In recent years, I have become extremely puzzled by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's reading of Henri Bergson and no more so than in *La Nature* where Merleau-Ponty engages in a curious polemic, what is for me a strange account of Bergson's notion of creative evolution. It is true, of course, that *Creative Evolution* is one of Bergson's most difficult and notorious efforts, one that earned him intense criticism from largely conservative forces in France. In that book he proposes an original account of nature and of evolution, one that challenges the mechanistic and positivistic approaches to science that dominated his era but which also provides no support for factions seeking the means to justify finalism, for it is a text that makes its own strong scientific claims and proposes its own original idea of creation. In that text Bergson argues that the classical, scientific view, derived from René Descartes' notion of matter as extended substance and Isaac Newton's laws of motion, is useful insofar as it makes possible the objective repetition of identical material parts and therefore, the prediction of the motions of bodies, but that it is not an adequate model for the evolution of life. According to the classical view of matter, change is the displacement of parts that do not themselves change. As the Cartesian argues, they may be split into smaller and smaller parts, but in accordance with what would become Newton's laws of motion, once any part has left its position, it can always return. In principle, any state of the group of material parts may be repeated as often as desired. The group then has no history; it is therefore said to be time-reversible, and, as Bergson points out, in this structure, nothing new is
or can be created. What any group of material parts will be is already there in what it is, and what it is may well include all the points of the universe with which it is related (Bergson, *Creative Evolution*; Depew 25).

Moreover, for classical science, the tendency is to constitute isolable systems of matter that can be treated as closed mechanisms. However, as Bergson argues, in a startlingly original way, the isolation is never complete. Even a so-called isolated (closed) system generally remains subject to external influences, binding that system to another more extensive one, and so on, until they reach the solar system, which is presumably the most objectively isolated and independent system of all. But even here (and this is perhaps the most precocious statement Bergson makes) there is no absolute isolation; meaning, matter does not exist in a closed system. For our sun radiates heat and light beyond even the farthest planet, connecting our solar system by a tenuous thread to the rest of the universe which itself goes on infinitely. And along this thread, Bergson will argue, *something is transmitted to even the smallest particle*, something that does not conform to the universal laws of mechanical motion insofar as it is not repeatable, not atomistic, not isolated, and not time-reversible. This something is what he calls the duration immanent to the whole universe. This is, he maintains, how the universe endures as a whole, meaning this is how it *creates* forms and elaborates the absolutely new (*Creative Evolution* 7-11).

How such duration might occur is the subject of *Creative Evolution*. Indeed, for what became the science of non-equilibrium thermodynamics, Bergson's claims may well be standard. Non-equilibrium thermodynamics supports the idea that energy flows through structures and organizes them to be more complex than their surroundings. Organized and structured patterns appear out of seemingly random collisions of atoms. Non-equilibrium thermodynamics studies
structures that increase in complexity and increase their capacity to do work insofar as they are open systems through which matter and energy flow. On the scale of living bodies, matter enters as food, drink, air; then it is transformed, and then excreted. On the sub-atomic scale, life's basic process is to take the low-entropy, long-wavelength photons of visible and ultraviolet light from the sun and re-radiate them as shorter-wavelength infrared radiation. This is the conversion of light into living matter and heat; this is the tenuous thread along which heat and light are radiated from our own sun and from the multitude of suns in the universe releasing the low-entropy, long-wavelength photons of visible and ultraviolet light which are then re-radiated as shorter wavelength infrared radiation: living matter, heat (Margulis 28, 32, 37). Strictly speaking, and contrary to the view of Bergson that will be suggested by Merleau-Ponty, there is, in Bergson's formulation of a "tenuous thread," no notion of an original life force; for there is nothing at the beginning of evolution beyond the molecules of matter and heat, which have, however, physical and chemical forces of their own.

The universe is said to have begun in a singularity, an explosion from an immensely hot, infinitely dense point 13.5 billion years ago. Within 1 second, its matter spread out 3 light years; by 3 minutes, cooling, it spread out 40 light years. The matter was simply traveling on the space as the space expanded (Margulis 24). Insofar as the basic operation of life is to trap, store and convert starlight into energy through processes such as photosynthesis whereby photons are incorporated, building up bodies and food, the photon (which is a quantum of electromagnetic radiation) is the principle energy source for sex and eating (Margulis 16). Given this view of origins, it seems to make sense for Bergson to argue that,

the resistance of [apparently] inert matter was the obstacle that had first to be overcome. Life seems to have succeeded ... by making itself very small ... bending to physical and
chemical forces ... Of phenomena in the simplest forms of life, it is hard to say whether they are still physical and chemical or whether they are already vital (*Creative* 98-99, *Oeuvres* 579).

Although the first animate forms were extremely simple, Bergson maintains that evolution does not follow a single line from these organisms but that it moves in bursts, breaking up the way a shell explodes into fragments; and in the evolutionary process each fragment also bursts apart and so on. This motion is an effect of two tendencies that, he argues, generate evolution: instinct and intelligence. As tendencies, they are neither opposites nor contradictory; the presence of one does not signal the complete absence or negation of the other. Nor does the evolutionary process move along a continuous line from instinct to intelligence so that they differ only in degree of complexity; intelligence is not conceived of as a higher degree or development of instinctual processes. Rather, they coexist and often intertwine, insofar as they are defined by Bergson as differences in nature or kind. In other words, given instinct and intelligence – one turned toward life, the processes we have called duration, the thread of light that *creates* forms and elaborates them, and the other toward matter whose tendency, we have noted, is to be repeatable, to separate into homogeneous, independent units – both stand out from a background of consciousness in general which is co-extensive with universal life; nevertheless, there is no continuity between them. Rather than differing in degree, instinct and intellect differ with respect to structure, function and orientation. Instinct grasps differences in kind, heterogeneities, and what endures, whereas intelligence grasps difference of degree, homogeneities, binding like to like – so only repeatable facts are entirely adaptable to intellectual conceptions (*Creative* 186).

This is why instinct is not merely a diminished form of intelligence, and so it is not intelligence at all but has a completely different structure from that of intelligence, and this is
what makes it possible for instinct to operate alongside intelligence. If we accept the argument that in its receptive and perceptive elements and in its viscera, every organism is a sum of contractions, retentions and protentions in virtue of its lived present, its cellular heredity, and its actions in its environment, then pure duration can be understood as the temporalization of affective (receptive) states, the orientation of instinct. For human beings, it is "the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states," thus allowing each state to be what it is, as when we listen to music, and the notes, though qualitatively heterogeneous with respect to tone, nevertheless follow one another, constitute a duration, a tenuous thread, a temporalization, without ever losing their discreteness (Bergson, Time 100, Oeuvres 67). Bergson argues that heterogeneous, affective states accompany all our perceptions, although our awareness of them may be overshadowed by external perceptions, which are always oriented toward our interests and actions in the world. That is, perceptions are external relations to other bodies, objects or phenomena, but there is one, the "perception" of one's own body, that is not actually a perception insofar as it is not an external relation but is given from "within." The non-perception of one's own body alerts us to the existence of a relation that is not external, not extended as matter. It alerts us to affections that are situated precisely at the interval between the multiplicity of perceptual excitations received from without and the movements about to be executed in response to those perceptions.

In lower organisms it is difficult to distinguish the perception that is oriented by action and is an external relation, from affective, temporal life – this tenuous thread between the organism and the world – because survival requires that the interval between perception and
action be infinitesimal. Active perception, receptive feeling and active response must be simultaneous. In higher animals, perception, affective sensibility, and action are, however, distinguishable. Theorists like Merleau-Ponty who prefer not to differentiate them have tended to equate sensation with physiology and perception with psychology, and to focus almost entirely on auditory or visual perceptions. From this point of view, the distinction between sensory discrimination and perceptual discrimination is theoretical but not factual; it is thought to be impossible to dissociate the two elements because bare sensation is presumed not to exist but rather always to be included in the complex of perception. This follows from the Gestaltist idea that a stimulus associated with a context acquires a meaning and that an adequate behavioral response to a stimulus carries a meaning that may modify perception. Moreover, since "hearing and sight are the main channels of communication ... stimuli reaching the mind via these gates are therefore the most prone to bear a context-related message" (Cabanac 400-403). However, as some contemporary physiologists maintain, other sensory inputs exist in addition to the five senses, such that any of the various afferent neuron pathways discovered by physiologists is potentially a source of sensation (Cabanac 404). Thus, the affective, sensible opening to the outside world as well as the mechanisms for transporting information from the outside world to the body's sensitive receptors are well defined. Additionally, afferent neurons convey a "vast amount of information about the physiological state of the milieu interieur" (Cabanac 404). Such internal nervous sensors, meager as they are, sensing physical and chemical variations in the body, nevertheless contribute to the argument for the existence of sensations independently of perceptions. Insofar as most of these afferent pathways are limited to a bundle of only a few neurons, the contrast between this tenuous thread and the large
avenues of the classical senses (especially sight and hearing) may explain how the latter have dominated not only psychology, but also philosophy (Cabanac 404).

Perceptions, Bergson argues, are largely chosen on the basis of the organism's interests, thus, they are decidedly narrow in their focus. Yet because the sensible affect, that is, the influence of the world on our bodies, cannot be chosen, it links us, sensibly, to the rest of the world on a far-reaching scale. In order to choose an appropriate response to each perceptual situation, higher organisms maintain a zone of indetermination that allows for an interval between each perception and their response to it. Such an interval, a zone of indetermination, makes possible the emergence of receptive, felt, sensible, affective images from the ontological unconscious, images that constitute what Bergson calls creative memory (as opposed to habitual or learned memory which remains the same in every similar situation). The movements of such organisms, following perception, are an effect of the tendency toward intelligence that is associated with the movement of the organism in the direction of action and matter. It is the tendency to act in the world on the basis of one's interests. But duration and action, like duration and perception, are differences in nature or kind and not merely differences of degree. This is because the "moments" of heterogeneous, temporal duration are differentiated qualitatively. Qualitative differentiations, we have noted, are heard in music as differentiations of tone but also of modulation, loudness or softness; or beyond sound, they are felt. Such sensitivities, "the capacity of an afferent neuron to detect a physical or chemical change occurring at its endings and to transmit this information to the nervous centers," have been described by physiologists as "sensation" (Cabanac 404). And while cautious physiologists recognize that "the brain possesses properties that can no more be explained by its
neuronal constituents than life can be explained by the atomic or molecular properties of the constituents of the living cell," and that what is called consciousness is one such property, nevertheless, insofar as consciousness may be defined as the border between those neuronal constituents and the world, then perhaps "sensation can be defined as the emergence of sensitivity into consciousness" (Cabanac 404).

Thus, what for Bergson are affective sensitivities may now arise in the form of what we may call sensitive images, sensations emerging into a present perception, thereby affecting one's self and filling perception with their qualitative coloring, whether this is the shock of a painful fall or the pleasure of the sun's warmth against the skin. As we have argued, it appears that afferent neurons convey a vast amount of information concerning the outside world and the physiological state of the milieu interieur. And this transmission of qualitatively heterogeneous information is to be differentiated from the movements of material entities through space, movements that are continuous and homogeneous, movements that are intellectualized quantitatively in terms that can be measured and compared. Repetition, along with habitual perceptions and actions, dominate intelligence because they order the world in terms of causality, contiguity, and identity. But affective sensibility, arising as the sensitive and felt component alongside perception, may be said to constitute a unique type of memory. This so-called ontological memory is constituted in relation to the sensation, the affective image, the body's own influence on itself, resulting in the pleasure and pain that often arises with perception but does not merge with perception insofar as it is receptive rather than active and narrowly focused. These qualitative affects, these sensitivities, tend to become conscious only in relation to a new present. They emerge into perception precisely in the interval between
perception and action. In the interval the organism pauses; in this pause, this slow down, it ceases to pursue its interested actions, thereby allowing affective sensitivities to enter into perception, to provide an absolutely new interpretation of the present perception. Perhaps, viewed in this way, we can see how, for Bergson, every affective image emerging into perception is a point of view on the whole of affective life. Just as in the universe, our sun radiates heat and light beyond even the farthest planet many light years away, connecting our solar system by a tenuous thread to the rest of the universe, so along this thread something is transmitted to even the smallest particle. By this means light from the past of the universe is converted into living matter and heat in our own bodies. So we are, all of us, constructed out of the memories of the universe itself. As such, when we are not acting merely out of habit, our perceptual life and the choices we make concerning when and how to act come from interpretations informed by such virtual memory images called forth by perceptual consciousness in an interval of attentive reflection (Olkowski ch.4; Bergson, *Matter* 102, *Oeuvres* 248).

Just as duration and action constitute differences in kind – although they are often found together in our conscious states and our actions – so too it is with instinct and intelligence. By instinct, Bergson means simply a tendency to connect with whatever an organism finds at hand using "inborn" organized instruments, even if these instruments have to be constructed. For example, the inborn capacity of a baby to suck the breast is an instance of instinct because the mouth, a definite object, seeks another definite object, yet the two function as a single process. Instinct functions directly, constituting immediate connections, which are singularities (*Creative* 140, *Oeuvres* 613-614). The most obvious instinctive connections that come to mind...
exist between animals and their world. If an amoeba is touched in any part by a foreign body, every part of the amoeba immediately retracts. "Perception and movement being here blended in a single property – contractility" (Matter 55, Oeuvres 203). What this implies, however, is that this tendency is just as well manifested in complex organisms, including humans, as when the eye is pulled by the motion of a thigh moving under clothing or the arm flings out to cushion a fall. The eye and the body's movement, the ground and the arm's trajectory are singularities, each one thing, not two. Instinct acts without the interposition of any distance, thus it acts "sympathetically," but only as a singular connection in which there is no distinction between the perception, the emerging sensation, and the action. The other tendency in evolution is intelligence, which extends itself in the direction of matter so as to induce matter to act on matter. It operates by extending, thus breaking the sympathetic singularity of the instinct into parts that are structurally independent of one another. By separating the elements of instinct into different parts, intelligence makes these parts into objects or tools that can function effectively for a wide variety of uses and actions. Intelligence often transfers functions from one object or tool to another, relating an object to another object, a part to a part, by means of reasoning processes that connect like to like, cause to effect, and attribute to subject (Creative 147, Oeuvres 620). Thus, fascinated by objects and action, intelligence externalizes itself in space and quickly constitutes the world in terms of immobile and independent objects.

The Bergsonian conception of tendencies that do not differ merely by degree but are really different in nature denies the prevalent view that takes instinct and intelligence to be merely successive degrees of the same development and opens up the possibility that they may coexist in one act insofar as they are of different natures; thus their functioning and orientation
in any realm are not the same. Other animal and plant characteristics, such as sex and gender may turn out to be structured similarly. That is, sexes and genders, in accordance with a theory of sexual difference, would be able to be differentiated as differences in kind and not as differences in degree. Thus, there would be no original "human nature," out of which "male" and "female" each represent degrees on a continuum, moving perhaps in opposite directions, to opposing extremes, along a continuum of homogeneous steps. Rather, "female," and "male" might be understood as truly heterogeneous, a relation of differences in quality. All the more because Bergson insists that the double-form that consciousness enacts arises because the "real" world has this double form; thus there is always a material basis for instinct and intelligence – they are structured by and in relation to the natural and social environment, but also, as we have argued, in relation to the matter and energy of the universe.

For Bergson then, instinct and intelligence are tendencies that differ in nature or kind. The former is qualitative and is felt as a temporal flux, the thread of duration, while the latter is quantitative and so is objectified in space. In La Nature, Merleau-Ponty proposes that for Bergson, there are, or at least there appear to be, two "orders" in nature. One, the physical-mathematical order of nature, an order which consists of the constancy of certain laws such that the same causes produce the same effects, and the other, a vital, living order according to which different causes or conditions produce the same effects as those of the physical order, effects that in the end amount to a system in which the vital order cancels out the physical-mathematical order. These two orders are, according to Merleau-Ponty, not merely what he defines as contrary (one, the vital, undergoing constant evolution, and the other, the physical-mathematical, static; one internal, and the other external; one temporal, and the other spatial);
they are contradictory in an absolute way. The existence of qualitative, instinctive life, according to Merleau-Ponty is enough to negate the physical-mathematical order. For Bergson, he declares, the two do not intertwine because they are contradictories and affirming the sympathetic life of instinct, which, for Bergson, consists of singularities is, according to Merleau-Ponty, the equivalent of denying the reality of the physical-mathematical order, that of spatiality and quantities (*La Nature* 87-95). For Merleau-Ponty, instinct and intelligence differ only by degree and not in kind. Furthermore, whereas Bergson claims that because it constructs tools, intelligence constantly creates new relations, that indeed, intelligence has been constituted along with the material world through a process of reciprocal adaptation, Merleau-Ponty counters that this cannot be the case.

This is because, Merleau-Ponty argues, since for Bergson every living organism is a unique series of acts, its affective, temporal life (which is also its principle of qualitative change) must be a principle of purely internal unity that remains absolutely opposed to what Merleau-Ponty would call, in *The Structure of Behavior*, the physical order (137-145). Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty claims, this temporality, this *durée* originates in an *élan commune*, a mysterious unity at the origin of the evolutionary process that makes possible the resonance or relationship between animal, plant, and microbe but in the process is used up and loses its force (*La Nature* 87-89). So, Merleau-Ponty argues, Bergson must conceive of nature as the reproduction of one and the same original being whereby the ends dominate the means (90). This makes Bergson's *durée* into a storage space, a quantity of vital force that empties itself out into a physical nature which it itself has created through an *inversion* of vital force into matter, making matter into the negation of temporal life. Merleau-Ponty reasons that unity between
these contradictions can only be accomplished by positing an external unifying principle such as God. Unwilling to do this, Merleau-Ponty declares that Bergson is left with dualism (93). Alternatives must be found. In place of the choice between God and dualism, Merleau-Ponty proposes another concept, another way of knowing the relations between psychic and physical, between consciousness and body. That concept is *intertwining*. It is this concept that I would like to examine, not I hope in order to establish a new contradiction, one between Bergson and Merleau-Ponty, in which the ideas of one can survive only by negating and so permanently defeating those of the other, but rather, in order to proceed against this idea as one proceeds against a limit (Olkowski ch. 3). The limit I have in mind here is the limit of perception without sensibility, the limit that casts these two as merely differences of degree rather than differences in kind, thus as differently structured and different in function. That is, I want to examine the conceptual and practical limitation of a theory of perception that does not consider the role of the sensible affect and ontological memory in the constitution of life and thought.

In Chapter Four of *The Visible and the Invisible*, titled "The Intertwining – The Chiasm," Merleau-Ponty considers the relation between the body as sensible, which is to say "objective" and the body as sentient, that is, as "phenomenal" body. He makes this inquiry in the context of interrogating the access of such a sensible-sentient or objective-phenomenal body to Being. "Objectivity" and the objective body, as Merleau-Ponty defines it in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, is something to be determined in relation to experience. "It is a matter of understanding how a determinate shape or size – true or even apparent – can come to light before me, become crystallized in the flux of my experience and, in short, be given to me (Phenomenology 300). Objectivity requires knowing how it is possible for determinate shapes
to be available for experience at all. But the possibility of determinate shapes is also called into question by Merleau-Ponty insofar as the body is experienced as a point of view on things, thus every body would experience a different point of view, even though individual things are given as abstract elements of one total world. Since the two elements form a system, an intertwining, in which each moment, that of a body with a particular point of view and that of things in the totality of their world are immediately expressive of one another, objectivity would seem to be difficult to achieve. The relationship between body and things, point of view and world, if they continually express one another would appear to be anything but determinate and the question of how objectivity is possible remains unanswered.

Merleau-Ponty, of course, refuses the Kantian solution whereby the subject thinks rather than perceives his (sic) perception and its truth (*Phenomenology* 301). And in so doing, he is arguing that neither perception nor cognition alone operate to make the world determinate. Instead, the experience of the determinate sizes and shapes of things, what is known as perceptual constancy, always presumes the existence of a world and a system of experience in which the body is inescapably linked with phenomena. That is, insofar as the body and phenomena are intertwined elements, expressive of one another, determinacy or objectivity will require an "existential" function, a pre-logical act by which means the subject first takes "his" place in the world (303, n. 1). The idea of the "existential function" has been fully articulated by Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*, and it appears that Merleau-Ponty closely follows Sartre's thinking in his own exposition. Arguing that the eye is the *center* of the perceptive visual field, as the ears are the *center* of a perceptive aural field, Sartre emphasized that we neither see nor hear these centers insofar as we are these centers. At the same time, the structure of the
world is such that we cannot see, hear or touch without being visible, touchable or heard. I cannot be an object for me, but the things in the world indicate that I am there (Nothingness 418, 419). As Sartre expresses this, "My being-in-the-world, by the sole fact that it realizes a world, causes itself to be indicated to itself as a being-in-the-midst-of-the-world" (419). Therefore, to say that I have a body is the same as saying that there is a world. Similarly, on the descriptive level, Merleau-Ponty argues that "my experience breaks forth into things and transcends itself in them, because it always comes into being with the framework of a certain setting in relation to the world which is the definition of my body" (Phenomenology 303). So-called pre-logical, existential functions are necessary for Merleau-Ponty insofar as they allow him to avoid Kant's conclusion that consciousness constitutes the world, a conclusion that would eliminate the existential function of bodies and things. As Sartre pointed out, "It must be conceded to Kant that 'the I Think must be able to accompany all our representations.' But need we then conclude that an I in fact inhabits all our states of consciousness and actually effects the supreme synthesis of our experience?" (Transcendence 34). The question for Sartre is whether the transcendental I Think unifies representations or if it is not the case that representations are unified so that it is possible to produce an I Think. For Merleau-Ponty, following Sartre, descriptions of the pre-logical existential functions, the existential intertwining of body and world, precede knowledge and explanation and are in fact the source of the unity of our ideas. This is why, for Merleau-Ponty, questions about knowing must always begin with the pre-logical existential domain which can be expressed phenomenologically by means of description. Insofar as the Kantian presupposition (that the world conforms to the consciousness we have of it) always begins with an account of sensibility already mediated by cognition, it does not suggest the possibility of the
intertwining of world and body, the pre-logical, pre-cognitive functions of the sensible-sentient, objective-phenomenal body. Thus, for Kant, the sensible realm of intertwining remains, by definition, unknown and unknowable. A much more satisfactory approach, for Merleau-Ponty, is that of Descartes. It seems to be Merleau-Ponty's choice to, in a manner, return to Descartes, who at least, in the midst of his profound doubt and in spite of his deepest fears, is not unwilling to examine the world of sensible experience on its own terms.

So, for example, we find in the *Phenomenology* an account of the thing and the natural world in relation to perception. This section of the *Phenomenology* appears just before the chapter on the *cogito*, a chapter that will address the problem of knowledge from the point of view of the knowing subject. Merleau-Ponty may be anticipating that investigation here by taking up some of the themes of Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Descartes, of course, begins the *Meditations* with an examination of sensation and experience and finds that both can be deceptive, thus neither can be trusted as a source of certainty for knowledge. In this context, it is not surprising that Merleau-Ponty's analysis of sensation and experience will overturn the results of the Cartesian analysis, because Merleau-Ponty describes the experience of the body, which remains ambiguous, rather than the knowledge of a *cogito*, which must be certain. However, in the same way that Descartes produces a privileged intuition of clear and distinct truth, Merleau-Ponty will insist upon certain privileged perceptions that guarantee unity to the perceptual process and serve as the basis for constancy or determinacy. Relying on the experiments of Gelb and Stumpf, Merleau-Ponty argues that for each perception there is an optimum distance from which "it" (presumably, the thing) requires to be seen as well as a direction from which the thing demands to be viewed for an optimal showing of itself, since at a
lesser or greater distance, or from a different direction, the perception becomes blurred, excessive or deficient.

Variations in appearance must then be exactly what Descartes took them to be. They are not real distortions of the object; they are not even perceived distortions, since perception, as we will see, gives us the thing. They are and can only be felt distortions, felt as the effect of an unequal distribution of the object's influences on the perceiver. In clinical experiments, such distortions can be controlled and so eliminated either by repeating the experiment until the desired results are "learned," or by removing all variables. The constancy of the experiment is duplicated in the perceptual process itself when, as perceivers, we constitute habits or norms that tend toward a maximum of visibility of a certain useful type. Failure to perceive in accordance with these habits or norms produces distortions on the level of feeling and on the level of perception. "A living body, seen at too close quarters, and divorced from any background against which it can stand out, is no longer a living body, but a mass of matter as outlandish as a lunar landscape, as can be appreciated by inspecting a segment of skin through a magnifying glass" (Phenomenology 302). The feeling arises that the thing is outlandish, and this feeling is based on the confused perception of a mass of matter that fails to meet the requirements of established norms. Merleau-Ponty thereby reiterates on the level of perception what Descartes insists upon on the level of cognition – that complex sensations (sensibility and feeling) can often deceive the perceiver or thinker. This may be why Merleau-Ponty concludes that in the flux of experience, when parts of objects mingle they become confused, but when they link up into a clearly articulated whole, they reveal their wealth of detail – they become clear and distinct (302-303).
The conclusion is that we must reorganize complex sensations or feelings in order for them to play any role in perception.

Merleau-Ponty argues that numerous experimental procedures have established the veracity of this claim. For example, there is the examination of the thing by means of its qualities – color, hardness, weight – as opposed to its geometrical properties. This is a particularly interesting discussion because it appears to entertain a reversal of the intuitions reached by Descartes through the process of doubt. Merleau-Ponty, whether deliberately or not, addresses the Cartesian "painters" argument with his own meditation on color. Descartes' argument is that we have no way of differentiating with certainty between the state of waking and that of sleep, but even so, the objects that appear to us in sleep must at least be like painted representations formed in the likeness of realities, at least with respect to what is most general – i.e., the eyes, head and hands, as well as the body as a whole. Even painters cannot make up sirens and satyrs out of nothing, but must rely on some existent reality, minimally, if not with respect to form, then at least with respect to color. That is, even though, conceivably, parts of the body and the body itself could be the product of imagination, it must be the case that more simple and universal objects exist, just as real colors must somehow exist (Meditation I).

Initially, color is the standard for actual existence. Descartes goes on however, to disavow this claim. This is because not only can we not distinguish between the experience of waking and that of dreaming, we also cannot be certain about the real existence of more simple and universal objects such as extension, figure, quantity, number, place, and time. If this is the case for universal objects then surely the sensation of colors as the standard for the actual existence of some minimal material reality can never withstand the test of systematic doubt.
This may be due to the possible influence of an evil genius, at once potent and deceitful, who employs all his artifice to deceive and whose mere possibility leaves Descartes in a state of suspended judgment and profound disbelief concerning even the most general and abstract reasoning. But more devastating than the pernicious effects of an evil genius are those of memory. We are advised by Descartes, even after he has discovered the *cogito*, not to depend on memory. Truth requires a clear and distinct immediate intuition that must be grasped in its totality, that is, all at once and not successively, because memory fails us and leads to error (Descartes, *Rules*, rule XI). If our judgments that 2+3=5 or that a square has four sides – simple deductions and the standard for all reasoning practices – must be grasped as a totality, then anything that requires memory is subject to error. In fact, Descartes concludes in Meditation VI that with respect to the perception of different sorts of colors (as well as odors, tastes, and sensations such as heat or hardness) one must go straight to the things themselves, the bodies from which these sensations arise, since bodies can, at least, be considered by the mind whereas sensations involve the confused mingling of mind and body.

Merleau-Ponty's approach to the quality of color is considerably more direct and thorough insofar as perception is his principle concern and cognition is a secondary matter. At first it appears that Merleau-Ponty takes up a distinctly anti-Cartesian position. "The qualities of a thing, its color for example, or its hardness or weight, teach us much more about it than its geometrical properties" (*Phenomenology* 304). When, for example, I look at a table, it "is and remains brown throughout the varied play of natural or artificial lighting. Now what, to begin with, is this real color, and how do we have access to it?" (304). The real color appears to be an
artificial reconstruction of the phenomenon. For perception, the brown of the table does not present itself in all kinds of light as the same brown, the same quality as actually given by memory.

Given a white wall in the shade and a gray piece of paper in the light, it cannot be said that the wall remains white and the paper gray; the paper makes a greater impact on the eye, it is lighter and clearer, whereas the wall is darker and duller, and what remains beneath the variations of lighting is, so to speak, only the 'substance of the color' (304-305).

So we are advised to avoid any reference to memory. The so-called "true color" of the object does not remain identical. Fluctuations in lighting result in different colors and memory cannot be trusted to yield the same quality; it may provide us with a habitual brown or it may substitute some new brown, some color felt rather than habitually perceived. Nonetheless, something like a fundamental perceptual quality, color constancy, continues to appear to us. Color constancy is distinguishable from the kind of color qualities identified by the empiricist and intellectualist positions. For them, Merleau-Ponty argues, color constancy consists of actual, fixed qualities that appear to reflection because sensation and memory constitute them, whereas in the perceived world there are no real color qualities. The idea of fixed color qualities belongs to the sphere of positivist physics, which takes color to be some real "thing."

Merleau-Ponty makes the same argument for perception that Descartes makes for cognition, that since, for humans, color perception develops late and the perception of colors arises only after the constitution of a world, color qualities as well as other sensible qualities such as hardness do not, in fact, teach us more about it than its geometrical properties. First, a world is
constituted, then color arises. Thus Merleau-Ponty maintains, following Scheler, "perception goes straight to the thing and by-passes the color" (305). What is the nature of the claim being made here?

If color follows upon the constitution of a world, then is it the case that objects and objectification precede the determination of color, and if, for Merleau-Ponty, objective means not something known by the mind but rather a structure that accounts for color determinacy or color constancy, is this not something like a transposition of the Cartesian position from the realm of cognition to the realm of perception? For just as with Descartes in the matter of cognition, sensible qualities along with memories they evoke have no place in the perception of color. What counts is the instantaneous intuition of clear and distinct objects. For Merleau-Ponty, as for Descartes, memory is dangerous and unreliable. He insists on "a brief focusing" of perception rather than the instantaneous intuition of clear and distinct ideas, but the impact is the same. It is impossible to tell what is out there and what is in here, what is my idea or my perception and what is actually other. Looking out over a landscape, someone who knows where to find the significant features directs my gaze to the light and shadow that make up the significant object. This means, according to Merleau-Ponty, that we perceive in conformity with the lighting, that something, some "apparatus" in us, responds to the light in accordance with its "sense" where sense means both its direction and its meaning. This "apparatus" is the gaze, a natural correlation we are told, an intertwining of appearances and our kinesthetic unfolding (310). Now what is the nature of this gaze? As Merleau-Ponty expresses this in *The Visible and the Invisible*,

We must understand that this red under my eyes is not, as is always said, a quale, a pellicle of being without thickness, a message at the same time indecipherable
and evident ... It requires a focusing, however brief; it emerges from a less precise, more general redness in which my gaze was caught ... before fixing it (132).

Not a chunk of absolutely hard, indivisible being, but a diacritical divergence from out of a constellation of reds.

And, just as Descartes turns to the cogito to find the intuition, that clear and distinct instant without succession in which existence and certainty are given all at once, Merleau-Ponty will turn to the seer, the perceiving being whose instantaneous perception evades the influence of unstable affective memories as well as stable, habitual memory. The look, this gaze, envelops visible things as if its relation to them involved a pre-established harmony since one looks, not at chaos, but always at things. There are two elements at stake here: one, the nature of the pre-established harmony and, two, the nature of the gaze. However, to understand the gaze, the views it "takes" and the commands it receives from things, Merleau-Ponty suggests that we employ a tactile model. This seems to be because, in feeling, in palpation, questioner and questioned, sensible-sentient and sensation are even closer to one another than they are in vision. However, in order to articulate the gaze employing a tactile model, Merleau-Ponty must take leave of the analogy with Descartes and return once again to Sartre's pre-logical, existential relationship to the world, a relationship in which even the gaze follows from tactility. In Sartre's account in Being and Nothingness it appears that the tactile relationship is explicitly theorized in relation to both the pre-established harmony and the gaze.

We have given up the idea of first endowing ourselves with a body in order to study second the way in which we apprehend or modify the world through the body. Instead, we have laid down as the foundation of the revelation of the body as such our original relation to the world – that is, our very upsurge in the midst of being (Nothingness 325).
Merleau-Ponty, I believe, is thinking, once again, in terms of Sartre's existentialist perspective when, in his later work, he returns to a description of the visible and tangible intertwining, reconceptualizing it in a manner that deviates from his earlier Cartesian model. The visible, he now argues, seems to rest *in itself*, although the seer does not disappear into it (*Visible* 130). There is a crisscrossing of touching and tangible when my hand is felt from within but it is also accessible from without; it serves as an initiation to and opening onto a tactile world. In touching one's own hand while it touches some "thing" the touching "subject" becomes the touched. Yet, once again, Merleau-Ponty establishes an important difference, a difference that reaffirms the primacy of vision, for while Sartre describes the body as a tactile upsurge in the midst of being, Merleau-Ponty describes a subject who *descends*.

What happens, according to Merleau-Ponty, is that the subject descends into the things; there, among things, it feels something massively, it "feels" the sack into which this "I" has fallen and in which it is now enclosed (134). Visible and tangible, he now insists, belong to the same world, there is no separation between them; they intertwine with one another and with the world as flesh. Fallen into and enclosed by the sack, by its massive materiality, through feeling, the body belongs to the order of things. As simultaneously a thing among things and what sees and touches these things, the body enacts the fundamental narcissism of all vision in which, Merleau-Ponty claims, activity is equally passivity; there is no distinction between them (137-139). What is felt is simultaneous with what is acted; they occur in the same instant. They are grasped in the same manner as a Cartesian intuition. For Merleau-Ponty this can be explained in terms of the look. Caught up in what one sees, one feels oneself looked at so that all activity is equally passivity. This is, I believe, Merleau-Ponty's revision of the Sartrean notion of the
look. The seer does not see the outside that others see; rather in the simultaneity or intertwining of passivity and activity, the seer exists within that outside, within that other and sees—"himself." This formulation strikes me as particularly problematic, especially if what one sees (or touches for that matter) is another subject whose independence is at stake. The simultaneity of activity and passivity corresponds, in Bergson's terms, to instinct not intellect, duration not objectivity. The lack of a reflective temporal interval between perception and action, the recourse to the immediacy of perception akin to the immediacy of cognitive intuition means that with respect to the other there is and will be no way of distinguishing between self and other and literally no memory of which is self and which is other. This is because, as I have argued in reference to Bergson, to physiology, and to Sartre, variations in appearance are sensations felt in the midst of perception; they are felt as the effect of the world's influences on the perceiver. However, if the fundamental narcissism of perception is maintained, if there is no distinction between active and receptive, if the subject descends into matter rather than arising out of it, then there must be a constant and possibly dangerous confusion between self and other.

So can we simultaneously perceive the world and apprehend the look fastened onto us? Or, is it not the case that either one or the other is actually taking place and that this defines the interval? Is there not a gap or an interval between perception, feeling, and action? For if to perceive is to look at (or it is to touch something with one's hand in a deliberate manner, like picking up a book to test its weight), and to apprehend the look is to be looked at and to become conscious of being looked at, then active perception and receptive sensibility are not simultaneous and indistinguishable for consciousness (Sartre, Nothingness 258). This may be
why Sartre insists that the look is always a pure reference to oneself. As Bergson argues, it is a reflective choice in the interval between perception and action. Reframing Sartre's somewhat paranoid example, when I hear the sound of footsteps behind me as I walk down the street at night, I do not at once apprehend someone there. What I apprehend, what I feel, is my own vulnerability: the body that can be hurt, the deserted street, the lack of refuge or defense. What I feel and so apprehend is that I am seen. In the instant between perception of the sound and my reaction, I apprehend through feeling, the influence of the other on myself and because of this I am free to decide, to reflect on how to respond. Without this interval of sensibility and reflection on feeling between active perception and action, between perception and objectification, there is no reference to oneself and there is no reflection on how to respond. Such reference is here provided by feeling, and insofar as this is the case, feeling must be a necessary though not sufficient condition of objectivity. By making receptive feeling and active perception one, Merleau-Ponty ascribes to Bergson a position he does not hold, that of subsuming intellect to instinct. Equally serious, Merleau-Ponty obscures the structure and meaning of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, which is, that the interval between self and other makes freedom possible. In others words, as Debra Bergoffen has articulated this, it is only the freedom of others that keeps each one of us from hardening into the absurdity of facticity (87).
Works Cited


