



# Merleau-Ponty and Derrida on Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*

---

*Douglas Low*

*Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy - Revue de la philosophie française et de langue française*, Vol XXXI, No 1/2 (2023) pp 188-209.

Vol XXXI, No 1/2 (2023)  
ISSN 1936-6280 (print)  
ISSN 2155-1162 (online)  
DOI 10.5195/jffp.2023.1039  
[www.jffp.org](http://www.jffp.org)



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.



This journal is operated by the University Library System of the University of Pittsburgh as part of its D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program, and is co-sponsored by the University of Pittsburgh Press

# Merleau-Ponty and Derrida on Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*

---

*Douglas Low*

University of West Florida

## Introduction

Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jacques Derrida: we have been without two of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's greatest philosophers for some time now, but questions regarding the relationship between phenomenology and postmodernism, and more generally regarding the relationship between perception and language, remain with us. It seems that these relationships may be clarified by considering the relationship of Merleau-Ponty and Derrida to Husserl and by arguing that the great wave of postmodernism that washed *past* Merleau-Ponty's work after his premature death was not fully warranted, at least without further consideration. Thus, one of the main goals here will be to carefully consider Derrida's interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of Husserl, particularly regarding what Husserl said about the relationship between perception and language. Moreover, this careful consideration will involve a defense of how Merleau-Ponty understands Husserl. Yet, perhaps the greater goal here is to better understand the relationship between phenomenology and language, between perception and language, even the relationship between perception and cognition (which only occurs with the assistance of language), and even the relationship between facts and essences. These relationships have yet to be fully understood, yet it will be argued that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy gets us closer than what was achieved by either Husserl or Derrida.

This essay is divided into three main sections. Section 1, *Merleau-Ponty's Interpretation of Husserl's Letter*, opens with a consideration of Jacques Derrida's criticism of Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of Husserl's letter to Lévy-Bruhl, that Husserl downplayed the concern for essences to focus on lived-through perception, and a consideration of Derrida's claim that Merleau-Ponty still harbored certain of Husserl's transcendental tendencies. Textual evidence will be provided to show that it is Derrida who is misinterpreting Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty claims that Husserl was *still*

concerned with the conceptual production of essences and that Husserl sought to focus on both experience and essences. Moreover, it will be argued that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is certainly not Husserl's, for Merleau-Ponty does not cling to the conceptual production of essences, certainly in the way that Husserl did.

Section 2, *Husserl at the Limits*, seeks to further confirm Merleau-Ponty's understanding of Husserl by considering Merleau-Ponty's now published lectures on Husserl: that he sought to return to experience *and* continue to produce conceptual essences---and that Merleau-Ponty disapproved of the latter while, nonetheless, reframing it for use in his own philosophy.

Section 3, *The late Merleau-Ponty and Husserl's Letter*, returns to the earlier consideration of Husserl's letter to Lévy-Bruhl. Now we will see that Merleau-Ponty recognizes Husserl's return to experience, recognizes that Husserl still sought the conceptual production of permanent essences, but also recognizes that Husserl realizes that his imaginative conceptual variation could not fully capture this experience. Merleau-Ponty seeks to overcome this tension in Husserl's thought, for we will see that Merleau-Ponty believes that it is speech and finally written language that help give permanence to conceptual essences, with these essences now appearing as a creative sublimation of a broader lived-through experience that can never be fully captured or expressed.

## Merleau-Ponty's Interpretation of Husserl's Letter

Derrida takes issue with Merleau-Ponty's characterization of the late Husserl as embracing situated worldly experience and as moving away from *a priori* thought. Let us critically evaluate this statement. Here is Derrida's claim:

The part devoted to relativism in . . . [Husserl's] celebrated Letter to [Lucien] Lévy-Bruhl [in 1935] can be interpreted in this way [that is, as moving toward experience and away from abstract thought]. From that letter . . . we might think . . . that Husserl renounced the historical *a priori* discovered by imaginary variation . . . This is notably the reading that Merleau-Ponty proposed: 'In a letter to Lévy-Bruhl, . . . Husserl seems to admit that the facts go beyond what we imagine and that this point bears a real significance. It is as if the imagination, left to itself, is unable to represent the possibilities of existence which are realized in different cultures . . . [Husserl] saw that it is perhaps not possible for us, who live in certain historical traditions, to conceive of the historical possibility of these primitive men by a mere variation of our imagination.'<sup>1</sup>

Thus Derrida *does* claim that Merleau-Ponty claims that the later Husserl is turning toward a greater focus on lived experience and away from the intuition of essences by way of the imagination. What seems to be at issue

here is that Merleau-Ponty finds in Husserl a move toward an existential phenomenology, a phenomenology rooted in perceptual experience, with less emphasis on imaginary variation (Husserl's eidetic reduction) or on conceptual construction, while Derrida rejects this claim and believes that he never prioritized perception over *a priori* analysis in the way that Merleau-Ponty suggests.<sup>2</sup> Yet, even with this criticism, Derrida still apparently believes that Merleau-Ponty is guilty of remaining too Husserlian, of still adhering to Husserl's transcendental tendencies, as we will see below. In addition, it is also clear that Derrida does not accept Merleau-Ponty's appeal to perceptual experience, as we shall see.

Considering the textual evidence, it appears that Derrida's belief is not accurate. After all, Merleau-Ponty does cite *what Husserl actually says* about the importance of the lived-through worldly experience in the Lévy-Bruhl letter. Husserl does say this, *and* this seems to be what Husserl is actually doing in his last work, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, particularly in §9, Galileo's Mathematization of Nature.<sup>3</sup> Taking up the letter first, this is the Husserl passage that Merleau-Ponty quotes: "It is a task of the highest importance, which may be actually achieved, to feel our way into a humanity whose life is enclosed in a vital, social tradition and to understand it in this unified social life. This is the basis of the world which is no mere representation but rather the world that actually is for it." In addition, Husserl here goes on to say that "historical relativism has its incontestable justification as an anthropological fact." Merleau-Ponty continues his exposition of Husserl's position stating that "while anthropology . . . may have the first word in the gaining of scientific knowledge, it does not have the last. Historical relativism is now no longer dominated at one stroke by a mode of thought which would have all the keys of history and would be in a position to classify all possible histories before any factual inquiry. On the contrary, the thinker who wishes to dominate history in this way must learn from the facts and must enter into them."<sup>4</sup> Husserl continues this line of historical, existential thought in *Crisis*:

In the intuitively given surrounding world, by abstractively directing our view to mere spatiotemporal shapes, we experience 'bodies'—not geometrical-ideal bodies but precisely those bodies that we actually experience, with the content which is the actual content of experience. No matter how arbitrarily we may transform these bodies in fantasy, the free and in a certain sense 'ideal' possibilities we thus obtain are anything but geometrical-ideal possibilities: they are not the geometrically 'pure' shapes which can be drawn in ideal space...<sup>5</sup>

Husserl is here clearly making a case for the importance of lived experience, that this experience of actual spatiotemporal shapes is not the same as an ideal construction, and is making the case that the ideals abstracted from it are not the same as the pure shapes of ideal space. Husserl continues:

The geometry of idealities was preceded by the practical art of surveying, which knew nothing of idealities. Yet such a pre-geometrical achievement was a meaning-fundament for geometry, a fundament for the great invention of idealization . . . It was a fateful omission that Galileo did not inquire back into the original meaning-giving achievement which, as idealization practiced on the original ground of all theoretical and practical life --- the immediately intuited world (and here especially the empirically intuited world of bodies) ---resulted in the geometrical ideal constructions. He did not reflect closely on this: on how free imaginative variation of this world and its shapes results only in possible empirically intuitable shapes and not in exact shapes; on what sort of motivation and what new achievement was required for genuinely geometric idealization.<sup>6</sup>

Again, what is being stressed here is the founding of the idealities of geometry in practical experience, in a practical experience that has been forgotten, resulting in the separation of geometrical idealities from experience, resulting in the alienation of science from actual experience, resulting in the crisis of European sciences. Yet, for our present purposes, what is significant here is that what Merleau-Ponty says about Husserl (about his appeal to lived experience) is clearly present in Husserl's *Crisis* as well as in his letter to Lévy-Bruhl, a claim Derrida says is not justifiable.<sup>7</sup> The above quoted texts indicate otherwise.

Furthermore, while Derrida accuses Merleau-Ponty of misinterpreting Husserl, the text reveals that it can certainly be claimed that Derrida is guilty of misinterpreting Merleau-Ponty. For example, Derrida accuses Merleau-Ponty of claiming or at least implying that Husserl, when thinking about future possibilities, was "deducing factuality itself *a priori*."<sup>8</sup> Yet, Merleau-Ponty never makes this *claim* about Husserl, that all future facts must be deducible from the eidetic essences, and the *implication* appears to be more Derrida's than Merleau-Ponty's. From what Merleau-Ponty states, it appears that for Husserl the *essential structures* of future events must conform to the eidetic essence. He never claimed (or implied) that Husserl believed that he could derive *all* future *particularities* from these essences. Merleau-Ponty is certainly aware that future particularities may be different or unpredictable for a present *essential* structure while the future *essence* remains predicable. In fact, even regarding the grasping of an essence in the present, what is important is the essential structure not the incidental particulars. If we are searching for the essence of an object such as a lamp, we will focus on its ability to emit light but not on the fact that the material of which it is made is shiny or a certain color. Moreover, the incidental particulars would not be deducible from the essence, in the present or the future.<sup>9</sup>

While it is true that Husserl still appeals to essences and conceptual analysis, lending some credit to Derrida's interpretive claim, which we will consider momentarily, for now let us consider an additional point made by

Derrida: that his criticism of Husserl is aimed at *all* phenomenology, including Merleau-Ponty's. Lawrence Hass even seems to think that this implies that Derrida believes that Merleau-Ponty likewise still adheres to certain transcendental tendencies, that he still relies on *prior conceptual powers* to make sense of the perceptual experience.<sup>10</sup> Yet Merleau-Ponty is certainly aware that transcendental philosophies, with their stress on the conceptual, tend to presuppose a distinction between sensibility and the understanding, a distinction that he does not accept within his own philosophy.<sup>11</sup> He mentions that even an intellectualist like Kant admitted that all knowledge begins with experience, that even the *a priori* must start from here, and, in making this claim, Kant must then admit that there is no way to make a precise distinction between sensibility and the understanding, between the factual and the *a priori*.<sup>12</sup> However, even though Merleau-Ponty is clear about this, it seems that Derrida (and Hass) presuppose that Merleau-Ponty adheres to this distinction between sensibility and understanding,<sup>13</sup> when in fact he conflates matter and form, which is clear from his comments regarding Kant's *a priori* and from his embrace of the Gestalt theory of perception, with its claim that the simplest perception is a figure against a ground, that form is initially perceptual structure. Moreover, given Merleau-Ponty's treatment of the lived-through body, that it cannot be understood as a mere thing or as the exemplification of an abstract concept, that it actively meets the world in the creation of meaning, the subsequent meaning of a perceived thing (its form if you will) must be understood as given within this engaged context and as given with its content. Thus, the argument that Merleau-Ponty remains committed to certain of Husserl's transcendental themes, of prior conceptual powers to make sense of perception, with its seeming corollary of the separation of the understanding and perception, is a misrepresentation. In fact, Derrida's framing of this whole reading of Merleau-Ponty and his interpretation of Husserl presupposes this distinction between "*de facto* and *de jure*, existence and essence," the factual and the *a priori* (see note above) when Merleau-Ponty's has already gone well beyond it.

In addition, Derrida says that the work of social scientists certainly uses imaginary variation to help gain access to universal invariants. However, he proceeds, "since these invariants will teach us nothing about the specific character of a particular society or epoch, I will--especially--have to 'empathize' (*einzufuhlen*), as Husserl said to Levy-Bruhl. But this empathizing (*Einfuhlung*) . . . cannot exactly institute science *de jure*. *Einfuhlung* itself is possible only *within* and *by virtue* of the *a priori* universal structures of sociality and historicity."<sup>14</sup> But is this true? Is empathy possible only within *a priori* universal structures? Merleau-Ponty argues just the opposite. It is through the lived empathy that the universal is formed, that we recognize the other who is *similar* (and yet also different). The universal is thus built from a recognition of numerous similarities (as well as the recognition of differences). In lived-through perception, my experience opens upon a shared world, upon a field that is experienced as public, as existing in its own right, and it is in this lived-

through experience that I catch a glimpse (via empathy, for human bodies are similar and similarly open upon this shared, pre-existent world) of what others live as their experiences opens upon this one same world. Our experiences overlap as we act into the world together. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is certainly not just about the description of one's own experience. It starts with this experience, compares it to other experiences, then compares these, by way of dialogue, to the experiences lived through by others – in order to form general concepts and more precise yet still provisional conceptual essences. These “essences” can then be used to help make sense of future events, even though they may be changed by them. Moreover, while transcendental thought distinguishes between matter and form, between sensibility and the understanding, Merleau-Ponty, as we have seen, conflates the two experiences, for lived-through perception is already oriented, already meaningful. Form is first and foremost gestalt perceptual form, and it is from this already meaningful perceptual form that the abstract form of concepts, by additional comparison to other meaningful experiences and the meaningful experiences lived-through by other perceivers, is created. Thus, Merleau-Ponty offers a counter example to Derrida's claim that empathy takes place only within the context of an *a priori* structures. True, since we are able to sympathize and empathize with others because our bodies *experientially* open upon the shared structures of a perceptual field, this field is presupposed, but the formation of general concepts and even *a priori* conceptual structures *follow from* a sublimation of this perceptual field and a comparison of experiences that occur within it.

Derrida's above reference to the work of social scientists is undoubtedly reference to Merleau-Ponty's discussion of this issue in “Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man” – which Derrida cites in the preceding pages, as noted above. My contention here is that Merleau-Ponty's discussion makes more sense than Derrida's. Yet it should be mentioned here that Merleau-Ponty does recognize the value of “case studies” when discussing Husserl's intuition of essences, since, for example, the principle of gravity, as he states in “Phenomenology and the Science of Man,” can be read from a single event.<sup>15</sup> When discussing case studies and induction, here as well as in *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language*,<sup>16</sup> he agrees with Husserl and Léon Brunschvicg that induction should not be characterized as it has been done by J.S. Mill's, one that is not simply the successive perception of particulars in search of commonalities to be abstracted, but one that uses an orienting hypothesis in order to grasp truly meaningful comparisons. It is in *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language* that he more explicitly mentions Kurt Goldstein's focus on case studies and his effort to grasp the meaningful core of what is being studied, rather than simply trying to bring the greatest number of facts under some general claim. Yet Merleau-Ponty proceeds to say that the facts and meaning, the respective domains of science and philosophy, cannot exist apart from one another. Thus, if we think of the Goldstein example, the case study reveals the core meaning of what is being studied,

but this meaning, at some point, must be related to other cases in an inductive manner.

Merleau-Ponty is thus well aware of strict empiricism's two fundamental problems. First, if knowledge is taken to be grounded in immediate observation of sense particulars, then knowledge is simply the *result* of contingent events, which isn't really knowledge at all. In fact, this approach ends in skepticism, for knowledge presupposes the *meaningful grasping* of events, which is not accounted for in the strictly empiricist approach.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, as we have just seen, since the first problem indicates the difficulty of accounting for the appearance of meaning in the observation of a particular, strict empiricism will have difficulty accounting for the observation of a common meaning among particulars.<sup>18</sup> This raises a serious problem for induction by enumeration, induction that searches for common meanings in successive observations of similar particulars. It is these problems that Merleau-Ponty seeks to avoid with his version of the phenomenological approach, with its attempt to bring together meaning and facts. Again, Merleau-Ponty does say, as perhaps Derrida is implying, that a case study can reveal a primary sense, one that is more enlightening than a study that proceeds merely by induction. He is aware that this sort of induction needs the orientation of meaning. Yet, the meaning uncovered in the case study is not an *a priori* in the way that Derrida implies here in his discussion of Husserl's intuition of essences, the *a priori* as a necessary conceptual truth. The "essential" meaning uncovered by way of the case study remains provisional and open to future alteration with the appearance of new observations.

Furthermore, while it is true, as Derrida says, that Husserl did not seem to square his *relative worldly historical experience* with his *conceptual eidetic analysis*, it must be recognized that Merleau-Ponty is fully aware of this. In fact, Merleau-Ponty says that Husserl, throughout his career, but especially toward the end of it, tried to do both – and, furthermore, that Husserl's ultimate stress on conceptual analysis and essences was wrong – at least as Husserl approached it. As Merleau-Ponty states with respect to Husserl's work,

. . . we find themes that do not seem to go together . . . There is in phenomenology at its beginning the will to come back to the lived, and there is at the same time . . . certain logicist components--and, in a sense, it is the opposite. Is it a question, with phenomenology, of constituting a table of concepts or essences - which would be the logicist tendency - or is it a question of restoring lived experience? The two things seem to be quite different, almost opposed . . . However, the fact is that from the beginning, Husserl says that he wants both . . . And this is what allowed me to say earlier that Husserl was never really a logicist.<sup>19</sup>



Thus, Husserl wanted to do both, return to lived experience and logical, conceptual analysis of it, and, even more, Merleau-Ponty interprets him as leaning more toward lived experience in the latter part of his career but, unfortunately, as ultimately still appealing to conceptual analysis and the search for essences. Yet, Merleau-Ponty's own philosophy certainly does not try to incorporate the lived-through, historical, existential into a transcendental phenomenology and its prioritizing of essences, as Derrida appears to think he does. Consider Merleau-Ponty's comments in his lectures on Husserl, entitled *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*<sup>20</sup>: "the crisis of European science" that Husserl addresses in his later writings "is due to *Sinentleerung* [the emptying out of sense]." For Husserl, Merleau-Ponty says, "the immediate remedy [for this problem] is historical *Besinnung* [reflection] to reawaken the *Urstiftung* [original founding or institution] and all of its horizons." The remedy is a historical reflection that is able to grasp the "interior of the history which bears the ideality," i.e., the human meaning as it has been developed. Now, this seems like a laudable goal, a laudable way to try to escape the alienation produced by the tradition. Yet here Merleau-Ponty immediately questions this goal and asks "can we still do this? Isn't total reactivation [of the past] impossible?"<sup>21</sup> Yet, even more, Merleau-Ponty proceeds to state that "we still need to know whether Husserl is mistaken to maintain intemporal formulas: *unbedingte Allgemeingultigkeit* <'unconditional general validity'> (*Husserliana* VI 366). Is there coincidence with the totality of the *Urstiftung*, if the tradition is always forgotten? We shall see [to] it to raise the question. Wouldn't coincidence be the death of the logos since forgetfulness makes the tradition fruitful?"<sup>22</sup> Merleau-Ponty's answer, to his clearly rhetorical questions, is not fully stated here, but, based on his overall philosophy (as well as the rhetorical nature of his questions), it must be that a coincidence with the totality of the founding is not possible, (or, more precisely, that an intellectual coincidence in the present with the totality of the founding is not possible), that Husserl is mistaken to maintain intemporal formulas such as "unconditional general validity," and that a total coincidence with the past world would mean the death of the *Stiftung logos* (the lived-through origin with its multitude of open possibilities.) Thus, in his own work, Merleau-Ponty is certainly not going to try to incorporate the historical/existential into the intemporal formulas, expressed in conceptual language, of a possibly transcendental phenomenology, as Derrida appears to claim, for we see here that he is critical of Husserl's attempt to do this. The attempt was made by Husserl, but not by Merleau-Ponty.

Rather, Merleau-Ponty proclaims that cognitive powers of the understanding are not separate from lived-through perception but are a *prolongation* or *sublimation* of the body's *perceptual orientation* toward the world and others. Granted, cognitive powers bring something new, but, again, this new power is a sublimation or a sublation or an *aufheben* in the Hegelian sense, in the sense of an emergent growth or development that solves the problems of preceding levels by integrating them in the global functioning of

the organism with a greater awareness and in a more efficient and unified way. Cognitive powers are a continuation of the human body's power of perceptual orientation and must not be considered outside or above it.<sup>23</sup>

Again, Merleau-Ponty does not deny the innovation and significance of abstract thought, expressed as it is with the assistance of language, mathematical symbols, algorithms, geometric formulas, and the like, for he recognizes that abstract calculations can be achieved without having to refer, at each step, to their source in perceptual experience. However, if at some point these abstractions do not refer back to the perceived world as we live and encounter it, then they render themselves meaningless. Merleau-Ponty expresses it this way:

Thus, nothing limits our power to formalize, that is, to construct increasingly general expressions of the same fact. But however far one proceeds with formalization, its signification remains in suspension, actually means nothing, and has no truth at all unless we refer its superstructures back to a visible object. To signify, to signify something as a decisive act, is therefore accomplished only when that something's constructions are applied to the perceived as the source of signification or expression.<sup>24</sup>

It is appropriate here to mention phenomenology's *Fundierung* relationship. When speaking about how Husserl understands the relationship between the power of perception and the power of the mind or the relationship between perception and the intuition of essences (*Wesenschau*), Merleau-Ponty states the following.

Husserl often says that to see an essence one must begin by having a perception, which serves as a base, or point of departure for a *Wesenschau* but not as the source of its validity. The relation between perception and *Wesenschau* is one of founding [*Fundierung*]; perception, that is, serves as the ground, or pedestal, on which an insight into essences is formed. Thus insight into essences is an intellectual taking over, a making explicit and clarifying of something concretely experienced, a recognition that it comes after something else, from which it starts, is essential to its nature. It also knows itself to be retrospective. The idea that it succeeds a more direct contact with the thing itself is enclosed in its very meaning.<sup>25</sup>

The way Merleau-Ponty understands and uses this *Fundierung* relationship is as follows. It is understood as a two-way relationship whereby terms influence each other reciprocally and simultaneously, yet with one of the terms remaining more primary. When considering the relationship between perception and language (which expresses thought), we must understand that these terms influence each other reciprocally and simultaneously, yet with perception as the more primary term. Perception, which is interested, sensual, and emotional, suggests or motivates certain expressions in painting and

song, as well as in speech and the written word. A variety of expressions is always possible and there is no definitively correct expression, yet some expressions are more clarifying than others, and these are the expressions that we should accept. Merleau-Ponty expresses this profoundly in *The Visible and the Invisible*.

Describe very precisely the way perception masks itself to itself, make itself Euclidean. Show that the pregnancy of the geometrical forms is grounded intrinsically (not culturally) in that they, better than others, allow an ontogenesis (they stabilize being . . .), but that this intrinsic pregnancy, in order to retain all its meaning, must be maintained within the zone of transcendence, within the context of pre-Being, of the *Offenheit* of the *Umwelt* [openness of the environment], and not dogmatically considered self-evident—the Euclidean perception has a privilege, but it is not an absolute privilege, and it is contested as absolute by the transcendence—which demands the Euclidean world as one of its aspects.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, different interpretations are always possible but some are more clarifying than others because they allow ontogenesis, because they help stabilize being, because they are more accurate than other interpretations. Yet they do so in the context of lived-through perceptual experience, as a sublimation of it, and it is to this open environment of lived-through perceptual experience that we must always return, always checking our expressions for the accuracy of their interpretations.<sup>27</sup>

One gets the impression, for some interpreters of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy (for example, Derrida and perhaps Hass as well), that the *Fundierung* relationship between perception and expression is less reciprocal than Merleau-Ponty intended, with more emphasis given to the power of linguistic expression, for linguistic expression (interpretation) seems to be doing the most important work. Contrarily, while Merleau-Ponty does stress that this relationship is reciprocal, his emphasis is on the power of the perceptual, with perception understood as engaged and adaptive movement, as an actively aware orientation, with perception even understood as the earliest form of expression.<sup>28</sup> Perception is our first expression, for it takes scattered givens from our perceptual field and helps express them as a meaningful structure, helps express them as a *sense*, with matter and form conflating into one another, with the perceptual field and the perceiving body crossing into one another (*Fundierung*) in the creation of *sense*. It is this meaning or sense that suggests or motivates other forms of expression,<sup>29</sup> that is sublimated through perception, even though the expressions of speech can fold back upon the perceived in a way that can help creatively orient it. Yet, the primary term here is still perception, with this primordial meaning being sublimated in more integrated, higher forms. Thus, primordial expression comes from below, if you will. Now, as we have seen, it is certainly true that speech and language fold back upon perception, that speech and language are

doing some of the work of expression, and that speech and perception fold into one another and cooperate, so to speak, that they cannot really be separated, yet, still, with perception remaining the more primary term in the relationship. Derrida's work implies that expression comes from above, from a power of linguistic expression (for language is a trace that erases the original trace of perception<sup>30</sup>).

Derrida explicitly claims the following about phenomenology and perception. "And contrary to what phenomenology which is always phenomenology of perception – has tried to make us believe, contrary to what our desire cannot fail to be tempted into believing, the thing always escapes. Contrary to the assurance that Husserl gives us a little further on, 'the look' cannot 'abide.'"<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, Derrida says: "Now I don't know what perception is and I don't believe that anything like perception exists. Perception is precisely a concept...And I believe that perception is interdependent with the concept of origin and center and consequently whatever strikes at the metaphysics of which I have spoken strikes also at the very concept of perception. I don't believe that there is any perception."<sup>32</sup>

Derrida clearly disregards the importance of the lived-through existential meaning of perception and of Merleau-Ponty's fundamental approach. He misses this lived-through perceptual experience in Husserl as well, in *Crisis*, in the already referenced §9 on Galileo – where Husserl talks about people's lives, their lived experience in practice, where measurement begins in praxis, and which reads quite differently than the appended "The Origin of Geometry." Husserl claims that Galileo forgets this life world, where the mathematization of nature, of natural shapes, begins to be idealized by geometry, where the natural shapes are treated as idealized shapes – which they are not. As we have seen, both lived-through experience and the formal are present in Husserl's work. Merleau-Ponty recognizes the importance of both, while Derrida downplays the former (and the latter in his own philosophy of linguistic deconstruction).

It should also be mentioned that David Carr, writing in his translator's introduction to *Crisis*, mentions that Husserl was not at all clear about the role of historical analysis in his later work. Carr even quotes Derrida, who states: "Though it is constantly *practiced* in the *Crisis* . . . itself, this new access to history is *never made a problem there*."<sup>33</sup> Thus, Husserl seems to be doing one thing in the section on Galileo, seeking to capture life-world experience, without fully clarifying what this means, and something different in the appended "The Origin of Geometry," seeking essences. If commentators focus mostly on the latter, then they are likely to miss or significantly downplay, as Derrida appears to do, the former. As we have seen, Merleau-Ponty recognizes this tension in Husserl's thought, the desire to do both description of lived-through experience and essential analysis, with Merleau-Ponty favoring the former and disapproving of the latter, at least as it is conceived by Husserl. Again, Merleau-Ponty is not naively claiming that Husserl returns

to lived-through experience, leaving the intuition of essence completely behind. After all, he does say that Husserl goes back to “imagined” origins, that Husserl is not attempting to do actual historical analysis. He does critically say that Husserl still puts experience in intemporal (conceptual) formulas, but he also sees the *existential* in the late Husserl, the appeal to the life-world. As we have seen, for Merleau-Ponty expression comes out of lived-through embodied perception. Even though it can be creative, intellectual expression in language is primarily a sublimation of the perceptual. Derrida gives too much to the power of language to freely interpret, as if language is an independent power brought to bear on perception, rather than the perceptual *logos* being a precursor to linguistic expression, rather than the perceptual being sublimated in painting, music, dance and poetry, speech, and finally in the more abstract expressions of written language.

## Husserl at the Limits

To further confirm the case for this interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's relationship to Husserl (that he recognizes that Husserl *does pursue lived experience*, as well as essential analysis), let us return to some of the details of Merleau-Ponty's treatment of late Husserl in *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*. As Merleau-Ponty says here, it is within one's practical activity that the passive and active fold into each other, and that the present is sensed and merges with the past. Also, as he continues his characterization of Husserl's *historical* thought, i.e., his bringing together of the past with the present, Merleau-Ponty states that geometry itself “consists in ‘spiritual’ being...engendered by human activity, belonging to our human space. I know this because it is a trace: Friday's footprint.”<sup>34</sup> In other words, since it is impossible for us to be historically present at the actual empirical origins of geometry, we are left with what might be imagined to be its origins, i.e., some practical human activity that presumes a certain *human sense*, just as Robinson Crusoe realizes that he is not alone on the island when seeing human footprints in the sand. Some human sense must accompany the original human activity that we can still presently observe. In the case of geometry, the first written formulas reveal a certain human presence and sense (human beings who were able to create *meaningful* geometrical formulas), just as the human footprints left in the sand on what appeared to be a deserted beach reveal a human presence and, presumably, some purposeful human activity.

We must attempt to retrace this lived-through human sense that has unfolded in human history. We can do this because certain meanings are sedimented in various social institutions. They are established as stable meanings that can be repeated and that suggest various future developments – and to which we must return if we seek to more fully understand that from which we have arisen, to more fully grasp the pathway of the past to our present. These sedimented meanings act as a trace (or suggestion) of a human

sense that is not now fully present, or, to some extent at least, is even absent (because they exist in the remote past). We can nevertheless get a glimpse of the past because it is *our* past, because we are connected to it from the present as time periods overlap as they recede and proceed in time. Yet Merleau-Ponty recognizes that we cannot return to the past to *fully recapture in conceptual form* the human meanings, the lived-through horizon of experience, that began to be instituted there. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty critically stresses here that this *Stiftung*, this founding or instituting of meaning, must be considered as open-ended, as providing a horizon of multiple possibilities, not as totally enveloping, not as implying fully defined terms for one fully determined future.<sup>35</sup> While Husserl seemed to recognize this open-endedness of lived-through experience, that a number of future possibilities are implied by it, he also remained sympathetic to the idea of an all-enveloping thought, even to a thought that is permanent.

For Husserl, it is written language that takes the final step toward the founding of the permanence of meanings constructed by human activity. Here is Merleau-Ponty on Husserl's position.

Through the written, meaning is virtually in the world. The permanence of ideal being rests on that of the world as containing virtualities of *Erzeugung* [[production]]. The ideal world supported by the sensible world. The written as element of the sensible world is *erfahrbar* in *Gemeinsamkeit* <'experience in common'>. As the element of the world of the nameable, it is *Eezeugbar* [in *Gemeinsamkeit*] [[production in common ground]]: its sensible inter-existence entails also inter-existence of sense...it is permanent as meaning, i.e., as element of the sayable and (correlatively) of the speech...<sup>36</sup>

The ideal meanings of geometry, for example, enjoy a permanence in existence because the written word, displaying a continuous sensible existence in the world (for what is written down today will still appear on the same page tomorrow), becomes a placeholder in the sensible world for the ideal. Merleau-Ponty continues his exposition of Husserl.

But in order for there to be truly coproduction, or *Deckung* [[coincidence]] of the present with the past, there has to be in addition 'simultaneity,' *Ineinander*, [i.e., the present act overcoming itself towards the acts of yesterday or towards those of others, encountering the act again in the coupling, i.e., the passage of one thought into another or into *Dokumentierung* [[documentation]]...The written is the...<'transformation of the original mode of being of the sense structure'> (*Husserliana VI 371*)...]<sup>37</sup>

Thus, it is written language that helps hold the past together with the present as they simultaneously slip apart, as the past slides away from the present. Thus, there is an absence that is given in the context of a presence, and, in Husserl's thought, it is written language that helps make this possible.

Yet, this is only part of the story for Merleau-Ponty, for there is something more fundamental than language, and, as we have seen, that is perception. Let us once again pursue an understanding of the role of perception, now in the context of language and time, for it is here that we will see a fundamental difference between Merleau-Ponty's thought and Husserl's. Merleau-Ponty often reads Husserl as seeking a third dimension, here something that can be regarded as a common source of ideality and historicity. For Merleau-Ponty, this third dimension is the experience of the embodied perceiving subject opening upon and intermingling with the public field of the world as it unfolds in time. Or, to restate this with reference to the ideal (ideality) and the temporal flow of immediate events (historicity), as my lived-through perceptual experience opens upon and intersects with the public field of the world as it unfolds in time, I think of the ideal in the closeness of the immediate past, as it passively passes from my present thought, as the present actively folds back into it and partially retains it. Merleau-Ponty makes this clear in the following passage drawn from *The Visible and the Invisible*:

Every ideation...is formed in a space of existence, under the guarantee of my duration, which must turn back into itself in order to find there again the same idea I thought an instant ago and must pass into the others in order to rejoin it also in them. Every ideation is borne by this tree of my duration and other durations, this unknown sap nourishes the transparency of the idea; behind the idea, there is the unity, the simultaneity of all the real and possible durations, the cohesion of one sole Being from one end to the other.<sup>38</sup>

It is Merleau-Ponty's reference to temporality here that helps clarify a fundamental disagreement with Husserl. In Michael Kelly's excellent overview of phenomenology and time consciousness,<sup>39</sup> he draws our attention to Husserl's two modes of intentionality with respect to time. The first can be characterized as a meaningful flow of experience from the present away from the past and towards the future, with these moments overlapping with no precise boundaries between them. This is referred to as a horizontal mode of intentionality. The second mode, called transverse intentionality, can be characterized as an objectification of the transcendent object that appears in and through the first mode. For example, as I walk around the exterior of a building, I first see the front, then the side, then the back, and so on, with these lived-through moments of experience passively flowing into one another and overlapping. Here I participate in the horizontal mode of operative or latent intentionality. Yet, according to Husserl, with the second mode of transverse intentionality, I am able to engage with the library as a transcendent object, as a singular object appearing through and even beyond the flow of experiences, which is intellectually represented in a present "now."<sup>40</sup>

Kelly proceeds to inform us that Merleau-Ponty rejects this latter mode while embracing the former. First of all, for Merleau-Ponty, it is lived-through

experience itself that highlights the present (albeit the present in the wide sense of including and shading into the past and future). As Merleau-Ponty puts it: "Time exists for me only because I am situated in it, that is, because I become aware of myself as already committed to it...Time exists for me because I have a present. No one of time's dimensions can be deduced from the rest. But the present (in the wide sense, along with its horizons of primary past and future), nevertheless enjoys a privilege because it is the zone in which being and consciousness coincide..."<sup>41</sup> Moreover, if this is the case, that is, if experience is centered in the "present" of a field, then there is no need for a reflective synthesis of experience. "There is no need for a synthesis externally binding together the *tempora* into one single time, because each one of the *tempora* was already inclusive, beyond itself, of the whole open series of other *tempora*, being in internal communication with them, and because the 'cohesion of a life' is given with its *ek-stase*" – with the present moment of experience leaping out of itself toward temporal, spatial fields which are experienced as dimensions of a bodily-being-in-the-world. For Merleau-Ponty, then, as my lived-through experience opens upon a stable public world, the moments of time hold together or cohere as they also slip apart, and do so on their own, so to speak, and do so because there is a *natural* cohesion and stability, because there is a *natural* spread of time – which also produces, right along with cohesion and stability, absence and difference.<sup>42</sup>

Now, just as moments of time hold together because they are a part of a stable world (a world that embodied perceptual consciousness is thrown into), and just as the experience of this cohesion provides the basis for the cohesion of speech, language and thought, for Merleau-Ponty the terms of speech and thought, as we have seen above, fold back upon the perceived to help further unify it, even to help form stable essences, especially with the help of written language. Yet, for Merleau-Ponty, unlike for Husserl, what remains primary here is the horizontal mode of lived-through experience, not the traverse mode of fixed, intemporal essences, for, again, these essences are created with the help of written language, which is based on the flow of lived experience, which is always unfolding temporally. Yet, just as it is still true that speech and written language, in turn, help stabilize the temporal flow of experience, of the past and present encroaching upon one another, they also help the movement of thought from one person to another by a similar passive/active encroachment. I passively listen to the others and actively take up their speech, just as they listen to and take up mine. Yet, it is written language that ultimately helps create "ideal significations," for they rely on written language for their continued existence, for written language is there (as a sensible object) for all to see and use over time, even if no one is present to think these thoughts for some time.

Thus, some of what we see in Husserl's thought, the *Ineinander* (or flowing into one another) of past and present (horizontal temporality), the *Ineinander* of lived-through perceptual experience and language, and



the *Ineinander* of speaking and listening, we also find in Merleau-Ponty's thought. When discussing language in his later works, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes a number of forms of *Ineinander* chiasm (of crossing or flowing into one another): the chiasm of the embodied perceiver *and* the perceived world, as the primordial source of meaning; the chiasm between the active, gesturing body *and* linguistic gestures, as our lived-through bodily perceptual encounter with the world sublimated in our linguistic gestures as they fold back on the perceived world to help express it more clearly, with a variety of expressions remaining possible,

yet with some expressing more clearly than the others; the chiasm between speaking and listening; the chiasm between linguistic expressions (especially in written form) and the ideal significations they express (with written language accounting for the continued existences of the ideals).<sup>43</sup>

Merleau-Ponty offers little criticism here in his lectures of Husserl's *Ineinander* or dialectical view of language, with aspects of experience crossing into and defining one another, other than Husserl's tendency, in spite of his appeal to the *Ineinander* of aspects of experience that occurs in lived-through experience, to retain a transcendental (traverse) and analytic perspective in search of intemporal conceptual essences.<sup>44</sup> The sense is that he is in agreement with Husserl's (horizontal) *Ineinander* view of experience and language but remains critical of Husserl's (traverse) attempt to grasp, analytically and cognitively, each aspect of experience and language as an explicit act, with intemporal results. It is fair to say that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of language is primarily a philosophy of speech, with speech as a sublimation of perception, and with written language as a sublimation of speech, as a more abstract expression of speech, or, simply, merely as speech written down, or more negatively, as a reification of speech. Of course, Merleau-Ponty is aware that written language does have new properties, such as providing continued physical existence to constructed ideal essences, but also that it primarily remains a sublimation of perception and speech.

## The late Merleau-Ponty and Husserl's Letter

Let us now return to the late text *The Visible and Invisible* to clarify some final points. Continuing the passage quoted above, Merleau-Ponty states:

Under the solidity of the essence and of the idea there is the fabric of experience, this flesh of time, and this is why I am not sure of having penetrated unto the hard core of being: my incontestable power to give myself leeway, to disengage the possible from the real, does not go as far as to dominate all the implications of the spectacle and to make of the real a simple variant of the possible; on the contrary, it is the possible

worlds and the possible beings that are variants and are like doubles of the actual world and the actual Being.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, I am able to pause and reflect and consider variations of my current experience, in order to determine what is not essential to it, but I cannot *definitively* determine what is essential. Experience (perceptual experience in the widest sense: seeing, hearing, touching, etc.) is always richer than my ability to vary it in my imagination. Here we are back at the meaning Merleau-Ponty expresses when considering Husserl's letter to Lévy-Bruhl. Merleau-Ponty favorably states that Husserl is considering the vital importance of lived-through experience and that the method of free variation in the imagination cannot possibly anticipate all of what experience can and does provide. Yet he also critically realizes that Husserl still clings to a conceptual analysis associated with the search for essences.

Merleau-Ponty makes clear that within the context of his own philosophy that there is no "space" for a pure thought or pure essence or pure ideality that is separate from speech. When speaking, he says, we find "the recuperation of a passivity by an activity," we find a taking up of the other (the other as world, as the past, as other human subjects) in a lived-through relationship of mutual influence. This "is how I think within the other person and how I talk with myself. Speech is not a product of my active thought, standing in a secondary relation to it." Rather, "it is my practice," and, in fact, it is lived-through, active speech that produces the thought, originally as a sublimation of perception. Therefore, as we have already seen above, we should not place ideal meanings outside of speech but "introduce an essential mutation in speech, namely, the appearance of writing. It is writing which once and for all translates the meaning of spoken words into ideal being, at the same time transforming human sociability, in as much as writing is 'virtual' communication, the speaking of  $x$  to  $x$  which is not carried by any living subject and belongs in principle to everyone, evoking a total speech."<sup>46</sup> Thus, for Merleau-Ponty, it is writing that helps us understand the existence of ideal meanings over time, that even helps provide for this existence, for without the language, and without living subjects to take it up, these ideals would fade away.

We have seen that Merleau-Ponty does read Husserl as moving away from his early focus on essences and reflective eidetic analysis (as found in *Logical Investigation*<sup>47</sup>) and toward a greater recognition of lived-through experience (as in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, "Letter to Levy-Bruhl" and in *Crisis*<sup>48</sup>), and according to Merleau-Ponty this is true especially with regard to language, with the later Husserl displaying a greater recognition that language is an "operation through which private thoughts acquire intersubjective value and, ultimately, ideal existence (*Ursprung der Geometrie*)."<sup>49</sup> Now, we have also seen that Merleau-Ponty is not naïve enough to think that Husserl has turned his eidetic phenomenology into an existential one, for he clearly states that Husserl remained committed to intemporal

essences, and he states (more than once) that he is “pushing Husserl further than he wished to go,” that he recognizes in Husserl’s work possibilities that were not fully expressed by Husserl.<sup>50</sup>

Thus when Derrida says that Merleau-Ponty is misrepresenting Husserl’s thought, he is stating what Merleau-Ponty (to some degree at least) has already admitted, yet with Derrida expressing a different (negative) attitude toward this “free” interpretation. This is somewhat ironic given Derrida’s own method of “deconstructive” analysis, whereby he displays *tensions* in another author’s work and brings them to the surface—expressing and exposing inconsistencies that were hidden or only implied.<sup>51</sup> Apparently it is alright for Derrida to do this but not Merleau-Ponty. Now, we have seen that Merleau-Ponty certainly recognizes the possibility of multiple interpretations of a body of work, yet we have also seen that he also values the interpretations that are the most accurate and clarifying. If new, creative interpretations create something useful, fine. There may be no need to thus be concerned about the accuracy of the interpretation. Yet, if we want to say what an original author says (including nature itself as “author”) and draw something new yet still implied from what was actually there, then accuracy is paramount. Merleau-Ponty recognizes both of these modes of interpretation, while Derrida is known for stressing free interpretation, even though here he inconsistently criticizes Merleau-Ponty of an “inaccurate” interpretation of Husserl’s work, thus assuming that there must be an accurate one. What Merleau-Ponty is stressing with his reading of Husserl is the latter mode, for he points out what Husserl *actually* says and he points out what *possibilities are implied* in what he says. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, Husserl’s “notion of an experienced essence, or an eidetic experience, contains in germ the consequence that I have just drawn from it.”<sup>52</sup> Derrida should have no problem with Merleau-Ponty’s more creative interpretations, again, given that his own philosophy tends towards the *free interpretation* of text, with little or no regard for an author’s original intention.<sup>53</sup> Yet, by the standards of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, and his use of phenomenology’s *Fundierung* relationship, some interpretations are better than others. What he actually attempts to do and what has been stated in the above essay align with this view, that some interpretations are better than others, for they are more clarifying. An attempt has thus been made here to defend Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of Husserl against Derrida’s claims that he misrepresents Husserl’s thought and to do so by carefully considering an analysis of pertinent texts, to do so by showing that Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation is more clarifying. Yet what is clearly of greater importance is to consider how these texts were able to help us better understand the relationship between perception and language. Thus, an attempt has also been made to show that Merleau-Ponty’s supposedly surpassed works are the texts that get us closer to this clarifying understanding than most, or at least closer than the works of either Husserl or Derrida.

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. John P. Leavey (Stony Brook, N.Y.: N. Hays, 1978), 111-112. The Merleau-Ponty passages quoted by Derrida can be found at Merleau-Ponty, "Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man," trans. John Wild in *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. James Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1964), 43-95. Hereafter cited in the text as PrP. See also Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, trans. Richard McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 98-113, especially 107-108; Edmund Husserl, "Letter to Lévy-Bruhl" in *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, vol. 8. (London: Routledge, 2008), 349-354.

See also Dermot Moran, Lukas Steinacher, "Husserl's letter to Lévy-Bruhl: Introduction" in *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, 325-347, which provides a detailed context for the letter; Dermot Moran, *Husserl's Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 285-287; Leonard Lawlor, *Derrida and Husserl: The Basic Problem of Phenomenology* (Indiana University Press, 2002). Lawlor carefully considers Derrida's *Introduction of Husserl's "The Origin of Geometry,"* as well as Derrida's earlier dissertation *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy*, trans. Marian Hobson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), which prepares Derrida for the developed criticisms he makes in his later works, particularly with regard to the phenomenology of language. See especially Lawlor's Chapter 5, "The Root, That is Necessarily One, of Every Dilemma: An Investigation of the *Introduction of Husserl's "The Origin Of Geometry,"*" pp. 88-142.

<sup>2</sup> In a discussion of Husserl's phenomenology and his phenomenology of language, Merleau-Ponty designates the following as an early work: Husserl, *Logical Investigation*, trans. John Niemeier Findlay (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970). Original German: *Logische Untersuchungen*, 1900-1901. And he designates the following as a later work: Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, trans. Dorion Cairns. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969). Original German: *Formale und Transzendente Logik*, 1929. See Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 85-86. Of course, the following should also be considered among later works: Husserl's "Letter to Lévy-Bruhl" and his *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970). Hereafter referred to as *Crisis*. Original German, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie: Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*, an unfinished 1936 manuscript by Husserl, ed. Walther Biemel (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1954).

<sup>3</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 23-59.

<sup>4</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, 90-92.

<sup>5</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 25.

<sup>6</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 49.

<sup>7</sup> Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry*, 112.

<sup>8</sup> Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry*, 112.

<sup>9</sup> See Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, 70.

<sup>10</sup> See Lawrence Hass, *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 167. Here is Derrida's claim: "[Merleau-Ponty] insists . . . that the rights of relativism . . . are preserved and 'conserved' by 'the intentional analyses' of transcendental phenomenology." Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry*, 111, my bracket addition.

- <sup>11</sup> See Donald A. Landes, "Between Sensibility and Understanding: Kant and Merleau-Ponty and the Critique of Reason," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 29 (3) (2015), 335-45, especially 337, 339-342.
- <sup>12</sup> See Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 220-222. See also Douglas Low, "Merleau-Ponty and Transcendental Philosophy," *Philosophy Today* 57 (Summer 2013): 279-294, especially 281.
- <sup>13</sup> Hass here also mentions that Derrida holds that all phenomenology operated within the distinction "between *de facto* and *de jure*, existence and essence. . ." (which, Derrida goes on to say, cannot occur "prior to the question of language"). Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 21.
- <sup>14</sup> Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry*, 114.
- <sup>15</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, 68-70.
- <sup>16</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language*, trans. Hugh Silverman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1979), 4-10.
- <sup>17</sup> Merleau-Ponty. *The Primacy of Perception*, 43-44.
- <sup>18</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, 68-69.
- <sup>19</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Entretiens avec Georges Charbonnier et autres dialogues, 1946-1959*, transcription by Jérôme Melançon (Paris: Verdier, 2016). I have provided the translation here, yet also see Cormac Coyle, "Interviews with Maurice Merleau-Ponty," trans. Cormac Coyle, 2020. <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1588&context=honors>
- <sup>20</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, ed. Leonard Lawlor with Bettina Bergo (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001). Merleau-Ponty is here referring to Husserl's *Crisis*, which includes "The Origin of Geometry" as an appendix.)
- <sup>21</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, 32, my bracket additions.
- <sup>22</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, 20. The translator of this text, Leonard Lawlor, uses "pointed brackets" < > to translate Merleau-Ponty's use of German terms or to provide an English translation of a German passage from a Husserl text cited by Merleau-Ponty. See Lawlor's comment on page xl. The square brackets [ ] are my addition. The reference to *Husserliana VI* is Merleau-Ponty's. Merleau-Ponty also treats Husserl's philosophy of language, as we will see below. See also Merleau-Ponty *Signs*, 84-97.
- <sup>23</sup> See Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, 7, where Merleau-Ponty discusses the "characteristic operation of the mind" in a broad perceptual context.
- <sup>24</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, trans. John O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 106. See also Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 385-386, 446-448, and Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by the Working Notes*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alfonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 149ff. Referred to as VI in the text.
- <sup>25</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, 68. The bracket addition is provided by the translator.
- <sup>26</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 213.
- <sup>27</sup> Moreover, to add to what we have already seen above, we know that a *perception* is correct if it provides the greatest balance of clarity and maximum richness. See Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 318.

- <sup>28</sup> See Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, 78: “All perception and all human action which presupposes it, in short every use of the human body, is already primordial expression. This means that perception is...the primary operation which first constitutes signs as signs. Perception makes what is expressed dwell in signs, not through some previous convention but through the eloquence of their very arrangement and configuration.”
- <sup>29</sup> See Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 187: “If we consider only the conceptual and delimiting meaning of words, it is true that the verbal form . . . appears arbitrary. But it would no longer appear so if we took into account the emotional content of the word, which we have called above its ‘gestural’ sense, which is all-important in poetry, for example. It would then be found that the words, vowels and phonemes are so many ways of ‘singing’ the world, and that their function is to represent things not, as the naive onomatopoeic theory had it, by reason of an objective resemblance, but because they extract, and literally express, their emotional essence.”
- <sup>30</sup> See M.C. Dillon, “Preface: Merleau-Ponty and Postmodernity” in *Merleau-Ponty Vivant*, ed. M.C. Dillon (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), especially xxvi-xxviii. See Jacques Derrida, “*Différance*,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago University Press, 1982), 13, 15, 24, and also “Ousia and Gramme: Note on a Note from *Being and Time*,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, 66.
- <sup>31</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs*, trans. D. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 103.
- <sup>32</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences” in *The Structuralist Controversy*, eds. R. Macksey and E. Danato (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1972), 272.
- <sup>33</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, xxxv-xxxvi and footnote 28 on xxxv.
- <sup>34</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, 28. Merleau-Ponty is undoubtedly here referring to the character Friday in Daniel Defoe’s novel *Robinson Crusoe*.
- <sup>35</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, 24.
- <sup>36</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, 57, my double square brackets.
- <sup>37</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, 58, my double square brackets.
- <sup>38</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and Invisible*, 112.
- <sup>39</sup> Michael Kelly, “Phenomenology and Time-Consciousness” in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, *A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*, see especially sections 1.e. and 4, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/phe-time/>
- <sup>40</sup> Husserl *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1983-1917)*, trans. J. Brough (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), § *The Double Intentionality of Retention and the Constitution of the Flux of Consciousness*, 105-110. Original German, *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins (1983-1917)*, ed. R. Boehm (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966).
- <sup>41</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 423-424.
- <sup>42</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 421, and *ek-stase* 70, 430, and comments regarding Laplace’s nebula, 432.
- <sup>43</sup> See Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 144-145, 149-155, as well as above.

- <sup>44</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Themes from the Lectures at the Collège de France, 1952-1960*, trans. John O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 120-121.
- <sup>45</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 112-113.
- <sup>46</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Themes from the Lectures at the Collège de France, 1952-1960*, 119.
- <sup>47</sup> This was noted above.
- <sup>48</sup> Noted above.
- <sup>49</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 84-85.
- <sup>50</sup> See Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, 72, and Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 160.
- <sup>51</sup> For an excellent, clear, and brief treatment of Derrida's method of deconstruction, see Douglas Kneale, "Deconstruction" in Micheal Groden and Martin Kreiswirth eds., *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory & Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 185-191. The best brief overview of Derrida's philosophy of which I am aware is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's translator preface to Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, preface and trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), ix-lxxxvii. Perhaps the best brief overview of Derrida's philosophy, especially as it is related to Husserl's thought, and written in his own hand, is Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. Davis Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).
- <sup>52</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, 72.
- <sup>53</sup> See Pauline Marie Rosenau, *Post-Modernism and the Social Science: Insights, Inroads, and Intrusions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 29-30.