

PREFACE

All projects have stories behind them, and perhaps the one behind this volume is worth telling. I first read some Merleau-Ponty while working on my doctorate at the New School for Social Research in the 1960s. Later, in the mid-1970s and after I had transferred from my first teaching position at Northern Illinois University to my second at Duquesne University, I studied Merleau's *oeuvre* fairly thoroughly and taught several graduate courses on his thought. On the basis of those efforts, I wrote "Merleau-Ponty's Examination of Gestalt Psychology."¹ It seems a tacit norm in how I was trained that one express gratitude to a source from whom one has learned by writing at least one essay on her or him; I have also paid my philosophical debts to Cairns, Gurwitsch, Hume, Husserl, James, Sartre, and Schutz.

While writing my Merleau-Ponty essay, I recognized the possibility of and need for a study of his interpretation of Husserl and even reserved the right to conduct it. I do hope that nobody took that claim seriously because my interests wandered elsewhere once I was no longer learning from Merleau-Ponty. But I also underestimated the task (more recently I thought similarly that I might survey Alfred Schutz's interpretation of Husserl only quickly to find that interpretation was far more extensive and complex than it had first seemed).

A study of Merleau-Ponty on Husserl had apparently still not been done when, several years ago, Dr. Ted Toadvine came to serve for a year as the William F. Dietrich Fellow under my supervision here at Florida Atlantic University. I soon found him extremely knowledgeable about Merleau-Ponty, told him my old idea for a study, and our collaboration began.

Toadvine had reviewed practically all of the secondary literature on Merleau-Ponty when writing his dissertation, *Contradiction, Expression, and Chiasm: The Development of Intersubjectivity in Merleau-Ponty*, at the University of Memphis under Leonard Lawlor, and he confirmed that indeed practically nothing had been published on how it was that Merleau-Ponty understood what was for him the greatest figure in the previous generation. When he told me how much Merleau-Ponty had actually written about Husserl, we decided that he should prepare the chronicle that is included as the appendix to the present volume.

1. *Research in Phenomenology* 10 (1980): 89–121.

I am responsible for the word “reading” in our title, although Ted did not resist it. Let me explain that choice. I do oppose all attempts to model as texts objects that are not texts and to construe all experiences as literary experiences. In the first place, I deny that we do literally read the items that we are most interested in, which is to say other animate beings; I may read my lover’s letters but I do not read my lover’s face. Not only do most objects not convey significations, as words do, but most of those that represent, e.g., smiles, are indicative or signaling.² I even doubt that thinking is an ingredient in all experiencing. It may seem harmless to say that a subsistence hunter or farmer “reads” signs of animals or the weather, but are the woods or the sky texts? Does such a model fundamentally help or hinder an understanding of how such people encounter their surroundings? Is not better and more literal terminology needed?

Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that Merleau-Ponty’s access to Husserl’s thought was fundamentally through the reading of texts. He never met Husserl, and he seems to have heard Husserl lecture only once. To be sure, he must have learned something about phenomenology in dialog with Husserl’s students, Eugen Fink and Aron Gurwitsch, but those are secondary sources. And, as Toadvine’s chronicle and some testimony included below show, Merleau-Ponty’s reading of Husserl was highly selective. He was not an Husserl scholar by any stretch of the imagination. Rather, he simply took inspiration from his main source.

Before we decided to include Toadvine’s chronicle in this volume, we called it a “prompting text” and sent it to the people we invited for our research symposium. They were equally amazed and used it to greater or lesser degrees in preparing their chapters. Even so, these chapters show that we have only begun to understand Merleau-Ponty’s reading of Husserl. Toadvine’s chronicle will be useful to others in years to come.

The main event in preparation for this volume was the research symposium held in Delray Beach in November 1999. This was the ninth such meeting organized by myself with colleagues and with support from the Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology, Inc. as well the William F. Dietrich Eminent Scholar Chair at Florida Atlantic University and

2. Cf. Aron Gurwitsch, “The Phenomenology of Signals and Significations,” in Aron Gurwitsch, *Marginal Consciousness*, ed. Lester Embree (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985), 83–106; and Lester Embree, “The Phenomenology of Representational Awareness,” *Human Studies* 15 (1992): 301–11.

published in the Contributions to Phenomenology series that C.A.R.P. Inc. sponsors at Kluwer Academic Publishers. The technique involved is simple, and others are welcome to imitate it.

Once one has the resources, a theme and a collaborator need to be decided upon. Then a list of perhaps fifteen possible participants is developed and ranked with some consideration given to matters of gender, generation, and geographical areas. Such considerations are necessary since the phenomenological tradition has always been receptive to women, since cultivating the next generation cannot be forgotten, and since it is a world-wide tradition.³ Each group of participants should look as much like phenomenology as possible.

Toadvine and I recruited an appropriate number of people from North America, East Asia, and Western Europe to come to Delray Beach for mutual criticism of drafts that would be revised into chapters for this volume; in future meetings, colleagues from Eastern Europe and Latin America will also be included. We were also guided in this process by the senses that we had of who might be more sympathetic with which of the two philosophers chiefly in question. The major error in our recruitment effort, for which we have neither explanation nor excuse, concerned the influence of Eugen Fink on Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl.⁴ This omission became clear during the symposium. Fortunately, Ronald Bruzina was just the expert needed for that aspect, and he has the character not to resent our oversight; his is Chapter 9 below. The editors and readers of this volume must be particularly grateful to him.

What of the influence of Aron Gurwitsch? According to some notes I kept from a conversation with Gurwitsch on November 13, 1971, "I suggested that he had taught M-P his phenomenology. He said he did not think so, that rather Aron, Levinas, and Cavaillès had done that." (Although there are several perfunctory footnotes, there are no discussions of Fink in Gurwitsch's work; in addition, Gurwitsch never mentions Levinas in print, although there is an early MS. on Levinas in his Nachlass.) Nevertheless,

3. Cf. Lester Embree and J. N. Mohanty, "Introduction," in *The Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, ed. Lester Embree et al. (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997), 1–10.

4. Cf. Fred Kersten, "Notes from the Underground: Merleau-Ponty and Husserl's Sixth Cartesian Meditation," in *The Prism of the Self: Philosophical Essays in Memory of Maurice Natanson*, ed. Steven Galt Crowell (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995), 43–58.

some people have thought otherwise, but an adequate textual basis has not been available for it to be studied. With Gurwitsch's *Esquisse de la phénoménologie constitutive* in press, however, this situation is about to change. Let me repeat the external facts about their contacts that are also mentioned in my Introduction to that work.⁵

Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Aron Gurwitsch were introduced during a reception at the home of Gabriel Marcel in Paris in the Fall of 1933. The younger man asked if the older was related to the author of *Phänomenologie der Thematik und des reinen Ich* and Gurwitsch acknowledged his doctoral dissertation.⁶ Merleau-Ponty began attending his courses of lectures at L'Institut d'Histoire des Sciences (Sorbonne), beginning with the first one, which was published as "Quelques aspects et quelques développements de la psychologie de la forme."⁷ He corrected the French on that long essay and also on the long critical study of the papers of a conference that was also published as *Psychologie du langage*.⁸ And Father van Breda told me that when Merleau-Ponty visited the recently established Husserl Archives at Louvain in April 1939 he told him at length about Gurwitsch's course of 1937, which is what the *Esquisse* was developed from.

Later Gurwitsch wrote as follows to Alfred Schutz:

I have checked Merleau-Ponty's *Structure du comportement* out of the library. It seems to be a very competent work. I took a look at his sections dealing with

5. Aron Gurwitsch, *Esquisse de la phénoménologie constitutive*, ed. José Huertas-Jourda (Paris: Librairie Vrin, forthcoming).

6. *Psychologische Forschung* 12 (1929): 279–381, English translation by Fred Kersten in Aron Gurwitsch, *Studies in Phenomenology and Psychology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966). Since this dissertation was cited neither in *La Structure du comportement* (1942) nor *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945), Gurwitsch was quite pleased when I showed him the citation of it in Merleau-Ponty's "La Nature de la perception" (1934), published in Theodore F. Geraets, *Vers une nouvelle philosophie transcendante: La Genèse de la philosophie de Maurice Merleau-Ponty jusqu'à la Phénoménologie de la perception* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 191; "The Nature of Perception: Two Proposals," trans. Forrest Williams, in Merleau-Ponty, *Texts and Dialogues*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman and James Barry, Jr. (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1992), 74–84.

7. *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique* 35 (1936): 413–70, English translation by Richard M. Zaner in Gurwitsch's *Studies in Phenomenology and Psychology*.

8. Aron Gurwitsch, "XIe Congrès international de psychologie," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 50 (1938): 145–60.

Goldstein's work. He used a great deal that I have said about that in print as well as in lectures. (December 15, 1946)

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I am currently reading Merleau-Ponty's *Perception*. . . . I hear an enormous amount from my lectures in the book. He has learned a lot from me and taken over a great deal. Not only in details, where he has carried many things further. I doubt that he would have had the idea of interpreting the psycho-pathological material phenomenologically without my influence. My reaction to the reading is a mixture of pleasure and melancholy. Honest pleasure over the excellent book, which is truly a fine achievement; also pleasure over the fact that my influence in a sense was the godfather. And the melancholy refers to the *modus præteritus*. Here I will never have such a fine influence. (August 11, 1947)⁹

After the war, Gurwitsch reviewed both the French original of *Phénoménologie de la perception* and later its English translation. His chief objection concerned the omission of the concept of noema from that work. One can indeed wonder how phenomenological an extensive research product without that concept can be.¹⁰ Merleau-Ponty cites Gurwitsch twice in his Sorbonne Lectures,¹¹ and his critique of Gurwitsch's *Theorie du champ de la conscience* has recently been published.¹²

What is written above addresses how the idea of this volume emerged for me and was then developed in collaboration with Ted Toadvine, but it does not address the source of my interest. My motivation was from the beginning not that Merleau-Ponty's reading was simply another nice topic

9. Alfred Schutz and Aron Gurwitsch, *Philosophers in Exile: The Correspondence of Alfred Schutz and Aron Gurwitsch 1939–1959*, ed. Richard Grathoff (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 88 and 93. Gurwitsch told me that when he departed France he left his copy of Schutz's *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt* (1932) with Merleau-Ponty, but there seems no further sign of this.

10. Cf. Lester Embree, "Gurwitsch's Critique of Merleau-Ponty," *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 12 (1981): 151–63.

11. Both published references are in Merleau-Ponty's 1950–51 course, "Psycho-Sociologie de l'enfant," in *Merleau-Ponty à la Sorbonne: résumé de cours 1949–1952* (Paris: Cynara, 1988), 262, 272.

12. Merleau-Ponty, "Notes de lecture et commentaires sur *Théorie du champ de la conscience* de Aron Gurwitsch," ed. Stéphanie Ménasé, *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 3 (1997): 321–42; "Reading Notes and Comments on Aron Gurwitsch's *The Field of Consciousness*," trans. Elizabeth Locey and Ted Toadvine, *Husserl Studies* 17, n. 3 (2000): 173–93.