

FAR FROM THE SUBSTANCE

WHITHER AND TO WHAT POINT?

*(Essay on the Ontological Kenosis of Thought since Kant)**

Originally, "kenosis" is the movement by which God empties himself of his divinity in the mystery of the Incarnation. Assigned to an ontological index that is no longer theological, the term indicates first the direction—we should, no doubt, better say the destiny—of modern thought in Kant and in Husserl, and second the orientation of Heidegger's questioning. Finally, perhaps we shall ourselves be fortunate enough to venture alone into a "void of being," where even Heidegger could not allow himself to be carried. But one should not promise too much ...

This entire movement is measured, as our title indicates, as a greater or lesser distancing from Substance. What I mean by "Substance" (with a capital "S" can in no way be reduced to the first category of Relation in Kant's table of the multiple *ptoses* of being.¹ It is a matter of the meaning of Being itself, as it obtrudes on [*s'impose*] modern metaphysics, even before metaphysics had entered into its critical period (the examples of Descartes and Spinoza suffice to illustrate this), and thereafter as it continued to reign surreptitiously [*régner en sous-main*], despite its transcendental emptying out (we will point this out, taking up various examples of what I once called the ontological equivocation of Kantian thought**), and finally, as it foils all attempts at methodological radicality in Husserlian phenomenology through the face-to-face of an omni-positing subject (which is nevertheless purely and simply posited) and an ultra-constructed² phenomenality, which is nevertheless tributary to an impressive matter.

Nevertheless, when it is a question of determining the meaning of Being in itself and not simply of designating it by invoking historical examples, we find ourselves before the worst of difficulties: that contained in the hermeneutics of triviality. "That which stands beneath"—literally the meaning of the term *sub-stance*—is, in effect, nothing other than the thetic profanation of the most banal of evidences, that of the presence of the real. That upon which I open my shutters each morning, that in which I attend to the affairs of life, that in which I fall asleep without concerning myself with what holds Hypnos and Thanatos together as twin siblings, and, despite all that, that *of which* I am never aware.

* This text was first published in *Études philosophiques*, no. 4 (Paris, 1999), and is now available in *Apolis*, Mauvezin, T.E.R., 2009, pp.

¹ Trans.—*Ptoxis*, or the plural *ptoses*, is generally a medical term for the prolapse or drooping of viscera or Besh. From the Greek *piptein*, it means originally the act of falling, by extension befalling, occurring; as though Being fell into modalities noted by Kant in his table of the categories.

** See *L'équivoque ontologique de la pensée kantienne*, reprint : Mauvezin, T.E.R., 2009.

² Trans.—The French term is *archi-construit*, in which the common prefix *archi-* denotes an absolute intensity or degree.

Save perhaps in the mode of a sort of halting [*mise en arrêt*], a tiny and silent recoil before the nothing of that primitive All—let us say, a sentiment of the World, or of existing (this is not an alternative, or even a difference). It is always a detail, and nothing but a detail in the immense population of things, that provokes this infinitesimal suspension: the cry of a harrier streaking the gray sky; a sudden chill that sends me back inside my skin; on another day a warm wind caressing my hair. And again. A red sun that sinks vertically down the far side of things; the tracery of branches, not to be untangled, in that great tree, whose shadow repeats it on a white wall, in an exact projection whose workings nothing gives away, and, then, on an evening in an earth of vanishing fields, an exalted color, as though it had just been laid down.

One will probably say that all this concerns the poetry of the World, and that philosophy is not poetry. For my part, I would say that there reigns here, in what writing is pointing toward, nothing less than a logic of phenomenality, a fabric of unsuspected a priori that readily put to shame the formula we used earlier ("the presence of the real"), just as much as the one metaphysics utilizes ("Substance"). In effect, the evidence of presence carries that of representation, from which the metaphysics of Substance arises, *but also* the philosophies of the phenomenon, the Kantian and the Husserlian, despite their efforts at questioning, describing, and systematizing "far away from substance."

The word says it itself: *prae-ens, pre(s)ent* is that which "is there before"—and before what if not me? And this "me" is, consequently, already there, as absolute reference of the real that is present. But the inverse is likewise inevitable: a "real" is already necessary in order that a me [*un moi*] take place, present to itself among the things present. There is, here, a sort of bad schism or cleft [*sorte de mauvaise schize*], an original denial of the original affirmation. In this way, the beginning begins only by beginning anew, or again: presence presents itself only representatively.

If we consider the heaviness of all this language, we could almost cry that "it's well done." The poet—him again—is even capable of naming *that which* thus avenges itself on philosophical impatience: the most terrible Nemesis, the reserve [*pudeur*] of the World.

For it ultimately *disappears* the moment I distribute it into a matter and a form, parts and a whole, things and qualities, substances and actions—to speak successively like the transcendental aesthetic, the analytic of the concepts of quantity, that of the concepts of quality, and that of the concepts of relation. Let us attempt to follow for a moment the course of this disappearance, beginning with space and time. These are, as we know, the two a priori forms. Their "exposition," as Kant says, reveals a thinking of form that exceeds—and this is the only time we find this in the entire *Critique of Pure Reason*—or rather breaks up, expressly refuses, the validity of the first couple we named, that of matter and form. In such a couple, in effect, the evidence of matter always precedes that of form, which, short of being the form of nothing, must be conceived as the spatial arrangement (that is to say, here, *in space*) of a multiplicity of given parts. But we will never think space itself—or spatiality as such—if we draw its various evidences from the intra-spatial. The ontological presupposition of a present reality, given first to sensibility, that is, as a diversity of sensations, would oblige us to conceive all form as an arrangement of sensations in space. Effected how, brought about in what way [*opéré comment*]? No sensation can come out of its absolute closure to initiate

the rapport of sensations among themselves. In a word, the spatial of the perceived is formal, and no form is the affair of a content [*nulle forme n'est l'aventure d'un contenu*].

What we have just rediscovered, with the tediousness of an apprentice, is what the Kantian mastery asserts from the outset: "The representation of space cannot be derived from the experience of relations between external phenomena" / "Space is not ... a universal concept for the relations of things in general."³ The *Critique* will thus have the audacity to declare "a priori" the spatial character of the experience [*l'épreuve*] we have of the World, and to consider that the "manifold" of this spatiality "rests ... on limitations."⁴ That this concept of limitation is frontally opposed to that of the "part," in other words, of "matter," and that, in consequence, the notion of "form" utilized to qualify space itself ("a priori form of sensibility") would thus become totally enigmatic—this is what Kant seems almost to want to smooth over by merely "exposing" this novelty ("transcendental exposition of space and time") in opposition to Leibniz's conceptuality, as though he feared having to expose himself, the thinker, to a novelty for which "words are lacking us."⁵

How are we to say, in effect (we hardly dare employ the term "describe" here, lacking any model at all that might offer itself to a painting), what he calls the *universum qua universum*, to which we are giving, for our part, its banal name, its true name: the World? Yet we must, notwithstanding, since the "a priori forms" that are space and time are forms of the World. Yet the World has no form, being nothing that would be given; it is the *formality of the gift* itself, which is something entirely different. And to think this difference, we must, in all necessity, distance ourselves from the register of reality (in the proper sense of being the *res* of a *res* ["thing"]). It will be necessary, then, to think the Whole (the World is, in effect, the Whole), while resisting the attraction of that so metaphysical *omnitude realitatis*. We shall also have to think sensibility before and against the evidence of "sensations," in order to substitute something like an overflowing, a spillover of limitations. We can see, at this latter turn, that a certain strangeness takes hold of language, or seeks its language. Let us attempt, then, to find a language for it. A cartography of the void.

a. The All [*Le Tout*]. And yet no: already, we should say "all" and not "the" All. "Everything is sunlit this morning"; thus will we express, for example, the way in which the gift gives itself under the aspect of the weather and the atmosphere [*le temps qu'il fait*], that unique gift of appearing in its integrality. A pure "how" that preserves its own unreality by avoiding—one might say "appropriately"—naming itself on the basis of what would already be "the things." For, if "everything [*tout*] is ..."—this or that, sunlit, or again misty and gray, etc.—indeed signifies the unity of a dispensation, if it signifies the World as the pure spending of "all things," it remains that "all things" here means—likewise appropriately—neither "each thing" (none have yet *emerged* from the gift, no more than a ray of light separates itself from the sparkling of the sea), nor consequently "all *the* things."

It comes down to finding that antecedence or priority, prudently buried by Kant in the Latin *a priori*, does not mean "before." And that delivers it also from "at the same time" and

³ Kant, "Transcendental Aesthetic," *Critique of Pure Reason*

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Trans.—This is the remark Husserl made at the end of his *Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, after reducing immanent time to a flux in which temporal positions remained more or less fixed—Trans.

"afterward." The world-space means [*veut dire*, literally "wants to say"] (and Kant silences it, rather) that any spatial given is open (to itself and for me), not *in* but *according to* an Opening that is nowhere itself open, or better: without any "itself." Space "itself" means nothing.

And yet there is indeed, if not "the All," then at least the all-form [*forme-tout*]. If we need not think this as the omni-encompassing Circle, then we must think it withal (i.e., find it, emerging from beneath the images of words, schemas, movements of meaning that fit it). We must replace, for example, "circle" by "ring," "compass," or "border" [*cerne*].⁶ What Kant so badly names "sensibility" signifies, in effect, that we invariably dis-cern phenomena—that is to say, we have to do with them on the basis of the "Border" or "Cerme." Of this, no one has any doubts. Do we ever worry about knowing whether, perchance, the little we do see—a few houses, a swath of sky, streets, or rather segments of streets—would not stop at the edge of some great nothing; at the edge of the grand canyon of Nothingness? One might say that, even if we are assured about our good old Earth, whose rotund existence is doubtless complete, by contrast the astronomic distances that separate the heavenly bodies from our galaxy, and then the galaxies themselves (which, moreover, are speeding away from each other), are sufficient to awaken in us the terror of infinity. In-finity. Never, never, never would there come about the moment of a World. "What is man in the Infinite?" etc. Yet Pascal's text is but the rhetoric of an apologetic desire, without the slightest phenomenological foundation. When I raise my eyes toward the night sky, I no doubt have the sentiment that the stars are "far off," but even there it is not a matter of great numbers, and nothing comes to tear apart the familiar proximity of the living room [*la proximité familière du séjour*]. I marvel confusedly about that, as Kant said without saying it: "The starry sky *over my head*"—the precise correspondent, or perhaps simply the other side, of the "moral law *in me*." As though the universality of the cosmos and that of the maxim, under the apparent naïveté of a reference to man, recall that the humanity of this man is *deferred* to the World [*déférée au Monde*]. *There* we live; *there* we are, and that is why we have a gaze both universal and open upon the unreal "how" of all that is real.

A situation that is confirmed if, from the World, we now pass to things.

b. "Things"—an expression we need use no more than "the All." In effect, Heidegger is right to remind us that that with which we have to do "proximally and for the most part" is not "things" (like so many sorts of units-of-reality objectively given, as the sciences find them ready and set "in nature") but *Zeuge* ["instruments, tools"] (or if you will, *pragmata*), anchoring units of "care": in no way that "object" that one can *also* call a chair, but from the outset that element-of-furniture that the chair is; in no way the thermal radiation of a celestial body, but the maternal warmth of *the Sun* [*la Soleil*] (*die Sonne*).⁷

Nevertheless, there exists for "things" a primitive mode of being that is different from the one described by the existential analytic; that is, the perceptual mode in which they are, as

⁶ Trans.—The French *cerne*, the root with which French and English form *discern* and *concern*, comes from the same Latin root that gives us *circle*: *circinus*. The term in French also means a circular trace or round shadow: eyes have dark *cernes*; a tablecloth has the round traces (*cernes*) of coffee cups; etc. Hence our dual use of border and ring.

⁷ Trans.—In German, the word for "sun" is feminine; in French, it is masculine. When Granel writes *la Soleil*, he is emphasizing the maternal warmth he contrasts to a "scientific" characterization of the sun, any sun.

we say, "given." Or let us say, "that with which" (a deliberately indeterminate expression) the painter finds himself confronted. There too it is not a matter of objects. On the other side of my street stands a university building, a long crescent shape with four floors, of which I see a section. If I were to paint it, its university function would be the first determination to vanish, as it is nothing that *could* appear; but the "building" (the totality in its architectural construction) is also nothing for the eye. One will reply, "There remains but the section, then," to show that one has understood. But one will really have understood nothing! For even if, to the knowledge of the one considering it, the "something seen" is indeed the section or the side of a building, this "something" is no such thing for any kind of *seeing*. What the seeing gives us is, sooner (literally, "sooner," "earlier") a set of differences in the whites and the grays, with kinds of darker recesses, together rhythmically broken up by bars of red brick and underscored by a long trail of vegetative green. The whole thing ends at the top with geometric lines that are longer than they are high and that form a kind of notching that thrusts forward. And when I write "the whole thing ends," it is not through the knowledge of the existence of a building that, despite our will to employ an *époque*,⁸ governs the description here, it is the *visual* difference between the totality, made up of tones and forms, as we have just said, *and* that which effectively forms another *part* of the given, another height (or rather, an elevation), where an *other* white and an *other* gray freely spread out—those of the vast and the luminous (*the* vast and *the* luminous, but of no thing, or what we call "the sky").

Thus, whence comes, or, if you prefer, how do we mark out the difference of belonging or adherence of what we must above all not call "the visual contents" but rather (sooner, and very awkwardly, we realize) qualities and forms? Nothing in what we have said allows us to set this question aside. *What* are we aiming at when we designate, as a perceptual "whole," something that owes nothing to the pragmatic notion of a "building" or to a transcendent concept of an "object" but that unfailingly distinguishes itself from the other "wholes" represented by the trees around it, the cars that line the street curbs, etc.? For, ultimately, the difference between this whole and the sky, which we pointed out, was the easiest to grasp. The sky, precisely, never presents itself as a "thing," in whose regard forms and qualities would stand in some relationship of belonging. The sky is the paradigmatic non-thing. And, in this way, it is emblematic of the World *as such*.

Let us remain there for a moment; we rediscover "things" afterward (that is, unless they are definitively not to be found), for we are here at the very birth of the divine, as the Latin language thinks it. *Dies* means the day, more precisely, the light of the day, the Cerne or ring, compass, border of which we spoke as the condition of perceptual discernment and which, for that reason, is in itself nothing that one might discern: *non cernitur dies*, as Pliny put it aptly. According to the poet Hyginus, a friend of Ovid, Dies, daughter of Chaos, is the mother of the Sky and the Earth. Moreover, it is true that the light of day, gradually erupting out of nocturnal chaos, "engenders" the first duality of the visible, according to which it "divides itself" [*se "partage"*] into the non-thing of the Sky and an Earth-of-things. The open region and the clearing of beings, as Heidegger says in *The Origin of the Work of Art*. In truth, it is the whole or totality of this division that is rightly original, and thus divine. Nevertheless,

⁸ Trans.—*Époque* refers to Husserl's technique of phenomenological bracketing, by which the objective existence or the subjective reality of intentional focus is provisionally set outside consideration.

from the beginning (the "beginning" of the Latin saying), the divine is concentrated, as it were, in the Sky: *dius* or *divus* means simultaneously the light of day, the sky, and the divine. *Sub divo*: in plain day, under the sky. It goes, effectively, without saying that this Opening, in which Light itself dwells, this evidence of evidences—albeit inaccessible and ungraspable for not being, in any way, a thing-is *manifestly* of a divine order.

But again, we should not forget that Light would not be without *that which* it manifests in its turn. This is a manifold that up to now we have called, provisionally, "things," but whose mode of being we must now acknowledge as remaining multiple and generally unquestioned throughout the Tradition. The unity of appearing, from which invariably arises the dispensation of the sensible, has but rarely the style of what is "thinglike" ["*chosique*"]: for example, a tree that gleams as the daylight breaks over it confirms under our eyes the unity of a profusion in which it is obvious that the light does not pile, one upon the other, some "thing" that would be the trunk, other "things" that would be the branches, and then the twigs, all the way to a moving, shimmering multiplicity of those little-leafy-things. The tree is a unity of appearing of a non-thinglike type. There are many others, totally different from vegetal profusion: the spreading unity of the slope of a hill, for example, or, again, the two types of passing-unity, that of a passing-that-remains (the river) or that in which the passing itself passes (the flight of a bird). Profusion, spreading, passage—these are styles, veritable formalities; succinctly, we will venture this term, idealities of the visible, which we recognize without even having to think about them, as is always the case with the a priori of experience.

The question is: Why has no philosophy managed to state these a priori? Why has no philosophy so much as suspected them? Is it not the very task of philosophical discourse first to detect, then to express these "idealities," as we have called them? Or again, would there be "fine" idealities; idealities so fine that the entire Tradition would simply have missed them? At first we can hardly believe this, it is so evident that, in its unfolding, what gives the Tradition its scansion is a progressive refinement of knowledge concerning *the conditions of discovery* [décèlement] of the ideal [*idée*]. One could show that this is already the meaning of the Aristotelian critique of the Platonic inception. It is more clearly still the meaning of Kantian critique and Husserlian radicalism—to remain with the moderns here. In his attempt to distance himself from the prominence of Substance, Kant seeks out the meaning of Being in what he calls "the originally synthetic unity of experience," from which flows a "schematic" sense of the sum of categorial idealities. Husserl attempts, in his turn, to endow thinking with an unshakeable fidelity to phenomena. He does this by reducing the "object" (which is to say, I repeat, the very meaning of Being for all the moderns) to its "how" (*das Objekt-im-wie* ["*the object in the, or its, how*"]), putatively given absolutely, once every thesis about its existence and every representative construction have been "suspended" (the *Épochè*). In both cases, the fruits of these efforts will be numerous. I would even say that they are more numerous—above all, they have a stranger novelty—in Kant than in Husserl. This is so because, in the first place, while the concept states the a priori of experience only when reduced to a schema, that schema is, itself, without images—in other words, unrepresentable. One finds at least two signs for this in the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

(1) The fact that the faculty of "categorizing" the phenomenon of experience properly belongs (in each block of three "pure concepts of the understanding") not to such and such

concept taken separately but to each one of them *in* the original unity of the three. Thus, for example, there is only unity insofar as it exists already in a plurality, which is therefore not several times one; just as there is plurality only as anticipated in a totality, which is therefore not the sum of a certain number of parts. The categorial triad called "quantity" is effectively not a thinking of numbers: it is a thinking of the numerous. Failing this, it would not escape the Antinomies. And again, we must clearly understand that being-numerous, precisely in its difference from number, poses a challenge to description. Try it and you will see!

(2) The "unrepresentability" of the transcendental schematism of phenomenal beings is again avowed (denied and avowed) by the expression Kant uses to name the originally synthetic unity of experience: he calls this "Something = X ". The use of the mathematical sign for the unknown is in no way haphazard. For what could this "Object in general" (the other name of the synthetic unity) really be (according to what *mode* of being), if it must be neither an object empirically given (which would effectively be the gift itself of the empirical) nor the noumenal correlate of the concept of an object taken in a merely logical generality? We are cast here, without consideration, into a void of signification.

The same goes for the correlate of the transcendental object, the other pole of the synthesis. Kant calls this the "I think," in a purely Cartesian fashion. To be sure, he "replaces" it in a certain way with something like, the unity of a belonging by accompaniment: "The 'I think' must accompany all my representations, etc." And in a sense it is true that the Cogito here loses all substantiality; which is to say that it ceases being the modern name for the soul, under pain of paralogism, designating merely the logical necessity of a unity of experience. Nevertheless, because this "logicity" is not only formal but also transcendental (i.e., ontological), it also names the effectivity of a void, whose existence we may conclude (by way of the deduction) but which we are incapable of *stating* for all that. $I = X$.

No doubt, Husserlian phenomenology is in the same situation. It may well combat—more systematically than Kant did—the "psychologism" that burdens every "naïve" noetics. Yet this praiseworthy effort cannot keep it from falling back, with each argument, into a substantializing regime of discourse presumed to be descriptive. I have shown this clearly enough elsewhere in regard to color, for example, or in light of the phenomenological doctrine of profiles [*esquisses*], or the consciousness of time*. I will therefore not return to that. My purpose, here, is—alas!—more ambitious than all the critiques. It is to seek the very root of this "stubbornness" by which Substance holds us in its bonds even when we think we have undone them, or at least loosened them. The response I will venture consists in saying that what escapes us could be called *the Ungraspability of Being*. By this expression I mean no sublime mystery, analogous to the Unknowability of God. I mean, instead, the withdrawal of the "how" that occurs in every phenomenal field—at once its finesse, its total novelty, and its unproducibility of Being, thus understood. And, since we are on the "subject," it will serve as the example whereby I attempt to follow this withdrawal, always remaining within the field of perceptual experience.

* Webm—See, on the one hand « La couleur dans l'impressionnisme », *Traditionis Traditio*, Paris, Gallimard, 1970, « Après Heidegger », *Écrits logiques et politiques*, Paris, Galilée, 1990 ; and, on the other hand, *Le sens du temps et de la perception chez E. Husserl* (forthcoming : Mauvezin, T.E.R., 2011).

If there is something certain here, it is that perceptual experience is *my* experience. It is, we could even say, the experience-of-me [*l'expérience-de-moi*]. To suppose that someone else could look through my eyes is absolute nonsense—not because my eyes "belong to me," but because the gaze is not made "by" the eyes. The gaze is given to me on the basis of the very thing I am looking at, as also are my eyes, and even "me." Decidedly. But it is precisely here that our difficulties begin. What does it mean that seeing [*le voir*], "my" seeing, could be "given to me on the basis of the very thing" of which it is a view? There is no more, on my part, a movement of appropriation of the real than there occurs, on the side of the real, some movement of reference to me. What then? Courage! We must state the strange, or simply remain blocked here.

A sort of hollow always gathers up the seen [*recueille toujours le vu*], like some mere part of the visible, though this frontier has nothing real about it: it undoes and redoes itself with the first movement of the head, with the slightest change of angle. It signifies precisely that "to see"—whether from the side of the one *who* sees or from that of *what* is seen—is never an adventure of (or in) the real. The Open is always a "Measure of Gathering" [*Mesure-de-Recueil*], whereby I come to myself as the meadow turns green, or rather with it, upon it—co-participating in the space of emergence or eclosure. A "Measure of Gathering" is the exact meaning of the Greek *logos*. There is no objective quantity in this "measure"; on the contrary, it delivers perceiving from the whole avalanche of things.

What I just named descriptively (literarily? I hope not) "a sort of hollow" is what Heidegger thematized as the "there" [*le Da-*] of *Dasein*⁹. The mode of being of what I call "me" is in effect a "being-there," not in the sense of in the middle of things, but rather there where they are themselves "a site" [*lieu*]. This is to say, there where appearing finds a measure. Perceptual unfolding always contains not only the difference between a "given" and its "horizon" (Husserl), but a sort of centering whose difficulty is to understand that it neither supposes nor posits any "core real" [*réel central*], but rather the necessity of a form, which itself is (not) a form but a formality of appearing. In this hollow, in this "there," this "centering," "I" am. I am there in a strictly Mallarmean mode: "The one absent from every bouquet."¹⁰

⁹ Webm. [We translated here the note included in the *Apolis* version of the text.]—"Dasein" (existence as ek-sistence) does not come from a previous evidence of something like "man" : it is man who is in Existence, not existence which is "human". (In effect, there is not any heideggerian existentialism.) "Da", in *Da-sein* – "there" in "being-there" – means an enclosure which *gives* the Being to us, and gives it as Opening-to-Being. At the same time, the Being loses any substantial meaning : whereas the Being was, in the Tradition, the *omnitudo realitatis*, it now gets a closer, quasi-familiar, meaning which is nevertheless enigmatic in its expression – something like the accomplished border and ring of the "ready-to-hand".

We have however to pay attention to the term "ready-to-hand", since if beings are ready-to-hand (*zu-handen*), the Being of these beings is never available to the thought – that is to the language (*logos*). In the very beginning of *Being and Time*, Heidegger dismisses the classical conception of thought as gazing on Being – contemplating the Ideas (Plato) as well as grasping intuitively the noemas (Husserl). For him, the Being is essentially "veiled", and cannot be compelled to present itself (so to speak, completely naked). Its only mode of disclosure, and consequently our only way to reach the "truth" is a sort of wrestling with the angel which aims to really capture Being into language. And I wish add that, in such conditions, Heidegger's inability to really handle language as the space of play of the thought is very puzzling. For if he asserted, form start to finish, this thesis, he has only been faithful to his own thesis in a sort of *etymological* meditation about the words of language, and has abandoned to poetry the usage of the divine ability involved in language.

¹⁰ Trans.— The French uses a feminine noun here, *l'absente*, implying the flower absent from every bouquet.

If you have had the patience to follow me up to this point, perhaps you will be willing to pass to the final stage. It involves working through the phenomenon of the body. An escape route from the radical critique of subjectivity could be found by appealing to the robust evidence of "my body," in order to account for this marking of experience that I call "me." We must demonstrate that "me," who has no soul, has no body, either. No body for me, in any case; nor in the eyes of others, so long as they do not lay on me [*ne posent pas sur moi*] a secondary gaze, objectifying and reflective—the clinical gaze, for example. We say, "I am ill", not "my body is ill." We say, "My God, he is big!" and not "Look how big his body is!" Above all, seeing ignores everything concerning my eyes, just as much as the meaning of your words transcends their acoustics. Obviously, I do not mean to argue that we are pure spirit. Rather, it is a matter of recognizing that we are not incarnate spirit, either. My body is for me neither a point of departure nor a point of arrival, neither a means nor an obstacle. It is, rather, totally out of the picture, even when a part of it enters into the image (as when I remove a thorn from my foot, for example).

It is because he failed to notice this irrelevance of the body for the phenomenon of perception grasped in its essence that Merleau-Ponty—with his praiseworthy goal of avoiding, there as elsewhere, every objectification—invented a sort of doublet for the body, which he called either "the body proper" or "the flesh." In a phenomenology of perception, this amounts to wasted effort. Effectively, my body then becomes a "body proper" only in the kinesthetic experience of muscular effort, for example, or in the "passive syntheses" of suffering. Yet not only am I violently distracted, at that time, from the perceived world, which falls into the abstraction of an "external world," it is also not a matter of restricting perception to that of my own body. Efforts and pains: these are *felt*, they are not *perceived*.

What, then, can we say about the stubborn question, which remains inevitable despite all our disinclination, of what we cannot avoid calling "the role of the body in perceptual experience"? This much, no doubt: facing the screen where I inscribe my perplexities, facing the wall and the opening of the window, "my body" (me"—or better, "the site of me") is a sort of black rectangle in the midst of a painting, which functions like a dispatcher of regions: there is the region of "what-is-in-front-of-me," precisely, clearly offered. On its edges, the double regions of the right and the left escape from the front toward the back, in such a way that only the beginnings of this profiling still participate in the "properly perceived" (but this, in an unfocused fashion), while the "rest" loses itself very quickly in the third region: that of what is "behind me," that is, perceptively nonperceived. It is clear that the body does nothing, undergoes nothing. In a word, in no sense does the body point to itself in this ever-recommencing, spatial regionalization of the perceptive (the perceived / the perceivable), of which the body is nonetheless the principle and blind spot. The body is the site of diversification of the a priori of the visible. is the pure ontological site.

Does that mean that it is the materialist truth of the certainty of "consciousness"? It is not this, either, since no "corporeal *matter*" enters into the spatial regionalization that we have just described: the latter is *formal*. I believe that, ultimately, we must stop at this result (at least for the time being, but perhaps also forever); it is altogether surprising, I admit, that the very thing that constitutes the purest field of thought is, as it were, *laid* upon [*posé sur*] our body. Wanting to know more about this would be like wanting to enter into the creative act of

God. What then!—might we say, on the contrary, that the invention of a divine creation is only a flight, on our part, from all that is terrible in the pure and simple finitude of Being itself?

Translated by Bettina Bergo