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The Visible and the Invisible

Maurice Merleau-Ponty



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THE PERCEPTUAL FAITH AND REFLECTION

THE METHODS of *proof* and of *cognition* invented by a thought already established in the world, the concepts of *object* and *subject* it introduces, do not enable us to understand what the perceptual faith is, precisely because it is a faith, that is, an adherence that knows itself to be beyond proofs, not necessary, interwoven with incredulity, at each instant menaced by non-faith. Belief and incredulity are here so closely bound up that we always find the one in the other, and in particular a germ of non-truth in the truth: the certitude I have of being connected up with the world by my look already promises me a pseudo-world of phantasms if I let it wander. It is said that to cover one's eyes so as to not see a danger is to not believe in the things, to believe only in the private world; but this is rather to believe that what is for us is absolutely, that a world we have succeeded in seeing as without danger is without danger. It is therefore the greatest degree of belief that our vision goes to the things themselves. Perhaps this experience teaches us better than any other what the perceptual presence of the world is: not affirmation and negation of the same thing in the same respect, positive and negative judgment, or, as we said a moment ago, belief and incredulity—which would be impossible; beneath affirmation and negation, beneath judgment (those critical opinions, ulterior operations), it is our experience, prior to every opinion, of inhabiting the world by our body, of inhabiting the truth by our whole selves, without there being need to choose nor even to distinguish between the assurance of seeing and the assurance of seeing the true, because in principle they are one and the same thing—faith, therefore, and not knowledge, since the world is here not separated from our hold on it, since, rather than affirmed, it is taken for granted, rather than disclosed, it is non-dissimulated, non-refuted.

If philosophy is to appropriate to itself and to understand this initial openness upon the world which does not exclude a possible occultation, it cannot be content with describing it; it must tell us how there is openness without the occultation of the world being excluded, how the occultation remains at each instant possible even though we be naturally endowed with light. The philosopher must understand how it is that these two possi-

bilities, which the perceptual faith keeps side by side within itself, do not nullify one another. He will not succeed if he remains at their level, oscillating from the one to the other, saying in turn that my vision is at the thing itself and that my vision is my own or "in me." He must abandon these two views, he must eschew the one as well as the other; since taken literally they are impossible, he must appeal beyond them to himself who is their titular and therefore must know what motivates them from within; he must lose them as a state of fact in order to reconstruct them as his own possibilities, in order to learn from himself what they mean in truth, what delivers him over to both perception and to phantasms—in a word, he must *reflect*. But as soon as he does so, beyond the world itself and beyond what is only "in us," beyond being in itself and being for us, a third dimension seems to open up, wherein their discordance is effaced. With the conversion to reflection, perceiving and imagining are now only two modes of *thinking*.^{*} From vision and feeling (*sentir*) will be retained only what animates them and sustains them indubitably, the pure thought of seeing or of feeling. It is possible to describe that thought, to show that it is made of a strict correlation between my exploration of the world and the sensorial responses it arouses. The imaginary will be submitted to a parallel analysis, and we will come to realize that the thought of which it is made is not in this precise sense a thought of seeing or of feeling, that it is rather the intent to not apply and even forget the criteria of verification and to take as "good" what is not and could not be seen. Thus the antinomies of the perceptual faith seem to be lifted; it is true indeed that we perceive the thing itself, since the thing is nothing but what we see— but not by the occult power of our eyes. For our eyes are no longer the subjects of vision; they have joined the number of things seen. And what we call vision rises from the power of thought that certifies that the appearance here has responded to the movements of our eyes according to a rule. When perception is full or effective, it is the thought of perceiving. If therefore it reaches the thing itself, it is necessary to say, without this being a contradiction, that it is entirely our work, and our own through and through, like all our thoughts. Open upon the thing itself, the perception is no less our own work, because the thing is

* Ideality (idea and immanence of truth).

henceforth exactly what we think we see—*cogitatum* or noema. It no more leaves the circle of our thoughts than does the imagination, which is also a thought of seeing, but a thought that does not seek the exercise, the proof, the plenitude, that therefore presumes on itself and is only half-thought. Thus the real becomes the correlative of thought, and the imaginary is, within the same sphere, the narrow circle of objects of thought that are only half-thought, half-objects or phantoms that have no consistency, no place of their own, disappearing before the sun of thought like the mists of dawn, and that are, between the thought and what it thinks, only a thin layer of the unthought. The reflection retains everything contained in the perceptual faith: the conviction that there is something, that there is the world, the idea of truth, the true idea given. It simply reduces that crude (*barbare*) conviction of going to the things themselves—which is incompatible with the fact of illusion—to what it means or signifies. It converts it into its truth; it discovers in it the adequation and assent of the thought with thought, the transparency of what I think for myself who thinks it. The brute and prior existence of the world I thought I found already there by opening my eyes is only the symbol of a being that is for itself as soon as it is because appearing, and therefore appearing to itself, is its whole being—that is the being we call mind.* Through the conversion to reflection, which leaves nothing but ideates, *cogitata*, or noemata subsisting before the pure subject, we finally leave the equivocations of the perceptual faith, which paradoxically assured us that we have access to the things themselves and that we gain access to them through the intermediary of the body, which therefore opened us to the world only by sealing us up in the succession of our private events. From now on everything seems clear; the blend of dogmatism and scepticism, the confused convictions of the perceptual faith, are called into question. I no longer think I see with my eyes things exterior to myself who sees them: they are exterior only to my body, not to my thought, which soars over it as well as them. Nor do I any longer allow myself to be impressed by that evidence that the other perceiving subjects do not go to the things themselves, that their perception takes place within them—an evidence that ends

* Passage to ideality as a solution of the antinomies. The world is numerically one with my *cogitatum* and with that of the others insofar as it is ideal (ideal identity, beneath the several and the one).

by rebounding upon my own perception, since after all I am "an other" in their eyes, and my dogmatism, communicated to the others, returns to me as scepticism. For if it is true that, seen from the outside, the perception of each seems to be shut up in some retreat "behind" his body, reflection precisely relegates this exterior view to the number of phantasms without consistency and confused thoughts: one does not think a thought from the outside, by definition thought is thought only inwardly. If then the others are thoughts, as such they are not behind their body which I see—they are, like myself, nowhere; they are, like myself, coextensive with being, and there is no problem of incarnation. At the same time that the reflection liberates us from the false problems posed by bastard and unthinkable experiences, it also accounts for them through the simple transposition of the incarnate subject into a transcendental subject and of the reality of the world into an ideality: we all reach the world, and the same world, and it belongs wholly to each of us, without division or loss, because it is *that which* we think we perceive, the undivided object of all our thoughts. Its unity, if it is not the numerical unity, is not the specific unity either: it is that ideal unity or unity of signification that makes the triangle of the geometer be the same in Tokyo and in Paris, the same in the fifth century before Christ and now. This unity suffices and it untangles every problem, because the divisions that can be opposed to it, the plurality of the fields of perception and of lives, are as nothing before it, do not belong to the universe of ideality and of meaning, and cannot even be formulated or articulated into distinct thoughts, and finally, because we have through reflection recognized at the heart of all the situated, bogged-down, and incarnated thoughts the pure appearing of thought to itself, the universe of internal adequation, where everything *true* that we have is integrated without difficulty. . . .

This movement of reflection will always at first sight be convincing: in a sense it is imperative, it is truth itself, and one does not see how philosophy could dispense with it. The question is whether it has brought philosophy to the harbor, whether the universe of thought to which it leads is really an order that suffices to itself and puts an end to every question. Since the perceptual faith is a paradox, how could I remain with it? And if I do not remain with it, what else can I do except re-enter into myself and seek there the abode of truth? Is it not evident that,

precisely if my perception is a perception of the world, I must find in my commerce with the world the reasons that induce me to see it, and in my vision the meaning of my vision? From whom would I, who am in the world (*suis au monde*), learn what it is to be in the world if not from myself, and how could I say that I am in the world if I did not know it? Without even presuming that I know everything of myself, it is certain at least that, among other things, I am a knowing; this attribute assuredly belongs to me, even if I have others. I cannot imagine that the world irrupts into me or I into it: the world can present itself to this knowing which I am only by offering it a meaning, only in the form of a thought of the world. The secret of the world we are seeking must necessarily be contained in my contact with it. Inasmuch as I live it, I possess the meaning of everything I live, otherwise I would not live it; and I can seek no light concerning the world except by consulting, by making explicit, my frequenting of the world, by comprehending it from within. What will always make of the philosophy of reflection not only a temptation but a route that must be followed is that it is true in what it denies, that is, the exterior relation between a world in itself and myself, conceived as a process of the same type as those that unfold within the world—whether one imagines an intrusion of the world in myself, or, on the contrary, some excursion of my look among the things. But does it conceive properly the natal bond between me who perceives and what I perceive? And because we assuredly must reject the idea of an exterior relation between the perceiving and the perceived, must we pass to the antithesis of immanence, be it wholly ideal and spiritual, and say that I who perceives am the thought of perceiving, and the perceived world a thing thought? Because perception is not an entering of the world into myself and is not centripetal, must it be centrifugal, as is a thought I form or the signification I give by judgment to an indecisive appearance? The philosophy of reflection practices the philosophical interrogation and the resultant effort toward explicitness in a style that is not the sole possible one; it mixes in presuppositions which we have to examine and which in the end reveal themselves to be contrary to what inspires the reflection. It thinks it can comprehend our natal bond with the world only by *undoing* it in order to *remake* it, only by constituting it, by fabricating it. It thinks it finds clarity through analysis, that is, if not in the most simple ele-

ments, at least in the most fundamental conditions implicated in the brute product, in the premises from which it results as a consequence, in a *source of meaning* from which it is derived.* It is therefore essential to the philosophy of reflection that it bring us back, this side of our *de facto* situation, to a center of things from which we proceeded, but from which we were decentered, that it retravel this time starting from us a route already traced out from that center to us. The very effort toward internal adequation, the enterprise to reconquer explicitly all that we are and do implicitly, signifies that what we are finally as *naturata* we first are actively as *naturans*, that the world is our birthplace only because first we as minds are the cradle of the world. But, in this, if the reflection confines itself to this first movement, if it installs us by regression in the immanent universe of our thoughts and strips whatever may be left over of any probative power with respect to itself, dismissing it as confused, mutilated, or naïve thought, the reflection then falls short of its task and of the radicalism that is its law. For the movement of recovery, of recuperation, of return to self, the progression toward internal adequation, the very effort to coincide with a *naturans* which is already ourselves and which is supposed to unfold the things and the world before itself—precisely inasmuch as they are a return or a reconquest, these operations of reconstitution or of re-establishment which come second cannot by principle be the mirror image of its internal constitution and its establishment, as the route from the Etoile to the Notre-Dame is the inverse of the route from the Notre-Dame to the Etoile: the reflection recuperates everything except itself as an effort of recuperation, it clarifies everything except its own role. The mind's eye too has its blind spot, but, because it is of the mind, cannot be unaware of it, nor treat as a simple state of non-vision, which requires no particular mention, the very act of reflection which is *quoad nos* its act of birth. If it is not unaware of itself—which would be

* Idea of return—of the latent: idea of the reflection coming back over the traces of a constitution. Idea of intrinsic possibility of which the constituted is its unfolding. Idea of a *naturans* of which it is the *naturata*. Idea of the originating as intrinsic. Hence the reflective thought is an anticipation of the whole; it performs all its operations under the guarantee of the totality that it claims to engender. Cf. Kant: if a world is to be possible. . . . This reflection does not find the originating.

contrary to its definition—the reflection cannot feign to unravel the same thread that the mind would first have woven, to be the mind returning to itself within me, when by definition it is I who reflect. The reflection must appear to itself as a progression toward a subject X, an appeal to a subject X. As the reflection's very assurance that it rejoin a universal *naturans* cannot come from some prior contact with it (since precisely it is still ignorance), reflection evokes it and does not coincide with it. That assurance can come only from the world—or from my thoughts insofar as they form a world, insofar as their cohesion, their vanishing lines, designate beneath reflection a virtual focus with which I do not yet coincide. As an effort to found the existing world upon a *thought* of the world, the reflection at each instant draws its inspiration from the prior presence of the world, of which it is tributary, from which it derives all its energy. When Kant justifies each step of his Analytic with the famous refrain "if a world is to be possible," he emphasizes the fact that his guideline is furnished him by the unreflected image of the world, that the necessity of the steps taken by the reflection is suspended upon the hypothesis "world," and that the thought of the world which the Analytic is charged with disclosing is not so much the foundation as the second expression of the fact that for me there has been an experience of a world—in other words, that the intrinsic possibility of the world as a thought rests upon the fact that I can see the world, that is, upon a possibility of a wholly different type, which we have seen borders on the impossible. It is by a secret and constant appeal to this impossible-possible that reflection can maintain the illusion of being a return to oneself and of establishing itself in immanence, and our power to re-enter into ourselves is exactly measured by a power to leave ourselves, which is neither older nor more recent than it, which is exactly synonymous with it. The whole reflective analysis is not false, but still naïve, as long as it dissimulates from itself its own mainspring and as long as, in order to constitute the world, it is necessary to have a notion of the world as preconstituted—as long as the procedure is in principle delayed behind itself. The reply will perhaps be that the great philosophies of reflection know this very well, as the reference to the true idea given in Spinoza or the very conscious reference to a pre-critical experience of the world in Kant shows, but that the circle of the unreflected and the reflection is deliber-

ate in these philosophies—that one begins with the unreflected, because one does have to begin, but that the universe of thought that is opened up by reflection contains everything necessary to account for the mutilated thought of the beginning, which is only the ladder one pulls up after oneself after having climbed it. . . . But if this is so, there is no longer any philosophy of reflection, for there is no longer the originating and the derived; there is a thought traveling a circle where the condition and the conditioned, the reflection and the unreflected, are in a reciprocal, if not symmetrical, relationship, and where the end is in the beginning as much as the beginning is in the end. We are not saying anything different. The remarks we made concerning reflection were nowise intended to disqualify it for the profit of the unreflected or the immediate (which we know only through reflection). It is a question not of putting the perceptual faith in place of reflection, but on the contrary of taking into account the total situation, which involves reference from the one to the other. What is given is not a massive and opaque world, or a universe of adequate thought; it is a reflection which turns back over the density of the world in order to clarify it, but which, coming second, reflects back to it only its own light.

It is indeed true that, in order to disentangle myself from the perplexities in which the perceptual faith casts me, I can address myself only to my experience of the world, to that blending with the world that recommences for me each morning as soon as I open my eyes, to that flux of perceptual life between it and myself which beats unceasingly from morning to night, and which makes my own secret thoughts change the aspect of faces and landscapes for me, as, conversely, the faces and landscapes bring me the help sometimes and the menace sometimes of a manner of being a man which they infuse into my life. But it is just as sure that the relation between a thought and its object, between the *cogito* and the *cogitatum*, contains neither the whole nor even the essential of our commerce with the world and that we have to situate that relation back within a more muted relationship with the world, within an initiation into the world upon which it rests and which is always already accomplished when the reflective return intervenes. We will miss that relationship—which we shall here call the openness upon the world (*ouverture au monde*)—the moment that the reflective effort

tries to capture it, and we will then be able to catch sight of the reasons that prevent it from succeeding, and of the way through which we would reach it. I see, I feel (*sens*), and it is certain that for me to account for what seeing and feeling are I must cease accompanying the seeing and the feeling into the visible and the sensible into which they throw themselves, and I must contrive, on this side of them, a sphere they do not occupy and whence they would become comprehensible according to their sense and their essence. To understand them is to suspend them, since the naïve vision occupies me completely, and since the attention to vision that is added on subtracts something from this total gift, and especially since to understand is to translate into disposable significations a meaning first held captive in the thing and in the world itself. But this translation aims to convey the text; or rather the visible and the philosophical explicitation of the visible are not side by side as two sets of signs, as a text and its version in another tongue. If it were a text, it would be a strange text, which is directly given to us all, so that we are not restricted to the philosopher's translation and can compare the two. And philosophy for its part is more and less than a translation: more, since it alone tells us what the text means; less, since it is useless if one does not have the text at one's disposal. The philosopher therefore suspends the brute vision only in order to make it pass into the order of the expressed: that vision remains his model or measure, and it is upon that vision that the network of significations which philosophy organizes in order to reconquer it must open. Hence the philosopher does not have to *consider as inexistent* what was seen or felt, and the vision or the feeling themselves, to replace them, according to the words of Descartes, with the "thought of seeing and of feeling," which for its part is considered unshakable only because it presumes nothing about what effectively is, only because it entrenches itself in the apparition to the thought of what is thought—from which it is indeed inexpugnable. To reduce perception to the thought of perceiving, under the pretext that immanence alone is sure, is to take out an insurance against doubt whose premiums are more onerous than the loss for which it is to indemnify us: for it is to forego comprehending the effective world and move to a type of certitude that will never restore to us the "there is" of the world. Either the doubt is only a state of rending and obscurity, in which case it teaches me nothing—or if it teaches me some-

thing, it is because it is deliberate, militant, systematic, and then it is an act, and then, even if subsequently its own existence imposes itself upon me as a limit to the doubt, as a something that is not nothing, this something is of the order of acts, within which I am henceforth confined. The illusion of illusions is to think now that to tell the truth we have never been certain of anything but our own acts, that from the beginning perception has been an inspection of the mind, and that reflection is only the perception returning to itself, the conversion from the knowing of the thing to a knowing of oneself of which the thing was made, the emergence of a "binding" that was the bond itself. We think we prove this Cartesian "spirituality," this *identity* of space with the mind, by saying that it is obvious that the "far-off" object is far-off only by virtue of its relation with other objects "further off" or "less distant"—which relation belongs properly to neither of them and *is* the immediate presence of the mind to all; the doctrine finally replaces our belongingness to the world with a view of the world from above. But it gets its apparent evidence only from a very naïve postulate (and one suggested to us precisely by the world) according to which it is always *the same* thing I think when the gaze of attention is displaced and looks back from itself to what conditions it. This is a massive conviction drawn from external experience, where I have indeed the assurance that the things under my eyes remain *the same* while I approach them to better inspect them, but this is because the functioning of my body as a possibility for changing point of view, a "seeing apparatus," or a sedimented science of the "point of view," assures me that I am approaching the same thing I saw a moment ago from further off. It is the perceptual life of my body that here sustains and guarantees the perceptual explicitation, and far from it itself being a cognition of intra-mundane or inter-objective relations between my body and the exterior things, it is presupposed in every notion of an object, and it is this life that accomplishes the primary openness to the world. My conviction that I see the thing itself does not *result* from the perceptual exploration, it is not a word to designate the proximal vision; on the contrary it is what gives me the notion of the "proximal," of the "best" point of observation, and of the "thing itself." Having therefore learned through perceptual experience what it is to "see well" the thing, that to do so one must and one can approach it, and that the new data thus acquired are deter-

minations of the *same* thing, we transfer this certitude to the interior, we resort to the fiction of a "little man in the man," and in this way we come to think that to reflect on perception is, *the perceived thing and the perception remaining what they were*, to disclose the true subject that inhabits and has always inhabited them. But in fact I should say that there was there a thing perceived and an openness upon this thing which the reflection has neutralized and transformed into perception-reflected-on and thing-perceived-within-a-perception-reflected-on. And that the functioning of reflection, like the functioning of the exploring body, makes use of powers obscure to me, spans the cycle of duration that separates the brute perception from the reflective examination, and during this time maintains the permanence of the perceived and the permanence of the perception under the gaze of the mind only because my mental inspection and my attitudes of mind prolong the "I can" of my sensorial and corporeal exploration. To found the latter on the former, and the *de facto* perception on the essence of perception such as it appears to reflection, is to forget the reflection itself as a distinct act of recovery. In other words, we are catching sight of the necessity of another operation besides the conversion to reflection, more fundamental than it, of a sort of *hyper-reflection* (*sur-réflexion*) that would also take itself and the changes it introduces into the spectacle into account. It accordingly would not lose sight of the brute thing and the brute perception and would not finally efface them, would not cut the organic bonds between the perception and the thing perceived with a hypothesis of inexistence. On the contrary, it would set itself the task of thinking about them, of reflecting on the transcendence of the world as transcendence, speaking of it not according to the law of the word-meanings inherent in the given language, but with a perhaps difficult effort that uses the significations of words to express, beyond themselves, our mute contact with the things, when they are not yet things said. If therefore the reflection is not to presume upon what it finds and condemn itself to putting into the things what it will then pretend to find in them, it must suspend the faith in the world only so as to *see it*, only so as to read in it the route it has followed in becoming a world for us; it must seek in the world itself the secret of our perceptual bond with it. It must use words not according to their pre-established signification, but *in order to state* this prelogical bond. It must plunge into the world

instead of surveying it, it must descend toward it such as it is instead of working its way back up toward a prior possibility of thinking it—which would impose upon the world in advance the conditions for our control over it. It must question the world, it must enter into the forest of references that our interrogation arouses in it, it must make it say, finally, what in its silence *it means to say*. . . . We know neither what exactly is this order and this concordance of the world to which we thus entrust ourselves, nor therefore what the enterprise will result in, nor even if it is really possible. But the choice is between it and a dogmatism of reflection concerning which we know only too well where it goes, since with it philosophy concludes the moment it begins and, for this very reason, does not make us comprehend our own obscurity.

A philosophy of reflection, as methodic doubt and as a reduction of the openness upon the world to "spiritual acts," to intrinsic relations between the idea and *its* ideate, is thrice untrue to what it means to elucidate: untrue to the visible world, to him who sees it, and to his relations with the other "visionaries." To say that perception is and has always been an "inspection of the mind" is to define it not by what it gives us, but by what in it *withstands* the hypothesis of *non-existence*; it is to identify from the first the positive with a negation of negation; it is to require of the innocent the proof of his non-culpability, and to reduce in advance our contact with Being to the discursive operations with which we defend ourselves against illusion, to reduce the true to the credible, the real to the probable. It has often been pointed out¹⁵ that even the most credible imagination, the most conformable to the context of experience, does not bring us one step closer to "reality" and is immediately ascribed by us to the imaginary—and that conversely an even absolutely unexpected and unforeseeable noise is from the first perceived as real, however weak be its links with the context. This simple fact imposes upon us the idea that with the "real" and the "imaginary" we are dealing with two "orders," two "stages," or two "theaters"—that of space and that of phantasms—which are set up within us before the acts of discrimination (which intervene only in the equivocal cases), and in which what we live comes to settle of

15. EDITOR: In particular by Sartre, *L'Imagination*. [English translation by Forrest Williams, *Imagination: A Psychological Critique* (Ann Arbor, 1962).]

itself, outside of all criteriological control. The fact that sometimes the controls become necessary and result in judgments of reality which rectify the naïve experience does not prove that judgments of this sort are at the origin of this distinction, or constitute it, and therefore does not dispense us from understanding it for itself. If we do so, we then will have to not define the real by its coherence and the imaginary by its incoherence or its lacunae: the real is coherent and probable because it is real, and not real because it is coherent; the imaginary is incoherent or improbable because it is imaginary, and not imaginary because it is incoherent. The least particle of the perceived incorporates it from the first into the "perceived," the most credible phantasm glances off at the surface of the world; it is this presence of the whole world in one reflection, its irremediable absence in the richest and most systematic deliriums, that we have to understand, and this difference is not a difference of the more and the less. It is true that it gives rise to mistakes or to illusions, whence the conclusion is sometimes drawn that it therefore cannot be a difference of nature, and that the real, after all, is only the less improbable or the more probable. This is to think the true by the false, the positive by the negative—and it is to ill-describe indeed the experience of dis-illusion, wherein precisely we learn to know the fragility of the "real." For when an illusion dissipates, when an appearance suddenly breaks up, it is always for the profit of a new appearance which takes up again for its own account the ontological function of the first. I thought I saw on the sands a piece of wood polished by the sea, and *it was* a clayey rock. The breakup and the destruction of the first appearance do not authorize me to define henceforth the "real" as a simple probable, since *they are only another name for the new apparition*, which must therefore figure in our analysis of the *dis-illusion*. The dis-illusion is the loss of one evidence only because it is the acquisition of *another evidence*. If, out of prudence, I decide to say that this new evidence is "in itself" doubtful or only probable (in itself—that is: for me, in a moment, when I will have gotten a little closer to it or looked more closely), the fact remains that at the moment I speak it incontestably gives itself as "real" and not as "very possible" or probable; and if subsequently it breaks up in its turn, it will do so only under the pressure of a new "reality." What I can conclude from these disillusions or deceptions, therefore, is that perhaps "real-

ity" does not belong definitively to any particular perception, that in this sense it lies *always further on*; but this does not authorize me to break or to ignore the bond that joins them one after the other to the real, a bond that cannot be broken with the one without first having been established with the following, so that there is no *Schein* without an *Erscheinung*, that every *Schein* is the counterpart of an *Erscheinung*, and that the meaning of the "real" is not reduced to that of the "probable," but on the contrary the "probable" evokes a definitive experience of the "real" whose accomplishment is only deferred. When faced with a perceptual appearance we not only know that it can subsequently "break up," we also know that it will do so only for having been so well replaced by another that there remains no trace of it, and that we seek in vain in this chalky rock what a moment ago *was* a piece of wood polished by the sea. Each perception is mutable and only probable—it is, if one likes, only an *opinion*; but what is not opinion, what each perception, even if false, verifies, is the belongingness of each experience to the same world, their equal power to manifest it, as *possibilities of the same world*. If the one takes the place of the other so well—to the point that one no longer finds any trace of it a moment after the illusion—it is precisely because they are not successive hypotheses about an unknowable Being, but perspectives upon the same familiar Being, which we know cannot exclude the one without including the other and which we know in any case to be itself beyond contestation. And this is why the very fragility of a perception, attested by its breakup and by the substitution of another perception, far from authorizing us to efface the index of "reality" from them all, obliges us to concede it to all of them, to recognize all of them to be variants of the same world, and finally to consider them not as all false but as "all true," not as repeated failures in the determination of the world but as progressive approximations. Each perception envelops the possibility of its own replacement by another, and thus of a sort of disavowal from the things. But this also means that each perception is the term of an approach, of a series of "illusions" that were not merely simple "thoughts" in the restrictive sense of Being-for-itself and the "merely thought of," but possibilities that could have been, radiations of this unique world that "there is" . . . —and which, as such, never revert to nothingness or to subjectivity as if they had never appeared, but are rather, as Husserl puts it well, "crossed

out" or "cancelled" by the "new" reality. The philosophy of reflection is not wrong in considering the false as a mutilated or partial truth: its error is rather to act as if the partial were only a *de facto* absence of the totality, which does not need to be accounted for. This finally destroys any consistency proper to the appearance, integrates it in advance into Being, deprives it of its tenor of truth because it is partial, makes it disappear into an internal adequation where Being and the reasons for being are one. The movement toward adequation, to which the facts of dis-illusion bear witness, is not the returning to itself of an adequate Thought that would have inexplicably lost sight of itself—nor is it a blind progress of probability, founded on the number of signs and concordances. It is the prepossession of a totality which is there before one knows how and why, whose realizations are never what we would have imagined them to be, and which nonetheless fulfills a secret expectation within us, since we believe in it tirelessly.

The reply will no doubt be that if, in order to save what is original in the "world" as a preobjective theme, we refuse to make of it the immanent correlative of a spiritual act, then the natural light, the openness of my perception upon the world, can result only from a preordination whose effects I record, a finality to whose law I am subjected, as I undergo the law of finality of all my organs. And that moreover once this passivity is introduced in me, it will vitiate everything when I proceed, as one must, to the order of thought and will have to explain how I think about my perceptions. Either I reinstate at this level the autonomy I renounced at the level of the perceived—but then one does not see how this active thinker could recover possession of the reasons of a perception that is given to him ready-made—or (as in Malebranche) the passivity overtakes the order of thought also, which, like the perception, loses every efficacy of its own and has to await its light from a causality that functions in it without it, as the perception obtains its light only through the play of the laws of the union of the soul and the body—and consequently the thought's grasp upon itself and the light of the intelligible become an incomprehensible mystery, in a being for whom the true is at the term of a natural inclination, conformable to the pre-established system according to which his mind functions, and is not *truth*, conformity of self with self, light. . . . And it is indeed certain that every attempt to fit a passivity

upon an activity ends up either in extending the passivity to the whole—which amounts to detaching us from Being, since, for lack of a contact of myself with myself, I am in every operation of knowledge delivered over to an organization of my thoughts whose premises are masked from me, to a mental constitution which is given to me as a fact—or ends up by restoring the activity to the whole. This is in particular the flaw in the philosophies of reflection that do not follow themselves through; after having defined the requirements for thought, they add that these do not impose any law upon the things and evoke an order of the things themselves which, in contradistinction to the order of our thoughts, could receive only exterior rules. But we are not opposing to an interior light an order of the things in themselves into which it could not penetrate. There can be no question of fitting together passivity before a transcendent with an activity of immanent thought. It is a question of reconsidering the interdependent notions of the active and the passive in such a way that they no longer place us before the antinomy of a philosophy that accounts for being and the truth, but does not take the world into account, and a philosophy that takes the world into account, but uproots us from being and the truth. The philosophy of reflection replaces the “world” with the “being-thought.” One cannot, while recognizing this deficiency, justify it in spite of everything because of the untenable consequences of an exterior regulation of our thoughts, for only from the point of view of a philosophy of reflection is this the alternative, and it is the reflective analysis that we find questionable. What we propose is not to stop the philosophy of reflection after having started as it does—this is indeed impossible, and, all things considered, a philosophy of total reflection seems to us to go further, be it only in circumscribing what in our experience resists it; what we propose is to take another point of departure.

To remove all equivocation on this point, let us repeat that we reproach the philosophy of reflection not only for transforming the world into a noema, but also for distorting the being of the reflecting “subject” by conceiving it as “thought”—and finally for rendering unthinkable its relations with other “subjects” in the world that is common to them. The philosophy of reflection starts with the principle that if a perception is to be able to be my own it must from the start be one of my “representations”—in other words, that I, qua “thought,” must be what effects the

connection between the aspects under which the object presents itself and their synthesis into an object. The reflection, the return to the interior, would not modify the perception, since it would limit itself to bringing out what from the first made up its framework or its joints, and since the thing perceived, if it is not nothing, is the set of connecting operations which the reflection enumerates and makes explicit. One is barely permitted to say that the reflective gaze turns back from the object toward me, since I qua thought am what makes there be a distance and in general any relation whatever from one point of the object to another. With one stroke the philosophy of reflection metamorphoses the effective world into a transcendental field; in doing so it only puts me back at the origin of a spectacle that I could never have had unless, unbeknown to myself, I organized it. It only makes me be consciously what I have always been distractedly; it only makes me give its name to a dimension behind myself, a depth whence, in fact, already my vision was formed. Through the reflection, the *I* lost in its perceptions rediscovers itself by rediscovering them as thoughts. It thought it had quit itself for them, spread itself out in them; it comes to realize that if it had quit itself they would not be and that the very outspread of the distances and the things was only the "outside" of its own inward intimacy with itself, that the unfolding of the world was the coiling up upon itself of a thought which thinks anything whatever only because it thinks itself first.

Once one is settled in it, reflection is an inexpugnable philosophical position, every obstacle, every resistance to its exercise being from the first treated not as an adversity of the things but as a simple state of non-thought, a gap in the continuous fabric of the acts of thought, which is inexplicable, but about which there is nothing to say since it is literally *nothing*. But are we to enter into reflection? In its inaugural act is concealed a decision to play a double game which, once unmasked, divests it of its apparent evidence; in one move the philosophical lie is perpetrated with which one first pays for this henceforth invulnerable method. It is essential to the reflective analysis that it start from a *de facto* situation. If it did not from the first take as given the true idea, the internal adequation of my thought with what I think, or the thought in act of the world, it should have to suspend every "I think" upon an "I think that I think," and this upon an "I think that I think that I think," and so on. . . . The

search for the conditions of possibility is in principle posterior to an actual experience, and from this it follows that even if subsequently one determines rigorously the *sine qua non* of that experience, it can never be washed of the original stain of having been discovered *post festum* nor ever become what positively founds that experience. This is why we must say not that it precedes the experience (even in the transcendental sense) but that it must be able to accompany it, that is, that it translates or expresses its essential character but does not indicate a prior possibility whence it would have issued. Never therefore will the philosophy of reflection be able to install itself in the mind it discloses, whence to see the world as its correlative. Precisely because it is reflection, re-turn, re-conquest, or re-recovery, it cannot flatter itself that it would simply coincide with a constitutive principle already at work in the spectacle of the world, that, starting with this spectacle, it would travel the very route that the constitutive principle had followed in the opposite direction. But this is what it would have to do if it is really a *return*, that is, if its point of arrival were also the starting point—and this exigency is no optional clause, since if it were not fulfilled the regressive analysis, declining to make any progressive synthesis, would be abandoning the pretension to disclose the sources to us and would be nothing more than the technique of a philosophical quietism. The reflection finds itself therefore in the strange situation of simultaneously requiring and excluding an inverse movement of constitution. It requires it in that, without this centrifugal movement, it should have to acknowledge itself to be a retrospective construction; it excludes it in that, coming in principle after an experience of the world or of the true which it seeks to render explicit, it thereby establishes itself in an order of idealization and of the “after-the-fact” which is not that wherein the world is formed. This is what Husserl brought frankly into the open when he said that every transcendental reduction is also an eidetic reduction, that is: every effort to comprehend the spectacle of the world from within and from the sources demands that we detach ourselves from the effective unfolding of our perceptions and from our perception of the world, that we cease being one with the concrete flux of our life in order to retrace the total bearing and principal articulations of the world upon which it opens. To reflect is not to coincide with the flux from its source unto its last ramifications; it is to disengage

from the things, perceptions, world, and perception of the world, by submitting them to a systematic variation, the intelligible nuclei that resist, and to proceed from one intelligible nucleus to the next in a way that is not belied by experience but gives us only its universal contours. It therefore by principle leaves untouched the twofold problem of the genesis of the existent world and of the genesis of the idealization performed by reflection and finally evokes and requires as its foundation a *hyper-reflection* where the ultimate problems would be taken seriously. To tell the truth, it is not even certain that the reflection that proceeds by way of the essences can accomplish its propaedeutic task and fulfill its role of being a discipline of the understanding. For there is no guarantee that the whole of experience can be expressed in essential invariants, that certain beings—for example, the being of time—do not in principle elude this fixation and do not require from the start, if they are to be able to be thought by us, the consideration of the fact, the dimension of facticity and the hyper-reflection, which would then become, at least in regard to them, not a superior degree at the ultimate level of philosophy, but philosophy itself. But if time should elude the reflection, space too would be involved in this secession, since time is bound to the present through all its fibers, and, through the present, to the simultaneous; one would also have to describe in terms of facticity, and not in terms of essences, a subjectivity situated in space and in time. Little by little it is the whole of experience—the essence itself, and the subject of the essences, and the reflection itself as eidetic—that would require reconsideration. The legitimate function of the fixing of the eidetic invariants would be no longer to confine us within the consideration of the *what*,¹⁶ but to make evident the divergence between the eidetic invariants and the effective functioning and to invite us to bring the experience itself forth from its obstinate silence. . . . In recognizing that every reflection is eidetic and, as such, leaves untouched the problem of our unreflected being and that of the world, Husserl simply agrees to take up the problem which the reflective attitude ordinarily avoids—the discordance between its initial situation and its ends.

Confronting the mind, focus of all clarity, with the world reduced to its intelligible schema, a consistent reflection dissi-

16. TRANSLATOR: In English in the text.

pates every question concerning the relationship between them. Henceforth their relationship will be one of pure correlation: the mind is what thinks, the world what is thought; one could conceive neither of encroachment of the one upon the other, nor of confusion of one with the other, nor of passage from one to the other, nor even of contact between them. Since they are related to one another as the bound to the binding or the *naturata* to the *naturans*, they are too perfectly coextensive for the one to ever be able to be preceded by the other, too irremediably distinct for the one ever to be able to envelop the other. Philosophy therefore impugns as meaningless every encroachment of the world upon the mind, or of the mind upon the world. That the world could pre-exist my consciousness of the world is out of the question: is it not obvious that every world without me that I could think of becomes, by the very fact that I think of it, a world for me; that the private world I divine at the origin of another's gaze is not so private as to prevent me from becoming at that very moment its quasi-spectator? What we express by saying that the world is in itself, or that it is beyond the perception I and the others have of it, is simply the signification "world," which is the same for all and independent of our phantasms, just as the properties of the triangle are the same in all places and at all times and do not begin to be true the day they are recognized. There is a pre-existence of the world with regard to our perception, of the aspects of the world which the other perceives to the perception I will have of them later, of my world to that of men yet to be born, and all these "worlds" make one unique world, but do so only in that the things and the world are objects of thought with their intrinsic properties, are of the order of the true, of the valid, of the signification, and are not of the order of events. The question whether the world be unique for all the subjects loses all meaning once one has admitted the ideality of the world; it no longer makes any sense to ask if my world and that of the other are numerically or specifically the same, since, as an intelligible structure, the world lies always beyond my thoughts as events, but also beyond those of the others, so that it is not divided by the knowledge we acquire of it, nor unique in the sense that each of us is unique. In all that they signify, my perception and the perception another man has of the world are the same, even though our lives be incommensurable, because the *signification*, the meaning—being an internal adequation, a relation of self

with self, pure interiority and total openness all at once—never descend into us as subjected to a perspective (for as such we are never our own light to ourselves), and because thus all our truths as truths rejoin of themselves and form by right one sole system. Thus, with the correlation between thought and the object of thought set up as a principle, there is established a philosophy that knows neither difficulties nor problems nor paradoxes nor reversals: once and for all, I have grasped within myself, with the pure correlation between him who thinks and what he thinks, the truth of my life, which is also the truth of the world and of the other lives. Once and for all, the being-object is placed before me as alone meaningful for me, and every inherence of the others in their bodies, and of myself in my own, is impugned as a confusion—once and for all, the being-self is given to me in the adequation of my thought with itself, and, from this side also, there is no question of taking seriously the compound of the mind with the body. I am forever subjected to the centrifugal movement that makes an object of thought be for a thought, and there is no question of my quitting this position and examining what Being can indeed be before it be thought by me or (what amounts to the same thing) by another, what indeed can be the intermundane space (*l'intermonde*) where our gazes cross and our perceptions overlap: there is no brute world, there is only an elaborated world; there is no intermundane space, there is only a signification "world". . . . And here too the reflective attitude would be inexpugnable if it did not belie in the hypothesis and as reflection what it affirms in the thesis about what is reflected on. For before the reflection I thought myself situated in an actual world by my body, in the midst of other men situated in it by their bodies; I thought I saw them perceive the same world I perceive, and thought I was one of them occupied in seeing their world—and where else have I found, if not in this naïve initiation and in these confused perceptions, the meaning first sighted that I wanted to approach by the reflection? * How was I able to appeal to myself as to the universal source of meaning—which is to reflect—if not because the spectacle had meaning for me before I discovered that I am he who gives it meaning, that is—since a philosophy of reflection identifies my being with what I think of it—before being this?

* Show that the reflection suppresses the intersubjectivity.

My access to a universal mind via reflection, far from finally discovering what I always was, is motivated by the intertwining of my life with the other lives, of my body with the visible things, by the intersection of my perceptual field with that of the others, by the blending in of my duration with the other durations. If I pretend to find, through reflection, in the universal mind the premise that had always backed up my experience, I can do so only by forgetting this non-knowing of the beginning which is not nothing, and which is not the reflective truth either, and which also must be accounted for. I was able to appeal from the world and the others to myself and take the route of reflection, only because first I was outside of myself, in the world, among the others, and constantly this experience feeds my reflection. Such is the total situation that a philosophy must account for. It will do so only by admitting the double polarity of reflection and by admitting that, as Hegel said, to retire into oneself is also to leave oneself.*

* Perhaps write a separate paragraph (at the end) on reflection as Husserl understands it. It is a reflection that finally is not installed in an active constituting agent (*Auffassungsinhalt-Auffassung*), but finds at the origin of every reflection a massive presence to self, the Retention's *Noch im Griff*, and, through it, the *Urimpression*, and the absolute flux which animates them. It presupposes the reduction of Nature to immanent unities. Yet the *Tönen* is not immanence—unless one understands immanence in the sense of ecstasy!—it utilizes the very structure of the flux.

Distinguish perhaps: 1) reflection, contact with self (Kantian, the Binding)—conditions of possibility. 2) Specular reflection, gaze (Husserl). Thematization of the psychological immanence, of the internal time. 3) Reflection of the absolute flux.

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The Visible and the Invisible contains the unfinished manuscript and working notes of the book Merleau-Ponty was writing when he died. The text is devoted to a critical examination of Kantian, Husserlian, Bergsonian, and Sartrean method, followed by one extraordinary chapter, "The Intertwining—the Chiasm," that reveals the central pattern of Merleau-Ponty's own thought. The working notes for the book provide the reader with a truly exciting insight into the mind of the philosopher at work as he refines and develops new pivotal concepts.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty is the author of *In Praise of Philosophy*, *The Primacy of Perception*, *Sense and Non-Sense*, *Signs*, *Themes from the Lectures at the Collège de France, 1952-1960*, *The Prose of the World*, *Adventures of the Dialectic*, *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language*, all published by Northwestern University Press.