L'épigenèse transgénérationnelle, ou l'histoire spectrale de la *chair* : Une approche merleau-pontienne de l'épigénétique

De récentes avancées en génétique, et plus particulièrement dans le domaine de l'attestation du patrimoine génétique, ont enrichi notre compréhension de la transmission génétique. Nous voudrions démontrer ici que qu'une approche merleau-pontienne de certaines de ces découvertes récentes n'ouvre pas seulement de nouvelles perspectives sur la philosophie merleau-pontienne de la *chair*, mais donne en outre un nouvel aperçu sur la notion de patrimoine biologique. Ce que nous tentons de faire valoir dans cet article, c'est l'hérédité et la transmission intergénérationnelle des facteurs environnementaux. Ce qui revient à défendre l'hérédité des changements phénotypiques résultant de facteurs environnementaux, même si ces changements ne deviennent manifestes que dans les générations suivantes. Ou cela revient encore à poser l'équivalent d'une transmission des expériences appartenant aux générations passées par l'intermédiaire du corps (i.e., par l'intermédiaire de l'influence épigénétique sur le développement phénotypique), aux futurs descendants. Nous tenterons d'en faire la démonstration – en termes merleau-pontiens –, comme d'une forme de mémoire ou d'institution (*Stiftung*) corporelle et transgénérationnelle, qui à son tour institue un *style*.

Epigenetica transgenerazionale, o la storia spettrale della *carne*. Un approccio merleau-pontyano all'epigenetica

Recenti progressi nel campo della genetica, in particolare la sostanziazione dell'ereditarietà epigenetica, hanno ampliato la nostra comprensione della trasmissione genetica. Cercheremo di dimostrare che un approccio merleau-pontyano ad alcune di queste recenti scoperte apre non solo nuove prospettive sulla filosofia della *carne* di Merleau-Ponty, ma fornisce anche nuovi sviluppi alla nozione di ereditarietà biologica. In questo articolo vorremmo mettere l'accento sulla trasmissione ereditaria o intergenerazionale dei fattori ambientali. Questa è essenzialmente riconducibile alla trasmissione ereditaria di cambiamenti fenotipici dovuti a fattori ambientali, sebbene questi cambiamenti possano divenire concretamente visibili solo nelle generazioni successive. Vorremmo dimostrare che questo è in un certo senso riconducibile alla trasmissione delle esperienze delle generazioni passate attraverso il corpo (per esempio attraverso l'influenza epigenetica o lo sviluppo fenotipico) per la loro progenie. Cercheremo di descrivere questo processo – in termini merleau-pontyani – come una particolare forma di memoria transgenerazionale del corpo o istituzione (*Stiftung*), che a sua volta istituisce uno *stile*.

Bryan E. Bannon

READING THE LIVING SIGNS: A PROPOSAL FOR A MERLEAU-PONTIAN CONCEPT OF SPECIES

In the academic year 1958-9, Maurice Merleau-Ponty taught a lecture course at the Collège de France entitled "Philosophy Today", which is handed down to us in the form of his lecture notes. This course takes place immediately following his first two courses on the concept of nature, but preceding the third course. Each of these courses treats a distinct subject matter: the first deals with the idea of nature proper, the second the being of life in light of the relationship of the living being to both nature and other living beings, and the third seeks to situate the human being in nature with respect to animal bodies. If, then, this course on contemporary phenomenology, mainly Husserl and Heidegger, appears between the first two and the last of his courses on nature, it is easy to view it as an interruption, a digression from his pursued theme. But this is not so. In fact, Merleau-Ponty opens the course on contemporary ontology with the same passage with which he ended the second course on nature and closes it with a recommendation on how to interpret the third course. It is clear that this series of lectures is not only a continuation of the previous lectures, but perhaps a necessary transition to the subject matter of the third, preventing us from seeing these last lectures on nature as simply a meditation on the bodily nature of humans and animals, but rather inviting us to read them as a historical event indicating a "new instauration"[1] or renewal of philosophy.

But before we get too far ahead of ourselves, let us return to those previously alluded to lines with which Merleau-Ponty concludes the 57-58 course on nature and begins the 58-9 course on ontology:

> We have seen physics, φυσις and we have just seen animality. It remains for us to study the human body as the root of symbolism, as the junction of φυσις and λογος because our goal is the series φυσις-λογος-History[2].

In the "Philosophy Today" lectures, Merleau-Ponty adds the following:

> The end is even more generally ontology (in the modern sense), that is, consideration of the whole and of its articulations beyond categories of substance, of subject-object, of cause, that is, metaphysics in the classical sense[3].

What remains the same between these two iterations is two-fold: first, there is the association of the first course on nature with φυσις and the second with λογος. This indicates that animality is to be thought as λογος. We shall return

to this point at length momentarily. The second point that remains the same is that the end of the lectures is the series φυσις-λογος-History. These three terms can only be thought of together, especially if we are to go beyond substantialist metaphysics. In his earliest work, *The Structure of Behavior*, this series takes the form of a three-order system (the physical, the vital, and the human). In that text, each order is founded upon the previous order, but in such a way that it forms new structures that are not reducible to the previous order. What is worthy of note, however, is the transition that the third order undergoes from "the human" in *The Structure of Behavior* to "history" in these late lectures. This shift suggests a larger movement in Merleau-Ponty's thought away from an ontologically informed philosophical anthropology toward a "fundamental thinking" on the model of Heidegger's *Besinnung*. This leads us to what is new to the second locution: the moments of the series φυσις-λογος-History are taken as the whole of being, and its constituent parts are being's articulations. As he will put it later, each moment of the series is a leaf (*feuillet*) of being. Thus, when I asserted earlier that the third lecture course on nature was an invitation into another beginning or a renewal of philosophy, we can now see that the way in which this renewal will be enacted is through a questioning of these three terms.

Over the duration of this third lecture course, Merleau-Ponty treats the question of human-animal difference philosophically, but his means of doing so is through a close examination of embryology and evolutionary theory. Given how skeptically Merleau-Ponty approaches science throughout his work, particularly in his later writings, and his explicit criticisms of certain scientific practices[4], these forays into evolutionary biology seem somewhat out of place. But to those familiar with Merleau-Ponty's work, these interventions concerning the meaning of modern science are to be expected. Though we will not discuss his criticisms of these sciences directly, it is sufficient for us to mention his intention: to establish the necessity of phenomenology *alongside* the sciences, as the ontological is always accompanied by the ontic. He takes his direction in all this, however, from Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism*. The "Philosophy Today" lectures conclude with Merleau-Ponty paraphrasing a passage from this text where Heidegger discusses the "hardly imaginable, abyssal, living kinship"[5] between the the human and the animal. Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty following him, situates this relationship in language, but language conceived as neither an utterance of an organism, an expression of life, a sign, nor as reference. Rather, Merleau-Ponty finds in this view of language the "advent (*avènement*) of Being"[6]. It is at this point that Merleau-Ponty closes his lecture series by claiming that this *Denken*, which is left in the German in his notes, is the philosophical direction/meaning (*sens*) of his courses on nature. Consequently, this last lecture on nature must be viewed as an attempt to think through two distinct problems: first, the relationship of human to animal life and, second, to conceive of language not as an externalization of an already constituted thought by a rational being, but rather as the coming to be of being itself.

With this brief orientation, we can now consider the central question of this paper: what is the manner in which the various forms of life relate to one another? We are not asking this in the scientific-ontic way that would find us cataloging the various types of social relationships between living beings, describing the relations between predator and prey, or calculating birth and mutation rates within a population. No, these questions are obviously better answered by the ethologist, the conservation biologist, or the evolutionary theorist. Rather, we find ourselves asking a different kind of question, a question rooted in the historicity of life: how are we to conceive of the abyssal divergences between living forms while simultaneously maintaining the corporeal continuities of which our closest kinship (*parenté*) consists? Two distinct goals emerge from such an approach. The first goal is to show how Merleau-Ponty conceives of human-animal difference in light of his concerns about language and history. This will necessitate looking at *The Structure of Behavior* and *The Prose of the World* as exemplary early texts on the subject. The second goal is to show how this view in some way forces a reconsideration of some of Merleau-Ponty's points due to his lingering humanist concerns that prevent him from following through on some of his more radical ideas about life. We shall see that the uniqueness of human being can only be acknowledged through the recognition of the uniqueness of each species: even though he uses the word constantly, there can be no such thing as "animality" if one accepts his thinking about life in general. I shall attempt to defend this view as emblematic of the ontological concern mentioned earlier with respect to the simultaneity of radical separation and profound kinship, difference and continuity. This is the challenge offered to us: not to think of separation and continuity as opposed and, if this is possible, to reconsider the kinship of living beings on this basis.

1. *Bringing Life into the Fold*

Before attempting to address these concerns, we must first come to understand the framework within which Merleau-Ponty operates in order to see what exactly is at stake. His later philosophy is devoted to the advancement of a new form of phenomenology that he had been developing both in contradistinction to and in harmony with the insights of not only Husserl and Heidegger, but also lesser noted influences upon him, Hegel and Bergson. The development of this new phenomenology begins with the publication of *The Structure of Behavior* in 1942. In that text, Merleau-Ponty confronts the most current science of his time and attempts to demonstrate how the findings of those sciences, how scientific facts, fail to support the ontological framework within which they were generated. This does not cause Merleau-Ponty to reject the scientific facts, but rather to call into question the mechanistic and vitalist ontologies that were being justified on their basis. For our purposes, it must suffice to repeat the conclusion of those analyses: "Structure is the philosophical truth of both naturalism and realism"[7]. He rejects the realist definition of nature as "a multiplicity of events (*événements*) external to each other and bound together by relations of causality"[8] because the laws that govern those events only obtain in light of a

structure that holds them together. That is, the laws that describe the relations between forces are accurate because their description takes place within an already elaborated structure: nature must be conceived as a structured system.

Since this natural system is only of "relatively stable ensembles"[9], it must not only be a system, but also an open one. This view presages his later endorsement of Whitehead's process philosophy and his use of certain insights from Canguilhem's *The Normal and the Pathological*, and we see expressed an idea that Merleau-Ponty will never abandon: nothing exists *partes extra partes*; everything exists relative to a structure or a whole. Merleau-Ponty attributes this mistake of a nature *partes extra partes* to the Cartesian worldview and the "pseudo-cartesianism" of modern science. The rejection of this view of nature clarifies his positive claim that "the world is an ensemble of objective relations carried out by consciousness"[10]: he is not admitting an "idealist" ontology because, even at this point in his thinking, consciousness or mind (*esprit*) is nothing but a physical process. What is irreducible to the order of physics is not the existence of a mind, but the conscious structures that cannot be *explained* by the realist ontology.

Structural ontology is a third way between mechanism and vitalism, but how is this so? Is it not a paradox to say that the mind is nothing but a physical process and yet not reducible to the order of physics? The answer to this apparent paradox lies in the dialectical relation between the orders of physics, life, and mind. The orders are not "real" or "types of beings;" rather, they are thought of as "three planes of signification or three forms of unity"[11]. That is, human consciousness is simultaneously in- and for-itself insofar as it is both its body as well as a living being with a mind; consciousness can be conceived in either way *analytically,* but, in actuality, it is self-conscious of its being both.

If one hears the echoes of Hegel here, this is no accident. Throughout *The Structure of Behavior*, Hegel's thought is introduced either to make a positive point[12] or else to introduce a theme that will be explored further in another text[13]. At this point in his thinking, Merleau-Ponty sides strongly with Hegel, ultimately concluding that the "Gestalt" of Gestalt Psychology should be heard in its "Hegelian meaning," "the concept before it has become conscious of itself"[14]. Perhaps the most poignant moment of Merleau-Ponty's early affinity with Hegel comes when Merleau-Ponty cites Hegel in an attempt to distinguish life from nature. Merleau-Ponty asserts the following: "'the concept is only the interior of nature' says Hegel and already the nature of the living body appears unthinkable *for us* without this interior unity of signification that distinguishes a gesture from a sum of movements"[15]. Though this will be much more important in a moment, for now, let it be noted that a gesture is defined by its being meaningful only with reference to an interior unity of a living body. The interior unity is externalized in the gesture. He goes on to say that life appears "at the moment when a piece of extension, by the arrangement of its movements and by the allusion that each of its movements make to all the others, withdrew (*se replir*) into itself, and started both to express something and to show to the outside an interior being"[16]. Life is extended, but in its movements it folds in

on itself, it auto-affects, and its withdrawal into itself creates a "hollow." For the animal, this hollow creates a semi-stable relationship to its milieu in the form of behaviors, which are not of the stimulus-response variety, but rather are expressive of certain needs and instincts of the organism that will allow its continued existence. Humans, as "a new species of animal"[17], are characterized by their "work," a term explicitly appropriated from Hegel[18]. One such "work" of human consciousness is speech, the use of language. In order to speak, one must belong to the same meaningful world by means of articulating similarly the perceived world from which meaning is derived. Recall, however, that consciousness is an auto-affective folding in on itself of an extended body, and it is through this sensing (*sentir*) that the world is articulated. Meaning, then, is relative to a body or, more specifically, a body-schema, and language expresses the meaningful articulations of the human world by the human body. In this gesture of speaking, the human being "ceases to adhere *immediately* to the milieu" and, because there is no longer an immediacy of contact between body and world, humans can have *knowledge* of this world"[19]. As with Hegel[20], language actualizes the pure "I" and thereby shatters the immediate relation of consciousness and its milieu. This mediation is the source of both human uniqueness as a species and a "hierarchy" of the various forms of life "where individuality is progressively actualized [*se réaliser*]" because "matter, life, and mind," the three orders, "must participate unequally in the nature of form"[21]. At this point Merleau-Ponty mirrors in a different manner the Cartesian conviction that an animal's lack of spoken language is evidence that the animal lacks an individual soul[22]. Because of the human's mediated relation to its milieu, "'life' does not have the same meaning in animality and humanity and the conditions of life are defined by the proper essence of the species"[23]. But what is intended by the phrase "proper essence?" Is this essence biological, vital, or something else entirely? Merleau-Ponty situates the proper essence of a species in its "being in the world" or "existence": there is a "certain milieu characteristic of the species" toward which the "gestures of behavior" are directed so as to develop "a certain manner of treating the world"[24]. Having thus seen that ultimately the essence of a species is its manner of being in the world, we must leave *The Structure of Behavior* in order to investigate further this claim and come to understand why Merleau-Ponty ultimately abandons the notion of a hierarchy of the species. If what distinguishes one species from another is its being in the world, which consists of a *style* of comporting one's gestures toward an articulated world, then we must turn our attention toward *The Prose of the World,* because it is in this text that Merleau-Ponty encounters the difficulty of his own view as currently constructed.

2. *Cultural Life-Styles*

The Prose of the World is a transitional text for Merleau-Ponty, and one, it should be noted, that he abandoned, most likely by the end of 1952. In it, he at-

tempts to take the theory of expression from *Phenomenology of Perception* and develop from it an understanding of history. Of course, to a certain degree this is what was attempted in *The Structure of Behavior* as well, but in *The Prose of the World* language is no longer taken as the "work" of a consciousness. Instead, there is a "carnal generality"[25] between consciousnesses that allows language to develop. Already we see Merleau-Ponty moving away from considering expression as an externalization of an internal unity and toward his later view that the inner and the outer are hardly discernible. Rather than language imparting a sense of individuality to the human being, in this text language must be based on a generalizable body in order to be meaningful. Language is, therefore, anonymous: "there can only be speech (and in the end personality) for an 'I' who carries within itself the germ of depersonalization"[26]. There is no private language, but not because there is a correspondence between word and object or meaning independent of expression. Endorsing Saussure, Merleau-Ponty rejects this view of sign and signifier bound together by an external world: "language is less a sum of signs [...] than a methodological means of differentiating signs from one another and thereby constructing a universe of language"[27]. Within this "universe," we are then able to isolate certain constellations of words that do not belong together *necessarily*, but can be assembled from out of the now meaningful whole. Language is a diacritical system, it articulates the perceptual world by "inventing a series of gestures"[28] that are institutionalized into signifying systems that derive their expressive power from their normativity constantly being called into question in the name of establishing new norms of expression[29]. Language *lives* in a literal sense in that if it fails to adapt to changes in its environment it will cease to be spoken, but in its adaptations it becomes essentially other than how it was. This is the paradox of expression: to the extent that an expression is meaningful, it has successfully repressed the whole of language through its differentiation as a singular expression. However, if the expression did not call into play the already instituted normative system, the expression would be meaningless. As with personality, the condition of possibility of an expression is the condition of the expression's impossibility. Language always withdraws, like the auto-affecting extended body, to form a hollow, an interior, out of which an equilibrium is sought in the form of a correspondence between itself and the world.

Of course, if language is a diacritical system, such a correspondence is impossible and we can say that one expression calls for others: there is only ever partial coincidence between expression and world. This notion of partial coincidence is perhaps one of the most important in understanding Merleau-Ponty's later thought. The life of language is accomplished, as in *The Structure of Behavior*, through the creation of particular gestures. One's participation in a language obliges one to produce gestures in a particular way so as to be understood, but in order for these gestures to signify something for the speaker it is not enough to repeat a fixed inventory of expressions. Signification is founded within "the style of human relations that emanate from [signs]": it is the "blind and involuntary logic" that obtains through the relationship between

our body and the perceived things that allows us to "glimpse (*entrevoir*) the anonymous spirit (*esprit*) that invents, at the heart of language, a new mode of expression"[30]. The human body finds itself always already within a world. This world must be articulated in a certain way if the body is to function properly, and this articulation occurs largely through perception. Perception, of course, is relative to a body-schema and its capabilities of interacting with the environment. This being the case, the significance of a perceived object to one's life establishes a system of relations and values. As in *The Structure of Behavior*, a manner of being in the world creates a world of significance. Now seen as living, language becomes historical: the past, sedimented meanings within a language (*langage parlé*) can be taken up in order to project into the future new horizons of possible expression (*langage parlant*). Each shift in the horizon is emblematic of a new style of being in the world because of the intimate connection between the life of the body, its perception, language, and history. These embodied styles, these ways of seeing and articulating the world, these transformations within the history of the human spirit, these are all "coherent deformations" of one particular bodily schema. Hence, if we are able to trace empirical connections between one style of expression and another or compare two styles distant from one another in either time or space, this is because both styles are deviations from the same perceptual world. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, "perception inauguerates an order and founds an institution or tradition"[31]: life is what inauguerates and the instituted tradition is culture. Because culture is opened up by perception, and because perception is relative to a bodily schema, there is a unity of culture based upon the body[32]. For our purposes, the most important consequence of this view is that culture is not a "thing," continually developing toward some optimum goal. Rather, it is a field of organization within human history and expression. As a field, there cannot be progress within a culture, but only "expansion"[33]. Whereas progress is an inherently hierarchical notion insofar as it requires the replacement of one perspective or gesture by a "better" one, expansion, in Merleau-Ponty's sense, implies the multiplication (and not assimilation) of viewpoints, gestures, and styles immanent to the cultural field.

So where do we now find ourselves with respect to our question about the historicity of life? We have found that all perception is intrinsically expressive as it calls for the body to respond to a phenomenal situation. In this way, "all perception, and all action that it presupposes, in short every usage of our body is already *primordial expression*"[34]. This is just to say that signs first receive their meaning from the body: already at the level of perception we have discovered expression. As expression is inherently horizonal, the expression of language must be derived from primordial perceptual expression: language is a coherent deformation of the perceptual world. There is a kinship between language and the preverbal, gestural communication out of which it emerges. Because gesture and speech meet in perception, that is, in the articulated world of a living being, and because gesture and speech are horizonal and therefore historical, we can say that life itself, as expressive, is historical. But all this has been said

of *human* language, and yet the thoughts are extended to life in general. There is, then, a tension in the view that appears along with the return of the question with which we began. In order to understand the full import of what it means to say that life is historical in this way, however, we must redirect ourselves toward the courses on nature because it is there that Merleau-Ponty looks at life in general and tries to understand the relations between life, language, and the body in a different way, through the eyes of an animal.

3. *"L'étrange parenté"*

With the connection of life and history through language, we are now prepared to investigate the nature of species. But why is it language that supplies us with our entry point into this subject? Because, I suggest, life itself is conceived on the basis of language; there is a language of life, which need not be verbal, with its own vocabulary[35]. The language of life, I contend, is nothing more than the prose of the world. Nature writes the body and continues to inscribe itself within the individual's flesh in a vocabulary that Ted Toadvine has rightly described as a musical or melodic one[36]. Toadvine's insight helps us to make sense of the myriad metaphors between life and musical themes that occur in Merleau-Ponty's work: a singular life is itself a singular variation of a melody, theme, or musical phrase. Just as the prose of different authors and the scores of certain composers are immediately identifiable because of their distinctive expressive values, we find within the surging forth of life a wide array of characters, each endowed with its own expressive possibilities. It should come as no surprise, then, that Merleau-Ponty invokes Proust's use of the word "*côté*" to describe the asymmetrical exchanges between body and world that induce behavior[37]. After all, Swann's appreciation for M. Vinteuil's "little phrase" stems from the way it embodies his love for Odette, but soon this phrasing became part of the vocabulary of all of Mdm. Verdurin's Circle[38]. So, we may go along with Swann's *côté*, and, by following Swann's way, we hear his love for Odette in the melody; such is the virtue of Proust's writing and why Merleau-Ponty can claim that no one has done more than Proust in tracing the relations between the visible and the invisible[39]. The *côté* is a singular way of being, of relating to the world, which is generalizable precisely because the *côté* is a means of dealing with or treating a common world. The world must be dealt with because it is constantly impinging upon the body, calling for action. This impingement puts the body into a state of disequilibrium[40]; it is pregnant with its possibilities for action within its given horizons, but it has not yet given birth to that gesture that will restore equilibrium by filling the hollow held open by perception. Since the body is expressive insofar as it is a perceiving body, every body that perceives will have its own *côté*, its own way of dealing with the world in an expressive manner. This is what is meant by "style," a singular means of striving for equilibrium with one's milieu. As with language, however, a stable and total equilibrium is impossible to achieve.

This comparison between life and language is not merely spurious. As we have seen, Merleau-Ponty finds something structurally analogous to life in the expressive nature of language, and conversely, life has its own style, a notion that is modeled on the essence of language. But language as a diacritical system can no longer be thought of as a thing, a system of reference composed of word-things that correspond to world-things; language ceases to be *substantial*, and becomes expressive and relational. Given their structural kinship, the same is true of life, a fact Merleau-Ponty notes toward the beginning of the second course on nature. Biology has become "dialectical," but "the whole problem is currently to know what the word 'dialectical' means"[41]. Biology is the study of life, specifically life as an open or complex system joined to a given milieu that is itself an open system[42]. The milieu consists of a series of signs that are meaningful to an organism based upon its bodily schema, and the reading of these signs provokes behaviors. These behaviors are themselves meaningful, consisting of gestures both verbal and non-verbal. Of course, gestures are always expressive of a body's being in the world, and so we arrive back at the view of life as a dialectical process between organism and environment from *The Structure of Behavior*. The difference here is that the dialectic is no longer conceived of as Hegelian, but rather as hyper-dialectic.

This heralds a larger transition in Merleau-Ponty's thinking: if the dialectic is no longer Hegelian, language can no longer be seen as "work." Since "work" is the principle of negativity that propels the natural consciousness into self-consciousness, in replacing the Hegelian scheme, Merleau-Ponty must propose a new sense of negation so as not to be drawn back into the philosophy of consciousness that he himself finds in his earliest works[43]. This new sense of negation is found in the *écart*: divergence, dehiscence, or, one could say, spacing[44]. The *écart* is what is opened up by the fold of which we have been speaking from the very beginning, but now the *écart* has been thematized, giving to the fold an entirely different sense: life is no longer an interiority within nature but is conceived as the inverse of the open system of nature, "the reality of a process"[45]. If nature is a process, it can no longer be thought of in terms of punctual temporality and atoms frozen in time. If being can no longer be grasped as substantial, the "particle" must be replaced by "molar being": "a being of the order of Logos, and not of the 'pure thing'"[46]. As we will see, however, there is a multiplication of the Logos into the logoi of the sensible and of language. The logos within which the human dwells is language, and the reason for this is that the human body is symbolism[47]. That the human body is synonymous with symbolism is certainly a continuity throughout Merleau-Ponty's work, but why does he think this? Following Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, Merleau-Ponty claims that animal life is always the instauration of a dimension into the natural world. For reasons we have already addressed, this dimension must be that of meaning. In this case however, where symbolism counts as "a term taken as representative of another"[48], the claim must be read as saying that the human body separates itself from natural, perceived symbols; language is like a second nature[49]. We must be careful not to take this as a multiplication of

worlds: there is no Platonic reinvestment here. The logos of human language is merely "the other side (*côté*) of the logos of perception"[50].

The other logos, that of perception to which all living things have access, is different from language, but how? He explains that "if life is the instauration of the basis of history, and if history is different from the history of human being, then it is a natural history. It is not an individual history; it is the future of a type, of a collective being"[51]. This collective being is the species, and so we see that far from being the radical view that it may have seemed, Merleau-Ponty reinscribes one of the most traditional of philosophical distinctions between the human and animal while at the same time admitting their kinship. Quoting Valéry, he calls humans the "animal of words," while animals are "the logos of the sensible world: an incorporated meaning"[52]. In other words, the human capacity to speak is indicative of a relation to the world that animals lack: humans are capable of mediated reflection while animals are immediately connected to their worlds. While human-animal difference is now conceived as a lateral relation rather than a hierarchy – humans are simply "a different manner of being a body"[53] – the human manner of being a body, symbolism, brings humanity within language and endows it with individuality. Meanwhile, animals' bodily style relegates them to a particular existence, that is, they do not exist as singular beings; they exist as species-being.

Looking back at how we arrived at this place, we see a conditional that needs to be subjected to further inquiry. Merleau-Ponty says "if history is different from the history of human being," and so we must ask if this is the case. Are there actually two distinct orders of history with respect to life, one natural and the other human? Do these orders correspond to the two logoi? If the logos of language is simply the inverse side of the logos of perception, why is it that not all perceiving, and therefore expressive, beings participate in both logoi? Why is the logos of perception, for animals, only one-sided? We must reorient ourselves once more to address these concerns, because in addressing them we shall once more regain the more radical path upon which Merleau-Ponty first embarked. We shall see that the "strange kinship" only remains strange if we fail to follow the way (*côté*) that has already been indicated to us.

4. *The Multiplicity of Life*

In order to approach these issues, we must look more closely at the being of a species with respect to human-animal difference. As Merleau-Ponty emphasizes a number of times throughout his courses, the relation between humans and other living beings is not one of "rupture." Even though language individuates human beings from their collective species-being, this does not make humans something other than an animal, nor does it endow humans with some additional value. Humanity "overcomes" its animal nature without this overcoming instituting a hierarchy[54]; the relation between them is lateral. He says that they are, invoking a term of Husserl's, *Ineinander* or, in his own vocabulary, intertwined[55]. If species are intertwined, one could say that each is a coherent deformation of the other: a new species is always a few slight morphological differences away from an already existing species. Additionally, Merleau-Ponty accepts Descartes' definition of the human body as a circuit that is not closed in on itself through its commerce with the external world[56]. This being in an open circuit with the external world is another way of thinking of the flesh of the sensible world: our body does not end with its physical limits; those objects around us that are part of our habitual existence become incorporated. So when he recommends that Descartes' definition of the human body be extended to animals as well[57], we should then also say that animals actively participate in the flesh of the world. I submit that this is the meaning of Merleau-Ponty's several mentions of an "Inter-animality": perceiving beings all share in this intertwining of perception within the flesh of the sensible. In human being, this intertwining of perception in a common world is called the "interworld"[58]. But what is the difference between inter-animality and the interworld of the human being? His answer: the morphological transformation that allowed for the formation of language. This "metamorphosis" reveals the supposed kinship between animals and humans to be "illusory" and their bodies to be "only homonyms" because the morphological change is also the genesis of the possibility of reflection *in the body*[59]. The body's ability to reflect, which he emphasizes is *not* a result of cephalization or cerebralization[60], is a "coming to self of being through sensing (*sentir*) and the realization of an intersubjectivity which is first intercorporeity and becomes culture only by relying on sensible-corporeal communication"[61]. Reflection, then, requires two things: perception and intersubjectivity, but this intersubjectivity is "first" the bodily being together (inter-animality) within which there is gestural communication.

If one accepts all this, then I see no reason to exclude animals from this reflection. The reason for this lies in what we have said of *The Prose of the World*. If the animal body is just as much an open circuit with the world as the human body, then an animal will have meaningful relations to the world based upon its type of circuit, will have a species-particular relation to the flesh of the sensible. Thus, each type of body, each bodily schema, is the ground of the intercorporeity that becomes culture. The architecture of meaningful signs or symbols toward which the animal is oriented through its perceptual systems constitutes the "beginning of culture" or a "preculture"[62], and through the mediation of Adolf Portmann's study *Animal Forms and Patterns*[63], Merleau-Ponty admits that animals' morphological appearances can be seen "as a language" and that "the mystery of life" can be grasped in this language of appearance[64]. Thus, the "dialogue" between members of a species constitutes "an animal culture"[65]. But if animals have an intercorporeity and this intercorporeity can become cultural on the basis of the bodily appearances and "symbolic activity"[66], then animals have the same fundamental structures in place of which human intersubjectivity consists. Each species, then, with its distinct dialogue, with its distinct means of presenting and interpreting symbols, has its own interworld, and this interworld is in dialogue with other species' as

well within inter-animality. This dialogue, at whichever level one encounters it, is dialectical, but in such a way that the positions of the dialectic are not fixed in opposition but are reversible. Because this reversibility is never complete, however, the dialectical movement always produces a surplus, which is largely affective in nature, that never allows the dialectic to stagnate. So species, including *Homo sapiens*, can be seen as individuals as well, entering into collective dialogue with other species, all of which are alive, because of our affective relations to them. In this way, we can say that all expressive gesturing within the perceptual logos also has its other side, has its second nature, based upon the morphology of the species. This does not, of course, mean that we have given human language to all living beings. Rather, it means that each species has its own side (*côté*) with respect to language that may or may not be accessible to beings with other bodily schemas.

To revisit Merleau-Ponty's conclusion, then, we can now see how to reintroduce the kinship between species. If all species have their own way (*côté*) in language, and each individual has its own way within the species, all life, at both the level of the species and of the singular individual, is expressive. As expressive, species are individuated through a coherent deviation from life in general (body schema), and the individual is individuated from the species-being or "a priori of the species"[67]. This is why life cannot be defined as Bichat defines it as the sum of functions that resist death: life is rather the "power (*puissance*) to invent the visible"[68]. In his book *The Implications of Immanence*, Leonard Lawlor discusses this particular instance of Merleau-Ponty's rejection of Bichat alongside a more prolonged treatment of Foucault's relationship to Merleau-Ponty. Lawlor claims that death, as the metamorphosis of the living back into nature, back into the earth which carries us, is thought in terms of birth and thus Merleau-Ponty's rejection of Bichat follows from a desire for "tranquility"[69]. This "true tranquility," however, is mentioned with reference to Bergson[70], so even though I agree with his claims about death being thought in terms of birth and life, I do not see here an abandonment of the "barbaric principle" or "savage being." To show this I would point to the manner in which life is conceived through the folding in upon itself of the physical: life is born out of nature. But in the birth of life, there is not tranquility, as we have seen, but the constant asymmetrical exchange between body and world sustained by the attempt at an ever elusive equilibrium. One might call this always intended but never achieved harmony an unstable equilibrium. In sensing, which is the hallmark of life, each living being "models" or "cuts up" the visible world in a slightly different way, but they are all within the visible world. This is the kinship between species and how life invents the visible. On the other hand, because their perceptions carve up the world differently and consequently sustain a different style of participating in the logos of the sensible, a species is initially only capable of seeing things from its own side and the kinship remains "strange" rather than illusory.

5. *Conclusion*

One might claim at this point that we have failed to determine the difference that remains between humans and other animals. If this is so, then the reason for such a deficiency is that no such difference exists when "humans" and "animals" are taken as two homogenous and self-contained groups[71]. Humans are just one form of life, and each other species of life has equal status. This may seem as if we are simply pushing the problem off, now taking each species as a self-contained group that can be distinguished in a determinate manner from other groups, but this is not so. As we said, species are all together in an inter-animality and their kinship in this way allows them to enter into communication: we can at times and with a certain amount of familiarity literally *see* an animal's (or another person's) mind. Since each is a coherent deformation of others, species can adapt and change with respect to each other on the basis of their kinship and affective relations. One can distinguish inter-special differences only between two species at once, and even then it can be highly problematic to determine the boundaries and borders of a species, so the differences can never be taken as absolute.

I must hastily add, however, that this was not even the question we set out to answer. Our question was how life reveals itself as historical, and to it we now have a tentative response: life is historical in its language-like structure. But even this opens other questions, such as whether life is like language or, contrarily, whether language is like life? But these are questions to which we lack the time to address. Instead, let us conclude by looking at how the above considerations might contribute to a better understanding of the ontology that supports them.

At every order that presents itself, there are further orders that can be explicated from it. If we look at the order of nature, we can arrive at the order of life, life gives us species, from species we could look at personal styles, etc. But at each analytic moment, all the other orders are present within it. Thus, to take one moment in isolation is to lose sight of the whole. There is one sole being from which each singular constellation of relations is a deviation or coherent deformation, but *being,* taken as a whole, can only be spoken of in terms of its *dimensionality* or *depth*[72]. This is not inconsistent with Merleau-Ponty's discussion of being in terms of flesh in *The Visible and the Invisible* precisely because in that text he says that flesh, as "carnal being, as the being of depths, of several leaves (*feuillets*) or several faces, being of latency, and presentation of a certain absence, is a *prototype* of being, of which our body, the sensible sentient, is a very remarkable variant, *but whose constitutive paradox already lies in every visible*"[73]. The flesh of the body, of which he gives a phenomenology in that chapter, is simply a prototype: a particular example of a more general structure. Flesh is an "element of being"[74]; it is not being itself. This explains why there can be a multiplicity of flesh; within the immanence of being there are many kinds of folds. Merleau-Ponty explicates at least five kinds: the flesh of nature, the flesh of language, the flesh of the body, the flesh of time, the flesh of the sensible, etc. Each flesh is a leaf of being, and only when

we acknowledge that flesh is not unitary but heterogeneous—that is, there is no "the Flesh"—will we begin to understand the direction of Merleau-Ponty's final philosophy. This is why this paper is a proposal: I am suggesting that pursuing this idea of being as dimensionality will further clarify the constitution of a species because just as each species has its own way (*côté*) of being in the flesh of the sensible world, so it will have its own flesh of language, time, etc. And so we see the ontological problem clearly: being can never be grasped as a whole; even if one could, which one cannot, fully explicate a given *côté*, there will always be another side from which to see it.

Bryan Bannon
bbannon@memphis.edu

NOTES

1 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de cours 1959-61.* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 156. Hereafter cited as "Notes", the translations of this work are my own. I translate the French word "*instauration*" by the same English word, even though it is archaic, in order to highlight a subtle change of meaning between it and the usual translation of "inauguration". "Instauration," in English, not only refers to the institution of something, but also to a restoration or renewal, while "inauguration" lacks this latter sense. It is my hypothesis that the introduction of this word to replace "*inauguration,*" which appears more regularly in his earlier texts, should be read as indicating Merleau-Ponty's increased understanding of the Heidegger's distinction between the *Beginn* and the *Anfang*.

2 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La Nature: notes, cours du Collège de France.* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), p. 256. Translated by Robert Vallier as *Nature: course notes from the Collège de France* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), p. 199. Translation here very slightly modified. Hereafter, these texts will be cited as "Nature" with the French pagination preceding the English.

3 Notes 37.

4 In many of his texts, Merleau-Ponty criticizes modern science for its "operationalism", which refers to the manner in which the natural sciences manipulate a series of constructed variables within a pre-established model or matrix so as to "solve" the problems that arise within that constituted model of the world. See, for example, the first section of *L'Oeil et l'Esprit* (Paris: Folio essais-Gallimard, 1964); translated by Michael Smith in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*. Ed. Galen A. Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993).

5 Following Robert Vallier, I am translating "*parenté*" as "kinship", though I would like to suggest "affinity" as an equally good translation. Since Merleau-Ponty explicitly denies that evolution should be viewed as a theory of descent based upon filiation, using "kinship" could be misleading because of precisely that connotation. "Affinity," however, maintains a biological significance, eliminates the problem of filiation, and accentuates the possibility of other kinds of alliance that are not biological that are also maintained in the French term.

6 Notes 148.

7 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La structure du comportement* (Paris: PUF, 1942), pg. 241. Translated by Alden L. Fisher as *The Structure of Behavior* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1963), pg. 224. Hereafter, these texts will be cited as "SC" with the French paginations preceding the English.

8 SC 1/3.

9 SC 149/139.

10 SC 1/3.

11 SC 271/201.

12 See, for example, SC 166/153 or 175/162.

13 For example, "The problem of perception lies completely in this duality [between consciousness in-itself and the consciousness in- and for-itself]" (SC 191/176).

14 SC 227/210.

15 SC 175/162, translation modified.

16 SC 175/162, translation modified.

17 SC 175/162.

18 See G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* translated by A. V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977) paragraph 194 where work (*arbeiten*) is what rids the servant consciousness of its natural existence and elevates it to self-consciousness.

19 SC 188/174, emphasis added.

20 See in general section C.BB.B of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*: "Self-Alienated Spirit. Culture", and in particular paragraphs 50-8 where the "I" becomes actual through its externalization in the *act* of speech.

21 SC 143/133.

22 Aside from his letters to More, this theme is most explicit in the concluding pages of his 5th *Discourse on Method.*

23 SC 188/174.

24 SC 136/125-6.

25 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La prose du monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p. 29n. Translated by John O'Neill as *The Prose of the World* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 20n. Hereafter, these texts will be cited as "PM" with the French paginations preceding the English.

26 PM 29/19, translation modified.

27 PM 45/31.

28 PM 47/32.

29 PM 50/35.

30 PM 52/36.

31 PM 111/79.

32 PM 114/81.

33 PM 112/80.

34 PM 110/78, translation modified.

35 N 334/265.

36 Ted Toadvine. "'Strange Kinship': Merleau-Ponty on the Human-Animal Relation." in *Analecta Husserliana* 93 (2006): 17-32.

37 N 195/146.

38 This analysis is present in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 193. Translated by Alphonso Lingis as *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 149. Hereafter, this text will be cited as "VI" with the French paginations preceding the English. Also, it has come to my attention that Gallimard has slightly altered the pagination of this text so that more recent printings of the text are approximately two pages ahead of older printings. So, for example, what I cite as page 193 of the 2003 printing can probably be found on page 191 of older printings.

39 VI 193/149.

40 N 207/155.

41 N 187/139.
42 This can be applied at the macrolevel in such fields as conservation biology or at the microlevel in a field such as embryology, which is primarily Merleau-Ponty's concern, looking at systems of cells and the ways in which they differentiate and develop into forms and structures. Biophysicist Robert Rosen uses the means immanent to biological discourse itself to assert a similar definition of life as complex and relational. See *Life Itself* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).
43 See the working note from February, 1959 where he states that the results of *Phenomenology of Perception* need to be brought "to ontological explicitation" because the problems that the *Phenomenology of Perception* left unaddressed cannot be addressed through the "philosophy of 'consciousness'" of that work (VI 234/183).
44 N 208/156-7.
45 N 208/157.
46 N 209/157.
47 N 209/157, 281/219.
48 N 273/211.
49 N 290/227.
50 N 290/227.
51 N 209/157.
52 N 219/166.
53 For example, N 277/214.
54 N 335/268.
55 N 340/273.
56 N 286-7/223.
57 N 339/271.
58 E.g. VI 114/84, throughout his translation, Lingis translates "*intermonde*" as "intermundane space."
59 N 340/272-3.
60 N 339/271.
61 N 340-1/273.
62 N 231/176.
63 This is the English language title to Portmann's work *Die Tiergestalt* (Reinhardt Verlag, 1948) translated by Hella Czech (Schocken Books, 1967).
64 N 245/188.
65 N 259/198.
66 N 254/195.
67 This phrase is used multiple time throughout Merleau-Ponty's works; for example, SC 133/122, N 243/186
68 N 248/190.
69 Leonard Lawlor, *The Implications of Immanence* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), pp. 119-20.
70 N 79/52.
71 Jacques Derrida has many interesting insights into this issue in his *L'Animal que donc je suis*, which has not yet been translated as a whole. Its first chapter can be found under the title "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)" in *Critical Inquiry* 28(2): 369-418, and the third chapter as "What if the animal responded?" in Cary Wolfe (ed.), *Zoontologies: the question of the animal* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002): 121-146. Both excerpts are translated by David Wills.
72 N 318/251.
73 VI 177/136, emphasis added.
74 VI 139/182, 191/147.

Lire les signes vivants : proposition pour un concept merleau-pontien de l'espèce

Cet article s'interroge sur l'évolution de la conception merleau-pontienne de la vie animale, au fil de son oeuvre. Dans ses premiers écrits, Merleau-Ponty défend l'idée que la " vie " n'a pas la même signification comme vie animale et comme vie humaine, s'il est vrai que la " dialectique humaine " transforme notre relation à la vie. Dans les derniers travaux, et plus particulièrement dans les cours sur la nature, cette position s'assouplit à travers une conception non hiérarchique du rapport homme-animal, mais reste essentiellement la même : même s'il n'y a aucune rupture entre humains et animaux, ils restent fondamentalement distincts, pour autant que tous les non-humains peuvent être regroupés dans une seule et même classe, celle de " l'animalité ". J'essaie de montrer que Merleau-Ponty ne parvient pas à aller jusqu'au bout de ses intuitions les plus radicales concernant les relations entre êtres vivants, parce qu'il reste prisonnier de cette distinction fondamentale, et je suggère quelques pistes pour affronter aujourd'hui un tel problème, à partir de ces intuitions inabouties. La proposition théorique consisterait alors à prendre au sérieux la biologie " dialectique " et à développer la conception merleau-pontienne des espèces, basée sur les relations des êtres vivants entre eux et avec leur environnement, plutôt que de traiter les organismes exclusivement comme des unités discrètes. Nous revenons en conclusion sur les conséquences qu'une telle approche peut avoir sur notre compréhension de l'ontologie merleau-pontienne en général.

Leggere i segni viventi: proposta per un concetto merleau-pontiano di specie

Questo contributo intende proporre una possibile direzione di ricerca incentrata sulle trasformazioni che il pensiero di Merleau-Ponty ha attraversato, da un testo all'altro, nel suo confronto con la questione della vita animale. Nei suoi primi lavori Merleau-Ponty assume che il termine "vita" non abbia il medesimo significato in relazione all'animale e all'essere umano, a causa dell'alterazione che la "dialettica umana" impone alla relazione dell'essere umano con la vita. Nelle opere più tarde, in particolare nei corsi sulla natura, questa posizione diviene più sfumata, tanto che la relazione tra animale e uomo si traduce in un rapporto privo di gerarchie, senza che, tuttavia, muti l'essenziale della tesi. Può essere che non si dia "cesura" tra uomini e animali, ma essi risultano ancora essenzialmente differenti, tanto che tutti gli animali non-umani possono essere raggruppati in un'unica classe, quella dell'"animalità". Vorrei quindi provare a mostrare che Merleau-Ponty non arriva da dare pieno sviluppo alle sue intuizioni più radicali circa i rapporti tra gli esseri viventi proprio perché mantiene fino all'ultimo questa distinzione, e vorrei suggerire infine alcune vie possibili attraverso cui giungere a un confronto con tale problematica, giocando le risorse dell'opera di Merleau-Ponty in una direzione che egli non ha battuto. La proposta è quella di prendere in parola la biologia "dialettica" sviluppando una concezione merleau-pontiana delle specie basata sulle interrelazioni tra gli esseri viventi e i loro ambienti naturali, piuttosto che sui soli organismi intesi come unità discrete. Concludo questo contributo valutando quali potrebbero essere le conseguenze di questo approccio in ordine a una comprensione più generale dell'ontologia di Merleau-Ponty.