In Merleau-Ponty's last and incomplete work The Visible and the Invisible, the notion of "flesh" is introduced. In that work it sheds its accustomed meaning to become an elementary term which seems to have no counterpart in Western thought, but which may not be entirely foreign to some other cultural traditions. 'Flesh' is a basic term describing the phenomenon of perceiving, and of being the object of perception, of reciprocal tactile contact, of mutual mingling. Whereas in The Phenomenology of Perception, the author had emphasized the intermingling of subject and world as intelligent embodiment, his final work involved a study of the interrelationship of inner and outer -- the "criss-crossing" of the touching and the tangible, of seer and seen, of toucher and touched, and of the indeterminacy of the "boundaries" of each of the senses and their inherent transposability.

In foregrounding the human's pre-discursive experience (prior to schema of rationality and language) Merleau-Ponty focuses on 'raw' sensibility. But this is not an attempt to excavate a pre-social level of human experience, or a sort of foundation of consciousness. Rather, the aim is to avoid any atomistic conclusions and to bring to light the genuine openness of subjects and world. Merleau-Ponty demonstrates this point in his account of relations between the visible (sensible) and the invisible (intelligible), the seer and the seen. The visible is a sort of "palpitation" of being. It is never self-identical, nor absolutely dispersed. Being is not plenitude, self-identity or substance, but rather divergence, non-coincidence. "Flesh" refers to the capacity of being to fold in upon itself, its simultaneous orientation to inner and outer. Using the term "double sensation," Merleau-Ponty describes the transfer of what is touching to that which is being touched, explaining that the touching subject passes over into the rank of the touched, descending into things, such that it is the one touch which occurs in the midst of the world and in things.

Thus, our attention is drawn to the interaction of the tangible and the visible. Merleau-Ponty writes of the implication of the seer in the visible, and of the shared participation of the subject and the object in a visibility of everything. But it is his articulation of the tangible which is particularly significant, signaling a radical departure from the Western philosophical tradition in which, while the toucher is always touched, the one who sees merely does so from a distance and is, therefore, not implicated in what is seen. His discussion of the tangible underscores a determination to depict both "subject" and "object" in a generalizable visibility, which is, for each, the same visibility -- that is, the same "flesh." From this discussion of flesh comes the insight that everyone who sees is simultaneously in view as it were, to another. The artist sees a landscape but the landscape, in an important sense, also "sees" the artist. But this is not anthropomorphism at work. On the contrary, what it amounts to is a major claim about a non-entitative, non-identical materiality shared by both the subjects and the objects of perception. "Flesh" furnishes the capacity for turning the world back on itself, to bring into play its reflexivity. Thus subject and object are inherently open to each other for they are "constituted" in the one stroke separating the flesh into its distinct modalities.

The account of "flesh" in Merleau-Ponty's work undermines the dichotomous structure of the mind/matter dualism, doing away with the separation between animate and inanimate, between species, between observer and object of investigation. Such a move gives us a way of re-conceiving materiality so as to make it one, enabling us to dispense with the conventional mental/material distinction. The body-subject is an experienced structure; the things outside of the body are always "encrusted" in its joints. The body is that which reveals other "thats," precisely because it consists of the same material as they. One's flesh is where the lines of direction of the world are inscribed on a fold in their midst. Movement of eye and hand are of a tissue like that of the structured layout of the world. Lived human experience is, thus, a seamless web -- a unified zone of awareness which is rent through that process of abstraction which accompany all attempts at objectification.

**BODY SUBJECT AS PLACE-CONSTRUED, IMMERSED IN ENVIRONMENT**

As more than one critic of the philosophical tradition has pointed out in recent years, the subject-object distinction, the "man and the world" separation has functioned discursively as an elaborate but powerful fiction supporting a reality in which man has dominated women, other men, and nature. The results have been disastrous for all but the few. Merleau-Ponty's account of the relationship of humans to the world presents body-subjects and environments as synonymous for the purpose of everyday living. Although the material world provides the individual with images of himself or herself, that world is not, however, "outside" the person. On the contrary it is experienced as inextricably bound up in a quite concrete sense with the embodied ("enfleshed") subject. It seems to me, therefore, that, in Merleau-Ponty's account, body-subjects are always in an important sense "place constructed" in the same way that all knowledges and everything in the world is so construed. All existence arises from the specificities of place and all environments have body-subjects who are at different times, in differing cultures, related to them. While aware that, in the dominant cognitive mode, the world is an objective entity for a "thinking subject," Merleau-Ponty is concerned with the moments of daily living in which as subjects we interpenetrate the world and are fused with it. So for him there are no ontological "cracks" between persons and nature, the self and world, between what exists (the issue for traditional philosophy) and what we say about what exists (what has become the key issue for postmodernism). They are one and the same.

Merleau-Ponty's account of body-subject and "flesh" demands that we pay attention to the connectedness of body-subject to world and to the immersion-in-world that is the reality of human existence. The definition of things, their discontinuities with all other realities, and the habit of referring to borders which demarcate oneself and all possible others is just one way of talking about experience. It is the one most familiar to us. But "realities" alter dramatically when different aspects of human existence are foregrounded, (for example the aspect of place or rootedness within environment). We can focus on the notion of subject as rationality, or the self as an arrangement of bodily parts, thoughts and feelings, or on "subjects" inscribed within gendered discourses. Or we can take Merleau-Ponty's perspective, that it is not so much that every "reality" has an inherent structure, but rather that structure can be seen to inhere in a whole range of "realities." What such a view seems to me to contain within it is a conception of the material as an inherent intertwining of subject and world. It is a conceptualization of materiality which does not demand a split between human corporeality and the corporeality of "nature." Ultimately this conception of materiality, which clearly has a cosmological dimension, includes everything in and of the world.