

# Merleau-Ponty, Bodily Knowledge and Felt Meaning

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## Introduction

"Common sense" tells us that we live in a dualistic universe, divided between physical things and mental things. We have learned to think this way because of the pervasive influence of Descartes and his discovery of the *cogito*. This influence is especially noteworthy with regards to the foundations of science, since a major problem with scientific thinking is that it privileges the physical model over the mental one. This is a problem because neither model can completely contain the whole of reality on its own.

For example, scientists continue to struggle with defining the exact nature of consciousness. While finding solutions for how the mind integrates information and how it focuses its attention is relatively easy; determining why or how consciousness occurs is much harder, since we can't just point to some physical mechanism to explain it. Clearly, explaining consciousness falls outside the range of the physical sciences.

Husserl with his phenomenological approach to experiential reality demonstrated that empirical science simply isn't rigorous enough to account for such a phenomenon as consciousness. Empirical science misses the central defining essence of consciousness because the physical model of the world cannot provide a direct description of lived experience. The dualist model that is behind empirical science has dominated our thinking for over 400 years. However, by practicing Husserl's *phenomenological epoché*, a procedure which requires that we bracket out all such knowledge and limit ourselves to investigating the world only in terms of how it is given to us through our direct experience of it, we can stop putting into play these preconceived ideas about the nature of reality, a result which he calls the *phenomenological reduction*. According to Husserl, our direct experience of the world is a temporal process, involving the ongoing correlation between the passive acquisition of noematic experience (the object as such, as it appears to consciousness) along with the active interpretation of this information through the noesis (conscious acts directed at the unfolding meaning of the object, as it undergoes changes over time). Consciousness is, then, for Husserl, an ongoing relationship between individuals and the world they inhabit (Husserl, 1982, pp. 59–62).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty provides a unique approach to the phenomenological investigation of consciousness, different from the central positions of the three foremost phenomenologists of his time. First of all, instead of echoing Husserl's notion that all consciousness is intentional, namely conscious *of* something, Merleau-Ponty developed the thesis that all consciousness is perceptual consciousness. Secondly, while he agreed with Heidegger that human reality, or Dasein, is constituted by the active intentionality of consciousness in the form of the life-world, he parted ways with him concerning the primacy of perception and its connection to the perceived world,

because for Heidegger the Being of beings is primary reality, and this is a notion not accessible to perception. Finally, Merleau-Ponty's position is also against Sartre's view that there is a "pure" consciousness, independent of being and without content or structure. He believed instead that Sartre's dichotomization of reality into being-in-itself and being-for-itself introduced relations between modes of being, which in his view properly belong between consciousness and the world. Merleau-Ponty's model of experiential reality is dialogical and relational rather than metaphysical and dualist.

This experiential orientation leads to the realization that the psychological realm is not just the interior world of conscious life, but is instead something which is constituted by the intentional relationship between the subject and its situatedness in what we all recognize as the real world of common experience. This relationship does not consist in the unification of two otherwise separate poles, either. Instead, the ego and its situation are recognized and defined only in terms of their relationship with one another. "The world is not an object such that I have within my possession the law of its making," writes Merleau-Ponty. "... Truth does not 'inhabit' only the 'inner man,' or more accurately, there is no 'inner man.' Man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b, p. xi). We find ourselves *already* in the world, and it is in this world that we come not only to know ourselves, but other people as well. Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty believed that Descartes's metaphysical dualism could not do justice to the discontinuous aspects of human experience, like for example the contingent and nonconceptual character of our ongoing relationship with the world and with other conscious beings. This is why he advocated "a new idea of reason, which does not forget the experience of unreason" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b, p. 8). He did not wish to lose sight of the ambiguity which he believed was as equally central to understanding the human condition as was clarity (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b, p. 8).

For Merleau-Ponty, we are connected to the world through our bodies. Based on this idea, he identified the two distinct types of space we experience: "lived space" and "objective space." Lived space is the first-person account of the space around each of us; it is the space in which someone's own body is the main point of orientation. Objective space, on the other hand, refers to a more mathematical interpretation of space, one that is defined by the three dimensions of length, breadth, and depth. In his view we relate to space bodily through both of these types of comprehension. When Merleau-Ponty concludes

that our bodies are not "in" time and space so much as they "inhabit" these dimensions instead (Merleau-Ponty, 2001a, p. 380), he is suggesting not only that we are aware of our own subjectivity through our own specific body, but also that we know the details of our own "lived space" through this embodiment, because it is our primary connection to space. Our bodies are thus the context in which we experience space, and even more fundamentally, the world. Our individual body also derives meaning from the concept of its own lived space, even while it has no control over the objective space it also inhabits simultaneously.

Merleau-Ponty describes an additional aspect of our bodily engagement with the world through another reference to Descartes's *cogito*. He thus explains that "Consciousness in the first place is not a matter of 'I think that,' but of 'I can,'" (Merleau-Ponty, 2001a, p. 348) suggesting that bodily knowledge and sensual experience of the world come before intellectual and conscious knowledge of it. This does not mean that the mind is somehow not factored into our understanding of the world, but rather that it is tied into our *bodily* understanding of the world. We engage with the world first through our bodies and then through our understanding of bodily limits; this means that we first experience the world directly through our bodily senses, and only then do we experience the world in relation to ourselves. In this way, consciousness is produced from our bodily engagement with the world around us.

Because humans are innately embodied, we therefore have an embodied consciousness as well. Because consciousness and embodiment are inseparable for Merleau-Ponty, our intersubjectivity is made known to us by the fact that our consciousness is recognized both on and through our bodies. This means that to know a body is to know a mind. (This is a key idea for the development of "felt meaning"—see below.) It also means that bodies can be seen as both subjects *and* objects. He therefore asks, "If my consciousness has a body, why should other bodies that I perceive not 'have' consciousness?" (Merleau-Ponty, 2001b, p. 450). This understanding of the correlation between body and consciousness defines intersubjectivity.

The true field of intersubjective experience for Merleau-Ponty, however, is not the body but language. Language precedes human existence and therefore all other engagements with intersubjectivity. When he stresses "we must re-discover 'the social world,'" (Merleau-Ponty, 2001b, p. 454) he is arguing that we are engaged with the social world through the "mere fact of existing" (Merleau-Ponty, 2001b, p. 454). This means inevitably that we are engaged with language too, because language is our primary means

of relating to the social world.

Furthermore, if the use of language is a shared activity, then this fact allows us to reconcile what would otherwise be, in any account of intersubjectivity, a conflictual engagement with the other. Because language precedes any single human being's existence, the subject already has a starting point for relating to the other. In this way, language has the capacity to serve as the main vehicle through which we can put a stop to all engagements with the other that are otherwise defined by conflict.

Similarly, Alfred Schutz recognizes how the world of daily life is not merely my own private world, but an intersubjective one. My experiences of this intersubjective world are not just my own, but are open to the verification or refutation by others. In what Schutz calls the "we-relation," two individuals share a community of time and space, and are mutually "tuned-in" to one another. This "tuning-in" constitutes a common interest, a common environment, and a common relevance bestowed upon their ongoing actions.

In his essay "Making Music Together" (Schutz, 1964, pp. 159-178), Schutz references G.H. Mead's example of "two wrestlers (who) communicate with each other by a 'conversation of gestures' which enables either of the participants to anticipate the other's behavior and to orient his own behavior by means of such anticipation" (Schutz, 1964, p. 160). The two wrestlers make up a shared community of space and time coordinates that open up common sectors, which in turn enable the articulation of an indirect form of communication. Both music-making and silence-sharing are indirect forms of communication as well.

The shared community of space and time is thus the foundation for the "face-to-face" relationship, which makes it possible for each person within the "we-relation" to have maximum visual access to the other's body as an experiential field. This common spatial environment serves as a shared frame of reference for the mutual scheme of expression, interpretation, verification, etc. The community of time, on the other hand, serves to provide the illusion of a shared personal moment, within which each person in the "we-relation" can follow the other's actions as they unfold phase by phase.

Both members of the we-relation experience the ongoing process of communication in a vivid present which consists of retentions and anticipations within each person's stream of consciousness concerning what each of them is saying, seeing, and doing. They are both talking and listening, to themselves and to the other, in an ongoing and interpenetrating way. "Similar interrelated activities," says Schutz,

would include "the relationship between pitcher and catcher, tennis players, fencers, and so on; we find the same features in marching together, dancing together, making love together, or making music together" (Schutz, 1964, p. 162). None of these relationships would be possible if they were limited merely to conflict.

Schutz defines the musical situation as "two series of events in inner time, one belonging to the stream of consciousness of the composer, the other to the stream of consciousness of the beholder, (which) are lived through simultaneously, which simultaneity is created by the ongoing flux of the musical process" (Schutz, 1964, p. 173). Schutz's thesis is that this sharing of the other's flux of experiences in inner time, this living through a vivid presence in common, constitutes a "we-relation," which is the foundation of all possible communication.

For Merleau-Ponty however, the body is the vessel from which we communicate, since it physically amplifies our words. Consequently, in his view, phenomenology must focus on the body, if for no other reason than to prevent its focus from remaining solely on the mind. In Sartre's existentialist account of phenomenology, for example, the mind plays a central role in defining our relation to the world and to others. This, in Merleau-Ponty's view, is naive because it leads to the mind and the body being seen as two separate entities. His own thesis, that embodiment defines our primary relationships to ourselves, to the world, and to each other, avoids such metaphysical dualism.

But how can the lived body assume the responsibility of being the general medium for our having a world in the first place? The answer is that it can do so because it has its own corporeal intentionality. Here Merleau-Ponty replaces the rigid dichotomy between mind and body of traditional philosophy with the concept of the "intentional arc" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 136), which binds us to the life-world we inhabit and anchors us within it (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 144). Bodily intentionality is so massive and so sensitive that its agency provides "a certain gearing of my body to the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 250), a gearing that is the "origin of space." More precisely, this origin is found in the body's "pre-objective" experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 267) of its own movement. Merleau-Ponty gives the example of the geometer who does not merely project abstract figures into an abstract space, but knows their relationships because of his ability to describe them with his own body (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 67).

The lived body is also the origin of both "spatializing" and "spatialized" space, between space understood as something

actively expanding and as something fixed and closed-in. The lived body thus has an empowering force, which lends to space the power to connect things which would otherwise be isolated from each other in the vastness of undifferentiated space. Merleau-Ponty claims that we should therefore avoid saying that our body is *in* space or *in* time; rather, we should say it *inhabits* them instead. "I am not in space and time," he writes, "nor do I conceive of space and time. I belong to them, my body combines with them and includes them" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 140).

Understanding the lived body as the source of expressive and oriented space has implications for our understanding of *place* as well. Place can no longer be reduced to a position in objective space; it is now seen as something ambiguously experienced by the lived body, which is itself oriented in a constantly changing and shifting way. Place is now understood to have a *virtual* dimension, previously overlooked by classical accounts. As Edward Casey explains in his book *The Fate of Place*: "A place I inhabit by my body is not merely some spot of space to which I bring myself as to a fixed locus—a locus that merely awaits my arrival. ... A place is somewhere I *might* come to; and when I do come to it, it is not just a matter of fitting into it. I come into a place as providing an indefinite horizon of my *possible* action" (Casey, 1997, p. 232). Place thus has a virtual dimension due to its imaginative possibilities.

Closely linked with the concept of a virtual dimension is the concept of a phenomenal dimension. Just as the theme of the phenomenal field was introduced by Husserl as an alternative to the empiricist idea of the perceptual world, so does Merleau-Ponty's theme of the phenomenal body introduce the idea of virtual movement into and out of places of possible action as an alternative to the empiricist idea of objective space. Merleau-Ponty's notion of place is that it is a *felt* experience; in fact, the lived body not only feels but *knows* the places to which it is especially attached. This kind of knowledge, moreover, has to do with *familiarity*, which has to do with seeing the body as "the matrix of habitual action" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 82).

Being-in-the-world is therefore for Merleau-Ponty not a matter of strictly measurable relationships. The human body is not merely a body among many others, it is also our only means for gaining access to the world and facing our tasks. The body's spatiality is not merely geometrical either, but is a spatiality of situatedness, of being oriented towards the myriad of possible worlds which confront it. This is a world of constant uncertainty, which has no absolute basis outside ourselves. If we find ourselves, for example, confronted by the collision between shifting

external perceptions and often misguided personal feelings, then all we can do is acknowledge how this is the fate of the human condition.

The relation between the body and sound is also more complex than is commonly realized. Human ears are actually not natural reflectors of sound in the world. They are instead transducers, and they play a key role in the making of sound. Because the perception of sound is not a mirror of nature, it's more accurate to say that perception *makes* sounds, even if it makes sounds differently than a microphone does. Because of the role of perception in sound production, we should say that we hear music with our minds and not just our ears.

In his book *Listening and Voice*, Don Ihde explains that "in the auditory dimension the imaginative mode is a matter of 'voice' in some sense" (Ihde, 1976, p. 12). He goes on to point out that in Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the expressive body "Merleau-Ponty notes that what is taken as an inner silence is in fact 'filled with words' in the form of what will here be characterized as 'inner speech.' Focally, a central form of auditory imagination is thinking as and in a language" (Ihde, 1976, p. 120). This ultimately means that language itself is embodied, and that "meaning in sound embodies language" (Ihde, 1976, p. 152).

How is it then, that when we hear a stream of sounds, what we hear is words? How does the mind know when they start and stop—how does it organize this stream of pressure on the eardrum into language and background noise? The answer is that the ear is a piece of the mind. The ear creates aural figures and aural backgrounds the way the eye makes figure and ground. Merleau-Ponty's conception of the phenomenal body contains the realization that the body is *embedded* in the world. We hear words and not just mere sounds because our minds have been trained to recognize certain repeated sound-patterns in meaningful ways.

Although it would seem that the relation between the sound of a word and its actual meaning is completely arbitrary, Merleau-Ponty doesn't see it that way. He distinguishes between the conceptual meaning of a word and its gestural meaning. He claims that specific sounds have an emotional impact on us and are thus able to convey an indeterminate meaning, a meaning that sets boundaries to and provides a grounding for the conceptual meaning that follows it. He even gives pathological evidence to support his theory, observing that "certain patients can read a text 'putting expression into it' without, however, understanding it. This is because the spoken or written words carry a top coating of meaning which sticks to them and which

presents the thought as a style, an affective value, a piece of existential mimicry, rather than as a conceptual statement” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 182). Similarly, many of the “nonsense” words in Lewis Carroll’s Jabberwocky poem from *Alice in Wonderland*, (e.g. “Twas brillig, and the slithy toves / Did gyre and gimble in the wabe / All mimsy were the borogoves / And the mome raths outgrabe”) as well as many of the passages from James Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*, (e.g., “Oftwhile balbulous, mithre ahead, with goodly trowel in grasp and ivoroiled overalls which he habitacularly fondseed”) lend support to the idea of gestural meaning. Although there is a definite grammatical structure to these selections, many of the words contained therein don’t make any sense at all—even though, somehow, they resonate in the mind all the same.

In his book *Dimensions of Apeiron*, Steven Rosen expands on Merleau-Ponty’s concepts of depth and reversibility by exploring their mathematical ramifications. Associating Euclidean space with classical ontology, Rosen points out that Merleau-Ponty was in essence proclaiming this classical notion of space to be ontical or experiential in nature, in contrast to the embodied, apeironic dimension (apeiron is the ancient Greek term for “the unbounded”) of topological space which Merleau-Ponty called “wild being” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 253). A key property of this wild or chaotic space is the reversibility of subject and object. To illustrate this property, Merleau-Ponty made reference to the situation of touching, wherein at one moment my left hand touches an external object and thus plays the role of subject, while in the next moment my left hand is touched by my right hand, which now plays the role of subject while my left hand now plays the role of object.

The same phenomenon occurs with the other senses. Merleau-Ponty thus turns to the faculty of vision and provides the example of the Necker cube, which consists of a drawing of two overlapping squares at an angle to one other, connected corner to corner by short lines. While the “cube” is in reality just a two-dimensional drawing of twelve lines, what we perceive is a three-dimensional cube. Since the cube seems to flip back and forth between two equally valid interpretations, however, this not only makes the picture ambiguous, but suggests that what we are seeing isn’t actually there. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, “I organize the cube” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 275). This means that by focusing on different parts of the cube, I change the structure of my perception. What I take as figure (as distinct from ground) determines whether I see the cube as from below or from above.

Ihde, in his book *Postphenomenology*, takes the “bistability” of the Necker cube a few steps further. “There is a third stability,” he notes, “a two-dimensional one, which may be gestalted. ...the central parallelogram is the body of an insect; the hexagonal outline is a hoe; and the lines from the parallelogram to the hexagon are the legs of an insect... [what emerges from this is] the hermeneutic tale as the vehicle of letting the ‘insect’ be seen. ...Were I to use the Merleau-Pontian phrase, I am demonstrating that ‘culture is perceived’” (Ihde, 1993, pp. 78-8).

Merleau-Ponty took the issue in a different direction, though, and asserted that reversibility equally applies to speech and what it signifies. Thus the speaking and thinking subject is not just a detached cogito but also an embodied participant in the phenomenological lifeworld. While reversibility merely changes what is being objectified, it does nothing to directly challenge the act of objectification whereby we pass irreversibly from subject to object. A gap still remains between the right hand touched and the right hand touching. The presencing of Being, the ability to glimpse what lies between the opposing perspectives, remains out of reach.

The topological example of the Moebius strip shows a way out of the dilemma. Although mathematicians refer to it as a one-sided figure, we can still experience both its inside and outside simultaneously. Yet even though the two perspectives are different, they become in this instance paradoxically one and the same. Thus, if we continue to trace a line on one side of such a figure, upon returning to the starting point we find that both sides have been traced. What we have, though, is merely a two-dimensional model of one-sidedness within which inside and outside get folded into one another.

For such a phenomenon to occur in three-dimensional space, we would have to produce something on the line of a Klein bottle, a bottle whose tube-like top folds into and opens up inside itself without, however, allowing a hole in its body, clearly an “impossible” object – at least, without access to the notion of a fourth dimension. This “higher dimension,” which is needed to complete the formation of the Klein bottle, is also the dimension of prereflective Being. Take the example of the worm Uroburos that swallows its own tail. For this to happen, its mouth becomes the hole that swallows itself. Similarly, the Klein bottle can be understood within its own integrity to possess such an enclosure, so that its hole is canceled out by becoming part of its whole. It thereby becomes a self-containing object that contains its prereflective origin without a break.

Eugene Gendlin's therapeutic practice of initiating a discussion with his clients concerning the notion of "felt meaning" can be seen as another example of a self-containing object, in which the mind-body duality is bridged. We are thus led, with the reversibility operating in wild space, to a realization of the intimate harmony of outside and inside, object and subject, bounded and boundless. As Gendlin explains in his book *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning: A Philosophical and Psychological Approach to the Subject*, "We are most aware of the dimension of felt meaning when our symbols fail to symbolize adequately what we mean" (Gendlin, 1997, p. 64). He goes on to say that at any given moment our focus of attention involves meanings that lie beyond our immediate focus. In other words, only part of the presently held meaning is symbolized explicitly; there are always some inexplicit aspects that have yet to be symbolized, even if they could be so at any moment. Once any of these hitherto inexplicit meanings is made manifest, though, its passage from inexplicit meaning to explicit meaning leads to something that we recognize, experience—even feel. While these implicit meanings remain on the fringe of our thought, however, they still contribute to the meaning development of whatever we were thinking about since they remain within the focus of our attention. In other words, our experience of meaning involves associating symbols with felt meanings (Gendlin, 1997, pp. 66-67).

In his book, *Focusing*, Gendlin identifies six focusing movements. They consist of the following: clearing a space, the felt sense, finding a handle, resonating, asking, and receiving (Gendlin, 1978, p. 64). He suggests that the subject should pay special attention to how their body feels at each stage in the process (Gendlin, 1978, p.51). The first step involves silencing what is going on inside your head and paying attention instead to how your body feels, especially in your gut. The second step involves selecting a personal problem, and, without thinking about it explicitly, paying attention to what this problem feels like. Step three requires that you provide a descriptive name for this feeling. Step four asks that you move back and forth between this word and the felt sense it evokes. Step five requires that you ask, what is it about this problem that invokes this feeling? Keep asking this question while trying to sense how it makes you feel, and keep doing this until it leads to a shift or a release inside your body. Step six involves being receptive to this shift, staying with it for a while and acknowledging that you have focused on something real. (See Gendlin, 1978, pp. 43-45). In order to illustrate the difficulty with how the process actually works in practice,

Gendlin refers to how one of his best focusing teachers overcame his own problem with focusing: "At first, when I tried to focus, I could never get a felt sense. All I had were words I could feel, but there never was any feeling except right in the words. ...I was only looking at the center of each feeling, and in the center was what the words said. It took me three months till one day I noticed there was more to the feeling. It had, sort of, fuzzy edges. They were beyond what the words got. That was the breakthrough for me" (Gendlin, 1978, p. 90).

In his appendix to *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning*, Gendlin acknowledges his debt to Merleau-Ponty for developing the idea that "'emotional essence' constitutes our experience of the meanings of words" (Gendlin, 1997, p. 287). Gendlin adds that this notion of emotional essence "shows that language, rather than being arbitrary symbols, is a way of being in—and 'singing'—the world" (Gendlin, 1997, p. 287). He then explains how Merleau-Ponty, by developing the theme of felt meaning, is able to point out its function in articulating the experience of novel ideas and expressions (Gendlin, 1997, p. 287). When we "sing the world" we move freely between the opposing fields of sensual feeling and abstract ideation.

Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on dialogical relationships is also important to the creation of meaning in both its social and ecological contexts. In a dialogue between people, for example, each of the participants connects with the other's feelings and meanings. Hearing plays as great a role here as speaking, and both are understood to be part of the same effort to bring to light something that makes sense. He even goes further, adding that "to the extent that I understand, I no longer know who is speaking and who is listening" (Merleau-Ponty, 1973, pp. 143-144). Such an authentic dialogue will be recognized as a continuation of something that has already been going on for a long time. Other examples of this kind of dialogue would be the ongoing relationships between reader and writer, painter and viewer, musician and listener. In each of these situations, a shared experience and a shared language are presupposed. In addition, there is no struggle for control between the participants, since the enterprise is a commonly shared one and the roles of artist and audience are recognized as necessary and complementary to one another.

The whole scenario within which such a dialogue takes place is part of the larger issue of the perceptual intertwining which Merleau-Ponty characterizes as "the flesh of the world": I touch the earth while the earth touches me. In dialogue, not only do we see and touch one another, but we are also visible and tangible for others. The world is

not merely an object to be observed by consciousness. Our embodied subjectivity is never located purely in either our being touched or in our touching, but in the intertwining of these two aspects. Merleau-Ponty's image of the "chiasm" refers to this intertwining between body and world; it describes how this overlapping and encroachment can take place between touching and being touched, where they are never exactly the same thing. Similarly, every authentic dialogue is intertwined with the thoughts of each participant, in the sense that the thought of each makes possible and is made possible by the dialogue, and by the perceptual domain it makes possible. (see Merleau-Ponty, 1973, p. 14). Discourse, thought, and perception are not autonomous domains. They mutually implicate one another in such a way that our access to any of them involves all of the others. The ongoing possibility of transitioning from one to the other is also part of what Merleau-Ponty calls "the reversibility which is the ultimate truth" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 155).

If perception and thought are intertwined in dialogue with discourse through reversibility, then perhaps silence also can be shown to be intertwined with discourse as part of reversibility too. In other words, if perception can be focused in different ways (like concentrating on touch or on sight or on any combination of the senses) and if thinking can be engaged in according to different modes (like musing, planning, constructing, theorizing, or calculating), then silence can be engaged with in different ways as well. According to Merleau-Ponty, we recall, the world is involved in a kind of dialogue with me—and I with it. Since I am not merely subjected to the world but am engaged in both speaking to it and listening to it as well, then both speaking and listening require any number of the modalities of silence, involving different shifts of focus and shifts in the cutting off of attention as well.

For Merleau-Ponty, the being of the world can only appear to us as both present and absent; it is never simply present. We therefore interrogate the world and listen to its call as it is jointly constituted by both discourse and silence. Similarly, both the being of man and the being of the world are constituted by passive and active modes of consciousness encroaching upon one another. They do not negate one another as opposites, but when taken together provide depth. In the intersection between man and world, meaning reveals and conceals itself simultaneously. Meaning is therefore not all of a piece but is rather in a state of constant tension between the poles of speech and silence. These poles are not merely coextensive, though. Instead, silence serves as the foundation for discourse just as the

world is the foundation for objects. Since felt meaning only takes place when we are at a loss for words, then it too can be seen as part of our ongoing dialogue with silence at the limits of language.

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