

PUBLIC LECTURE

CONFÉRENCE PUBLIQUE

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“The Ontological Weight of Perception in Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology”

Shortly after Merleau-Ponty's sudden death in 1961, a working note that had been “read, reread, underlined, and marked by several red lines in the margin” was found open on his desk. It reads: “Encroachment, which is for me philosophy itself, is nothing but confusion for Descartes, or in other words, nothing.” Given Descartes' presence throughout his work, Merleau-Ponty's vocation was arguably the attempt to address the perennial Cartesian legacy of the schism between body and mind so as to revalorize the “confusion” that Descartes had sought to purge from clear philosophical thought. In other words, he puts at the center of philosophy the intertwining of lived perception that Descartes dismissed as “nothing.” In this paper, I explore the ontological weight of perception in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological method as a thinking of and from within the entanglement of perception. “The experience of one's own body,” argues Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception*, does not amount to “nothing,” but rather “reveals to us an ambiguous mode of existence” (204). Through what I will call the “transcendental force” of his phenomenological description, Merleau-Ponty reveals a necessary expressive dimensionality in human existence, without falling back into a classical transcendental philosophy. In short, philosophical interrogation expresses the ontological weight of perception, since perception is not merely of psychological interest, but rather has the capacity to bring about a rethinking of consciousness itself.

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