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Chapter Nine

The Inhuman Gaze and Perceptual Gestalts:

The making and unmaking of others and worlds.

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Introduction:

[In the gaze] the other person transforms me into an object and denies me, I transform him into an object and deny him, it is asserted. In fact, the other's gaze transforms me into an object and mine him, *only* if both of us withdraw into the core of our *thinking nature*, if we both make ourselves into an *inhuman gaze*, if each of us feels his actions to be not taken up and understood, but observed as if they were an insect's.

The Phenomenology of Perception, (2006: 420; 2012: 378)

Merleau-Ponty is here both referencing the infamous Sartrean scenario of the voyeur caught in the act of peering through a keyhole¹ and also in a more general sense alluding to Sartre's pessimistic account of human relations – that the encounter between persons is one that is inherently

conflictual, a battle to resist objectification through objectifying the other first. And further Merleau-Ponty observes, the very possibility of objectification depends on our capacities to ‘withdraw into the core of our thinking nature’. By cancelling empathic availability and affective responsiveness in advance such objectifications open up the possibility of violence, negligence and ethical failure (Daly 2016). Nonetheless, as stated in the introduction to this volume, objectification can serve positive ends in certain occupations which necessitate compartmentalization, separating affectivity from pure cognition so as to be strictly task-focused; and as Moran (2020, this volume) has argued the capacity of objectification is an achievement of subjectivity.

In this essay I wish to focus on Merleau-Ponty’s analyses of the role of perception in our ethical engagement with others. While on the one hand for Merleau-Ponty, ‘the perception of the other founds morality’ (Merleau-Ponty 1964a: 26), on the other, it is the *rationalizing* of perception by stripping it of empathic responsiveness, becoming an *inhuman gaze*, that allows ethical failure (Daly 2014; 2016). Through his groundbreaking analyses of embodied percipience, Merleau-Ponty offers a powerful critique of *the view from nowhere* (Merleau-Ponty 2006, 2012; Nagel 1986), the objectivist, disembodied, unsituated, purely rationalist view which underwrites all *inhuman gazes*. Complicating and deepening these analyses, Merleau-Ponty also draws on gestalt theory, elaborating particularly on the roles of perspectivism, wholism and figure-ground structures in the perception of things and of others. It is Merleau-Ponty’s engagement with gestalt theory that informs the key claims of this essay. Specifically, I will argue that while we can theoretically decompose perception in terms of gestalt structures to better understand the mechanisms of

perceptual experience in general, we can also understand how it is possible to achieve an *inhuman gaze* through a rationalizing deconstructive process of perception; rather than ‘making’ others and worlds, these are ‘unmade’ for potentially violent and unethical ends (Scarry 1985; Schulz 2007; Daly 2016; Guenther 2018).

Merleau-Ponty’s initial approach to the problem of objectification is to reinstate the significance of embodiment and perception; there are no disembodied, acosmic gazes, no *views from nowhere*, nor God’s-eye-views; these are objectivist fantasies. He outlines his aims thus:

The perceiving mind is an incarnated mind. I have tried, first of all, to re-establish the roots of the mind in its body and in its world, going against doctrines which treat perception as a simple result of the action of external things on our body as well as against those which insist on the autonomy of consciousness. These philosophies commonly forget – in favor of a pure exteriority or of a pure interiority – the insertion of the mind in corporeality, the ambiguous relation which we entertain with our body and, correlatively, with perceived things. ((Merleau-Ponty 1964a: 3,4)

Merleau-Ponty’s account of incarnated consciousness highlights the fact that the relation of the subject to her environment, is neither that of an ‘automatic machine’ responding with ‘pre-established mechanisms’, nor is it a pure thinking, rational consciousness supervening on the thing-like body and giving structure to our experience of the world and entities. Furthermore, a theory of the body is already a theory of perception *and* a theory of intersubjectivity. This is important on

three counts: firstly, the kind of body we are with regard to the physical facts of shape, structure, proportions of head, orientation and placement of eyes, feet, knees, limbs, fingers and thumbs, constrains and enables our engagement with the world and determines what counts as a relevant world for us; the physiognomy of a species gives access to very particular perceptual worlds and these worlds serve to shape and inflect the capacities of the species; there is mutual co-determination. Secondly, because we are incarnated consciousnesses, our bodies are our points of view on the world; and so, perception is inherently perspectival and in Merleau-Ponty's analysis this does not reduce perception to a relativism (Merleau-Ponty proposes a multiperspectivalism as discussed later in this chapter). Thirdly, embodied percipience determines our situatedness – temporally, geographically, socially and culturally. All these analyses thus contribute to Merleau-Ponty's project to challenge the traditional objectivist account through a deeper analysis of perception.

Responding to the traditional account of perception

According to the traditional understanding of perception, perception involves a modular process of inside-out, to outside in, to inside-out; the eye mechanism engages with the external phenomena, the sense data enters the retina, the visual cortex processes this information to create a representation in our brain, and this representation informs the perceiver about the external world who can then act. This is an overly complicated and cumbersome approach which fails to take account of the full powers of perception and exaggerates the role of representation in order to support a cognitivist view. Shaun Gallagher incisively captures the inadequacies of the representationalist account thus:

... the non- (or minimal) representationalist view contends that if we are in the world, we can access the environmental detail relevant to our needs, there seems no need to create an internal representation of that detail. Just as it would be odd to call or text my friend on her cell-phone when she is standing right in front of me, so it would be odd to think that although the world is immediately present, we need an internal representation of it in order to perceive it (Gallagher 2008: 168).

Simply, from the phenomenological perspective, the world is its own best representation. Representation while essential for the higher cognitive/reflective modes of belief, memory, conceptualization etc., is not necessary for the pre-reflective engagement with the world which is by far the most usual *modus operandi*. Reflection, and perforce representation, only become necessary in situations of interruption, breakdown or when a deliberately *thetic* engagement is called for as in learning a new skill. What is also often overlooked in the traditional modular accounts is that perception is paramount for there to be any experience in the first place; perception is our opening onto the world; it is not just one modality of intentionality alongside the other intentional modalities (cognition, memory, imagination, belief, anticipation, etc.). Following Merleau-Ponty, I have argued elsewhere that perception is ontologically and epistemically basic (Daly 2020). Correlatively, the perceived life-world is primary and is our first access to reality; perceptual structures underlie and support all higher-order modes of consciousness such as rationality, imagination and culture, but not in a reductive manner; none of these are reducible to perception. This is Merleau-Ponty's thesis of *The Primacy of Perception*. He writes: 'The perceived world is the always presupposed foundation of all rationality, all value and all existence.

This thesis [of the primacy of perception] does not destroy either rationality or the absolute. It only tries to bring them down to earth' (Merleau-Ponty 1964a:13). So we can see that Merleau-Ponty is not rejecting rationality out of hand but rather as he puts it 'bringing it down to earth'; locating it within the overall economy of conscious processes rather than presiding over them; and further, emphasizing the crucial role the perceiving body plays even in the exercise of reason and the understanding of concepts (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 154, 211; 2006: 176, 237). Although the world of perception is the core of our life, we have the tendency to forget this because critical thought appears autonomous in that it can stand back and capture perceptual experience in words, '*bare propositions* which it discusses, accepts or rejects', and all the while this higher order process loses the awareness of the perceived world which underlies and gives meaning to 'the verified true and the false' (Merleau-Ponty 1964a: 3; see also Harney 2020, this volume).²

Early last century Gestalt³ psychologists of perception identified aspects of perception which do not fit the traditional picture, key to which is *the constancy hypothesis* – which proposes that there is a one to one correspondence between the external sensory stimulus and the internal perceptual content. This is an error that feeds into both empiricism and rationalism, reducing perception to either sensation or judgment respectively (Carman 2009; Mooney 2020, this volume). Both of these traditions fail to recognize that the world is so much more than a source of stimuli and a product of intellectual judgments; it is first and foremost the place of undertakings and projects, a field of possibilities, the context in which we act as Merleau-Ponty so cogently described in his notion of the 'I can', thereby opposing the Cartesian 'I think' (Merleau-Ponty 2006, 2012; Noë 2004; Gallagher 2020, this volume). More recently neuroscientists Melvyn Goodale and Andrew

Milner (2017) have thoroughly debunked this traditional account with their discovery of the two streams of visual perception (dorsal and ventral) which empirically tracks central phenomenological insights (ie. regarding operative and thetic intentionality). Nonetheless, the traditional account surprisingly persists and continues to overtly and covertly inform some of the philosophical debates centered on perception. In contrast to the inside-out, outside-in, inside-out modular traditional approach, Gestalt theory emphasizes that the principles of proximity, similarity, continuity and closure structure our perceptual experience; that perception is perspectival; that we perceive wholes prior to perceiving the parts; that we perceive in terms of the structures of figure-ground, thereby adding a normative dynamic to perception. While Merleau-Ponty's appropriation of ideas from Gestalt psychology was not uncritical, he nonetheless effectively integrated aspects of gestalt theory into his philosophical analyses (Heinamaa 2009; Sheredos 2017). In brief, his criticism of gestalt centers on its tendency to reify the structures and processes of perception; and also that as an empirical discipline Gestalt psychology relies on reasons and causes and does not adequately address motivational aspects of perception and its meaning value.⁴

Perceptual gestalts: Making others and making worlds

Perception is not reducible to brute sensation nor does it qualify as a pure cognitive mode; rather it is the embodied, percipient subject's direct and primary engagement with the phenomenal and social worlds.⁵ There are two pivotal insights from gestalt theory that Merleau-Ponty uses to support his claim for the primacy of perception. Firstly, brute sensations are unfindable in experience; there are no isolated sense-data – they are always in the middle of a field – a visual

field, an auditory field, a tactile field etc., (Merleau-Ponty 2006: 4). Things are always in some context or environment. So too with subjects; we always belong to a wider sphere of intersubjectivity – whether at the level of family, community, nation, species or animality. And secondly, because perception is always shifting from figure to ground, from focus to context, from self to other and back again, it is at the most fundamental level, relational. This inherent relationality of perception is what underwrites the meaningfulness of physical events and social encounters. Merleau-Ponty sets up this idea of inherent relationality first with regard to things:

To see is to enter a universe of beings which display themselves ... Thus every object is the mirror of all others. When I look at the lamp on my table, I attribute to it not only the qualities visible from where I am, but also those which the chimney, the walls, the table can “see”; the back of my lamp is nothing other than the face which it “shows” to the chimney. I can therefore see an object insofar as objects form a system or a world and insofar as each of them treats the others around it like spectators of its hidden aspects and a guarantee of their permanence (Merleau-Ponty 2006:79; 2012: 70, 71).

Elaborating on his distinction between the differing orders of perception and cognition, Merleau-Ponty asserts that: ‘Perception does not give me truths like geometry, but presences’ (Merleau-Ponty 1964a:14). In the above description, we can see that the hidden aspects are grasped as *present*, rather than that they *exist*. The grasping of the hidden sides is not an intellectual synthesis determining the veracity of what exists, but rather a practical synthesis generated through vision

and movement. Truths of geometry are amenable to an intellectual synthesis and can be grasped in totality; presences, however, can never be totalized, there is always more to discover.

... the perceived world is not a sum of objects our relation to the world is not that of a thinker to an object of thought, the unity of the perceived thing, as perceived by several consciousnesses, is not comparable to the unity of a proposition, as understood by several thinkers, any more than perceived existence is comparable to ideal existence.....We experience a perception and its horizon “in action” rather than by “posing” them or explicitly “knowing” them (Merleau-Ponty 1964a: 12).

Further to these analyses, we can say that the grasping of the hidden sides is not only *not* an intellectual synthesis, nor is it *only* a practical synthesis as Gallagher has demonstrated drawing on Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. He proposes that it is not possible ‘to provide an adequate account of object perception without taking intersubjectivity into account ... [because there is] an implicit intersubjectivity built into the perceptual experience’ (Gallagher 2008: 171). While it is possible to say that the hidden sides are possible perceptions for myself at another vantage, Gallagher stresses that the hidden sides are co-existent and co-present in virtue of a ‘plurality of possible subjects’ or in Husserl’s term – an ‘open intersubjectivity’ (Gallagher 2008: 172). And there is yet a further sense, elaborated on notably by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, that others are already implicated in object perception in that we arrive in a world of things and others that is already inhabited, and it is through interactions with others that we are initiated into the meaning and use-value of these things. Merleau-Ponty writes: ‘Whenever I try to understand myself, the whole

fabric of the perceptible world comes too and with this comes others who are caught in it; we are *of the world*' (1964b:15). Thus, the social permeates perception through and through.

Perception also has an intrinsic normative dimension. The normative structure of perceptual *gestalts* in the phenomenal domain demonstrates the conditioning role that context/environment can play in the perception of things; the perception of a landscape is conditioned by the light and mist, and once the mist disperses and the sun shines through strongly, the landscape is perceived differently. So too with the various perceptual illusions, such as the Müller-Lyer lines or the moon appearing larger at the horizon than when in mid-heaven, the conditioning power of the context is essential to the efficacy of the illusions. The perceptual *gestalt* incorporates both the figure and the ground, the 'something' and the context; it is impossible to find one without the other. The *gestalt* is 'the birth of a norm, not realized according to a norm; it is the identity of the exterior and the interior, not the projection of the interior into the exterior' (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 62; 2006: 70). Normativity is not something imposed from either inside or outside but is intrinsic to perception which is always in the mode of *gestalt* (see Kelly 2005). In other words, these *gestalts* have a normative structure due to the shifting attention between figure and ground, between self-awareness and other-awareness; the perceptual ground or environment prescribes the perception of the figure (more determinate or less determinate) and so too the intersubjective context has a prescriptive impact on the subjective experience.

In the intersubjective domain this conditioning by the social environment is brought into sharper focus the more tightly constrained and entrenched the environment, the more its power to obscure and distort; blacks in the 19th century southern states of the USA were viewed as constitutionally suited to slavery and any attempt to escape was pathologized as drapetomania; women within patriarchy are perceived as inferior, weak, deceptive, passive and best suited to serving male gratification; and in 21st century Australia, boat refugees are perceived by many as a threat to national security. There are no shortage of examples from history or the present media that we could cite. Importantly, such perceptions allied to power structures and media become coercive and pernicious. Challenge and change the social environment, and you change the perception.

And so, it is in this way that I have proposed the possibility of going beyond rationalist ethics to discover a deeper level of ethical susceptibility by revealing the normative structure of perceptual *gestalts* in the intersubjective domain, thereby establishing *the view from everywhere*, a view grounded in a multiplicity of perspectives (Daly 2016; 2019). Merleau-Ponty reflects this approach when he writes:

We observe it [morality] in an experience, which is the perception of others.... Just as perception of a thing opens me up to being, by realizing the paradoxical synthesis of an infinity of perceptual aspects, in the same way the perception of the other founds morality by realizing the paradox of an alter ego, of a common situation, by placing my perspectives and my incommunicable solitude in the visual field of another and all the others (Merleau-Ponty 1964a:26).

This is how Merleau-Ponty is able to universalize his ethics and thereby avoid reduction to a relativist monocular perspective (Daly 2016). Moral consideration is thus never a purely internal and private deliberation, but already implicates a multiplicity of perspectives, ‘all the others’; historical, present and even future perspectives.⁶

Perceptual gestalts: Unmaking others, unmaking worlds

In this section I aim to show how the above analyses and understandings of perception in terms of gestalt principles can serve to illuminate what is happening in violence and ethical failure; that the gestalt structures and processes of perception can be deconstructed and corrupted to serve destructive ends to engender the unmaking of others and worlds. I begin by detailing some examples of extreme objectification, dehumanization and demonization highlighting the deconstructive processes at work in each case.

Some of the most infamous and well-documented cases of brutal torture and inhumanity are those of the witch trials of medieval Europe. Lyndal Roper’s historical analysis of the context and development of the ‘witch craze’ presents in harrowing detail many of the documented cases of the dark history of Christian religious ideology in constructing the identities and worlds of witches, while simultaneously deconstructing them as godly, ensouled human beings.

.... As late as 1747 Magdalena Bollmann of Marchtal was interrogated on suspicion of witchcraft. She did not confess... Bollmann was tortured with thumbscrews, on the rack, and on the 'bock', the bench on which she was stretched and whipped. She was stripped and shaved, and needles were inserted into areas around her genitals.... The interrogators had determined to torture the woman to death since she would not confess. Yet throughout, they represented their behaviour as a religious act. They hung her up, her hands tied behind her back, and let her hang there "for the duration of five or six Our Fathers" and burnt her with the blessed Easter candle "partly under her nose, partly under her two big toes". The way in which they employed holy objects looks less like confidence in the sanctity of their office than an attempt to employ the counter-magic of the Church to shield themselves not only from the power of the Devil, but also from a full awareness of what they were doing; they could believe they were carrying out religious rituals, not inflicting pain (Roper 2004: 49, 50).

And in more recent times: imagine a scene in which a punishment is enacted according to the more literalist retributive interpretation of sharia law.⁷ A man with his entire family surrounding him – his wife, his children, his mother, his father, brothers and sisters - is strapped onto a surgical table and is about to have his eyes gouged out for a crime. Imagine what he is feeling and how he can anticipate his future existence; unable to see his own face, the faces of those he loves, the sky, the trees, his home; what might the members of his family be feeling – knowing their shared existences would be changed forever, no longer the gaze of the father or husband, but just empty sockets and the burden of needing to care for a blind person; what must the person secretly filming this terrible

event be feeling - urgency to capture this event for a wider global audience, repugnance and fear of discovery; but also I wonder how the 'surgeon' could perform this deed. What would it take for him to carry this out? What would it cost him psychologically, emotionally and morally to perform such an act?

If we accept the view that we are perceptual, embodied, intersubjectively constituted beings, how can such deeds be possible? The above descriptions are of events sanctioned by church authorities and the law of the land. Torture in its all its various justifications, manifestations and contexts was claimed by Victor Hugo in 1874, to no longer be practiced and he had good reason at the time to make such a claim (Peters 1996). Now, however, from the end of the 20th century and into the 21st century, torture has been a routine procedure in one out of three countries (Peters 1996) and is used in 141 countries (Amnesty International 2014). This is despite the fact that the *Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*, has been ratified by an overwhelming majority of countries since its adoption in 1984 by the United Nations General Assembly. Despite the law and the general repugnance for such practices, there are manuals detailing how to go about training and programming someone in the dispositional attitudes and the subtleties of the techniques; how to execute the torture most effectively, maximizing pain, humiliation, trauma, identity fragmentation, vulnerability and minimizing fatalities. The *CIA Human Resource Exploitation Training Manual* is just one of many (in Schulz 2007).

Here we see many of the progressive features of training, the gradual movement from one worldview (human, civilian, empathic, caring) to another (inhuman, torturer, cruel,

detached). The subject (the conscript/ recruit/torturer-to-be) is progressively desensitized while the object (the subversive/Communist/terrorist/victim-to-be) is progressively dehumanized, objectified, stripped of any identity except the demonizing labels of the dangerous enemy who will take your life if you do not protect yourself. (Schulz 2007: 145)

.... the very process of routinization of torture involves a kind of continuous and dynamic distortion of facts and events which, in the end, amounts to the construction of a new reality. This socially constructed reality - the routine of torture, replaces objective reality with one that is presumed to exist. In doing so, it also supplants conventional morality, substituting in its place the ideological dictates of the authority structure within which torture occurs. [...]. (Schulz 2007: 148)

Merleau-Ponty's analyses give us a new way to understand such acts – through perception and perceptual gestalts. Recall that for Merleau-Ponty perception in its usual functioning gives us not truths but presences, including the presences of fellow creatures. It is my contention that through *the inhuman gaze*, presence is annulled at both poles of perceptual intervolvement; it is replaced with a pure totalizing rationality on the part of the perpetrator and the victim is replaced with the idea; the totalizing ideology and the idea of a witch, a sinner or a political dissenter. The *inhuman gaze* deconstructs the perceptual gestalt: there are no fields, only a pure totality and everything is absorbed into the monocular perspective of the ideology; there is no shifting attention between figure and ground, between self and other; wholes are deconstructed into disconnected atomistic parts; no human beings immersed in meaningful lives, only resistant, dehumanized, demonized entities, only body parts – such as eyes that must be gouged out, testicles crushed, young children

tortured in front of mothers, arms dislocated from their sockets while chained up for lashing, electrical prods inserted in orifices, along with all the other diabolical techniques in the torturer's repertoire. The 'plurality of subjects' which before afforded all the possibilities of perception and worlds is now irrevocably corrupted; the already inhabited world of familiar meanings and familiar objects of use are subverted and are now deployed for fiendish purposes - the unmaking of worlds and the destruction of identities.

But there is a paradox in torture, a maddening paradox which slowly but surely tortures the torturer – to effectively torture, to effectively dehumanize, the torturer must exploit the very humanity of both himself and the victim – he must draw on his experience of being human in order to more effectively corrupt and break this down, he must recognize in the victim the very particular aspects of human value and vulnerability so as to exploit these to the most vicious effect, and he must be able to recognize when the torture is likely to go too far and end in irretrievable madness or a fatality (Daly 2014: 239). This paradox in torture maps exactly the same paradoxical structure of the more general objectification in human relations; without ignoring the moral repugnance of torture, nor discounting the profound and devastating consequences of torture, we can say it is ultimately self-defeating in that in inflicting inhuman harm, the torturer also harms himself. Why? Because as Merleau-Ponty has discovered, we can never escape sociality; sociality is an irreducible; just as perception already implicates the body, so too as argued previously, perception already implicates intersubjectivity – perception, body and intersubjectivity are thus equiprimordial.

.... we must rediscover the social world, after the natural world, not as an object or a sum of objects, but as the permanent field or dimension of existence: I can certainly turn away from the social world, but I cannot cease to be situated in relation to it. Our relation to the social, like our relation to the world, is deeper than every explicit perception and deeper than every judgment. It is just as false to place us within society like an object in the midst of other objects, as it is to put society in us as an object of thought, and the error on both sides consists in treating the social as an object. We must return to the social world with which we are in contact through the simple fact of our existence, and that we inseparably bear along with us prior to every objectification. (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 379; 2006: 421)

And so ‘we are not only born into sociality but our sociality goes to the roots of our being’ (Daly 2014: 227).⁸

Although in the short term, it may seem the torturer is impervious to all he is inflicting on the victim and in fact it seems to bring immense pleasure and the privileges afforded by power – there are increasing numbers of documented cases indicating that long term consequences ensue: paranoia, nightmares, hauntings, physical and nervous collapse, alcohol and substance abuse, sleeping disturbances, break-down in trust, post-traumatic stress disorder, domestic violence, breakdown in the sense of self, suicide, and moral injury engendering ‘toxic levels of guilt and shame’ (Peter 1996; Rejali 2007; De Pillis 2014; Muller 2016; Dee 2017; Shay 2014, in Protevi 2020, this volume).

Another name for burnout [suffered by torturers] is vicarious trauma. Symptoms can include “difficulty managing emotions; feeling emotionally numb or shut[ting] down”; difficulty sleeping or oversleeping; physical problems; losing “a sense of meaning in life and/or feeling hopeless”; relationship problems; excessive worrying; increased irritability or aggression; “destructive coping or addictive behaviors”; lack of participating in enjoyable activities; and avoidance. (*Office for Victims of Crime*, in Dee 2017)

Conclusion

Merleau-Ponty never developed an ethics as such, however, as I have demonstrated in earlier writings there is significant textual references which give indications of how his ethics might have developed if he had lived long enough to pursue this project. The three axes of his vision – perception, the body, and intersubjectivity are key to the elaboration of all aspects of his philosophical interrogations, including the unwritten ethics. In the earlier writings, I have focused on these three axes in conjunction with his non-dualist ontology to elaborate the beginnings of a Merleau-Pontian ethics (Daly 2016). In this current essay, I have chosen to focus specifically on the role of perceptual gestalts to reveal how through a rationalizing deconstructive process it is possible to achieve an *inhuman gaze*; rather than ‘making’ others and worlds, the structures of perception are broken down and subverted so as to ‘unmake’ others and worlds for violent and unethical ends. The consequences for cultivating *the inhuman gaze* rebound on the ‘gazing’ perpetrator as much as the objectified, dehumanized other; this I have shown is demonstrated in the testimonies of both victim and perpetrator in the cases of torture. Not only do these analyses

and cases support Merleau-Ponty's prescient insights into constitutive sociality but also my claims for the unavoidable demand of the ethical.

ENDNOTES

¹ "Let us imagine that moved by jealousy, curiosity, or vice, I have just glued my ear to the door and looked through a keyhole. But all of a sudden I hear footsteps in the hall. Someone is looking at me! What does this mean? It means that I am suddenly affected in my being and that essential modifications appear in my structure.... First of all, I now exist as *myself* for my unreflective consciousness. It is this irruption of the self that is most often described: I see *myself* because *somebody* sees me... I am for myself only as I am a pure reference to the Other" (Sartre 2003: 284).

² It has been suggested that Merleau-Ponty's thesis of the primacy of perception may lead to reductionism and anti-rationality rendering reason, truth, philosophical and scientific endeavours meaningless. Renaud Barbaras clarifies the stakes by proposing that Merleau-Ponty needs to furnish science with a 'genuine foundation opposite from scientific perversion' through thinking both fact and essence together, thereby integrating a positive objectification into such endeavours (Barbaras 2004).

³ Christian von Ehrenfels, a student of Franz Brentano, coined the term 'gestalt' which literally means – shape, figure, form; 'it also refers to a structure or complex... an indivisible whole, whose elements have value only in relation to the whole' Clausewitz in Smith (1988: 4).

⁴ Merleau-Ponty's criticism of gestalt: While he is appreciative that gestalt theory has revealed the structures of perception, perspective, holism, and figure-ground organization – he rejects the reifying tendencies which aim to determine fixed laws, principles and norms of truth. Correlatively, his pre-predicative lived perception cannot be accurately captured in terms of reasons and causes; the gestalt principles of proximity, similarity, continuity, and closure can all according to Merleau-Ponty become thematic only after the perceptual engagement. He writes: 'The unity of the object is established upon the presentiment of an imminent order that will suddenly, respond to questions that are merely latent in the landscape. It will resolve a problem, only posed in the form of a vague uneasiness; it organizes elements that until then did not belong to the same universe and which, for that reason, as Kant said insightfully, could not have been associated' (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 18; 2006: 20).

⁵ See O'Shea (2018) for a discussion of William James' work on the distinction between the percept and the concept. As Husserl noted, James' work was inspirational for some of his own thinking; but as O'Shea alerts, James failed to fully 'account for percepts as immediate cognitions of reality' (2018).

⁶ Herein lies the philosophical explanation for why future generations must be central in moral considerations, notably as we have seen with the current climate change crisis.

⁷ Attending a lecture given by human rights lawyer Julian Burnside a number of years ago at Melbourne University, the author was deeply disturbed by the presentation of footage, secretly filmed by a guard, of this very situation taking place in Iran. To be clear, this particular punishment was enacted according to a literalist interpretation of Sharia Law which experienced a revival towards the end of the 20th Century in some countries; notably Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria. The term Sharia means 'The clear, well-trodden path to water' or simply 'the way'. It is based on the Koran, the life of the Prophet Mohammed and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), that is the expert interpretations by Islamic scholars. While the more infamous understandings of Sharia derive from the literalist interpretations promoted by various Islamist movements involving the notion of 'retaliation in kind' or 'an eye for an eye' retributive justice, the more accurate understanding includes very socially oriented moral principles more in keeping with modern Western morality and very strict constraints in the implementation of the law. Nonetheless, since 2013 there have been more than 1,800 executions in Iran, as well as numerous floggings and amputations. For more detailed information about the various interpretations of Sharia, see Hussain 2003 and Krayem & Farache 2008.

⁸ '... contrary to the social world I can always avail myself of my sensible nature, close my eyes, stop up my ears, live as a stranger in society, treat others, ceremonies and institutions as mere arrangements of colour and light, and strip them of all their human significance. Contrary to the natural world I can always have recourse to the thinking nature and entertain doubts about each perception taken on its own But I can fly from being only into being...' (Merleau-Ponty 2006: 419; 2012: 377).

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