

Eye and Mind

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Maurice Merleau-Ponty

What I am trying to convey to you is more mysterious; it is entwined in the very roots of being, in the impalpable source of sensations.

J. Gasquet, Cézanne

Science manipulates things and gives up living in them.[1] Operating within its own realm, it makes its **constructs** of things; operating upon these indices or variables to effect whatever transformations are permitted by their definition, it comes face to face with the real world only at rare intervals. It is, and always has been, that admirably active, ingenious, and bold way of thinking whose fundamental bias is to treat everything as though it were an **object-in-general**—as though it meant nothing to us and yet was predestined for our ingenious schemes.

But **classical science** clung to a feeling for the **opaqueness** of the world, and it expected through its constructions to get back into the world. **For this reason it felt obliged to seek a transcendent or transcendental foundation for its operations.** Today we find—not in science but in a widely prevalent philosophy of the sciences—an entirely new approach. Constructive scientific activities see themselves and represent themselves to be **autonomous**, and their thinking deliberately reduces itself to a set of data-collecting techniques which it has invented. To think is thus to test out, to operate, to transform—the only restriction being that this activity is regulated by an experimental control that admits only the most "worked-up" phenomena, more likely produced by the apparatus than recorded by it.

Whence all sorts of vagabond endeavors. Today more than ever, science is sensitive to intellectual fads and fashions. When a model has succeeded in one order of problems, it is tried out everywhere else. At the present time, for example, our embryology and biology are full of "gradients." Just how these differ from what classical tradition called "order" or "totality" is not at all clear. This question, however, is not raised; it is not even allowed. The gradient is a net we throw out to sea, without knowing what we will haul back in it. It is the slender twig upon which unforeseeable crystallizations will form. No doubt this freedom of operation will serve well to overcome many a pointless dilemma—provided only that from time to time we take stock, and ask ourselves why the apparatus works in one place and fails in others. **For all its flexibility, science must understand itself; it must see itself as a construction based on a brute, existent world and not claim for its blind operations the constitutive value that "concepts of nature" were granted in a certain idealist philosophy.** To say that the world is, by nominal definition, the object *x* of our operations is to treat the scientist's knowledge as if it were absolute, as if everything that is and has been was meant only to enter the laboratory. Thinking "operationally" has become a sort of absolute artificialism, such as we see in the ideology of cybernetics, where human creations are derived from a natural information process, itself conceived on the model of human machines. **If this kind of thinking were to extend its dominion over humanity and history; and if, ignoring what we know of them through contact and our own situations, it were to set out to construct them on the basis of a few abstract indices (as a decadent psychoanalysis and culturalism have done in the United States)—then, since the human being truly becomes the *manipulandum* he thinks he is, we enter into a cultural regimen in which there is neither truth nor falsehood concerning humanity and history, into a sleep, or nightmare from which there is no awakening.**

Scientific thinking, a thinking which looks on from above, and thinks of the object-in-

general, must return to the "there is" which precedes it; to the site, the soil of the sensible and humanly modified world such as it is in our lives and for our bodies—not that possible body which we may legitimately think of as an information machine but this actual body I call mine, this sentinel standing quietly at the command of my words and my acts. Further, *associated bodies* must be revived along with my body—"others," not merely as my congeners, as the zoologist says, but others who haunt me and whom I haunt; "others" along with whom I haunt a single, present, and actual Being as no animal ever haunted those of his own species, territory, or habitat. In this primordial historicity, science's agile and improvisatory thought will learn to ground itself upon things themselves and upon itself, and will once more become philosophy....

"A thing or person of the same kind or category as another."

This paragraph seems to develop the notion of intersubjectivity in an admittedly indirect manner.

Now art, especially painting, draws upon this fabric of brute meaning which operationalism would prefer to ignore. Art and only art does so in full innocence. From the writer and the philosopher, in contrast, we want opinions and advice. We will not allow them to hold the world suspended. We want them to take a stand; they cannot waive the responsibilities of humans who speak. Music, at the other extreme, is too far on the hither side of the world and the designatable to depict anything but certain schemata of Being—its ebb and flow, its growth, its upheavals, its turbulence.

M-P argues for the autonomy of the painter.

Only the painter is entitled to look at everything without being obliged to appraise what he sees. For the painter, we might say, the watchwords of knowledge and action lose their meaning and force. Political regimes which denounce "degenerate" painting rarely destroy paintings. They hide them, and one senses here an element of "one never knows" amounting almost to an acknowledgment. The reproach of escapism is seldom aimed at the painter; we do not hold it against Cézanne that he lived hidden away at L'Estaque during the Franco-Prussian War. And we recall with respect his "life is frightening," although the most insignificant student, after Nietzsche, would flatly reject philosophy if he or she were told that it did not teach us how to live life to the fullest. It is as if in the painter's calling there were some urgency above all other claims on him. Strong or frail in life, but incontestably sovereign in his rumination of the world, possessed of no other "technique" than the skill his eyes and hands discover in seeing and painting, he gives himself entirely to drawing from the world—with its din of history's glories and scandals—*canvases* which will hardly add to the angers or the hopes of humanity; and no one complains. [2] What, then, is the secret science which he has or which he seeks? That dimension which lets Van Gogh say he must go "still further"? What is this fundamental of painting, perhaps of all culture?

II

The painter "takes his body with him," says Valéry. Indeed we cannot imagine how a *mind* could paint. It is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings. To understand these *transubstantiations* we must go back to the working, actual body—not the body as a chunk of space or a bundle of functions but that body which is an *intertwining of vision and movement*.

On the "intertwining" or "chiasm":

"The...[term] indicates his new conception of the body, as a 'chiasm' or crossing-over (the term comes from the Greek letter *chi*) which combines subjective experience and objective existence. His term for this new conception of the body is 'flesh' (*chair*) and he insists that it is an 'ultimate notion; a concrete emblem of a general manner of being; which provides access both to subjective experience and objective existence.'"

I have only to see something to know how to reach it and deal with it, even if I do not know how this happens in the nervous system. My moving body makes a difference in the visible world, being a part of it; that is why I can steer it through the visible. Moreover, it is also true that vision is attached to movement. We see only what we look at. What would vision be without eye movement? And how could the movement of the eyes not blur things if movement were blind? If it were only a reflex? If it did not have its antennae, its clairvoyance? If vision were not prefigured in it?

All my changes of place figure on principle in a corner of my landscape; they are carried over onto the map of the visible. Everything I see is on principle within my reach, at least within reach of my sight, and is marked upon the map of the "I can." Each of the two maps is complete. The visible world and the world of my motor projects are both total

[Thomas Baldwin, *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings*, New York: Routledge, 2004.]

parts of the same Being.

This extraordinary overlapping, which we never give enough thought to, forbids us to conceive of vision as an operation of thought that would set up before the mind a picture or a representation of the world, a world of immanence and of ideality. Immersed in the visible by his body, itself visible, the see-er does not appropriate what he sees; he merely approaches it by looking, he opens onto the world. And for its part, that world of which he is a part is not *in itself*, or matter. My movement is not a decision made by the mind, an absolute doing which would decree, from the depths of a subjective retreat, some change of place miraculously executed in extended space. It is the natural sequel to, and maturation of, vision. I say of a thing that it is moved; but my body moves itself; my movement is self-moved. It is not ignorance of self, blind to itself; it radiates from a self....

The "intertwining" again.

The enigma derives from the fact that my body simultaneously sees and is seen. That which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognize, in what it sees, the "other side" of its power of looking. It sees itself seeing; it touches itself touching; it is visible and sensitive for itself. It is a self, not by transparency, like thought, which never thinks anything except by assimilating it, constituting it, transforming it into thought—but a self by confusion, narcissism, inherence of the see-er in the seen, the toucher in the touched, the feeler in the felt—a self, then, that is caught up in things, having a front and a back, a past and a future....

This initial paradox cannot but produce others. Visible and mobile, my body is a thing among things; it is one of them. It is caught in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing. But because it moves itself and sees, it holds things in a circle around itself.[3] Things are an annex or prolongation of itself; they are incrustated in its flesh, they are part of its full definition; the world is made of the very stuff of the body. These reversals, these antinomies,[4] are different ways of saying that vision is caught or comes to be in things—in that place where something visible undertakes to see, becomes visible to itself and in the sight of all things, in that place where there persists, like the original solution still present within crystal, the undividedness of the sensing and the sensed.

"unbreakable", "impenetrable"

This interiority no more precedes the material arrangement of the human body than it results from it. What if our eyes were made in such a way as to prevent our seeing any part of our body, or some diabolical contraption were to let us move our hands over things, while preventing us from touching our own body? Or what if, like certain animals, we had lateral eyes with no cross-blending of visual fields? Such a body would not reflect itself: it would be an almost adamantine body, not really flesh, not really the body of a human being. There would be no humanity.

But humanity is not produced as the effect of our articulations or by the way our eyes are implanted in us (still less by the existence of mirrors, though they alone can make our entire bodies visible to us). These contingencies and others like them, without which mankind would not exist, do not by simple summation bring it about that there is a single man. The body's animation is not the assemblage or juxtaposition of its parts. Nor is it a question of a mind or spirit coming down from somewhere else into an automation—which would still imply that the body itself is without an inside and without a "self." A human body is present when, between the see-er and the visible, between touching and touched, between one eye and the other, between hand and hand a kind of crossover occurs, when the spark of the sensing/sensible is lit, when the fire starts to burn that will not cease until some accident befalls the body, undoing what no accident would have sufficed to do....

The intertwining is now brought to bear on painting.

Once this strange system of exchanges is given, we find before us all the problems of painting. These problems illustrate the enigma of the body, which enigma in turn legitimates them. Since things and my body are made of the same stuff, vision must somehow come about in them; or yet again, their manifest visibility must be repeated in the body by a secret visibility. "Nature is on the inside," says Cézanne. Quality, light,

color, depth, which are there before us, are there only because they awaken an echo in our bodies and because the body welcomes them.

Things have an internal equivalent in me; they arouse in me a carnal formula of their presence. Why shouldn't these correspondences in turn give rise to some tracing rendered visible again, in which the eyes of others could find an underlying motif to sustain their inspection of the world?[5] Thus there appears a "visible" to the second power, a carnal essence or icon of the first. It is not a faded copy, a *trompe l'oeil*, or another *thing*. The animals painted on the walls of Lascaux are not there in the same way as are the fissures and limestone formations. Nor are they *elsewhere*. Pushed forward here, held back there, supported by the wall's mass they use so adroitly, they radiate about the wall without ever breaking their elusive moorings. I would be hard pressed to say *where* the painting is I am looking at. For I do not look at it as one looks at a thing, fixing it in its place. My gaze wanders within it as in the halos of Being. Rather than seeing it, I see according to, or with it.

The word "image" is in bad repute because we have thoughtlessly believed that a drawing was a tracing, a copy, a second thing, and that the mental image was such a drawing, belonging among our private bric-a-brac. But if in fact it is nothing of the kind, then neither the drawing nor the painting belongs to the *in-itself* any more than the image does. They are the inside of the outside and the outside of the inside, which the duplicity of feeling [*le sentir*] makes possible and without which we would never understand the quasi presence and imminent visibility which make up the whole problem of the imaginary. The picture, the actor's mimicry—these are not devices borrowed from the real world in order to refer to prosaic things which are absent. For the imaginary is much nearer to, and much farther away from, the actual—nearer because it is in my body as a diagram of the life of the actual, with all its pulp and carnal obverse exposed to view for the first time. In this sense, Giacometti says energetically, "What interests me in all paintings is likeness—that is, what likeness is for me: something that makes me uncover the external world a little." [6] And the imaginary is much farther away from the actual because the painting is an analogue or likeness only according to the body; because it does not offer the mind an occasion to rethink the constitutive relations of things, but rather it offers the gaze traces of vision, from the inside, in order that it may espouse them; it gives vision that which clothes it within, the imaginary texture of the real. [7]

Shall we say, then, that there is an inner gaze, that there is a third eye which sees the paintings and even the mental images, as we used to speak of a third ear which grasps messages from the outside through the noises they caused inside us? But how would this help us when the whole point is to understand that our fleshly eyes are already much more than receptors for light rays, colors, and lines? They are computers of the world, which have the gift of the visible, as we say of the inspired man that he has the gift of tongues. Of course this gift is earned by exercise; it is not in a few months, or in solitude, that a painter comes into full possession of his vision. But that is not the question; precocious or belated, spontaneous or cultivated in museums, his vision in any event learns only by seeing and learns only from itself. *The eye sees the world, and what it would need to be a painting, sees what keeps a painting from being itself, sees—on the palette—the colors awaited by the painting, and sees, once it is done, the painting that answers to all these inadequacies just as it sees the paintings of others as other answers to other inadequacies.*

It is no more possible to make a restrictive inventory of the visible than it is to catalog the possible expressions of a language or even its vocabulary and turns of phrase. The eye is an instrument that moves itself, a means which invents its own ends; it is *that which* has been moved by some impact of the world, which it then restores to the visible through the traces of a hand.

In whatever civilization it is born, from whatever beliefs, motives, or thoughts, no matter what ceremonies surround it—and even when it appears devoted to something else—

Philosophical term for an object without consciousness, as opposed to the being of a person (for-itself).

from Lascaux to our time, pure or impure, figurative or not, painting celebrates no other enigma but that of visibility.

What we have just said amounts to a truism. The painter's world is a visible world, nothing but visible: a world almost mad, because it is complete though only partial. Painting awakens and carries to its highest pitch a delirium which is vision itself, for to see is to *have at a distance*; painting extends this strange possession to all aspects of Being, which must somehow become visible in order to enter into the work of art. When, apropos of Italian painting, the young Berenson spoke of an evocation of tactile values, he could hardly have been more mistaken; painting evokes nothing, least of all the tactile. What it does is entirely different, almost the inverse. It gives visible existence to what profane vision believes to be invisible; thanks to it we do not need a "muscular sense" in order to possess the voluminosity of the world. This voracious vision, reaching beyond the "visual givens," opens upon a texture of Being of which the discrete sensorial messages are only the punctuations or the caesurae. The eye lives in this texture as a man in his house.

Here M-P begins weaving in the "invisible" to that which is "visible".

"pauses, interruptions, or breaks."

Cf. Heidegger—language is the house of Being.

Let us remain within the visible in the narrow and prosaic sense. The painter, any painter, while he is painting, practices a magical theory of vision. He is obliged to admit that objects before him pass into him or else that, according to Malebranche's sarcastic dilemma, the mind goes out through the eyes to wander among objects; for he never ceases adjusting his clairvoyance to them. (It makes no difference if he does not paint from "nature"; he paints, in any case, because he has seen, because the world has at least once emblazoned in him the ciphers of the visible.) He must affirm, as one philosopher has said, that vision is a mirror or concentration of the universe or that, in another's words, the *idios kosmos* opens by virtue of vision upon a *koinos kosmos*; in short, that the same thing is both out there in the world and here at the heart of vision—the same or, if you will, a *similar* thing, but according to an efficient similarity which is the parent, the genesis, the metamorphosis of being into its vision. It is the mountain itself which from out there makes itself seen by the painter; it is the mountain that he interrogates with his gaze.

Cf. Clement Greenberg. Abstraction is neither the issue nor a counterexample.

"private world"

"shared world"

What exactly does he ask of it? To unveil the means, visible and not otherwise, by which it makes itself mountain before our eyes. Light, lighting, shadows, reflections, color, all these objects of his quest are not altogether real objects; like ghosts, they have only visual existence. In fact they exist only at the threshold of profane vision; they are not ordinarily seen. The painter's gaze asks them what they do to suddenly cause something to be and to be *this* thing, what they do to compose this talisman of a world, to make us see the visible. The hand pointing toward us in *The Nightwatch* is truly there only when we see that its shadow on the captain's body presents it simultaneously in profile. The spatiality of the captain lies at the intersection of the two perspectives which are impossible and yet together. Everyone with eyes has at some time or other witnessed this play of shadows, or something like it, and has been made by it to see things and a space. But it worked in them without them; it hid to make the object visible. To see the object, it was necessary *not* to see the play of shadows and light around it. The visible in the profane sense forgets its premises; it rests upon a total visibility which is to be recreated and which liberates the phantoms captive in it. The moderns, as we know, have liberated many others; they have added many a muted tone to the official gamut of our means of seeing. But the interrogation of painting in any case looks toward this secret and feverish genesis of things in our body.

"incompatible"

And so it is not a question asked of someone who doesn't know by someone who does—the schoolmaster's question. The question comes from one who does not know, and it is addressed to a vision, a seeing, which knows everything and which we do not make, for it makes itself in us. Max Ernst (with the surrealists) says rightly, "Just as the role of the poet since [Rimbaud's] famous *Lettre du voyant* consists in writing under the dictation of what is being thought, of what articulates itself in him, the painter's role is to circumscribe and project what is making itself seen within himself". [8] The painter lives in fascination.

The actions most proper to him—those gestures, those tracings of which he alone is capable and which will be revelations to others because they do not lack what he lacks—to him they seem to emanate from the things themselves, like figures emanating from the constellations!

This strikes me as comparable to Nietzsche's notion of the artist in his Dionysian mode as vehicle for that which is expressed through him in a willing self-abnegation. [??]

Inevitably the roles between the painter and the visible switch. That is why so many painters have said that things look at them. As Andre Marchand says, after Klee: "In a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who looked at the forest. Some days I felt that the trees were looking at me, were speaking to me.... I was there, listening.... I think that the painter must be penetrated by the universe and not want to penetrate it.... I expect to be inwardly submerged, buried. Perhaps I paint to break out." [9]

We speak of "inspiration," and the word should be taken literally. There really is inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration in Being, action and passion so slightly discernible that it becomes impossible to distinguish between who sees and who is seen, who paints and what is painted. We say that a human being is born the moment when something that was only virtually visible within the mother's body becomes at once visible for us and for itself. The painter's vision is an ongoing birth.

In paintings themselves we could seek a figured philosophy [10] of vision—its iconography, perhaps. It is no accident, for example, that frequently in Dutch paintings (as in many others) an interior in which no one is present is "digested" by the "round eye of the mirror". [11] This prehuman way of seeing things is emblematic of the painter's way. More completely than lights, shadows, and reflections, the mirror image anticipates, within things, the labor of vision. Like all other technical objects, such as tools and signs, the mirror has sprung up along the open circuit *between* the seeing and the visible body. Every technique is a "technique of the body," illustrating and amplifying the metaphysical structure of our flesh. The mirror emerges because I am a visible see-er, because there is a reflexivity of the sensible; the mirror translates and reproduces that reflexivity. In it, my externality becomes complete. Everything that is most secret about me passes into that face, that flat, closed being of which I was already dimly aware, from having seen my reflection mirrored in water. Schilder observes that, smoking a pipe before a mirror, I feel the sleek, burning surface of the wood not only where my fingers are but also in those otherworldly fingers, those merely visible ones inside the mirror. [12] The mirror's phantom draws my flesh into the outer world, and at the same time the invisible of my body can invest its psychic energy in the other bodies I see. [13] Hence my body can include elements drawn from the body of another, just as my substance passes into them; man is a mirror for man. Mirrors are instruments of a universal magic that converts things into spectacle, spectacle into things, myself into another, and another into myself. Artists have often mused upon mirrors because beneath this "mechanical trick," they recognized, as they did in the case of the "trick" of perspective, [14] the metamorphosis of seeing and seen that defines both our flesh and the painter's vocation. This explains why they have so often chosen to draw themselves in the act of painting (they still do—witness Matisse's drawings), adding to what *they* could see of things at that moment, what *things* could see of them—as if to attest to there being a total or absolute vision, leaving nothing outside, including themselves. Where in the realm of the understanding can we place these occult operations, together with the potions and idols they concoct? What can we call them? Consider, as Sartre did in *Nausea*, the smile of a long-dead monarch which keeps producing and reproducing itself on the surface of a canvas. It is too little to say that it is there as an image or essence; it is there as itself, as that which was always most alive about it, the moment I look at the painting. The "world's instant" that Cézanne wanted to paint, an instant long since passed away, is still hurled toward us by his paintings. [15] His *Mont. Sainte-Victoire* is made and remade from one end of the world to the other in a way different from but no less energetic than in the hard rock above Aix. Essence and existence, imaginary and real, visible and invisible—painting scrambles all our categories, spreading out before us its oneiric universe of carnal essences, actualized resemblances, mute meanings.

III

How crystal clear everything would be in our philosophy if only we would exorcise these specters, make illusions or objectless perceptions out of them, brush them to one side of an unequivocal world!

Descartes's *Dioptrics* is an attempt to do just that. It is the breviary of a thought that wants no longer to abide in the visible and so decides to reconstruct it according to a model-in-thought. It is worthwhile to remember this attempt and its failure.

Here there is no concern to cling to vision. The problem is to know "how it happens," but only enough to invent, whenever the need arises, certain "artificial organs" which correct it.[16] We are to reason not so much upon the light we see as upon the light which, from outside, enters our eyes and regulates our vision. And for that we are to rely upon "two or three comparisons which help us to conceive it [light]" in such a way as to explain its known properties and to deduce others.[17] The question being so formulated, it is best to think of light as an action by contact—not unlike the action of things upon the blind man's cane. The blind, says Descartes, "see with their hands." [18] The Cartesian model of vision is modeled after the sense of touch.

At one swoop, then, Descartes eliminates action at a distance and relieves us of that ubiquity which is the whole problem of vision (as well as its peculiar virtue). Why should we henceforth puzzle over reflections and mirrors? These unreal duplications are a class of things; they are real effects like a ball bouncing back. If the reflection resembles the thing itself, it is because this reflection acts upon the eyes more or less as a thing would. It deceives the eye by engendering a perception which has no object, yet this perception does not affect our conception of the world. In the world there is the thing itself, and outside this thing itself there is that other thing which is only reflected light rays and which happens to have an ordered correspondence with the real thing; there are two individuals, then, bound together externally by causality. As far as the thing and its mirror image are concerned, their resemblance is only an external denomination; the resemblance belongs to thought. The dubious relationship of likeness is—among things—an unequivocal relationship of projection. □

M-P's critique of Cartesian representationalism draws its strength from the contrast between the projection of the visual image—the descriptive optics of modern physics—and our lived experience of the world.

The Cartesian does not see *himself* in the mirror; he sees a puppet, an "outside," which, he has every reason to believe, other people see in the very same way, but which is no more for himself than for others a body in the flesh. His "image" in the mirror is an effect of the mechanics of things. If he recognizes himself in it, if he thinks it "looks like him," it is his thought that weaves this connection. The mirror image is in no sense a *part* of him. For him, icons lose their powers.[19] *However vividly an etching may "represent" forests, towns, men, battles, storms, it does not resemble them. It is only a bit of ink put down here and there on the paper. A figure flattened down onto a plane surface scarcely retains the forms of things; it is a deformed figure that must be deformed—the square becomes a lozenge, the circle an oval—in order to represent the object. It is an image only as long as it does not resemble its object. If not through resemblance, how, then, does it work? It "excites our thought" to "conceive," as do signs and words "which in no way resemble the things they signify."*[20] The etching gives us sufficient indices, unequivocal "means" for forming an idea of the thing that does not come from the icon itself; rather, it arises in us, as "occasioned" by the icon. *The magic of intentional species—the old idea of effective resemblance so strongly suggested to us by mirrors and paintings—loses its final argument if the entire potential of a painting is that of a text to be read, a text totally free of promiscuity between the seeing and the seen. We need no longer try to understand how a painting of things in the body could make them felt in the soul—an impossible task, since the very resemblance between this painting and those things would have to be seen in turn, since we would "have to have other eyes in our minds with which to apperceive it,"*[21] and since the problem of vision remains intact even after we have introduced these simulacra, wandering between things and us. What the light casts upon

our eyes, and thence upon our brain, does not resemble the visible world any more than etchings do. Nothing goes from things to the eyes, and from the eyes to vision, no more than from things to a blind man's hands, and from his hands to his thoughts.

Vision is not the metamorphosis of things themselves into the sight of them; it is not a matter of things' belonging simultaneously to the world at large and a little private world. It is a thinking that unequivocally decodes signs given within the body. Resemblance is the result of perception, not its basis. Thus, the mental image, the visualization which renders present to us what is absent, is a fortiori nothing like a breakthrough to the heart of Being. It too is a thought relying upon bodily indices—this time insufficient ones—which are made to say more than they mean. Nothing is left of the oneiric world of analogy....

"[E]very theory of painting is a metaphysics."

What interests us in these famous analyses is that they make us aware of the fact that **every theory of painting is a metaphysics**. Descartes does not say much about painting, and one might think it unfair on our part to make so much of a few pages on engravings. And yet the very fact that he speaks of painting only in passing is itself significant. Painting for him is not a central operation contributing to the definition of our access to Being; it is a mode or a variant of thinking, where thinking is canonically defined as intellectual possession and self-evidence. His very brevity is the indication of a choice; a closer study of painting would lead to a different philosophy. It is significant, too, that when he speaks of "pictures" [*tableaux*] he takes line drawings as typical. We shall see that the whole of painting is present in each of its modes of expression; there is a kind of drawing, even a single line, that can embrace all of painting's bold potential.

painting vs. drawing

But what Descartes likes most about engravings is that they preserve the form of objects, or at least give us sufficient signs of their forms. They present the object by its outside, or its envelope. If he had examined that other, deeper opening upon things given us by the secondary qualities, especially color, then—since there is no rule-governed or projective relationship between them and the true properties of things, and we understand their message all the same—he would have found himself faced with the problem of a conceptless universality and opening upon things. He would have been obliged to find out how the uncertain murmur of colors can present us with things, forests, storms—in short the world. He would have been obliged, perhaps, to integrate perspective, as a particular case, into a broader ontological power. But for him it goes without saying that color is an ornament, mere coloring, and that the real power of painting lies in drawing, whose power in turn rests upon the ordered relationship between it and objective space established by perspectival projection. Pascal's famous saying that painting is frivolous because it attaches us to images whose originals would not move us is a Cartesian saying. For Descartes it is self-evident that one can paint only existing things, that their existence consists in being extended, and line drawing alone makes painting possible by making possible the representation of extension. Thus painting is only an artifice that puts before our eyes a projection similar to the one things themselves would (and do, according to the commonsense view) inscribe in them. Painting causes us to see, without real objects, just as we see things in everyday life; and in particular it makes us see empty space where there is none.[22]

Discussion of **depth** in image and perception.

The picture is a flat thing contriving to give us what we would see in the presence of "diversely positioned" things, by offering sufficient diacritical signs, through height and width, of the missing dimension.[23] Depth is a *third dimension* derived from the other two.

It will be worth our while to dwell for a moment upon this third dimension. There is, at first glance, something paradoxical about it. I see objects that hide each other and that consequently I do not see; each one stands behind the other. I see depth and yet it is not visible, since it is reckoned from our bodies to things, and we are [as Cartesians] confined to our bodies. There is no real mystery here. I do not really see depth or, if I do, it is only another *size*. On the line from my eyes to the horizon, the foreground forever hides all the other planes, and if on either side I think I see things staggered at intervals,

Things with independent, external existence.

it is because they do not completely hide each other. Thus I see each thing outside the others, according to a width measured differently.[24] We are [as Cartesians] always on the hither side of depth, or beyond it. It is never the case that things really *are* one behind the other. The encroachment and latency do not enter into their definition. They express only my incomprehensible solidarity with one of them—my body; and by their positivity they are thoughts of mine and not attributes of things. I know that at this very moment another person, situated elsewhere—or better, God, who is everywhere—could penetrate their hiding place and see them openly deployed. What I call depth is either nothing, or else it is my participation in a Being without restriction, first and foremost a participation in the being of space beyond every particular point of view. Things encroach upon one another *because they are outside one another*. The proof of this is that I can see depth in a painting which everyone agrees has none and which organizes for me an illusion of an illusion.... This two-dimensional being,[25] which makes me see a third, is a being that is pierced [*troué*]*—as the men of the Renaissance said, a window.... But in the final analysis the window opens only upon *partes extra partes*, upon height and breadth merely seen from another angle—upon the absolute positivity of Being.*

It is this space without hiding places which in each of its points is only what it is, neither more nor less, this identity of Being that underlies the analysis of engravings. Space is in itself; rather, it is the in-itself par excellence. Its definition is *to be* in itself. Every point of space is, and is thought as being, right where it is—one here, another there; space is the self-evidence of the "where." Orientation, polarity, envelopment are, in space, derived phenomena linked to my presence. Space remains absolutely in itself, everywhere equal to itself, homogeneous; its dimensions, for example, are by definition interchangeable.

Like all classical ontologies, this one elevates certain properties of beings into a structure of Being, and in so doing it is both true and false. Reversing Leibniz's remark, we might say that it is true in what it denies and false in what it affirms. *Descartes's space is true, when contrasted with a thought too empirically dominated, which dares not construct.* It was necessary first to idealize space, to conceive of that being—perfect of its kind, clear, manageable, and homogeneous—which an unsituated thinking glides over without a vantage point of its own: a being which thought transcribes in its entirety onto three right-angled axes—so that subsequent thinkers could one day experience the limitations of that construction and understand that space does not have precisely three dimensions, (as an animal has either four or two legs), and that dimensions are taken by different systems of measurement from a single dimensionality, a polymorphous Being, which justifies all of them without being fully expressed by any. *Descartes was right in liberating space: his mistake was to erect it into a positive being, beyond all points of view, all latency and depth, devoid of any real thickness.*

He was also right in taking his inspiration from the perspectival techniques of the Renaissance; they encouraged painting to experiment freely with depth and the presentation of Being in general. These techniques were false only in that they presumed to bring an end to painting's quest and history, to found once and for all an exact and infallible art of painting. As Panofsky has shown concerning the men of the Renaissance, this enthusiasm was not without bad faith.[26] The theoreticians tried to forget the spherical visual field of the ancients, their angular perspective which relates the apparent size not to distance but to the angle from which we see the object. They wanted to forget what they disdainfully called *perspectiva naturalis*, or *communis*, in favor of a *perspectiva artificialis* capable in principle of founding an exact construction. To accredit this myth, they went so far as to expurgate Euclid, omitting from their translations the eighth theorem, which was inconvenient. But the painters knew from experience that no technique of perspective is an exact solution and that there is no projection of the existing world which respects it in all aspects and deserves to become the fundamental law of painting. They knew that linear perspective was far from being an ultimate breakthrough; on the contrary, it opened several pathways for painting. For example, the Italians took the way of representing the object, but the Northern painters discovered and worked out the formal technique of *Hochraum*, *Nahraum*, and *Schrägraum*. Thus plane projection

does not always stimulate our thought to rediscover the true form of things, as Descartes believed. Beyond a certain degree of deformation, it refers us back, on the contrary, to our own vantage point; as for the things, they flee into a remoteness out of reach of all thought. Something about space evades our attempts to survey it from above.

The truth is that no means of expression, once mastered, resolves the problems of painting or transforms it into a technique. For no symbolic form ever functions as a stimulus. **Symbolic form works and acts only in conjunction with the entire context of the work, and not at all by means of a *trompe-l'oeil*.** The *Stilmoment* never dispenses with the *Wermoment*.^[27] The language of painting is never "instituted by nature"; it must be made and remade. The perspective of the Renaissance is no infallible "gimmick." It is only one particular case, a date, a moment in a poetic information of the world which continues after it.

Yet Descartes would not have been Descartes if he had thought to *eliminate* the enigma of vision. For him, there is no vision without thought: but *it is not enough* to think in order to see. Vision is a conditioned thought; it is born "as occasioned" by what happens in the body; it is "incited" to think by the body. It does not *choose* either to be or not to be or to think this thing or that. It must carry in its heart that heaviness, that dependence which cannot come to it by some intrusion from outside. Such bodily events are "instituted by nature" in order to bring us to see this thing or that. The thinking that belongs to vision functions according to a program and a law which it has not given itself. It does not possess its own premises; it is not a thought altogether present and actual; there is in its center a mystery of passivity.^[28]

M-P's positive claims.

Thus the Cartesian situation is as follows. Everything we say and think of vision has to make a *thought* of it. When, for example, we wish to understand how we see the location of objects, we have no other recourse than to suppose the soul to be capable, knowing where the parts of its body are, of "transferring its attention from there" to all the points of space that lie along the prolongation of its bodily members.^[28] But so far this is only a "model" of the event. For how does the soul know that space of its body which it extends toward things, that primary *here* from which all the *theres* will come? This space is not, like them, just another mode or specimen of extension; it is the place of the body the soul calls "mine," a place the soul inhabits. The body it animates is not, for it, an object among objects, and it does not deduce from its body all the rest of space as an implied premise. The soul thinks according to the body, not according to itself, and space, or exterior distance, is also stipulated within the natural pact that unites them. If, at a certain degree of ocular accommodation and convergence the soul becomes aware of a certain distance, the thought which draws the second relationship from the first is as if immemorially encoded in our inner workings.^[29] Usually this comes about without our reflecting upon it—just as, when we clasp a body with our hand, we conform the hand to the size and shape of the body and thereby sense the body, without having need to think of those movements of the hand.^[29] The body is both the soul's native space, and the matrix of every other existing space. Thus vision doubles. There is the vision upon which I reflect; I cannot think it except as thought, the mind's inspection, judgment, a reading of signs. And then there is the vision that actually occurs, an honorary or established thought, collapsed into a body—its own body, of which we can have no idea except in the exercise of it, and which introduces, between space and thought, the autonomous order of the composite of soul and body. **The enigma of vision is not done away with; it is shifted from the "thought of seeing" to vision in act.**

Here we see the non-representationalist view of M-P being invoked.

Still, this de facto vision and the "there is" which it contains do not upset Descartes's philosophy. **Since it is thought united with a body, it cannot, by definition, truly be conceived. One can practice it, exercise it, and, so to speak, exist it; yet one can draw nothing from it which deserves to be called true.** If, like Queen Elizabeth,^[30] we want at all costs to think *something* about it, all we can do is go back to Aristotle and scholasticism, to conceive thought as a corporeal something which cannot be conceived but which is the only way to formulate, for our understanding, the union of soul and body.

Cf. Kant and the pre-conceptual apprehension of the world in experience.

The truth is that it is absurd to submit to pure understanding the mixture of understanding and body. These would-be thoughts are the emblems of "the practice of everyday life," the verbal blazons of union, permissible only if not taken to be thoughts. They are indices of an order of existence—of humanity and world as existing—of which we are not held to produce a concept. For this order there is no *terra incognita* on our map of Being. It does not confine the reach of our thoughts, because it, just as much as they, is sustained by a Truth which grounds its obscurity as well as our own lights.[31]

We have to go to these lengths to find in Descartes something like a metaphysics of depth. For we are not present at the birth of this Truth; God's being is for us an abyss. An anxious trembling quickly mastered; for Descartes it is just as futile to plumb that abyss as it is to think the space of the soul and the depth of the visible. Our very position, he would say, disqualifies us from looking into such things. That is the secret of Cartesian equilibrium: a metaphysics which gives us definitive reasons to leave off doing metaphysics, which validates our self-evidence while limiting it, which opens up our thinking without rending it.

The secret has been lost, and lost for good, it seems. If we are ever again to find a balance between science and philosophy, between our models and the obscurity of the "there is," it must be of a new kind. Our science has rejected the justifications as well as the restrictions which Descartes assigned to its domain. It no longer pretends to deduce its invented models from the attributes of God. The depth of the existing world and an unfathomable God no longer stand over against the flatness of "technicized" thought. Science manages without the excursion into metaphysics that Descartes had to make at least once in his life; it begins from the point he ultimately reached. Operational thought claims for itself, in the name of psychology, that domain of contact with oneself and with the world which Descartes reserved for a blind but irreducible experience. Operational thought is fundamentally hostile to philosophy as thought-in-contact, and if it rediscovers a sense of such a philosophy, it will be through the very excess of its daring; when, having introduced all sorts of notions that Descartes would have held to arise from confused thought—quality, scalar structures, solidarity of observer and observed—it suddenly realizes that one cannot summarily speak of all these beings as *constructs*. Meanwhile, philosophy maintains itself against such operationalist thinking, plunging itself into that dimension of the composite of soul and body, of the existent world, of the abyssal Being that Descartes opened up and so quickly closed again. Our science and our philosophy are two faithful and unfaithful offshoots of Cartesianism, two monsters born of its dismemberment.

Nothing is left for our philosophy but to set out to prospect the actual world. We *are* the compound of soul and body, and so there must be a thought of it. It is to this knowledge by position or situation that Descartes owes what he himself says of it, or what he sometimes says of the presence of the body "against the soul," or of the exterior world "at the tip" of our hands. Here the body is no longer the means of vision and touch, but their depository.

Our organs are not instruments; on the contrary, our instruments are added-on organs. Space is not what it was in the *Dioptrics*, a network of relations between objects such as would be seen by a third party, witnessing my vision, or by a geometer looking over it and reconstructing it from outside. It is, rather, a space reckoned starting from me as the null point or degree zero of spatiality. I do not see it according to its exterior envelope; I live it from the inside; I am immersed in it. After all, the world is around me, not in front of me. Light is found once more to be action at a distance. It is no longer reduced to the action of contact or, in other words, conceived as it might be by those who cannot see.[32] Vision reassumes its fundamental power of manifestation, of showing more than itself. And since we are told that a bit of ink suffices to make us see forests and storms, light must have its own power to generate the imaginary. Its transcendence is not delegated to a reading mind which deciphers the impacts of the light qua thing upon the brain and which could do this quite as well if it had never inhabited a body. No longer is it a matter

of speaking about space and light, but of making space and light, which are *there*, speak to us. There is no end to this questioning, since the vision to which it is addressed is itself a question. All the inquiries we believed closed have been reopened. What is depth, what is light, *τί τὸ ὄν*? What are they—not for the mind that cuts itself off from the body but for the mind Descartes says is suffused throughout the body? And what are they, finally, not only for the mind but for themselves, since they pass through us and surround us?

This philosophy, which is yet to be elaborated, is what animates the painter—not when he expresses opinions about the world but in that instant when his vision becomes gesture, when, in Cézanne's words, he "thinks in painting." [33]

IV

The entire history of painting in the modern period, with its efforts to detach itself from illusionism and acquire its own dimensions, has a metaphysical significance. There can be no question of demonstrating this here. Not because of the limits of objectivity in history and the inevitable plurality of interpretations, which would forbid linking a philosophy and an event, for the metaphysics we have in mind is not a separate body of ideas for which inductive justifications could then be sought in the experiential realm—and there are, in the flesh of contingency, a structure of the event and a virtue peculiar to the scenario that do not prevent the plurality of interpretations but in fact are the deepest reason for it. They make the event a durable theme of historical life, and have a right to philosophical status. In a sense everything that may have been said and will be said about the French Revolution has always been and will henceforth be within it, in that wave arising from a roil of discrete facts, with its froth of the past and its crest of the future. And it is always by looking more deeply into *how it came about* that we make and will go on making new representations of it. *As for the history of works of art, in any case, if they are great, the sense we give to them later on has issued from them. It is the work itself that has opened the perspective from which it appears in another light. It transforms itself and becomes what follows; the interminable interpretations to which it is legitimately susceptible change it only into itself.* And if the historian unearths beneath its manifest content a surplus and thickness of meaning, a texture which held the promise of a long history, then this active manner of being, this possibility he unveils in the work, this monogram he finds there—all are grounds for a philosophical meditation. But such a labor demands a long familiarity with history. I lack everything for its execution, both competence and space. *But since the power or the fecundity of works of art exceeds every positive causal or linear relation, it is not illegitimate for a layman such as myself, speaking from his memory of a few paintings and books, to express how painting enters into his reflections, and to register his sense of a profound dissonance, a transformation in the relationship between humanity and Being, when he holds up a universe of classical thought, contrasting it en bloc with the explorations of modern painting. A sort of history by contact, that perhaps does not go beyond the limits of one person, though it owes everything to his frequentation of others....*

"I believe Cézanne was seeking depth all his life," says Giacometti. [34] Says Robert Delaunay, "Depth is the new inspiration." [35] Four centuries after the "solutions" of the Renaissance and three centuries after Descartes, depth is still new, and it insists on being sought, not "once in a lifetime" but all through life. It cannot be merely a question of an unmysterious interval, as seen from an airplane, between these trees nearby and those farther away. Nor is it a matter of the way things are conjured away, one by another, as we see so vividly portrayed in a perspective drawing. These two views are very explicit and raise no problems. The enigma, though, lies in their bond, in what is between them. The enigma consists in the fact that I see things, each one in its place, precisely because they eclipse one another, and that they are rivals before my sight precisely because each one is in its own place—in their exteriority, known through their envelopment, and their mutual dependence in their autonomy. Once depth is understood in this way, we can no longer call it a third dimension. In the first place, if it were a

"heating a substance until it burns away"

dimension, it would be the *first* one; there are forms and definite planes only if it is stipulated how far from me their different parts are. But a *first* dimension that contains all the others is no longer a dimension, at least in the ordinary sense of a *certain relationship* according to which we make measurements. Depth thus understood is, rather, the experience of the reversibility of dimensions, of a global "locality" in which everything is in the same place at the same time, a locality from which height, width, and depth are abstracted, a voluminosity we express in a word when we say that a thing is *there*. In pursuing depth, what Cézanne is seeking is this **deflagration** of Being, and it is all in the modes of space, and in form as well. Cézanne already knew what cubism would restate: that the external form, the envelope, is secondary and derived, that it is not what makes a thing to take form, that that shell of space must be shattered—the fruit bowl must be broken. But then what should be painted instead? Cubes, spheres, and cones—as he said once? Pure forms having the solidity of what could be defined by an internal law of construction, forms which taken together, as traces or cross-sections of the thing, let it appear between them like a face in the reeds? This would be to put Being's solidity on one side and its variety on the other. **Cézanne had already made an experiment of this kind in his middle period. He went directly to the solid, to space—and came to find that inside this space—this box or container too large for them—the things began to move, color against color; they began to modulate in the instability.**[36] Thus we must seek space and its content *together*. The problem becomes generalized; it is no longer solely that of distance, line, and form; it is also, and equally, the problem of color.

Color is the "place where our brain and the universe meet," he says in that admirable idiom of the artisan of Being which Klee liked to quote.[37] It is for the sake of color that we must break up the form *qua* spectacle. Thus the question is not of colors, "simulacra of the colors of nature." [38] The question, rather, concerns the dimension of color, that dimension which creates—from itself to itself—identities, differences, a texture, a materiality, a something....

Yet there is clearly no one master key of the visible, and color alone is no closer to being such a key than space is. The return to color has the virtue of getting somewhat nearer to "the heart of things,"[39] but this heart is beyond the color envelope just as it is beyond the space envelope. The *Portrait of Vallier* sets white spaces between the colors which take on the function of giving shape to, and setting off, a being more general than yellow-being or green-being or blue-being. Similarly, in the water colors of Cézanne's last years, space (which had been taken to be self-evidence itself and of which it was believed that the question of where was not to be asked) radiates around planes that cannot be assigned to any place at all: "a superimposing of transparent surfaces," "a flowing movement of planes of color which overlap, advance and retreat." [40]

As we can see, it is not a matter of adding one more dimension to those of the flat canvas, of organizing an illusion or an objectless perception whose perfection consists in simulating an empirical vision to the maximum degree. Pictorial depth (as well as painted height and width) comes "I know not whence" to alight upon, and take root in, the sustaining support. **The painter's vision is not a view upon the outside, a merely "physical-optical"[41] relation with the world. The world no longer stands before him through representation; rather, it is the painter to whom the things of the world give birth by a sort of concentration or coming-to-itself of the visible.** Ultimately the painting relates to nothing at all among experienced things unless it is first of all "autofigurative." [42] It is a spectacle of something only by being a "spectacle of nothing,"[43] by breaking the "skin of things"[44] to show how the things become things, how the world becomes world. Apollinaire said that in a poem there are phrases which do not appear to have been *created*, which seem to have *shaped themselves*. And Henri Michaux said that sometimes Klee's colors seem to have been born slowly upon the canvas, to have emanated from some primordial ground, "exhaled at the right spot"[45] like a patina or a mold. Art is not construction, artifice, the meticulous relationship to a space and a world existing outside. It is truly the "inarticulate cry," as Hermes Trismegistus said, "which seemed to be the voice of the light." And once it is present it awakens powers dormant in

ordinary vision, a secret of preexistence. *When through the water's thickness I see the tiled bottom of the pool, I do not see it despite the water and the reflections; I see it through them and because of them.* If there were no distortions, no ripples of sunlight, if it were without that flesh that I saw the geometry of the tiles, then I would cease to see it as it is and where it is—which is to say, beyond any identical, specific place. I cannot say that the water itself—the aqueous power, the syrupy and shimmering element—is *in* space; all this is not somewhere else either, but it is not in the pool. It inhabits it, is materialized there, yet it is not contained there; and *if I lift my eyes toward the screen of cypresses where the web of reflections plays, I must recognize that the water visits it as well, or at least sends out to it its active, living essence. This inner animation, this radiation of the visible, is what the painter seeks beneath, the words depth, space, and color.*

Anyone who thinks about the matter finds it astonishing that very often a good painter can also produce good drawings or good sculpture. Since neither the means of expression nor the creative gestures are comparable, this is proof that there is a system of equivalences, a Logos of lines, of lighting, of colors, of reliefs, of masses—a nonconceptual presentation of universal Being. The effort of modern painting has been directed not so much toward choosing between line and color, or even between figurative depiction and the creation of signs, as it has been toward multiplying the systems of equivalences, toward severing their adherence to the envelope of things. This effort may require the creation of new materials or new means of expression, but it may well be realized at times by the reexamination and reuse of those already at hand.

There has been, for example, a prosaic conception of the line as a positive attribute and property of the object in itself. Thus, it is the outer contour of the apple or the border between the plowed field and the meadow, considered as present in the world, such that, guided by points taken from the real world, the pencil or brush would only have to pass over them. But this line has been contested by all modern painting, and probably by all painting, as we are led to think by da Vinci's comment in his *Treatise on Painting*: "The secret of the art of drawing is to discover in each object the particular way in which a certain flexuous line, which is, so to speak, its generating axis, is directed through its whole extent."^[46] Both Ravaisson and Bergson sensed something important in this, without daring to decipher the oracle all the way. Bergson scarcely looked for the "sinuous outline [*serpement*]" outside living beings, and he rather timidly advanced the idea that the undulating line "could be no one of the visible lines of the figure," that it is "no more here than there," and yet "gives the key to the whole."^[47] He was on the threshold of that gripping discovery, already familiar to the painters, that there are no lines visible in themselves, that neither the contour of the apple nor the border between field and meadow is in *this* place or that, that they are always on the near or the far side of the point we look at. They are always between or behind whatever we fix our eyes upon; they are indicated, implicated, and even very imperiously demanded by the things, but they themselves are not things. They were thought to circumscribe the apple or the meadow, but the apple and the meadow "form themselves" from themselves, and come into the visible as if they had come from a pre-spatial world behind the scenes.

Yet this challenging of the prosaic line is far from ruling out all lines in painting, as the impressionists may have thought. It is simply a matter of freeing the line, of revivifying its constituting power; and we are not faced with a contradiction when we see it reappear and triumph in painters like Klee or Matisse, who more than anyone believed in color. For henceforth, as Klee said, *the line no longer imitates the visible; it renders visible*"; it is the blueprint of a genesis of things. Perhaps no one before Klee had "let a line muse."^[48] The beginning of the line's path establishes or installs a certain level or mode of the linear, a certain manner for the line to be and to make itself a line, "to go line."^[49] Relative to it, every subsequent inflection will have a diacritical value, will be another aspect of the line's relationship to itself, will form an adventure, a history, a meaning of the line—all this according as it slants more or less, more or less rapidly, more or less subtly. Making its way in space, it nevertheless corrodes prosaic space and its *partes*

extra partes; it develops a way of extending itself actively into that space which sub-tends the spatiality of a thing quite as much as that of a man or an apple tree. It is just that, as Klee said, to give the generating axis of a man the painter "would have to have a network of lines so entangled that it could no longer be a question of a truly elementary representation." [50]

In view of this situation two alternatives are open, and it makes little difference which one is chosen. First, the painter may, like Klee, decide to hold rigorously to the principle of the genesis of the visible, the principle of fundamental, indirect, or—as Klee used to say—absolute painting, and then leave it up to the *title* to designate by its prosaic name the entity thus constituted, in order to leave the painting free to function more purely as a painting. Or alternatively he may undertake, with Matisse (in his drawings), to put into a single line both the prosaic, identifying characteristics of the entity and the hidden operation which combines such indolence or inertia and such force in it as are required to constitute it as *nude*, as *face*, as *flower*.

There is a painting by Klee of two holly leaves, done in the most representational manner. At first glance the leaves are thoroughly indecipherable, and they remain to the end monstrous, unbelievable, ghostly, *on account of their exactness*. And Matisse's women (let us keep in mind his contemporaries' sarcasm) were not immediately women; they became women. It is Matisse who taught us to see his shapes not in a "physical-optical" way but rather as structural filaments [*des nervures*], as the axes of a corporeal system of activity and passivity. *Whether it be representational or nonrepresentational, the line is no longer a thing or an imitation of a thing. It is a certain disequilibrium contrived within the indifference of the white paper; it is a certain hollow opened up within the in-itself, a certain constitutive emptiness—an emptiness which, as Moore's statues show decisively, sustains the supposed positivity of things. The line is no longer the apparition of an entity upon a vacant background, as it was in classical geometry. It is, as in modern geometries, the restriction, segregation, or modulation of a pre-given spatiality.*

Just as painting has created the latent line, it has made for itself a movement without displacement, a movement by vibration or radiation. And well it should, since, as they say, painting is an art of space, is carried out upon a canvas or sheet of paper and so lacks the wherewithal to devise things that actually move. But an immobile canvas could suggest a change of place, just as a shooting star's track on my retina suggests a transition, a motion not contained in it. The painting itself would then offer to my eyes almost the same thing offered them by real movements: a series of appropriately mixed, instantaneous glimpses along with, if a living thing is involved, attitudes unstably suspended between a before and an after—in short, the externals of a change of place which the spectator would read from the imprint it leaves. Here Rodin's well-known remark reveals its full weight: instantaneous glimpses, unstable attitudes petrify movement, as is shown by so many photographs in which an athlete-in-motion is forever frozen. We could not thaw him out by multiplying the glimpses. Marey's photographs, the cubists' analyses. Duchamp's *La Mariée* do not move; they give a Zenonian reverie on movement. We see a rigid body as if it were a piece of armor going through its motions; it is here and it is there, magically, but it does not go from here to there. Cinema portrays movement, but *how*? Is it, as we are inclined to believe, by copying more closely the changes of place? We may presume not, since slow motion shows a body being carried along, floating among objects like seaweed, but not *moving itself*.

Movement is given, says Rodin, by an image in which the arms, the legs, the trunk, and the head are each taken at a different instant, an image which therefore portrays the body in an attitude which it never at any instant really held and which imposes fictive linkages between the parts, as if this mutual confrontation of impossibles could—and alone could—cause transition and duration to arise in bronze and on canvas. [51] The only successful instantaneous glimpses of movement are those which approach this paradoxical arrangement—when, for example, a walking man or woman is taken at the moment when both feet are touching the ground; for then we almost have the temporal

Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride* (Cf. *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*.)

ubiquity of the body which brings it about that the person *bestrides* space. The picture makes movement visible by its internal discordance. Each member's position, precisely by virtue of its incompatibility with that of the others (according to the body's logic), is dated differently or is not "in time" with the others; and since all of them remain visibly within the unity of one body, it is the body which comes to bestride duration. Its movement is something conspired between legs, trunk, arms, and head in some locus of virtuality, and it breaks forth only subsequently by actual change of place. When a horse is photographed at that instant when he is completely off the ground, with his legs almost folded under him—an instant, therefore, when he must be moving—why does he look as if he were leaping in place? And why, by contrast, do Gericault's horses really run on canvas, in a posture impossible for a real horse at a gallop? It is because the horses in *Epsom Derby* bring me to see the body's grip upon the ground and that, according to a logic of body and world I know well, these "grips" upon space are also ways of taking hold of duration. Rodin said profoundly, "It is the artist who is truthful, while the photograph lies; for, in reality, time never stops." [52] The photograph keeps open the instants which the onrush of time closes up forthwith; it destroys the overtaking, the overlapping, the "metamorphosis" [Rodin] of time. This is what painting, in contrast, makes visible, because the horses have in them that "leaving here, going there," [53] because they have a foot in each instant. *Painting searches not for the outside of movement but for its secret ciphers, of which there are some still more subtle than those of which Rodin spoke. All flesh, and even that of the world, radiates beyond itself. But whether or not one is, depending on the era and the "school," attached more to manifest movement or the monumental, the art of painting is never altogether outside time, because it is always within the carnal.*

Now perhaps we have a better sense of how much is contained in that little word "see." Seeing is not a certain mode of thought or presence to self; it is the means given me for being absent from myself, for being present from within at the fission of Being only at the end of which do I close up into myself.

Painters have always known this. Da Vinci invoked a "pictorial science" which does not speak in words (and still less in numbers) but in works that exist in the visible just as natural things do—yet pass on that science "to all the generations of the universe." [54] A silent science, says Rilke (apropos of Rodin), that brings into the work the forms of things "whose seal has not been broken"; it comes from the eye and addresses itself to the eye. [55] We must understand the eye as the "window of the soul." "The eye. . . through which the beauty of the universe is revealed to our contemplation is of such excellence that whoever should resign himself to losing it would deprive himself of the knowledge of all the works of nature, the sight of which makes the soul live happily in its body's prison, thanks to the eyes which show him the infinite variety of creation: whoever loses them abandons his soul in a dark prison where all hope of once more seeing the sun, the light of the universe, must vanish." The eye accomplishes the prodigious work of opening the soul to what is not soul—the joyous realm of things and their god, the sun.

A Cartesian can believe that the existing world is not visible, that the only light is of the mind, and that all vision takes place in God. A painter cannot agree that our openness to the world is illusory or indirect, that what we see is not the world itself, or that the mind has to do only with its thoughts or another mind. He accepts, with all its difficulties, the myth of the windows of the soul; what is without place must be subjected to a body—or, what is even more: what is without place must be initiated *by* the body to all the others and to nature. We must take literally what vision teaches us: namely, that through it we touch the sun and the stars, that we are everywhere at once, and that even our power to imagine ourselves elsewhere—"I am in Petersburg in my bed, in Paris, my eyes see the sun" [56]—or freely to envision real beings, wherever they are, borrows from vision and employs means we owe to it. Vision alone teaches us that beings that are different, "exterior," foreign to one another, are yet absolutely *together*, are "simultaneity"; which is a mystery psychologists handle the way a child handles explosives. Robert Delaunay says succinctly, "The railroad track is the image of succession which comes closest to the

"a property or quality of a thing as it is perceived".

"an opening that reveals". Cf. Heidegger & Sartre.

the "visible" and the "invisible" intertwined.

parallel: the parity of the rails."[57] The rails converge and do not converge; they converge *in order to* remain equidistant farther away. The world is in accordance with my perspective *in order to* be independent of me, is for me *in order to* be without me, to be a world. The "visual quale" gives me, and is alone in doing so, the presence of what is not me, of what *is* simply and fully.[58] It does so because, as a texture, it is the concretion of a universal visibility, of one sole Space that separates and reunites, that sustains every cohesion (and even that of past and future, since there would be no such cohesion if they were not essentially parts of the same space). Every visual something, as individual as it is, functions also as a dimension, because it is given as the result of a dehiscence of Being. What this ultimately means is that the hallmark of the visible is to have a lining of invisibility in the strict sense, which it makes present as a certain absence. "In their time, our erstwhile opposites, the Impressionists, were perfectly right in electing domicile among the scrub and stubble of the daily spectacle. As for us, our heart throbs to get closer to the depths.... These oddities will become...realities...because instead of being limited to the diversely intense restoration of the visible, they also annex the occultly perceived portion of the invisible."[59] There is that which reaches the eye head on, the frontal properties of the visible; but there is also that which reaches it from below—the profound postural latency whereby the body raises itself to see—and that which reaches vision from above like the phenomena of flight, of swimming, of movement, where it participates no longer in the heaviness of origins but in free accomplishments.[60] Through vision, then, the painter touches both extremities. In the immemorial depth of the visible, something has moved, caught fire, which engulfs his body; everything he paints is in answer to this incitement, and his hand is "nothing but the instrument of a distant will." Vision is the meeting, as at a crossroads, of all the aspects of Being. "A certain fire wills to live; it wakes. Working its way along the hand's conductor, it reaches the canvas and invades it; then, a leaping spark, it arcs the gap in the circle it was to trace: the return to the eye, and beyond."[61] There is no break at all in this circuit; it is impossible to say that here nature ends and the human being or expression begins. It is, then, silent Being that itself comes to show forth its own meaning. Herein lies the reason why the dilemma between figurative and non-figurative art is wrongly posed; it is at once true and uncontradictory that no grape was ever what it is in the most figurative painting and that no painting, no matter how abstract, can get away from Being, that even Caravaggio's grape is the grape itself.[62] This precession of what is upon what one sees and makes seen, of what one sees and makes seen upon what is—this is vision itself. And to give the ontological formula of painting we hardly need to force the painter's own words, Klee's words written at the age of thirty-seven and ultimately inscribed on his tomb: "I cannot be grasped in immanence."[63]

V

Because depth, color, form, line, movement, contour, physiognomy are all branches of Being and because each entwines the tufts of all the rest, there are no separated, distinct "problems" in painting, no really opposed paths, no partial "solutions," no cumulative progress, no irretrievable options. There is nothing to prevent the painter from going back to one of the emblems he has shied away from—making it, of course, speak differently. Rouault's contours are not those of Ingres. Light is the "old sultana," says Georges Limbour, "whose charms withered away at the beginning of this century." [64] Expelled at first by the painters of matter, it reappears finally in Dubuffet as a certain texture of matter. One is never immune to these avatars or to the least expected convergences; some of Rodin's fragments are statues by Germaine Richier *because they were sculptors*—that is to say, enmeshed in a single, identical network of Being.

For the same reason nothing is ever finally acquired and possessed for good. In "working over" a favorite problem, even if it is just the problem of velvet or wool, the true painter unknowingly upsets the givens of all the other problems. His quest is total even where it looks partial. Just when he has reached proficiency in some area, he finds that he has reopened another one where everything he said before must be said again in a different

way. Thus what he has found he does not yet have. It remains to be sought out; the discovery itself calls forth still further quests. The idea of universal painting, of a totalization of painting, of painting's being fully and definitively accomplished is an idea bereft of sense. For painters, if any remain, the world will always be yet to be painted; even if it lasts millions of years...it will all end without having been completed.

Panofsky shows that the "problems" of painting that structure its history are often solved obliquely, not in the course of inquiries instigated to solve them but, on the contrary, at some point when painters, having reached an impasse, apparently forget those problems and allow themselves to be attracted by other things. Then suddenly, their attention elsewhere, they happen upon the old problems and surmount the obstacle. This hidden historicity, advancing through the labyrinth by detours, transgression, slow encroachments and sudden drives, does not imply that the painter does not know what he wants, but that what he wants is on the hither side of means and goals, commanding and overseeing all our *useful* activity.

We are so fascinated by the classical idea of intellectual adequation that painting's mute "thought" sometimes leaves us with the impression of a vain swirl of significations, a paralyzed or miscarried utterance. And if one answers that no thought ever detaches itself completely from a sustaining support; that the sole privilege of speaking thought is to have rendered its own support manageable; that the figurations of literature and philosophy are no more settled than those of painting and are no more capable of being accumulated into a stable treasure; that even science learns to recognize a zone of the "fundamental," peopled with dense, open, rent beings of which an exhaustive treatment is out of the question—like the cyberneticians' "aesthetic information" or mathematico-physical "groups of operations"; that, in the end, we are never in a position to take stock of everything objectively or to think of progress in itself; and that the whole of human history is, in a certain sense, stationary: What, says the understanding, like [Stendhal's] Lamie, *is that all there is to it?* Is this the highest point of reason, to realize that the soil beneath our feet is shifting, to pompously call "interrogation" what is only a persistent state of stupor, to call "research" or "quest" what is only trudging in a circle, to call "Being" that which never fully is?

But this disappointment issues from that spurious fantasy^[65] which claims for itself a positivity capable of making up for its own emptiness. It is the regret of not being everything, and a rather groundless regret at that. For if we cannot establish a hierarchy of civilizations or speak of progress—neither in painting nor even elsewhere—it is not because some fate impedes us; it is, rather, because the very first painting in some sense went to the farthest reach of the future. If no painting completes painting, if no work is itself ever absolutely completed, still, each creation changes, alters, clarifies, deepens, confirms, exalts, re-creates, or creates by anticipation all the others. If creations are not permanent acquisitions, it is not just that, like all things, they pass away: it is also that they have almost their entire lives before them.

Notes

1. "L'oeil et l'esprit" was the last work Merleau-Ponty saw published. It appeared in the inaugural issue of *Art de France* I, no. 1 (January 1961). After his death it was reprinted in *Les Temps Modernes* 184-85, along with seven articles devoted to him. It has now been published, in book form, by Gallimard (1964). Both the *Art de France* article and the book contain illustrations chosen by Merleau-Ponty. According to Professor Claude Lefort, "L'oeil et l'esprit" is a preliminary statement of ideas that were to be developed in the second part of the book Merleau-Ponty was writing at the time of his death—*Le visible et l'invisible* (part of which was published posthumously by Gallimard in February 1964). The translator wishes to acknowledge his immense debt to George Downing, who spent many long hours working over the final revisions of the translation. Also, thanks are due to Michel Beaujour, Arleen B. Dallery, and Robert Reitter for their advice and encouragement.—Trans.

2. [Il est là, fort ou faible dans la vie, mais souverain sans conteste dans sa ruminantion du monde, sans autre "technique" que celle que ses yeux et ses mains se donnent à force de voir, à force de peindre, acharné à tirer de ce monde où sonnent les scandales et les gloires de l'histoire des toiles qui n'ajouteront guère aux colères ni aux espoirs des hommes, et personne ne murmure.]
3. Cf. *Le visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 273, 308-11.—Trans. 4. See *Signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 210, 222-23, especially the footnotes, for a clarification of the "circularity" at issue here.—Trans.
5. [Cet équivalent interne, cette formule charnelle de leur présence que les choses suscitent en moi, pourquoi à leur tour ne susciteraient-ils pas un tracé, visible encore, où tout autre regard retrouvera les motifs qui soutiennent son inspection du monde?]
6. G. Charbonnier, *Le monologue du peintre* (Paris, 1959), 172.
7. [Beaucoup plus loin, puisque le tableau n'est un analogue que selon le corps, qu'il n'offre pas à l'esprit une occasion de repenser les rapports constitutifs des choses, mais au regard, pour qu'il les épouse, les traces de la vision du dedans, à la vision ce qui la tapisse intérieurement, la texture imaginaire du réel.]
8. Charbonnier, *Le monologue*, 34.
9. *Ibid.*, 143-45.
10. ". . . une philosophie figurée." Cf. Bergson (Ravaisson), note 46 below.—Trans.
11. P. Claudel, *Introduction à la peinture hollandaise* (Paris, 1935).
12. P. Schilder, *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body* (London, 1935; New York, 1950), 223-24. ["the body-image is not confined to the borderlines of one's own body. It transgresses them in the mirror. There is a body-image outside ourselves, and it is remarkable that primitive peoples even ascribe a substantial existence to the picture in the mirror" (278). Schilder's earlier, shorter study, *Das Körperschema* (Berlin, 1923), is cited several times in *The Structure of Behavior* and in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Schilder's later work is of especial interest with regard to Merleau-Ponty's own elaborations of the meaning of the human body; it is worth examining for that reason, as well as for the chance it provides to discern some fundamental coincidences between Merleau-Ponty and certain American pragmatists.]
13. Cf. Schilder, *Image*, 281-82.—Trans.
14. Robert Delaunay, *Du cubisme à l'art abstrait* (Paris, 1957).
15. "A minute in the world's life passes! to paint it in its reality! and forget everything for that. To become that minute, be the sensitive plate, . . . give the image of what we see, forgetting everything that has appeared before our time." Cézanne, quoted in B. Dorival, *Paul Cézanne*, trans. H. H. A. Thackthwaite (London, 1948), 101.— Trans.
16. Descartes, *La Dioptrique*, Discours VII [conclusion]. Edition Adam et Tannery, VI, 165.
17. *Ibid.*, Discours 1. Adam et Tannery, 83. [*Oeuvres et lettres de Descartes*, ed. Andre Bridoux, Edition Pléiade, 181. Page references from the Bridoux selections have been added in the belief that this volume is more widely accessible today than the Adam and Tannery complete edition.]
18. *Ibid.*, Adam et Tannery, 84. [Bridoux, 182].
19. This paragraph continues the exposition of the *Dioptric*.—Trans.
20. *Ibid.*, Discours IV. Adam et Tannery, 112-14. [Bridoux, 203-4; in English, *Descartes: Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. N. Kemp Smith (Modern Library Edition), 145-47.]
21. *Ibid.*, 130. [Bridoux, 217; Smith, 148.]
22. The system of means by which painting makes us see is a scientific matter. Why, then, do we not methodically produce perfect images of the world, arriving at a universal art purged of personal

art, just as the universal language would free us of all the confused relationships that lurk in existent languages?

23. *Dioptrique*, Discours IV. [Note 20 above.]

24. Discours V of the *Dioptrique*, especially Descartes's diagrams, helps considerably to clarify this compressed passage.—Trans.

25. That is, the painting.—Trans.

26. E. Panofsky, *Die Perspektive als symbolische Form*, in *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg*, vol. 4 (1924-25).

27. *Ibid.* [The Stillmoment, or moment of an instituted style, does not dispense with the Wermoment, or moment of the individual perception.—Trans.]

28. Descartes, Discours IV, Adam et Tannery, 135. [Bridoux, 220; Smith, 154.] Here is N. Kemp Smith's translation of the passage under discussion: "Our knowledge of it (the situation of an object) does not depend on any image or action which comes to us from the object, but solely on the situation of the small parts of the brain whence the nerves take their origin. For this situation—a situation which changes with every change however small in the points at which these nerve-fibers are located—is instituted by nature in order to secure, not only that the mind be aware of the location of each part of the body which it animates, relatively to all the others, but also that it be able to transfer its attention to all the positions contained in the straight line that can be imaged as drawn from the extremity of each of these parts, and as prolonged to infinity."

29. *Ibid.*, Adam et Tannery, 137. [Bridoux, 222; Smith, 155. N. Kemp Smith's translation is given here.]

30. No doubt Merleau-Ponty is speaking of Princess Elizabeth, Descartes's correspondent. Cf. *Phénoménologie de la perception*, 230-32 (C. Smith translation, 198-99), and Descartes's letter to Elizabeth of 28 June 1643 (Bridoux, 1157-61).—Trans.

31. That is, the obscurity of the "existential" order is just as necessary, just as grounded in God, as is the clarity of true thoughts ("nos lumières").Trans.

32. Cf. note 18, above.—Trans.

33. B. Dorival, *Paul Cézanne* (Paris, 1948), 103ff. [H. H. A. Thackthwaite's translation (London, 1948), 101-3.]

34. Charbonnier, *Le monologue*, 176.

35. Delaunay, *Du cubisme*, 109.

36. F. Novotny, *Cézanne und das Ende der wissenschaftlichen Perspektive* (Vienna, 1938).

37. W. Grohmann, *Paul Klee* (Paris, 1954), 141. [New York, 1956.]

38. Delaunay, *Du cubisme*, 118.

39. Klee, *Journal*. French trans. P. Klossowski (Paris, 1959).

40. George Schmidt, *Les aquarelles de Cézanne*, 21. [*The Watercolors of Cézanne* (New York, 1953).]

41. Klee, *Journal*.

42. "The spectacle is first of all a spectacle of itself before it is a spectacle of something outside of it." — Translator's note from Merleau-Ponty's 1961 lectures.

43. C. P. Bru, *Esthétique de l'abstraction* (Paris, 1959),99,86.

44. Henri Michaux, *Aventures de lignes*.

45. Ibid.
46. Ravaisson, cited by Bergson, "La vie et l'oeuvre de Ravaisson," in *La pensée et le mouvant* (Paris, 1934), 264-65. [The passage quoted here is from M. L. Andison's translation of that work, *The Creative Mind* (New York, 1946), 229. It remains moot whether these are Ravaisson's or da Vinci's words.]
47. Bergson, *ibid.*
48. Michaux, *Aventures de lignes*. ["laissé rêver une ligne."]
49. Ibid. ["d'aller ligne."]
50. Grohmann, *Paul Klee*, 192.
51. Rodin, *L'art*. Interviews collected by Paul Gsell (Paris, 1911).
52. Ibid., 86. Rodin uses the word "metamorphosis," quoted below.
53. Michaux, *Aventures de lignes*.
54. Cited by Delaunay, *Du cubisme*, 175.
55. Rilke, *Auguste Rodin*, French translation by Maurice Betz (Paris, 1928), 150. [English translation by Jessie Lamont and Hans Trausil (New York, 1919; republished 1945).]
56. Delaunay, *Du cubisme*, 115, 110.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Klee, *Conférence d'Iena* (1924), according to Grohmann, *Paul Klee*, 365.
60. Klee, *Wege des Naturstudiums* (1923), as found in G. di San Lazzaro, *Klee*.
61. Klee, cited by Grohmann, *Paul Klee*, 99.
62. A. Berne-Joffroy, *Le dossier Caravage* (Paris, 1959), and Michel Butor, "La Corbeille de l'Ambrosienne," *Nouvelle Revue Française* (1959), 969-89.
63. Klee, *Journal*. ["Je suis insaisissable dans l'immanence."]
64. G. Limbour, *Tableau bon levain à vous de cuire la pâte: L'art brut de Jean Dubuffet* (Paris, 1953), 54-55.
65. "Mais cette deception est celle du faux imaginaire, qui. . ."

Annotations added, T. R. Quigley, 23 Nov 08