MERLEAU-PONTY (1962) held that the body transcends thing-like reality, with the result that the usual scientific methods are grossly inadequate in relationship to it. His method for the study of the body, "radical reflexion," rather than revealing to us the phenomenal world, gives us presence in the world as transcendent. In such a phenomenology, consciousness, superimposed on a world that is already-there, radically primary, is not primary; it is secondary to the instructing spontaneity of the body. Each thought gives meaning to the world, but a meaning which, since we never express it completely, is always incomplete. The body bears within itself, and through its animation, expresses, the scheme of the already-there world. The spoken word similarly is schematic; it gives form to my signifying intention when I am about to speak.

The lived-body, being the experienced body, is tied to the lived-moment. Language, however, is not anchored in time. Con-
sider the most basic act of my body, breathing. I can never re-
peat my last breath, that is, the breath I just drew. My last 
breath is not temporally transportable, and being for my body at 
that moment, neither is it translatable or transformable, as are 
the words "my," "last" and "breath." Thus, language is an ex-
pression of the body which transcends it. Since etymologically 
"transcend" means "to climb over or beyond," there is a literal, 
etymological basis for searching in language for the trans-ascend-
ant life of the body, its vestiges, vestments, or investments. 
Heidegger early (Sein und Zeit) referred to language as "the home 
of Being-ness," and more recently has developed what has been 
called a "phenomenology of words" (Edie, 1962), manipulating 
etymologies to "reduce" the everyday meaning of words, to 
"explode" them, disclosing their implicit, buried meanings. To 
re-cover human language at its meaningful source, in the her-
meeneutic phenomenology of Heidegger, is to un-cover Being. 
Merleau-Ponty, confining himself to a more concrete and more 
psychological assertion—that both having and being his body, 
man in his language projects it onto and into his spatial-temporal 
world—had not, until his last work, explicitly spoken of the body 
as a source for the revelation of Being. However, Kwant’s analysis 
(1968) of Merleau-Ponty’s unfinished book, The Visible and the 
Invisible, shows that he finally held that the fact that our body 
is both subject and thing shows the impossibility of original in-
tentional opposition between subject and thing, and that an un-
derlying Being, which he called "l’Etre sauvage," is not yet sub-
jective or objective, but potentially both.

As Kwant (1968) points out, this is the metaphysical back-
ground for Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the body, but the analysis 
itself is concrete. There is real reflexivity in our body. An analysis 
of the hand—as it seizes a glass, a cup, a lamp, an apple, as it 
feels the softness of a pear, the quality of a particular bolt of 
cloth—shows that the "perceptibility of the touchable thing is 
effected by the right attitude of our hand." This is an attitude of 
which we are usually unaware, but one which we could not adapt 
or correct if we did not feel our feeling hand. In perceiving the 
world the body perceives itself, and this self-perception "condi-
tions the perceptibility of the world."