

THE MEDIATION OF TOUCH

LUCE
IRIGARAY



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*May this book unveil to its reader the sensitive and transcendental
potential of the mediation of touch*

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1

Introduction: Expelled from the Nest

In his book *No and Yes*, René Spitz writes that the ‘infrahuman animals divide into two main classes which manifest basically different feeding behaviours. These classes are named ‘altricial’ (in German *Nesthoker*, in French *nidicoles*) and ‘precocial’ (in German *Nestflüchter*, in French *nidifuges*). The definition of these two classes shows that the human being, which at birth is in a state of powerlessness and relative immaturity and which, during a long period, will need to be fed, helped and cared for belongs to the class named ‘altricial’ (’*Le non et le oui*, Chapitre IV, p. 18; *No and Yes*, Chapter 5, p. 23). Thus it would be possible to conclude that humans are altricial beings upon which culture imposes becoming precocial beings, and without any transition between the two stages. Indeed, what is favoured by altricial beings is touch and warmth, whereas precocial beings favour sight and locomotion. And if touch intervenes for the latter group in the first time of nutrition, it is in a completely different way from that of the formers: a ‘pushing pressure’, notably of the head, (op. cit., pp. 22–3; op. cit., pp. 28–9) instead of the search for contact between the skins and mucous tissues of the infant and the mother.

Our tradition requires us to give up such a primitive touch for the benefit of sight. This means ignoring, even indirectly repressing, the first bio-psychic experiences and the first link between the body and the

psyche in the relationship with the other. What education do we receive to transform the first mode of entering into relation with the other? Who or what teaches us to cultivate this first link with ourselves and between us—notably to pass from a clinging to or even a spontaneous seizing to the caress and from skin to mucous tissues? And if sight and locomotion are necessary for precocial beings in order to feed themselves it is not the same with human beings. Why does our culture favour them? Could it be possible to maintain that sight contributes to the communication between humans more than touch? Instead, does it not necessitate the mediation of an object to the detriment of consideration for the intersubjective bond?

Would it not be the kiss, the caress, the embrace and the tactile communion which could represent a development of the first bond and emotions as a manner of communicating between us? This requires another way of conceiving of and of using negation—as that which ensures an intersubjective difference and not merely that which has to do with the adequacy or not adequacy of some predicates or ‘object(s)’.

But why should the ‘semantic gestures’ and the ‘verbal symbols’ comply with a relationship with an ‘object’—which in fact prevents us from discovering what can act as mediation between two subjects? Do we need an object to ‘endow a gesture or voice production with a meaning’? (op.cit., Chapitre VI, p. 31; op. cit., Chapter 7, p. 39). And does the significance of the identification with or of the imitation of the other as an educational process not mean reducing the otherness of this other through apprehending him or her as a sort of object? However that may be, the objectal relationship is considered to represent progress in the development of the child and imitation to be a usual way of apprenticeship. The object would be that which allows children to surmount their narcissism.

The importance of the object could be explained by the passage from the one to the multiple, from the individual to the community. However, such a passage without a transition through the relationship between two naturally different individuals, which can preserve physical belonging and sensitivity, leads to a form of abstraction by which the incarnate subjectivity gets lost. Thus the latter will cling to an object to remain rooted in the concrete. But when the stress is put on the object, reciprocity

between subjects is partly diverted, especially from the bodily level. And what is left of it could be limited to a kind of logical dichotomy: yes or no, good or bad, and so forth. What was decisive for our subjective becoming, that is, energy in/of communication, is not sufficiently taken into account nor cultivated. Due to the investment in objects, the relationship between subjects loses the complexity of its qualities in emotional communication and tactile communion and forces them to submit to an objectivity extraneous to their own. Hence, the extremely restricted and frustrating categories of which adults, including psychologists, will make use to interpret, and even shape, the behaviours of children (*op.cit.*, Chapitre VI; *op.cit.*, Chapter 7). Energy which is effective in communication with the other is misjudged. So, according to Spitz, the children identify with the object of love, which is then the supplier of their needs, which can prevent and blurs the existence of a loving relation and of the difference between subjects.

Instead of developing a culture of the first intersubjective relation, our tradition has substituted for it a logic governed by judgment and a truth for which it acts as the reference, and even as the purveyor. Such logic takes little account of the processes relative to intersubjective relationships, which, nevertheless, are subjected to it. Then the 'not', more generally the negative, does not serve the difference between sexuate identities and subjectivities, but it obeys the arbitrage of understanding concerning the suitability of the object(s). Thinking will be worked out from such a use of the negative, whereas the negative ought to be used to preserve the specific individuation of the subjects so that they could enter into relationship, even into a reciprocal relationship.

Undoubtedly, such a negative, which applies to subjectivity itself as particular and not universal, presupposes an additional stage in the working out of thinking. For example, instead of speaking of the mother as a lost object, one then devises a culture of the link with the mother which resorts to internalization. The internalized mother is not lost. She is in myself as a place where I keep her and can prepare a further meeting with her. I do not appropriate her, I appropriate myself to the possibility of a relation with her. This appropriation does not entail that I assimilate my mother to an object—for example to a bobbin, to allude to the Freud's forth-da. Rather it is a matter of maintaining her presence in me by the

internalization of her smell, her voice, her touch, her smile. The presence of the mother exists for the children and it would be possible to help them to preserve it by bringing within their reach elements which evoke this presence: a cloth which keeps the mother's smell, a recording of her voice and so forth. In that way children are introduced to a psychic economy in which activity and passivity do not divide from one another—a thing which is crucial for the discovery of the touch which corresponds to self-affection and hetero-affection.

According to Spitz, the communication of infants with adults would begin with a 'no' that they would be able to assume from the sixteenth month. But does the 'rooting', the behaviour through which the newborn tries to be in touch with the breast of the mother, not correspond to a search for communication—to a 'yes' more than to a 'no'? To cultivate such a touch and to differentiate it from its initial dependence on need—assuming that it could ever be a question of a mere need—and from its reduction to the presumed quest of an 'object', would be decisive for the becoming, above all relational, of the child.

Moreover, the smile, which happens long before the sixteenth month, seems also to be a positive sign that the baby addresses to the other. The smile is perhaps the most universal communicative gesture between humans, and it intervenes between them without the mediation of any object.

It is strange that Spitz, and not only him, puts the stress on the negative regarding the first way of communicating with another human and that the latter is experienced by the baby as 'foreign', 'frustrating', 'forbidding', 'aggressor' and so forth. The smile, but also the babbling, bear witness to a really precocious and positive search for intercommunication on the part of the infant. And yet, there is no question of that in most of the authors, at least those whom Spitz quotes. Could it be because the smile and the babbling represent an intersubjective communication without the mediation of any object and that they mean a passage from the link dependent on a first food need to a more autonomous, psychic and even spiritual link?

As for Henri Wallon, he does not hesitate to assert that the infant has no relational life even though it succeeds in finding the nipple of the mother's breast, which it touches also with its hand, and not only in a

tense way, while it sucks. Thereby a relational touch exists from the beginning of life, and the baby does not live in a closed world, as Wallon maintains. Touch is even necessary for its survival, which is dependent on touch more than on sight. And one cannot claim that the infant's way of touching is merely functional because it may let itself die of hunger in the absence of its mother, as has been taught by Françoise Dolto. For his part, Aristotle asserts that, for lack of touch, an animal will die.

What, therefore, does it mean, for a human, to sacrifice touch to sight? To remove the infant from its altricial destiny in order to transform it into a precocial being? At what cost? What have we sacrificed of our human life by favouring sight to the detriment of touch—and also the articulate language to the detriment of sensory and sensitive perceptions and gestures? Why would it be useful to separate the functional activity of the infant from its relational longings, as our education systems too often do? Why would the touch of the other have no function in human development, in particular that of uniting interoceptive with exteroceptive feelings towards the acquisition of the proprioceptive experience? Would this not correspond to the function of the caress, and even more of the kiss, in our longing for uniting with one another? Do we not exile the human being from itself or reduce it to the most elementary aspect of animality: the digestive function, when we fail to join together interoceptive and exteroceptive feelings? Then the human being would emerge as such through an aptitude for using articulate language and for a spirituality which, in reality, divides it into a somatic part and a mental part. Perhaps, some would say: into a part which has more to do with the genetic phenotype and another part with the linguistic phenotype—without a real unity of the human being, a unity of which amorous desire would be in search through a union, including a physical union, with the other which differs from oneself by nature.

Nevertheless the fulfilment of this desire requires a sensory, and more generally a sensitive, education, particularly regarding the connection between touch and sight or hearing. In one case, the relationship, especially the intimate relationship, with oneself prevails; in the other case, it is instead the relation with what is the cause of the perception. Thus there is less need for representation in the case of touch, since the meaning of what or whom one touches can do without the mediation of

representation. This does not inevitably suppress intention, notably concerning reciprocity in touching, because the relational life already occurs at a more immediate and physical level, which can miss differentiation for lack of education—a thing which explains many errors and disappointments in amorous relationships, more generally in affective relationships, and the substitution of abstract rules, defined according to the adaptation to the sociocultural environment, for the regulation of natural affects existing between living individuals.

The entire emotional sphere is more often than not considered to be upsetting a more suitable activity and not an important aspect of human becoming. The description of troubles which are caused by emotions are multiple, but their role in the development of subjectivity and intersubjectivity is little treated (cf. Henri Wallon, *Les origines du caractère chez l'enfant*, pp. 44–61). Some theoreticians do not even hesitate to think about emotions as something which thwart our relational life because 'emotion consists only of dissociated, lacunal, disproportionate and chaotic reactions' (cf. J.R. Kantor cited by Wallon, p. 45). As for Darwin, he considers emotion to be a current survival of remainders of previous behaviours (op.cit., pp. 45–6).

According to Wallon, for Piaget and his school, 'the passage from childish to adult thinking amounts to the passage from an absolutely individual thinking, which knows only itself, to a thinking which, through becoming socialized, learns how to limit its own points of view as far as it would realize that they are incompatible with the points of view of the other and it would compel itself to use only those that the thinking of the other could use at the same time of it' (op. cit., p. 225). How could the child have this sort of thinking when it has not yet reached individuation? Why would the ideal model of adult development be to acquire a thinking that the other could use at the same time of oneself?—which does not take account of the qualitative elements of the concrete experiences of each, without even imagining that the qualitative could be more related to the transcendental than the quantitative, which in a way tries to substitute for it. And why should the rights of the child be those which are common to all? Could such an ideal of universal similarity correspond to the criterion which can assess the level of human development? Does this passage from the submission of the child to parents and

masters to a submission to a current state of development and culture not amount to a model of evolution which is called into question by an intercultural era? Does the latter require us to acquire an additional aptitude for abstraction in relation to the sensitivity of the child or to have access to another way of conceiving of and living sensitivity as a possible mediation between all humans, even before transforming our specific words or objects? Is sensitivity itself not able to act as a means of communicating or communing with every human being if it returns to its original potential? And would the relationship with the other as different not be that which allows a culture of sensitivity to escape the alternative between automatic reflexes and representations? (op.cit., pp. 38–43). But the relationship with the other is practically absent from the analyses of Wallon and of many other theoreticians concerning the emotions.

And yet the one who has been conceived and begotten in the mother, and fed by her, prefers an interpersonal relationship to a relation to object(s). The same does not apply to the one who has been completely or partially conceived outside the mother. The mother is an internal incubator for the whole embryonic life of the human, which is not the case, for example, for the bird, a part of the embryonic life of which takes place outside of the mother, who sits on the eggs outside of herself.

Nevertheless, the bird is fed by its sires for a certain time but in the guise of an object not as the blood or the milk of the mother. Humans are thus more altricial than birds, at least a part of them, even if they were born in a nest. It is above all human beings which need the tactile perception of the mother and her warmth in order to develop during their embryonic life and to feed themselves after birth.

If it seems understandable that, in one case, an animal favours sight, locomotion and object in order to live, it ought not to be the same for a mammal such as the human being for whom the relationship with the other is that which ensures the survival and the development of life, notably through the mediation of touch and tactile movements, neither of which being in search of an object as such nor resorting to the muscular. Does the fluid which feeds the fetus or the newborn not amount to a link between living beings more than to a connection to object(s)?

Why has this link not been cultivated as that which gives life? Why did our culture not care about the evolution of this bond from a relation of

dependence, in which needs prevail, to a relation of reciprocity in which desire is determining? This does not mean that touch, warmth and food are absent from our culture, but their nature and sense have changed. Has favouring the relation subject-object(s) over the relationship between living beings not thwart the development of our human existence? Why has birth been called 'a coming into the world' neglecting the importance of 'coming to the other' which, from the beginning, exists for the infant and that the stopping of the natural growth keeps, and even imposes, as the possibility of pursuing the becoming thanks to sexual desire strictly speaking but also the sexual desire for a community life? Why do philosophers linger so much on the relation between the subject and the world and take less interest in the intersubjective relationship, especially as being at the origin of the world? Why is the word above all viewed as denomination and representation of the elements of the world and so little as a means of communication between 'I' and 'you' although it is in that way that the 'I' and the 'you' are formed or ought to be formed in order to have a human signification and status and the sense to circulate between them and beyond?

Indeed, is it not from that relation that speech originates and can remain alive without freezing in lexical terms more or less arbitrarily defined? Before it becomes more or less exact, more or less true, does not meaning form itself there as a relational means, as a current syntax underlying and justifying every lexical use? Is it not in order to enter into relation that sense must exist? Must it confine itself to a means of appropriating and exchanging objects, including those that the words designate? Does that not amount to stopping at needs—and only for certain living beings, not for human beings originally?

What has our culture done with this first truth? What has it done with the relationship between two human beings which allows us to come into the world and to have access to a more autonomous life? Why has our culture ignored, even repressed, the importance of such a relationship, subjecting the survival and the becoming of subjectivity to a dependence on object(s) more than to a relation to another subject? Ought not the subject to be first of all the guardian of such a relation in order to develop natural life and its spiritual becoming? Why have we been so blind to such truth, even though it is inscribed in nature itself? Are we really

human beings, or merely surviving waiting to have access to their true life, if we do not take it into consideration?

There is no doubt that we come into the world by breathing by ourselves, and that this renders us autonomous apart from an environment, in particular a vegetal one, which provides us with oxygen. But we are not yet capable of procuring food for ourselves, beginning with the food that the milk of the mother represents. One way or another we are dependent on the other, on others, for our survival and development until we complete our somatic growing. It is the desire awakened by the dynamism of the germ cells which, then, will allow us to more freely assume our relationship with the other, an other which does not belong to our family genetic legacy.

Our culture seems to have cared about the somatic survival of the species without considering sufficiently the necessity of our more creative development at the psychic and spiritual levels thanks to a relationship between genders and germ cells which are different and are not only devoted to the reproduction of the species. In order to ensure its survival, humanity would have gone from an altricial to a precocial economy, from favouring warmth and touch in the relationship with the other to favouring sight and locomotion in relation to object(s).

However, by becoming presumably precocial, have humans not neglected to develop their ontological potential as altricial beings and thereby regressed to a phylogenetic submission? Human beings would have sacrificed the ontological potential of the individual to an evolution determined by a phylogenetic legacy, apparently more autonomous with respect to the mother but more dependent on the species, more rigid at the level of behaviours, less adaptable and self-modelling (*Le non et le oui*, Chapitre IV, pp. 19–20; *No and Yes*, Chapter 5, pp. 25–6), regulated by sight, locomotion and the research for object(s) more than by the relationship with the other, viewed in an ‘objectal’ way and not as a tactile communication or communion between two different individuals.

To become human would ask us to give up a fundamental sensitive relation with nature, in particular with our own nature. Instead of reaching the spirit which corresponds with our nature, have we not imposed on the latter structures to free ourselves from it and dominate it, the most important of them being language, a language which codifies the real in

a more or less arbitrary way, and which worries little about connecting our brain with our body, about uniting, in us and between us, physical materiality with mental aptitudes, notably by a culture of the different areas of our brain: the midbrain, the thalamus and the cortex? Do our linguistic codes really take account of our memory? Of the connection between memory and affect(s)? Do they not instead aim at substituting themselves for it—leading us to remember words more than ourselves and other living beings?

Such a strategy has probably been imposed on us at a time of our evolution. Have we not to return to this failure in human becoming in order to regain the path towards our real blossoming? In order that we could find again the mediating resources of touch, not only to satisfy our needs as altricial beings but as a means of fulfilling our desire, especially towards the other which differs from us by nature—a ‘roundabout way’ or a ‘provisory suspension’ of our instincts by thinking being not sufficient to allow us to achieve that. Rather we have to subject the pretence to think itself to an *epoche* by compelling it to respect the negative which corresponds with the partiality of our natural being. It is not only a question of being capable of postponing the satisfaction of instincts or drives through thought and language but of admitting that our thinking cannot grasp the nature of another living being, that it has limits, in particular those that culture imposed on it.

In order to go back to our condition of altricial beings and its possible development, the existence of the soul can act as a guide. According to Aristotle, the soul is a property of the animal world, to which we belong as humans, which can evolve towards properly human qualities. The soul would be made of breath and touch, two elements which are essential to animal life, and which can grant it autonomy when they become internalized. Without breathing by itself and the ability to move to feed itself, no animal can survive. And Aristotle says that it is touch which can help the animal to find the food which is suitable. How could we not compare these words with the observations of Spitz concerning the search for the mother’s breast by the infant?

But Aristotle has not considered how touch, associated with breath, can allow us to overcome the stage of a merely material food. In his time, the philosopher did not take an explicit interest in subjectivity.

Furthermore, the implicit subjectivity—the *upokeimenon*—of his thinking was masculine and it favoured the object to the detriment of the relationship between subjects. Now it is the latter which can ensure the passage from need to desire, from the search for a merely material food in order to survive to a food of another sort enabling us to have access to humanity. This more, both physical and psychical, ontological food could contribute to the culture of our belonging to the world of altricial beings, a culture which could exist and develop thanks to an interpersonal relationship, in particular between differently sexuate beings which do not share the same genetic inheritance. Aristotle's thinking about woman was an additional element which prevented him from imagining this specifically human evolution of the soul.

The resource that the Aristotelian soul represented for a culture of altricial beings thus little by little disappeared, and has even been forgotten, as well as the careful attention to breath and touch that it entailed. Hence, touch itself split up into a barely differentiated pathos, a passive experience of the elements of the universe, of the 'animal' world, of the lived ties with the mother, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, an active perception, especially by the hand, which can seize, finger, identify. Such a perception can be accompanied by an intuition, which functions as information about the action that must be carried out, an action in which form has a crucial role.

The relational and interpersonal touch between the infant and the mother, that the Aristotelian soul seems to remember, has disappeared. Our touch is no longer a means of entering into relation with the other in order to provide us with a material or an affective, an ontical or an ontological, food which human life needs. It has become a passive, and often unconscious, individual remembrance of a sensation or apprehension which has intervened in the active constitution of the world through its possible functioning as a tool. All that happens within the horizon of an autological, not to say autistic and solipsistic world, where activity and passivity henceforth are separated from one another notably because the mediating function of touch in the being in relation of different living beings no longer exists.

For lack of founding his world on an interpersonal relationship, man got lost either in a natural or in a constructed world. The environment

which originates from the union between two living beings and which constitutes a horizon imperceptible in the present is lacking—a horizon which happens or exists only in advance or in retrospect for the subjects, none of them being able to create it only by themselves.

This horizon can be sensed or perceived but not appropriated by a single subject. From that results our splitting up in a world the various constructions of which do not take account of the union between two different living beings and two different worlds. Hence the world is lived as a barely differentiated nature or a universe which is made up of elements which are more or less arbitrarily gathered regardless of any living dynamism.

Such dynamism is basically relational. Each can experience it as the letting occur and being said in him- or herself of a relation more or less appropriate to their being. There is no doubt that the relationship between two humans different by nature is the one which most originally can act as the foundation or as the background of a human world. But it is not perceived as such and subjectivity attempts to weave relations with various elements more perceptible of the world in order to meet its need or desire for a conjunction. An ontological foundation is thus transformed into a multitude of ontical, material or spiritual, running aground. The stumble is original and every relationship is, then, in search of the one, both material and spiritual, of our elusive origin—an imperceptible energy foundation which is even more ontological than that of the white which, according to Henri Maldiney, joins all the colours.

This foundation is composed of dynamic exchanges between living beings from which singular bodies can emerge, notably thanks to a propensivity of different germ cells to unite with one another. Such an emergence is more problematic for the woman because, unlike the man, she shares with the other not only the germ cells but also the soma. This probably explains why she is likened to an earth which is nourishing but not fertilizing by itself. The forgetting of the conjunctive nature of our origin thus ended in a distribution between masculine germ cells and a feminine soma. Hence the tear that we endure between body and spirit and the fact that we long for a return to and within the maternal womb instead of acknowledging the conjunctive nature of our conception and its evolutionary and not regressive potential.

The relation to the environment then becomes determinant in our subjective becoming, which is fulfilled through a more or less dialectical process in relation to the environment and the objects that it includes. In such an evolution, the intersubjective relationship vanished as well as the crucial role of touch. And what ought to remain in the service of the latter substitutes for it. The subject-world and subject-object logic henceforth act as a background and a foundation for the subject-subject relation and the assumption of difference that it requires instead of adequacy, similarity, and equality serving as truth criteria and methodological markers.

Henceforth, we ‘germinate’ thanks to the sun which ‘silently comes into us as a remote friend’, Cézanne writes (cf. *Cézanne*, by J. Gasquet, quoted by Maldiney in *Regard Parole Espace*, p. 243). Human germination no longer is the result of the union between different germinal cells. The human being goes no further than a plant, rather than a vegetative germination of its nature, ignoring how its own conception happened, and it searches for incarnating its being either through its ‘own will’ or through an undergone ‘bearing’—either through the activity of a demiurge or through the passivity of an embryonic life. It does not reach the link between activity and passivity that a desire shared with a different human being, even with every living being, can procure. And yet, does that not represent access to a properly human becoming, the foundation and ground of a human world taking place between those of nature itself and those of a divine universe?

Are we not too quickly resorting to the latter so that to assess its truth and depth and to overcome our own being torn between a natural and mortal soma and potentially spiritual and immortal germ cells, which bring to our bodily belonging an immanence and a transcendence which are not merely natural?

The germ cells are also the cause of forms which do not only amount to somatic limits or limits defined by sight but limits which have meaning by themselves. This meaning is not extraneous to the negative because the forms particularize the soma to which they belong, but they also transcend it and make it irreducible to an object. These forms express the nature of the material of the soma from which they emerge, a soma which does not remain a more or less inert and opaque mass. In their gathering, these forms address a sign or a call to the other—opened up to the

outside through their outlines themselves, sources of energy through their apparently static permanence. The body as soma seems to be the support from which they arise towards a commitment to the world, in particular to the other, the difference of which arouses their dynamic potential, awakening them from a drowsiness due to a mechanical and neuter functioning.

Unlike sight, which generally fixes and objectifies what it perceives, touch prompts the existing forms to liberate the energy that they show to enter into relation with what or whom is outside of them. To transform touch into an analogue of sight (cf. Maldiney, *Regard Parole Espace*, p. 255) amounts to removing from touch the mediating function which is peculiar to it. It is to forget its germinating power, a power which has to do with a natural essence whereas the constructed essences are more dependent on sight.

Favouring the haptic character of touch to the detriment of its mediating potential amounts to viewing it within a metaphysical horizon in which seizure, prehension and apprehension are comparable to an operation of sight. But such a functioning removes from touch its intersubjective potentialities. To seize the other by our touch as by our sight runs the risk of being seized by him or her—as the words of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty regarding sexual intercourse prove. There is neither possible reciprocity nor possible communion by seizing. And if touch can individualize, it is through restoring to the body its natural properties and forms. It gets into contact and takes nothing but, rather, gives back nature to itself while giving it a human status—while individualizing it as human in particular thanks to reciprocity.

Touch has more to do with the origin of a genesis than with the seizure of a form, notably to identify it. And the genesis, or rebirth, that touch can grant needs a beyond or a underside regarding the foundation, the ground, the surface or the level already existing. But this beyond originates in an intimacy or interiority of the one who touches or of the ones who touch one another. It involves a bringing, or a bringing again, into the world in which matter and form(s) have to find, or find again, their organization, their mutual structuring.

In a way, there will never exist a thesis as far as a reciprocal touch is concerned. It always remains in the elaboration of a hypothesis. The

union—what some call a synthesis—rests in the service of a foundation and ground from which definitive forms do not emerge but, rather, a never-ending reworking of the relations between matter and form(s) towards the accomplishment of the living who are in touch.

In order for an evolution faithful to nature to come true, living beings must remain different and more and more acquire their own singular identity. Their union must maintain and serve their difference, from which another world can arise. The negative relative to an original partiality not only must be respected and assumed but also kept alive. A culture of touch allows us to do that by individualizing forms and associating them with one another without cutting them off from the ground from which they are formed. Desire is that which requires and makes possible such a culture, a desire which longs for both limit(s) and limitlessness, individuation and union, immanence and transcendence. Such a desire arises from us thanks to the otherness of the other as a longing for transcendence which aims at a never-ending process of the evolution of matter. The bodily presence becomes sensitive interiority, which can be experienced and shared as the origin of a perpetual birth or rebirth. So the energy of each living being contributes to its own development, to the achievement of the union of the one with the other, especially as genders, and to the evolution of one's own species as well as to that of the world.

Part I

Merged with the World



2

Born of Soma and Germ Cells

Divided Between Two Truths

Nature itself includes a part of invisibility, its most important part, the one which is concerned with its original determination—its genotype—and the sap as existence, growth and relationality determining factor. Invisibility is not a matter of ideality, as Merleau-Ponty maintains. The dynamism through which nature ensures ‘intra-structures and intersections’ is invisible (cf. *La Nature*, p. 291; *Nature*, p. 228). This dynamism is also operating in intersubjectivity, when this is not more or less arbitrarily constructed. It permits the link between bodies and the actualization of their potential, notably thanks to desire, especially a sexual desire. The inter-bodies relation of intersubjectivity, to which Merleau-Ponty alludes, seems to be the result of an artificial elaboration, of a coding extraneous to life itself. Its invisibility is not a real one; it bears witness to a lack of connection between the real and the coding.

Hence our body is torn between two truths: that of life that it incarnates and that of sociocultural encodings. Two languages correspond to these two truths: one wants difference and the other sameness. The first is appropriate to the relation between living beings, beginning with two

different living beings, and the second is a mode of expression and communication between one and many, the one and the multiple.

Why has our culture imposed on us an artificial coding? Why has it attributed transcendence and its verticality to idealities, whereas it already exists in nature? Does not the sap raise vertically while also spreading out horizontally, for example to reach the other(s)? Is not the articulation between these two dimensions—the ‘suture’ or the ‘joint’ of which Merleau-Ponty is in search—at work in nature itself? In fact, verticality and horizontality need one another.

These two dimensions take part in our genesis as living beings. This consists in a conjunction. As living beings, we are not born of nothing but of a conjunction between two different beings. In such a birth, there is, no doubt, a rupture of continuity, which does not mean that our being originates from nothing. And in its origin, horizontality and verticality intervene: if to live entails to grow, growing is dependent on a conjunction, on conjunctions.

In fact, our totality is first natural—the result of a conjunction between two different elements which attract and penetrate one another. Why have we neglected this totality for the benefit of the whole that we form as a world and of our relation to this world? Why have we forgotten the link which originates our own being: the union between two different living beings, and wanted to reconstruct a whole by addition of many unities stepping over the conjunction of which we were born as a first whole? Why have we substitute for this totality, which remains open because it exists thanks to a difference and which is also fecund, a totality composed by addition of persons and/or things, which produces devices, and even nothingness, more than a real with a generative potential, at the natural and the ontological levels, and which, furthermore, involves the assumption of a negative and not its exclusion or rejection?

Inserting the negative in the constitution of the whole entails the desire to overcome it. This cannot happen through a solitary becoming but through a union with what or whom one is not. I want to unite with what or whom I am not not to become them but to become the one who I am thanks to assuming the negative that my particularity represents towards a union with the other. Contrary to what is generally imagined, notably by the philosophers, desire does not lack finality: it longs for