.

In sum, Barbaras interprets Merleau-Ponty's comments about metaphor to indicate, not that metaphors are impossible, but that metaphors cannot be understood as a transfer

of sense between highly circumscribed entities. His reasoning is two-fold. First, if the terms of the relation are understood to be highly circumscribed entities then the notion of metaphor as a transfer is impossible. Between radically separate entities, there is no common space for a transfer to occur. If the terms of the relation consent to transfer, then this transfer must overcome the strict circumscription of the terms, implying a circumscription that is not strict. Secondly, if the circumscription of the terms is overcome, then we can no longer speak merely of transfer, because if the terms are not circumscribed then there must already be some semblance of commonality between the terms. If there is a commonality, then it seems as though there is - in fact - no need for a transfer. Through exploring the notion of metaphor as transfer, Barbaras reveals the impossibility of this understanding.

Let us now consider how Barbaras uses these ideas to make sense of the metaphor 'a direction of thought.' If spatial direction (the visible) and intellectual "direction" (the invisible) are strictly determinate entities, then it is difficult to understand how they may be put into relation in the metaphor 'a direction of thought.' After all, for the metaphor to make sense it must somehow overcome the radical circumscription of the terms. Similarly, as we have seen, if the circumscription of the terms can indeed be overcome, then it seems as though the terms are not so radically circumscribed - thus rendering the notion of a transfer superfluous. If the sense of the metaphor 'a direction of thought' cannot be understood to be made possible by transfer, then how can it be understood?

For Barbaras, the metaphor 'a direction of thought' is possible because there is "an ontological complicity" between the terms of the relation, such that the possibility of each figuring the other is maintained. Therefore, he insists, "[t]o speak of a "direction" of

thought is not, in fact, to appeal to a strictly spatial term in order to represent figuratively a strictly mental event; it is first to reveal - and to support oneself with - a dimension common to spatiality and meaning, “prior” to their distinction.”⁶² This metaphor is made possible on the side of the world, like all metaphors, by the fact that there is an “ontological complicity” between the visible and the invisible. As we have seen, the visible and the invisible are not circumscribed entities, but rather exist in a relation that can be characterised by difference and continuity. This complicity is revealed, albeit indirectly, in the possibility of the metaphor ‘a direction of thought.’ Barbaras claims that when we speak of ‘a direction of thought,’ we point to a dimension that is “deeper than the distinction between spatial and spiritual, of which both are crystallizations, both are modes of differentiation.”⁶³

Barbaras further articulates this claim through consideration of Merleau-Ponty’s allusion to a phrase of Claudel’s (which we considered in section one of chapter two). Barbaras claims that Merleau-Ponty’s allusion to “a certain blue of the sea is so blue that only blood would be more red” [VI 132], should be understood to mean that

[b]lue and red are variants in the dimension of colour; they are also in the dimension of a muted “thick” depth that is *at the same time* that of blood red and sea blue. These two terms, in their sensible reality, harbour a depth, crystallize this dimension, render visible this invisible, or rather are the visibility of the invisible.⁶⁴

With this phrase, Merleau-Ponty is indicating, albeit indirectly, that there is a dimension “deeper than the distinction between spatial and spiritual,” a dimension that both blood-red and sea-blue adhere to and in which they appear, not as things in themselves, but as modes of differentiation.⁶⁵ Sea-blue *is* sea-blue only insofar as it *is not* blood-red and, as such, blue and red are manifestations in a dimension of variation, in which each color *is* only insofar as it *is not* the other. Each color figures the other. Because each thing, like

each color, is not a determinate circumscribed entity, but rather a manifestation in a dimension of variation, the possibility of figuring each by the other is maintained. Therefore, Barbaras seems to claim, the double referentiality that makes metaphor meaningful (the metaphoric 'is' which is born of the literal 'is not') is not the result of the addition of a term of comparison, but is a modality of the copula.⁶⁶ Anything that is in the visible world, *is* precisely insofar as *it is* not something else and this differential relation is at the heart of the appearance of any term. This differential relation is what makes metaphor possible on the side of the world, because this relation, in being a modality of the visible, is also a modality of the invisible. Therefore, the dimension that is "revealed" when we speak of 'a direction of thought,' a dimension "deeper than the distinction between spatial and spiritual," is the same dimension that allows the metaphor "a certain blue of the sea is so blue that only blood would be more red" to make sense.⁶⁷

Of course, we must recognize the fact that just because every thing is figured by, or is a figuration of, every other thing, does not mean that all metaphors are created equal. There exists a tension between the "is" and the "is not" that allows metaphors to make sense; as such, this tension must be respected in any consideration of the possibility of metaphor. Not every literal 'is not,' can generate a metaphoric 'is'; we cannot put into relation any two terms and expect that they will generate a meaningful metaphor. What we find here, again, is the primacy of extra-referentiality over infra-referentiality. The grammatical and syntactic structure of language must be operative in order for an expression to make sense, however we cannot understand what makes a metaphor possible through an appeal to the infra-referentiality of language.⁶⁸ After all, we cannot insert just any terms on either side of the copula (*p is q*), and expect a metaphor to make

metaphoric sense. In this way, we can reassert that speech, and not only metaphorical speech, makes sense only in relation to situations and other people. This is true insofar as the destruction of literal sense which makes metaphor possible cannot be deduced from the infra-referential aspect of a metaphor. Rather, this sense can only be arrived at on the side of the world. It is extra-referentiality then, through appeal to the primacy of appearance, that ensures both the destruction of the literal sense, and the establishment of the metaphoric sense of the expression.

We have claimed, following Barbaras' interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's remarks on metaphor, that the possibility of the metaphoric modality attests, albeit indirectly, to a dimension "deeper than the distinction between spatial and spiritual, of which both [terms of the metaphor] are crystallizations, both are modes of differentiation."⁶⁹ We will be able to understand this idea better if we consider Barbaras' claim that Merleau-Ponty's comments about metaphor do not succumb to, what Ricoeur terms, "ontological vehemence." For Ricoeur, ontological vehemence is a view of metaphor characterised by the primacy of the metaphoric 'is' over the literal 'is not.' Ricoeur writes that this view is "naïve and uncritical" and that it focuses solely upon "the ecstatic moment of language - language going beyond itself."⁷⁰ For Ricoeur, an understanding of metaphor is ontologically vehement insofar as it emphasizes the "moment of belief," the moment when the literal sense of what is said, is eclipsed by the metaphoric sense. The problem with this understanding is that it is formulated as though the literal 'is not' is of no consequence.

Merleau-Ponty's remarks about metaphor do not succumb to ontological vehemence. Merleau-Ponty, Barbaras claims, does not emphasize the ecstatic moment of

language, nor does he posit a “beyond of language where indistinction would finally rule.”⁷¹ Metaphors do not refer to a realm where, red and blue or spatial direction and thought are indistinguishable. Its reference is not to a realm where things are not yet emblemized. The fact is that this dimension is the very means by which things come to be what they are. Barbaras writes:

While it is true that all things crystallize a dimension, remain on the way to individuation, it is no less true that the dimension is nothing other than what gathers it together and that nothing precedes this process of individuation. Every being could be accentuated as an emblem of Being, and metaphor reveals well the co-belonging of every thing at the world; but, just as much, Being is always already emblemized...*Every spoken word is still perception*, enrooted in a mute world and its merely presumptive objectifying power: as such, there is a truth of the metaphor against instituted language.⁷²

Being appears as “always already emblemized.” When we speak, we do not speak of a world in which things appear as nameless and unknown. When we set our eyes upon a table, we do not first determine what the qualities of the thing before our eyes are, and then infer, on the basis of these qualities, that it is a ‘table.’ The table is already emblemized.

Speech is grounded in our perception of the visible world, a world in which every thing can figure every other thing. As a result of this grounding in a dimension of variation, we are able to relate in speech that which cannot be related in reality. We are able to take up the differences in speech, and reconfigure the world according to them. Speech can give rise to a metaphorical “is” on the basis of a literal ‘is not.’ Again, when we perceive, we do not perceive things as nameless and unknown. After all, as obvious as it may sound, a table appears as ‘a table.’ Perception takes up what is sedimented in language, and this sedimentation must also be taken into consideration. Barbaras continues:

But, conversely, lived experience *is always spoken-lived experience*, the world already meaningful. Therefore, there is a truth of instituted language over against metaphor, and the specificity of metaphor as rupture vis a vis ordinary experience is preserved.⁷³

Things appear as always already emblemized and, as such, lived experience is lived-spoken. Therefore, inasmuch as perception allows us to relate terms that are unrelated in the world, the fact that perception is of things that have *already been nominated* ensures that the literal 'is not' of a metaphoric expression is maintained. Putting these two ideas together, we may say that there is a circuit of perception and language that makes the metaphorical modality possible. Every spoken word is founded in perception, it takes up the modality of the dimension of variation and, *at the same time*, every perception is of a world that is saturated with meaning. Thus perception is rooted in established meanings. As such, what Ricoeur terms, the "tensiveness"⁷⁴ of metaphor is maintained in Merleau-Ponty's notion of the circuit of perception and language; perception allows speech to reconfigure the world, but this reconfiguration does not break with sedimented meaning. If speech were to perform such a break, then the literal 'is not' could not be maintained. Therefore, perception permits speech to reconfigure the world through metaphor (to establish a metaphoric 'is'), only because perception is of a world that is already emblemized as established meanings, which come into being through difference, and thus the literal 'is not' remains in play. In sum, as Barbaras makes explicit, "[t]he dimension of sense, at once figurative and figured, is the truth of sense itself."⁷⁵

Let us attempt to relate this formulation to the notion of reversibility as we considered it in the preceding chapter. Barbaras claims that the dimension of sense is the truth of sense itself. We have already considered a similar idea, which we found in Dillon's interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of language:

The words makes sense when the words make sense. This is not a mere tautology: it is the function of words to *make* sense and they succeed in this function only when that signification returns to illumine the organization of the chain of signifiers that brought it to light.⁷⁶

Both Dillon and Barbaras seem to be asserting that the sense of a spoken expression only assumes its full significance in the situation in which it is uttered, which rebounds upon, or is echoed in, the sense of the expression. *This is the movement of reversibility at the level of speech.* Accordingly, we may further understand Merleau-Ponty's assertion that "the sense upon which the arrangement of the sounds opens back upon the arrangement." [VI 154] The sense of an expression is not merely a result of the systematic arrangement of signifiers; it is also the result of the situation, which reflects back upon the signification. This relationship, as it is described by Merleau-Ponty, entails that infra-referentiality makes sense insofar as it is illuminated by extra-referentiality; and it is only after this illumination, that the signification is able to be understood as a proper reconfiguration of the world. Perhaps this will become clearer if we return to the example that we considered in chapter two. The woman in the tobacco shop asks: "Shall I wrap them together?" Merleau-Ponty states that he understands this expression all at once, but in order to understand what was said "first the meaning must be given." Therefore, every spoken word is founded in perception and *simultaneously* every perception is of a world that is always already saturated with meaning. As such, we may concur with Barbaras' assertion that, "[t]he dimension of sense is the truth of sense itself."⁷⁷ In sum, the uniqueness of Merleau-Ponty's formulation seems to rest in his claim that the sense of an expression precedes the arrangement of signifiers.

The crucial feature of speech is that it can generate novel meanings on the basis of pre-established meanings. This can be seen in the example of the exchange in the

tobacco shop. The terms of the expression “Shall I wrap them together?” have already been established, they are not novel. [VI 189] However, the situation in which these words are uttered is. The established terms are thus combined to form a novel meaning, and this novel meaning is sustained by extra-referentiality, by the way in which they fit into, and make sense of, the situation in which they are uttered. The meaning of a phrase is thus “singular and multiple.”⁷⁸ In that the terms of the phrase, as well as the arrangement of those terms are established, the meaning of the phrase is singular. However, in a situation, this phrase takes on a novel meaning that is unique to that situation. We can understand this uniqueness, if we consider that the question “Shall I wrap them together?” has a sense, but this sense only takes on its full significance in a situation; considered outside of any reference to a situation this phrase would make little sense. After all, is it uttered in a tobacco shop, on Christmas eve, or in a morgue? Depending on the situation, the established terms take on a different significance. As Merleau-Ponty claims, the question “Shall I wrap them together?” makes sense, “but first the meaning must be given.” [Ibid.] The terms only make sense in a situation in which they are reflected, and only then do they reflect back upon the situation.

Our consideration of Merleau-Ponty’s comments on metaphoricity, as they are interpreted by Barbaras, have allowed us to further understand Merleau-Ponty’s notions of the visible and the invisible, as well as the reversibility of speech. In considering his comments on the metaphor ‘a direction of thought,’ and his critique of the notion of metaphor as transfer, we saw that the impossibility of transfer rests on the fact that the visible and the invisible cannot be understood as strictly determinate and circumscribed entities. We saw that, because the visible and invisible are both *different* and *continuous*,

the notion of a transfer makes little sense. The only way that this metaphor can make sense is if we understand it as a modulation in a dimension of variation. As such, it is Barbaras' estimation that

[t]he metaphorical expression should be conceived not as a relation between terms whose meaning is given elsewhere, but as the attestation of an ultimate reality, of a "pregnancy" of which the expressing and the expressed are, within the metaphor, provisional and never completely circumscribed poles. The world is the place of the metaphor and the metaphor as place. The figuration of every thing by every thing reveals the ultimate ontological texture.⁷⁹

In addition, we saw that the metaphoric modality allows us to indirectly reveal the reversibility of speech. We have considered that the reversibility of speech, the movement of the visible and the invisible, cannot be revealed as a positive determinate entity. We cannot grasp this movement as such. However, in establishing that metaphor is made possible by a tension between the literal and the metaphorical reference of a metaphor (a tension that is already operative on the level of perception), we were able to understand that this movement is brought to the surface in the metaphoric modality. Through the fact that a metaphor only makes sense in relation to a situation, we were able to understand the primacy of extra-referentiality, insofar as a metaphor makes sense through a tension that is established on the side of the world. The tension between the literal 'is not' and the metaphoric 'is' can, as we have seen, only be established through the rebounding of the situation back upon the signification. In sum, we were able to understand that reversibility is what makes sense possible, it is what entails that "[t]he dimension of sense, is the truth of sense itself."⁸⁰

Conclusion

In this work, we have considered the question of the relationship between speech and the world, in light of Merleau-Ponty's notion of reversibility. In chapter one, we saw that being is invariant, that my experience is singularly my own. However, we also saw that, although my being is invariant, my perception is intertwined with the world in which I live with others. Consciousness cannot be understood to be at the centre of our experience of the world, because our experience is born in-between people who share a common world. In chapter two, we saw that speech, like perception, is always of a world that we share with other people. We saw that the ability to speak is acquired from other people who initiate us into speaking. In addition, we saw that reversibility is also operative at the level of speech, insofar as anything that can be said makes sense only with reference to the situation in which it is said. In this way, speech is only comprehensible insofar as the situation in which we speak is echoed in what is said, thus rendering the utterance significant and the situation intelligible. However, we also saw that reversibility is never completely realized and, as such, no situation can be rendered *completely* intelligible. We discussed this moment of reversibility, *pace* Dillon, through the notion of the primacy of extra-referentiality, insofar as anything that can be said makes sense in relation to the world that we share with others. In chapter three, we considered the primacy of extra-referentiality in light of Barbaras' interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's remarks about metaphor. We saw that metaphoric speech depends on extra-referentiality in order to make sense, insofar as the tension between the literal and metaphoric sense of an expression only arises through reference to the world in which we live with others. Therefore, in response to the question of the relationship between speech and the world, we may say speech and the world are related through reversibility,

which ensures that the world in which we live is the ground upon which the sense of an expression rests.

In concluding, we may ask: what does a description of the relationship between speech and the world, as articulated in light of the work of Merleau-Ponty, say about our experience of being, with others, in the world?

As we have seen, language is everything because it is the voice of no one, as well as the voice of every thing. [VI 155] Language is the voice of no one, insofar as language is governed by rules and is established as sedimented meanings, of which no one is the originator and that no one can be said to possess. Simultaneously, language is always about a world that we co-inhabit with other perceiving, speaking beings. When we speak, the situation in which we speak is echoed in the systematic organization of what is said, thus rendering the expression and the situation intelligible. However, intelligibility is a possibility that is never completely realized; situations are always *becoming* intelligible and cannot be thematized *in toto*. The sense of a situation can only be illuminated through speech and language, and this sense is grounded in that very situation which seeks illumination. Language, therefore, is everything because the world in which we live is *always already* both seeable *and* sayable, figured and reconfigured.

However, *seeing* and *speaking* are not the action of a constituting consciousness on the world. Rather, they are modulations in a dimension of variation. As Barbaras makes explicit, “the sensible and the intelligible must themselves be apprehended as differentiations of an ultimate dimension which is Being.”⁸¹ The ultimate ontological texture of this dimension is revealed in “the figuration of every thing by every thing.”⁸²

As seeing and speaking beings, we are intertwined in the open and inexhaustible system of differences. *I am* precisely insofar as *I am not* someone else.

I am in an ever-changing situation, which I share with others and which has a history. As such, it is not my being that guarantees the truth of what I see and say, but the being of others. We see and speak of a world in which other people are the guarantors of what is true and false. This reality cannot be altered through an act of intellectual reflection. Furthermore, we see and speak of a world in which meaning has been established in history. This history, of which no one can be said to be the originator, configures and reconfigures the living-present. Consequently, alongside Schutz, we may say that each person makes sense of the world, and their place in it, in terms of a story that “in part is forced upon him and in part determined by the biographical chain of his decisions.”⁸³ As such, we may say that being-situated is not the outcome of a constituting consciousness, but rather is a product of the world in which our lives and our decisions unfold alongside the lives and decisions of others.

The belief that my perspective is objectively true is challenged by the coexistence of others who see and speak of the same world that I do. The place from which I see and speak is invariantly my own, but through the possibility of reversibility I come to recognize that we are each a manifestation in a dimension of variation in which each person is situated - a dimension which is neither possessed by, nor highly circumscribed for, anyone. It is the people with whom we cohabit that guarantee the truth of what we see and say; it is not guaranteed by the clarity and distinctness of our ideas.

Merleau-Ponty's meditation on forms of reversibility teaches us that the notion of clear and distinct ideas is erroneous. We do not have clear and distinct ideas. What we have are modulations, figurations and reconfigurations, the truth and falsity of which are guaranteed by the people with whom we live and speak. This guarantee arises despite the fact that a reconfiguration can just as easily be a falsification as an assurance of truth. After all, something said may be an illumination of the world, as much as it may be an obfuscation.

In addition, the world in which we live appears "in an interrogative mode" [VI 103] and, as such, our interrogation of the world is never complete. The world that we cohabit gives rise to questions, and we respond to questions through speech; however, like reversibility, the truth of what we say is "always imminent, but never realized in fact."⁸⁴ [VI 174] We do not possess clear and distinct ideas, because the world does not admit of strict determination or circumscription. We can never arrive at a complete thematization and, as such, what has been – as well as what can be - said remains open to interpretation, to reconfiguration, to exchange, as well as to falsification, misunderstanding and confusion. Therefore, a complete understanding is an impossibility, but interrogation never comes to an end.

Such an understanding of reversibility, as never fully realized, has great merit with regard to a consideration of human perception and language. This position does not understand subjectivity as sovereign, nor does it collapse subjectivity into objectivity; rather, it attempts to bring into relief the fact that being, like the world in which we live and speak with others, is constituted by difference and continuity. Reversibility reveals that the 'there *is*', is simultaneously an '*is not*.' This tension is the very condition of the

in-between, of difference and continuity. Speech and language, like perception, are not things, but our means of taking up the world (which is, in fact, born in-between people). However, we must understand that, inasmuch as the situation in which we live and speak is an openness to the world and other people, it can also be a closure. Barbaras writes that for Merleau-Ponty:

The world is between others and me, present to others but possessed by no one; it is the promise of a unity, the horizon of reconciliation and finally truth, that place where each one can get along with the others. But insofar as the subjects join together only by remaining ineluctably distinct, transgress their insularity only to return to themselves, the world is also the place of discordance and conflict, the reconciliation must always be done over, and the truth is always dissimulated...The relation with the other is indissolubly understanding and incomprehension, agreement and antagonism, the conquest of sense identical to the fortunes and risks of historicity.⁸⁵

We have already recognized, through our consideration of metaphor, that language reveals the co-belonging of every thing and everyone at the heart of the world.⁸⁶

Nonetheless, in the world in which we live and speak, discord is as much a possibility as accord, harmony as much a possibility as strife, and recognition as much a possibility as rejection. Our being is situated, *I* am only insofar as *you* are, and *we* are only insofar as we leave the singularity of our existence behind and take up our relationships with other people. [*PhP* 456] However, our relationships can be an opening as much as a closure, solidarity always has the possibility of being eclipsed by alienation.

Reversibility brings to the fore the fact that being is not autonomous, nor dissolves in the unity of Being.⁸⁷ We speak *of* and *about* a world in which we are fundamentally rooted; we interrogate the world, and others guarantee the truth of our interrogation. However, reversibility, as we have seen, “is always imminent, but never realized in fact.” [147-48] Thus, in the in-between, in the openness of the world to figuration and reconfiguration, we find the possibility both of understanding and

misunderstanding, solidarity and alienation. We are our situation and, as such, we are always already implicated in the commerce of the true and the false, which we take up and renew. Our mode of being is *being-together*, even while some people desire to make others their slaves, or impose the singularity of their vision and story upon all that is.

In this work, we have interrogated the relationship of speech and the world. In following the direction of Merleau-Ponty's thought, we saw that this question can be addressed through considering the varieties of reversibility to which human perception and language are subject. Through such a consideration, we came to see that I am outside of myself insofar as I inhabit a world with others. I must turn to them in order to return to myself. Together, we belong to a common world that is simultaneously visible and intelligible, is perceived and spoken, that admits of configuration and reconfiguration, and in which meaning is dynamic and contingent. Through considering Merleau-Ponty's philosophy in light of the interpretations of Dillon and Barbaras, we came to understand that reversibility is the name given to the fact that we make sense of *our* situation only from *within* that situation. We are situated through and through. The notion of reversibility reveals that we cannot step outside of our situation and we cannot soar over it - in short, we cannot remove all opacity and depth from it. We are our situation, and we make sense of our situation from within it, alongside other people. In this way, the notion of reversibility reveals that language is everything - it is the means by which our world makes sense.

Endnotes

¹ Martin C. Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, Evanston : Northwestern University Press, 2nd edition (1998) and Renaud Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon: Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, trans. T. Toadvine and L. Lawler. Indiana: Indiana University Press (2004), p. 194-198.

² Gerry H. Gill makes this idea explicit in his essay, "Merleau-Ponty, Metaphor and Philosophy," *Philosophy Today*, vol. 34, No. 1 (1990).

³ Renaud Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon*, p. 194-198.

⁴ We do not *project* our horizon before us, but we find ourselves engulfed by it. Alfred Schutz formulates a wonderful description of the world-horizon. This passage is worth quoting at length:

Everyone lives through his individual life cycle of birth, old age, and death; he is subject to the vicissitudes of health and sickness; he alternates back and forth between hope and grief. Everyman takes part in the rhythm of nature, sees the movement of the sun, the moon and the stars, lives through the change of day and night, and is situated within the succession of seasons. Everyman stands in mutual relations to other men. He is a member of a social structure into which he is born or which he has joined, and which existed before him and will exist after him. Every total social system has structures of familial relationships, age groups, and generations; it has divisions of labour and differentiation according to occupations; it has balances of power and dominion, leaders and those led; and it has these with all associated hierarchies.

This description leaves no doubt that our world-horizon is not of our own making, is a complex intertwining of nature and culture, and is highly contingent. *The Structures of the Lifeworld*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press (1967), p. 18.

⁵ Merleau-Ponty brings these notions together when he writes "There is a human body when, between the seeing and the seen, between touching and touched, between one eye and the other, between hand and hand, a [crossover] takes place." [EM 163]

⁶ Merleau-Ponty makes this explicit when he writes, of perceptual faith, that "[w]e see the things themselves; *the world is what we see.*" [VI 3; emphasis added]

⁷ Schutz articulates the fact that our experience is invariant when he writes that [t]he social world can be lived through as a system of order with determinate relation constants, although this perspectival apprehension, his subjective explanations of order, are for me as well as for him dependant on his position or standpoint, which in part is forced upon him and in part determined by the biographical chain of his decisions." *The Structures of the Lifeworld*, p. 18.

⁸ Renaud Barbaras, *Desire and Distance*, trans. Paul B. Milan, Stanford: Stanford University Press (2006), p. 13.

⁹ Andrew C. Rawnsley, "A Situated or a Metaphysical Body?" *Janus Head*, 9 (2), Amherst: New York (2007), p.631.

¹⁰ Merleau-Ponty articulates this idea in the *Phenomenology* when he writes: "More directly than the other dimension of space depth forces us to reject the preconceived notion of the world and rediscover the primordial experience from which it springs: it is, so to speak, the most 'existential' of all dimensions, because...it is not impressed upon the object itself, it quite clearly belongs to perspective and not to things." [PhP 256]

¹¹ Schutz explicates this notion when he writes : "I understand the purpose of the tool, I grasp what a sign stands for, and I understand how a man orients himself in his relation to a social setting." *The Structures of the Lifeworld*, p. 17.

¹² The notion of a fundamental tension between the “is” and the “is not” is adopted from Paul Ricoeur’s work *The Rule of Metaphor*, however he uses these terms in a different context than I am using them here. We will use these terms throughout this work, however we will only specifically consider Ricoeur’s work in Chapter 3. *The Rule of Metaphor*, trans. R. Czerny with K. Mclaughlin and J. Costello, Toronto: Toronto University Press (1977).

¹³ Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty’s Ontology*, p. 144 and 158.

¹⁴ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas II*, trans. R. Rojcewicz and A. Shuwer, Dordrecht Kluwer (1989), p. 152.

¹⁵ Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty’s Ontology*, p. 158.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

²⁰ In the *Phenomenology*, Merleau-Ponty notes that the recognition that others have a body that is structurally the same as one’s own has a basis in early childhood development. He writes

[a] baby of fifteen months opens its mouth if I playfully take one of its fingers between my teeth and pretend to bite it. And yet it has scarcely looked at its face in a glass, and its teeth are not in any case like mine. The fact is that its own mouth and teeth, as it feels them from inside, are immediately, for it, an apparatus to bite with and my jaw, as the baby sees it from the outside, is immediately, for it, capable of the same intentions. ‘Biting’ has immediately, for it, an intersubjective significance. It perceives its intentions in its body, and my body with its own, and thereby my intentions in its own body.” [PhP 352]

²¹ Merleau-Ponty makes this explicit when he writes: “His body and the distances participate in one same corporeity or visibility in general, which reigns between them and it, and even beyond the horizon, beneath his skin, unto the depths of being. [VI 149]

²² Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty’s Ontology*, p. 166.

²³ René Descartes, *Meditations*, trans. L.J. Lafleur, New York : The Bobbs-Merrill, 2nd edition (1960), p.74.

²⁴ Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty’s Ontology*, p.208.

²⁵ Dennis T. O’Connor, “Reconstructive Time: *Écart, Différance*, Fundamental Obscurity,” in *Écart & Différance: Merleau-Ponty and Derrida on Seeing and Writing*, Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press (1997), p. 156.

²⁶ Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon*, p. 192-93, fn. 7.

²⁷ Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty’s Ontology*, p.171.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.170.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 220-21.

³¹ Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon*, p. 237.

³² Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty’s Ontology*, p. 220-21.

³³ Merleau-Ponty writes: “...with one sole gesture he closes the circuit of his relation to himself and that of his relationship with others and, with the same stroke, also sets himself up as *delocutary*, speech of which one speaks: he offers himself and every word to a universal word.” [VI 154]

³⁴ Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon*, p. 197, fn. 9.

³⁵ See: “we do not see, do not hear the ideas, and not even with the mind’s eye or with the third ear: yet they are there, behind the sounds or between them.” [VI 151]

³⁶ He writes: “The very idea of a *complete* statement is inconsistent. We do not understand a statement because it is complete in itself; we say that it is complete or sufficient because we have understood.” [S 17]

³⁷ Consider the original:

[Les idées] sont ce certain écart, cette différenciation jamais achevée, cette toujours à refaire entre le signe et le signe, comme la chair, disions-nous, est la déhiscence du voyant en visible et du visible en voyant. Et, comme mon corps ne voit que parce qu’il fait partie du visible où il éclôt, *le sens sur lequel ouvre l’arrangement des sons se répercute sur lui.*

Le visible et l’invisible, p.201; emphasis added.

³⁸ Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty’s Ontology*, p. 218.

³⁹ See: Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty’s Ontology*, p.172 and Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon*, p.179-180.

⁴⁰ Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon*, p.180.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.151.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.237.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.237.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.237.

⁴⁵ Gill, “Merleau-Ponty, Metaphor and Philosophy,” p. 53.

⁴⁶ *Oxford Shorter English Dictionary* (2002), s.v. “Metaphor.” Emphasis added.

⁴⁷ Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon*, p.194.

⁴⁸ See: Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty’s Ontology*, p. 159; Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon*, p. 197, fn. 9.

⁴⁹ Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon*, p. 197, fn. 9.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.194; emphasis added.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.194.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.194.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.194.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.194.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.195.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

⁵⁹ Ricoeur refers to this as “ontological vehemence.” *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 249-51.

⁶⁰ Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon*, p.195.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p195; emphasis added.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.195.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.195.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.196.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.195.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p197 fn. 9.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁶⁸ Ricoeur makes this explicit when he writes : “There is no grammatical feature that distinguishes metaphorical attribution from literal attribution...Not marking the difference, and, in this sense, hiding it, is precisely the trap that grammar sets.” Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, p.252.

⁶⁹ Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon*, p.195.

⁷⁰ Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, p.149.

⁷¹ Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon*, p. 197, fn. 9.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 197, fn. 9.

⁷³ Ibid., p.197, fn. 9.

⁷⁴ Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 255-56.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.195.

⁷⁶ Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, p. 218.

⁷⁷ Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon*, p. 195.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 237.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.196.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 195.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 308.

⁸² Ibid., p. 196.

⁸³ Schutz, *The Structures of the Lifeworld*, p. 18.

⁸⁴ Which is not to say, with Nietzsche, that only interpretations exist, while facts do not. Rather, there are facts, but not laid out bare before us. The world appears in an "interrogative mode" and, as such, facts require the work of interpretation, which can only be performed alongside other people. See: Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, Penguin Books: New York (1976), p. 458.

⁸⁵ Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon*, p. 254-55.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 197, fn.9.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.254.

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