A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ACCOUNT
OF MERLEAU-PONTY’S
NOTION OF STYLE: FROM EMBODIMENT TO FLESH

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Abstract

This thesis is an investigation of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s notion of style via the individual, artwork, and the world. It aims to show that subject-object, self-other, and perceiver-perceived are not contrary, but are reverses of one another each requiring the other for meaningful experience. In experience, these cognitive contraries are engaged in relationships of communication and communion that render styles of interaction by which we have/are a world. A phenomenological investigation of Merleau-Ponty’s notion of style via existential meaningfulness, corporeal and worldly understanding, stylistic nuances (with respect to the individual, the artwork, and the world), and the existential temporal dynamic provide the foundation for understanding our primordial connection with the world. This phenomenological unpacking follows Merleau-Ponty’s thought from Phenomenology of Perception to “Cézanne’s Doubt” and “Eye and Mind” through The Visible and the Invisible.
"[P]henomenology can be practised and identified as a manner or style of thinking".  
--M. Merleau-Ponty (Phenomenology of Perception viii)

"To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is."  
--M. Merleau-Ponty (Phenomenology of Perception ix)

**Introduction**

In the "Preface" of *Phenomenology of Perception*,¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes: "Husserl’s first directive to phenomenology, in its early stages, to be a ‘descriptive psychology’, or to return to the ‘things themselves’, is from the start a foreswearing of science. I am not the outcome or the meeting-point of numerous causal agencies which determine my bodily or psychological make-up." (PhP viii)

What Edmund Husserl is in essence doing is not only repudiating logical positivism, but also the possibility that perceiver and perceived are intertwined, whether causally or necessarily. This foreswearing of affective forces proved to be detrimental to Husserl’s goals; namely, his understanding of the world as separate from his perception of it. Though Husserl’s phenomenological approach laid the groundwork for Merleau-Ponty’s own style of thinking, in his break from and refutation of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty revolutionizes the way in which we understand phenomenology and our relationship in/with/to the world. This development of thought does not happen in a successful return to things themselves, but in an examination of the relationships between the perceiver and the perceived.
In response to Husserl's call to the return to the 'things themselves' and the dogmatisms associated with Cartesianism, Maurice Merleau-Ponty sought to show that binary opposites are not strangers in the body nor in the world, but only occupy this dichotomized position because of cognition. We can see this systematized opposition as early as Plato, but this cognitive distinction finds its true home in the philosophy of René Descartes. Merleau-Ponty argues that subject-object, self-other, and perceiver-perceived are not contrary, but are reverses of one another, each requiring the other for meaningful experience. In experience, these cognitive contraries are engaged in relationships of communication and communion that render styles of interaction by which we have/are a world. The things that Husserl sought to reduce via his époque are inseparable from their styles of appearing.

An investigation of Merleau-Ponty's notion of style via the individual, artwork, and the world shows us that these relationships, which have been dichotomized as exclusionary in Western thought, always overlap and transgress one another. Merleau-Ponty's particular approach to these issues interweaves phenomenological description and psychological case studies and theory, creating a style of philosophizing that is enigmatically unique. His poetical style of writing, the way in which he expresses his ideas, points not only to his account of being in the world, but more importantly, to his project as a whole, and the manner in which it unfolds throughout the course of his philosophic career.

In Merleau-Ponty's treatment of these contraries, some believe that he overcame dualistic thinking. However, if we were to stop our investigation with Phenomenology of Perception, in which he examines the difficulties in both empirical and intellectual thought, we can see that he still falls prey to his predecessor's dogmatisms despite his critiques. In the last pages of his magnum opus he refers to the body as structural (PhP 455), but if we look further, particularly at his later indirect ontology wherein he breaks away from the language of the traditional dichotomies, we can see that this earlier
phenomenological study of perception (qua embodied) opened avenues for thinking through the dynamics of worldly existence. The ambiguity of embodied existence (this admixture of subject-object, self-other, and perceiver-perceived) became a paradigm for his later understanding of worldly being.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty explains that personal style is the opaque meeting of our history and facticity (the two are always hand-in-hand), a manner of being toward the world and others *via* an esoteric faithfulness to our past, present, and future projects as they interact with(in) our phenomenal field. Style is not only individually embodied, it is the elusive invariant that serves as a fingerprint for all things worldly, the how of appearing. This identification and recognition of styles entails that there is, at the core of all existence, a temporal dynamic that appears in the unfolding of history. This ambiguous dynamic of history and facticity engaged with the phenomenal field is visible *via* a particular style of being. The dynamic escapes reduction, but is the very aseity of the person/place/thing.

Aseity, the interaction between the world and person, place, or thing, remains embodied in *Phenomenology of Perception*. At the conclusion of this work, style is an interaction between worldly beings/things, a unique mixture of the personal and the shared, and a recondite bond between history and facticity. However, it is not until Merleau-Ponty’s investigation of artwork that our understanding (and perhaps, his own) progresses beyond embodiment and our own abilities to perceive worldly styles, and delves into the depths of the interaction between our personal styles and those of others, things, places, and the world. Merleau-Ponty opens this interface by examining operative elements in the work of art, particularly in Paul Cézanne’s later work, as described in his essay “Cézanne’s Doubt”.3
Cézanne was able to render in paint the communication and communion of perceiver and perceived (supposed contraries). He did this by painting the advent of appearances. The birth of appearance allows us to see the way in which things appear to us prior to any imposition of cognitive contraries (contra Immanuel Kant). We are engaged in a fundamental way in the world via his paintings. Therein no intermediary stands between the painted world and us, which is also the case in experience. In experience, we are ourselves intertwined with the world. Contrary to Husserl, there is no separation between the what of appearance from the how of appearing. Style expresses or points to this connection, and so by investigating style, we come to understand our primordial non-cognitive interaction with the world whereby our intertwining with the world is free from dichotomized categories until the advent of reflection. The distinction of subject-object, self-other, and perceiver-perceived proceeded from thinking about appearances.

Cézanne’s work awakens us from our cerebral slumbers by showing us this shifting way in which we experience the world. In perception, we are not separated from the world. Of what would perception be without a perceiver and *vice versa*? Neither trumps the other. Experientially, the separation of perceiver and perceived is nonsensical. Cézanne’s brilliance lies not in his stylistic nuances or post-Impressionistic flair, but in his ability to show us how we are affected and drawn in by the world. The world is active in our perception. In uncovering these affective intertwining forces of the world, Merleau-Ponty moves beyond Husserl’s reductive thinking, replacing his call for a return with a reciprocal interchange, whereby neither subject viewing nor object viewed can be reduced or singled out without slipping into mere epistemology.

Merleau-Ponty’s investigation makes clear that it is not only the individual who interrogates the object (perceives), but the object also elicits behaviour from the individual. There are lures of the
world whereby we are drawn in and our bodies answer these worldly solicitations. The cross-hatching of subjective and objective affectations renders the world as meaningful. Movement manifests in this intertwining, and the world comes alive under our gaze, taking on a temporal flavour which seems to be its own, but is in fact only rendered via this interaction. Our primordial connection with the world is not one of (mere) subject viewing and object viewed, as Cézanne demonstrates. Perceiver and perceived are not separate, they are intertwined in dynamic relationships whereby subject and object, self and other, perceiver and perceived are mutually bound or intertwined via affective vectors in a primordial reversibility.

Reversibility lies at the heart of this stylistic union. Furthermore, it is the fundamental condition for the synaesthesia of the senses and makes possible the incorporation of our bodies into the sensible world. From this relationality of self and world are born styles of appearing, whether it is in the gestures of a friend, the Parisian countryside, or the waking world. There is in any and every style of being an elusive mix of the personal and the shared. As Merleau-Ponty explains in “Eye and Mind” and The Visible and the Invisible, both the individual (personal) and the world (shared) are in constant dialogue and transgression whereby meaning is not made in a vacuum, but is birthed via the reciprocity of worldly affectations, the call and answer of all things worldly. This is the primordial interwovenness of perceiver and perceived, and also that which is forgotten in Husserl’s epoché. We cannot separate our meanings from the world, as Husserl would have liked. Instead, this chiasm between the traditional cognitive contraries is the wellspring of meaning and its stylized dehiscence, for it is that which we call being and that which gives us a world.

A phenomenological investigation of Merleau-Ponty’s notion of style via existential meaningfulness, corporeal and worldly understanding, stylistic nuances (with respect to the individual,
the art work, and the world), and the existential temporal dynamic provides us with a foundation for understanding our primordial connection with the world. This phenomenological unpacking will follow Merleau-Ponty's thought from Phenomenology of Perception through The Visible and the Invisible.

Phenomenology of Perception, read as a phenomenological account of embodiment, lays the necessary groundwork for Merleau-Ponty's later thinking. By thinking the body and its stylized manner of being, Merleau-Ponty has found an exemplar par excellence for thinking a more general existence, i.e., the world. The stylized body, indebted to both history and facticity, is fleshed out in the aforementioned work. By beginning with the body, Merleau-Ponty reveals the primacy of perception, which highlights the problems of his predecessors' (empirical and intellectual) theoretical understandings of being in the world. The body, as temporal and situated, shows us something more fundamental about the way in which we are in and of the world. In and through Merleau-Ponty's notion of style we come to understand our primordiality, our intimate connection (connexion) in/to the continual unfolding of the world.

Bridging the gap between Phenomenology of Perception and The Visible and the Invisible are two important essays on the individual in the world who is approached via artwork. Both essays share this common theme, however, “Cézanne’s Doubt” has its roots firmly in Phenomenology of Perception, whereas “Eye and Mind” is more complex, written contemporaneously with The Visible and the Invisible, and so we find it more akin to this posthumously published text.

“Cézanne’s Doubt” shows us that not only does the individual demonstrate a certain style of being in the world via Merleau-Ponty's account of the work of art, but style also holds an existential significance that speaks both to and of the embodied individual, hence its ties with Phenomenology of
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Perception. Works of art, Cézanne’s in particular, elucidate this existential import by calling on our body to appropriate the images via our temporal depth. Our body qua habit, moment, and project, which is explicated in *Phenomenology of Perception*, is unified with our phenomenal field in viewing the painting. Given this way of appearing, one can grasp the artwork without ever forming a distinct idea of it, much in the same way that our bodily experience is synaesthetic. This experience allows Merleau-Ponty to compare the body with a work of art in his later writings.

In Merleau-Ponty’s later works, we explore the complexity of the individual and her/his phenomenal field. In “Eye and Mind” and *The Visible and the Invisible*, style becomes the (in)visible relationship between the world and body. In Merleau-Ponty’s synaesthetic notion of embodiment, style demarcates the meeting of fact and essence, between the body and the world.

We are able to track Merleau-Ponty’s move from a phenomenological account of embodied style (the meeting of subjective and objective affectivity as exemplified in the art work) to an (indirect) ontological account of worldly style (in the thesis of the flesh). Thus, it is appropriate that a project that begins by thinking the body lends itself to thinking the world, which phenomenologically necessitates thinking them simultaneously. Merleau-Ponty does not gloss over the body in his later ontology, but extends the corporeal schema found in *Phenomenology of Perception* to a world schema found in *The Visible and the Invisible* which is evidenced in the stylistic nuances that play in the spaces between the body and the world. However, in order to understand this brilliant fruition we must begin with the stylized body.
Chapter 1: Style of being in the world

Merleau-Ponty’s notion of style of being is a general existential dynamic of meaning-fulness, wherein individual styles show themselves both as particular and as belonging to the existential dynamic of the world. We can understand these particular styles because we are situated in the world, and even possess ourselves, a certain style of interacting with the world. By beginning with the stylized body we can arrive at a new way of thinking the world. According to M.C. Dillon in *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, “With the development of the notion of style, essence [...] takes on new meaning.”

Merleau-Ponty’s conception of style is often overlooked, particularly in *Phenomenology of Perception*, but an investigation of meaningfulness, corporeal understanding, stylistic nuances, and the existential dynamic provides us with a basis for understanding our primordial interconnection with the world. We can never fully unpack a style or the existential organization of the world, though we can know them in their temporal depths with which we are involved over the course of their continual unfolding.

Existential Meaningfulness

This worldly unfolding is meaningful in two respects. Something is meaningful if it is cognitively significant for an individual. It falls into and is cast in a human meaning structure. On the other hand, each something is meaningful: its surplus of significance cannot be merely subsumed under its cognitive properties or affectations. It is often the case that we are drawn to someone or something without really understanding why it is so. It is difficult to pinpoint both the origin of these significances and the affectations that arise from these encounters. These affectations escape our cognitive distinctions, and so we are left without precise and exhaustive linguistic distinctions for these
experiences. A great example of this enigma is the idea of love. Dillon writes of love, "We learn to respond to fleshy significance long before that significance detaches itself to become a conventional sign." As infants we learn to respond to our mother's touch before we cognitively understand the meaning of this caress. Merleau-Ponty is concerned with this enigma of meaning, i.e., the meaning-fullness of experience that operates on a primordial level of understanding. These experiences provide a foundation for our human meaning structures. (MPO 66) The ways in which we are affected by the world (for example, by our mother's touch) are prior to any conceptualizations. Our primary affectations and the fecundity therein, are often forgotten in analytic thinking.

These primary affectations of perceptual experience are often overlooked or obscured altogether. In "An Unpublished Text by Maurice Merleau-Ponty: A Prospectus of His Work," Merleau-Ponty writes, "We never cease living in the world of perception, but we bypass it in critical thought – almost to the point of forgetting the contribution of perception to our idea of truth." It is this forgetting of our embodiment and the implications thereof, that Merleau-Ponty focuses on throughout the Phenomenology of Perception. Interrogating our perceptions (Merleau-Ponty's philosophic style) continuously brings him back to the body; phenomenologically speaking, the body perceives prior to any differentiation of subject and object, self and others. Hence, the body is our point of departure for understanding the ambiguities of meaningful existence.

Meaning is not merely the assigning of cognitive importance to a perception. Meaning is found and made in and by the body. We all find different things meaningful based on a variety of factors, assumed by our bodies and our cultural traditions, which inform our experiences. The unfolding of temporal experience is crucial in understanding the way in which our bodies locate and express this meaning in the world. To grasp this importance, Merleau-Ponty distinguishes between the past,
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present, and future. He writes, “our body comprises as it were two distinct layers, that of the habit-body and that of the body at this moment.” (PhP 82) Both are obviously one and the same body wherein the past, present, and future intermingle. Both the habit-body and the body at this moment inform one another to the extent that no absolute distinction can be made between them. However, employing a temporal distinction will allow us to think about the body in a way that does not merely ossify into the ontological rigidity of the Sartrean in-itself. We can separate the habit and momentary body in order to better understand our relationship with our phenomenal (perceptual) field. More importantly, in speaking about the body as such, Merleau-Ponty calls attention to the importance of temporality in thinking the lived body.9

Our bodies develop and replace habits as time passes; yet some experiences remain stylistically embedded in our bodily comportment over the course of our lifetimes, without any necessary cognitive awareness. Since, for example, we do not have to relearn to climb the stairs every day, it must be the case that we are able to carry with us a sensory-motor understanding of our perceptual field, even in the face of new experiences, as no experience is wholly foreign by virtue of the temporality and spatiality of our world. Our bodies perpetually recast themselves, never completely losing their hold on the world, the past, or the future: “each moment of time calls all the others to witness.” (PhP 69) We incorporate into our bodies new experiences and goals without completely obscuring others. We can learn to perform new tasks with our bodies, such as running on a treadmill, differentiating types of clouds, or distinguishing between the scents of rosemary and thyme. In doing so, we do not cease to be able to run on a trail, find faces in clouds, or get lost in a potpourri of scents. Our abilities to perceive and move in the world are always embodied, and therein experiences necessarily affect our bodily comportment, though new content can and does reconfigure our bodily schema, making certain
tasks easier to perform, and others more difficult. This describes our connection with our past, according to Dillon, without "freezing time or relapsing into ideality." (MPO 78) We can retain old structures of understanding and learn new ones. Hence, there are always elements of the old within the new and vice versa. There are elements of the new within the old because our future informs our present in a manner analogous to the way our past informs our present. Over time, our bodies manifest, make meaningful, this connection with our past experiences and future expectations. This process of reappropriation, reconfiguration, and projection is never complete, insofar that our experiences can never quite obliterate this opening (horizon) onto the past and future. Our bodies are always informed by our past and projected schema, and can only "exhaust" these possibilities in death.

This recasting and reconfiguration of the past in the face of the present and (near) future are important phenomenal elements of our bodily schemas. Bodily schema, though constant, as it is our ground for experience, varies because it can change over time; such as we see with exercise, plastic surgery, accident, skill-development, aging, and so forth. We can attribute certain properties to our bodies, yet these properties change. However, our bodies that provide for these lifestyle changes sustain these properties. As Anthony J. Steinbock suggests, our bodies "exhibit a type that is optimal for it under certain circumstances";\(^{10}\) therefore, this provision is not just the latent kinaesthetic possibilities of our bodies, but it is also our ability to comport ourselves in new situations as directed toward certain outcomes. This comportment carries with it tendrils of the past and indications of the future, whether movements, expressions, or gestures.

As new experiences intertwine with old and those anticipated, they inform our perceptions, and our grasping of meaning is reconfigured. Over time our corporeal schemas bear resemblance to the "stages" of a painted wall:\(^{11}\) the paint is not yet dry in some areas, the sun has faded others, existing
layers have peeled away, the paint begins to crack, new shades distort the colours that lie beneath, and all of this is conditioned by a multitude of textures, sheens, and light. These old colours or habituated ways of perceiving haunt our bodies by revealing old experiences and future dreams - always remaining just behind our gaze. Our habituated ways, whether they are experiential or just hoped for, inform our situation at every moment. Just as, according to Merleau-Ponty, our heartbeat can be felt in our toes, this same infiltration of our experience and desires “belongs to all presents, the old no less than the new.” (PhP 85) Neither the past nor the future overcomes the moment but “secretly nourishes it.” (PhP 85) The past and the future provide the moment with a transcendent opening (an open horizon) that demands a stylized approach. Herein, the body takes on an important role in understanding existence. The ground for understanding lies not merely in conceptualizations of the world, but in our abilities to continuously find meanings in the world through past appropriations and future intentions both of which are found in the expressions of the now moment as our particular styles. These moments do not arise in a vacuum, distinct from the individual; the body makes these moments meaningful by reorienting, redeveloping, and projecting them toward a future.

The body learns to reorient and redevelop past experiences in the expectancy of future events. We comport ourselves in certain ways while performing certain tasks toward desired ends. These mannerisms, our approaches to the world, carry with them the markings of habits and experiences long forgotten, meanwhile telling of future hopes and expectations. This intertwining in the ways which we approach and appropriate the world, is what Merleau-Ponty describes as living as a stylized being. Interestingly, our bodies remain open to new experiences without totally obscuring the continuity of our manner of comportment, our style of being in the world. And so the past, as well as the future “remains our true present and does not leave us but remains constantly hidden behind our gaze instead
of being displayed before it.” (PhP 83) Over time, our bodily schemas change, however, their certain ways of locating meaning in the world persist.

This location is informed over time without our explicit awareness. We implicitly appropriate experiences into and with our bodies. It is not cognitively feasible to have to relearn to climb stairs every time we face a set of stairs, as would be the intellectualists’ approach Merleau-Ponty critiques in *Phenomenology of Perception*. After many cautious attempts, we learn to climb without thought, and can then perform other tasks while we climb. Our bodies move into situations and develop habits, like climbing stairs, of which we are not even cognitively aware. Our bodies do this because it is in their organization to adapt and incorporate significant actions into our mobility. The habit-body learns to deal with situations by grasping these significances and incorporating them into our bodily schema. (PhP 143) If this appropriation and incorporation did not occur, we would be limited to performing a few simple tasks at any given moment due to our limited cognitive abilities. This is the shortcoming of intellectualism. We are unable to think all of our behaviour into the world.\(^\text{12}\)

Especially difficult to think into the world, is our relationship with the future. It is easy enough to grant our activity-based bodily habituation, such as climbing the stairs. However, the future is a more enigmatic informer of the body at this moment. Merleau-Ponty speaks of the present as informed by “a double horizon of past and future”. Merleau-Ponty writes of our bodily relationship with time:

> In every focusing movement my body unites present, past and future, it secretes time, or rather it becomes that location in nature where, for the first time, events, instead of pushing each other into the realm of being, project round the present a double horizon of past and future and acquire a historical orientation. There is here indeed the summoning, but not the experience, of an eternal *natura naturans*. My body takes possession of time; it brings into existence a past and a future for a present; it is not a thing, but creates time instead of submitting to it. (PhP 240)
The anticipation of the future informs how we find meaning in the world to the same extent as does our past experiences because they are a part of our past via desires, hopes, dreams, intentions, and so forth. At one moment the past present was being lived as a future intention; thereupon, it would have been incorporated into the body along with other passing experiences. No matter the experience, it is always informed by past experiences and future intentions; this then informs the habit-body which is in turn informed by the past and the future. The future, like the past, is also hidden behind our gaze. The anticipation of the future is necessary to the body, as the body provides temporal experience with a sense of continuity, a direction. For example, we are always making plans, and in doing so shaping our present. We display these hopes for the future in the way in which we appropriate present situations and interpret past experiences. Our temporality provides a necessary continuity in our lives. Experience demands this double horizon, an opening onto the past and future.

This double horizon, of which Merleau-Ponty writes, intertwines with the present in an intrinsically meaningful manner. According to Dillon, this meaning owes its naissance to the principle of autochthonous organization. (MPO 66) The world is intrinsically meaning-full. Each moment and everything that we perceive therein “has meaning, and we shall find this same structure of being underlying all relationships.” (PhP xix) Even as early as the “Preface” (PhP), Merleau-Ponty’s thinking reaches beyond its prima facie project (the overcoming of dichotomous thinking) to speak of the world’s original organization. Merleau-Ponty’s style of thinking gravitates around our pre-conceptual understanding of meaningfulness. Dillon is careful to note that the intrinsic meaningfulness we find in the world does not deny the influence of “culture, history, language, and other human meaning structures”, but instead supports their possibilities. (MPO 66) This reservoir of meaningfulness (the interaction between the world and our bodies), our primordial interpenetration
with the world, allows us to temporally reconfigure that which we find meaningful. Though we may cognitively forget that which we find meaningful, our bodies remember and remain open to our past, present, and future.

Meaning is revealed in this interaction with the world. Our bodies and things interact to reveal the meaning-fullness of the world. In The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, Eric Matthews describes meanings as “both ‘found in’ the world and ‘created’ by our active dealings with objects.” The individual’s history and future projects play into what she/he finds meaningful, however, we must not forget the body’s relationship to the phenomenal field. Bodily orientation and perception are essential to how we interact with the phenomenal field. For example, Merleau-Ponty claims that this orientation of our corporeal schema is not done purely by sight, but is part of the body’s perspective on the original organization of the world. A notable example of this is Merleau-Ponty’s use of the psychological experiment that employed inverted glasses to demonstrate corporeal orientation. (PhP 244) After wearing the inverted glasses for a few days, which turn the visual world upside down, the subject was able to function normally, as if he were not wearing the glasses at all. This meant that he was not oriented purely by sight; rather, there is a more fundamentally holistic bodily understanding of the phenomenal realm. He did not retain his old spatial coordinates (the world as it appears right-side up), but assumed new ones, relative to his new perspective. He moved into a new level that was established by his body. This taking up of a new spatial viewpoint allowed him to adapt, and more importantly, demonstrated that it is the body that orients and reorients the phenomenal field, not a singular, cognitively distinguished (visual) mode of perception.

The phenomenal field always calls for the adoption of new levels and orientations, but does not dictate an objective spatial organization per se. The relationship between the body and world is much
more dynamic than had previously been suggested by the theories of the empiricists and intellectualists. This experiment allows Merleau-Ponty to safely assert, “no content is in itself oriented.” (PhP 248) In fact, space “is indefinite because it is never posited before an aspatial subject.” It is the body’s responsibility and role to rediscover or reorient itself in each given new spatial level.

Though we are spatially anchored by our bodies (e.g., right side up), they, according to Alphonso Lingis, “perceive and move in a field. In stylizing, their positions and initiatives pick up the style of the field, catch on its levels and follow its directives.” This original organization of our bodies in a perceptual field anchors us in a spatial manner which is complimentary to our individual styles. We attune ourselves to our environment because we find and make it meaningful. These significances call to our bodies to take up certain movements that are then stylized by the habit-body. And so

to be an experience is to hold inner communication with the world, the body and other people, to be with them instead of being beside them. To concern oneself with psychology is necessarily to encounter, beneath objective thought which moves among ready-made things, a first opening upon things without which there would be no objective knowledge. [Herein, we discover ourselves as] ... an experience, which means as an immediate presence to the past, to the world, to the body and to others. (PhP 96-7)

The relationship between our bodies and the world, including others, is one of reciprocity. We move in the world according to what we find significant, and as stylizing we bring a certain flavour to every act that we perform while adhering to the directives (affective vectors) of our perceptual field. This support or semblance of order that our bodies demonstrate is describable by Gestalt theory. Merleau-Ponty uses this to explain how the body is the ground for experience. Gestalt theory holds that elements in the phenomenal field have some basic organization. What we find meaningful in a phenomenal field is already structured. The body at every moment continuously “redevelops and
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reorientates the gestalt of the intentions of the preceding present. The result is that each present establishes its own unique sense but must also have a direct connection with this past,”¹⁷ and is thus not without order. Our bodies open not only on our past presents and future intentions, but interact with that which presents itself in the phenomenal field. That which we find meaningful is informed by our past presents and future projects, and these meanings enable us to appropriate and instill meaning in our perceptual field via past motivations and future intentions. This description accounts for our unique connection with time. Though we cannot take up our whole past or all that we want from the future in each moment, we grasp tendrils from our past and future while letting others slip away. Therefore, what we find meaningful often escapes our present conception, though it does provide grounds for our understanding of the world and ourselves.

Corporeal Understanding

In trying to understand ourselves, we necessarily isolate one aspect of our unity, and therein, lose sight of ourselves as fully embodied experiential wholes. We cannot think all of our behaviour into the world for in attempting to reflect on our behaviour, we do not experience these mannerisms as they arise in the bodies that we live. We live much more ambiguously. The isolation of a single characteristic, bodily feature or affectation does not uncover the embodied being; it loses sight of the fact that the embodied being is caught up in the world, and is always in the act of perceiving and intending, not merely a thinker thinking her/himself into being.

Though we perhaps do not cognitively understand the manner of our being in the world, what we find meaningful often escapes our direct comprehension. The body (as a host of habits) carries the
past with it in its gait, stance, gaze, mannerisms, and expressions. Our embodied history is decisive in locating and instilling meaning in the world. One's body is, according to Merleau-Ponty, a meeting point of a host of "causalities". In so far as I inhabit a "physical world", in which constant "stimuli" and typical situations recur – and not merely the historical world in which situations are never exactly comparable – my life is made up of rhythms which have not their reason in what I have chosen to be, but their condition in the humdrum setting which is mine. (PhP 83-4)

Though we are not always cognitively aware of our situatedness, our bodies find themselves moving into situations that merely constitute another day. If we were to think of all the activities that our bodies perform in the course of the day, from walking to the bus stop, to riding the elevator, to operating a microwave, we would probably be mentally exhausted, not to mention overwhelmed. Our bodies retain this as lived-through-world, and thus we do not have to cognize our every perception (contra Descartes). This is demonstrative of how we rely on our bodies to find meaning (make our way through the snow or operate a microwave) without cognitive awareness. Our bodies synthesize almost all that we do into an experiential whole. This is called the habit-body by Merleau-Ponty, and when coupled with the body at this moment, we can approach both new and old obstacles.

Merleau-Ponty stresses the temporality of the body as described in his phenomenology. The body is open to temporal experience: it opens upon itself as the habit-body and the body at this moment intermingle. In this vein, he writes that time does not "carry away with it these impossible projects; it does not close up on traumatic experience; the subject remains open to the same impossible future if not in his explicit thoughts, at any rate in his actual being." (PhP 83) Our habit-body owes its formation to a history that is always unfolding (the body as it is temporally open). The body provides the ground for experience and understanding, even if such are not explicitly thought. The body moves
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and perceives. It has skin, eyes, ears, tongue, and nose, and synthesizes these sensations in accord with the habit-body's past experiences.

Our bodies are linked to the past. Consider the experience of nostalgia, whether evoked by music, scents, flavours, or photographs. Momentary sounds, smells, tastes, and images recall memories, not by explicit reminders, but by our body's continuous call on the past to bear witness to this present. Our bodies are also linked to the future. Consider the experience of anticipation, whether evoked by a ringing telephone, the scent of a baking pie, or an advertisement for a coming event. Momentary sounds, smells, and sights anticipate experiences, not by explicit indicators, but by our body's continuous call on the future to bear witness to this present. This accounts for our experiences of such things as nostalgia or anticipation. The body provides us with an experiential background or perceptual Gestalt. We incorporate into our bodily schema our experiences, even if we are not explicitly aware of this appropriation and incorporation. This is the doing of the habit-body. Without the body, experience would be nonsensical (and probably impossible).

This realization of the nature of embodiment as an incorporation of past, present and future is "a manner of style of thinking" (PhP viii) in itself. Not only does trying to think the body point to our non-conceptual styles of corporeality (and the overlapping of our embodied experiences), but it also provides Merleau-Ponty with an ontological perspective with which he can describe the world. In adopting this understanding, we can follow Merleau-Ponty's project from the Phenomenology of Perception through The Visible and the Invisible. Of this, Thomas Langan writes, "The reader can so completely possess the author's style – the unity woven by his project through the series of moments, the relation between figures within the major configuration (or champ) of the whole [...] to the entire oeuvre – that he comes to understand the original project itself, the Urentwurf." To understand
Merleau-Ponty’s project is to uncover the way in which we live our bodies: “What was initially a thematic answer to thematic questions became ultimately an exemplar.” (MPO 131) Describing the body became a way to understand the difficulties we encounter in empirical and intellectual theories, thereby allowing us to better understand the world.

The way in which we live our bodies is informed by a double horizon, a mingling of past experiences and future intentions. All of our experiences stand in relation to this tension. Since there is this infiltration of the present by past experiences and future intentions, it must be the case that these informants are imbued with certain affectations given the nature of the experience or intention. These are affective vectors. They are an integral part of our being as temporal tensions. Affectations thread together these moments, championing our lives and playing a crucial role in determining our appropriation of each preceding moment. Steinbock says that this appropriation is due to a “saturated presence” of our phenomenal field. Steinbock writes, “In short, if we prefer, value, hesitate, love, lack, are disappointed, denounce, reject, judge, and so on, it is because our comportment to the world and to others is saturated.” For the most part our bodily being is saturated by affectations, such as love, disappointment, or rejection. However, these affectations are alterable. Each affectation saturates us via our intentions either by seeking more or by turning away and toward another affectation that will take its place. If we agree with Steinbock’s reading of Merleau-Ponty, then we can agree that the nature of our being is one of plenitude and not lack. Steinbock writes, “intentionality is characterized not by lack, but surplus, not by absence, but too much presence.” We turn away or toward an affectation because we already have too much of it. For example, if we were melancholy, we would find an implicit sadness in our surroundings, unless it is the case that we have reached a plenitude of melancholy (this is different for everyone given our particular worldly
comportment), whereby we would then actively seek out happiness in our phenomenal field. Our capacities for emotion are informed by our double horizon.

Our lives open onto a horizon of possible affectations via our temporal tensions. Merleau-Ponty unites these affectivities in what he calls the “intentional arc”. An intentional arc is an intertwining of affectivities which situate the lived body and which “carves out a setting that is optimal for it”\(^{23}\) propelling it toward a future. According to Merleau-Ponty,

the life of consciousness – cognitive life, the life of desire or perceptual life – is subtended by an “intentional arc” which projects round about us our past, our future, our human setting, our physical, ideological and moral situation, or rather results in our being situated in all these respects. It is this intentional arc, which brings about the unity of the senses, of intelligence, of sensibility and motility. And it is this which “goes limp” in illness. (PhP 136)

Each individual has a distinctively stylized intentional arc, which informs her/his corporeal schema. Our past, future, human setting, physiology, ideology, and morality all condition the way in which we comport ourselves in the world. Individuality, in this model, is thus a complex interwoven coincidence of experiences, an ambiguous whole that presents itself as a style of being.

Our style of being informs and is informed by experience. According to Hugh J. Silverman’s reading of Merleau-Ponty, “The ‘intentional arc’ is the experience of the meaningfulness of an individual, i.e., his ‘intentional arc,’ his experience. The ‘intentional arc’ personalizes as it actualizes significations as meaningful and significant.”\(^{24}\) This individuality of appropriation and projection is her/his style. It informs what s/he finds meaningful. These meanings are an autochthonous organization\(^{25}\) informing both the context and the organism in its environment. These meanings are evident in our manners of being toward the world, and therefore, in detaching them from our experiential wholes and trying to understand them or the parts of our being separately, would only render our styles unintelligible. Therefore, understanding all the nuances of our intentional arcs and
their origins is not possible. It is possible to trace certain aspects of our being to certain events, but the unity of our style, and how it is lived escapes complete conceptualization, and often even escapes our own understanding.

**Style of being in the world**

Let us take the case in point: in “The Synthesis of One’s Own Body,” in Chapter Four of Part One (PhP), Merleau-Ponty explains that we often do not recognize isolated aspects of ourselves in a photo, video, or recorder, primarily because we do not know ourselves as *partes extra partes*: I can look at my hands or at my knees in a photo and not necessarily recognize them. In the same way, upon hearing my voice on a machine, I feel somewhat disconnected from the intonation and expressions used. The voice does not seem to belong to anyone in particular, especially not me. This is because I do not experience myself in or as parts: hands, knees, or voice. Given, once it is pointed out to me, I cannot deny that it is myself. On the other hand, we do recognize “the visual representation of what is invisible to us in our own body.” (PhP 149) I am able to immediately identify my gait on a video, even though I have never really seen myself walking down the street. Merleau-Ponty explains that this is because “each of us sees himself as it were through an inner eye which from a few yards away is looking at us from the head to the knees.” (PhP 149) This is the case because we imagine ourselves as possessing certain traits and parts, and we experience ourselves as a unity. A trait without a context is meaningless with respect to experience. Along the same lines, a knee without a body is not meaningful as lived experience. It is just a knee, whereas the knee as part of a greater whole, the body, is meaningful as lived. According to John F. Bannan, our body image consists of “an undivided possession of the parts of [our...] body, for this image envelopes them.”26 The parts of our body are
already there, unified and important, ambiguously enveloped by our corporeal schema which is holistic. And so the body cannot be perceived as merely an object, a cogitated sum of parts, for it is a complex whole, a double horizon (an opening of meaning). Our bodies are simultaneously open on the past and the future, informed by affective vectors and intentional arcs, and engaged in a phenomenal field.

The body opens on the world in a way that is “more ancient than thought.” (PhP 254) The meanings that we uncover and create in our world are demarcated, not solely by linguistic concepts, but by certain styles. We are able to recognize and exemplify these pre-conceptual styles because of our unique relationships to and with the world. Our bodies at every moment are open to the phenomenal field. Even in sleep we are always connected to the world. The ringing phone in the early morning can be incorporated into our dream or wakes us. In such cases as sleep, our intentional arc is “shortened,” however, we never fully lose our bearings in the world. This ongoing relationship with our phenomenal field distinguishes us from objects, and yet dismisses any absolute claims to pure subjectivity. Dillon thus correctly comments, “the body is neither purely subject (in which case it would be invisible to him) nor purely object (in which case it could not serve his primitive intentions); it is rather the ground of a style of interacting with the environment.” (MPO 122) Our bodies are our means for this continual worldly interaction, and this interaction inscribes itself on the physical body as a style of being.

Objects could be argued to also exhibit a style of being. For example, cars have particular ways of moving based on their history and facticity. However, unlike us, such objects are not necessarily engaged in continuous intentional dialogues with their environments to the same extent. In “Merleau-Ponty’s Critique of Intentionality,” Hubert L. Dreyfus points out,
Merleau-Ponty argues that phenomenological examination shows that, in a wide variety of situations, human beings relate to the world in an organized purposive manner without the constant accompaniment of a representational state that specifies what the action is aimed at accomplishing. Examples are skilful activity, [...] it is possible to be without any representation of what one is trying to do as one performs the action. Indeed, at times one is actually surprised when the action is accomplished, as when one’s thoughts are interrupted by one’s arrival at one’s office.\(^{27}\)

Unlike an object, our style of being is imbued not only with an interwoven complexity of affectation, cognition, emotion, and motility, but also with the past, present, and future, whereby we perform habitual activity unthinkingly or spontaneously while directing ourselves toward yet another outcome. Our intending is a continual non-premeditative adjusting to changing situations. Thus, “our body is not an object for an ‘I think,’ it is a grouping of lived-through meanings which moves towards its equilibrium.” (PhP 153) Our body’s equilibrium is its optimal intertwining with its environment; this is when it is most comfortable.

Each of us has a unique style, which is an expression of this optimal interaction. Individuality is a “distinctive kind of coherence,”\(^ {28}\) which is grounded in the relationship between the body and the world. The intertwining of perceiver and perceived, the coition of the body with things, has a certain inarticulate attitude or style with respect to its tasks. This manner of approaching the world is “an adverbial unity; it is manifest in the melodic ‘how’ of appearance and behaviour. [...] I have difficulty articulating [t]his style in a determinate way because there is no specific invariant...” (MPO 79) This melodic “how” of appearing “functions as a ground of identification” or an “ethological fingerprint,” both for ourselves and for others. (MPO 79)

The fingerprints of which Dillon speaks tell us something about ourselves and others. Matthews writes, “the world as we perceive it is again a world of meanings, which include our own bodies and other embodied persons as having particular sorts of meaning for us.”\(^ {29}\) These
fingerprints are meaningful, constantly uncovered and created by the way in which we orient ourselves and interrogate the world. Since there are a multitude of meanings, we must accept, as experience shows, that there are multitudes of styles happening in our shared phenomenal realm. This accounts for both the individualized and shared aspects of our being in the world. For example, my stride is much quicker when I walk the streets of a big city. My body adapts to the field in which it is moving, i.e., the crowded, fast-paced sidewalk. On the other hand, when I walk along the sidewalk of a small town, my pace is slower. There is a lot of room in which to move my body, and generally the other walkers are fewer in number and not in a hurry. Initially, an inhabitant of a big city will stride quickly in a small town, until she/he has reoriented her/himself to a slower paced, less crowded field. In this manner, our bodies take on the contours and shades of lived experience. A big city inhabitant can be recognized as such by her/his approach. Stylistically her/his gait tells of her/his experience as a big city denizen. We need not have shared this experience with her/him to understand her/his gait in order to find meaning therein. We can conceptualize and identify the nuances of her/his stride, and guess at her/his former habitat. In this way, we recognize her/his gait as expressing a style of moving down the street, but we also recognize it for what it tells us of her/his past habit body!

This stylization of the body is not only informed by the past habit body but also by the future projected body. Merleau-Ponty writes that we are always in a process of willing ourselves to adopt certain roles. (PhP 436) These volitions can be found in the way in which we approach and appropriate certain tasks. For example, if I want to be an academic (philosopher), I adopt a style that is somewhat consistent with other academics. My appropriation of these academic characteristics will be particular to my own unique style of being; however, it does require adopting
a style that is coherent and consistent with other academics with respect to the way in which they spend their time. The style of an academic is distinct from the style of a fashion model, construction worker, stay at home father, and so forth. In order to fulfill my project of becoming an academic, I must learn a new phraseology, cultivate certain interests (such as reading and writing), and comport myself in a manner which is consistent with other academics. Our bodies take on the contours and shades of future expectations. These expectations “give direction, significance and [a] future to my life”. (PhP 447) The habit-body is this blurring between my past experiences and my hopes for the future. These two horizons are played out in the moment.

The two horizons interpenetrate as a style of being in the world. Subtle nuances, expressions, and gestures are suggestive of an individual’s style. Our ability to recognize these subtleties is important for Merleau-Ponty. Our understanding of these dynamic relations is “transformed by the unfolding of perception. [Nonetheless,] the world remains the same world.” (PhP 327-8) The world provides us with the ground to perceive the interactions of things. Linda Singer aptly expresses this capacity of recognition in her essay, “Merleau-Ponty on Style.” This ability, writes Singer, “testifies to the human capacity to wrest significances from the world and to transform them into a mode of access and illumination which transcends the particularities of its origins.”30 Our ability to pick up on subtleties opens the horizons of our intendings, and the intendings of others. We take up these nuances and depths, and thereby find ourselves within a certain situation that possesses a certain style and possesses us. Consider the ideas of the writer. Every author and philosopher speaks to readers differently. In the case of Merleau-Ponty, it is not only his examination of embodiment which opens a new horizon of understanding, it is the manner by which he proceeds to analyze the body that allows one to get caught up in his projects, seeking ways to appropriate his ideas. In this vein one can say that
Merleau-Ponty speaks to everyone differently, as do we all to each other. Yet, by virtue of expressing ourselves, we reveal our own attitudes about and styles of being in the world, which can be understood without necessarily obliterating their individuality.

In our styles of expression is a “panorama of the past” (PhP 181), an overlapping of capacities of “I can-s”, facticity, and history, all of which are demonstrated through our bodies. Each expression, while reaching out and incorporating pieces of the world, “[carries] a top coating of meaning which sticks to them and which presents the thought as a style, an affective value....” (PhP 182) In order to be understood, there must be, in our expressions, a significance which speaks of our own situation and opens upon the experiences of others. Expressions are meaning-full because they overflow the definiteness of their verbal literalness by the “all there” (PhP 198) that speaks, and the word which is spoken.

Our expressions can never totally escape their facticity or their history, for they share in the world in a way which is much more organic and enigmatic than we often believe. They open horizons within those that we live via different renderings or “singings” of the world. (PhP 187) We understand these differences because we share sensibilities: even our top-coatings, our habituated bodies, fold into one another because our histories do not happen in solitude. Friends, family, and colleagues express the same gestures/mannerisms because our embodiments adjust and “overlap” these others. (PhP 185) We know the other body exists, has a history, has a project, and is situated, through our own similar styles of intending and living (gesturing, expressing, and intonating). Merleau-Ponty writes, “We co-exist in the same situation and feel alike, not in virtue of some comparison, as if each one of us lived primarily within himself, but on the basis of our tasks and gestures.” (PhP 444) Through our tasks and gestures, an implicit discourse, we are given a world that we recognize because it is our own; we give
it meaning, and likewise it calls on us to do so. We take up others’ thoughts, which are fostered by our own. In taking up these expressions, we simultaneously take up our own perspectives in the world. We thereby continuously recast our body (resituate ourselves in light of new appropriations) and use it to give the world meaning. Through this process we open ourselves to an “external witness” (PhP 193) and share in communication and community, whereby we can be recognized and validated as beings that share the world with others.

This dynamic, however, does not apply to all bodies. As a result of a cerebral injury in the occipital region, Schneider’s style of being and attitude towards the world is impoverished. His style of being is shallow because the connection between his habit-body and his body at this moment has been weakened. This firm connection in the healthy individual presents possibilities for finding and expressing meaning in the world. Because Schneider does not have these possibilities the way a healthy individual does, he cannot find, nor can he express meanings in the same manner as a healthy individual. The opportunities for appropriation and expression of meanings are therefore, not even available to him. Hence, his style, the way in which he expresses his relationship with his phenomenal field, is superficial. It lacks the depth, the connection between the habit-body and the body at this moment, which in the healthy individual allows for the expression of a distinctive style.

This superficiality is indicative of not only this weak connection, but of his restricted relationship with his phenomenal field. The very structure of his perception has been changed. (PhP 156) He no longer sees his phenomenal field as presenting possibilities for his appropriation because his momentary existence is not implicitly informed by his history. He is unable to draw from his past effectively, and therein, is unable to orient himself toward possible futures. Only that which is explicit calls to Schneider for attention and appropriation.
For example, Schneider is only sexually aroused by physical (explicit) stimulation. However, he is unable to remain aroused after the sexual stimulus has been removed. (PhP 156-157) Schneider does not remain aroused because he cannot implicitly make the connection between the present stimulation and a past, wherein his pleasure was extended beyond initial stimulation toward future consummation. When the stimulus is removed, the new present (absence of stimulation) replaces (the possibility of further) arousal. In the case of the uninjured individual, the body remembers further pleasures associated with physical stimulation, and is able to remain aroused. Instead, for Schneider, the aroused state is replaced by the present moment, wherein such stimulation is absent, and therefore, arousal is absented.

This historical shallowness of Schneider’s intentional arcs, the weak connection between the present and the past, inhibits Schneider from locating or even searching for the implicit meanings of the world. The world presents itself to the uninjured individual as having meaningful possibilities. We interrogate it and our intentions reveal meanings. Schneider does not ask of his situation what the uninjured individual usually asks, i.e., for the significance of her/his environment, in this case, sexual significance, and thereby, Schneider is no longer open to indirect arousal. He cannot project himself towards a future, in this example, towards an orgasm.

This case provides the evidence that Merleau-Ponty needs to assert that sexuality is not merely instinctual, but is part of our bodily schema qua habit, a possibility that we all live differently. Sexuality is one general kind of affectivity that guides us in finding meaning in the world. It is one of those original meaning structures. The body not only opens upon possible sexual experiences, but more importantly, it reveals our style towards the world as it seeks and endows situations with meanings, sexual and otherwise. This is done via the connection between the habit-body and the body
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at this moment, which bear hints of our future, and constitutes our temporal depth. Merleau-Ponty writes, "In so far as a man’s sexual history provides a key to his life, it is because in his sexuality is projected his manner of being towards the world, that is, towards time and other men." (PhP 158) This key, that manifests itself sexually (as well as in other manners) in the individual, is our style of being in the world. It is indicative of a more general mode of existence, namely, our primordial communication and communion with our phenomenal field. This interaction has temporal import in that our bodies are not only informed by our past and future intentions which in turn inform our relationship with the world, but there is also a continuity of uncovering and appropriating meaning in the world.

This reciprocity with our environment provides the healthy individual with implicit directives and coordinates that call upon us to be appropriated, and we can say: "there is something to be done/understood here!" This reciprocity between Schneider and his environment does not exist as such. It is possible to evoke affectations from Schneider, such that his habit-body shows his existential being. However, for Schneider, the world remains "emotionally neutral" (PhP 157); it possesses no affective value for him beyond explicit momentary stimulations. All of his sensations are mere immediate surges of meaning. When he is physically stimulated, he becomes aroused; and when he is not physically stimulated, he is not aroused. Other bodies/faces hold no affective value, sexual or otherwise, for Schneider. For him, "the actual is entirely without any horizon of possibilities" (PhP 135n3); whereas, if the healthy individual seeks out the sexual in their situations, the individual finds those situations become or are already infused with sexuality.

Since we are our bodies, situated both factically and historically, we infuse situations with different meanings and affectations. The past and future nourish the present: if that link to our past or
our hopes for the future is weakened, our present loses some of its fecundity. That link is weakened for Schneider: he is not actively engaged with his temporality; he does not actively draw from his past, nor can he project himself toward an abstract future. He is stylistically shallow. Contrary to Schneider, the healthy individual demonstrates a “deeper” temporal depth. The healthy body is able to appropriate situations (e.g. sexual), and open itself to possibilities (orgasm) via its intertwining with the (temporal) world. This existential structure is the overlapping or reciprocal informing of the habit-body as a sedimentation of past experiences, the body at this moment as it approaches the phenomenal field, and the body as it projects itself in the world via its intentions.

Intentionality takes on new configurations in the work of Merleau-Ponty. What was, as in Husserlian phenomenology, recognized as an awareness of the structures of consciousness, becomes much more for Merleau-Ponty. Intentionality is the manner in which each individual comports her/himself,

that formula which sums up some unique manner of behaviour towards others, towards Nature, time and death: a certain way of patterning the world which the historian should be capable of seizing upon and making his own. [...] In this context there is not a human word, not a gesture, even one which is the outcome of habit or absent-mindedness, which has not some meaning. (PhP xviii)

Meaning is not only found in a bodily schema of past situations, it is very much in every attitude we direct toward our elaborations on the world. According to Dillon, the body not only reveals a past which “is populated with faces and places, triumphs and humiliations, it is what carries me forward to the next encounter, sustaining me with its ‘I can’ and debilitating me with tendrils from past defeats.”32

The body projects itself beyond the moment, and therein transcends mere perceptual (and cognitive) immanence. I see in a situation a possibility or an opportunity (an “I can”) to surpass my current state, which allows and drives me to reach past the momentary perception towards a future possibility or
affectation. Merleau-Ponty writes, the present "transcends itself towards a future and a past." (PhP 421) The body at this moment beckons both the past and the future to behold its present interaction with the phenomenal field.

Existential Temporal Dynamic

This coition of time manifests as style, in which we partake and generate. (PhP 422) Our interpenetration with the world is evidenced internally (inner consideration/affectation) and externally (the outwardness of our intention). Affective vectors are informed by and inform our bodies.33 It is not just the perceiver who considers or moves to get a closer view, the object of perception is also "active" in that it calls to the perceiver to get a closer look or shouts to back away. The perceptual relationship is dynamic. The perceiver reaches out to the phenomenal thing as it solicits her/his attention. We can stop to consider something when our attention is drawn to it. This relation includes both the call, the "look at me" of the world, and the answer, the perceiving of the agent. Though, it is completely and/or analytically impossible to separate the interpenetration of the perceiver, perceived, and perceiving.

In continually perceiving (for we live always in the phenomenal field), the perceiver simultaneously reaches beyond (transcends) her/his perceptual perspective, while remaining steadfastly in her/his relation with the (immanent) perceptions. Merleau-Ponty writes of this seemingly contradictory notion:

There is a paradox of immanence and transcendence in perception. Immanence, because the perceived object cannot be foreign to him who perceives; transcendence, because it always contains something more than what is actually given. And these two elements of perception are not, properly speaking, contradictory. For if we reflect on this notion of perspective,... we see that the kind of evidence proper to the perceived, the appearance of "something,"
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requires both this presence and this absence. (PP 16)

For example, because we are embodied we can never see a tree from every possible angle, for we are necessarily situated. “The nature of our experience”, according to Matthews, “is such that it must be embodied, since we do not perceive the whole of Being in one go, but only what is perceptible from the place in Being where our bodies are located.”

We do not have to see the backside of the tree to imaginatively perceive what the backside looks like, minus a few knots of course. Experience is generally harmonious, and we are this “concrete coincidence of immanence and transcendence in the phenomenon of the lived body.” (MPO 146)

In Michael B. Smith’s reading of transcendence, he writes, “Merleau-Ponty’s transcendence is no longer the name of a movement but of that which moves in the movement: a transcendence, a human being, a subjectivity, which is described as a temporalizing upsurge of being directed largely toward virtuality, a modality of nonbeing.”

The perceiver in interrogating the perceived fulfills an intention, namely, answers the questions posed by the object, e.g., not merely by moving around the tree to get a better look, but by anticipating that which does not present itself immediately, and is therefore, not directly available to perception. Our experience informs our intentions, and so in directing ourselves in perceiving, we are not merely the directed body at this moment, but a network of intentionalities which carry with them past intentions. The body is, according to Monika M. Langer, this “dynamic synthesis of intentionalities which, by responding to the world’s solicitations, brings perceptual structures into being in a ceaseless dialectic whereby both body and objects are constituted as such.”

Considering Schneider once again, his connection between his habit-body and his body at this moment is shallow. He, unlike the healthy individual, does not hear the calls by the phenomenal realm
to recognize and appropriate that which surrounds him. The world holds little affective value, sexual or otherwise, for Schneider. The possibility to transcend his current situation does not present itself, and therefore, he does not appropriate or take up the dynamics offered by and in his perceptual field.

On the other hand, the individual without any brain trauma, actively partakes in this dynamic of affectation, and herein, recognizes (some of) the possibilities of their situations. These emerge from the intertwining of the perceiver and the perceived. That which is presented immanently (the front side of the tree) contains within it an inexhaustible depth (for we can never see the whole tree at once) that transcends its immanency (the backside of the tree). Therefore, the thing is never merely empirically given, as Schneider limitedly sees it; the thing must be "taken up," "reconstituted," and "experienced" (PhP 326) in the appropriations and transformations called for by the situation. (PhP 169) This individualistic appropriation, the transformation of a situation, the movement past the immanent, and the projecting beyond are expressed as certain styles of embodied worldly being.

As embodied, we all "express the same essential structure of our being" (PhP 284), namely, our primordial relationship with our phenomenal field, or what Merleau-Ponty calls "perceptual faith." As perceivers we are intertwined with the objects of our perception, both as they are immediately presented to us and as we transcend their immanency. We give significance to these things by the way we question and think about them, in our moving around them, touching them, and so forth. We find answers and significances by this active interrogation that always yields further perceptions and understandings. This process is essentially dynamic. It is continuous and fundamental to our being in the world. However, what concerns us here is the manifestation of these fundamental relationships as stylized.37

Merleau-Ponty writes,
The world has its unity, although the mind may not have succeeded in interrelating its facets and in integrating them into the conception of a geometrised projection. This unity is comparable with that of an individual whom I recognize because he is recognizable in an unchallengeable self-evident way, before I ever succeed in stating the formula governing his character, because he retains the same style in everything he says and does, even though he may change his place or his opinions. A style is a certain manner of dealing with situations, which I identify or understand in an individual. (PhP 327)

We are able to recognize the style of a friend as he approaches us. We recognize the way he picks up his feet, swings his arms, and adjusts his bag on his shoulder. None of these things singularly define the impression we have of him; in fact, there is even an element of unpredictability in the style with which he orients himself. He is always in a process of reorientation, and so no essential facet of his comportment binds his identity. His intentions are foreshadowed in every action he performs and expression he utters. According to Lingis, “we recognize a friend by the style of his conversation, his gesturing, his way of entering into a group, of taking decisions or procrastinating. The style maintains a coherence we catch on to, which varies within a certain range without our being able to predict exactly what turn it will take.”

His style is open to a variety of dress, movement, expression, and so on. Nonetheless, there is a consistency, a coherence that is demonstrated regardless of his bizarre dress, inhibited movement, or uncharacteristic expression. His mannerisms are unified and express something far greater than a summation of his characteristics. We understand him as “an unchallengeable style” (PhP 364), a way of being in the world that interrogates that which surrounds him.

This way of being in the world is “more ancient than any ‘attitude’ or ‘point of view.’” The body does not give us “a representation of the world but the world itself.” This world is available, both through our bodies and through the bodies of others. With this paradigm, Merleau-Ponty has
given us a new way to think existence. The body *qua* habit, moment, and project, is the key to revealing this thinking for Merleau-Ponty.

We are able to discern these meanings because our bodies have an existential structure. We understand these meanings as we understand a winter scene, a city block, or a friend, because all share in an existence that is perceptual and has temporal depth. According to Merleau-Ponty, “an act confers a certain quality upon us for ever, even though we may afterwards repudiate it and change our beliefs. Existence always carries forward its past, whether it be by accepting or disclaiming it.” (PhP 393) The past does not cease the moment we perceive. It is hidden behind our gaze, informing our perceptions. What we find meaningful requires a carrying forward of this past. For it is the past that stylizes the way in which we interrogate the world. This stylizing sketches our possible future, bringing not only significances to our experiences, but by tracing “out in advance at least the style of what is to come.” (PhP 416) We are implicated in our future projects just as much as we are influenced by our past. In this manner, our habit-bodies reveal past experiences by calling on the past in each single gesture, expression, and stride; they also carry kernels of what is to come. The present always transcends itself toward a future and a past, whereby “there is a temporal style of the world.” (PhP 422) It is through this temporal style of the world that “being is conceived”. (PhP 430)

Our indebtedness to the world’s existential dynamic is evident in every act that we perform. It is our affinity with time that brings existence continuity and meaning. (PhP 414) We necessarily have an implicit sense of the present passing into the past while heralding the future. Without this temporal dynamic, experience would not be continuous, which would render it nonsensical or nonexistent. The past would not hold the meaning for us that it does. (PhP 414) This temporal continuity of the world renders us as “a psychological and historical structure, and [we] have received, with existence, a
manner of existing, a style. All [of our ...] actions and thoughts stand in a relationship to this structure". (PhP 455) Though we exist much more fluidly than Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* phraseology permits, our dialogue with the world is indebted to this aforementioned temporal continuity. This continuous interchange, the blending of past and future in the face of the present is stylized. It is this temporal style of being in the world that unifies the individual and her/his phenomenal field, which reveals the primordiality of existence. This primordial dance, which we continuously perform with and in the world, is expressed and articulated by the artist.
Chapter 2: Style of the painter and her/his world

Style exhibits the existential dynamic of the world not only in an individual or a place, but also in certain artworks. An artwork has stylistic significance much like the individual. In fact, an artwork is an expression of the painter’s manner of being towards the world. However, what will be explored is a particular style of painting that is not merely an expression of the painter, but also holds an existential significance that speaks both to and of the embodied individual.

Only a specific style of painting can locate this existential significance. This style of painting illuminates our original connection with the world. It does this by calling on our body to appropriate the image via our temporal depth. Our body qua habit, moment, and project is unified with our phenomenal field in viewing this particular style of painting. Given this way of appearing, one can understand the artwork without ever forming a distinct idea of it, much in the same way that our bodies realize our sensations without necessarily organizing them. The style pictorially describes our interaction with the world, prior to cognitive conceptualizations. In this manner, “the body is to be compared, not to a physical object, but rather to a work of art.” (PhP 150)

Paul Cézanne’s later paintings brilliantly demonstrate this connection between the body and the work of art. Cézanne not only exhibits a particular style of painting, but his connection with the world is such that his style of painting, especially his landscapes, exhibits this fundamental connection. This connection is already at work prior to our employment of specific theoretical meaning structures. Because of this, Cézanne’s renderings of the world on canvas appear to be unstable, shifty, and unorganized. However, these initial impressions are necessary, for according to Merleau-Ponty, they show that Cézanne captures “the birth of order through spontaneous organization” (CD 13), much in the same fashion as do our bodies. In the words of Cézanne: “Painting from nature is not copying the
objective, it is realizing one’s sensations.” The realization of which Cézanne speaks is evident in a phenomenological analysis of his painting *Grand pin et terres rouges*.

**A phenomenological analysis of an artwork by Cézanne**

The Cézanne that catches my eye, and upon which my analysis will focus, has been flown over from St. Petersburg’s *Hermitage Collection* for a show at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto. My gaze halts on Cézanne’s *Grand pin et terres rouges*. There is nothing that directly jars my sight. However, in the first moment I am uneasy in a web of greens and waves of rust. I can focus on the long brush strokes of green, but only for a moment. One green slowly (or is it quickly?) blends into yet another long stroke. My eyes follow the light and I cannot decide whether this great pine tree passes languidly into another or whether there is in fact really no passage from one to the next. Is it just the one tree? The painting could be one thick image, one tree before a clearing, an experience in which I never quite remember exactly what I saw, a result of not stopping to take order of my surroundings. The painting does not give me a definitive image such as those paintings which are drawn in three-point perspective. Though this painting shows me a pine tree, and it is definitely the central image, it does not hold my attention the way other paintings of trees do. I cannot decide if Cézanne even really cares about the tree or just titles it as such to point out the obvious, giving us a way to recognize this painting from the others.

Perhaps it is the “how” and not the “what” that is important. There are no abrupt outlines, nor is there a discernable foreground. The pine tree blends into the rest of the foliage and the rusted dirt. The fusion of foreground and background make it impossible to tell what is important in this painting. It comes to me as one harmonious image. And if I refrain from interrogating the brush strokes, I am
unable to differentiate the pine tree’s branches from the dirt. In fact, after a moment, I am no longer curious as to how the tree presents itself to me as per its arrangement on the canvas.

This cognitive dissonance allows me to enter into the level of the greens and rusts. Once I have stopped wondering about the appearance of the tree, I do not really think of anything in particular. Perhaps it is because after a moment of curiosity about the painting as a work of art, I merely get a sense of being there. I am invited into this scene, wherein I do not take inventory of my surroundings. I no longer feel the need to have answered such questions as: What does it mean? To what does it refer? I smell the foliage and the rusted dirt. I feel the dryness that such an environment promises; even the noises of the gallery have been pushed into the background. I am standing before this tree; my feet are planted on the arid dirt. I do not merely look at the painting, like I would a table or even the lone maple tree that stands before my window (I know its every branch). It is, after the first moment, not something to be figured out. It gives itself completely as an existential whole.

Existential Meaningfulness

Merleau-Ponty explains the genius of Cézanne’s work is his ability to paint the opening of possibilities, the manifestation of order, the genesis of sens: “when the over-all composition of the picture is seen globally, perspectival distortions are no longer visible in their own right but rather contribute, as they do in natural vision, to the impression of an emerging order, of an object in the act of appearing, organizing itself before our eyes.” (CD 14) This ability to articulate in paint the way in which we experience the world is appealing to Merleau-Ponty in that it mirrors his own project. This Cézanne describes our relationship with the world with art; Merleau-Ponty describes this relationship with words. However, it is not this expressive connection that is important here, but the project of
Cézanne. Though it could be argued that there are other means by which to render such primordial connections to the world, Cézanne’s artworks beautifully highlight our connection to the visible prior to theoretical constraints. Cézanne’s paintings reveal our pre-conceptual understanding of the world and the existential coherence therein. He does this by making a distinction between “the spontaneous organization of the things we perceive and the human organization of ideas and sciences. We see things; we agree about them; we are anchored in them; and it is with ‘nature’ as our base that we construct our sciences.” (CD 13) This foundation in nature is paramount for Cézanne. Because of this distinction between nature and science, his works are not only significant as something to be viewed, but are meaningful as both a commentary on our socialization (because of our forgotten roots in nature) and a rendering of the pre-social.

An artwork is meaningful if it is significant for an individual. This includes landscapes, propaganda, abstract art, and so on. This significance simply means that we can relate to or identify with the image in the painting. In identifying with the work, we can appreciate the work’s origins, message, representational value, technique, and so forth. However, if something is existentially meaningful, its significance cannot be merely attributed to the factors of its production or intention. The grand pine is not only meaningful because it reminds me of my summers in Northern Ontario. Cézanne renders it as meaningful for me, the viewer, because it hints at the more fundamental relationships that I have with the world. I get lost in Grand pin because it shows me the nature of my connection with the world. According to Allen S. Weiss in “Towards an Erotics of Art,” “art teaches us how to see”, and in the case of Cézanne, art teaches us something far more fundamental about the way in which we see. In fact, Merleau-Ponty wants to make clear that Cézanne’s artwork is not just a representation, an offering of beautiful company, but is its own subject. It does not merely indicate a
landscape in the world. It is a landscape in the world, and we can experience it as such, and at the very same moment, Cézanne’s landscape shows us how we interact with things in the world, namely, the landscape as experienced. These layers of meaningfulness draw us in and we get caught up in Cézanne’s works, for they are “an inexhaustible reality full of reserves” (CD 15), saturated. They are existentially meaningful.

Let us return to my earlier account of Grand pin in order to get a sense of this meaningfulness in Cézanne’s work. First, in order to grasp some of the significance of an artwork, we must open ourselves up to and move into its levels. Galleries take much of this responsibility from the viewer by suggesting viewing distances, employing special lighting, particular mounting heights, and so forth. However, moving into the levels of a painting is actually far less methodical. Each and any level is that by “which or according to which we perceive.” When I am looking at Grand pin I get a sense of being there. I do not just have the optimal viewing distance via the recommended height and lighting. I am invited into the scene. We do not necessarily comprehend the spatial significance of an artwork, but we “take up and are caught up in” these spatial styles when we spend some moments with the work. We are able to enter into or get lost in the artwork, especially when we forget about the work’s origins, meanings, representational value, techniques and so forth. In his essay, “Painting, Perception, Affectivity,” Michel Haar warns that we must be aware of the tradition that informs our gaze and our judgments. Those who linger on traditional critical elements of an artwork, such as form, run the risk of (dis)missing the blended colours and long brush strokes as those of a nearsighted eccentric. (CD 9) However, Cézanne’s move away from the clarity of Renaissance painting and the play of light that characterizes Impressionism reveals something more fundamental about the way in which he experienced the world.
A comparison and contrast between a Cézanne and a Renaissance painting (those that rely on three-point perspective) can help us understand what it is that Cézanne achieves in his work, and why it is existentially meaningful. Renaissance paintings are drawn according to calculated perspective, whereas “the lived perspective, that which we actually perceive, is not a geometric or photographic one.” (CD 14) Renaissance painting uses Euclidian spatial coordinates, and thereby, champions mathematical perfection. Renaissance painting does not take into account a lived perspective (situatedness), and does not call on the body in the same way as a Cézanne. For example, I can look at The School of Athens by Raffaello Sanzio from almost any point and have a clear rendering of the painting. The figures do not shift as I pass by the work, like they do if I am walking down the street and pass by a restaurant’s busy window. The body is not called upon to enter into the levels of the painting, to adopt new spatial coordinates the way it does when I walk down the street and peer into the restaurant window.

In Renaissance painting, the space is already oriented for the viewer. The painting is meaningful as a representation of an event. It is nothing more than “polite company: the gaze offers no resistance to the supremely easy movement. But this is not how the world appears when we encounter it in perception.” (WP 53) Our bodies engage in continuous dialogue, communion and communication with the world. We appropriate certain styles of perceiving based on our habit-bodies, our intentions, and our primordial connection with the world. It is the case, as Merleau-Ponty writes in “Eye and Mind,” that “[v]ision is a conditioned thought; it is born ‘as occasioned’ by what happens in the body; it is ‘incited’ to think by the body.” (296) We habituate our bodies to move around an object, to see an object under particular circumstances, in order to get a better sense of that which we perceive. A
Cézanne engages us in much the same manner as does an object in the world. It is this call for consideration, a comporting ourselves toward, whereby we recognize a painting’s wealth of meanings.

Cézanne not only moved away from Renaissance painting but also from the Impressionist style. He did this by pulling apart Impressionism’s web of light and air. By so doing, he was able to depict objects, not simply as they “appear in instantaneous perception, without fixed contours” (CD 11), such as did Claude Monet, for Cézanne showed us the way in which our eyes draw out objects, giving form to matter. (CD 13) Cézanne, like the Impressionists, worked from nature, but he did not render nature meaningful as an atmospheric web of reflecting sunlit colours indicative of surface significances. Instead, by saying, “nature isn’t at the surface; it’s in depth”; Cézanne returned to the objects and the way in which they call to us to be uncovered by our bodies via their affective objective vectors.

Cézanne’s paintings, like all things worldly, provide affective vectors that either call to or repel the viewer. In much the same manner as the subject intends via subjective vectors, objects also intend via objective vectors. Steinbock argues, “if we are inclined to take in more of an object, it is not merely because we want to see more, but because it affectively sketches the course of its givenness, because it has already been given fully. If we turn away from something in repulsion or disgust, it is not because we lack interest, but more primordially, because we have already had too much of it.”

The painting beckons me and I move closer, or it repulses me and I move on to the next painting. This call can draw me in; and it can explain why it is possible that I forget that I am in a gallery and not in the Parisian countryside. Having never been to France, I am still able to implicitly understand what it is to stand before the Parisian pine. It is not simply a matter of relating to the image via a past experience and the affectations that arise therein, a sort of nostalgia for France. The painting is its own
The text on this page appears to be a continuation of a discussion or argument, but the specific content is not clear due to the low contrast and quality of the image.
subject, and the objective vector is "essentially active in the formation of [its] sense." The painting is meaningful as is each experience of the world. It is unique because its depth provides conditions for an infinite possible ways of appearing, and at the same moment, it remains one harmonious experience: it is "an infinite process of continual appearances that determine the objective [vectors] more clearly, this schema sketches out or prescribes possible ways in which the object must be fulfilled in order to remain" as a particular painting or image with depths.

The Grand pin is one thick image (saturated), an experience of which I never quite remember exactly what I saw. I do not remember on two counts: First, the object is saturated. It has an infinite number of possible ways of appearing, and as a finite being, I can never exhaust them. Second, I generally do not stop to cognitively take order of my surroundings as I would be more apt to when in a gallery. For example, when I walk through the forest, I do not stop to take count of all the trees. When I am walking, I am interacting with my environment, not by actively taking stock, but by an intimate interchange of my body and my surroundings. I enter into the greens of the trees, the greys of the stone path, and the blues of the sky. There is a harmony, a synergy, between my environment and myself. The objects in my phenomenal field can scream for my attention or delicately solicit my awareness. Merleau-Ponty goes so far as to say of the sky: "I abandon myself to it and plunge into this mystery, it ‘thinks itself within me’, I am the sky itself as it is drawn together and unified". (PhP 214) This similar experience of harmony is possible in viewing a Cézanne. However, a painting can never replace the experience of the "all there" of the world. We may be able to drown in the blue of a painted sky, but surely it does not replace the experience of lying in the grass looking up at that sky. Nonetheless, art is a teacher. It teaches us about what it is to drown in the sky or walk the Parisian countryside. The painted pine still envelopes me and it becomes something from which I cannot look
away. Steinbock writes, "the objective vector can draw me in and resituate me, the subject, if it can solicit my explorations, it is due to the fact that what comes into relief exercises an affective force." In this manner, Cézanne was lured by the world and the way in which it appeared, to what seems to be a greater extent than most. He said, "it's terrible, the way my eye gets glued to a tree-trunk or a lump of earth. There's such a strong pull, it's painful tearing it away." Like the lump of earth, the great pine captures my body in a primordial dialogue. I gear myself into the levels of the painting.

According to Jacques Taminiaux, the painting "manifests to our gaze the unmistakable schema of the life of things within our bodies." We witness the "birth of order" (CD 13) on the canvas of a Cézanne, as if we were in the Parisian countryside situated on the rusty red earth before the great pine. We even forget that we have been invited into Cézanne's world, and merely experience the Parisian countryside. We are in Cézanne's world not via the gallery because there is no mediation in this experience. Our experience of the painted pine mirrors our experience of the pine in the world. The painting is not only a representation of the world, but it is also worldly. It too has affective objective vectors. This is necessary as the painting is of and in the world; however, it is the experiential element, the forgotten invitation that differentiates a Cézanne from a Raffaello or a Monet. We are not necessarily even aware that the pine is taking shape, whereas this is generally not the case in Impressionism and Renaissance painting. In Renaissance painting the pine is ossified. We do not have to orient our bodies when we are looking at a Renaissance painting.

Our bodies orient themselves in viewing a Cézanne. Merleau-Ponty writes, "My gaze wanders in it [the painting] as in the halos of Being." We are in the forest with the pine, the surrounding foliage, and dry earth. At the same moment, we are no longer looking at the work, but are looking according to the work. We can appropriate the levels of the painting by experiencing the
landscape, even though we can cognitively recognize our situatedness, not on the rusty red earth, but in the gallery. We are always anchored in our world. Despite the distortions of the artifices of gallery viewing, the painting teaches us of our own primary connection with the world. Art teaches us how we see, and teaches us to understand our primordial relationship with the world, not as ready-made, an object viewed, such as suggested by Renaissance painting, but as a fecundity in which we are actively engaged.

Cézanne's use of colour, line, and particularly the intertwining of the two, call on us to engage with his painted world through its affective objective vectors. The light in a Cézanne "ceases to function as a radiance in which we are immersed; we begin to look not at it but with it and according to it. Our gaze follows the light as it penetrates open spaces, outlines contours, stops on surfaces, and comes upon things it finds and does not make visible." We are not given the full image at once. This is the way in which we see things in the world. Our eyes must move over things in order to see aspects of them. In fact, just as in the world, there are elements in the painting that do not reveal themselves at all (such as the back side of the pine tree).

The light in a Cézanne does not illuminate the whole picture, but provides a directive for our gaze. Our eyes ride the light and come upon aspects of the object in the painting that remain concealed or invisible; much in the same manner, we can never see things in their entirety as we are necessarily and always situated. This intertwining of colour and line form a contour, which, according to Edwin Weihe in "Merleau-Ponty’s Doubt: The Wild of Nothing," "take the eye to the ideal limit toward which the sides of an object – an apple, for instance – recede in depth, the dimension in which the object is presented (has come forth, we might say) as an 'inexhaustible reality full of reserves'.” A Cézanne gives us a depth wherein we experience movement within the work. This is done by a call to the body
to adopt a style of viewing to witness this natality of order. Perception brings movement to the painting. It is not, as in the case of a Monet, a matter of close brushstrokes that render movement in the world qua painting. The movement is not painted, but it manifests itself via the relationship between the painting (its affective objective vectors) and the viewer (our affective subjective vectors).

According to Weihe, Cézanne paints the activity of emerging, of matter taking on form, of order arising out of spontaneous, rather than imposed, organization, so that the stable object and the shifting manner in which it appears are inseparable. The result is a lived object, vibrant and vibrating [...]. We do not see it with absolute clarity because it swells, indicating several outlines simultaneously; it oscillates, contorts, germinates, in fact, as in a primordial world.  

This is why when I look at the great pine tree I am unable to clearly distinguish between it and the surrounding foliage. Each brush stroke endows the painting with a contour that anticipates the next, a recession of depth, giving me a thread to follow, a style to recognize, a level to adopt. According to Merleau-Ponty, these invitations to the viewer arise from the unification of “the stable things which we see and the shifting way in which they appear; he [Cézanne] wanted to depict matter as it takes on form”. (CD 13) In this rendering of the world as continuous and shifting, we can enter into and perceive the levels of the work, thereby understanding several perspectives at once. The objects come alive, so to speak, under our gaze, much in the same manner as they do in the world. These uses of colour, line and the resulting contours make us feel as though we are there in the painted world, and like perception, it gives or presents us the world as meaningful. In realizing this birth of meaning through Cézanne’s use of colour and line, our relationship to and understanding of the world is amplified.
Corporeal Understanding

We can deepen our understanding of our relationship with the world via each Cézanne because his works enable us to experience the world as it manifests in our bodies (I was lost in the painting), while giving us a visual account of that manifestation (I understand my appropriation of the levels of the work via my experience of the Parisian country-side). According to Jonathan Gilmore in “Between Philosophy and Art,” a Cézanne shows us the way in which we perceive our environment and pictorially describes this perception. 64 This experience, our bodily understanding of that which we perceive, is cognitively recognizable once we dissociate ourselves from the landscape. However, before we can understand this relationship of our bodies and the world qua painting, we must live this relationship. For example, I do not smell the perfumes of the other gallery browsers, but I (projectively) smell the forest, nor do I hear their conversations, but instead I hear the indecipherable noise of the forest. According to Merleau-Ponty,

Cézanne declared that a picture contains within itself even the smell of the landscape. He meant that the arrangement of colour on the thing (and in the work of art, if it catches the thing in its entirety) signifies by itself all the responses which would be elicited through an examination by the remaining senses; that a thing would not have this colour had it not also this shape, these tactile properties, this resonance, this odour, and that the thing is the absolute fullness which my undivided existence projects before itself. (PhP 318-9)

A good painting carries within it the ability to evoke in the viewer an experience of being there.

Cézanne’s painting expresses a crosshatching of our sensations, particularly of the visible and the tactile. Though our sensations, for the most part, blur together, they do flesh out the experience.

Taminiaux writes, “What painting expresses most forcefully is the reciprocal overlapping of all the dimensions of the sensible.” 65 Cézanne’s painting enables us to smell the pine tree or feel the dry rusty
red earth below our feet. In looking at a Cézanne, we experience this overlapping of sensibilities that we would have, had we actually been standing in the Parisian countryside. This synaesthesia of our senses invites us to question our understanding of our relationship to the world.

Merleau-Ponty says that the work of Cézanne expresses the unity of our senses (they are not separate), giving us an experiential whole via the painted visible. In a Cézanne, we meet objects “that do not pass quickly before our eyes in the guise of objects we ‘know well’ but, on the contrary; hold our gaze, ask questions of it, convey to it in a bizarre fashion the very secret of their substance, the very mode of their material existence and which, so to speak, stand ‘bleeding’ before us. This is how painting [leads] us back to a vision of things themselves.” (WP 93) Cézanne is not only able to paint existence like every other painter; his visible holds within it the natality of the world. The bleeding canvas reveals this primordial connection. It is this how of appearing that teaches us of our manner of being in the world. This intertwining of sensibilities (particularly the visible and the tactile) is not evident in the Renaissance three-point perspective. Plato (from The School of Athens) does not bleed from the work. Cézanne, on the other hand, revisits vision before theoretical understandings, such as the three-point perspective, inform or dictate the expression. Merleau-Ponty writes,

We live in the midst of man-made objects, among tools, in houses, streets, cities, and most of the time we see them only through the human actions which put them to use. We become used to thinking that all of this exists necessarily and unshakeably. Cézanne’s painting suspends these habits of thought and reveals the base of inhuman nature upon which man has installed himself. (CD 16)

Understanding our basic relationship with the world, namely, the primacy of perception and the birth of order therein, returns us to the precognitive ways in which we live the world; this understanding is not merely cognitive, but more fundamentally it is existential.
Style of the Painter and her/his World

Nina Maria Athanassoglou-Kallmyer in *Cézanne and Provence: The Painter in His Culture* expresses this existential understanding as described when viewing *Grand pin*; she writes, “Cézanne’s *Grand pin* seems imbued with a lifelike pulse. Its branches spread to encompass the entire picture plane, forming a shimmering web of green and yellow strokes. ... A uniform radiance envelopes the picture.” 66 This uniform expression, the “all there” of this painting is Cézanne’s style. This “extension of the body’s basic capacities to intentionally intertwine with the world,”67 rendered in the artwork reveals to us the way in which Cézanne’s worldly disposition is manifest. From his artwork we can sense his “certain style of living” (PhP 444), the expressions of his habit-body that are particular to him.

We are told that Cézanne’s eyesight was bad and that it declined over the course of his lifetime. Merleau-Ponty tells us that Cézanne wondered if it was not his poor eyesight that provided the mistake that dictated his whole life. (CD 9) Some may attribute the bleeding of images in his paintings to this decline of his vision. His contemporary Camille Pissarro also relates that he had one of the “most astounding and curious temperaments”.68 Some could attribute his shifting figures69 to this temperament. However, we do not need to know his (personal psychological) history to understand his work, because it is in the work itself that we can grasp his entire oeuvre, the unity that is the personality of the painter himself.70

Merleau-Ponty writes that even if we were to think of Cézanne, the man, it could only be done through his style of being towards the world. His works, relationships, dress, experiences, and so forth, are all interdependent and provide us with insights into his life; these things are not separable from who he was: “If Cézanne’s life seems to us to carry the seeds of his work within it, it is because
we get to know his work first and see the circumstances of his life through it, charging them with a meaning borrowed from that work.” (CD 20) His work provides a lens into his life with which we can understand his being. According to Véronique M. Foti, Cézanne’s work “draws tacitly on the ‘style’ of embodied human existence, on a fundamental stratum” and reveals his particular style of embodiment therein, which is informed by his past, future, and human setting, thereby enabling us to speak of Cézanne’s style as an expression of the significances of his life.

What Cézanne expresses in his work is his bodily comportment in the world; this is not foreign to the expressions of others. According to Taminiaux’s reading of Merleau-Ponty’s “Introduction” in Signs, “a style imposes itself simply because it adheres to the visible and somehow or other finds in the sensible its own antecedents; precisely because of this, a style is accessible to others, it is interindividual and does not emerge ex nihilo from the stormy solitude of the genius.” Though each style of being in the world takes on different shapes with respect to the task at hand, and the individual’s different facticities and histories, all styles are rooted in the world. And so Cézanne’s works are not entirely foreign even to those who mistake his work as having or being of inhuman quality. Regardless of Cézanne’s style of being in the world, “only a human being is capable of such a vision which penetrates right to the root of things beneath the imposed order of humanity” (CD 16) and renders the world visible.

This unique mode of expression, Cézanne’s style of being, is implicated in every work that he produced. Because of this rendering of meaning through the artwork, it is not necessary for our purposes to labour over the life of Cézanne. However, it ought to be noted that, true to his word, Merleau-Ponty does not separate Cézanne’s life from his examination of Cézanne’s work, because his
work is an expression of his bodily being in the world. His body *qua* habit, moment, and project saturates his work.

“Cézanne’s Doubt” intertwines the man and his art without hesitation, highlighting the ambiguity and interdependence of the artist and the artwork. Merleau-Ponty tells us that Cézanne was unable to “master new situations;” he reverted to old habits and alienated himself from humanity, giving himself up to the “chaos of sensations”. (CD 13) In a conversation with Joachim Gasquet, Cézanne says, “Sensation is at the root of everything.” In this manner, he was most concerned with the visible world and the way in which we are affected by these objective vectors. Merleau-Ponty even mentions that Cézanne believed that faces ought to be painted as objects because he believed that expressions arise as a spontaneous organization of the painted features. (CD 10) The emerging of order (as a face) dictated how it was to appear. The affective objective vectors of the emerging face ushered forth brushstrokes from Cézanne. All of these affectations and nuances of Cézanne’s life and attitudes reveal his primary connections with visible experience and his attention to appearance. For Cézanne, it was not about setting “appearances straight” (CD 13) with theory (such as the Renaissance three-point perspective), but realizing that theories “leave no room for intuition”, and thereby curb affective objective vectors.

Cézanne was able to side-step theoretical understandings of the world in artwork. His style of painting celebrates the advent of appearance. Cézanne gets lost in the object of his attention in much the same manner as we can while viewing *Grand pin*. For example, we can enter into the levels of the painting, our gaze fixed on the work. We forget that we are in a gallery and not in the Parisian countryside. Our eye gets lost among the greens and rusts, as did Cézanne’s while he was painting. According to Merleau-Ponty, Mme. Cézanne said that he would lose himself in the landscape,
"looking at everything with widened eyes, ‘germinating’ with the countryside.” (CD 17) We are able to experience this dehiscence of the world in Cézanne’s expressions for “what is said and the way in which it is said – cannot exist separately from one another.” (WP 97) Because of this connection between Cézanne’s expression and that which it indicates (it tells us of our own being in the world); we are able to recognize Cézanne’s style and leave behind the theoretical via our own experience of his work. This style of painting renders our primordial connection with the visible world. It was both Cézanne’s connection to appearances (perhaps his poor eyesight) and his forgetting “all that he had ever learned from science” (CD 17) that allowed him the vision he required in order to render our primordial connection with the world in his art.

Existential Temporal Dynamic

Our gaze draws together our connections with the world. In examining the way in which things appear to us, come to be for us, we can understand how and in what way we are in the world. Since it is the case that “no two objects are seen simultaneously, a world in which regions of space are separated by the time it takes to move our gaze from one to the other, a world in which being is not given but rather emerges over time” (WP 54), we need to understand ourselves as partaking in this temporal flux. Things come to exist for us over time; each experience conditions and is conditioned by this temporal existential dynamic. We live as tensions between past (habit) and future (project), relying on this existential dynamic for the unfolding of our experience.76

Cézanne highlights this indebtedness to time in his trembling objects. According to Steinbock, his style of painting optimizes the “futural presence (and not merely a present in the future) that guides the present fullness, structuring the course of appearances.”77 His objects are not given all in one
moment, contrary to a Renaissance painting, much in the same fashion that the objects in the world are not given all at once, but provide us with affective vectors that solicit our perceptual interrogation. These vectors guide us. Some vectors draw us in while obscuring others. Whether it is a lure or repulsion, the vector still furthers our intentions by evoking a response. These affectations from the object intermingle with our subjective vectors. This intertwining highlights the relation between objective and subjective vectors and constitutes our spatial-temporal relationship with the world.

In order to engage with the world, the eye “palpates” (VI 131) its surroundings which in turn guide the eye. As embodied, we are able to draw out of our surroundings understandings. In this manner, we can think of the eye as analogous to the touch. Our hand passes over something picking out and feeling its contours. We must move our hand to get a sense of what we are touching. Laying our hand flat on an object does not tell us much about the object’s qualities, nor is it the case that our eyes settle on one aspect to view the thing. Even if we do not move our bodies, our eyes continue to “feel out” the object and reveal its nuances to us. We see the dryness of the soil and the rough bark of the pine tree. We do not have to run our hand across either of these to understand how they would feel to the touch. Our senses inform one another and so cannot be separately realized. We experience the world as a harmonious unity, and not as an amalgamation of constructed sensations. We are an aspect of the world’s autochthonous organization: the body is “a synergetic system, all the functions of which are exercised and linked together in the general action of being in the world.” (PhP 234)

Not only is there a synergy of our sense experiences. There is also an intertwining of the seer and the seen. It is not only the eye that interrogates the object (via affective subjective vectors), but the object reveals itself (via affective objective vectors) through this interrogation. The subjective and objective vectors intertwine. Merleau-Ponty writes in “Eye and Mind”,
The enigma is 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 not a self through transparency, like thought, which only thinks its object by assimilating it, by constituting it, by transforming it into thought. It is a self through confusion, narcissism, through inherence of the one who sees in that which he sees, and through inherence of sensing in the sensed – a self, therefore, that is caught up in things, that has a front and a back, a past and a future.... (EM 283-4)

Herein lies Merleau-Ponty’s notion of fundamental reversibility not only in the synergy of our senses, but moreover, in the world and every aspect of our being. Cézanne calls attention to this interpenetration, the primordial nature of our connection to the world, by making “visible how the world touches us” (CD 19), and by so doing, he gives us back to ourselves. He does this by painting the advent of appearance which calls to us to yield to the pull of the objective vectors of the painting. This thereby, decentres our (subjective) outlook on the world. We can feel this pull to the Parisian countryside and understand that we exist as part of a worldly reciprocity.

The reciprocity of all things worldly takes its cue from the double touch. We are touched by the world because we touch the world. Merleau-Ponty writes,

There is a human body when, between the seeing and the seen, between touching and the touched, between one eye and the other, between hand and hand, a blending of some sort takes place – when the spark is lit between sensing and sensible, lighting the fire that will not stop burning until some accident of the body will undo what no accident would have sufficed to do.... (EM 284-5)

Even in our gaze we are given over to all things worldly because our place is always among these things. We embody both the ability to touch and be touched. We are this meeting of orders, which never collapses, yet dynamically reverses itself. And like our bodies that can both touch and be touched, the world reciprocates our palpations and caresses with its own. It is not only the body that partakes in this phenomenon of reversibility, for it extends to all things worldly. If we agree with
Cézanne that “‘everything comes to us from nature; we exist through it; nothing else is worth remembering’” (CD 12), then we can understand ourselves as this fundamental reversibility that shares in the existence of the world wherein things are not given, but temporally emerge via an intertwining of our perceptual experiences and the perceptuality of the world.

Cézanne shows us this existential dynamic, this intertwining, in his bleeding and vibrating objects. His attention to the visible and the way in which things manifest themselves to the gaze enables him to delve into this existential dynamic, that which relies on both the time it takes for our eye to feel the object and the space which it crosses over in doing so. Cézanne tells Joachim Gasquet, “Everything we look at disperses and vanishes, doesn’t it? Nature is always the same, and yet its appearance is always changing. It is our business as artists to convey the thrill of nature’s permanence along with the elements and the appearance of all its changes. Painting must give us the flavour of eternity. Everything, you understand.”78 Space and time do not freeze into ideality in a Cézanne, for he paints the world in the same fashion as the world intertwines with our bodies. This allows for movement and metamorphosis. Cézanne renders this world as appearance and evanescence, and true to these characteristics of our phenomenal field, his objects adhere to the temporal unfolding of the world, whereby we are obliged to recognize our own “trans-historical and quasi-eternal living present.”79 The complexity of this living situatedness finds its home in Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the flesh.
Chapter 3: Style of Being

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty focuses on individual perception. We see instances of the objective pull on the subject by her/his phenomenal field that contributes to her/his understanding; however, this solicitation remains somewhat enigmatic until his investigations of art. But it is not until his later work that we can understand the complexity of the relationship of the individual and her/his phenomenal field. Granted, there are hints of this dynamic as early as *Phenomenology of Perception*, but it is in “Eye and Mind” and *The Visible and the Invisible* that we are able to fully view the truly original accomplishment of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological investigations, his unique style of thinking. In these later works, style is not just an individual’s manner of approaching the world or an object’s way of soliciting the subject; style is the (in)visible relationship between the world and body. The body and the world are cohesive. (VI 152) This is the cross-hatching of subjective affectation and objective affectation wherein we can say there is something rather than nothing.

In Merleau-Ponty’s synaesthetic notion of embodiment, style demarcates the meeting of fact and essence, between the world and the body. Dillon, as previously quoted, said, “with the development of style, … essence takes on new meaning.” (MPO 79) Thus we can trace Merleau-Ponty’s move from a phenomenological account of embodied style (the meeting of subjective and objective affectivity) to an (indirect) ontological account of worldly style. His original ontology finds and never forgets its roots in the body. Merleau-Ponty writes, “There is a strict ideality in experiences that are experiences of the flesh: the moments of the sonata, the fragments of the luminous field, adhere to one another with a cohesion without concept, which is of the same type … Is my body a thing, is it an idea? It is neither, being the measurant of the things.” (VI 152) It is then fitting that a
life project that begins by thinking the body lends itself to thinking the world, which phenomenologically necessitates thinking them simultaneously. Merleau-Ponty does not gloss over the body in his later ontology, but extends the corporeal schema to a world schema that is the intertwining of the two. We live through the temporality of perception with our bodies, which render us a world.

**Existential Meaningfulness**

Perception takes on new shape in Merleau-Ponty’s later work, or rather reaches new depths. Merleau-Ponty, having admittedly been caught in the Cartesian dualistic framework in *Phenomenology of Perception*, attempts to overcome this dichotomous thinking with his notion of reversibility, which comes to fruition in the notion of the flesh. Reversibility is never far from the surface of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology. Hints of this style of thinking can be found in *Phenomenology of Perception*. (PhP 407)

Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological style allows him to think the body, while never forgetting our primordial connection with the world. We do not just locate meaning in the world “out there”, but find meaning within ourselves, which shares in the meaningfulness of the world. Our relationship with the world is not simply one of subject and object, or sentient and sensed. We are in a reciprocal relationship with the world. According to Merleau-Ponty, the “body is made of the same flesh as the world (it is a perceived), and moreover that this flesh of my body is shared by the world, the world reflects it, encroaches upon it and it encroaches upon the world … they are in a relation of transgression or of overlapping.” (VI 248)
There is, at the heart of all perception, a reflexive capacity which is marked by an intertwining of perceiver and perceived. The subjective and objective vectors of affectation intertwine. For example, when viewing Cézanne’s *Grand pin*, we do not just perceive the painting hanging on the gallery wall, we get caught up in the painting. We find ourselves standing in the Parisian countryside on the dry rusty red earth. We slip from subject (cognitively viewing a painting in a gallery) to Being (immersed in the world) via worldly dimensions. Merleau-Ponty writes, “Perception is not first a perception of things, but a perception of elements (water, air...) of rays of the world, of things which are dimensions, which are worlds, I slip on these ‘elements’ and here I am in the world, I slip from the ‘subjective’ to Being.” (VI 218) We get caught up in the world whereby the distinction between self and world is not constantly present; again, “the world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself.” (PhP 407)

Our bodies respond to the world and the world responds to our bodies, as we are caught in a necessarily primordial connection (connexion) with all things. We are made of the same flesh as the world and our bodies demonstrate this in their interaction with the world. In slipping from subjective thinking to Being, we open ourselves to this connection. In getting caught up in the “rays of the world”, we live our bodies as meaningful. This dynamic relationship, a sharing in the flesh, reveals a worldly aseity and our participation therein.

Merleau-Ponty’s enigmatic notion of the flesh entails a dehiscence of meaning that is not cognitively, but visibly ordered. It organizes itself via a style of appearing. This style of appearing is our access to reality. It is that which gives us the aseity of things, places, and persons, and reveals the self-generative flesh of the world without ever fully giving itself over to linguisticality. According to Merleau-Ponty,
The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term ‘element,’ in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an ‘element’ of Being. (VI 139)

We can understand Merleau-Ponty’s notion of flesh in the same manner as Thales of Milesus’ account of water. Experience makes visible coagulated flesh via styles of being or ways of appearing, just as experience made visible that moisture was the first principle for Thales. However, we can get a better sense of the flesh as elemental if we consider Merleau-Ponty’s comment that perception is foremost a perception of elements, not things. (VI 218) Standing before Cézanne’s Grand pin we are enveloped by the Parisian countryside before we begin to differentiate the trees from the surrounding foliage. The intertwining of perceiver and perceived is primary. First we engage with the world and the world with our bodies, then we cognitively understand that with which we engage. However, there is still something that falls outside of our conceptualization. The heart of style remains opaque. There is a certain unity by which we see, i.e., our participation in the unfolding of the scene (world). Style shapes this chiasm of the sentient and the sensible, and it is what gives this unfolding flavour, existential meaningfulness.

Due to its interiority, meaningfulness escapes explicit conceptualization (what is a fragment of being?), but we engage the world in a dialogue of vision, touch, and so forth, which enable and express this dynamic of worldly Being. We engage these elements as meaningful because they are of the world, in the same way that we are of the world. The flesh “articulates itself through that part of itself which we, ourselves are. Through itself is also through us: we who are both fleshy and articulate, the flesh of the world that has discovered the signs of its (and our) self-referentiality.” (MPO 242) We recognize things as meaningful because we also recognize ourselves as implicated in that
meaningfulness. Significance emerges in our active dealings with the world, the intertwining of subjective and affective vectors. Our bodies as psycho-historical dynamics understand folds in the flesh and the styles of the world via the reciprocity of affectation between the world and our bodies.

Our gaze has a history, and that history informs our visible, bringing our style of perceiving to the way in which things “arise as a relief upon a depth of being”. This dynamic between the body and the world is a reciprocal interchange, an intertwining of affective vectors. It is another facet of the worldly autochthonous organization of which we partake. We are open to the world. We cannot necessarily choose what we find meaningful. There are things that we see which speak to our psycho-historical structure which are not filtered out by our gaze and affect us without an explicit awareness on our part. Our gaze, an interpenetration of our facticity and history, gathers together the flesh of the world and expresses particular styles of being in a unified manner of appearing (that which gives us the aseity of the person, place, or thing).

Our participation in the unification of appearance is evidenced at the heart of all perception, namely, in the intertwining of all things worldly, ourselves included. According to Taminiaux, “The reflexivity that arises at the very core of perception is one of a flesh caught by fleshly ramifications at the very same time it becomes a self.” At the moment of perception there is a surpassing (a grasping for the future), a positing of something more, what Taminiaux refers to as the becoming of a self. This self is (in) a dynamic relationship with the world. In his essay, “Flesh and Otherness,” Claude Lefort expresses a similar interpretation of perception. He writes, “a double doubling occurs, the body becoming at once sentient and sensible and distinct from the eternal world that it continues to belong to, to adhere to.” There is, as both Taminiaux and Lefort suggest, a double association of identity and alterity already active in perception. We identify ourselves with the world in the momentary
sensations of experience. At the same instant, the body at this moment projects beyond the merely sensible experience, affirming its difference from the momentarily sensible. This transcendence is informed by the habit-body and our future projects, but is able to transcend the immanence of the body only by virtue of its place (orientation) in the world and its solicitations. We need a possibility (terrain) for this movement, though so long as we are alive this movement has no distinct beginning or ending, though it is always anchored in our world. This paradox of identity in alterity, as suggested by Taminiaux and Lefort, which is touched on in Phenomenology of Perception is extended to our relationships with the world in The Visible and the Invisible; we understand the cohesiveness of that which we cognitively separate, especially subject and object, self and world. Style shows us that that which we find meaningful originates in this dynamic relationship, in the double movement of our being as sentient and sensible, and adhering to and being distinct from the world. The recognition of style demonstrates that we are not just in the world (affected by our phenomenal field), but also of the world (transforming that which we perceive). Existential style arises as the amalgamation of our facticity and history between these cognitively separate ideas. This intertwining is explained in Merleau-Ponty's analogy of the mirrors.

Merleau-Ponty describes his late ontology: "as upon two mirrors facing one another where two indefinite series of images set in one another arise which belong really to neither of the two surfaces, since each is only the rejoinder of the other, and which therefore form a couple, a couple more real than either of them." (VI 139) The analogy of the mirrors works beautifully because it visually gives us that which does not easily lend itself to description. It combines that which is believed to be the definiteness (immanence) of the reflecting with the indefiniteness (transcendence) of that which is reflected, pointing to the moments of perpetual ambiguity. The reflections and
reflecting(s) are caught in inescapable relationships, and so neither the definite nor the indefinite takes priority over the other. In the same fashion neither sentient nor sensible are prioritized in experience understood phenomenologically. The overlapping tells us that each requires the other (VI 137), as does the world and the lived-body. According to Merleau-Ponty, "they are two aspects of the reversibility which is the ultimate truth". (VI 155)

Meaning is found not in the individual or the world, but in the continuous dialogue between the two. We need the world in order for us to have a habit-body, future projects, and experience in general. The mirror analogy demonstrates our endless dynamic (our carrying forward), an infinite momenting of communication and communion that we find in perception. This dehiscence "gives cohesion, sense and meaning to the differentiations of the flesh." As human beings we distinguish ourselves from the world in our surpassing, however, in the analogy of the mirrors, there is also cohesion of identities in our sensations *qua* difference. Dillon calls this phenomenon "identity-within-difference." (MPO 159) We think that what we are seeing in the mirror is our own reflection, "Look it's me! I am an individual." However, what we are doing is just divorcing ourselves from the flesh of all things worldly by reflecting/cognizing a more general existence wherein there is no double movement or experiential flux of all things worldly; things become representational. According to Taylor Carman, the phenomenal field "is neither a representation nor a locus of representations, but a dimension of our bodily embeddedness in a perceptually coherent environment, a primitive aspect of our openness onto the world." The world is the reversibility, the cross-hatching of subjective and objective affectations which are already in our bodies as an intrinsic openness.

Our implicit openness onto the world is often cognitively obscured. However, the relationship of the mirrors (in this particular example) is integral for reflection. The space between the mirrors
must remain open to allow for this imaging - dehiscence. The openness is a link between the orders -
mirrors, that of reflection and reflected, identity via difference. Herein lies our essential ambiguity.

Our identity requires a belonging. There is a spontaneous division (self \textit{qua} identity and other \textit{qua}
difference), a dehiscence of meaning (I am an individual!), and a perceptual Gestalt (I am an
individual among individuals and in the world), a joining without definite meaning. These contraries
are not radically other, however, neither are they coincidental. The flesh is both one and the many.

Gary Brent Madison comments on this \textit{"inscription of the other in the flesh of the same,"}^90 in the vein
of Husserl's \textit{Cartesian Meditations},^91 in his essay, \textit{"Flesh as Otherness"}:

\begin{quote}
What the flesh "means" is that, when I engage in reflection, I am \textit{already}
for myself an other. Because of this, otherness is inscribed in my very flesh.
It is precisely because the flesh, which introduces otherness into me, is also
"my" flesh that there are for me alter \textit{egos}, other \textit{my selves}, such that I am
always for myself the other of the other of me. The other, in order to be for
me, does not have to "encroach" on me: when I begin to reflect, he or she is
already "in" me, as a constitutive dimension of my flesh. I do not "project" the
"other" the other is what I discover when, in moments of reflexivity, I seek to
lay hold of myself.\textsuperscript{92}
\end{quote}

This cognitive plurality of the flesh (individuated fragments of being) and Merleau-Ponty's analogy of
the mirrors give life to that which is at play, i.e., reflection, and breathing room, openness and the
possibility for differentiation -individuation. In this vein, styles are born. There is a style of being
wherever there is a fragment (reflection) of being. The imaging is born, styles are born, from this
relationship of similarity and alterity, which is, of course, no image at all (it is not factual), but only
an indefinite chain of reflection, non-conceptualizable styles of being. Herein, we can recognize and
give meaning to that which differentiates itself (we recognize the styles of others), even in the face of
changes (in the habit-body) certain styles remain. This stylized reflexivity exists within us always as a
latent ambiguity. Silverman points out, "I am the same person who knows through experience that he
is ambiguous and who appears to himself as ambiguous. We are always in that situation.\textsuperscript{93} As autochthonously organized we implicitly understand our situated ambiguity in being of and in the world. The way in which we live this ambiguity determines existential meaningfulness.

\textbf{Worldly Understanding}

Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of ambiguity first arose in dealing with the body. His analogy of the mirrors fleshes out our initial account of what it means to be ambiguously situated in the world, making way for a more general existential ambiguity. We experience this worldly ambiguity in our relationship with temporality (our habit-body and future body inform our body at this moment), sense experience (synaesthesia), bodily experience (the double touch), human existence (the inexhaustibility of meaning), and perception (as we slip from subjective thinking to Being).\textsuperscript{94} None of these are solely dependent on the body. We can say that the body engages in an ambiguous dynamic of reflection, similar to the openness and positioning of the mirrors. These ambiguities are possible only in the communication and communion between the outer and the inner. Merleau-Ponty writes that the body makes itself both the outside answering to the inside, and the inside answering to the outside. (VI 144) This echoes his earlier thought in \textit{Phenomenology of Perception}. (PhP 407) As we reach out to the world as sensing beings, the world in turn reaches out to us as sentient beings. Style is born in this interpenetration. Our body, \textit{via} the tree’s solicitations and our own kinaesthetics (facticity) and curiosities (history), have a manner of touching the tree. We reach our hand out to touch the bark of the tree, and it feels rough to our fingertips. Just as the image bounces from mirror to mirror \textit{via} their interplay, mirror answering mirror, the interrogative process of kinaesthetic embodiment is bound up in an ambiguous dynamic of relational sensibility, the inside responds to the outside and \textit{vice versa};
this is the unfolding and coiling back upon itself of the flesh. This inherence of the world is stylized, whereby from the unfolding emerges in the way in which we interact with the world.

We can still, at this point, find ourselves caught in a dualistic framework of rendering the body as sentient and sensing, as a bridge between orders of affectations. But this demarcation is not meant to highlight the different aspects of worldly being, it is meant to show the dynamic that makes these differentiations possible. The body is an interface of this separation and differentiation, that in and by which we touch and are touched. In us is already the alterity of the world and other, as Madison earlier suggested. Richard A. Cohen clarifies this perceptual separation of us and the world: “Subject and object are not two opposed domains to be somehow united, they are both aspects of the same flesh: the flesh seeing itself, turned upon itself, overlapping itself, folded upon itself, reversible.” Cohen thus points to a fundamental feature of Merleau-Ponty’s thought – reversibility. We can separate subjective and objective vectors of affectivity, which render us a world, however, what we are really interested in is the dynamic intertwining of all worldly being, the cohesiveness of fact and essence which arises as a style of being. According to Dillon’s reading of Merleau-Ponty, this notion of reversibility, the dynamical intertwining of all worldly being, is modeled on the phenomenon of the double touch.

(MPO 157)

What was in Merleau-Ponty’s earlier writing a dynamic relationality of the body became a worldly dynamic. In Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty brings our attention to the double touch wherein the sentient and sensing hand flips from left to right indefinitely. (PhP 93) In The Visible and Invisible Merleau-Ponty takes this reciprocity further in a “Working Note” from May 1960 (VI 254-7): he writes that touched and touching “do not coincide in the body: the touching is never exactly touched. This does not mean that they coincide ‘in the mind’ or at the level of ‘consciousness.’
Something else than the body is needed for the junction to be made: it takes place in the *untouchable.*

(VI 254) There is a dynamic between my left and right hand that never completes itself. The two orders never meet one another “face to face” so to speak, though they each are integral for the existence of the other. To touch, we must be touchable. To see, we must be visible. Furthermore, to touch we must be visible and to see we must be touchable. Sentience arises in and through this dynamic relationality.

This intertwining of our sensations is not merely a process of synergy, as explained in *Phenomenology of Perception,* for there are other dimensions of perception that reach beyond mere synthesis and flourish under the notion of the flesh. The flesh encompasses and is constituted by all things worldly, and since the visible takes place in a tactile space, Merleau-Ponty advises that

We must habituate ourselves to think that every visible is cut out in the tangible, every tactile being in some manner promised to visibility, and that there is encroachment, infringement, not only between the touched and the touching, but also between the tangible and the visible, which is encrusted in it, as, conversely, the tangible itself is not a nothingness of visibility, is not without visual existence. Since the same body sees and touches, visible and tangible belong to the same world. (VI 134)

Consider the eye. Merleau-Ponty writes that the look palpates the visible things (VI 133) because it takes its place in the order of the visible and the tactile. For example, we can feel the roughness of the bark of a tree by looking at it or we can feel looked at by others. It is common to feel the gaze of another on our body. This crosshatching of the tangible and the visible allows for these affectations. We are solicited by the world to be touched by another gaze, or to touch the other *via* our own. We can even go so far as to say that we can feel looked at, not only by others, but also by things. Merleau-Ponty writes in “Eye and Mind,” that many painters have experienced this reversed gaze. He quotes Paul 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.” (EM 288) This brings the relation
of sentient and sensing full circle. Because we exist in the realm of the visible and tangible, we can feel others seeing, see others feeling (touching), see others seeing, and feel (touch) others feeling (touching). All of this occurs in a stylized manner. This dynamic is possible via our situatedness and participation in the flesh of the world and also the synaesthetic nature of perception.

We understand this relationality because we are sentient and sensible. These are flipsides of existence of which we are not necessarily cognizant. Just as a tree has a back side, which is invisible to us as we interrogate the front side, similarly, existing in the world has a back side, a reversible, which remains invisible to the other order (we cannot see ourselves seeing), though it calls to us, and fills itself in (as the inner eye imagines myself seeing). The intertwining of both subjective and objective vectors actively “overdetermines” our relationship with the world, hinting at the invisible layer of being which gives visibility meaning. Everything is not all given at once. The invisible layer is hinted at by the world’s styles of appearing. These styles show us that the world is not just factical, but has an underbelly that makes visible these factical attributes. Only by following the rays of the world can we recognize this being as fleshy, as having more than we can visibly attribute to its being. Our relationship with the world is overdetermined. Merleau-Ponty’s ontology explains this overdetermination by delivering “phenomenon from the sphere of immanence and restor[ing] the transcendence.” (MPO 131)

The double sensation not only calls attention to this encounter of immanence and transcendence within the body, but also, as we have been examining, within the body/world and world/world dynamic. These worldly relationships reveal to us an implicit harmony in our phenomenal field, which we recognize without fully cognizing the “what” of this unity. Just as the Parisian countryside is “all there” in Cézanne’s Grand pin, so is the connection of all things worldly.
These things do not converge in any single instant, but provide us with a depth from which we can understand the implicit relationality of the scene which arises from this depth as a style of being.

According to Merleau-Ponty, “There is present a latent significance, diffused throughout the landscape or the city, which we find in something specific and self-evident which we feel no need to define.” (PhP 281) I am implicitly aware of this significance; a certain style of being that spreads itself out and radiates from that which initially solicits my gaze. We understand the manner in which the world unfolds itself because it also enfolds us. We get caught up in that which we are looking. “In short,” Merleau-Ponty writes, “the same thing is both out there in the world and here in the heart of vision.” (EM 287) Reversibility ensures this continuum of implicit understanding via the world’s foldings and enfoldings. This coiling, dynamic of the world creates openness. As the space between the mirrors allows for reflection, “to see is to have at a distance” (EM 287), the “openness” of our bodies, on the past, present, future, and the dynamic between self and world that arises therein, welcomes this reciprocity which is the flesh.

The flesh, both a connective tissue and an opening of horizons, is the ontogenesis of meaning. Self and other intertwine. Alterity and identity are primordially bonded whereby they form new relationships and uncover horizons, exhibiting their connections. This connected openness (spread) is the place of relationality, and thereby, provides a wealth of meanings, implicit in our understanding of being in the world. According to Dillon, this hiatus “is not sheer emptiness, it is replete with emergent meaning.” (MPO 243) We can never completely uncover a totality of meaning as finite beings. Merleau-Ponty writes, “If coincidence is lost, this is no accident; if Being is hidden, this is itself a characteristic of Being, and no disclosure will make us comprehend it.” (VI 122) The meeting of alterity and identity, sentient and sensing, eclipse in this hiatus or chiasm. The fullness of this
Merleau-Ponty’s Notion of Style

interrelation cannot be completely represented, and therefore, precludes a comprehensive understanding of the chiasm.

We are constantly trying to articulate the way in which things appear, their styles of being. We interrogate the inexhaustible depths of being, searching for “that divergence without contradiction, that divergence between the within and the without that constitutes its natal secret.” (VI 135-6) We will never learn the natal secret because in our corporeal schema and the world, and the meeting of the two, there are styles of existence that are primordial, and thereby, escape conceptual realization, for such are always haunted by ambiguity. Grasping always marks our nature as sensible and sentient beings.

Hubert L. Dreyfus writes, “human beings relate to the world in an organized purposive manner without the constant accompaniment of a representational state that specifies what the action is aimed at accomplishing.” We never tire of this grasping because we are involved in a continuous dynamic of affectation. We seek understanding and attempt to concretize that which is fundamentally ambiguous. We seek because it is our nature to interrogate the world around us. We are not corpses (yet).

We seek to birth meaning from the pregnancy of the world, to understand the “what” of the world’s style (the unity of facticity and essentiality) of appearing by making immanent that which transcends. The flesh allows for this dynamic quest for that which we can never quite lay our fingers on. The flesh is not static, nor is it suffocating. We stretch the flesh by constant interrogation, urging and being urged by a continuous unfolding, coiling over, and dehiscence of being. The flesh of the world incorporates the flesh of the body. “One can say that we perceive the things themselves, that we are the world that thinks itself – or that the world is at the heart of our flesh.” (VI 136n2) The threads of existence are interwoven, forming a fabric of flesh that is not mind, matter, or substance, but elemental. (VI 139) The flesh is not substantial, therefore, it cannot be absolutely schematized, though
it calls to and invites us to take up new levels and uncover new horizons, for we (always) remain open. Our world is cloaked in flesh: it is living; yet it transcends itself. It is the “presence of someone in the dark” (VI 150), reminding us that we are not alone: without us there would be no world; and without world there would be no us.

Though we are able to cognitively differentiate between bodily flesh and worldly flesh, there is a general style of being that adheres to all flesh. Merleau-Ponty writes, “to comprehend is to apprehend by coexistence, laterally, by the style, and thereby to attain at once the far-off reaches of this style and of this cultural apparatus.” (VI 188) We are not necessarily cognitively aware of these nuances of the worldly styles of being, a sharing in the same existential significance, because appearances fluctuate, though they remain on the horizon of being.

Style of Being

The horizon of being is a laterality of possibilities that is organized and comprehended via different styles of worldly being. We understand our world because it organizes itself into and partakes in particular appearances of which we are a part. Merleau-Ponty writes, “I am a field of experience where there is only sketched out the family of material things and other families and the world as their common styles, the family of things said and the world of speech as their common style, and finally the abstract and fleshless style of something in general.” (VI 111) Everything that we perceive organizes itself via an underlying depth that brings an existential significance to those families in which we participate. Styles inform the “humdrum setting” which is our own. (PhP 84) Though our experiences are merely “sketched” out of a common style of being, a figure upon a foreground, a fold in the flesh, they nonetheless enable us to retain our world as continuous and lived.
There is, relative to our shifting being (a dynamic at the mercy of our past, present, and future), a continuity that persists. Between our history and our facticity, our style of being as a relief upon a depth of being stays intact, and it is by this participation in and retention of a style of being that we come to know others. Merleau-Ponty explains,

There is no individual that would not be representative of a species or of a family of beings, would not have, would not be a certain style, a certain manner of managing the domain of space and time over which it has competency, of pronouncing, of articulating that domain, of radiating about a wholly virtual centre – in short, a certain manner of being. (VI 115)

Each individual embodies a certain style of being, whereby her/his bodily comportment and active doing suggest a past, present, and future. Our styles of being and our momentary interactions with the world tell a story by the articulations of our body. There is at the heart of these expressions a persistence that makes us individuals (different from, but recognizable by others), and shows each of us to be an existential temporal dynamic that shares (finds identity) in the style of the world, the domain of all domains. In this manner, we cannot separate our history and our dynamic being from our facticity or being in the world; all notions of alterity are already inscribed in my being.

This interpenetration of our facticity and history elicits our style of being, and the ways in which we understand the being of the world and others. Consider the style of the painter: Merleau-Ponty notes,

Anyone who thinks about the matter finds it astonishing that very often a good painter can also make good drawings or good sculpture. Since neither the means of expression nor the creative gestures are comparable, this fact [of competence in several media] is proof that there is a system of equivalences, a Logos of lines, of lighting, of colours, of reliefs, of masses – a conceptless presentation of universal Being. (EM 303)

A painter's connection with the visible dictates her/his particular style of expression one in which “vision becomes gesture”. (EM 299) This unique mode of gesture with different mediums points to the
dynamics of synaesthesia, whereby our relationships with the world are consistent in all our bodily expressions.

There is another level to this cohesiveness of style that is particular to the artist. An artist’s style of being in the world (expressing themselves in paint and other mediums) and that which s/he makes available to us through art are informed by her/his embodiment. The non-artist is also informed by her/his body, but not in the same manner as the painter. In lending her/his body to the world, “the artist changes the world into paintings” (EM 283), thereby rendering being visible. The non-artist also articulates being through her/his style, however, without a direct medium for manipulation and product for our interrogation (a stylized depiction of expression), her/his rendering of being (through gesture, gait, expression, and mannerisms) is less obvious. Her/his style is individualized giving us access to her/his being as recognizable via our own history and facticity. The visible articulations of the flesh, as in the case of a Cézanne, show us our existentiality, and thereby, render not only the style of an individual (non-artist), but the style of the world by the artwork’s place in the visible. According to Merleau-Ponty,

The painter’s world is nothing but visible; a world almost demented because it is complete when it is yet only partial. ... 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 man lives in his house. (EM 287)

What we see when we are looking at Cézanne’s Grand pin is not just the visual given (the pine and its surrounding foliage), but our bodies come to occupy the textures of that which is visible. This synaesthesia (smelling the pine, listening to the sounds of the countryside, and so forth) that we experience through the artwork is enabled by the emerging order (meaning) of the world. The
invisibles become visible, not by our movement around the tree or our touching of the arid soil, but by the sheer ability of the painter to render these invisibles in paint. Merleau-Ponty explains, the painting “signifies by itself all the responses which would be elicited through an examination by the remaining senses; that a thing would not have this colour had it not also this shape, these tactile properties, this resonance, this odour, and that the thing is the absolute fullness which my undivided existence projects before itself.” (PhP 319) This fecundity (voluminosity) is found in depth (the intertwining of fact and essence, subject and object) and becomes visible via a style of appearing. This depth is the chiasm between the sentient and the sensible, and is the source for synaesthetic experience and reversibility.

Reversibility characterizes our worldly embodiments, namely, our being in the world as bound up with other bodies. We understand all bodies as participating in the same world in a manner similar to our own. There is, according to Merleau-Ponty, a proliferation of worldly “exchanges to all the bodies of the same type and of the same style which I see and touch”. (VI 143) This happens because we are not wholly inside ourselves, but share in the style of the world, i.e., the reversibility of the inside and outside, the sentient and sensible. Because our bodies both experience and house these reverses of being (sentient/sensible), there must be something by which we are touched and which we touch, a communication and communion among fleshy bodies. In an intimate passage by Merleau-Ponty, he explains the reciprocity between two individuals:

[T]he body no longer couples itself up with the world, it clasps another body, applying (itself to it) carefully with its whole extension, forming tirelessly with its hands the strange statue which in its turn gives everything it receives; the body is lost outside of the world and its goals, fascinated by the unique occupation of floating in Being with another life, of making itself the outside of its inside and the inside of its outside. And henceforth movement, touch, vision, applying themselves to the other and to themselves – and this by virtue of the fundamental fission or segregation of the sentient and the sensible which, laterally, makes the organs of my body communicate and founds transivity from one body to another. (VI 143)
The experience of being with another shows us that we are solicited not only by the goings on of the world (the call of the artwork), but more profoundly by the other. The call (objective vectors of affectation) of a Cézanne can pull us into the Parisian countryside, wherein we experience synaesthesia; however, there are variations of our synaesthetic perceptions (we do not all necessarily smell the pine). We are all solicited by different objects/beings to different degrees. We are solicited by and directly solicit the fleshy style of the other; our affectations intertwine. The facticity of one’s body can be forgotten, whereby “the body is lost” to itself in the cusp of touching/touched, seeing/seen, tasting/tasted, smelling/smelt, and hearing/heard. The interaction of bodies of the flesh reveals to us our polymorphous being, not through reflection, but through synaesthetic communication and communion with the other.

In the synaesthetic experience, Merleau-Ponty privileges vision, as in the case of artwork, because vision is a more dominant in our human interaction with the world. The most obvious experience of synaesthesia happens in the seer/seeing/seen relationship, wherein we not only engage in vision, but also in tactility. This reciprocity and cross-hatching of the visible and the tangible gives us constant styles of the world and textures of things. In seeing, our eyes follow the contours of the visible, birthing appearances; we are then bound to that which we see: “I lend them my body [the visibles] in order that they inscribe upon it and give me their resemblance, this fold, this central cavity of the visible which is my vision, the touching and the touched, form a close-bound system that I count on, define a vision in general and a constant style of visibility from which I cannot detach myself”. (VI 146) We are given over to ourselves via the texture of that which we engage, such as the body of another or the bark of a tree. Our style of being is informed by the visibles of the world that take on an existential temporal dynamic as the eye moves across these spectacles. We see another’s skin and
relate it to our own, as a soft sentient whole. We see the rough varied bark of a tree and distinguish it from our skin. The flesh of the world or my own returns to itself in the visible/tactile relationality and renders its own style of being as both similar and different from the style of being of other fleshy things.

We are carnally indebted to the fecundity of the flesh whereby things are rendered visible to our psycho-historical being. Our affectations intertwine with those of the world. The intertwining of subjective and objective vectors renders visible a style of being which is necessarily informed by an invisible layer, tendrils of history that affect the already saturated style of appearing. However, the visibles are telling of their reverse, not the non-visible, but the invisible essence of the appearance, that which makes style allusive and elliptical. Cézanne was able to paint this invisible layer which the eager eye absorbs, but passes over in intellection. In Merleau-Ponty’s account of meaningfulness, fact and essence are visibly bound to the depths of these reverses (not opposites). Merleau-Ponty writes of the fleshy dimensions that our gaze opens:

[T]he surface of the visible, is doubled up over its whole extension with an invisible reserve; ... in our flesh as in the flesh of things, the actual, empirical, ontic visible, by a sort of folding back, invagination, or padding, exhibits a visibility, a possibility that is not the shadow of the actual but is its principle, that is not the proper contribution of a 'thought' but is its condition, a style, allusive and elliptical like every style, but like every style inimitable, inalienable, an interior horizon and an exterior horizon between which the actual visible is a provisional partitioning and which, nonetheless, open indefinitely only upon other visibles. (VI 152)

Our gaze indefinitely opens upon other visibles, but never detaches itself from that which makes these visibles appear. It remains connected to that which stands in relief and inarticulate. We recognize styles of the world that we are unable to recreate in thought alone. Our bodies remain attached to these inarticulates (invisibles) via synaesthesia. The power of a Cézanne lies in its capability to solicit our
gaze, not just by making visible the Parisian countryside, but in retaining (creating) the countryside’s connection with the invisible, which thereby renders its depth via its style of being.

In depth, the invisible becomes visible. Our bodies solicit and make visible specific fleshy folds via our psycho-historical structuring. Merleau-Ponty writes, “The present, the visible counts so much for me and has an absolute prestige for me only by reason of this immense latent content of the past, the future, and the elsewhere, which it announces and which it conceals.” (VI 114) In the bond between our facticity and essence we reinforce the reversibility of our own visible and invisible (as we grasp for tendrils of the past and future while letting others slip away) via our style of recognizing the world. These worldly styles are non-duplicative, as our being, just like our sentient and sensing natures are not superposable. Our styles are different; they find their identity in the expressive differences of our respective histories and facticities. However, we share in the style of the world, as it is a “relief of the simultaneous and of the successive, a spatial and temporal pulp where … individuals are formed by differentiation.” (VI 114)

**Existential Temporal Dynamic**

The articulated differences (particular styles) of our own flesh and that of the world are informed by a “spatial temporal pulp,” our history and facticity. Merleau-Ponty writes,

we are experiences, that is, thoughts that feel behind themselves the weight of the space, the time, the very Being they think, and which therefore do not hold under their gaze a serial space and time nor the pure idea of series, but have about themselves a time and a space that exist by piling up, by proliferation, by encroachment, by promiscuity – a perpetual pregnancy, perpetual parturition, generativity and generality, brute essence and brute existence, which are the nodes and antinodes of the same ontological vibration. [The] very sphere of our life. (VI 115)
This rich texture, the piling up of spatio-temporal experience via “proliferation,” “encroachment,” and “promiscuity” is the “all there” of experience or the aseity of being. Not only does synaesthesia pertain to our momentary sensations, such as standing in the Parisian countryside, but more generally to all of our experiences. This is why, when we are positioned before *Grand pin*, we are able to have the experience of being in this painted countryside. This particular experience, viewing a Cézanne, calls on other experiences to inform the senses. This is how we get a sense of the Parisian countryside without ever having stood on the arid soil. In fact, it is this overlapping of experience that renders us a unified world. Because the present calls on the past and future to bear witness to its intertwinings, our bodies can approach each moment as a continuation of the last and the prolongation of the present into what will be.

The proliferation of experience always (even as a young child) overdetermines this cohesive relationship we have with the world. We are never unaffected or ineffectual. Our subjective vectors are coloured by our habit, moment, and projecting body. Embodiment configures and is configured by this style of being. According to Singer, “Style permeates perception and its objects as the field of lived significance that arises from their intertwining.” Consider the way in which our eye moves across an object. While rendering certain aspects of an object visible, we obscure others, bringing into visibility aspects which are accented by our embodiment. We move about an object in a particular manner given our facticity and our history (our past experience and future intentions of/for the object). This palpation of objects with our stylized gaze renders movement particular to the individual in the world, which is key to understanding our own unique experiences of time. Vision always precedes itself thus ensuring an existential temporal dynamic. However, this making visible of the world and instilling it with a temporal significance would not be realized without an objective pull from the
world. The world must, as do our bodies, lend itself to the inscriptions of temporality. Without this reciprocity of body and world there would be no intertwining of significances, and therefore, there could be no uncovering of meaning.

The objective lure has its own style of being, its own particular synthesis of the flesh. It has the ability to captivate our gaze given its style (its particular amalgamation of flesh). According to Singer’s reading of Merleau-Ponty, “In the case of natural objects (things not explicitly penetrated by human purpose) there is a distinctive appearance which is intrinsic to the thing, a fusion of substance and quality which constitutes the thing in its suchness.” ¹⁰⁰ This stylized ascity intertwines with our own historically and factically stylized affectations, and renders the world as existentially meaningful. This is birthed in the chiasm between perceiver and perceived, and their reciprocity. This perpetual pregnancy, a tireless fecundity, in turn, brings about an effectual closure in which things come into relief while others are obscured, temporally flavouring all that we experience. Style is important to this existential temporal dynamic because it delineates the way in which we experience the world as coherent given our finite nature. ¹⁰¹

Since, in fact, we never meet this finality face to face, we live through the temporality of perception with our bodies engaging the world in an apparently endless dynamic of reversibility. The world as analogous to our bodies, also carries with it the flavour of eternity. In our reciprocal interaction with the world we understand the historical weight inherent in the things that we perceive. The particular folds in the flesh (styles of being), which we are called to and make visible by interrogation, are telling of the burden of history and the world’s ability to endure indefinitely. Merleau-Ponty writes, “I am not a finalist, because the interiority of the body (=the conformity of the internal leaf with the external leaf, their folding back on one another) is not something made,
fabricated, by the assemblage of the two leaves: they have never been apart --”. (VI 265) In this primordial communication and communion which both unfolds and enfolds us, we are rendered the world as a synaesthetic whole.
Conclusion

As perceivers, we cannot get back to the things themselves without perception. Merleau-Ponty writes, “Before the essence as before the fact, all we must do is situate ourselves within the being we are dealing with, instead of looking at it from the outside – or, what amounts to the same thing, what we have to do is put it back into the fabric of life, attend from within to the dehiscence (analogous to that of my own body) which opens it to itself and opens us upon it”. (VI 118) In order to understand the world we cannot forget that we are perceptual beings in a phenomenal (qua perceivable) horizon or field. In examining the what of appearance, we must also remember the how of appearance. This is equally important. We do not and cannot experience the two as separate. There is no atemporal core underlying appearance to which we can return, nor is there a wellspring of truth or reality separate from the perceiver-perceived relationship. Meaning is birthed in this interaction. We can only understand existence from within this interaction or “fabric of life”, which is existentially temporal.

According to Merleau-Ponty, “we are in the realm of truth.” (PhP xvi) No reduction can bring us any closer to the thing than we already are in experience. In fact, examining experience not only teaches us about the aseity of the thing, but also of our own worldly implication in the thing’s style, namely, that influence which Husserl wanted to deny as crucial to our idea of the thing. But we are psycho-historical and embodied beings situated in the world, who understand the world through interaction and participation. Husserl’s thought has thus been inverted by Merleau-Ponty to show that we cannot get back to the things themselves purely in thought; the notion of revealing the thing as separate from our own perception of it is nonsensical. There is no natal secret divorced from a thing’s style of appearing to which to return. We are united directly with things through our bodies and the way in which they appear to us as historically and factically situated beings.
The communication and communion between the world and ourselves is apparent in the styles of being. Subject and object, self and other, and perceiver and perceived are wed. Our affectations mesh with those of the world, and thus understanding can be born. Everything in the world is part of an interwoven Gestalt whereby we can only know things in the world as part of this contexture of which we are necessarily also a part. The world and our bodies are in a constant dynamic of overlapping; we cannot know one without the other. Each is inscribed in the other.

This clandestine inscription, which is opaque to reflection, is one of reciprocity: there is a mutual exchange, a call and answer, a primordial infiltration, which neither begins nor ends with the perceiver or the perceived. Vectors of affectation intertwine in our phenomenal field, stylistically revealing the “organic bonds between the perception and the thing perceived.” (VI 38) We implicitly understand this intertwining of self and world; it is always a fact for us (PhP xv), and no reduction will get us back to the thing itself because primordially there is no separation that would call for such a return (for we have never nor could ever have left and disappeared into the Cartesian cogito).

In supposing that he could return to a more fundamental, ontical being, Husserl tries to escape that which allows him to think that such a reduction is possible, namely, he sought to escape his own conceptualization of the thing via a conceptual idea – that there was in fact a “thing in itself”, a pre-experiential worldly being which he could know. However, the invisibility (that which Husserl took to be the essence of the thing or the “thing in itself”) is not the thing itself. It is just part of the aseity/thisness of the thing, which we implicitly understand as the depth of the thing’s visibility. It is that which is stylistically revealed in the making visible, the dehiscence of being in our experience of our phenomenal field. (EM 308) The thing’s essence is never, and can never be, divorced from its
existence and our experience of it. In experience, we do not and cannot separate a thing's, person's, or place's manner of appearing and its appearance. This is its style of being.

However, style does not merely serve as an epistemic corrective. This was not Merleau-Ponty's intent. Merleau-Ponty points to a more primordial understanding of existence, one in which experience precedes cognition, for we implicitly already understand existence as an intertwining of affectations. The notion of style gives us a new way to think about this worldly interweaving. We recognize things not via their qualities alone, but by the way in which these qualities are organized and expressed by their very being. This expression of being depends on facticity and history, and our relationship with these dynamics. The reduction obscures this expression of being, and divorces things from their relationship with temporal unfolding. The bond between the thing's existence and essence comes to us in experience. Cognitive descriptives cannot exhaust the thing's manner of being. The style of being tells us of the thing. This manner of expression, the thing's style, is fundamental and inseparable from its being.

Therefore, Merleau-Ponty's notion of style gives us a way in which to think the amalgamation of supposed cognitive contraries because "in the end, we are never in a position to take stock of everything objectively". (EM 310-1) Husserl's separation forgets the reciprocity between the body that is able to take stock of the things themselves and the world that offers itself up for counting. Husserl's "descriptive psychology" is not a return to the thing's depth of being, but an obscuring of that depth via cognition and the forgetting that any such description is made possible by experience. Merleau-Ponty's notion of style paints a portrait of the flourishing of experience and shows us that cognitive contraries are in an intimate relation of communication and communion that succeeds in addressing Husserl's insurmountable phenomenological aporias.
References


11. This was suggested to me by Professor Helen Fielding at The University of Western Ontario (London), February 2001.
12. Professor Michael Berman suggested this in our discussion of the habit-body at Brock University (St. Catharines, Ontario), February 2005.
16. I will speak of reciprocity further in this thesis, especially in Chapter 3, as it is a key notion that permeates Merleau-Ponty’s thinking from *Phenomenology of Perception* through *The Visible and the Invisible*.
20. *ibid.*
23. *ibid.*, 61.
25. Merleau-Ponty writes, “I do not bring together one by one the parts of my body; this translation and this unification are performed once and for all within me: they are my body itself.” (PhP 150)
31 Schneider is a patient with “motor and intellectual deficiencies” whom Merleau-Ponty used to problematize empirical and intellectual theories with respect to embodiment. (PhP 155n1)
33 In Chapter 2 of this thesis I elaborate on objective vectors of affectation, which inform our bodies by intertwining with our own subjective affective vectors. In his essay “Merleau-Ponty, Husserl, and Saturated Intentionality,” Steinbock writes, “both subjective and objective vectors are ‘active’ forces, as it were, ‘overdetermining’ the intentional relation” (55) between the world and us.
34 The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, 164.
37 The ontological reciprocity between perceivers and the world will be discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis with respect to The Visible and the Invisible.
38 The Imperative, 35.
40 ibid.
41 Cognitive conceptualizations are available to any real embodied viewer, but we are not discussing abstract artworks. It is possible to understand the artworks that I will discuss as representations of nature. However, Merleau-Ponty places emphasis on the phenomenological experience of the painting.
43 Paul Cézanne, Grand pin et terres rouges (hereafter Grand pin), oil on canvas. (Saint Petersburg: Hermitage Museum, 1890-95). (See Figure 1, Appendix)
45 For my investigation of style I am focusing on the visible. This does not regulate to the sidelines the style of the tactile. It ought to be noted that the tactile is always given in the visible. See PhP 313. I will discuss this crosshatching of the sensible in Chapter 3.
46 Merleau-Ponty did not deny that other artists also possessed this capacity, however, his references to them are fewer and so I have chosen, for the project at hand, to concentrate on Cézanne.
48 I borrow this term from Steinbock. See “Merleau-Ponty, Husserl, and Saturated Intentionality,” 54.
49 The Imperative, 27.
52 Raffaello Anzio, The School of Athens, stanza della segnatura. (Vatican City: Vatican Museum, 1509-1510). (See Figure 2, Appendix)
53 Monet’s works on the Seine near Giverny are a great example of the Impressionists attention to light and air. My favourite is Claude Monet’s morning on the Seine, near Giverny, oil on canvas. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1897). (See Figure 3, Appendix)
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56 ibid., 64.
57 ibid.
58 ibid., 65-6.
59 Joachim Gasquet's Cézanne: A Memoir with Conversations, 167.
61 The Imperative, 25.
63 ibid., 103.
65 "The Thinker and the Painter," 208.
67 "Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style," 238.
69 An example of this is his painting of rolling fruit, Rideau, cruchon et compotier, oil on canvas. (Witney, New York: Coll. Mrs. John Hay, 1893-94). (See Figure 4, Appendix)
70 Merleau-Ponty's Critique of Reason, 135.
73 Merleau-Ponty writes, "The natural world, as we have seen, is nothing other than the place of all possible themes and styles." (PhP450)
74 Joachim Gasquet's Cézanne: A Memoir with Conversations, 166.
75 ibid., 167.
76 See the final part of Chapter 1.
78 Joachim Gasquet's Cézanne, 148.
80 Merleau-Ponty writes in a "Working Note," "Being is what requires creation of us for us to experience it." (VI 197)
83 Alphonso Lingis, "Translator's Preface" (xI-xlvi), in VI(xlxi).
84 ibid., 57.
85 "The Thinker and the Painter," 200.
87 In "Merleau-Ponty, Husserl, and Saturated Intentionality," Steinbock uses the term "terrain" to refer to "a typically familiar milieu that is affectively oriented and orienting; it is affective in experience and constituted as privileged in and through optimal modes of comportment and correlatively, optimal meanings and physiognomies". (68)
“Flesh as Otherness,” 33.

Inscriptions: Between Phenomenology and Structuralism, 81-2.

ibid., 76-7.


Merleau-Ponty writes, “we could not dream of seeing ‘all naked’ because the gaze itself envelopes them, clothes them with its own flesh.” (VI 131)

“Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style,” 240.

ibid., 240-1.

ibid., 243.

Appendix

Fig. 1. Paul Cézanne, *Grand pin et terres rouges*, oil on canvas. (Saint Petersburg: Hermitage Museum, 1890-95).
Fig. 2. Raffaello Sanzio, *The School of Athens*, Stanza della Segnatura. (Vatican City: Vatican Museum, 1509-10.)
Fig. 3. Claude Monet, *Morning on the Seine, near Giverny*, oil on canvas. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1897).
Fig. 4. Paul Cézanne, *Rideau, cruchon et compotier*, oil on canvas. (Witney, New York: Coll. Mrs. John Hay, 1893-94).
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Monet, Claude. Bras de la Seine pres de Giverny, oil on canvas. Musée Ile-de-France, 1897.


