Maurice Merleau-Ponty
Between Phenomenology and Structuralism

Theoretical Traditions in the Social Sciences

General Editor: ANTHONY GIDDENS

This series aims to create a forum for debate between different theoretical and philosophical traditions in the social sciences. The series will concentrate on the work of particular thinkers whose ideas have had a major impact on social science.

Ted Benton, THE RISE AND FALL OF STRUCTURAL MARXISM:

Althusser and His Influence

Chris Bryant, POSITIVISM IN SOCIAL THEORY

Ira Cohen, STRUCTURATION THEORY

Mark Cousins and Athar Hussain, MICHEL FOUCAULT

John Forrester, JACQUES LACAN

Bob Jessop, NICOS POULANTZAS

William Outhwaite, REALIST PHILOSOPHY IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

James Schmidt, MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY: Between Phenomenology and Structuralism

Dennis Smith, THE CHICAGO SCHOOL

Piotr Sztompka, ROBERT K. MERTON'S SOCIAL THEORY

Robin Williams, ERVING GOFFMAN

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Between phenomenology and structuralism

James Schmidt

Boston University

St. Martin's Press New York

© James Schmidt 1985

All rights reserved. For information, write:

St. Martin's Press, Inc., 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010

Published in the United Kingdom by Macmillan Publishers Ltd.

First published in the United States of America in 1985

ISBN 978-0-333-30551-5 ISBN 978-1-349-17869-8 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-17869-8

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Schmidt, James.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty: between phenomenology and
structuralism.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, 1908–1961. I. Title.

B2430.M3764S36 1985 194 84–24829

For J. E. M.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Note on Abbreviations and Translations</i>	x
1 Introduction: Merleau-Ponty and Social Thought	1
The life and the reputation	1
The works and the lacunae	5
An overview and some caveats	9
2 Phenomenology, Structuralism and the Human Sciences	13
Descartes's ghost	13
Husserl's Descartes	20
Phenomenology and psychology	25
Straying from the 'Cartesian way'	31
Merleau-Ponty's Husserl	35
Phenomenology and the human sciences	44
3 Others	58
Merleau-Ponty and his other	58
Wrestling with monsters: Descartes, Hegel and Husserl	61
Regarding the regard of the other: <i>Phenomenology of Perception</i> vs <i>Being and Nothingness</i>	70
The political dimension: <i>Adventures of the Dialectic</i> and <i>The Communists and Peace</i>	80
Visibility, carnality, reversibility: <i>The Visible and the Invisible</i>	89
4 Speech, Expression and the Sense of History	102
From perception to history, via expression	102
Reading (and misreading) Saussure	105
Speech as gesture, history as perception	111
Saussure, the sign, and the problem of history	127
Beyond Marx and Husserl: a new ontology	141

5 Conclusion: Between Phenomenology and Structuralism	155
Merleau-Ponty at the limits of phenomenology	155
Some equivocations on the threshold of structuralism	160
The party at Durkheim's breaks up	164
<i>Notes and References</i>	168
<i>Index</i>	206

Acknowledgements

My thanks go first of all to Anthony Giddens, Steven Kennedy, and John Winckler for their encouragement at the start and their patience in waiting for the finish.

The finish was made easier by Gretchen Arnold (who processed these words), Jane MacDonald (who proofed them), and Carole Chandler (who persuaded a somewhat recalcitrant machine to give them back). A grant from the Graduate School of Boston University helped to defray the cost of preparing the manuscript.

I owe my introduction to Merleau-Ponty's work (and a good deal more) to four teachers: Christopher Schaefer, Hayward Alker, W. E. Griffith, and Kurt H. Wolff. I am also obliged to John O'Neill for suggesting some of the themes which eventually found a home in the third chapter. My first extended foray into Merleau-Ponty's writings took place at the Research Institute on International Change (Columbia University); its director, Seweryn Bialer, deserves long-overdue thanks. Erazim Kohák, Jeffery Mehlman, and George Psathas, my colleagues at Boston University, helped on a number of points, both bibliographic and conceptual.

The manuscript profited greatly from Tom McCarthy's comments; its author has gained even more from his encouragement and support. Tim Allen saved me from a number of false steps, provided a steady stream of helpful references, aided with the index, and suggested some fruitful lines of inquiry. And Jim Miller helped beyond measure. We first met on a sweltering summer evening a decade ago over under-cooked chicken, Barry White, and Alban Berg and talked about Merleau-Ponty. We have talked a good deal since then, and I hope that some of what I have gained from our friendship has made its way into these pages.

James Schmidt

The author and publishers would like to thank Northwestern University Press for permission to reproduce extracts from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures of the Dialectic*, translated by Joseph Bien (1973), and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (1968) and Routledge & Kegan Paul and Humanities Press Inc. for permission to reproduce extracts from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Colin Smith (1962).

Note on Abbreviations and Translations

Abbreviations in the Notes and References refer to the following of Merleau-Ponty's works. Although I have always cited English translations, I have made a number of minor changes in the interest of consistency and clarity.

- AD* *Adventures of the Dialectic*, trans. Joseph Bien (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973)
- CAL* *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language*, trans. Hugh J. Silverman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973)
- H&T* *Humanism and Terror*, trans. John O'Neill (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969)
- IPP* *In Praise of Philosophy*, trans. John Wild and James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963)
- PP* *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962)
- PrP* *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays*, edited by James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964)
- PW* *The Prose of the World*, trans. John O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973)
- S* *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964)
- SB* *The Structure of Behaviour*, trans. Alden L. Fisher (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963)
- SNS* *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964)
- TFL* *Themes from the Lectures at the Collège de France 1952–1960*, trans. John O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970)
- VI* *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968)