

Merleau-Ponty and the Paradoxes of Expression (Philosophy, Aesthetics and Cultural Theory)

By Donald A. Landes

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Merleau-Ponty and the Paradoxes of Expression offers a comprehensive reading of the philosophical work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a central figure in 20th-century continental philosophy.

By establishing that the paradoxical logic of expression is Merleau-Ponty's fundamental philosophical gesture, this book ties together his diverse work on perception, language, aesthetics, politics and history in order to establish the ontological position he was developing at the time of his sudden death in 1961. Donald A. Landes explores the paradoxical logic of expression as it appears in both Merleau-Ponty's explicit reflections on expression and his non-explicit uses of this logic in his philosophical reflection on other topics, and thus establishes a continuity and a trajectory of his thought that allows for his work to be placed into conversation with contemporary developments in continental philosophy. The book offers the reader a key to understanding Merleau-Ponty's subtle methodology and highlights the urgency and relevance of his research into the ontological significance of expression for today's work in art and cultural theory.

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Editorial Review

Review

Don Landes gives us a new reading of Merleau-Ponty, at once wondrously insightful, compelling, and rigorous, that shows how expression and creativity are at the heart of his philosophy. In doing so, Landes makes a deep and lasting contribution to Merleau-Ponty scholarship, by revealing a developing unity across Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, from start to finish, and linking Merleau-Ponty's views of expression and the body to their philosophical context, especially to Gabriel Marcel and Leon Brunschvicg. But Landes also makes an original contribution by showing how Merleau-Pontian expression fruitfully connects to the studies of the genesis of meaning in Gilbert Simondon and Jean-Luc Nancy, and how a Merleau-Pontian phenomenology of expression speaks to current philosophical concerns. -- David Morris, Department Chair and Professor of Philosophy, Concordia University, Canada Donald Landes' Merleau-Ponty and the Paradoxes of Expression presents a remarkably clear reading of Merleau-Ponty's entire philosophical itinerary, going from his early The Structure of Behavior to his final writings around the time of The Visible and the Invisible. Landes' study is oriented by what must be considered Merleau-Ponty's most important concept: expression. Through "the paradoxes of expression," Landes, in fact, joins up with Merleau-Ponty's movement of thought, extends it and reveals what aspect that had remain "unthought." There is no question that Landes' Merleau-Ponty and the Paradoxes of Expression is an outstanding study of Merleau-Ponty thought. But also, I think it will be viewed as a classical study, rivaling the studies produced by Dillon, Madison, and Barbaras. -- Leonard Lawlor, Sparks Professor of Philosophy, Penn State University, USA Donald Landes' Merleau-Ponty and the Paradoxes of Expression offers a "genetic engagement" with Merleau-Ponty's work, drawing together the expressive traces that run like lines of force through his corpus, from the earliest work to the posthumously published working notes and final lectures. Bringing an impressive array of historical as well as contemporary interlocutors into the conversation, Landes' creative reading is destined to become as indispensable a resource for students encountering Merleau-Ponty for the first time as for longstanding scholars of his work. Taking Merleau-Ponty's thought in entirely new directions, and weaving in provocative insights from the voluminous secondary scholarship along the way, Landes enacts the "paradoxical logic of expression" he discovers in Merleau-Ponty's work, soliciting our participation in this "forever open appeal to expressive bodies to share meaning. Gail Weiss, Chair, Department of Philosophy, The George Washington University, USA Landes traces how a subtly but radically shifted concept of "expression" weaves through Merleau-Ponty's lifetime oeuvre, including the sometimes overlooked The Structure of Behavior and the oft-misunderstood political works. As such, this book is a valuable contribution to a vital emerging topic in Merleau-Ponty scholarship. Using both Merleau-Ponty's published works and some unpublished lecture material, Landes also brings to bear the intriguing work of Merleau-Ponty's onetime student Gilbert Simondon, in particular Simondon's notion of a relational, metastable equilibrium...Though clearly written, the discussion is for specialists. Summing Up: Recommended. Graduate students and above. -- A. B. Curry, University of Saint Joseph, Connecticut CHOICE

About the Author

Donald A. Landes is Assistant Professor in the Department of Philosophy at Concordia University, Montréal, Québec, Canada.

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