Conclusion

The literature review of the reading of Merleau-Ponty for cognitive science which I presented in chapter one illustrates some of the diversity and specificity of this reading. The diversity lies in two dimensions. On the one hand, there is a difference between psychological and philosophical aspects of this reading. That is, one can distinguish attempts to describe the convergence between Merleau-Ponty's descriptions and contemporary embodied, embedded cognitive science from using Merleau-Ponty to critique the epistemological presuppositions of philosophical positions which support cognitivism. On the other, within the psychological aspect, there are important differences between reading Merleau-Ponty for connectionist and for enactivist cognitive science. Connectionists focus on habituation and acquisition of skills, and the passive achievement of a maximum prise, while enactivists focus on the distinction between the living and the non-living, and the importance of autonomous, anticipatory activity.

The unity of the reading, which prompted me to describe it as a "mundane" reading, lies in the way in which the compatibility of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology with naturalistic explanations and models – the non-transcendental character of his philosophy – is taken for granted.

The last two chapters, however, have revealed that there is more to Merleau-Ponty than the mundane reading presents. In fact, it could be said that the attempt to expose the limitations of the mundane reading has forced us to recognize themes in Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology that would not otherwise have been made explicit.

Reread, if you will, the following quote which was cited in the preamble to chapter one.

I can therefore see an object in so far as objects form a system or a world, and in so far as each one treats the others round it as spectators of its hidden aspects and as guarantee of the permanence of those aspects. (PhP, 68)

There, we compared this description to Dana Ballard's attempt to create an observer independent memory by exploiting object-orientated geometries. In light of what we have just discussed in chapter three, however, the description of the surrounding objects as "spectators" takes on much greater prominence. It now
sounds like an implicit evocation of the transcendental intersubjectivity. From that perspective, the surrounding objects refer to the thing’s hidden aspects, because they instantiate some of the intersubjective perspectives implicated in the transcendence of the perceived. It is as though I share my attention to the thing with these peripheral things the way I might share the thing with others.

Read this way, this quote connects up with different aspects of Merleau-Ponty’s work. Since it suggests the originality or even priority of intersubjective experience, it is now reminiscent, for example, of his defense of a truth to infant animism in the *Structure of Behaviour*.

People have long spoken of infantile “animism”; but the expression seems improper to the extent that it evokes an interpretation in which the child would confer a signification on the qualitative givens which is distinct from them, would construct souls to explain things. The truth is that there are no things, only physiognomies … [though] the physiognomy must be delineated in a minimum of matter. What can be the appearance of this sensible support? (StrB, 168)

I’ve suggested that Merleau-Ponty’s responds to this question through invoking the metaphor of invitation. The sensible support of physiognomic perception has the appearance of an anonymous, general invitation. It would be difficult to see how one could avoid granting this claim a metaphysical significance. It could serve to define Merleau-Ponty’s empirical realism, i.e. a realism within the context of his transcendental strategy. Thus, from the perspective offered here, Taylor is only half right when he claims that Merleau-Ponty rejects all forms of anti-realism. There is a defense of realism, but it is still within the context of a transcendental philosophical standpoint.

This is also borne out by comparison with *Structure*. Attempting to capture the truth of realism that remains in the wake of its critique by intellectualism, Merleau-Ponty argues that it is the *passivity* of experience which motivates realism, and which intellectualism corrupts and misunderstands by treating it as an error. While it true that “the experience of passivity is not explained by an actual passivity,” as the realist supposes, all the same, ”it should have a meaning and be able to be understood.” (StrB, 216) I have tried to show how construing the
sensible as a kind of invitation enables another conception of passivity which is neither the opposite of freedom\textsuperscript{99}, nor reducible to cause.

But the account of the transcendental aspect of Merleau-Ponty’s thought which I’ve offered in chapter two is a phenomenological one. So, instead of speaking of empirical realism, we should really be speaking of the natural attitude understood from within a transcendental reduction. This is significant because, as we saw in chapter two, it is not epistemological scepticism that motivates Merleau-Ponty’s reduction, but the figure of the pathological subject. In fact, we are now in a position to see that presenting Merleau-Ponty’s transcendental strategy in epistemological terms may distort it. While it plays a similar role to the sceptic, placing the pathological subject in this role indicates a shift away from the epistemological concerns of the transcendental tradition, e.g. Kant, in the direction of the theme of normality.

This shift can be regarded as a reframing of epistemological questions, and may be worth comparing to that advocated by virtue epistemologists, who hold that epistemological issues are best understood in the context of the reproduction and conflict of intellectual virtues. Merleau-Ponty’s reduction also takes the primary focus off truth and objectivity, but instead of placing it on virtues like honesty, diligence, and transparency, his approach takes the appropriate context to be that of normal prepersonal inherence in a world held in common.

The discussion of Haugeland allowed me to illustrate this by re-enacting such a shift in my critique of his account of objective perception, which was reframed in terms of the need to distinguish normal and pathological forms of body image constitution. It could be said that this challenge is not so much a criticism as it is a warning not to suppose that the objective perception Haugeland describes is self-sufficient. As I explicitly indicated, what Haugeland describes is not so much incorrect as it is founded in a more primordial involvement. Haugeland therefore risks a kind of objectivism insofar as he does not acknowledge this founding involvement with a common world. Moreover, by asking that normal perception be distinguished from the experience of the anorexic, the critique suggests that the

\textsuperscript{99} Although this implies that the notion of freedom must be separated from that of pure activity, and which is therefore not a conscious imposition of one’s will. Compare e.g. Heinämäa’s descriptions of the surfer and the body in labor (Heinämäa 2003, 112) with Merleau-Ponty’s claim that freedom expresses itself “not by an absolute creation,” but instead “only by a series of unobtrusive deflections which necessitate first of all following its course” (PhP, 455, my emphasis)
problem with such an objectivism is not that it is wrong, but that it is unliveable.\textsuperscript{100}

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The project initiated here can be expanded and clarified in a number of ways. Overshadowing all would have to be the development of the implications of locating Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy – at least in its early form – between genetic and generative phenomenology. Even a cursory review of Steinbock’s groundbreaking \textit{Home and Beyond} reveals a number of promising paths. For example, Steinbock argues that in his manuscripts Husserl considered the phenomena of normality and abnormality to be \textit{leading clues (Leitfäden)} for the transformation of phenomenology from a genetic to a generative mode.\textsuperscript{101} This may help us explain why Merleau-Ponty incorporates a confrontation with pathology into his practice of the reduction, where Husserl does not.

Moreover, Steinbock offers powerful constitutional descriptions of normality as concordance, optimality and typicality. These are all important concepts within discussions of Merleau-Ponty's relevance to cognitive science, and a thorough inquiry into the sense of these terms in a Husserlian context would provide a useful foil against their naturalistic interpretation.

On a similar note, the recuperation of the transcendental aspect of Merleau-Ponty’s thought must surely bring the relationship between Merleau-Ponty and Fink to the fore. It would be worth comparing the picture of Merleau-Ponty offered here with Fink's picture of a constructive phenomenology in the \textit{Sixth Cartesian Meditation}.\textsuperscript{102} This would no doubt help to connect the methodological issues discussed in chapter two with the emphasis on temporalisation that is characteristic of genetic phenomenology.\textsuperscript{103}

Another avenue of development would involve exploring the ethical significance of the distinction between a phenomenological confrontation with pathology and a mundane, or empirical, one. That is, to what extent is a philosophical

\begin{footnotes}
\item[100] Describing it this way opens up the possibility that the kind of critique exhibited here could be construed in terms of an anti-nihilism, and be compared to the genealogical critique of computationalism undertaken in Fred Evans’ \textit{Psychology and Nihilism} (Evans 1993).
\item[101] See esp. Section 3 of Steinbock (1995)
\item[102] Fink (1995)
\item[103] For a fascinating account of Merleau-Ponty as constructive phenomenologist, see Bruzina (2001). Bruzina restricts himself largely to the \textit{Structure of Behavior}, \textit{Nature} and \textit{The Visible and the Invisible}, and says little about the \textit{Phenomenology} itself.
\end{footnotes}
engagement with the sick also an ethical engagement. In this way, this project might link up with the feminist critique of the clinical encounter, which has been a part of the Australian feminist reception of Merleau-Ponty for some time, and in so far as it bears on the mode of engagement within cognitive science may help to deconstruct the gap between therapeutic and theoretical encounters. In this way, it may be possible to contribute to the development of a second-person approach to the relationship between phenomenology and cognitive science, spearheaded by Evan Thompson and Natalie Depraz.

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The way we read the *Phenomenology* and what we take it to say are not separable from one another. Taking the *Phenomenology* to be concerned with expertise or anticipatory activity, as the mundane reading does, and treating the text itself as a set of heuristics, immediately intelligible given the right framework, or more generally as anticipating contemporary cognitive science, are two sides of the same coin.

By contrast, I have suggested that the *Phenomenology* is concerned with transcendence, fecundity, and invitedness and that it approaches these themes through a reduction inspired by pathology. This squares, roughly, with my description of the experience of reading the text which I offered at the very start. The *Phenomenology* is opaque, and its opacity invites the reader to read with the text, or according to it. Thus, the *Phenomenology* borrows itself from its readers just as Merleau-Ponty said we all borrow ourselves from others. But it does not plagiarise us. It makes something else from what it borrows, and in doing so, makes something else of us, too. Its fecundity lies not simply in its opacity, like the promise of another world, but precisely in that opacity's transformative power in this one. As usual, though, Merleau-Ponty himself puts it best:

> if [a] book really teaches me something, if the other person is really another, at a certain stage I must be surprised, disoriented. If we are to meet not just through what we have in common but in what is different between us – which presupposes a transformation of myself and of the other as

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104 See e.g. Diprose (1994; 2002)

105 It's interesting to note the considerable interest in Merleau-Ponty within the literature around the practice and ethics of nursing. See e.g. Thomas (2005), Toombs (2001), Wilde (2003) and Wynn (1997; 2002).

106 See especially the papers collected in Thompson (2001).
well – then our differences can no longer be opaque qualities. They must become meaning. (PW, 142)

I have attempted to make some meaning out of a disorientation provoked by reading the *Phenomenology* in light of its reception within cognitive science. There is a lot to be gained from the reading of Merleau-Ponty for cognitive science. The translation of Merleau-Ponty’s language into that of control systems and neurobiology grants an original significance to his descriptions. However, in my opinion, this reading is far more provocative in what it bring into negative relief. By implicitly naturalising Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, it prompts us to refocus our attention on the transcendental aspects of the work, aspects which have otherwise been dismissed through a kind of compassionate neglect. So, I do not mean to reject the mundane reading in so far as it is a reading of Merleau-Ponty for cognitive science, though I will resist attempts to reduce Merleau-Ponty to this reading.

My overall claim is that we are not yet done with reading Merleau-Ponty, even his early work on which the mundane reading is based. This thesis is therefore offered as a small contribution to the task of preserving the fecundity and transformative power of Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology*, upon which the very future of that classic text depends.