

THE POLITICS OF THE *FLESH*: PHENOMENOLOGY, TRAGEDY & BEYOND

THE POLITICS OF THE *FLESH*:
PHENOMENOLOGY, TRAGEDY & BEYOND

By

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ABSTRACT

We reconsider the work of French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty. And we argue for a non-foundational relation and solidarity between philosophy and the political within his work and the prose of the world.

If Merleau-Ponty begins by privileging philosophy over the political, his work does not end with the privileging of the political over philosophy. Rather the come and go of man's interrogation of the one by the other and of the other by the other of the other comes to dominate discussion. The question of the very space of this come and go, interrogation and discussion ultimately organizes Merleau-Ponty's work.

In that this space is neither object nor subject, all hitherto existing philosophy - phenomenology included - is called into question. If Marx and Hegel anticipate such radicalness, it is nonetheless through Saussure and Weber that Merleau-Ponty overcomes subjective thought or existing philosophy. This is not to privilege the object however. It is to turn back on Being or, as Merleau-Ponty says, the *flesh*. And this is not to privilege this Being or *flesh*. Man may be, as Pascal said, a reed. But man is an interrogative reed. It is man who interrogates the *flesh* that he might come to better terms with himself.

What man must ultimately come to terms with is, as Madison has suggested, his Promethean Urge. Radical thought and radical action - philosophy and revolutionary politics - seek to steal back from the gods the fire of reason said to be man's by right and

nature. Merleau-Ponty's radicalness lies beyond this presumption. He teaches that "[a]lienation is not simply privation of what was our own by natural right; and to bring it to an end, it will not suffice to steal what has been stolen, to give us back our due."

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I dedicate this work to Alia Al-Saji.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS WITH A NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

Merleau-Ponty's Works:

AD	<i>The Adventures of the Dialectic</i>
CAL	<i>Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language</i>
HT	<i>Humanism and Terror</i>
IPP	<i>In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays</i>
MP	<i>Letter to Sartre: "Paris, [le] 8 juillet [1953]"</i>
PhP	<i>Phenomenology of Perception</i>
PW	<i>The Prose of the World</i>
S	<i>Signs</i>
SN	<i>Sense and Non-Sense</i>
TD	<i>Texts and Dialogues</i>
VI	<i>The Visible and the Invisible</i>

Other Works:

C	Marx, Karl, <i>Capital</i>
CM	Flynn, Bernard, <i>Political Philosophy at the Closure of Metaphysics</i>
CR	Husserl, Edmund, <i>The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendent Phenomenology</i>
CT	Flynn, Bernard, "Chair et Textualité: Merleau-Ponty et Derrida"
F	Marx, Karl, "Theses on Feuerbach"
G	Derrida, Jacques, <i>Of Grammatology</i>
GI	Marx, Karl, <i>The German Ideology</i>
HD	Marx, "Critique of Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy in General"
ML	Ewald, François, <i>Magazine Littéraire</i> , # 320, Avril 1994, p. 68-86.
P	Madison, G. B., "Did Merleau-Ponty Have a Theory of Perception?"
PMP	Madison, G. B., <i>Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty: A Search For The Limits of Consciousness</i> .
PS	Schmidt, James, <i>Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Between Phenomenology and Structuralism</i> .
SR	Bernet, Rudolf, "The Subject in Nature: Reflections on Merleau-Ponty's <i>Phenomenology of Perception</i> ."
ST	Sartre, Jean-Paul, <i>Letter to Merleau-Ponty: "Roma, [le] 18 juillet [1952]."</i>

When available, English translations of Merleau-Ponty's works are cited. Minor changes in these translations were made infrequently.

INTRODUCTION / OF PHILOSOPHY & POLITICS

There is always a solidarity of philosophy and politics, but in evil, not in good: they do not succeed in living together, together they suffer.

Merleau-Ponty - "Philosophy and Politics Today"

The work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty is profoundly political. We might even suggest that it is organized by the political. This is by no means the usual account of his work, although it is most consistent with the path taken by his student Claude Lefort.

The myth that there are two Merleau-Pontys is convenient. The philosopher, Paul Ricoeur says, was "the greatest of French phenomenologists." The political polemicist, on the contrary, irresolutely and variously identified himself with Marx, non-communism and liberalism. This neatly halves what the philosopher has to read and make sense of. It leaves equally unchallenged political science that swallows up philosophy and philosophy that is above the empiricism of politics. It licences equally philosophy that envelops politics without thinking it and philosophy common to ethics manuals that reduces politics to itself - both leaving political life untouched. This myth respects the object-subject distinction, with politics being the unthinking, amoral object - hence the objectivity of political science - and philosophy being the thinking, moral subject - hence philosophy's subjectivity and self-righteousness. This myth saves the North American reader the trouble of understanding the French political context in which

Merleau-Ponty writes on the excuse that politics is not philosophical and philosophy is not political. It insulates this academic reader equally from Merleau-Ponty's serious commitment to Marx and his thoroughgoing critique of Marx, which together would by the death of academic American liberalism in the face of a far more serious and subtle commitment to historical liberalism somewhat after the style of Max Weber. This myth, perhaps most dangerously, leaves unquestioned the philosopher's most secret desire - to be delivered from politics to the divine reign of the philosopher-king. In short, the myth leaves all the idols intact by leaving the relation between philosophy and the political profoundly unthought.

Would Merleau-Ponty have suffered such a reading of his work? As the reader of his 'philosophical work' well knows, Merleau-Ponty was not one to leave idols intact, nor to do philosophy with a hammer. He would carefully take them apart, always manifesting a more subtle unity. This will become evident in the chapters that follow, with the epilogue interrogating philosophy and the political as woven together in one fabric, as cut of one cloth, as articulations of one *flesh*. Here however, and by way of introduction, Merleau-Ponty would himself take the opportunity to speak against the disentangling and unravelling of his work, would speak in person through his rupture with Jean-Paul Sartre. The letters of this rupture, two by Sartre and one by Merleau-Ponty, have but recently been published together with a brief introduction by François Ewald.¹ The philosophical import of the letters is Merleau-Ponty's refusal to "accept the opposition between philosophy and politics by which Sartre strives to silence him." (ML

68)

* * *

Merleau-Ponty and Sartre had been friends while studying at the *l'Ecole Normale Supérieure* in the late twenties and found themselves reunited as wartime *résistants* in the group "*Socialisme et liberté*." (ML 68) In the euphoria of the *Libération* and united by a mutual disdain for intellectualist philosophies that reduce action to thought, other to self, object to subject, they founded *Les Temps modernes*. The journal would decipher the prose of the world. This meant, among other things, equally submitting America and the U.S.S.R. to a critique from a neutral, French perspective that took its bearings from Karl Marx and, perhaps less obviously, the phenomenologies of G.W.F. Hegel and Edmund Husserl as appropriated in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* and Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. It was Merleau-Ponty in particular, James Schmidt says, who was "concerned to defend the principles of communism against liberal critics while at the same time ready to criticise the Soviet Union and the French Communist Party for betraying their Marxist heritage."² Before the spring of 1952, Schmidt says, "Sartre had been a good deal less concerned with politics and a good deal further from Marx than Merleau-Ponty," as perhaps is testified to by Merleau-Ponty's assumption of "the responsibilities of editor-in-chief and political editor." (PS 82) Merleau-Ponty, in his reply of July 8th 1953 to Sartre's censure for having discussed differences between them at the conference "Philosophy and Politics Today" on May 28th 1952, offers us a glimpse of what the established order at the journal had been but was

no more:

Not agreeing with you, what could I have done? If we had together decided the political attitude of the journal, it would not have been friendly - or rather it would have been treason - to discuss [differences] publicly. But you never deliberated the least of your political decisions with me. . . . It is true that those decisions [concerning the Occupation] had a personal side; but it was not otherwise as to the orientation of [the journal] . . . How could I have been tied by these positions you so jealously guarded as *your own*. If you find it unfriendly that I discuss them, I myself find very little friendliness in the silence in which you take them. . . . we must have the same consideration for each other, I was engaged by your publishing on politics about as much as you were by mine (no one outside the journal imagined that I was so little in contact with your development). When the infamous affairs of the *Camps* [in the U.S.S.R.] burst forth, I brought you a text and demanded that you sign it with me. You never did the same. But the process was practicable. At the least, it implied that you allowed me every right to deliberate on you publicly.³

Merleau-Ponty adds: "I have *always* discussed publicly your theses . . . admittedly the separation between us was much more perceptible this time." (MP 73) But he notes, both returning to the matter of mutual "consideration" and underlining differences on Marx - "you cited in speech and writing [my] *Humanism and Terror* in your sense" - and on phenomenology - "you mentioned, not without sarcasm . . . those poor souls who see the social between the *en soi* and the *pour soi* . . . readers recognized me in these lines." (MP 74) Merleau-Ponty, setting the stage for the last act of a tragedy, observes: "To renounce speaking of your theses, I would have to renounce having an opinion. Precisely, you say, I must not have an opinion." (MP 74) The Korean War was to destroy, among other things, not only the uneasy co-existence of two very different commitments to Marx and

two very different appropriations of phenomenology, but an often difficult friendship.

Act one opens with charges by the Communist press that America is engaging in biological warfare (PS 81) and closes with Sartre, pen in hand, returning "precipitously from Rome" (ML 68). The charges assure General Matthew B. Ridgeway, come to Paris on May 28th 1952 to take command of NATO, an atypically warm Parisian welcome, creating the context wherein the absurd arrest of Jacques Duclos for conspiracy is not quite utterly unimaginable. (PS 81) Schmidt recounts the affair:

Jacques Duclos, a leading figure in the French Communist Party and a member of parliament, was arrested - allegedly with a loaded pistol, a truncheon, a wireless transmitter, and two carrier pigeons in his car. Only after he had been imprisoned on charges of conspiracy did it become widely known that the pistol and truncheon belonged to his driver/bodyguard, that the wireless transmitter was, in fact, an ordinary radio, and that the pigeons were neither carrier pigeons nor even alive; they were destined not for a meeting with the KGB in Moscow but rather for a rendezvous with some *petits pois* in a casserole. (PS 81)

Events attain their zenith in the revelry of the Rightist press when the proletariat does not answer the call by the Party for a strike in protest. This, Ewald says, was more than Sartre could stand. (ML 68) This, Sartre would later say, was his "conversion."⁴

Act two opens with Sartre's reaction. It is recounted by Schmidt:

Swearing 'an undying hatred of the bourgeoisie' and taking up the defence of the French Communist Party, he wrote night and day and produced the first of a series of articles which appeared in *Les Temps modernes* between July 1952 and April 1954 under the title 'The Communists and the Peace.' (PS 81)

Ewald thickens the plot:

in a fever [Sartre] writes "The Communists and the Peace" - contenting that one must defend the Communist Party the moment that it is attacked - which he publishes in *Les Temps modernes* without consulting Merleau-Ponty.

Sartre - aiming to steal victory from the Right by "denying that the proletariat was capable of such action against the party" (PS 83), by protecting the Party against the proletariat - effects a marriage wherein philosophy and politics "instead of combining their virtues . . . exchange . . . their vices."⁵ His argument marries what is most suspect in his phenomenology - Hegel's master-slave dialectic recast as a joyous cut and thrust of gazes extended to infinity and without a social world or sedimented communication sustaining and mediating the duel between the radically separated terms - and what is worst in the practice defining the existing state of Marx's thought - the failed communication between Party and proletariat that reduces the former to master and the latter to slave. This phenomenological refinement of Marx's thought become Bolshevism turns a failure into a virtue by making the Party the "*regard d'autrui*" that "constitutes the proletariat" through the reduction of men caught in its gaze to what is tantamount to a slave-object. (PS 84-5) So constituted, with no real unity of its own, the proletariat cannot, in interesting ways, catch the Party in turn in its gaze. (PS 84-85) This produces a novel account of the failed strike. Sartre asks rhetorically, "*who* refused to strike?"

Well, *individuals*, and a great number of them at that; if you like, the great majority of workers. 'And isn't that what's called the proletariat?' No, it is not . . . The worker restricts himself to refusing to participate *personally*; he doesn't pass judgement. And far from wishing, like Kant and the drunks of the Fourth Republic, 'to raise the principle of his own act to a universal law,' he strives to keep it

private.⁶

This is an argument that Stalin might appreciate, for, "by definition, only 'individuals' and never the 'proletariat' criticize or fail to follow party directives." (PS 84) But was not the Party reduced to master and the proletariat reduced to slave what *Les Temps modernes* was supposed to be criticizing as the betrayal of Marx and as the other half of a bargain that delivered liberalism and capitalism over to Marx's gentle criticisms? Merleau-Ponty had thought so as late as his January 1950 editorial on the *Camps* in the U.S.S.R. (PS 82) If he afterwards seeks out a more subtle commitment to Marx, it remains closer to the latter's inspiration than Sartre's commitment by "conversion" in that there is no question of defending the Party against the proletariat. Of this "conversion," Merleau-Ponty says in 1959: Sartre, who "was never a Marxist," "who had never been a Communist and who was not always well understood, considered it necessary to . . . support the Communists . . . because he thought that the others were wrong in using Russia as a symbol of evil."⁷ Nonetheless, the publication of Sartre's unqualified support of the U.S.S.R. and the Party unleashes a clash of gazes. Merleau-Ponty telephones Sartre to tell him that "he is going to publish in *Les Temps modernes* an article wherein he will demarcate his own political position." (ML 68) Sartre "refuses him expression of a position different than his own in *Les Temps modernes*" (ML 68). Merleau-Ponty "threatens to resign." (ML 68) Lefort, Merleau-Ponty's student and a Trotskyist who has left the Party, is, however, granted permission to publish a response, to which Sartre in turn responds in April 1953. In the interim and in the face of "a poor Marxist text" that

Sartre insists be published, Merleau-Ponty insists on a "disclaimer which he compose[s] and Sartre delete[s] without even warning him." (ML 68) The act closes with Sartre's "biting" response to Lefort "which [does] not shirk before personal attacks" (ML 68), obliging Merleau-Ponty to intervene so that certain passages might be "deleted." (ML 69 fn. 6)

The final act is transacted by letter. Merleau-Ponty's of July 8th 1953 to Sartre accords Lefort "an important role in our disagreement." (MP 80) Sartre's reply of the same month and year "responds solely on the terrain of their relation . . . professing a sincere and pure friendship . . . without so much as broaching the essential: the interdiction to publish an article on politics in *Les Temps modernes*." (ML 69) Sartre's letter of July 19th one year earlier, on the contrary, is a self-justification by way of a critique of Merleau-Ponty's position, or, as Sartre says, "non-position."⁸ Sartre says: "I condemn vigorously and without hesitation your attempts to condemn me. I will certainly not give them hospitality in [*Les Temps modernes*] when to do so would be to risk troubling my readers." (ST 72) Merleau-Ponty no longer has the right to express a political opinion, Sartre contends, because he no longer has a political opinion to express, having abandoned politics for philosophy. Sartre says: "you retire yourself from politics . . . you prefer to devote yourself to your philosophical research . . . an act at once legitimate and unjustifiable." (ST 70) It is "legitimate if it remains a subjective decision that implicates you only" (ST 70), but it is no longer so if you speak from your *subjective*, philosophical non-position of the *objective*, the political, thereby implicating

others. Sartre says: "the words you speak if not against me, at least against my present attitude immediately resonate *in the right* and take on an objective meaning" (ST 70); "to be rigorous" (ST 72), to not "play the game of the reactionaries and the anticommunist" (ST 71), "your choice must reconcile itself to pure reflection on history and society." (ST 72) Sartre explicitly denies Merleau-Ponty "the right to play on two tables." (ST 72) And since the political and not the philosophical table counts, Merleau-Ponty's choice - which condemns him, if he is rigorous, to political silence - is unjustifiable: "In these circumstances where one must choose as a man, as a Frenchman, as a citizen and intellectual, I reproach you . . . very severely for abdicating, for taking your 'philosophy' as an alibi." (ST 73) Your lofty philosophy has made you forget what the "ambiguous terrain of politics" (ST 73) is:

You alleged that one must know what the Soviet regime is to choose.
But as one always chooses in ignorance and since it is not reserved
to us to know, it would be bad faith to give this difficulty of *principle*
for an empirical difficulty. (ST 70-1)

Sartre is articulating a *philosophy* of a radical separation between choice and reason, action and thought, politics and philosophy, where the first term is privileged. But who would guess that this is a *philosophy* since he asks: "is something like philosophy possible?" (ST 71) Philosophy, he answers, is possible as "an auto-portrait of the painter himself . . . a self-justification," but then and as such "it forbids you to judge the non-philosophers." (ST 71) Persuading us that he does not care about philosophy any more, but not at all altering the fact that he is practising it, Sartre diagnoses the reader's

philosophy as "an extrapolation of your own psychology and its projection in the domain of value and of principles." (ST 71) This would seem to thoroughly disentangle Sartre and the Party from discussion, criticism and judgement. Sartre, however, insists his position admits of criticism "from all points of view: on the condition that the points of view are *already* political . . . that they translate a position objectively taken and founded on objective motives." (ST 71) One objective motive, stated negatively in the criteria drawn up for Merleau-Ponty to observe if he would publish again in the journal, is: "it is not permitted to aim to divide a Party that receives 5 or 6 million votes." (ST 72) As for "positions objectively taken," this extends even to the Right and without difficulty, since Sartre can stand a hostile gaze, it welds the Party together in fact, but thought, or worse, interrogation, rather than blind choice and hatred, is downright terrifying. Merleau-Ponty's sin is that his commitment is not absolute, that he discusses, criticizes and judges, that he understands too well the "assembly-line reductions of all proceedings and criteria to a single one" - and rejects the reductions - understands too well "that in the last analysis every undertaking and political or non-political investigation is judged according to its political implications, the political line according to the interests of the Party, and the Party's interests according to the leaders' views" (S 11) - and seeks the proletariat beyond this. Sartre tells Merleau-Ponty that "a socialist can critique my understanding of the Communist Party." (ST 71) Who decides that criticism by a socialist does not aim at dividing the Party, whereas criticism by Merleau-Ponty, by Marx, by the *proletarians* who did not strike, does? No one else than Sartre and the Party. No

one else but the very persons being discussed, criticized and judged. This is an unlimited lease on a deaf ear. Objectivism and subjectivism meet. There is a solidarity between them, and it is not a productive one. The *philosophical* silence Sartre and the Party would live in in the name of 'politics,' is shattered by the *political* statement of Merleau-Ponty breaking off a friendship and joining the "great majority" of the *proletarians* who, in their own *political* statement, remained at work. And then there shall be the *political* statement of Hungary, then of Poland, then of . . .

What Sartre does not understand, what he is out of contact with, is the development of Merleau-Ponty. Sartre is not struggling with new problems. The problems of master-slave, ruler-ruled, power-criticism, politics-philosophy, action-thought and object-subject have a long history. But he is pushing a style of thinking them to its limit. In Marx, politics and philosophy were united as nowhere before, save Hegel, and so they stood and fell together. Marx, Merleau-Ponty says in 1960,

discovered all the abstract dramas of Being and Nothingness in history . . . put down an immense metaphysical burden there . . . [and as] a total reconstruction of human origins in a new future, revolutionary politics went by way of this metaphysical centre. (S 6)

Marx's "identity of thought and action" or of philosophy and politics, which is called into question by the present, is typically "postponed till a later date . . . the indefinite future preserv[ing] the doctrine as a way of thinking and a point of honour at the moment it is in difficulty as a way of living." (S 8) Sartre, however, arrives on the scene, radically separates what are not identities, and tells the world to live communism not for the future

but for the moment. This sheds light. Hardly convincing as a way of justifying one's communism to oneself and downright misleading in so far as it denies that it is philosophy, this - partly for these very reasons - is most suggestive of how communism is living - annexing the prestige of Marx's thought but denying that it is philosophy and thereby practising it without having to think (let alone face and deal with) the failures, the contradictions, the betrayals. Merleau-Ponty says in 1960 that communism has become "linked to a purely tactical politics, a discontinuous series of actions and episodes with no tomorrow." (S 6) What became of the practice of Marx's thought is thematized in the very person of Sartre. Merleau-Ponty remarks that "instead of combining their virtues philosophy and politics exchanged their vices - practice became tricky and thought superstitious." (S 6) But the dead ends of Sartre are familiar to Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty came upon them differently in the *Phenomenology of Perception* and *Humanism and Terror*. But this time he has a crucial insight, he has glimpsed a new style, a way beyond failed marriages and failed divorces. It changes how he works. Sartre notices the change but, as Merleau-Ponty says, writes it off as "a personal matter which does not concern the reader . . ." (MP 74) Merleau-Ponty, wishing Sartre could give up his absolute commitment long enough to listen, says: "You do not deliberate with me, you censure me." (MP 78)

For his part, Merleau-Ponty replies: "I nowise renounced writing on politics in 1950. . . . I have decided, since the Korean War, and this is something completely different, no more to write on events to the degree that they put themselves forward."

(MP 74-5) This is not silence: "I have always . . . thought that the *Prose of the World* would have a second part on Catholicism and a third on revolution. I gave a lecture in Geneva in September 1951 of which a substantial part was political." (MP 74) What has changed is not so much his commitment to Marx and to the Left - both being open to interrogation of course - as his understanding of the subject's relation to events, and it has changed not by way of a retreat into the tradition, into the philosophies of Hegel, Marx or Husserl. It has changed rather in going forth in search of styles uniting - in difference - linguistic, historic and politics events, by way of inspiration gleamed from the linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, the history of Max Weber, and his own interrogations of the political in the U.S.S.R. and elsewhere. Merleau-Ponty recalls that he "had many times suggested offering in the journal rather than hastily taken positions, studies of ensembles, in short, aiming at readers' head rather than heart." (MP 76) He explicates why:

I glimpsed there an action of the writer that consists in working the come and go between the event and the style that bears it [*la ligne générale*], and not in confronting (in the imagination) each event as if it were decisive, unique and irreparable. (MP 76)

"Engagement," Merleau-Ponty says, "with *each* event individually taken aside becomes . . . a system of 'bad faith' . . ." (MP 75) Merleau-Ponty makes it clear that he has found something crucial, a new style of engagement that is not more philosophical than political: "This method is closer to politics than your method of *continual engagement* (in the Cartesian sense)"; and "it is more philosophical, because the distance that it brings about between the event and the judgement that one makes of it disarms the trap of the

event and lets the sense be clearly seen." (MP 76) Merleau-Ponty concludes: "I had therefore no need to separate philosophy from the world to remain a philosopher - and I have never done so." (MP 76) He notes that it is rather the other way around: "you take a position without really attending to the content, without examining the life of the Party in the last forty years, its ideology, its history." (MP 79) Sartre's direct engagement is a disengagement. And Merleau-Ponty will argue that the case is not so different with Marx's thought.

In their place Merleau-Ponty would articulate an indirect engagement, an interrogation from within the ensemble of styles which permit no pure surpassing. What is ultimately implicated in the notion that it is the writer's interrogation that works the come and go between events and the styles that bear them, is the relation between philosophy and history. Merleau-Ponty argues that it "is less simple than was believed." (S 13) This is criticism of Hegel and Marx. In particular, Merleau-Ponty will say that the cure to history's horrors cannot be stolen from the god in moments of revolution: "The remedy we seek does not lie in rebellion but in unremitting *virtù*." (S 35) This is no summons back to Catholicism let alone ethics manuals. This is, Merleau-Ponty will gladly admit, *dis-illusionment* before the hope of "salvation" on Earth. (S 35) What this "*virtù*" entails is the historically tutored articulation of a renewed "encroachment" (S 13) of philosophy and politics. And the philosophy that will come of this, Merleau-Ponty shall say,

is all the less tied down by political responsibility to the extent it has

its own, and all the more free to enter everywhere to the extent it does not take anyone's place (does not *play* at passions, politics, and life, or reconstruct them in imagination) but discloses exactly the Being we inhabit. (S 13)

This "unremitting *virtù*" is the ceaseless interrogation of "the Being we inhabit," where this Being is political to a greater extent than Merleau-Ponty himself realized, yet nonetheless suggests in the traces of the political that have passed to us from the tragedy of his early death. The inspiration manifest in these traces warrants a re-interrogation and re-articulation of Merleau-Ponty's work.

* * *

Chapter One - MAN AS THE ROOT - considers Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* and his seemingly unrelated *Humanism and Terror*. The *Phenomenology of Perception* was indebted to, but was at the same time an extremely creative reading of, Edmund Husserl.⁹ *Humanism and Terror*, on the contrary, founds the myth of a Merleau-Ponty who was a political polemicist, in this instance, in the hire of Karl Marx. This work has received ever worse grades for most or all of its stated aims. What is missed is the fundamental unity between it and the *Phenomenology of Perception*: both appeal to a positive pre-linguistic life, a presence elsewhere. This is indeed a bad marriage which teaches Merleau-Ponty the vices of phenomenology no less than of Marx. Still, and this must be said, to the end Husserl and Marx remain truths for Merleau-Ponty, but truths that have failed, that are gradually written over - not off. Each in his way was far too optimistic concerning the subject, and neither threatened seriously

the subject-object distinction.

Chapter Two - DOUBTS ABOUT MAN - begins with Merleau-Ponty's unfinished *The Invisible and the Visible*. This, Merleau-Ponty's last work together with his working notes, sketches a wholly renewed phenomenology. Here we open upon phenomenological ontology, phenomenology no longer set on recovering the subject, but rather interrogating the Being wherein subject and object, self and other, self and self, are intertwined and inscribed. The reader familiar with Derrida will be shocked by the degree to which he and his notion of *differance* are anticipated and exceeded here as this leads inevitably, by way of Saussure and Merleau-Ponty's work dating to 1953, into a new understanding of language and the intertwining of language and the perceptual wherein neither is a positivity, nor an elsewhere. Saussure is the death of transparency, the death of the dream of the return to things themselves, the return to man to man relations, the return to self, this return being by way of the dream of transparent linguistic, economic, philosophic and historic symbolic systems. What will remain unclear is where man is in all this, for as a positivity, man is no more.

Chapter Three - THE DEATH OF THE MAN? - begins where its predecessor leaves off, with work dating to the early fifties, with Saussure, with the spectre of a lifeless structuralism. This spectre will be rapidly exorcised by intertwining language as understood by phenomenology - which privileges speech and so events - and as understood by Saussure's structuralism - which privileges structure and so ignores the subject. Man will be the difference between event and structure. The intertwining of

event and structure amounts to the notion of *style*, *institution* or *advent*, where, for example, Calvinism, a datable religious event, is presumptive of time, organizes subsequent events, is an *advent*, a logic *in* contingency, a *style* that is neither subject nor object but the *institution* of a symbolic system as the place where generations of men live. Here we have turned to Merleau-Ponty's very creative reading of Max Weber, to the study of historical, religious and economic epochs, to the mutations that institute them. This is a history that does not ignore man, but properly is of Being, of what Merleau-Ponty calls the *flesh*, properly is of the *institutions* of Being, the *articulations* of the *flesh*. But if there is one *flesh* of history, it is only through the interrogations of man.

The EPILOGUE considers Merleau-Pontean liberalism and the political style of the *flesh*, the politics of the *flesh* we inhabit.

1. *Magazine Littéraire*, # 320, Avril 1994, p. 68-86. Translation my own. The introduction is hereafter cited as ML.
2. *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Between Phenomenology and Structuralism* (New York: Humanities Press, 1992), p. 82. Hereafter cited as PS.
3. *Letter to Sartre*: "Paris, [le] 8 juillet [1953]," *Magazine Littéraire*, #320, Avril 1994, p. 73-4. Translation my own. The letter is hereafter cited as MP.
4. *Situations*, trans. Eisler (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1966), p. 198 cited in PS 81.
5. "Introduction," *Signs*, trans. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964 [1960]), p. 6. *Signs* is hereafter cited as S.
6. *The Communists and The Peace with a Reply to Claude Lefort*, trans. Fletcher, Kleinschmidt & Bert (New York: George Braziller, 1968), p. 76-7 cited in PS 84.
7. "The Philosophy of Existence," *Texts and Dialogues*, eds. Silverman & Barry (London: Humanities Press, 1992), p. 138. *Text and Dialogues* is hereafter cited as TD.
8. *Letter to Merleau-Ponty*: "Roma, [le] 18 juillet [1952]," *Magazine Littéraire*, # 320, Avril 1994, p. 70. Translation my own. Hereafter cited as ST.
9. Rudolf Bernet says of Merleau-Ponty that there "is no interpreter of Husserl's thought more inspired, more careful to bring to light [its] the most hidden tendencies . . . and thereby give it an un hoped for future." ("The Subject in Nature: Reflections on Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*," *Merleau-Ponty in Contemporary Perspective*, eds. Burke & der Veken (Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993.), p.53.) Such readings were in fact Merleau-Ponty's forte. But this is not at all to say that Husserl and others, Saussure in particular, would have accepted what Merleau-Ponty finds and sometimes too generously attributes to them. Bernet's paper is hereafter cited as SR.

1 / MAN AS THE ROOT

To be a radical is to seize things by the root.
For man, the root is man himself.
-Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of
Hegel's Philosophy of Right*

Phenomenology - The Return to Phenomena

For Maurice Merleau-Ponty, history, meaning and even the spectre of transparent language are but articulations of Being, are but inscriptions of the *flesh*, where this Being is not man, where this *flesh* is not our own. In so far as Being or the *flesh* is not a presence elsewhere, is rather a term engendering difference, an *in-between*, Merleau-Ponty's work would be a philosophy no less than politics without foundations.

The young Merleau-Ponty, on the contrary, takes the *flesh* for our own, takes incarnate man for indeterminate Being. The young Merleau-Ponty would understand man as the subject of history and meaning. In his *Phenomenology of Perception*, through a radical deployment of Edmund Husserl's thought, the young Merleau-Ponty makes incarnate man - man with a back that he cannot get behind - the root of history and meaning. This gesture institutes a new and revolutionary style of phenomenology that remains, nevertheless, a prisoner of the metaphysics of presence, philosophically and even more so politically. This new and revolutionary style of phenomenology remains held by the metaphysics of presence precisely because it is the presence of man and humanism that presides over - and thereby escapes - interrogation.

The *Phenomenology of Perception* begins by asking, "What is phenomenology?"¹ We proceed by progressively elaborating an answer in contact with the Galilean sciences, Descartes, Husserl and Marx. The initial outline of our answer is deepened and radicalized in the come and go between Husserl and Marx, giving rise to the notion of the *lived body*. The *lived body* is then intertwined with Marx's body politic, thereby suggesting their shared vices. These interrogations shall establish that for the young Merleau-Ponty phenomenology is description that recovers the subject, albeit not exactly that of Husserl or Marx.

Phenomenology, the young Merleau-Ponty begins, "is a matter of describing, not of explaining or analyzing." (PhP viii) This is to adopt a very specific reflective attitude designated as a "return to things themselves," or better, a "return to phenomena" (PhP viii & 1). Such a return seeks to recover lived experience antecedent to the objective world, antecedent to, for example, any distinction between primary and secondary qualities and thereby before the object-subject distinction. Merleau-Ponty offers an example of such lurking lived experience which the Galilean or objective sciences, despite their most fervent exertions, fail to do away with: the objective world of science "can never make me stop seeing the sun two hundred yards away on a misty day, or seeing it 'rise' and 'set'" (PhP 61). This return to lived experience or phenomena is reflection on and description of the *lifeworld*.

The *lifeworld* was unearthed by Husserl in *The Crisis* as the irreducible fruit of a lifelong effort to inscribe existence in presence elsewhere, to give it and to reduce it to

a transparent and determinate ground. The *lifeworld* is at once the pregiven or always already there world of experience which is constantly and unquestioningly taken for granted and the life of thought which this pregiven sustains.² The *lifeworld* is a world of know *how* and only subsequently a world of knowledge *that*. It is a world of an *existing* subject before any abstractions concerning the conceivable but wholly derivative existence of an epistemological subject. This is to say that epistemology cannot get behind the back of the *lifeworld*. For Merleau-Ponty, the *lifeworld* is existence before knowledge, existence of which knowledge always *speaks*, and in relation to which not only every scientific analysis or schematization, but philosophy itself is an abstraction. (PhP ix, xiv & 337) We understand by "abstraction" - with Husserl - "an exclusive looking-at-something" which tends to notice nothing else (CR 330), which, in particular, tends to forget itself as a visible seeing, as a seer who counts among the seen. What is questioned here is reflection, philosophy and knowledge so caught up in and fascinated by the spectacle that they, like a voyeur, forget - and are mortified upon being recalled to - their carnal existence behind the keyhole, their place in the spectacle, their inscription in the always already there *lifeworld*. What is questioned here is a voyeur's gaze that having forgotten that it is from somewhere, acts as if it were a pure, unbounded gaze from nowhere, a gaze that arrays the world before itself as an object.

Catching this voyeur's gaze in the act behind the 'in-itself spectacle' that is witnessed from 'nowhere' and '*re-presented*' in the subject, is the work, more or less conscious and thoroughgoing, of those who would debunk the objective sciences.³ Marx

is a party to this gesture when he exposes and betrays the commodity, "a very trivial thing," as "a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties."⁴ His return to phenomena betrays what is given and treated as a transparent, self-sufficient presence - an object or thing in itself - as in fact a "phenomenal form" (C 304), an amalgam of "qualities at the same time perceptible and imperceptible to the senses." (C 320-1) And so betrayed, the commodity is at last thought. It yields to Marx's interrogation, to questions not of its own asking, to description recovering man, and his practice in particular, as its hitherto imperceptible root.

Phenomenology's return to phenomena, if initially no more radical, is, however, more thorough. No object or thing, no matter how 'natural,' no matter how 'real,' escapes it. Phenomenology sees phenomena everywhere. Or to be more precise, for phenomenology, lived experience is but phenomena. Phenomenology would expose and betray an imperceptible in every transparent, given, self-sufficient presence. By doing so, it would open an interrogation of the imperceptible. This interrogation would recover the subjective *acts* that not only sustain the commodity and its concealing onto-theological reflex (philosophy and religion), but sustain every object and thing and their concealing metaphysical reflex (the explanations, analyses and schematizations of science and philosophy). These to-be-reflected-on-subjective-acts would sustain nothing less than meaning, history and reflection on the unreflected (interrogation of the imperceptible). They would sustain what is perceptible: lived experience, presence itself.

The phenomenological attitude and return to phenomena effects the 'reduction'

of the *natural attitude*, where this 'reduction' is nothing other than the celebrated *phenomenological reduction*. For Marx, the natural attitude would be consciousness or the senses not only imprisoned in the capitalist world, but wholly fascinated by it, and thus unaware of being held by it, accepting this world's inhumanity as natural. It would be the attitude within which commodities stand over and against subjects as objects valuable by nature - rather than valuable by man - as objects endowed with natural social power - that is to say, unthought and unchallenged social power - as autonomous subjects in fact, "entering into relation both with one another and the human race" (C 321) - man having abdicated control over the products of his labour, man producing not for himself but for exchange on a market that runs his life. The 'reduction' of this natural attitude is the thinking of the mode or method of social production that produces it.

For Husserl, the natural attitude is the *travestissement du monde*, the dressing up of the world in a garb of method-laden ideas. (CR 51) This *travestissement* is effected by none other than Galileo and apprentices, these including René Descartes and so all of modern science and all of modern philosophy too. This *travestissement* consists in the attempted substitution of an objective world constructed by scientific method for the always already there *lifeworld*. It consists, Husserl says, in exchanging "for *true being* what is actually a *method*" (CR 330). In particular, the construction of the natural attitude consists in methodically driving the subject from the world to the point of being able to speak of 'things in themselves' and, as Husserl puts it, "pure nature" (CR 330). Method functions here as an exclusive gazing-at-something which sees no further, which wilfully

makes "nature thematic and nothing else." (CR 330) Method forgets itself as method, forgets its origin in the subject, and this forgetfulness becomes, as Heidegger would say, the forgetfulness of ever having forgotten.⁵ As much as the social power of commodities, "pure nature" becomes *natural*. As much as the growth of capital becomes identified with Time,⁶ the march of technology becomes the taking in hand of Truth.⁷ The natural attitude as unthought method thus becomes the prolific *aigues-mortes* (lifeless waters) of "philosophical naïveté" (CR 59), philosophy assisting the progress of an ever more profound forgetfulness of a subtler and more enigmatic Being, one decidedly less clear and distinct, less transparent and determinate than "pure nature."

The natural attitude, whether involving commodities or things in general, is not, however, devoid of reflection. As a way of being in the world, it is rather, Merleau-Ponty says, "too tightly held in the world to be able to know itself as such at the moment of its involvement." (PhP xv) Its reflection - whether on the subject or the object, on, in either case, a spectacle put in the foreground by reflection's withdrawal into the background - tends towards first or naive reflection - ideology Marx would say - reflection held too closely by the very unreflected that it purports to interrogate and elucidate. The nature attitude exceeds itself as an unreflective attitude. It envelops reflection. It holds the certainties of common sense and science, possesses and haunts an in no way radical - half-blind in fact - philosophy.

Nevertheless, a retreat into self, a flight from an oppressive outside, a closing of one's eyes, a stopping up of one's ears, a *dis-owing* of things and the world, of all that

subjects the subject, is precisely what the phenomenological reduction of the natural attitude is not. The confession that such a closing and shutting up of the senses "can hardly be done,"⁸ not his derivative stratagem of doubt, is, for phenomenology, the tragic dignity of Descartes. Descartes, in this brief moment, almost admits the world, before any extra-worldly reconstruction through method, as no less certain than the subject. That the world is no less certain than the subject is a point that Merleau-Ponty insists upon (PhP ix-x) and that Husserl draws from the method of doubt by pushing it further. (CR 77-83)

Husserl & The Transcendental Subject

In Cartesian hands, doubt constructs the natural attitude. What Descartes does not doubt is Galilean method. Operating from with its bifurcation of subject and object, but flattering the subject, or at least, what would be a human subject, rather than a view from nowhere, were it not disembodied and torn from the world, Descartes doubts the world, Cartesianism denigrates the carnal, denigrates objects, things, the body and the world. What this leaves us with, or at least pushes further, is the notion, Merleau-Ponty says, of "two modes of being, and two only: being in itself, which is that of objects arrayed in space, and being for itself, which is that of consciousness." (PhP 349) What Husserl doubts - not so much doubting Galilean method and the subject-object bifurcation as attempting to overcome them from within - is the Cartesian subject. Or more precisely, it is the Cartesian subject that he submits to a *phenomenological reduction*, no

more making it disappear than the world, exposing and betraying rather what is imperceptible in it as well as in the world. Husserl would 'reduce' the transparent self-evidence "of psychic, 'inner,' or 'self-perception,'" recovering transcendental subjectivity anterior to the subject and the world. This transcendental subjectivity is not man. Rather, Husserl says, it is "that sole absolute, primal self-evidence from which all scientific knowledge must - *if philosophy is to be possible* - be derived." (emphasis added; CR 81 & 78) Transcendental subjectivity is a supreme and pure, transparent and determinate consciousness that constitutes all that is. It is the constituting consciousness of all consciousness and of all things. It is the presence elsewhere that grounds existence. This is one way - among others - of coming to terms with human subjectivity, to terms with a lesser subjectivity that is, as Merleau-Ponty says, "dependent yet indeclinable." (PhP 400)

To maintain that our subjectivity is "dependent yet indeclinable," is to say that the *cogito* is true, but not as Descartes would have it. An actual doubt, Merleau-Ponty says, is not certain. One can entertain doubts about it, "considered as a definite modality of thought and as consciousness of a doubtful object" (PhP 399). What is, however, certain, what is implied by my thought about my thought, by my doubt about my doubt, is "I think" or "something appears to me." (PhP 400) Merleau-Ponty insists that "it is not *because* I think I am that I am certain of my existence: on the contrary the certainty I enjoy concerning my thoughts stems from their genuine existence." (PhP 382) This is to "avoid equating myself with a series of 'consciousnesses,'" of one damn 'I think' after

another,⁹ for each of these belongs to a continued advent "with its load of sedimentary history and sensible implications" (PhP 400). This is to say that "it is not the 'I am' which is pre-eminently contained in the 'I think,' not my existence which is brought down to the consciousness which I have of it," since "to know that [I] think, it is necessary in the first place that [I] actually should think." (PhP 383 & 400) It is the 'I think' rather "which is re-integrated into the transcending process of the 'I am,' and consciousness into existence." (PhP 383) My 'I think' and what appears to me "takes for granted more than I can know" (PhP 383), takes for granted my existence, my body and my inscription in the *lifeworld*. My thought is not defined by "self-possession and coincidence," being, on the contrary, "an outcome of expression and always an illusion" (PhP 389) in so far as its transparency and determinateness are a suspended questioning of language and a linguistic subject, of its own history and a historic subject, of its own being and a carnal subject. (PhP 396 & 399) Clear and distinct or transparent and determinate ideas are but a suspended questioning in the face of all that is implied in that "fundamentally obscure operation which has enabled us to immortalize within ourselves a moment of fleeting life." (PhP 389) This recovery of existence is not, however, to the benefit of Husserl's transcendent subjectivity.¹⁰

Merleau-Ponty, less than content with Husserl's overcoming of Galilean method from within, would call into question the bifurcation whereby we have only two modes of being. He would recover - active and stirring beneath the thinking, epistemological subject - an existing subject destined to the world as its background and element. He

would recover - occulted by, yet breathing meaning into the subject that says 'I think, I am' - a subject that is the world's carnal project and linguistic ruse. He would recover the human subject that is being abused by Cartesian and Galilean thought - would describe the world as we live it. In the end, the young Merleau-Ponty would recover behind even the *lifeworld* not Husserl's transcendental subjectivity but a certain opaque, carnal, pre-reflective existence. Against classical transcendental philosophies - Husserl's does not escape inclusion here - Merleau-Ponty remarks that it is striking how they

never question the possibility of the complete disclosure which they always assume *done somewhere*. It is enough for them that it should be necessary, and in this way they judge what is by what ought to be, by what the idea of knowledge requires. (PhP 61)

Voyeurism in the name of knowledge is ingenious, but it is also "reflection which loses sight of its own beginnings." (PhP x)

The Cartesian confession recalls, from an immense distance, these beginnings. After closing his eyes, stopping up his ears and supposedly turning away all his senses, Descartes proclaims his intention to efface from his "thoughts all images of corporeal things," only to confess that "this can hardly be done," and so proposes instead to "view them as vain and false."¹¹ Merleau-Ponty observes that I may well close my eyes and stop up my ears, but "I shall nevertheless not cease to see, if only the blackness before my eyes, or to hear, if only silence" (PhP 395). To doubt this blackness and silence, as much as to doubt "images of corporeal things," to consider it "vain and false," is "a substitute," Schmidt observes, "for an operation that 'can hardly be done': the annihilation

of the world" (PS 22). Rather than ridding us of the world, doubt intends it. To "doubt," Merleau-Ponty says, "is always to doubt something, even if one 'doubts everything.'" (PhP 383) Consciousness is not, Husserl says, "self-contained and real by itself" (CR 85). Thinking is thinking *of* something. Consciousness, Husserl says, is a "*having something consciously*" (CR 82). There is no retreat into self. There is rather, Paul Ricoeur says, a "priority of the consciousness of *something* over self-consciousness."¹² And therefore, as Merleau-Ponty says, "we must not . . . wonder whether we really perceive a world, we must instead say: the world is what we perceive." (PhP xvi) Consciousness has the world as its *intentional object*. This is to insist that what we are conscious *of* "is included *as such* - that . . . perception is *in itself* a perception *of* something, of 'this tree.'" (CR 85) The question of whether this something that appears to me is an adequate '*re-presentation*' of 'the tree in itself,' and ultimately of 'the world in itself,' is precisely what is no longer considered here. The world of which phenomenology speaks - the world of all worlds, the horizon of all horizons - in on the side of the subject, is within lived experience. But, for that matter, this subject is a subject only by being outside itself, by being a part of the spectacle, by being in the world, by finding itself only in lived experience. For phenomenology, "there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself." (PhP xi) What *is* are phenomena, and the only question of adequacy phenomena admit of is posed in terms of further phenomena. There are not subjective images somehow formed and then held up to and compared with the objective world as seen nowhere. Phenomenology would end *re-presentationalism*.

Merleau-Ponty, however, remains less than content with what is - in its initial form at the very least - still an attempt to overcome Galilean method from within. Husserl's originality, he contends, is not the discovery or rediscovery of *intentionality*, or at least not a *re-presentational* intentionality,¹³ not intentionality as transcendental subjectivity inevitably practices it. Husserl's originality lies rather with a "deeper intentionality, which others have called existence." (PhP fn. 121) A *re-presentational* intentionality reverses - if at a greatly reduced distance and to the benefit of subjectivity - adequate or objective '*re-presentation*,' leaving intact the bifurcation whereby we have only two modes of being. The intentional subject who is *no-thing*, who is pure freedom, "a pure meaning-giving act," "throws itself into [the intentional object]" (PhP 121). It constitutes the intentional object through and through rather than '*re-presenting*' it. Or more precisely, intentional subjectivity '*re-presents*' and objectifies itself in the intentional object, in the thing. And should the intentional subject not remain unbounded, should it

cease to be definable in terms of the act of sense-giving, [it] relapses into the condition of a thing, the thing being precisely what does not know, what slumbers in absolute ignorance of itself and the world, what consequently is not a 'true self,' i.e. a 'for-itself,' has only a spatio-temporal form of individuation, existence in itself. (PhP 121)

What Merleau-Ponty hopes to overcome - from within the philosophy of consciousness - is consciousness that does "not admit of degrees." (PhP 122)

All of this is to say that phenomenology - whether opening on Merleau-Ponty's ambiguous existence or recovering Husserl's clarity and distinctness anterior to all ambiguity - is nowise a closing of one's eyes and a stopping up of one's ears in the face

of the carnal. Phenomenology is rather heightened consciousness of the subject *and* the world, of each as more than it seems, as unveiled and hidden, as "phenomena" Husserl says (CR 78), and irreducible phenomena at that Merleau-Ponty adds.

Marx & The Human Subject

In general terms, the phenomenological reduction proceeds by exposing and betraying for further reflection an absence in the reflections that present the subject with the world. It betrays an imperceptible, a lack as well as a surplus, in all that subjects the subject. And it thereby would take a distance from what holds reflection too closely, thereby seeks to go beyond the natural attitude.

The phenomenological reduction in its most succinct rendering, that of Husserl's assistant Eugen Fink, awakens "'wonder' in the face of the world." (PhP xiii) For Merleau-Ponty, "it alone is consciousness of the world because it reveals that world as strange and paradoxical." (PhP xiii) It is a "relearning to look at the world" (PhP xx) and so a method recommendable to the sciences, though not entirely without precedent in them. Pushing Marx, one could say that it puts the world in its most glaring form. To so present the world, the reduction, through the natural attitude's bracketing, breaks with our familiar acceptance of things, manifesting, through an interrogation that would think the natural attitude's functioning, their hitherto imperceptible and unlooked for aspects, betraying what would otherwise pass as self-evident presences. In particular, Merleau-Ponty says, the reduction "slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world

and thus brings them to our notice" (PhP xiii).

The phenomenological reduction slackens the hold that the commodity has over us. In so doing, however, the reduction does not dissipate the mist that withholds the commodity's full presence from a reflective natural attitude. On the contrary, it takes the absence and opacity of the commodity as its theme, reflecting on the "absurd form" (C 324), exposing and betraying its essential self-concealment. The reduction does not expose and betray the commodity's social power as a mere illusion of first or naive reflection. Rather it thinks the commodity precisely as an illusion with substance or weight, as an objective illusion and a fetish, as an appearance that is all too real, a manipulative 'nature' bearing upon man more heavily than nature. Let alone does the reduction destroy this surplus 'nature' and end the subject's subjection to it - work that Marx entrusts not to thought, not to enlightenment, but to tomorrow's revolution. The reduction turns back on the subject's subjection. It interrogates the natural attitude in a reflection on reflection, reflection on an indecent phenomenon that "does not," as Marx says of value, "stalk about with a label describing what it is" (C 322), that does not present itself to consciousness as what it fully is. The reduction turns back on and thinks the natural attitude in a reflection on reflection on an unreflected human practice that conceals itself and withholds reflection from being at one with itself. It is reflection on the source that makes such a label necessary in the first place. For Marx, this source and root can be no one other than man himself.

It is Marx who gives us a glimpse of Merleau-Ponty's deeper intentionality, of

a dimension wherein subject and object are drawn close, encroach upon each other, even exchange roles, yet keep a certain distance. Such a dimension is exposed with the betrayal of the commodity as a phenomenon, as an object that is all too real, that is surplus 'nature' and irreducible otherness - another subject in fact - and that would, nevertheless, cease to exist if we all died on our way to market. Marx gives us a glimpse of existence wherein the subject in relation to the world is both further away and far closer than any '*re-presentation.*'

For a *re-presentational* intentionality the commodity and its power can be but appearances. Consciousness is faced with an ostensive phenomenon and an illusionary power. It is faced with a hieroglyphic and a manipulative 'nature' produced as such by acts of sense-giving that are nothing but consciousness concealing itself from itself, which is no real concealment, just consciousness playing at opacity and subjection. Behind its subjection to the commodity and its hunger for capital, which is the commodity's most evolved form, consciousness *knows all that it does, knows* clearly and distinctly all that Marx would say of the fetishism of commodities and the game of surplus value, for capitalist consciousness is not the consciousness of a 'capitalist.' There are no actual capitalists. Consciousness only plays at being one and it can stop playing whenever it wants. Merleau-Ponty, by way of psychology's equivalent understanding of lunacy, pushes *re-presentational* intentionality to its logical and absurd extreme:

The lunatic, *behind* his ravings, his obsessions and lies, *knows that he is raving*, that he is allowing himself to be haunted by an obsession, that he is lying, in short he *is* not mad, *he thinks he is*. All is then for

the best, and insanity is only perversion of the will. (PhP 125)

Capitalism as "perversion of the will" fails to do justice to our situation as much as lunacy as "perversion of the will" fails to do justice to that of the lunatic, to his illness. But *re-presentational* intentionality may be restated. Consciousness may be attributed to Husserl's transcendental subjectivity or, what Marx concretizes as the becoming social of society, Hegel's absolute spirit, and we installed therein as actual capitalists, as moments of consciousness concealed from itself only in us, and coming in us to knowledge either through a Husserlean phenomenological reduction or a Hegelian unfolding of history. But this is not a description of our situation. This is an explanation, and a conservative one at that. It is an explanation as well as voyeurism on the part of Husserl and Hegel because we are again blinding ourselves to our beginnings and the significant lacks therein, we are again judging "what is by what ought to be," by the nowhere of a God's-eye perspective, judging what is by what the fascination with knowledge requires, God of course being all-knowing. It a conservative explanation, Bernard Flynn notes (CM 20), recalling Marx, because the transcendence by consciousness of the commodity played at by consciousness through the consciousness of this play, is a transcendence that leaves the commodity that we actually face intact just when philosophy deems it overcome.¹⁴ It is to such philosophical 'revolutions' that Marx dedicates the last of his celebrated "Theses on Feuerbach": "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it."¹⁵ Changing it of course requires an understanding of how the world might and might not be changed.

Although *re-presentational* intentionality fails to describe our situation and leaves us far from putting an end to the commodity and capitalism, we are left less far from tomorrow's revolution than by adequate, objective or materialist *re-presentation*.

The "Theses on Feuerbach" begins with it:

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism . . . is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of *contemplation*, but not as *human sensuous activity, practice*, not subjectively. (F 143)

Adequate, objective or materialist *re-presentation* - wherein the capitalist world links up with 'self-sufficient nature' and 'the world in itself' - does not see the world's dependence on the subject. This *re-presentationalism* - wherein 'the world' is seen from 'nowhere' and '*re-presented*' more or less adequately on 'the silvery surface of the mind' - does not see the encroachment of the subject on the object and world's return at the heart of the subject. This is to say that it understands neither objectification - the subject's life in the object - nor alienation - the subject's life in the object forgotten and returned over and against the subject, the subject's responsibility for - *but not as a pure consciousness or will* - the capitalist world and the natural attitude to which it is subjected and condemned.

If *re-presentational* intentionality cannot admit the natural attitude's substantiality, weight or objectivity, materialist *re-presentationalism* takes no distance from it. For one the distance is absolute, for the other non-existent. In the end, for one there is only an 'inside of thought,' a 'for itself,' and for the other only an 'outside of

things,' an 'in itself.' There is a kinship here, Merleau-Ponty observes, the "common ignorance of phenomenon" (PhP 336), the common urge to think within and so choose between the terms of the subject-object bifurcation. Hence consciousness in between and admitting of degrees remains unthinkable.

Marx, in descriptive work that thinks the natural attitude, unearths between capitalist and commodity a consciousness that admits of degrees, only to cut off his own thought, reducing it not so much to a politics as to what knowledge or ideal reason requires, to clear and distinct or transparent and determinate existence. Imagine for a moment that what Marx takes to be the essences of production, the "equality of all sorts of human labour" and labour's measurement "by the duration of [its] expenditure," were "expressed objectively" by products become commodities, by products that respectively are "equally values" and that admit of fluctuating rates of exchange. (C 320) Products as such, products alienated from the subject's engendering labour and exchanged on the market, return over and against man in that their rates of exchange or exchange-values on the market - the differences of value that appear between them - become what no producer can ignore in the ever renewed process of production. As for the market, it is neither capitalist nor commodity, but the place of their reciprocal involvement, where this reciprocal involvement comes to organize nothing less than the ever renewed process of production. Such a partnership between capitalist and commodity that neither term can absorb into itself since the partnership is what makes the terms what they are - a consciousness in between and admitting of degrees - is nothing other than perverse human

practice for Marx. It would be human practice torn by a "cleavage and self-contradictions" that permits such a monstrosity to exist, that permits human practice "to detach itself from itself" in the person of the market, of what becomes an overhanging natural attitude. (F 144) It would be human practice torn by a cleavage and self-contradictions that permits human practice to detach itself from itself and establish itself as a realm not of equal human labours of certain durations directed to clear and determinate social ends through the explicit cooperation of men, but of commodities that are valuable by nature, that have their own self-aggrandizement as their end, and to this end buy and sell men as naturally as things. This natural attitude and realm would, however, have its truth, is an objective rather than a subjective illusion for Marx, even if he intends to transcend it not only in thought but in practice. He says:

the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest *appear*, not as direct social relations between individual at work, *but as what they really are*, material relations between persons and social relations between things. (emphasis added; C 321)

The continued existence of such a world - a world wherein direct "man to man" relations are lacking (HD 316), wherein man is present to man only indirectly and obliquely through the mediation of an order of things, a system of inhuman others - would be our fault, we having yet to transcend, take possession, determine and make transparent the human practice that sustains it.

For Marx, the source of occultation and the root of phenomena - the unreflected that withholds reflection from being one with itself - is clear, determinate and simple, in

its opacity, indeterminacy and differentiation. It is man, or more precisely, *his* practice that is at fault. The origin is the unscientific division of labour in the form of commodity production. The source of occultation is an insufficiently scientific, scientific mode or method of production. The root of phenomena is the de-centred ordering of production outside the direct, complete and fully conscious, transparent control of producers. What withholds reflection from being total is unreflected, socially-oriented production, effected privately and organized indirectly and cryptically in the market through a system of differential exchange-values, under the guidance and mediation of *an-other of our own making*.

"*Of our own making*" is crucial. In the absence of this qualification Marx could comfortably share a drink with Swiss structural linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, French post-structuralist Jacques Derrida, German postmodern historian (on Merleau-Ponty's reading) Max Weber and French postmodernist (at least from the early fifties onward) Maurice Merleau-Ponty. But alas, Marx is insistent: "*Man makes religion, religion does not make man.*"¹⁶ To say a few merely suggestive words in anticipation of matters truly dealt with only beginning in the second chapter, there is no place in Marx for the *irreducible* reversibility and thickness, *a la* Weber and Merleau-Ponty, of institutions that are not more made by man than man is made by them. There is no place in Marx for institutions that live in man and wherein man lives - man working from within them the come and go between events and their continuing existence, where they are the *transmutable* (say from Catholicism to Protestantism and Protestantism to capitalism) *but*

never surpassed milieu of man's continuing life. Not content with two lives that are held and live in each other only at a distance from each other, only across the non-coincidence of the difference between man and institution, not content with transformations that are the intentional planning of neither, Marx contends that the "coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice." (F 144) We admit that the overcoming of the juxtaposition of circumstances and man through Marx's identity of object and subject, through history that is little more than the exercise of human reason, can only "be conceived" as "revolutionary practice." We admit that the fascination with transparent rather than institutional rationality - the former being man's own whereas the latter is merely fire on loan from the gods - demands "revolutionary practice." But we wonder whether "revolutionary practice" so "conceived," "conceived" as the surpassing of man's institutional inscription, is practicable. We shall argue in the third chapter that it is not. The institution of hitherto existing history, at the very least, demonstrates it to be possible nowhere else than in the philosopher's conceptions and abstractions.

Nevertheless, Marx has every intention of surpassing the institutions of religion and economy. He says:

that the secular basis [economy] detaches itself from itself and establishes itself in the clouds as an independent realm [religion] can only be explained by the cleavage and self-contradictions within this secular basis. The latter [economic practice] must itself, therefore, first be understood in its contradiction [the cleavage or difference between man and the milieu of the market] and then, by the removal of the contradiction [the reduction of the market institution to man],

revolutionised in practice. Thus, for instance, after the earthly family is discovered to be the secret of the holy family, the former must then itself be criticised in theory and revolutionised in practice.

Marx's disagreements with Derrida and Saussure are similar to those with Weber and Merleau-Ponty. There is in Marx, as this passage suggests, no *unsurpassable* supplementing, *a la* Derrida, of man by otherness, by the religious Other (God) or by the economic Other (value or money) or by the Other of religious or economic structure. Let alone is religion or capitalism, *a la* Saussure on Derrida's and Merleau-Ponty's reading, an irreducible differential order of otherness that *has man*, wherein man learns to think and is forever inscribed. For Marx religion and capitalism cannot be an order irreducible to the presence of a self, cannot be an Other. Religion is grounded in capitalism's contradictions. Religion *re-presents* these contradictions. And capitalism is grounded in man by the grounding of value - which is perhaps nothing other than the Other, nothing other than systemic difference - in presence. Value is grounded in presence by its supposed *re-presentation* of and reduction to Marx's essences of production: the "equality of all sorts of human labour" and labour's measurement "by the duration of [its] expenditure."¹⁷ What religion and capitalism, and language too, cannot be for Marx, but would be for Saussure and are for poststructuralism and postmodernity, are systems and institutions not of presences, not of positive terms, not of *re-presented* substance or essences, but of differences without positive terms, of term-engendering differences of meaning or value, man, *if he still exists*, being their product, but evidently not as a self-sufficient presence, not as a positivity. In Marx, or at least on all but the most heretical

readings, there is only promethean humanism - man in his presence or positivity as source and root - or at least the presumption of such a promethean man. But this is not to say that Marx would reduce all *otherness* to the presence of self. Certainly he would reduce God and all discourse on an Other divided from man to torn human practice. Certainly he would reduce value and the market as differences of value, which - like all discourse on *otherness* - amounts to concealing ideology, to torn, cloven, self-contradictory human practice. Certainly he would reduce power and "'civil' society" as divisions of power - the "standpoint of" and "highest point attained by contemplative materialism" - to torn and divided human practice awaiting healing, awaiting "the standpoint of the new [materialism]" and thus "*human* society, or socialized humanity." (F 145) Certainly he would reduce institutional authority of any kind and the divisions that remove it from man's direct, complete and fully conscious, transparent control to man's abdication of control over *his own* product and practice. But he would not reduce every Other to the presence of self, man not quite being his own supplement, man having to steal the fire of reason from some Other, which brings us back to objectification.

For Marx, objectification is the subject's life in the object, but not only as the encroachment of the subject on the object. Objectification is also the subject's life in the object as the encroachment of a certain class of objects on the subject, as the subject's subjection to and sufferance of a *real* other. A subject, Marx says, that "is not itself an object . . . has no being for its *object*, that is, is not related objectively, its being is not objective," and so is "unactual, non-sensuous, merely conceived," "merely imagined, an

abstraction." (HD 326) Such being cannot be touched and so is not. Whereas a subject that is an object for its object is "*another, another actuality*, from the object outside" (HD 326). It can be touched and so suffers the world. Marx says that to be "actual is to be a . . . *sensuous* object" (HD 326), to be a subject is to be touchable, to "be sentient is to *suffer*." (HD 326) And what man is properly touched by, properly suffers, is on the hitherside of the institutions or "symbolic orders"¹⁸ of religion, capitalism¹⁹, civil society and even language in so far as language is ideology. This hitherside or outside is what we (now perhaps with false modesty as the other half of promethean reason) have not made, what we have not tainted with production on the hitherside and outside of transparent and determinate human control. The hitherside or outside is nature and it encroaches on the inside as "desire" (CM 21), as drives or natural needs which find genuine rather than abstract expression in natural language, language on the hitherside or outside of ideology. Hence the *real* subject is subjected by *real* nature. Whereas the subject of Marx's natural attitude is subjected by an abstraction from nature, by surplus 'nature,' which is animated by and reducible to man himself. Marx concludes that "a consistent naturalism or humanism," as opposed to the abstract or contemplative materialism and the abstract or formal humanism we live, takes its distance from materialism and idealism as the "unifying truth of both." (HD 325) We wonder if this is not rather a bad marriage awaiting a bad divorce.

Whether orders of *otherness* are reducible to man, as Marx's humanism would have it, whether they are reducible to subjectivity of whatever sort, is the question that

phenomenology poses neither for Marx nor for itself, at least initially. Rather its Husserlean inspired critique of Marx would be that Marx stops just when he is getting interesting. His moralism of the *propre* (of what is properly self) motivates a first rate reduction of the *im-propre*, of that part of the *lifeworld* denoted as "alienated" and "abstraction" (what is not properly self), being colonized by an insufficiently scientific, scientific mode or method of production of the subject's own making that has returned to run the subject's life. Marx's polemic makes clear, in fact, a cardinal implication of intentional consciousness. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, the "consciousness of the world is not *based* on self-consciousness: they are strictly contemporary . . . I am not concealed from myself because I have a world." (PhP 298) Were the capitalist subject to retreat into itself, were it to *dis-own* the commodity and the world so that it might know and coincide with itself, it would not succeed, would merely reproduce, in a supposedly transparent self-reflection, ideology obscuring ever more thoroughly both its subjection to the commodity and the subjective acts that constitute the commodity behind its own back. It is in fact upon an intentionality in which the subject participates behind its own back - an intentionality that in opposing the thesis of a '*re-presentation*' of the 'in itself,' escapes the antithesis of a '*re-presentation*' of the 'for itself' - that Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* rests. But the *Phenomenology* does not limit itself to the single act of recovering this deeper intentionality or existence operative nowhere else but behind the back of the capitalist and the capitalist world. In this regard, Merleau-Ponty is closer to Husserl. Marx's reduction ceases in the face the remainder of the *lifeworld*

denoted as "objective" and "natural," yet, as Husserl would note, colonized by an insufficiently scientific, scientific method, a method of the subject's own making that has returned to run the subject's life, in this case, that of Marx. This is to say that Marx bursts through the natural attitude only to reinstate it, to reinstate its occultations. For Husserl, the difference between abstract and real, between alienated and objective, is of no consequence before the question of how there is a world, be it capitalist, Galilean, linguistic, perceptual, whatever. If subjective acts sustain the capitalist world wherein the subject is subjected to an *abstract* object in the person of the commodity and the market, whose acts sustain the natural world wherein the subject is subjected to a *real* object in the person of the in itself thing and nature? Marx's appeal to nature is for Husserl the return of "pure nature" and Galilean method. Husserl would recover beneath *desire*, beneath the subjection of the *real* subject to *real* nature, the intentional acts that constitute this nature, to the benefit, to be sure, of transcendental subjectivity and the 'for itself.'²⁰

Merleau-Ponty - with an intentionality in which I participate behind my own back, a participation that leaves me far from holding the world as "an object such that I have in my possession the laws of its making" (PhP xi), a participation that is rather a sort of dialogue - hopes to follow Husserl's archaeology, to push the reduction further than Marx, yet not take up a position within the bifurcation whereby we have only two modes of being. With his deeper intentionality, Merleau-Ponty would turn to an ambiguous existence in between. Against Marx no less than Husserl, he contends that "radical reflection amounts to a consciousness of its own dependence on an unreflective life which

is its initial situation, unchanging, given once and for all." (PhP xiv) In the end, what radical reflection recovers for the young Merleau-Ponty is the body and, in its person, the presence of a tacit *cogito*, a notion that may prove to be far less radical and original than it perhaps seems.

The Lived Body & the Body Politic

What is the *lived body*, *le corps propre*? Derrida, in *Of Grammatology*, says that within the structure of "giving-oneself-a-presence or a pleasure, the experience of touching-touched receives the other within the narrow gulf that separates doing from suffering."²¹ He calls this "auto-affection" and describes it as "a universal structure of experience." (G 165) Merleau-Ponty, some years earlier and in only slightly different terms, says that when I press my hands together there is "an ambiguous set-up in which both hands can alternate the rôles of 'touching' and being 'touched.'" (PhP 93) He notes, however, "that the two hands are never simultaneously in the relationship of touched and touching to each other." (PhP 93) There is indeed a "narrow gulf," that between the two sides of what Merleau-Ponty calls the *lived body*, a "narrow gulf" that makes there be two hands, one receiving the other as touched, the other suffering the other as touching.

The lived body is neither a consciousness nor a physicalistic body, neither (merely) subject nor (merely) object, but, as G. B. Madison suggests, "a consciousness which is itself corporeal."²² Merleau-Ponty contends that the lived body must be recovered as that to which the voyeur is eventually recalled. Soon or later the voyeur as

he spies is himself spied, is exposed and betrayed as a seer who is himself visible, as "a consciousness which is itself corporeal," as a sensing-sensible, as being in the world, and thereupon is dealt with "as a subject-object, as capable of 'seeing' *and* 'suffering'" (emphasis added; PhP 95). Merleau-Ponty pushes this further by returning to the example of my hands. Should my right hand, caught up in the exploration of the world, slip so as to be touched by my left, my right hand as the sensible object of my left is not my right hand as a sensing subject, not my right hand that in a moment and through a reversal of roles may touch and take my left as its sensible object: "the first is a system of bones, muscles and flesh brought down at a point of space, the second shoots through space like a rocket to reveal the external object in its place." (PhP 92) But my right hand is not, *a la* Husserl or even more Sartre, in one instance constituted through and through and in the next constituting consciousness. That would be to accept a position within the bifurcation that Merleau-Ponty wishes to overcome. Rather he notes that "I can identify the hand touched as the same one which will in a moment be touching." (PhP 93) This is to say that

in this bundle of bones and muscles which my right hand presents to my left, I can anticipate for an instant the . . . incarnation of that other right hand, alive and mobile, which I thrust towards things in order to explore them. The body catches itself from the outside engaged in a cognitive process; it tries to touch itself while being touched, and initiates 'a kind of reflection.' (PhP 93)

Such *reflexivity* on the part of the *lived body*, which prefigures the linguistic subject's *reflection*, is nowise defined by coincidence, for, as Merleau-Ponty said above, my "two

hands are never simultaneously in the relationship of touched and touching to each other." A coincidence would reduce and destroy the very difference that makes there be two hands. It is the non-interiority of self, "the outside, the exposed surface of the body," Derrida says, "[that] signifies and marks forever the division that shapes auto-affection." (G 165) Thus, as Derrida says, "the experience of touching-touched admits the world as a third party." (G 165) And we return to what is Merleau-Ponty's very motto: "there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself." (PhP xi)

But the lived body is something more for the young Merleau-Ponty, it is the embodiment or incarnation of his Husserlean-inspired, deeper intentionality. My body, he says, "keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system." (PhP 203) This is to insist that consciousness "is in the first place not a matter of 'I think that' but of 'I can' (PhP 137), not of knowledge *that* but of know *how*. This is to surround me with "meanings whose reciprocities, relationships and involvements do not require to be made explicit in order to be exploited" (PhP 129), with nothing less than a world in which I am always already active, a participant, behind my own back. More particularly, this is to replace the acts of transcendental subjectivity as intentionality's subjective correlate, objects being its objective correlate, with the acts of an always-already-there, opaque lived body irreducibly and reversibly engaged in a conversation with the perceived world. And with the invocation of intentionality and all that it implies, perhaps this is why Derrida does

not cite Merleau-Ponty when discussing "touching-touched" (G 165), why elsewhere he deals subtle jabs to the *corps propre* (G 62 & 66), why he even proclaims that in reading *Of Grammatology* we "pass the very limits of phenomenology" (68). Merleau-Ponty's deeper intentionality, the lived body's "perceptual consciousness" as opposed to transcendental subjectivity's "intellectual consciousness," amounts to, Madison suggests,

a palace revolution, a revolution *within* idealism, which for this very reason does not succeed in calling into question idealism as such. . . . What Merleau-Ponty did not see . . . is that *the mere substitution of a philosophy of experience for a philosophy of consciousness changes nothing in regard to the basic structures of philosophy.* (PMP 272)

Working from within philosophy of consciousness, from within intentionality, from within a certain bifurcation, Merleau-Ponty makes the lived body, its "perceptual, prereflective, *lived* experience," the "true transcendental" (PMP 271). A "transcendental" is defined in *The Visible and The Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty's unfinished and last work, as nothing other than "a *positive that is elsewhere*."²³ This is to suggest that Merleau-Ponty's revolutionary, inverted, and yet conserved, Husserleanism, as Merleau-Ponty himself will say of Marx's revolutionary, inverted, and yet conserved, Hegelianism, risks being little more than a profoundly obscure metaphysics of presence or, as Merleau-Ponty later admits, a bad ambiguity.

It is true that the lived body, perceptual consciousness or pre-reflective, pre-linguistic, silent lived experience - including the proletariat's lived experience - hardly seems to fit the definition of a transcendental. Or at least it hardly seems to be a positivity or presence elsewhere until one notes that in relation to it "speech is already

a separation." (PhP 337) This is where, if in a more straightforward manner, the Cartesian project shipwrecked. It was so fascinated with what words had to say that it never questioned how they came to say such things. A "merely verbal" or "spoken *cogito*" does not attain "its objective," Merleau-Ponty says, "since that part of our existence which is engaged in fixing our life in conceptual forms, and thinking of it as indubitable, is escaping focus and thought." (PhP 400 & 402) Descartes was a prisoner of language, was *had* by words. But can one get out of words? Merleau-Ponty portentously asks: "Shall we therefore conclude that language envelops us, and that we are led by it?" (PhP 402) Sixteen years later, two months before his death, in his last working note, Merleau-Ponty pronounces philosophy "a study of language that has man" (VI 274). The young Merleau-Ponty, on the contrary, assures us that to suggest such a thing is to "forget half the truth." (PhP 402) Descartes' words would be meaningless, he reasons, "were I not, before any speech can begin, in contact with my own life and thought, and if the spoken *cogito* did not encounter in me a tacit *cogito*." (PhP 402) In positing a silent or tacit *cogito* behind the spoken *cogito* as its possibility, in characterizing the lived body's reflexivity as the pre-reflective, pre-linguistic "presence of oneself to oneself" (PhP 404), Merleau-Ponty is not unmindful of the fact that "speech is already a separation." He says:

The whole question amounts to gaining a clear understanding of the unspoken *cogito*, to putting into it only what is really there, and not making language into a product of consciousness on the excuse that consciousness is not a product of language. (PhP 402)

But "what is really there"? Does not Merleau-Ponty make language into the "product of consciousness"? And is not consciousness *a la* Saussure "a the product of language"? There is a lack of accord between the young and the later Merleau-Ponty, perhaps even between the young Merleau-Ponty and himself, not to mention Derrida, on these three questions. Let it be noted that while the later Merleau-Ponty insists that there is a silent, perceptual world of which language speaks - a world of "non-language significations" - he denies expressly that such significations are "*positive*" and what he revokes as "impossible," as a "mythology of a self-consciousness to which the world 'consciousness' would refer," is a "tacit cogito" (VI 171). The whole problem might then be that we are again judging "what is by what ought to be," although not so much by what the idea of knowledge as the idea of intentionality - 'consciousness *of*' - requires.

The lived body, incarnate intentionality, silent lived experience or the tacit *cogito* is a positivity or presence to which the milieu of language is inevitably subordinated. The young Merleau-Ponty, rightly in our estimation, says that for us "there is no experience without speech, as the purely lived-thought has no part in the discursive life of man." (PhP 337) This anticipates Gadamer's famous epigram that "Being that can be understood is language" and is in agreement with its restatement by Madison as "Being that can be perceived is language."²⁴ But this is also a delicate matter - neither Merleau-Ponty, nor Gadamer, nor Madison wishes to make a prison of language - and so not without reason Merleau-Ponty feels compelled to add that "the *primary* meaning of discourse is to be found in that text of experience which it is trying communicate."

(emphasis added; PhP 337) Derrida, not known for hermeneutical charity, excuses himself from phenomenology when confronted with what could be construed as the suggestion that language translates a text already written, that it admits of a pre-text, a pre-text being the apogee of *positivity* or *presence* elsewhere. And not without reason, for Schmidt and Flynn note that for the young Merleau-Ponty language is precisely what Saussure says it is not - "motivated," and "profoundly" so. (CM 152 & cf. PS 115-116) To say that language is "motivated" is to posit between signifier and signified - between language and thought or between language and the perceptual - a relation of 're-presentation' that is not accidental, arbitrary and conventional but in some sense 'natural,' in some sense involving a 'resemblance.' To raise such a point against Merleau-Ponty is not, however, to side with Derrida, or more precisely, with the position whereby language is about nothing but itself, whereby it concerns neither thoughts nor things, which is a solution to be sure, although perhaps not a happy one, to 're-presentationalism.'²⁵ But to side against Derrida might just deny us the means of understanding the young Merleau-Ponty's political position, its evolution and its intertwining with the philosophy of the later Merleau-Ponty.²⁶

The young Merleau-Ponty concedes that the relation between things and words "appears arbitrary" (PhP 187). Or more precisely, he concedes that the relation between things and the worn coins of language, between things and *spoken, sedimented* or *secondary* speech appears arbitrary. Spoken, sedimented or "secondary speech renders a thought already acquired" (PhP 389). It is opposed to *speaking* or *originating* speech,

successful metaphor and literature being examples, which "brings [thought and things] into existence, in the first place for ourselves, and then for others." (PhP 389) If we start from time and exchange worn spoken speech - with its legendary shifts, displacements and reversal of what any particular signifier signifies - then arbitrariness reigns. Merleau-Ponty suggests that a different account might emerge if we begin rather with speaking speech, it being a sort of ever renewed first day, the moment when words are still natural, when they still say what they were intended to say, before their fall into the perversions of practice and the horrors of historical sedimentation. Beginning from this ever renewed first day, language would no longer appear arbitrary, Merleau-Ponty says,

if we took into account the emotional content of the word. . . . It would then be found that the words, vowels and phonemes are so many ways of 'singing' the world, and that their function is to represent things not, as the naïve onomatopoeic theory had it, by reason of an objective resemblance, but because they extract, and literally express, their emotional essence. If it were possible, in any vocabulary, to disregard what is attributed to the mechanical laws of phonetics, to the influence of other languages, the rationalization of grammarians, and assimilatory processes [to time and exchange], we should probably discover in the *original* form of each language [on *the* first day] a somewhat restricted system of expression, but such as would make it not entirely arbitrary. (emphasis added; PhP 187)

This appeal to an origin in the perceptual life and to the day when the "emotional content" of words "literally express[es]" the "emotional essences of things," to a day prior to the disfiguring of the "emotional content" of words and their subsequent indirect and oblique expression of "emotional essences," and ultimately to a state of affairs behind the back of the existing state of affairs as its ground in the face of arbitrariness, amounts to

an appeal to positivity and presence elsewhere that recalls a strikingly similar appeal made by Marx.

This similarity carries us from the heart of a philosophy to the heart of a politics. For Merleau-Ponty, the lived body, perceptual consciousness or "tacit *cogito* . . . does not constitute the world, it divines the world's presence about it" (PhP 403-4); for Marx, "practical consciousness," the consciousness of "the individual who is becoming conscious of himself," is consciousness of "the *immediate* sensuous environment."²⁷ For Merleau-Ponty, speech at first "literally" expresses perceptual life²⁸, and only subsequently falls into indirect and oblique spoken, sedimented or secondary speech; for Marx, language at *first* "is directed to, and arises from, our immediate contact with reality" (CM 25), "is the language of actual life" (GI 414), and only subsequently falls into indirect and oblique speech in the person of ideology, Hegel's history of spirit, for instance, being the disfigured expression of the history of man's commodity production. For Merleau-Ponty, the "tacit *cogito*, my self experienced by myself . . . does not constitute . . . the word . . . nor . . . the meaning of the word, which instantaneously emerges for it in its dealings with the world and other men living in it, being at the intersection of many lines of behaviour" (PhP 403-4); for Marx, *pre-ideological* language is "directly interwoven with the material activity and material relationships of men," being the "direct result of their material behaviour." (GI 414) For Merleau-Ponty, speaking or originating speech rests on and is grounded by perceptual consciousness, on perceptual consciousness *of* the "emotional essences" of things, perceptual consciousness being in

the *presence* of objects²⁹; for Marx, *pre-ideological* language rests on and is grounded by practical consciousness, practical consciousness suffering the *real* in terms of natural needs, practical consciousness being in the *presence* of *real* objects by way of *desire*.³⁰ And just as Merleau-Ponty offered above a story of how the objectification of the self's perceptual life in speaking or originating speech falls into the alienation of spoken, sedimented or secondary speech which has us and thereby is taken for *an-other* not of our own making, not reducible to self, Marx has his own darker version of the fall from the objectification of "actual life" into alienation and abstraction, into ideology returned over and against us. And what is more, Marx's version ends happily. His version leaves us a recipe by which we might cook up a future in which alienated consciousness is decisively transcended in revolution.

For Marx, the root of self's alienation from self - and with it all ideology - is of course no one other than man himself. In particular, the root is not so much human practice succumbed to the division of labour in general (to an insufficiently scientific, scientific mode of production in which labour and reason are juxtaposed) as succumbed to the division of mental from material labour (the division of labour nowise being a conscious expression of the reason of all men). Flynn cites the *German Ideology* where Marx says that from the moment of the division of mental from material labour onward

consciousness can really boast of being something other than consciousness of existing practice, of *really* representing something without representing something real. From this moment on consciousness can emancipate itself from the world and proceed to the formation of 'pure theory,' theology, philosophy, ethics, etc. (GI 423)

Marx's happy ending entails the reappropriation of language become indirect and oblique, become ideology, through the healing of the difference that separates mental from material labour, where this difference is taken for *the* cleavage and self-contradiction of all cleavages and self-contradictions. Thus, to take the most important case, the irreducible *ontological difference* and systemic *otherness* that philosophers elaborated by way of Saussure that they might *really* understand something - existing language - without understanding something *real* - existing language, *a la* Marx, grounded in and reducible to a positive self alienated from itself - is but ideology and abstraction from a *real* and perfectly reducible difference at work behind their backs, the difference between mental and material labour. With the healing of this *real* difference through the transformation of "the division of labour from a 'natural fact' to a consciously enacted program" (CM 29), we destroy the philosophies of *ontological difference* by realizing the later Merleau-Ponty and Jacques Derrida as the philosophers who *abstractly* name the *real* lynchpin withholding *actual* man from the self-*presence* that the philosophers of *ontological presence* have been perfectly content to merely contemplate in their *abstract*, ontological elsewhere. Marx destroys and realizes onto-theology by identifying ontology with abstraction, with indirect and oblique thought, with ideology, which, nevertheless, allusively thinks, or at least expresses, the cleavage and self-contradictions of human practice since it is but a *re-presentation* of this cleavage and these contradictions. Hence onto-theology is destroyed precisely at the moment when its problems are at last decisively resolved through their *real* resolution not in thought, which could never be

decisive, but in practice. In an interview a year before his death, Merleau-Ponty suggests that Marx's "error was not that he believed that civilization is an ontological complex, but that a civilization was emerging that would take the place of an ontology,"³¹ the problems of ontology having been grounded in and reduced to human practice, to man himself. In the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty puts considerable distance between himself and Marx's optimism: "to say with Marx that man poses for himself only problems he can solve is to revive a theological optimism and postulate the consummation of the world." (PhP 398) One then would hope that the young Merleau-Ponty, despite equally grounding existing language in and reducing it to self's alienation from self, resolving it, Flynn says, "into a moment of past expression which has become alienated from the activity of expression and thereby institutionalized" (CM 152), harbours no equally grand and reductionist designs whereby self, wrongly taken for existing civilization, grounds the politico-linguist project of reducing existing civilization to self, to man as its root.

Certainly Merleau-Ponty harbours no equally grand and reductionist designs in so far as language is concerned. A project of linguistic reappropriation is most antithetical to the dominant tones of the *Phenomenology of Perception*. Spoken, sedimented or secondary speech may be unhappy, alienated consciousness, but Merleau-Ponty has no intention of somehow transcending this tragedy. Might there not however be politico-humanist undertones in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, in a consciousness of "emotional essences" and the literal expression of lived experience (say that of the

proletariat) that answer to the notes he hammers out three years later in *Humanism and Terror*?

The title of this political text, Merleau-Ponty's first, is perhaps deceiving. The work does not show, or at least not intentionally, how a politics of humanism breeds Terror.³² In the last analysis, history, the contingency of history, the conflict of interpretations on the part of history's actors, takes the blame for history's horrors. Merleau-Ponty recalls Pascal:

did not Pascal three centuries ago bitterly remark that it has become honourable to kill a man if he lives on the other side of the river, and conclude that things are such that these absurdities are the life of societies?³³

Merleau-Ponty, nevertheless, is more sanguine than Pascal, more sanguine by way of his humanism. "We shall not go so far," he says, not, that is, in the direction of violence cumulating in little more than more violence, and so we shall go further, for "one could take this road if it was to create a society without violence." (HT xxxvii) The humanism of which the young Merleau-Ponty speaks, humanism as, if not the end of history, then at least history's direction and meaning (its *sens*), shrewdly plays the means of history, including Terror, off against these very means that they might be overcome in the "the mutual recognition of men as men," the recognition of man as "the supreme being for man" (HT 156 & 155). This may not mean the end of history and of the conflict of interpretations, but would at least reduce the absurdity of violence to the absolute minimum of *real* conflicts of interpretation, where this absolute minimum may be

vanishingly small in so far as communism is the end of pre-history, in so far as communist society, being *one* united voice, does not permit waste, does not admit of rival interpretations. In particular and to cite Lyonnais graffiti, the mutual recognition of men as men or the recognition of man as the supreme being for man means "NI DIEU, NI ÉTAT, NI CAPITAL," means, as Marx would say, the end of private production and of "single individuals in civil society." (F 145) Merleau-Ponty contends that to renounce or fail in "this historical mission" - history being posited as "the advent of humanity" - is to "dig the grave of Reason in history." (HT 154, 156 & 154) He contends that to renounce or fail in the actualization of Marx's thought - Marx's thought being posited as "*the* philosophy of history" - "would mean in the end . . . that the world and our existence are a senseless tumult." (HT 153 & 156) This is to say that reason is reason and "Marxism is *the* philosophy of history" in so far as they are objectifications of man's historical coming to self-presence in mutual recognition. Were this advent not inscribed in the heart of history then absurdity would reign, there would be but "dreams or adventures." (HT 153) This is clearly a teleological understanding of reason and history, reason and history assigned a mission in the face of absurdity with man being their seed, root and final form.

Merleau-Ponty insists that this "is not to advance a hypothesis" (HT 155), insists that this is no abstract adoption of a position on the terrain of ontology, and in particular, within the metaphysics of presence. Rather this "is simply to enunciate a conception of man as a being who is situated in relation to nature and to other men" (HT 155), is

simply an objectification of the way things really are. Hence we are directed back to a familiar level, back to the perceptual life that Descartes supposedly sensed - the "silent *cogito* was the one [he] sought when writing his *Meditations*" (PhP 402) - back to the silent lived experience of societies which Pascal looked in the face without discerning beyond the empirical absurdities the historical mission that Marx clearly saw there. (HT 162) In the name of "Hegel and Marx (who is the 'realization' of Hegel)," Merleau-Ponty invokes an "*a priori* or inner structure of life and history of which empirical events are the unfolding and of which, in the last analysis, man is the agency" (HT 162). This is to advance an understanding of Marx's thought or *real* humanism as *pre-ideological* or *pre-political*, not "the adoption of a certain number of ends through reasoning and will, but . . . the simple extrapolation of a *praxis* already at work in history, of a reality that is already committed, namely the proletariat." (HT 126) Marx's thought or *real* humanism is but the objectification of the proletariat, of its perceptual live and silent lived experience, and in relation to these, any other historical project is alienation of self from self, an abstraction, ideology . . . in the eyes of the proletariat. To admit this, one would think, is to admit that liberalism too can claim to have plumbed and objectified - as liberalism itself - the depths of the perceptual life and silent lived experience of a different class, and so the liberal would face the enemy across Pascal's river of blood and honour, just as the enemy faces him: two classes set to honourably kill each other in the name of tomorrow's universal humanity. What we have here is two sides rooted in the Truth, but inconveniently, not the same Truth.

This leaves us far from an overcoming of Pascalean absurdity, far from everything that *Humanism and Terror* - written at the start of the Cold War - would help us avert, in particular, World War III. *Humanism and Terror* would help us avert this war not because Merleau-Ponty, a committed Marxist, threw his lot in with the pacifists. He would help us avert this war because it would be, for the best of theoretical reasons, futile. Neither the liberal nor the communist, but especially the liberal, had an objective claim to kill honourably. The communist, unlike the Marxist, had more or less abandoned, at least in the eyes of the proletariat as seen through those of Merleau-Ponty, proletarian politics. With time, however, the communists of the USSR might prove that this was not so, that they had merely been forced to take for the sake of the proletariat a most substantial detour behind its back. Hence Merleau-Ponty's ill-starred 'Wait and See' attitude towards communism and the USSR. Between the Marxist and the Communist there was a conflict of interpretations. Stalin, in the end, might be right, but until the existing proletariat could perceive that he was anything more than an adventurer killing without honour, it was better to recall Lenin who made proletariat consciousness the principle of his politics. This generosity towards Stalin was partly rooted in the fact that the Marxist too had problems, being faced with nothing less than an intractable history. He had not abandoned the proletariat, but it had abandoned him, not living up to its role as *the* actor on the stage of world history. All of this, Merleau-Ponty admits, "introduces a crisis into Marxist dialectics" (HT xxxi) - but not into history as a whole. The problem is that Bukharin, the 'last Bolshevik,' Stalin, who orchestrated the Moscow

Trials to be rid of him, and Trotsky, who disowned Stalin from abroad, each can imagine himself to be "using [Terror] to realize a genuinely human history which . . . provides the justification for revolutionary violence." (HT 97) That all three noble Marxists cannot be right at the same time - there is the tragedy of history, the "evil in collective life" (HT xxxviii). The tragedy and evil most certainly does not lie as blood in the absurdity of Pascal's river at that bend where it divides communists from liberals. Bukharian, Stalin and Trotsky can each hope for redemption because their violence has a "meaning . . . it is possible to understand it, to read into it a rational development and to draw from it a humane future." (HT 97) He who has no hope of redemption is the liberal. His violence does not aim at a "humane future." He is not caught in a *real* conflict of interpretations. He is, as Merleau-Ponty shall argue, objectively or historically wrong.

This is an excellent story, theology (Hegel), naturalism (Galileo) and humanism (Descartes) united in a sort of second coming that will be the end of history's horrors, the end of history itself, or of pre-history at least. Schmidt suggests that Merleau-Ponty's "passage from perception to history . . . takes the form of a leap." (PS 125) We disagree. Merleau-Ponty has not "simply coupled the universal history he found in Kojève and Lukács [leading interpreters of Hegel and Marx respectively] to . . . the *Phenomenology of Perception* [with its interpretation of Descartes]." (PS 124-5) There is an insidious logic at work here, that Schmidt himself hints at elsewhere.

The proletariat, like the lived body, is a subject-object. It is capitalism's producing subject and reproduced, bought and sold, object. And what is more, it too can

touch itself. There is a kind of proletariat reflexivity, a kind of universal self-*presence* to be found in the silent life of the toiling masses. Perhaps it seems extravagant to posit the proletariat as a silent, social *cogito* grounding a coming revolutionary societal *cogito*, grounding the conversion of man's silent presence to man into man's conscious and explicit recognition by man. It is true that the *Phenomenology of Perception* and *Humanism and Terror* are on the surface anything but closely integrated. It is also true that this would be to reintegrate Descartes into Hegel and Marx, which perhaps counts for it rather than against it, at least from the perspectives of Hegel and Marx. But in any case, we need not ourselves posit the proletariat as a silent, social *cogito* since Merleau-Ponty posits it as such for us. He says that the proletarian "is the universality that he reflects upon," is universality "not just in thought and by means of abstraction but in reality and by the very processes of his life," where the objectification of proletariat's life alone secures "the self-consciousness that the philosophers have anticipated" (HT 116), where "self-consciousness and class consciousness are absolutely identical." (HT 115) One might say that Marx destroys Descartes by realizing him as communism. But probably one should not say this, matters being better put in terms of the body.

The proletariat is a consciousness which is itself corporal. A proletarian as an object is touched by every other proletarian, suffers universality, when he is bought with the commodity, the commodity being but the productive subjectivity of every other proletarian alienated from itself. And the roles, as with my hands, can be reversed. A proletarian as a subject touches every other proletarian, touches universality, when his

productive subjectivity is alienated from itself as the commodity, the commodity being what buys as objects every other proletarian. The proletariat's reflexivity emerges, its universality becomes a conscious *self-presence*, when in passing between the roles the proletarian touched or bought with the commodity is recognized as the same commodity that will in a moment be touching or buying proletarians. The proletariat catches itself from outside engaged in touching or buying itself. It tries to touch or buy itself while being touched or bought, and initiates a kind of reflection. The proletariat surprises itself behind the commodity, capital and capitalist as the *real* productive subject of capitalism, and would reappropriate and reinstall itself in its own productive subjectivity. Given that this is how intentional subjectivity - of whatever sort - works, given that the *later* Merleau-Ponty rejects any understanding of the *lived body* as intentionality, given that we have just paraphrased precisely what the *later* Merleau-Ponty says the body's reflexivity is not (cf. VI 249), we raise the possibility of a more thoroughgoing *autocritique* in Merleau-Ponty's *The Adventures of the Dialectic* and *The Visible and Invisible* than is generally acknowledged. Criticism of the proletariat would be criticism of the lived body and criticism of the lived body would be criticism of the proletariat.

Proletarians, like my two hands, are never simultaneously in the relation of touched and touching to each other. Merleau-Ponty has always insisted on this non-coincidence. Where and how is the touched-touching junction of *self-presence* then made? The later Merleau-Ponty has an answer, which we will consider in the following chapter. The young Merleau-Ponty does not. Where the junction is not made, the later

Merleau-Ponty says, is "in the body," "'in the mind' or at the level of 'consciousness.'" Portentously he says: "Something else than the body is needed for the connection to be made" (VI 254). It is this something else, this something else that is not man, that the young Merleau-Ponty, Marx and *real* humanism cannot think, that they must reduce to self's alienation from self. It is Schmidt's suggestion that the Merleau-Ponty of the *Phenomenology of Perception* implied that the junction was made in the body. (CM 94-5)

One can half-image the intentional thread which connects the intentional subject and the intentional object running from my left hand as a subject to my right hand as object *not* across the difference that separates them, *but* up my one arm and across my body . . .

With respect to the proletariat such an implication is pivotal, not merely conserving the metaphysics of presence, it licenses the pernicious political return of modernity - of knowledge, certainty and homogenous Truth - into a democratic political domain defined by the absence of knowledge, the dissolution of certainty and the re-articulation of Truth as rivalry, as the difference of *truths*.³⁴ Were the connection of a proletarian touching his fellows made in the body of proletariat itself, then the commodity and capitalism would be nothing more than tools of the presence of proletarians to each other, the power of this universal touch belonging to proletariat *propre* . . . and not to the *other*. The commodity and capitalism would then be precisely what Marx and the young Merleau-Ponty insists that they are, nothing more than self's alienation from self, an unnecessarily indirect and oblique communication.

As tools of the proletariat, the commodity and capitalism might quite simply be

set down on the work bench of history. As masks, they might quite simply be torn off so that man might stand before man face to face. As matter wholly animated by man, they, by way of the Terror of the Revolution to end all revolutions, might quite simply be hung on the wall of some museum of pre-history, perhaps beside some bones of a capitalist honourably drowned so that the spread of waters dividing mental and material might finally be filled in, as it never was in the U.S.S.R., China and Pol Pot's Kampuchea, though the last came closest. What is forgotten is that Pascal's waters are not a lake but a savage river. This *écart*, this spread, separation and divide between ruler and ruled, this instituting of power, is the brute Other who can never be mastered, who can never be reduced, who can only be tempted, diverted and perhaps, to degrees and for a time, tamed or held in check. The thought of existing language - say of French and of existing philosophy with it - hung on a museum wall as an indirect, oblique, inadequate, ideological tool and mask would have horrified the young Merleau-Ponty, even the young Merleau-Ponty we are less familiar with. Merleau-Ponty was never tempted, as Husserl was in his youth, by the project of an ideal language. Perhaps this project never tempted him because he had an intuition that lurking behind the mask was not the face of man . . . but of Terror. The later Merleau-Ponty learns to live with capitalism. What he disavows, together with Marx's understanding of the proletariat as the revolutionary reappropriation of history inscribed in history's heart, is the 'tacit cogito,' 'perceptual positivities,' the reductionist relation constructed with words between the silent lived experience of 'subjectivity' and what are in fact systems of *otherness*. What Merleau-

Ponty disavows is the reduction to either consciousness or to man that swallows up not merely religion, state and capitalism, but history, language and, in the end, in the ensuing Terror, man himself. Merleau-Ponty says:

to make the 'reduction,' to return to immanence and to consciousness of . . . it is necessary to have words. It is by the combination of words (with their charge of sedimented significations . . .) that I *form* the transcendental attitude [whether Husserl's, Marx's or Merleau-Ponty's], that I *constitute* constitutive consciousness [including deeper intentionality and man]. The words do not refer to positive significations . . . Mythology of a self-consciousness [transcendental subjectivity, the lived body and the proletariat] to which the word 'consciousness' would refer -- (VI 171)

These words are addressed not only to 'philosophy' in the person of Husserl, not only to 'politics' in the person of Marx, but to the substantial life of the metaphysics of (self-)presence in the persons of the young Merleau-Ponty and the European World.³⁵

But of course only Marxists, which is to say, *political philosophers* like Marx and Merleau-Ponty, approach so abstractly and in terms at all like these the proletariat. What of the 'proletariat in itself' which they propose to 're-present' accurately? The proletarian himself, caught up in a *world market* objectively experiences his life as dependent "on what happens everywhere else in the world," but unlike most men and even some of his comrades, he does not experience this universality, "this relation to the rest of the world as a fate and draw from it only resignation." (HT 114) It is true, Merleau-Ponty admits, that economy is not the only way to experience universality, that "in reflection every man can *conceive* of himself as simply a man and thereby rejoins others." (HT 115) But in relation to the lived experience of the proletariat, to its

experience of dependency as a universal touched-touching, other universalities are not really *real*, are but the philosophical abstraction of a liberal:

he has to forget his peculiar circumstances, and once he had gone back from thought, to living, he again conducts himself as a Frenchman, a doctor, a bourgeois, etc. (HT 115-6)

Personally we doubt that a French proletarian is more proletarian than French. But in any case, it is the proletarian alone, Merleau-Ponty says, that has or can detach himself "from special circumstances not just in thought and by means of abstraction but in reality and through the process of his life." (HT 116) Because of the proletarian's unique situation, the way this universal dependency touches him "at work" and "affects his wages, he more than anyone else has a chance of experiencing it as an 'alienation' or an 'externalization'" (HT 114) - rather than as *otherness*, or as something entirely less philosophic. It is nonetheless here, despite this abstract philosophical matter, that we find the *real* lynchpins of "Revolution" and its honourable, revolutionary violence: "the existence of universal dependence" - a perceptual, lived recognition of man by man - and "consciousness of such dependency as alienation" - the *de facto*, natural, inhuman quality of this recognition, it being effected through the mediation of *another of the proletariat's own making*. (HT 115) It is because the proletariat is capitalism's *real* object and *real* subject that Marxism alone is the *speaking* or *originating* speech of history and the proletariat alone is the *real*, objective and historical *sens*, direction and meaning, that must be said. Thus it is alone honourable to spill liberal and capitalist blood in the river separating mental from material labour and to drown in it liberals and capitalists, weighted down with their sedimented

interests, so that this difference, and with it all differences, might someday be filled in.

The overcoming of difference at the end of history, the overcoming of the natural and inhuman by man himself, is nothing less than the destruction of merely contemplated onto-theological presence in the act of dragging God from the heavens and back to Earth as man himself. Man becomes fully the God, the government, the commodity, the history, and, for Marx at least, the language that he always was, but that used to run his life. Man henceforth runs his life himself. Man henceforth *has* - rather than is *had* by - institutions. Flynn describes communism as depicted by Marx in the *German Ideology*:

everything, every institution, will exist only insofar as it is, and is perceived to be, 'the product of the preceding intercourse of individuals themselves.' (CM 29)

It is the transparency of man to himself - on the hither side of difference - the transparency of man in the everything that he touches - this strict reducibility to man - that makes man "the supreme being for man." It is this transparency that makes of man the ultimate voyeur, the narcissist so caught up in the spectacle that he forgets the very mediation of the mirror that does not so much divide him from himself as make there be a self to be seen. Difference, among whose emblems is the mirror, opens and is the place of fascination. Another such opening and place of fascination is language. The moment this differential system slips into the background, the moment we think ourselves a power of pure voyeurism, we have forgotten our beginnings. To speak in religious terms for a moment, may the *Other* have mercy upon us. May the *Other*, despite and because of our

slander and presumption, save us from ourselves.

1. *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Smith (New York: Humanities Press, 1962 [1945]), p. vii. Hereafter cited as PhP.
2. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendent Phenomenology*, trans. Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press), p. 76. Hereafter cited as CR.
3. Husserl was particularly concerned with psychology. But the history of science *qua* objective thought, embracing psychology itself, would become central in *The Crisis*, serving as both introduction and necessary path to phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty too took psychology as an especially important target and path, treating it, with Husserl, as the place where philosophies do battle and where phenomena appear that escape them. Merleau-Ponty's first book, *The Structure of Behaviour*, considered *Gestalt* psychology's ground breaking descriptions and its ultimate failure to insist on their originality in face of existing philosophy. As for the *Phenomenology of Perception*, while borrowing from Husserl's late turn to history, it, unlike Merleau-Ponty's ensuing political works, largely escapes the question posed by Paul Ricoeur: "How can a philosophy of the *cogito*, of the radical return to the ego as the founder of all being, become capable of a philosophy of history?" ("Husserl and the Sense of History," *Husserl: An Analysis* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), p. 145)

As for the tight weave of phenomenology and science that is perhaps suggested here, Husserl resisted it with considerable ambiguity, coming closet to taking it as a theme in *The Crisis*. Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, made much of it, playing the concerns of objective metaphysical science and subjective transcendental phenomenology off against one another in the process of articulating a 'mundane' or 'existential' phenomenology of the *lifeworld*.

The Austrian school of economics is a prime instance of just such play. Certainly there is Karl Menger's justly famous and decidedly unique 'subjective' theory of value which founded the school over and against classical objectivism. But there is also the portentous discussions concerning method in the 'mundane,' human sciences between Alfred Schutz - Husserl's pupil and almost assistant - and F. A. Hayek - diviner, with Ludwig von Mises, of the fall of the East (cf. my "Acquisition and Expressive Existence: the *lifeworld* phenomenology of Hayek, Schutz and Merleau-Ponty"). Hayek's deconstruction of economic method as the prolific but lifeless waters of economic objectivism was unprecedented in its time and remains perhaps the most telling to date (cf. his *The Counter-Revolution of Science & "Economics and Knowledge"* in *Individualism and the Economic Order*, and my *Socialism, Economics and the Death of Conversation*). If the approach of Hayek and the Austrian school was often - and ironically - "rejected as 'metaphysical,'" as Husserl said of his own efforts to think the sciences (CR 57), it attracts much attention today, especially in the East.

4. *Capital, The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Tucker (London: Norton & Company, 1978), p. 319. *Capital* is hereafter cited as C.
5. Bernard Flynn, in *Political Philosophy at the Closure of Metaphysics* (London: Humanities Press, 1992) which is hereafter cited as CM, elaborates on the wilfulness of the Cartesian gaze in a passage worth quoting in full: "In the unpublished and incomplete text, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, Descartes lays out a method by which one could attain truth. As is well known, the method is a project for a mathematical knowledge of the world. It is frequently claimed this methodological text of Descartes is pre-metaphysical, in the strict sense, since within it one does not find any discussion of God, the *Cogito* as foundation, or speculation about the ultimate notion of reality. Nevertheless, Jean-Luc Marion, in *Sur L'Ontologie Grise de Descartes*, contends that in the *Regulae*, Descartes had engendered the ontological framework within which truth could be obtained, but he had not yet shown that the world is such that it could be known by his method. A mathematized treatment of the world could yield knowledge (in the sense Descartes gave to the term) only on the condition that the world is in its essence extension. Therefore, in the *Meditations of First Philosophy*, Descartes attempts to prove that the world is such that it could be known by his method." (78)
6. Recall Benjamin Franklin's epigram: "Time is money."
7. Recall that technology is that by which nature is known and dominated.
8. James Schmidt draws our attention to this confession at the beginning of the *Third Meditation*. (PS 22)
9. This is of course an allusion to the not unrelated matter, considered in the second and third chapters, of history understood as "one damn thing after another."
10. This is a rival account of human subjectivity, of subjectivity that is "dependent yet indeclinable." It is an account that does not in any obvious way seek to ground itself in a presence elsewhere, even if this means the end of philosophy, the end of ideas that are clear and distinct not merely at the moment of their inception, but all the way down. Merleau-Ponty says: "There is no act, no particular experience which exactly fills my consciousness and imprisons my freedom, 'there is no thought which abolishes the power to think and brings it to a conclusion - no definite position of the bolt that finally closes the lock.'" (PhP 400) Clear and distinct ideas - knowledge - aim to be just such a "definite position," just such an imprisonment of "my freedom" - a last word. Our situation is rather, Merleau-Ponty says, one where I am "the constituting agent of my thought in general, failing which it would not be thought by anybody, would pass unnoticed and would therefore not be thought at all - without ever being that agent of my particular thoughts, since I never see them come into being in the full light of day, but merely know myself through them." (PhP 400)

Such an account leaves us free to think again, differently.

11. *Discourse on Method and The Meditations*. Trans. Sutcliffe (Great Britain: Penguin, 1988), p. 113.
12. Ricoeur, Paul, "On Interpretation," *Philosophy in France Today*, ed. Montefiore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.), p. 189.
13. Husserl, for his part, credits Descartes with the discovery, "though completely undeveloped," of intentionality. (CR 82)
14. In the "Critique of Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy in General," Marx, lamenting an intellectualism wherein "private property as *thought* is transcended in the *thought* of morality," says: "because thought imagines itself to be immediately the other of itself or *sensuous actuality* - thus taking it own action for *actual sensuous action* - this transcendence in thought which leaves its object intact in actuality believes it has actually overcome it." (*Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, eds. & trans. Easton & Guddat (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1967), p. 330.) This essay is hereafter cited as HD.
15. *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Tucker (London: Norton & Company, 1978), p. 145. The "Theses on Feuerbach" is hereafter cited as F.
16. *Towards The Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction, Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, eds. & trans. Easton & Guddat (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1967), p. 250.
17. Flynn, in detail that surpasses what we can here enter into, directs us to precisely such an interpretation of Marx, referring us to Cornelius Castoriadis ("From Marx to Aristotle, From Aristotle to Us," *Social Research* 45. 4 (1978), p. 667-739) and putting his argument as follows: "Marx solves the problem of the commensurability of products of different labors by means of a mixture of chemistry and metaphysics. Labor is seen as the underlying [*re-presented*] substance which takes on different phenomenal forms, and thus 'this Substance, the privilege of the economy, is in the end an instrument or vehicle of Reason.' This is to say, the economy is the instrument by which labor - the human essence - reveals itself, moves [in pre-history's march to communist revolution] from being implicit or merely in-itself to being explicit [communism]. It is the process by which 'the Other is reduced to the Same.'" (CM 106) Flynn portentously remarks that this "'labor stuff theory' . . . obviates the political activity of instituting value." (CM 106)
18. Flynn suggests this term, borrowing it from Jacques Lacan. (CM 31) See the first chapter of Flynn's *Political Philosophy at the Closure of Metaphysics*, "Marx: The Real through Desire and Language," for an excellent consideration, to which we are indebted, of Marx's quest to escape institutions or symbolic orders, his quest, as Marx himself says, for "none but perfectly intelligible and reasonable relations with regard to [our] fellowmen and to Nature." (C 327) In particular, what Flynn critiques is the role of *desire*, of the family and of

language in Marx, drawing respectively on Jacques Lacan, Claude Levi-Strauss -both friends of Merleau-Ponty - and Saussure - who Merleau-Ponty introduced to French philosophy.

19. Marx himself speaks of a "language of commodities." (C 317)
20. Rudolf Bernet observes that the reduction *chez* Husserl "can only let appear the correlation between the constituting activity of the transcendental subject and the accomplishments of this constitution. It cannot recuperate or let appear that which precedes and supports this constitution." (SR 57)
21. *Of Grammatology*, trans. Spivak (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1967), p. 165. Hereafter cited as G.
22. *Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty: A Search For The Limits of Consciousness*, trans. Madison (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981 [1973]), p. 23. Hereafter cited as PMP.
23. *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968 [1964]), p. 130 & 254. Hereafter cited as VI.
24. "Did Merleau-Ponty Have a Theory of Perception?" (*Merleau-Ponty, Hermeneutics and Postmodernity*, eds. Busch & Gallagher (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 93.) This essay is hereafter cited as P.
25. We do not consider - let alone propose to resolve - the question of whether this is Derrida's position. Let it be noted that the position in question absolutely privileges one of the terms, linguistic structure, by cutting away the other, thought, things or events.
26. We therefore propose to take a certain distance from works that recover the *Phenomenology of Perception*, sixteen years before *The Visible and the Invisible* and twenty-three before *Of Grammatology*, as being more consistent than not with *The Visible and the Invisible*, as being mostly devoid of the metaphysics of presence that Derrida - as well as the later Merleau-Ponty - suggests is to be found there. Such readings of the *Phenomenology*, while often convincing, are, like our own, motivated.
27. Marx, *The German Ideology, Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, eds. & trans. Easton & Guddat (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1967), p. 421 & 422. Hereafter cited as GI.
28. Madison banishes this *literal* expression of perceptual consciousness from the *Phenomenology of Perception* by reading it as an "anti-text," a text without "positive theses," (P 85) making it a "metaphorical" discourse, which "[u]nlike literal discourse, . . . achieves its proper effect only if, so to speak, [it] cancels itself out, self-destructs, undercuts its own semantic positivity." (P 90) This is a very plausible reading of the *Phenomenology*, of its incessant 'neither idealism, nor materialism,' when placed beside *The Visible and the Invisible*,

as opposed to Merleau-Ponty's early political work. Between our reading and that of Madison there is truth to be both won and lost, both unveiling and concealing. That this is always the case and in all matters is a point that shall be returned to in later chapters.

29. Bernet exorcises from the *Phenomenology of Perception* this being in the *presence* of the object on the part of consciousness by beginning his reading with the observation that intentionality, the "consciousness-object" distinction, is "not stubbornly cl[ui]ng to" (SR 55).
30. CM 21. Flynn does not, but could have, put his reflections on Marx's *pre-ideological* language (cf. CM 23-27), as he draws it from the *German Ideology*, beside his briefer remarks on Merleau-Ponty's *speaking* or *originating* speech. (cf. CM 152-3)
31. "Merleau-Ponty in Person (A Interview with Madeleine Chapsal, 1960)," TD, p. 10.
32. Which again is not to endorse the antithesis, the anti-humanism of Martin Heidegger for example, which failed to prevent this profound thinker, who in so many ways is Merleau-Ponty's *alter ego*, from becoming a Nazi.
33. *Humanism and Terror*, trans. O'Neill (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969 [1947]), p. xxxvii. Hereafter cited as HT.
34. It is to such matters that we turn in detail in the epilogue.
35. As Husserl spoke of world crisis in terms of *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*," we do likewise. This is not to say that all is reducible to Europe. Rather it is to say that in so far as Europe has touched every part of the world, the crisis of presence is a world crisis.

2 / DOUBTS ABOUT MAN

The visible . . . must be presented without any compromise with *humanism*, nor moreover with *naturalism*, nor finally with *theology*--

-Merleau-Ponty, "Working Notes of March 1961"

Phenomenological Ontology

Merleau-Ponty concedes that he failed to be radical enough. He concedes, in his own words, that "problems posed in the *Phenomenology of Perception* are insoluble because I start from the 'consciousness'-'object' distinction" (VI 200). It is not enough to turn one's back on transcendental subjectivity. It is not enough to substitute for it an opaque lived body irreducibly forming a circuit with the perceived world. In the end, what must be interrogated is intentional consciousness itself.

With the opening of this interrogation - with which we begin - phenomenology no longer proceeds as description that necessarily recovers the subject. It is thus that phenomenology takes a distance from itself, opening itself to description - to which we then turn - that neither reduces the Other nor ignores Being. In a transitional 'philosophical' work, "The Philosopher and his Shadow," Merleau-Ponty suggests that "the ultimate task of phenomenology as philosophy of consciousness is to understand its relationship to non-phenomenology." (S 178) This is to herald Merleau-Pontean ontology, the "same phenomenology," Madison says, "only now become conscious of its limit and

desirous of thinking the limit" (PMP 190). The philosopher, Merleau-Ponty says, "must bear his shadow, which is not simply the factual absence of future light." (S 178) Going even further in *The Visible and The Invisible*, he says,

for me it is no longer a question of origins, nor limits, nor a series of events going to a first cause, but one sole explosion of Being which is forever. (265)

The *Phenomenology of Perception* - with its positing of presence elsewhere in the person of pre-reflective subjectivity to which language was lashed - had suggested otherwise.¹ We close the chapter by re-articulating precisely the involvement of the perceptual and language, where they are but differential inscriptions in the fabric of being or the *flesh*.

If Derrida recalls, with subtle jabs to the *corps propre*, Merleau-Ponty's initial failure to be radical enough, he conveniently forgets that Merleau-Ponty "recommences everything" (VI 130). Derrida has a point when he says that no "intuition can be realized in the places where 'the "whites" [or "spaces" of writing] indeed take on an importance.'" (G 68) And it is indeed true, in a sense, that a "phenomenology of writing is impossible" (G 68), but in the same sense in which a phenomenology of the *flesh* is impossible. It is with Merleau-Ponty's *flesh* as it is with Derrida's *arche-writing*, it "cannot occur *as such* within the phenomenological experience of a *presence*" (G 68), cannot be caught *as such* by the Derridean gaze. The path to this *no-thing* runs through the work of the later Merleau-Ponty:

We are interrogating our experience precisely in order to know how it opens us to what is not ourselves. *This does not even exclude the possibility that we find in our experience a movement towards what*

could not in any event be present to us in the original and whose irremediable absence would thus count among our originating experiences. But, if only in order to see these margins of presence, . . . to interrogate them, we do indeed first have to fix our gaze on what is apparently given to us. (VI 159)

This opens a very radical sort of interrogation. It is the beginnings of an ontology of subjectivity and presence, but, at the same time, an ontology working from within phenomenology, wherein phenomenology becomes itself, wherein phenomenology comes out of the closet and acknowledges itself as an ontology, but a negative ontology, no longer positing subjectivity as presence elsewhere. Phenomenology becomes interrogation betraying "irremediable absence." It betrays "margins" of subjectivity and presence that are neither self nor present. And as an ontology, it betrays "irremediable absence" and these "margins" as the 'place' where subjectivity and presence are inscribed, or better, as their very inscription.

Phenomenology thus overcomes itself as description that recovers the subject, or more precisely, that recovers a subject behind the subject. Merleau-Ponty, Madison says, wanted "to keep philosophy in contact with experience . . . to conceive of our actual experience as the absolute source of meaning for us" (PMP 225). But this is an extremely delicate matter. And, as Madison notes, the young Merleau-Ponty goes too far. With Husserl and in the tradition, Heidegger would add, of Protagoras, Merleau-Ponty defined "being as that which appears, and consciousness as a universal fact." (PhP 397) This is to deny the possibility of transcendence in immanence. It is to make the lived body or the proletariat - substituted for constituting consciousness - the source of being.

(PMP 225) And it is to leave this being hanging in what Madison aptly refers to as "ontological 'relativism.'" (PMP 209)

With the overcoming of phenomenology as description that recovers the subject, a closely related temptation plaguing both the *Phenomenology of Perception* and *Humanism and Terror* is put to rest. It is the temptation of bursting through our multifarious beginnings in the expressed (be it religion, politics, economics, language, philosophy, art, literature, self, culture, . . .) so as to discover anterior to it what would be its Truth. Against literal expression and extraction of emotional essences the later Merleau-Ponty says: "*One cannot make a direct ontology*" (VI 179) He even invokes "negative theology" as suggestive of the negative or indirect philosophy he would now practice. (VI 179) But Merleau-Ponty would disavow this allusion, with Derrida, if, in denying "the predicate of existence to God, it is to recognize him as a superior, inconceivable, and ineffable mode of being."² Merleau-Ponty's "'indirect' method" (VI 179) - the description of absence that "counts in the world" (VI 228) - opens upon "being³ in beings." (VI 179).

This "being in beings" - being as the *divergence* or *écart* between beings - is, Madison suggests, "Being qua Opening" (PMP 177). Derrida, taking philosophy as his example, explicates it rather well: "it opens up the very space in which onto-theology . . . produces its system and its history." (D 134-5) Derrida is of course speaking of *différance*, not *being*, *divergence* or *écart*, of the fabric of *arche-writing* and not of *flesh*. But what is in a name when, as Derrida says, "there never has been and never will be .

. . . a master name" (D 159); when, as Merleau-Ponty says, we are considering what "has no name in any philosophy" (VI 147). In considering such a *no-thing*, in considering such an advent on the Parisian scene, we return to a matter deferred until this chapter.

After noting that the junction and non-coincidence of touching-touched does not presuppose a coincidence elsewhere, neither in the 'mind' nor in the body - not at any level of consciousness - the later Merleau-Ponty tells us 'where' it takes place. It "takes place," he says, "in the *untouchable*." (VI 254)

The Untouchable

The *untouchable* is defined as: "That of the other I will never touch." (VI 254) "But," Merleau-Ponty hastens to add, "what I will never touch, he does not touch either, no privilege of oneself over the other here." (VI 254) The *untouchable* is what the touch does not touch. It is what is not the *same* in the *other* or even in the *self*. It is "the other than the other" (VI 264) who is touched as an other self or bought as an other commodity. The *untouchable* is the *divergence* between self and other, between self and self, between touching and touched, between buying and bought - being between beings as the *divergence* or *écart* that is their advent and appearance. Or, starting from "what is apparently *given*," from two hands and a certain number of proletarians, the presence of self to self in the same is not my other touched self reduced in the lived body to my touching self, not the other bought commodity reduced in the proletariat to the buying commodity. The presence of self to self in the same is no longer the reduction of the

other to the same, no longer a "coincidence" in the body. (VI 179) Rather, Merleau-Ponty says, "the same" - that same other touched or bought self - "would be the other than the other" that cannot be touched or bought. The untouchable is the *in-between* of my two hands, the *in-between* of proletarians, their shadow and obverse.⁴

The "untouchable of the touch" is the junction's "*other side*" and "*reverse*" (VI 255), is junction by *dis-junction*. The junction "is not an act," Merleau-Ponty says, "it is a being at (*être à*)" (VI 249). It is not "to reach *oneself*, it on the contrary to escape *oneself*, to be ignorant of *oneself*, the self in question is by divergence (*d'écart*)" (VI 249). As before the mirror, "Being as non-coincidence, as come and go posing each as the other of the other."⁵ Self-identity, whether achieved in the '*cogito*,' '*tacit cogito*' or '*silent, social cogito*,' becomes "negation of negation" or "difference of difference" (VI 264), rather than the coincidence elsewhere of touching self and touched self, of buying commodity and bought commodity. Merleau-Ponty, going even further, says we must start from this: "there is not identity, nor non-identity, or non-coincidence, there is inside and outside turning about one another," where "the turning point," "the application of the inside and the outside to one another," is the mirror, is *écart*, *divergence*, the *untouchable*, is the other than the other, negation of negation, difference of difference. (VI 264)

Merleau-Ponty asks, "What do I bring to the problem of the same and the other?" (VI 264) The answer is the structure of the *chiasm*. The *chiasm* is the refusal to disentangle. It is "the idea that every analysis that *disentangles* renders unintelligible." (VI 268) And so chiasm is entanglement, the "intertwining." (VI 130) The being

Merleau-Ponty would articulate has the structure of *chiasm*: being "not outside of us and not in us, but there where the two movements cross, there where 'there is' something." (VI 95) The *chiasm*, in this avatar, can be seen as a pair of terms mounted on an axis whose point of intersection, whose, so to speak, "turning point," is erased. Where the touching-touched junction takes place, where 'there is' something, is precisely at the erased point of intersection, "the turning point," the point of *dis-junction*, not outside of us in 'being in itself,' not in us in 'being for itself,' the junction being the advent of the inside, the touching hand, and the outside, the touched hand. This is to say that the terms of the pair, and so the pair itself, only count in the world where they 'cross,' or better, the crossing is the presence - by differentiation - of the 'terms.' The being Merleau-Ponty would articulate, neither 'being in itself' nor 'being for itself,' "lies before the cleavage operated by reflection, about it, on its horizon" (VI 95). The *chiasm* is the inscription of this being and this being is the other side and reverse of the *chiasm*.

When we say "reverse" we mean to draw "the other side" close, for the reverse is the very reversibility of the 'terms,' of the touching hand and the touched hand, of the buying commodity and the bought commodity. It is how 'terms' are drawn close, encroach upon each other, even exchange roles, yet keep a certain distance - "*coincidence différée*" Flynn suggests. (CT 204) It is how one could presume to speak of "identity within difference." (VI 225) It is how Merleau-Ponty transforms the problem of the same and the other into the question of a chiasm that "binds as obverse and reverse ensembles unified in advance in process of differentiation" (VI 262). There is, Merleau-Ponty says,

"neither me nor the other as . . . positive subjectivities . . . , not the For Itself and the For the Other" (VI 263). Rather they "are each the other side of the other," "two caverns, two openesses," with a shared "frontier surface" (VI 263). To explicate this and see the *chiasm* in another avatar, consider the finger of a glove turned inside out. (cf. VI 263) I and the other are applied to each other as same but different across that reversible difference separating inside and outside, "each the other side of the other," self offset from self. It is, Merleau-Ponty says,

[b]y reason of this mediation through reversal, this chiasm, [that] there is not simply a for-Oneself for-the-Other antithesis, [that] there is Being as containing all that, first as sensible Being and then as Being without restriction -- (VI 215)

This presence of self to self, of self to other - this "being at (*être à*) . . . by divergence (*d'écart*)" (VI 249) - is "perception as imperception, evidence in non-possession" (VI 201). Even with respect to that most reducible of things, the thing itself, Merleau-Ponty says, "it is precisely because one knows too well what one is dealing with that one has no need to posit it as an ob-ject" (VI 201), no need to intend it. One must rather speak of "a *separation (écart)* with respect to it," of self offset from the thing "blindly identified" (VI 201). It is thus that the later Merleau-Ponty would think being, being inscribed as *chiasm*, being that "unifies as it differentiates," that "holds apart as it brings together."⁶

What the *chiasm* holds together is impossibles. It is union across a difference - that between two pages of a book. It is "the male-female relation" where

each is "the *possible of the other*." (VI 228) The *chiasm* "is the 'place' where the 'modes of consciousness' are inscribed as structures of Being . . . and where the structurations of Being are modes of consciousness." (VI 253) The *chiasm* is the 'place' where the untouchable of touching-touched, the invisible of seeing - being seen, the unconsciousness of reflecting-reflected "(its central *punctum caecum*, that blindness that makes it consciousness i.e. an indirect and *inverted* grasp of all things)" are inscribed as "sensible Being," as reversible presence. (VI 253) This is to forever displace the primacy of consciousness.⁷ The *chiasm* is the trace of spatiality between touched-touching, the moment of time between the reversal of their roles, "space and time in joints and members, in dis-junction and dis-membering." (VI 228) The *chiasm* is that presence Derrida says, that "retention in the minimal unit of temporal experience," that "trace retaining the other as other in the same," without which "no difference would do its work and no meaning would appear." (G 62) If *écart* or *différance* is, as Merleau-Ponty says, "a *universal dimensionality*" (VI 265), "the formation of form" Derrida says (G 63), the *chiasm* is its articulation in dimensions, in "*hinges [charnières]* of Being" Merleau-Ponty says, as when "depth hollows itself out behind height and breadth," when "time hollows itself out behind space," when the "other dimensionality grafts itself onto the preceding ones" (VI 236). The *chiasm* is offered in yet another avatar when Roger Laporte suggests in a letter to Derrida "the hinge [*la brisure*]" as "a single word for designating difference and articulation" (cf. G 65).

What is not, however, one of being's avatars, is "a surpassing that reassembles,

. . . a new positive, a new position." (VI 95) Difference of difference, rather than realizing "a surpassing" Merleau-Ponty says, "is realized on the spot, by encroachment, thickness, *spatiality*" (VI 264) And it is precisely this thickness, Madison says, "which makes it be that he who see things is alongside them and yet does not merge with them and does not exhaust them." (PMP 174)⁸ This is precisely what the *Phenomenology of Perception* could only account for with an unhappy, reductive and incessant coming and going between intentional consciousness that installs itself in the world and a world that has the subject as its project. Such an unhappy, reductive and incessant coming and going, which as Madison suggested is a sort of "ontological 'relativism,'" becomes most grave when two Sartrean subjects try to stare each other down, or even worse, when two subjects try to reduce each other to moments of historical self-alienation across Pascal's river. Difference splits this unhappy, reductive and incessant coming and going between subject and object, being their advent, 'they' being "[a]bstracts from one sole tissue." (VI 262) What Merleau-Ponty achieves with the *chiasm* is the transformation of the problems of self and self, self and other, and self and thing into variants of a general question concerning impossibles. Unlike a problem however, this question does not presume a solution. But at least it is a question that rules out certain solutions - among them incommensurability and commensurability, either difference or sameness as each has been hitherto understood and sought. Perhaps the most Merleau-Pontean of things to say is that adequate responses are both less and more.

Language & the Perceptual - The Intertwining as *Flesh*

We pass from the *chiasm* to the *flesh*, from intertwining to systemic difference folded over and doubled up upon itself, in re-articulating language and its relation to the perceptual. If Merleau-Ponty would teach Saussure that to disentangle language is to render it unintelligible, Saussure taught Merleau-Ponty that to lash language to a ground is to achieve, if differently, the same thing. The intertwining of these two lessons is what, perhaps more than anything else, underwrites the work wherein Merleau-Ponty "takes up again, deepens, and rectifies" his earlier analysis, wherein the perceptual life, on the model of Saussurean language, is transformed into systemic difference and wound together with language such that the two are drawn close, encroach upon each other, even exchange roles, yet keep a certain distance - "coïncidence différencié" - "*divergence (écart)* by relation to a *level*" (VI 201).

Merleau-Ponty proposes precisely this intertwining of language and the perceptual in "The Problem of Speech," a *resumé* of a 1953-4 course:

The well-known definition of the sign as 'diacritical, oppositive, and negative' means that language is present in the speaking subject as a system of differentiations [*écarts*] between signs [language] and significations [the perceptual], and that, as a unity, the act of speech simultaneously operates the differentiation of these two orders.⁹

But what is not yet stressed is that the point of intersection is erased. This *chiasm* by differential "fabric" (S 42) doubled up and folded over on itself must still be grasped "within the perspective of ontology" (VI 168). Merleau-Ponty has still to ask, "*what*, across the successive and simultaneous community of speaking subjects, *wishes, speaks*,

and finally *thinks?*" (VI 176) But even on this point Merleau-Ponty is beginning to draw an ontology from Saussure, saying in 1952: "Language is much more *like a sort of being* than a means, and that is why it can present something to us so well." (emphasis added; S 43) Might not the same be said of history? If we emphasize "like a sort of being," it is to mark the distance travelled in the eight years since the *Phenomenology of Perception* - language is busily inscribing itself in a being that is not man - and the distance still before Merleau-Ponty in the seven years leading up to the commencement of the *Visible and the Invisible*.

Lest the originality of what Merleau-Ponty is drawing from Saussure be doubted, we must return to the *Phenomenology of Perception*. There he says:

language presupposes nothing less than a consciousness of language, a silence of consciousness embracing the world of speech in which words first receive a form and a meaning. This is why language is never subordinated to any empirical language, why languages can be translated and learned, and finally, why language is not an attribute of external origin, in the sociologist's sense. Behind the spoken *cogito*, the one which is converted into discourse and into essential truth, there lies a tacit *cogito*, myself experienced by myself. (403)

The *presence* of self to self, self to other, self to thing, was the root, foundation and Truth of expression for Merleau-Ponty, be it linguistic or historic, whether in the *Phenomenology of Perception* or *Humanism and Terror*. The later Merleau-Ponty, recalling his *ancien* style of reasoning, leaves no doubt as to the fate of the *Phenomenology of Perception* in so far as it is one of the most subtle metaphysics of self-*presence* ever woven¹⁰:

The Cogito of Descartes (reflection) is an operation of significations a statement of relations between them (and the significations themselves sedimented in the act of expression). It therefore presupposes a prereflective contact of self with self (the non-thetic consciousness of self – Sartre) or a tacit cogito (being close to oneself) - this is how I reasoned in *Ph.P* [the *Phenomenology of Perception*]. Is this correct? What I call the tacit cogito is impossible. . . . There are only *differences* between signification. (VI 171)

The perceptual life, like the *chiasm*, is difference without positive terms. In differential being there is a place for neither a foundation nor a perceptual self-*presence* that would deem itself one. There is not a positive *presence* of self to self, self to thing, self to other, let alone words that extract and literally express - that *re-present* - the emotional essence of such a positivity.¹¹ The tacit *cogito* or incarnate intentional consciousness was the last stand of philosophy that imagined "the relationship between subject and world as that of interior to exterior, and accordingly subordinated language to a private, pre-linguistic contact with the world." (PS 153) It was the last stand of subjective thought, which is to say, of all hitherto existing Western philosophy save perhaps Heidegger.

What remains in question is the place of subjectivity and Saussure in an ontology of being. Merleau-Ponty has his doubts about Saussure's intentions regarding subjectivity or at very least regarding structures and values beyond language. And then there is the spectre of Heidegger, the Nazi, whose ontology of being fathers that line of philosophers who announce, not without reference to Saussure, the death of man. But one senses here a sort of 'Marxism' with a vengeance, a spawn that swallows up man in

thought as well as in practice, a certain extrapolation, which we can only consider in the following chapter, from NI DIEU, NI ÉTAT, NI CAPITAL to NI CIVILIZATION, NI HOMME.

The evidence suggests that Merleau-Ponty read Saussure only after the *Phenomenology of Perception* and perhaps after *Humanism and Terror* - but not very much after. If Saussure receives a single reference in 1948 when Merleau-Ponty states his intention to "go beyond the alternatives of language as thing and language as the product of speaking subjects,"¹² in the years leading up to 1953, Saussure becomes very much *the* topic of discussion. In "Science and the Experience of Expression," the second chapter of *The Prose of the World* and perhaps to 1950, Merleau-Ponty says in regard to Saussure that "[w]e must pay a price for understanding language."¹³ Whatever this price might be, we are told that "no sign signifies by itself" and therefore "language always refers back to language," it "is expressive as much through what is *between* the words as through the words themselves, and through what it does not say as much as what it says" (PW 43). Meaning is diacritical or synchronic rather than adhesive, rather than being stuck on words, words in turn being stuck on things. In an essay dating to 1952, "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence," Merleau-Ponty says:

What we have learned from Saussure is that, taken singly, signs do not signify anything, and that each one of them does not so much express a meaning as mark a divergence of meaning between itself and other signs. Since the same can be said for all signs, we may conclude that language is made of differences without terms; or more exactly, that the terms of language are engendered only by the differences which appear among them. (S 39)

Meaning is diacritical or synchronic through and through. Language, like the *chiasm*, is difference without positive terms.¹⁴ Language is in fact a proto-type of the *chiasm*, or better, the *chiasm* is but an emblem of being inscribed as systemic difference. The most interesting reference, however, is upon the occasion of Merleau-Ponty's inaugural lecture at the *Collège de France* at the beginning of 1953, whereupon we are told that "Saussure, the modern linguist, could have sketched a new philosophy of history":

the union of philosophy and history lives again in more recent and special investigations which, though not directly inspired by Hegel and Marx, retrace their steps, because they confront the very same difficulties. The theory of signs, as developed in linguistics, perhaps implies a conception of historical meaning which gets beyond the opposition of *things* versus *consciousness*. (IPP 54)

Just as Merleau-Ponty would "go beyond the alternatives of language as thing and language as the product of speaking subjects," he would now go beyond history that ignores man and history that is man. But this is to pose the historical equivalent of the question: "*what*, across the successive and simultaneous community of speaking subjects, *wishes*, *speaks*, and finally *thinks*?" As Merleau-Ponty put it, when "historical forms" are treated as wishing, speaking and thinking, when Marx speaks of "feudalism, capitalism, proletariat . . . as though they were persons, knowing and willing," *who* or *what* do these "masks [*prosopopées*] represent?" (IPP 53) If Marx's "historical process," his "immanent meaning of inter-human events," his teleology and march to communism, is neither "in things" nor "in men, that is their minds," nor finally in "the expedient of Hegelian Objective Spirit," where is it, to *whom* or *what* does it belong? (IPP 53) Marx and the

young Merleau-Ponty shared an ingenious answer to this question that not only forgot our beginnings, that not only turned, in a most Sartrean fashion, "the dilemma of existence as thing versus existence as consciousness" (IPP 53-54) into a virtue, but that finally raises the question of whether the *Phenomenology of Perception* should not be re-read as an attempt by Merleau-Ponty to read Husserl through Marx.¹⁵ Such a critical re-reading of the *Phenomenology of Perception* would amount to a re-reading of "Western ontology" (VI 186), of Husserl, Marx, Hegel, Descartes, Galileo and Protagoras, through Saussure. But let us give credit (or put the blame) where it is due. Ferdinand de Saussure never dreamt of such a thing. This is the later work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

Marx posits a dialectic of thing and consciousness not at the level of language, but at that familiar perceptual level corresponding to "human matter" caught up "the movement of *praxis*." (IPP 54) We, however, might well ask, since Marx's "original insight into *praxis* put in question the usual categories of philosophy" (IPP 53), just *whose* or *what's praxis* is it? If Merleau-Ponty does not leave unhappy, alienated consciousness behind just yet and speak of being, of "the savage mind, which is the mind of praxis" (VI 176), neither does he accept Marx at face value any longer. Whatever Marx's labour-time, a *de-valuation*, corresponding to his plummeting social usefulness, is under way. It is not quite clear whether Merleau-Ponty realized in 1953 that the *Phenomenology of Perception* had no more overcome the dilemma of language as consciousness versus language as thing by way of the ugly sign "*dialectization*," than had *Humanism and Terror* overcome the dilemma of history as consciousness versus history as thing with the

same ugly sign. Note however, it is to a theory of language at odds with that in *Phenomenology of Perception*, to a "symbolic space," that Merleau-Ponty turns to overcome the "famous dichotomy" (IPP 56). In any case, what Merleau-Ponty did realize was that to invoke, in all its positivity and pregnancy, a dialectic of consciousness and thing buried in the perceptual level, a dialectic just waiting to be read by the very same Marx who put it there, is to relegate philosophy to "the rank of ideology, illusion, or even mystification . . . to say nothing of the injuries suffered by the concept of history" (IPP 54). This is to renounce *Humanism and Terror* and its historical mission scientifically read off of the text of history. There is a totalitarianism, a frightening lack of reversibility, in defining the outside of Marxism, all that is not said in the name of the proletariat, as false. When Marx goes to the perceptual life, Merleau-Ponty now realizes, "this can only mean in . . . so far as he thinks [it], and such objectivity . . . is the height of subjectivism" (IPP 54), not to mention linguistic and historical voyeurism, which is, after all, the same thing. Equivalently, when the young Merleau-Ponty takes "possession of the world of silence," this can only mean by a "rending characteristic of reflection . . . which, wishing to return to itself, *leaves itself*," which forgets that "speech envelopes the alleged silence of the psychological coincidence." (VI 179) The "[n]aïveté of Descartes," Merleau-Ponty says, that of staying at the surface, is equalled by the naïveté of installing oneself in the depths, the "naïveté . . . of a silent cogito that would deem itself to be an adequation with the silent consciousness, whereas its very description of silence rests entirely on the virtues of language." (VI 179) In "The Spectre of a Pure

Language," Merleau-Ponty admits: "We all secretly venerate the ideal of a language which in the last analysis would deliver us from language by delivering us to things." (PW 4) Here is the price we must pay for understanding language. Saussure "demands a reversal of our habits" (PW 25), a surrendering of certain dreams, the permanent deferral of the Tower of Babel built on the firm ground of the Garden of Eden. One might say that the Central Committee's building permit had been revoked by a French review board that insisted on something that was both less and more, something less presumptuous and more creative, more in the style of the postmodern, glass pyramid, now serving as the entrance to the Louvre. Saussure is tragedy . . . *dis-illusionment* in the face of the return to origins and the absolute possession of self, other and thing, *dis-enchantment* in the face of reappropriation.

To be precise, Saussure is the long overdue death of the spectre of positivity - of self, other and thing delivered up in the transparency of language. Merleau-Ponty admits: "French seems to us to go to thing themselves" (S 43), to "sing," (PhP 187), to "captur[e]" (S 43), to "literally express" (PhP 187), to "be traced upon" (S 44) and "coincide with" them (PW 25). Language seems to *present* positivities. Madison recalls the "disarmingly succinct way" Russell puts it: "the essential business of language is to assert or deny facts."¹⁶ Saussure teaches otherwise: "the power of language does not reside in the *tête-à-tête* it conducts between our spirit and things or, for that matter, in the privilege which might have been laid upon the first words of designating the very elements of being." (PW 41)¹⁷ If French seems to go to thing themselves the reason "is

not that it [does] but that it gives us the illusion of [doing] so by the internal relation of one sign to another." (PW 44) The sign's power "derives from its part in a system . . . not from the possibility it may have been instituted by God or by nature to designate a signification." (PW 36) Language must be submitted to a radical interrogation "without which it would again escape us by referring us to what it signifies" (S 46). Where there 'is something,' where meaning appears, is not in and through the supposed transparency of the word said. What makes each sign significant is the "lateral relation of one sign to another," and, in particular, the *unheard, invisible, untouchable* significative differences between them, meaning arising "only at the intersection of and as it were in the interval between words," (S 42) "at the edge of signs" (S 41), as the significative differences *in-between* that are their advent, meaning being the very "movement of differentiation and articulation." (S 42) This is to say that signs, and so languages, only count where "the train of words crosses and recrosses itself" (S 40), or better, its crossings and recrossings are the presence - by differentiation - of 'signs.' This differential being is not outside of us in things and not in us in consciousness, being "neither a thing nor an idea, in spite of the famous dichotomy," but there where the two movements cross, there where 'there is' something, there as a "symbolic space" (IPP 56) in which things and consciousness are inscribed.

What of the perceptual and the subject? The lot of the writer who is not a consciousness *of* what he wants to say and even more the lot of the child who neither understands nor is a consciousness *of* language but nevertheless comes to see the

differences, to draw the distinctions, is suggested by the lot of the weaver. Merleau-Ponty says: "Like the weaver, the writer works on the wrong side of his material. He has only to do with language, and it is thus that he suddenly finds himself surrounded by meaning." (S 45) As for the child, it, in a more dramatic sense, works on the wrong side of what it is destined to, has only to do with differences of material, and it is thus that he gradually comes to find himself inside the differential milieu of language. As these cases suggest, we must not merely admit *but* insist that structures, "limits and values exist" beyond language. (PW 37 fn. 2) These structures, limits and values are, Merleau-Ponty says, "of a perceptual order" (PW 37 fn. 2). As much as things, both the work recognized as what the writer wanted to say and the child are lodged in the universe of language by transforming "them into their meaning." (S 43) Being that can be perceived is, to be sure, overrun with language. As Provence is overrun by Cézanne, as Paris and France is overrun by Impressionism, so Paris, France, the entire landscape of the world, "is overrun with words . . . a variant of speech before our eyes." (VI 155) But it is also true that language is a being at (*être à*) the perceptual, that speech is the *divergence* (*écart*) between language and the perceptual, is "come and go posing each as the other of the other." What is the perceptual? The perceptual is the other of language, where the perceptual neither possesses language nor is possessed by language, the two differential systems being intertwined in a ceaseless, mutual "movement of differentiation and articulation" operated by speech.

The *flesh* is what Merleau-Ponty comes to call symbolic space. As early as his

inaugural lecture in 1953, he realizes that historical meaning - "the forms and processes of history, the classes, the epochs" - are inscribed in "systems of symbols," in "symbolic space" (IPP 56). And not only is history of this "symbolic space": "language," "political and religion institutions," "modes of kinship," "machines," "the landscape, "production," "all the modes of human commerce," are but "symbolisms," interconnected and opening upon one another for that very reason (IPP 56), united in difference, of one *flesh*, which is nowise to say harmoniously so. But this *flesh* folded over and doubled up on itself is not man, even if it is "a modulation of our coexistence." (IPP 56) In acting the individual is turned towards the historical community *and is dependent on history*, just as in speaking "he is turned towards the linguistic community *and is dependent on his language*." (emphasis added; IPP 55) Not that one should so speak, but pre-history and ideological language are a weight that shall never be lifted. There is no 'place' for an Archimedean point. In his 1960 "Introduction" to *Signs*, Merleau-Ponty says: "things *are said* . . . by a Speech . . . which we do not have but which has us." (19) He says in *The Visible and Invisible*: "I do not perceive any more than I speak - Perception has me as has language." (VI 190) Nowhere does differentiation and articulation stop leaving "a place for pure meaning" (S 42), for a foundation, for man as the root of historical and linguistic *sens*. Merleau-Ponty says: we who are "inside" of speech may "legitimately reject the perspectives that present the world of institutions and language as secondary and derivative with respect to the world of nature." (PW 43) And turning from *Humanism and Terror* to the last echo's of the *Phenomenology of Perception*'s bad ambiguity, he

adds: "The flesh of the world is not explained by the flesh of the body, nor the flesh of the body by the negativity or self that inhabits it - the three phenomena are *simultaneous*" (VI 250). The intertwined are not to be disentangled to the advantage of 'thing,' 'body' or 'self.' And turning finally to the intertwining of the language and the perceptual, Merleau-Ponty says:

The Saussurean analysis of the relation between signifiers and the relation from signifier to signified and between the significations (as differences between significations) confirms and rediscovers the idea of perception as a *divergence* (*écart*) by relation to a *level*. (VI 201)

The words that would deem themselves an adequation with a founding perception do indeed speak of the perceptual, but they do not coincide with it, they are the same but different, if less the same by being less different,¹⁸ differentiations of one *flesh*, united in the process of mutual differentiation.

If there still is man to speak of, this man will be of it, of the *flesh*, a particular style let us say, a life lived as a sort of dialectic in reverse, a "dialectic without synthesis . . . which . . . is not . . . scepticism, vulgar relativism, or the reign of the ineffable." (VI 95). If such a man is to be found, it will be in history, in the historical depth or diachrony of language, which Saussure dismisses, and of politics and culture. Or more strictly, if man is to be found, he will be found in the intertwining of synchrony and diachrony to which we turn.

1. The later Merleau-Ponty remarks: "It was meaningless to . . . realize the consciousness before the consciousness. And this is why we say, for out part, that what is primary is not the diffuse 'consciousness' . . . , it is Being." (VI 251)
2. "Differance," *Speech and Phenomena* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973 [1968]), p. 134.
3. Written alternatively with or without capitalization in the later works of Merleau-Ponty, whereas it was not capitalized previously, "Being" or "being" should, strictly speaking, be written as in Heidegger, crossed-out, "~~barré~~." (P 97)
4. What cannot be bought incidently, but that opens all buying and selling, is value. This is why Marx works very hard to reduce value to the proletariat, and, in particular, to the equality of all *its* different labours. If Marx can reduce this Other of all economic others to self, having already reduced all other Others to economics, history is his to take in hand . . . at least in thought. For an account of value as difference see my "The Spectre of Difference: a Merleau-Pontean Reading."

As for the practice of taking history in hand, Pascal perhaps better anticipated it than Marx suggesting that when man attempts to play the part of the angel, he inevitably ends up in the role of the beast. We are aware that it is unfashionable to link Marx to Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot, or even Lenin, but we do not believe that philosophy and politics come apart to the degree often suggested today. As Claude Lefort has remarked, if Louis XIV could say "*L'état, c'est moi*," Stalin came to find himself in a position where he could and in effect often did say "I am culture." The question of the ripping down of institutions that made such a thing possible is an all too philosophical question, blood on philosophy's hands one is half-tempted to say. It is most certainly a question on which light is shed by noting that the "'labour stuff theory' . . . obviates the political activity of instituting value" (CM 106), where value should be read in the widest imaginable sense.
5. Flynn, Bernard, "Chair et Textualité: Merleau-Ponty et Derrida," *Les Cahiers de Philosophie: Actualités de Merleau-Ponty* ed. Bresse (Lille: l'Association Des Cahiers de Philosophie, #7, 1989), p. 205. Translations my own. Hereafter cited as CT.
6. We are indebted to Alia Al-Saji, a graduate student at Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, for these concise turns of phrase.
7. This is also to make clear the difficulty of what Merleau-Ponty is attempting: "It is inevitable that consciousness be mystified, inverted, indirect, in principle it sees the things *through the other end*, in principle it disregards Being and prefers the object to it." (VI 248) Consciousness as touch touches the touchable, as vision sees the visible, as reflection opens on a past that has been

present, in short, knows only what appears in person, that appears *as such*. Phenomenology must think difference and ultimately the *flesh* "indirectly," Madison says, "through an *interpretation* of phenomenological experience." (PMP 193)

8. In one of his more suggestive descriptions Merleau-Ponty says: "The very pulp of the sensible, what is indefinable in it, is nothing else than the union in it of the 'inside' with the 'outside,' the contact in thickness of self with self" (VI 268).
9. *In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays* trans. Wild, Edie & O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 87-88. Hereafter cited as IPP.
10. But let us insist, recalling Bernet and Madison, that the *Phenomenology of Perception* is an ambiguous work, working from within the philosophy of consciousness to be sure, but often exceeding and differencing itself from it too. There is something of what Merleau-Ponty finds in Saussure already in the *Phenomenology*, otherwise he should have never turned to Saussure and found what he did. But it is also true that Merleau-Ponty found what he did in turning to Saussure, redeeming what otherwise would have remained a bad ambiguity anticipating postmodernity in silence.
11. Merleau-Ponty, drawing out the consequences, remarks: "All the positivist bric-a-brac of 'concepts,' 'judgements,' 'relations,' is eliminated, and mind quite as water in the fissure of Being." (VI 254)
12. *Sense and Non-Sense* trans. Dreyfus & Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 87. Hereafter cited as SN.
13. *The Prose of the World*, ed. Lefort, trans. O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973 [1969]), p. 43. Hereafter cited as PW.
14. Merleau-Ponty quotes Saussure's famous epigram: "In language, there are only differences without positive terms." (S 31)
15. Take for instance the long footnote on Marx's *historical materialism* that ends the *Phenomenology's* chapter on "The Body in its Sexual Being." This footnote was rudely discarded by a speaker on the occasion of the 1992 Merleau-Ponty Circle for being "bizarre." Its placement is just that, making it that much more important that we understand why it is there, understand Marx's place in the work of Merleau-Ponty.
16. Madison, G. B., "Being and Speaking," paper read at the 1994 annual meeting of the Canadian Hermeneutics Society, p. 1.
17. Recall the *Phenomenology of Perception* and note the difference: "If it were possible, in any vocabulary, to disregard what is attributed to the mechanical laws of phonetics, to the influence of other languages, the rationalization of grammarians, and assimilatory processes, we should probably discover in the

original form of each language a somewhat restricted system of expression, but such as would make it not entirely arbitrary." (emphasis added; PhP 187)

18. Subtlety is the only approach or presumption to identity philosophy truly knows.

3 / THE DEATH OF MAN?

Man is hidden, well hidden, and this time we must make no mistake about it: this does not mean that he is there beneath a mask, ready to appear. . . . The situation is more serious: there are no faces underneath the masks, historical man has never been human, and yet no man is alone.

-Merleau-Ponty, "Introduction," *Signs*

Speech & Language - The Intertwining

There is in the *flesh* no place for a return to things themselves, no place for a return to man, neither philosophically nor politically. The perceiving, speaking subject before whom landscape, language, history and politics are arrayed as objects is dead. The *flesh* is the indeterminate place of non-presence, or better, differential articulation, wherein landscape, language, history and politics are inscribed as intertwined symbolisms. The subject whom we shall consider is of these symbolisms, condemned to their styles but not as to a prison, even if whole societies may be reduced to just that by the poverty of our shepherding.

Voyeurism, which surveys these styles from elsewhere, offers us, to be sure, a spectacle - is, if we turn back on it, itself a spectacle. Merleau-Ponty's *The Adventures of the Dialectic*, published in 1955, begins with Max Weber and "how he tries, by going beyond the past as spectacle, to understand the past itself by making it enter into our own lives."¹ In this way, from within the differential historical matrix that is ours to tear new

meaning from, Merleau-Ponty would bring the liquidation of Marx's revolutionism, his style rendering prometheanism, to its conclusion. (AD 7) But more than that, he would "inspire a few - or many - to bear their freedom, not to exchange it at a loss; for it is not only their own thing, their secret, their pleasure, their salvation - it involves everyone else." (AD 233)

The welding of Saussure to the defense of liberty demands of Merleau-Ponty not only some of his most creative but also some of his most productive reading.² We begin with Merleau-Ponty's reading of Saussure, how Saussure is entangled with phenomenology, and how the notions of style and institution emerge from this entangling. With these notions the interrogation of language topples into the interrogation of history wherein they are played off against Marx's revolutionism. This will carry us to Weber, choice and freedom.

Merleau-Ponty would go "beyond the alternatives of language as thing and language as the product of speaking subjects." To do so, what he envisions through Saussure is "the perspective of the speaking subject who lives in his language (and who may in some cases change it)." (SN 83) Equivalently, in going beyond objective history which ignores man, "where the course of events is a series of episodes without unity" (IPP 97), and subjective history which is man, "the arrogance of a philosophy . . . which reduces [history] to our thoughts about it" (AD 19), what he envisions through Weber is "our *interest* in the past: it is ours, and we are its." (AD 19-20) One might equally speak of the perspective of the historical actor who lives in history (and who may in some cases

change it), and our *interest* in language: it is ours, and we are its. But a difficulty arises.

"Episodes without unity" describes with precision the second term of a duality that Saussure insists upon, the duality between language considered synchronically and language considered diachronically. A synchronic study considers language in cross-section, as suspended in a moment of time, "in its totality," "as tending towards a certain order, as forming a system"³, and without regard to any particular acts of speech and so of speakers, as *structure*. A diachronic study considers language in "longitudinal slice," "in the succession of time," wherein it "appears as a series of accidental events" (CAL 100), its history containing too many "random factors," too many "shifts of meaning" (S 85), "too many hazards to permit a logical development." (PW 22) Diachrony is the death of etymologically, historically or longitudinally grounded meaning. Merleau-Ponty says:

Saussure shows admirably that if words and language in general, considered . . . diachronically, offer an example of virtually every semantic slippage, it cannot be the history of the word or language which determines its present meaning. (PW 22)

The problem is where the cutting away of the origin would seem to lead. Does not this licence the decomposition of "language and in general institutions and societies into an infinite number of accidents?" (PW 23-24) Does not this licence a self-contained linguistics and an "agnostic history" which see only a succession of "unique" and "isolated facts" that "cannot be compared?" (AD 19) Are we not left with a senseless series of synchronies, each "a pure event," each devoid of meaningful relations to others, each shut

up in itself (PW 24), each "a prison" (PW 24) wherein an economy of signs is studied as perched on the razor's edge of the sophistic moment? Such an economy of signs, Merleau-Ponty says, "would determine even what one could say about it," and so "would be incapable of any clarification" (PW 24). Linguistics and history, enveloped by the present state of language, would be unable to go beyond it, "would be unable to reach a truth of language, and thus objective history would destroy itself," would, followed to its logical conclusion, which is to say, turned back on itself, say and mean nothing. (PW 24) This path, taken in the name of "rationalism" (PW 21), is that of "scientists and observers" Merleau-Ponty says (S 85), that of Saussureans. But if they stop "half-way on the road to an understanding of contingency," if they, because of their "extreme confidence in knowledge," stop at "nominalism" (PW 21) or even "irrationalism" (PW 22), if they dominate the successive synchronies of language and history from a nowhere outside of language and history, ascribing to scientific values which are "outside of time" (IPP 95) and to an understanding which modestly does "not flatter itself upon discovering a meaning to history, but tries constantly to bend history towards [its] values," it is Saussure, Merleau-Ponty claims, who takes us beyond such scepticism, such vulgar relativism, such a reign of ineffable reason. As Merleau-Ponty says, almost admitting that Saussure is being pushed,

[s]peech does not simply activate the possibilities inscribed in language. Already in Saussure, in spite of his restrictive definitions, speech is far from being a simple effect; it modifies and sustains language just as much as it is conveyed through it. (IPP 87)

Speech is a response. It is a certain uneasiness before the existing state of language, where this uneasiness is embodied through the transformation of existing meaning into a new state of language. Here is the alteration that Merleau-Ponty makes in Saussure before he can set to tearing symbolic space from the pages of Saussure. Saussure's synchronic linguistics of language becomes Merleau-Ponty's synchronic linguistics of speech.

This alteration is so obviously necessary to Merleau-Ponty that he not only constantly attributes it to Saussure, but fails to warn us that Saussure might have thought otherwise. It is only in "The Contribution of Linguistics" that Merleau-Ponty both admits that Saussure speaks of a synchronic linguistics of language and, more interestingly, offers reason to doubt the possibility of holding to it over and against a synchronic linguistics of speech. He says:

Speech [*parole*] is what one says: language [*langue*] is the treasure out of which the subject draws in order to speak; it is a system of possibilities. But how can one arrive at this French 'in itself'? In reality, each time I speak, I allude to my language as a totality. It is difficult for me to delimit the frontiers of speech and of language. The distinction cannot maintain itself under such a simple form. (CAL 100)

To refuse to treat language as an object or, for that matter, a subject, would be most inconsistent with the object-subject bifurcation. It would be to outflank the whole question of whether language is consciousness or thing, and with it, perhaps the question of whether "history is made by men or by things" (S 20). But as Derrida remarks, "there is a short-of and a beyond of . . . criticism," and to "see to it that the beyond does not

return to the within is to . . . leave a track in the text." (G 61) To simply collapse the speech-language distinction by which the voyeur gazes upon language as a thing, would risk making language into the product of the subject, from Saussure to Husserl as it were. To be sure, the synchronic study of language, language as *structure*, is entangled once more by Merleau-Ponty with *events*, with acts of speech, and so with the speaking subject. Saussure's synchronic linguistics of language becomes Merleau-Ponty's synchronic linguistics of speech, which, as synchronic, diacritical or differential, is, however, *nowise reducible to a self*. To mark this crucial qualification in a proper Derridean fashion, what Merleau-Ponty sets to intertwining is not a synchronic and diachronic linguistics of speech, but a synchronic linguistics of speech and a diachronic linguistics of language. Attributing diachronic contingency and unreason to the perspective of linguistics or science, and synchronic unity and reason to that of phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty would go beyond these mutually exclusive and mutually supporting alternatives in search of a linguistic and historical "reason *within* unreason" (IPP 97), the "union of contingency and meaning" (IPP 55). It is perhaps because differentiation and articulation can only be conceived of in movement, in the intertwining of synchrony and diachrony, that Merleau-Ponty cannot believe that Saussure wants to imprison himself in a moment of time with that fixed being that so excites the necrologist. Merleau-Ponty wants to believe that Saussure saw in the movement of differential articulation the *flesh*, that being that is the becoming of a plurality of meaningful lives.

Event & Advent - The Intertwining as Style, as Institution

Synchrony and diachrony envelope each other. Merleau-Ponty says: "the past of language began by being present"; and if "language allows random elements when considered according to a longitudinal section, the system of synchrony must at every moment allow fissures where . . . events can insert themselves." (S 86) Thus, on one hand, there is etymological, historic or longitudinal meaning, and, on the other, synchrony that both sustains it and fragments its unity by tumbling into future synchronic states. This *chiasm* of synchronic speech and diachronic language is the very *chiasm* of understanding, where to understand is to understand differently, differentially:

We begin reading a philosopher by giving the words he makes use of their 'common' [historic] meaning; and little by little, through what is at first an imperceptible reversal, his speech comes to dominate his language, and it is his [synchronic] use of words which ends up assigning them a new and characteristic [historic] signification. (S 91)

This is why to understand is never to go back. The only 'return' to the past we know is the going forward of further differentiation and articulation. Displaced as "face-to-face contemplation," knowing becomes "the power to organize discourses," the acquisition of "a certain style" of speaking, that ruse whereby a signification is made to "dwell in a speech apparatus which was not originally destined for it" (S 91). This is to say that 18th century French literature, rather than being the destiny of 14th century French or even Latin, was an acquisition, the work of throwing the elements of speech off centre and re-centring them through a process of "coherent deformation." (S 91) "Coherent" because they still signify and still are French. "Deformation" because they signify something they

did not previously and so French is no longer the French that it was.

We must in no way, however, imply that coherent deformation or creative destruction is pure addition, as language purists, capitalism's critics and monarchists are all too quick to point out. Paradigms are lost. What the de-centring and re-centring of the word "gay," silk production and political power achieves for some is taken from others, among them, Nietzsche (and his *The Gay Science*), Lyon (built on a royal silk monopoly) and Louis XVI (who was separated from his head that authority might be separated from his body and thereby disincarnated). It is here that the phenomenological perspective of synchronic caught "at a moment of its becoming" (CAL 100) takes on the "ontological bearing" (S 86) that is lost to the linguistic or scientific understanding of diachrony. It is here that we have truth to be won *and* lost, that we find unity and reason *within* contingency and unreason. Language, economy and political power survive the transformation, they retain their unity, rationality and truth, but this is a re-centred unity, rationality and truth based upon work that was contingent and merely presumptive of reason and truth. It is "a *retrospective illusion*" to say what was contingent and presumptive was already there in "the past which it transforms." (IPP 97) Successful speech, entrepreneurship or political practice is the "moment when the significative intention . . . proves itself capable of incorporating itself into . . . culture . . . shaping me and others by transforming the meaning of cultural instruments." (S 92) This is to equally deny the "*prospective illusion*" whereby the present halts "on the threshold of an empty future" as though synchrony, structure or style was without temporal depth, "as

though each present did not prolong itself towards a horizon of the future," as though man was at each new moment a pure meaning giving, "as though the [linguistic and historic] meaning of a period which is decided by human initiatives were *nothing* before that." (IPP 97) Speech, entrepreneurship and political action are but folds in the *flesh*, folds in an immense differential fabric, folds of language, the market and politics, folds of that broken continuity that is history. They are but a surplus of signification over what is already signified, a surplus of being over appearance. We must insist upon the 'paradox' of this emerging meaning. In retrospect, Merleau-Ponty says, it gives us "the illusion that it was contained in the already available significations, whereas by a sort of *ruse* it espoused them only in order to infuse them with a new life." (S 92)

This is to go beyond the Saussurean duality of *event* and *structure* by intertwining them as *event* and *advent*. Merleau-Ponty says: "the book, if it is authentic, transcends itself as a dated event." (IPP 57) This is to say that Protagoras, Galileo, Descartes, Hegel, Marx and Husserl, or for that matter, Luther and Calvin, are not merely events. They structure, institute and open up symbolisms, symbolic spaces, styles of *praxis*, of speaking, writing, thinking and acting, that linger, that are presumptive of time. These events are advents, synchronies with duration. They are institutions. Merleau-Ponty says:

what we understand by the concept of institution are those events in experience which endow it with durable dimensions, in relation to which a whole series of other experiences will acquire meaning, will form an intelligible series or a history - or again those events which sediment in me a meaning, not just as survivals or residues, but as the

invitation to a sequel, the necessity of a future.

Advents, styles or institutions organize subsequent events without which they themselves would not be, leaving no track in the text of civilization, of history. This is to say that every event is an advent, a transformation of meaning that is the promise of events influenced by and answering to it. But this is nowise to say that all advents are equally eventful or enduring. Greek art constitutes an institution, a synchrony of works united in their different styles by a style that perhaps has an eternal charm. Countless philosophy essays, published in journals and supposedly read by an average of 2.5 persons, are of a rather more limited productivity and duration. But if the seemingly eternal strikes us as the more interesting case, we should note that there is to it something of the living dead. This is not only so with Greek art - with armless, broken statues filling colourless rooms at the Louvre - but with Latin - a dead, no longer spoken language essentially learned only by scholars - and with Venice - a beautifully embalmed museum-city slowly sinking into its watery grave. The life of these institutions lies beyond them, in their children, in charcoals in Montreal that live by thematizing over two millenniums later in a different medium the life and death of Greek sculpture, in the Latin languages, in world overseas trade and commerce.

This is to speak of *transformations* beyond the light and the night of retrospective and prospective illusion. Potent advents are not so much presumptive of eternity in their own person as in the name they lend their children, some loved, some hated, all indeclinable, all mutations and transgressions of the seed, of the genetic code,

all original if you will. Painting has long since estranged itself from the styles found in the caves of France, and yet there is one painting beginning there and elsewhere, fragmented beyond repair, as its very life, as the very life of individual painters, cultures and epochs. There are styles - Cézanne - and there are styles of styles - Vermeer - and styles of styles of styles - the cave paintings at *Lascaux*. Merleau-Ponty says:

The first sketches on the walls of caves opened a limitless field of discovery. They set forth the world 'to be painted' or 'to be sketched,' calling forth an indefinite future of painting, so that they speak to us and we answer them by metamorphoses in which they collaborate with us. (PW 72)

This is not, however, to forget that even a "commemoration is also a betrayal" (S 159) - both less and more.⁴ And then there are the thankless children. There is the advent of the capitalism we live and the advent's advent in Protestantism - an example to which we shall return. There is the classic that is Heidegger and the classic's classics that are Descartes, Protagoras and Parmenides. Merleau-Ponty says, with an eye turned to Heidegger, that it makes no sense to ask whether you are or are not a Cartesian "since those who reject this or that in Descartes do so only in terms of reasons which owe a lot to Descartes" (S 11). What they owe him most of all, and Protagoras before him, and Parmenides before Protagoras, is the very symbolic space in which the betrayal, the symbolic killing of the father, is perpetrated. This is Merleau-Ponty's critique of Heidegger. The latter's diagnosis of philosophy is that the philosophers "lost being from the day they based it upon consciousness of self." (S 153) Now it is true that subjectivity is a historical invention, that the philosophers "created it, and in more than in one way."

(S 153) But Merleau-Ponty recalls Heidegger's beginnings:

The same philosopher who now regrets Parmenides and would give us back our relations to Being such as they were prior to self-consciousness owes his idea of and taste for primordial [direct] ontology to just this self-consciousness. (S 154)

Subjectivity is a classic, less an idea than an opening that Heidegger, Derrida and, in his own way, Merleau-Ponty can only betray and transfigure through a de-centring and re-centring of philosophy, of subjective thought, from within. Philosophy, Merleau-Ponty says, "once 'infected' by certain ways of thinking . . . can no longer annual them but must cure itself of them by inventing better ones." (S 154) This is quite literally the work of drawing distinctions, of differential articulation. And thus, even if subjectivity should finally be eliminated, philosophy "will never again be what it was before." (S 154).⁵ For Merleau-Ponty, subjectivity's fate seems close to that of another institution, Marx. If Marx's work is "no longer true *in the sense it was believed to be true*," it is still one of those places where you go and think, albeit no longer as before, more subtly now. (S 9)

The Eternal Return of The Same, Differently

In "Institution in Personal and Public History," Merleau-Ponty returns to the painter. Of him Merleau-Ponty observes: "Everything hangs together, and yet he cannot say in which direction he is going." (IPP 110) Being as differentiation and articulation is precisely that advent, that instituting of style, whereby "one work announces those to follow - and makes it so that they cannot be the same" (IPP 110). These brief words go to the heart of Merleau-Pontean language, history and politics. Here we find neither

absolute creation, nor meaningless repetition, but successive advents that are both the same and different: "every revolution is the first revolution" and "each time the struggle is different" (AD 220). Here we find a chiselling of symbolic space, a "jointing and framing of Being which is realized through man" (S 181): it is man who lends himself to the styles of painting or to the styles of revolution. Here we find, as Merleau-Ponty says in his last working note, the "visible . . . described as something that is realized through man, but which is nowise *anthropology* (hence against Feuerbach-Marx 1844). (VI 274) The critique of Marx comes down to the rejection of history understood as that coming to self-consciousness whereby the painter can say and choose "in which direction he is going" because his style has been rendered transparent, because he has been delivered from his style and from the institution of painting to their 'Truth,' to 'real things' or 'real thoughts,' leaving him who lives in his work - he who knows that painting is nowise the meaningless *re-presentation* of things or thoughts, but their genesis, the very genesis of truth and a meaningful future - without the slightest motive to paint, let alone live. For Merleau-Ponty, "the concept of the end of history . . . is an idealization of death" (AD 206). Cézanne is not the 'Truth' of Vermeer, and Vermeer is not the 'Truth' of the cave paintings at *Lascaux*. History cannot be added up this way, is not "an infinite refinement." (AD 93) "It does not accumulate truths." (AD 23) There are "both gains and losses," a "disenchantment" that cuts both ways. (IPP 102)

Neither painting nor history "is a coherent system." (AD 24) Here we find an answer to the question of "*what*, across the successive and simultaneous community of

speaking subjects, *wishes*, *speaks*, and finally *thinks*." History is the history neither of Hegelian Objective Spirit nor of the proletariat. Rather history is "a distracted interlocutor, it allows the debate to become sidetracked; it forgets the data of the problem along the way." (AD 24) Problems shift in their very articulation, engendering, yet again, "symbolic matrices which have no pre-existence and which can, for a longer or a shorter time, influence history itself and then disappear, not by external forces, but through an internal disintegration or because one of their secondary elements becomes predominant and changes their nature." (AD 16-7) History has its "intelligible nuclei" (AD 16), its epochs "ordered around a questioning of human possibility, of which each has its formula" (AD 24), each lending the stage to different "ways of treating natural being, of responding to others and to death," (AD 16), and for this very reason . . . history is not one life. It is only "through an unending interrogation that all the ages together compose a single and universal history" (IPP 102), that they are of one *flesh*, that they establish themselves not merely as less than coherent, but as more than incoherent.

This is what Weber teaches on Merleau-Ponty's reading of his historical studies.

Weber leads us beyond, Merleau-Ponty says,

a [subjective] history which judges, situates, and organizes - at the risk of finding in the past only a reflection of the troubles and problems of [the historian in] the present - and an indifferent, agnostic [objective] history which lines up civilizations one after another like unique individuals that cannot be compared. (AD 19)

It is true that the first marks an advance over the scientism of the second because the belief that there is reason in history at least knows that it is a *belief* in regards to reason.

Scientific agnosticism, on the contrary, is belief in a reason that withholds itself from belief and so is a *belief* that denies that it is belief, that claims objectivity for itself. But it is also true that the subjectivism of the first rejoins the objectivism of second when it becomes a science of reason in history, when it wrongly takes itself for *the* sole and unique *sens* (direction and meaning) of history, sets itself up as *the* Church of history and thereby becomes fanatical.

Merleau-Ponty says that his Saussurean and Weberian inspired "analyses are intended as a revision of Hegelianism" (IPP 112). If Hegelianism is "the discovery of phenomenology, of the living, real and original relation between the elements of the world," it nevertheless, Merleau-Ponty says, "situates this relation in the past in order to subordinate it to the systematic vision of the philosopher." (IPP 112) Hegel is the most subtle of necrologists, and hence the necrologist *par excellence*:

Hegel is the museum. He is all philosophies, if you like, but without their shadowy zone, their finitude, and their lively impact, as he believed, embalmed and transformed into themselves but really transformed into Hegel. (PW 108)

Marx - as the other half of this pair, as Hegel put on his head - situates life in the future and so again subordinates life to the "vision of the philosopher." The difference is that Marx is the revolutionary *par excellence*. Marx is the "absolute Other" (AD 90). He is the "absolute Other" of "history's horrors" (AD 219). He is a "way of closing history or prehistory" (AD 210), "an ingenuous meta-history into which we project all our disgust, taking the risk of assuring a new victory to the mystifications of history, which would be

all the more serious since so much is expected." (AD 210) In *Humanism and Terror*, Merleau-Ponty had the good sense to wonder whether "the slaves, once they dispossess the masters, manage to transcend the alternatives of lordship and bondage" (HT 155). But he had the bad sense to conclude that a failure in this regard must not be taken to suggest that "the Marxist philosophy of history should be replaced by some other." (HT 155) Rather it "would mean that there is no history - if history means the advent of humanity and humanity the mutual recognition of men as men - and consequently that there is no philosophy of history" (HT 156) - "the failure of Marxism would be the failure of philosophy of history." (AD 232). Merleau-Ponty contended that it "would mean in the end . . . that the world and our existence are a senseless tumult." (HT 156) Merleau-Ponty now realizes that the problem is just this sort of fanatical reasoning.

Merleau-Ponty atones for *Humanism and Terror* by exposing and betraying "a fanaticism that in the name of the secret of history gleefully overturns the most evident of our beliefs." (IPP 95) Among these overturned beliefs is the belief that the world and our existence, however incoherent, are more than a "senseless tumult." The "fanaticism" in question cuts off the very interrogation by which "revolution and nonrevolution make a single history" (AD 222). Merleau-Ponty now observes:

a government, even a revolutionary one, a party, even a revolutionary party, is not a negation . . . to establish themselves on the terrain of history, they must exist positively . . . we who have witnessed a Marxist revolution well know that revolutionary society has its weight, its positivity, and that it is therefore not the absolute Other. (AD 89-90)

Revolution and revolutionary authority rejoin the history of revolutions and revolutionary powers. The dictatorship of the proletariat "turns *the weapons of the bourgeoisie* against the bourgeoisie" and becomes "something like a bourgeoisie" (AD 220). Different but the same. Proletarian dictatorship is justified - the proletariat's universality being inscribed in capitalism - in the same way that "the Inquisition was justified by Providence." (AD 85) "But capitalism *is* something real," the Marxist objects, "Providence is not!" Whatever the status of Providence, capitalism *WAS* something real. Revolution destroyed it. Revolution is defined by "the excess of . . . will over institutions," where this excess is inscribed in the institution of history as history's secret. (AD 220) Merleau-Ponty observes that the "problem is always hidden by traditional discussions of historical materialism." (IPP 96) It matters not "so much to know that one is a 'spiritualist' or a 'materialist,'" as to differentiate "history as an unknown god - the good or evil genius - and history as the milieu of life" (IPP 96). The inscription in the institution of history of the excess of will over institutions as history's secret not only makes history "an unknown god" but signs over history to those who have a monopoly on knowing the will of unknown gods, the priests. So as we said, the authority of proletarian dictatorship and of the Inquisition maybe be different *but are the same*.

"But the proletariat is one, united body!" Ignoring all those officially outside the proletariat's bodily reversibility, all those dismissed as things and simply touched by the proletariat's power, can we maintain that the legitimacy of the dictatorship of the proletariat is inscribed on the body? Is there a coincidence or unity in the body? Was

not the heretic of the body of the Church and burned by that same body? Was not Danton of the revolutionary government, of the Committee of Public Safety in fact, and executed by Robespierre, the leader of said government and said committee? Was not Bukharin, Gorky and Trotsky of the proletariat, of the Revolution, of the Party, and each killed by it? "But that was no longer the Revolution and no longer the Party!" Well that depends, does it not, on whether the one who is speaking in the name of the Revolution and the Party is on the inside or the outside of the existing "Revolution" and "Party." Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety realized long before Stalin and Lenin that eventually the question becomes "less of revolutionizing than of establishing the revolutionary government." When Danton was executed by Robespierre was the latter "establishing the revolutionary government" or betraying the Revolution? When Robespierre was himself executed was this to finally establish "the revolutionary government" or to finally betray the Revolution? When Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*, "which only wanted to develop the Marxist dialectic" (AD 59), came up against Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, a work that "annul[led] all that has been said about knowledge since Epicurus" (AD 60), and was finally eliminated by the Marxist-Leninists who "pretended to consider the book . . . a revision and criticism of Marxism" (AD 59), was *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* realizing Marx and establishing the Revolution or betraying the life of Marx's thought and of the Revolution? The answer, in each case, is neither yes nor no, but both. There is inconveniently truth on both sides, and who has more of it, is always precisely the question that torments and

divides the body. Coincidence in the body politic is hard to come by, hard to come by in the body of the Party, in the body of the Revolution, even in the body of the proletariat, as the existence of the Camps in the U.S.S.R. frighteningly suggests. Perhaps this is why individuals who are of one political body but always risk being caught in the minority, or more simply, among the ruled, came to formulate constitutional rights, or more simply, human rights. But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Long before the philosopher "wakes up and speaks" (IPP 63), the terrain of history everywhere teaches, and taught liberals in particular, irreducible difference and division at the heart of the body. Even the divine authority inscribed on the body of the Pope and the king is power only by the difference between his intertwined divine body and carnal body. Without the latter he is God withholding his counsel. Without the former he is man without divine right.⁶ The differential articulation of authority and power in the political body is something Merleau-Ponty could not see in *Humanism and Terror* where it would have been heretical to ask: "Must we retain, by simply extending it to infinity, the limiting-idea of the homogeneous [coinciding] society, of the last society?" (AD 90)⁷

Marx is a "limiting-idea" in regards to "identity and difference" (S 12). He is the reduction to the One and the Same. He is the idea that history has one "focus," the idea "of Being as object" (S 12), rather than as opening. And this "inverted, and yet conserved, Hegelianism was profoundly obscure" (TD 10) as well as obscuring. Starting from the duality of "matter and spirit," Marx "believed (or did not discourage the belief) that this combination was headed towards non-contradiction or identity." (TD 10) As

Merleau-Ponty said: "His error was not that he believed that civilization is an ontological complex, but that a civilization was emerging that would take the place of ontology." (TD 10) His error was to believe that the institutions of capitalism and history were hatching a coinciding body politic that would overcome the very difference that the philosopher could no longer heroically hold together on paper. As Merleau-Ponty admits in *The Adventures of the Dialectic*, to suggest that the failure of Marx's holding together of difference on pages that he passed off as practice inscribed in the heart of history was somehow the end of philosophy of history - history become a senseless "tumult" - rather than the end of a style of philosophy that no longer was subtle enough to understand history, shows "well enough that we were not on the terrain of history (and of Marxism) but on that of the *a priori* and of morality." (AD 232) Or more precisely, Merleau-Ponty unwittingly joined Marx on the terrain of the metaphysics of presence, on the high ground of a metaphysical, *a priori* morality of presence. With an eye turned on Marx, Merleau-Ponty says: "that all societies which tolerate the existence of a proletariat are unjustifiable . . . does not mean that they are all of equal worth and worth nothing or that there is no meaning in history which produces them one after the other. (AD 232) And he continues: "This Marxism which remains true whatever it does . . . is not a philosophy of history - it is Kant in disguise, and it is Kant again that we ultimately find in the concept of revolution as absolute action." (AD 232) Revolution is the long prepared coming to self-consciousness or hatching whereby man masters his institutions, whereby man can say and choose in which direction he is going, because the institutions and symbolisms

wherein he lives have been rendered transparent, because he has delivered from institutions and symbolisms to their Truth, to communism, to the "absolute Other," to the history of the future, to *real* things and *real* thoughts, to the coincidence that would be *real* man to man relations. As such, revolution is the space of "absolute action," a space that we enter only in death and share with the embalmed body of Lenin, not even savouring the experience since death is yet another "coincidence différé." The techniques of Lenin's embalming are currently being peddled about the capitalist world, but in fact have long been in circulation, predating Lenin, going back to Hegel to be sure, and into the deepest reaches of onto-theological space. Philosophy, Merleau-Ponty says, "must reformulate what the traditional correlation between the object and the subject, preponderant even in Hegel, does not adequately express" (TD 10), or expresses only by embalming. Postmodernity is the transfiguring and twisting of this intelligible matrix into a different, less heavy, more lucid space. Merleau-Ponty changes skins, abandoning the skin of Protagoras, Galileo, Descartes, Hegel, Marx and Husserl, for the *flesh*, and thereby is "emancipated but not freed from every condition." (AD 153)

Merleau-Ponty is emancipated to ask, "is revolution an extreme case of government or the end of government?" (AD 216) His answer brings us close to the difficulty lying at the heart of a philosophy "which was to unite truth and action, but where one is simply an alibi for the other" (AD 93). Revolution "is conceived in the second sense" and thereby *legitimated*, this being its *authority*, but is "practiced in the first" (AD 216), practised as an "extreme" instance of the institution of governmental

power. We might substitute for "extreme," "insufficiently subtle" or "insufficiently differentiated." We might say that it is government "lacking separations and division," "without reversibility," "without the differential articulations of power in an elected parliament and authority inscribed not on an infinitely distant tomorrow but on the body of a people who can never seriously entertain the illusions of coinciding with themselves since parliamentary democracy is in its very structure *indirect* democracy." But that would be getting ahead of ourselves. Proletarian revolution is for Merleau-Ponty the arbitrary assertion

that history's sliding back on itself and the resurrection of past ghosts are bad dreams, that history carries within itself its own cure and will surprise us with it - and, precisely because one yields to this belief, a power is established which is all the more autonomous because it is thought to be founded on objective history. (AD 222)

One should ask, how can the absolute Other of history be inscribed in history; how the excess of will over institutions can be inscribed in and nurtured by the institution of history? Merleau-Ponty observes that for Marxism sometimes revolution "is a wave which picks up the Party and the Proletariat where they are and carries them beyond the obstacles"; sometimes, on the contrary, revolution is "beyond everything that exists, in the future which is the negation of the present, at the end of an infinite refinement." (AD 93) Transformation realizes and destroys. Communist revolution "saves everything and changes everything." (AD 93) The two views of revolution, revolution as inscribed in history and as absolute Other of history, "are not reconciled; rather they are juxtaposed," each masking the other. (AD 93) As Merleau-Ponty says: "one uses violence [against

history and man] with little scruple, since it is said to be inscribed in things," in history itself; and one "creates from nothing in the name of truth," which is the absolute Other of history. (AD 93)

This is nihilism that sees a human face when it looks in the mirror. In 1950, Merleau-Ponty almost admits that the difference between Nazism and Marxism is that the former takes the short road without passing through "the humane inspiration of Marxism." (S 268) But to be accurate, Merleau-Ponty rightly insists that there is no short road, that fascism does not come out of nowhere, that "[f]ascism is an anguish in the face of bolshevism, whose external form it takes in order to more surely destroy its content" (S 268). But Merleau-Ponty wrongly divides Marxist critique from Marxist action, Marx from Bolshevism, when, as he will argue throughout *The Adventures of the Dialectics*, this nihilism which legitimizes itself as "humane" is not only "the Bolshevik mind" but "the crisis of Marx's thought and its continuation." (93) On the terrain of history, as opposed to the "dubious" dream-space (AD 230) of *Les Temps Modernes* wherein much of *Humanism and Terror* first appeared,⁸ Merleau-Ponty concludes that "Marxist critique and Marxist action are a single movement." (AD 233) This brings us to the dream-space of Marx:

If [revolution] is the end of government, it is utopia, if it is a type of government, it always exists only in the relative and the probable, and nothing allows us to treat as the fact of a particular class and to group pell-mell under the designation of 'bourgeoisie' ['bureaucracy' or 'Party'] the contradictions which break out between the exigencies of the government and those of the revolution, and even less to give ourselves, under the name of 'proletarian power,' a ready-made

solution to this antinomy. (AD 216)

Marx, who told us what road is paved with good intentions, paints himself into the difficulty of having to get out of this corner because he tried to take the short road to humanity whereby one bypasses the terrain and *flesh* of history. Marx quite simply posited power which abstracts from "the liabilities of the historical role" (AD 221). This, Merleau-Ponty says,

is to act as if everything that historically exists were not *at the same time* movement and inertia, it is to place in history, *as contents*, on one hand the principle of resistance (called the bourgeoisie) and on the other hand the principle of movement (called the proletariat), when these are the very *structures* of history as a passage to generality and to the institution of relationships among persons. (AD 221)

Humanity, in the Marxist sense, requires "in history itself a substantial and given principle which would drive ambiguity from it, sum it up, totalize it, and close it (even if only by opening to history a future of pure movement)" (AD 221). Marx never came to terms with living history or came to it only with a dying philosophy, in the twilight of the idols. In this twilight that is neither the light nor the night of retrospective and perspective illusion, humanity must, for its own sake, participate with its eyes open in the differential articulation of what is always inhuman, "impure power" (AD 221).

To this end, Merleau-Ponty re-articulates, or more precisely, pushes further the differential articulation of philosophy of history. Of Marx, Marxists and the young Merleau-Ponty, he says:

In order to understand the logic and shifts of history, its meaning and

what, within it, resists meaning, they still had to conceptualize the sphere proper to history, the institution, which develops neither according to causal laws, like a second nature, but always in dependence on its meaning, nor according to eternal ideas, but rather by bringing more or less under its laws events which, as far as it is concerned, are fortuitous and by letting itself be changed by their suggestion. Torn by all the contingencies, repaired by involuntary actions of men who are caught in it and want to live, the web deserves the name of neither spirit nor matter, but, more exactly, that of history. This order of 'things' which teaches 'relationships between persons,' sensitive to all the heavy conditions which bind it to the order of nature, open to all that personal life can invent, is, in modern language, the sphere of symbolism. (AD 64-5)

It was to Saussure over and against Marx and Hegel that Merleau-Ponty turned for a new understanding of history. It is in reading Weber that he cashes it out politically as both less and more than heroic or tragic liberalism. This is a 'return' to man, but an *indirect* 'return,' a 'return' of further differential articulation. The man in question is most certainly not the root. It is here that the differentiation and articulation of Merleau-Ponty's "methodological subjectivism" begins. (PW 25)

Symbolic Mutation & The Advent of Capitalism

Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is for Merleau-Ponty a the study of the symbolic mutation whereby one institution becomes another. It is a study of history "as the milieu of life," a milieu wherein there is

between theory and practice, between culture and man's labor, between epochs and individual lives, between planned actions and the time in which they mature, an affinity that is neither fortuitous nor grounded in an omnipotent logic. (IPP 96-7)

It is an affinity that in a very particular sense is of choices and freedom.

Merleau-Ponty admits that present and past, historian and history, subject and object, knowledge and action, the justifiable and the unjustifiable, tend towards juxtaposed dualities rather than intertwined *écarts* in Weber's methodological works. But in Weber he recognizes a profound thinker who, when he sets to the interrogation of history, "disregards these antitheses" (IPP 99). Or more precisely, being a profound thinker who is very far from fanatical, Weber sees the intertwining of these terms beyond their antithesis and with an honesty that refuses to obscure difference, he struggles heroically to hold the terms together in their exaggerated difference. But heroism in the face of the *re-presentationalism* born of these antitheses is a war of attrition that the historian cannot win. Just as no amount of heroism will make the sign adequate to the 'thing itself,' no amount of heroism will make the signs of the historian adequate to the 'past itself.' This makes of man, subject and historian a tragic figure and of "history a sort of malefactor." (IPP 99)

For his part, Merleau-Ponty concedes that signs will never "lead us 'as if by the hand' to . . . things themselves." (S 90) He adds: "Let us not say that every expression is imperfect because it leaves things understood." (S 90) What is at stake here is the future of the subject-object bifurcation or, as Flynn puts it, "the modern doctrine of subjectivity," the "*frontal* conception of being" (CM 140). According to this conception, the object - the in itself thing and past - is thrown before the subject - the present, for itself speaker and historian - the latter being the "power of representation," being, as Heidegger showed, "the act of proposing, positing as such." (CM 140) But Merleau-

Ponty problematizes this paradigm: "Our relationship to history is not only one of understanding - a relationship of the spectator to the spectacle. We would not be spectators if we were not involved in the past, and action would not be serious if it did not conclude the whole enterprise of the past" (AD 11), if in each new present we were not at stake in the very summing up of the past. Merleau-Ponty starts from the intertwining of language and history in the very intertwining of synchrony and diachrony. He continues and goes beyond modernity by understanding the signifieds of language and history as the work of differential articulation in and between the silence of non-linguistic significations and the effervescence of linguistic and historic signs. This is to say that it is the nature of history to be silent and "undefined so long as it remains in the present," "to be suspended into the future," to "exist fully only through that which comes after," and consequently the signs of the historian, his invention, his "intervention" in history, rather than "a defect of historical understanding," is history's very presence. (AD 12) As Merleau-Ponty said in the *Phenomenology of Perception*: "there is no experience without speech, as the purely lived-thought has no part in the discursive life of man." (PhP 337) It is as a "coïncidence différé" that the past is present and the present is past. To speak of the past is to speak in the present and to speak of the present is to speak of the past. As Derrida says: "Privation of presence is the condition of experience." (G 166) The *écart* between the silence of non-linguistic significations and the effervescence of signs is that de-centring and re-centring of life that opens present and past, historian and history, knowledge and action. Of this *écart* between silent visibility and effervescence

language, Merleau-Ponty says:

It is as though the visibility that animates the sensible world were to emigrate, not outside of every body, but into another less heavy, more transparent body, as though it were to change flesh, abandoning the flesh of the body for that of language, and thereby would be emancipated but not freed from every condition. (AD 153)

The silence of the animal world is not nothing. It encroaches upon and is entangled with the silence of our world. But it is not human silence either. There are crucial *écarts*, crucial differences of differential articulation, crucial institutions of being that to us mean everything. To be sure, man has a sense of smell and dogs answer to words. But, as Madison has observed, between the dog who lives in scents and the man who lives in words, there is a world of difference, the same world in its communicating but irreducible dimensionalities. The *écart* between the perceptual and language opens, Flynn says, "a space in which there emerges an 'I' that is both of the stuff of the world and yet opened to it by not being identical within it." (CM 161) If freedom is a response, it is the response of one who is both of symbolisms - landscape, language, history, politics and culture - yet opened to them by not being identical within them. Borrowing an expression from Merleau-Ponty, Flynn says, "to think is to respond in a space in which I can 'give myself leeway.'" (CM 161) In such an account there is no more a place for history and symbolisms as malefactors than for a heroic and tragic subject that confronts them. There is no *con-frontation*. Symbolisms are the place of the subject and subject is the difference, the erased point, that is there intertwining, their unity *in* difference.

Given what Merleau-Ponty attributes to Saussure, Weber, we should suspect,

said none of this. Certainly not in his methodological studies where there is "a tête-à-tête between a Kantian understanding and a past in itself." (IPP 101) Certainly not in the duality wherein

knowledge, by multiplying views, confronts [and *re-presents* the infinity of historical reality] through conclusions that are provisional, open and justifiable (that is to say, conditional), while practice confronts it through decisions which are absolute, partial, and not subject to justification. (AD 10)

But in interrogating history, in understanding the situation of the historical actor wherein historian and politician meet, Weber, Merleau-Ponty says, is "obliged to go beyond . . . dualism" (AD 11). On the one hand, Weber as a historian must *act justifiably* in making the past present, must *know* the truth of history in the *unjustifiable* presumption of making present the past he sees outlined in the future, because, as a historico-political actor, he risks loosing upon humanity an evil that he shall not have a chance to revise, however provisional it might have been. A trio of scholars, Hegel, Marx and Heidegger, with their histories of Spirit, Man and Being, confirm this lesson all too well.⁹ But to regret them would be to efface the space from which we speak. The historian's act is not a book that can be withdrawn from circulation, or more strictly, it is a book, but no book can be truly recalled for each is an advent. On the other hand, the politician, Lenin, or the reformationist priest, Calvin, must *know* the truth of politics, religion and economics, of history, in the *unjustifiable* presumption of making present the past he sees outlined in the future, must *act justifiably* in making the future present, because as a politico-historical representative of existing humanity and civilization he would irreversibly

transform history. To choose well in such things - to succeed in one's life as well as in one's lingering, historical afterlife - "one must possess the capacity of which Weber speaks, the capacity to live history." (AD 29) One must also have luck. If you ask me where is man in the tumult of history, I would say in the distance, difference and diachrony between pairs of synchronies, in the transformation wherein one advent becomes another. Man is there as the difference between Latin and French, as the difference between 19th and 20th century Russia, as the difference between Calvinism and capitalism, and he is there with chance, and there with chance in the thickness of history. This is the methodological subjectivism of which Merleau-Ponty speaks. This is what Weber teaches in his study of the transformation of Calvinism into capitalism to which we turn and with which we conclude. But you say that we are just repeating the words of Machiavelli who left half to man and half to chance. Whatever Machiavelli said of institutional thickness, and we do not doubt that he said a great deal, all is but repetition, *but* repetition differently, meaningfully, each time with ourselves at stake.

The advent of capitalism is neither absolute creation nor meaningless repetition for Weber. It was neither fortuitous nor destiny. In relation to the advent of Calvinism it is the same but different. It is the result of the choice of a style of life that together with contingency and other choices opened a style of history wherein everything hung together - too well in fact - and yet wherein no one could say where history was going until it was far too late, not that one can regret such things. There was, in short, "a logic *within* contingency" (IPP 97-8). This is to say that the mutation was intelligible and so

that there is history. Weber uncovered the first hints of the reciprocities, relationships and involvements of Calvinism and capitalism in a text of Benjamin Franklin which sketched a Protestant work ethic whereby we "have a duty to augment our capital, to earn always more, without enjoying what we have earned." (AD 13) As Weber and Merleau-Ponty stress, there is here both "a religious and an economic efficacy." (AD 16) Calvinism, one might say, lends production and accumulation the body of God as the place of their legitimate inscription, and they in turn deliver that most distant of gods - who refuses his worshipper any sign of their salvation, who withdraws the question of their salvation wholly into his own hands - into the world in the bodies of the commodity and capital. What begins as the patient, meticulous, life-long asceticism of organizing the glory of God on Earth through the rationalization of nature - the Protestant having no recourse to God through others, the Church or "brotherly relations with created things" - becomes, "even in Puritanism, a presumption of salvation" (AD 15). God is taken in hand not as gold but as gold that begets gold when devoutly put into circulation. This not only carves through any remaining scruples about wealth and interest usury with a vengeance. (AD 13) In capital the Protestant equals in his pocket what in the person of Christ the Catholic has only in history, what in the person of the Pope the Catholic has only in Rome, what in the person of the king the Catholic has only in Paris, the divine embodied on earth, the intertwining of divine and carnal, of invisible and visible, the corporal presence of an otherwise transcendent God.

Or, to make matters more obviously political, in the commodity the Protestant

has in his pocket a morsel of divine authority that makes his enterprise his church and the market the kingdom of God. The divine authority of the Pope and the divine right of kings is de-centred with a vengeance in the divine right of the commodity. There are two particularly poignant and intertwined moments when this divine right trumped that of kings. The more recent of these was the financial crisis that forced Louis XVI to recall the Estates General, a parliament consisting of the nobility, the clergy and the bourgeoisie which had been dismissed by Louis XIII. The bourgeoisie seized the occasion to separate power from the king and inscribe legitimacy on the body of the people by separating Louis XVI, the nobility and many of the clergy from their heads. Five republics later France seems to have found a lingering formula for mediating between, or more precisely, intertwining, power and legitimacy, the state and the people, the visible and the invisible. But perhaps the more interesting if less graphic moment is when the largely Puritan Thirteen colonists informed England that they would no longer suffer "taxation without representation," a theme that played no small part in the advent of American democracy and all that continues to flow from it, including the French Revolution, five French Republics, the Western World, the World as we live it. By grace of Puritanism, the divine right of taxation comes to find itself a trespasser in the churches of enterprise and the holy kingdom of the market which respects no political border. And not only that, the Puritan is a veritable pioneer of democracy because if any earthly authority is going to relieve him of his morsels of God, and taxation is precisely the business of earthly authorities, even the lowliest of Puritans will insist that the God of those who work for

a religious living and an afterlife be given his say before that authority. If gold is God in action on earth, it is the Puritan who interprets and represents him to the world, gold by itself not inspiring a right and proper religious calling in all people. Merleau-Ponty draws the conclusion: "Religion, law, and economy make one single history because any fact in any one of the three orders arises, in a sense, from the other two." (AD 19) Each is of the others, opening upon them, by not being identical with them. This is to say that "[p]luralism, which formerly seemed to ban any attempt at a unified interpretation of history, on the contrary now attests to the solidarity of the [orders]". (IPP 101) What begins as a religious choice of men lodged as an advent in the *flesh* becomes "a cosmos," "a situation" (AD 16), the symbolic system of politics as much as that of economics taken up anew and delivered into that uneasiness wherein man will make political and economic choices that in turn affect sedimented religion choices as well as each other.

It is the very fortune of Calvinism in this regard that seals its fate. Calvinists and Puritans were far from the world's first merchants. Their success marks the fact that the logic of their meaningful venture brought something new and useful to, and thereby changed, an old practice that had its own logic and meaning. But "the effect turns back on its cause, carrying and transforming it in turn." (AD 16) Religion and economy, and politics too, are "interwoven, exchanging positions so that now one, now the other, plays the role of tutor." (AD 16) And the participants are aware of this, not that they can recall their choice or that of their parents, the advent of Calvinism having launched them in an adventure which involves man and chance, but whose subject is the institution. In

Wesley, Weber finds words that mark the transformation and denaturing of the Calvinist institution:

Religion necessarily produces the spirit of industry and frugality, and these cannot but produce riches. But as wealth increases, so will pride, passion, and the love of worldly things . . . So although the form of religion remains, the spirit gradually declines. (AD 15)

A secondary element is beginning to take charge of the Calvinist worldly calling, de-centring and re-centring it. But Wesley does not tell the whole story. Protestantism, to be sure, "sanctifies daily labor, organizes a worldly asceticism, and joins the glory of God to the transformation of nature." (AD 13) But it adds this "rational conduct of life" (AD 17) to other elements that together produced riches and together became the capitalism of Western Europe and America. Many of the elements that came together in this capitalism - capitalism being for Weber defined most of all by the style of "rationalization" - "exist here and there in history" (AD 13). Merchant as well as venture or speculative capitalism are as old as history, and trade reaches far back into prehistory. All three meet a "rationalizing tendency" in the style of Roman law without producing anything like the capitalism and rationalizing style we live. (AD 17) Calvinism has the good or bad fortune to be born into the Western world at a moment when there exists "a certain technology of production," "a certain sort of law," and "a government based on certain rules." (AD 17). The state of each of these symbolisms, like that of religious, is the work of human choices lodged as advents, as uncontrollable mutations, in the *flesh*. It is the fortuitous combination of these choices that makes Protestants rich. It is the

fortuitous combination of these choices, which, if one digs deeper, is again a "union of contingency and meaning," that gives the "rationalizing tendency" of the Protestant's worldly calling - now become something different - centre stage in a de-centring and re-centring of meaning which the Protestant institution does not survive as a religious institution. Here we have "an advent of meaning" (AD 17), the advent of a style and a symbolic system, the advent of a capitalism of "rationalization," that is the work of "an affinity of choices" (IPP 100). Merleau-Ponty says: "The notion of an 'affinity of choices' (*Wahlverwandtschaft*) makes the event something other than a conjunction of circumstances but without it appearing as an imminent historical necessity." (IPP 100) The intelligible nucleus of Calvinism does not implode, let alone implode due to external forces, but is meaningful denatured by man and the play of man's choices, giving birth to a new style that has its own secular life to lead through man. This is to insist that capitalism is not "the truth of Calvinism" (AD 15). It "denatures the Calvinistic ethic from which it arises and preserves only its external form or 'shell'" (IPP 102). Calvinism is denatured and twisted into the same but different symbolic space wherein one can "concentrate on gaining the best of this world and the next" (AD 15), and further twisted so one can concentrate on this world alone, as the logic and meaning of "rationalization" proceeds.

But is it not irrational to leave rationalization to an institutional subject when there is the human subject? And if one takes this road, who will rationalize the rationalizers? The first is Marx's question. Revolutionism in the name of a humanity

that is presumed to be rational is the answer. The second question is that of Lenin and Trotsky. In his 1950 essay "The U.S.S.R. and the Camps," Merleau-Ponty, while still a Marxist, sketches for us, every bit as much as Franklin and Wesley, although perhaps with less understanding than the latter, another symbolic mutation or "intelligible transition" (AD 13), that from "NI DIEU, NI ÉTAT, NI CAPITAL" to "NI CIVILIZATION, NI HOMME":

By looking towards the origin [advent] of the [symbolic and political] system of concentration camps, we can measure the illusion of today's Communists [what Marx's revolutionism, despite itself, has become]. But it also this illusion which forbids confusing communism and fascism [there is a symbolic mutation]. If our Communists accept the camps and oppression, it is because they expect the classless society [rational humanism] to emerge [by way of violence] from infrastructures [as the Protestant starts to presume that his salvation will arise from his money]. They are mistaken [this is irrational violence against humanity], but this is what they think [practised in the name of rational humanity]. They are making the mistake of believing in obscurity [they are refusing to look at what is happening], but this is what they believe [in order to keep Marx, humanity and rationality as points of honour]. . . . Before the gas chambers, the German camps were patterned after the Russian camps, and their penal devices after socialist ideology, exactly as the Party in the Fascist sense was patterned after the Party in the Bolshevik sense, and as fascism borrowed the idea of propaganda from bolshevism [there is everywhere a continuity of style]. . . . If we conclude from this that communism is fascism, we fully gratify, after the event, the wish of fascism [missing the crucial mutation in the symbolic system]. . . No Nazi was ever burdened with ideas such as the recognition of man by man, internationalism, classless society [nor are capitalists working any more for God's glory]. It is true that these ideas find only an unfaithful bearer in today's communism [as Wesley said of the Calvinism of his day], and that they act more as its décor than its motive force [as getting rich in good conscience comes before getting rich without any thought of conscience]. The fact remains that they are still part of it [as points of honour alone, a secondary element has

usurped the show]. They are what a young Russian or French Communist is taught [the young should not look at things either]. Whereas Nazi propaganda taught its listeners the pride of the German people, the pride of Aryans and the *Führeprinzip* [a scaled down and possible project, as Stalin in his own way realized, but deadly in the absence of its humanist pretensions]. (S 268)

This is not to say that Nazism was the truth of Marx any more than capitalism was the truth of Calvin. History, as we have said, cannot be added up this way. "History has meaning, but there is no pure development of ideas." (AD 16) The meaning of history "arises in contact with contingency, at the moment when human initiative founds a system of life by taking up anew scattered givens." (AD 16) Just as Calvin's choice of a religious "rationalizing tendency" turned into an economic system was but among those "scattered givens" taken "up anew" in the advent of capitalist institutional rationalism, Marx's choice of Promethean rationalism turned into a political system was but among those "scattered givens" taken "up anew" in the advent of Nazi irrationalism. Capitalism finishes Calvinism, but in both senses of the word: Calvinism "is realized because, as activity in the world, capitalism surpasses it; it is destroyed as asceticism because capitalism strives to eliminate its own transcendent motives." (AD 18) And likewise, Nazism finishes Marxism, but again in both senses of the word: Marxism is realized because, as "violence with little scruple" and the presumption of "creating from nothing," Nazism surpasses it; it is destroyed as humanism because Nazism strives to eliminate its own transcendental motives, strives to rationalize nihilism and Terror, tearing off the human face, rationalizing undifferentiated power. Nazism is a response. It is, among other things,

"anguish in the face of bolshevism," an answer to the question of who will rationalize the rationalizers.

If anything, this is not to say that Nazism and capitalism are the truth of the choices of Marx and Calvin but their falsity. Merleau-Ponty says:

Calvinism confronted and juxtaposed the finite and the infinite, carried to the extreme the consciousness we have of not being the source of our own being, and organized [rationalized] the obsession with the beyond at the same time that it closed the routes of access to it. In so doing it paved the way for the fanaticism of the bourgeois enterprise, authorized the work ethic, and eliminated the transcendent. Thus the course of history clarifies the errors and the contradiction of the fundamental choice, and its historical failure bears witness against Calvinism. (AD 22)

And yet to regret the affinity of choices that gave us capitalist rationalization and further the affinity of choices that gave us communism is to efface ourselves. This, in a sense, is precisely what Nazism does and is. On the pain of death and a repetition of history - all that Nazi Germany and World War II was but differently - we must rather understand this "rationalizing" style - "its meaning and what, within it, resists meaning." Merleau-Ponty, in the end, includes "capitalist rationalization" or "demystification" among history's "advances": "it is the resolve to take our given condition in hand through knowledge and action, . . . the appropriation of the world by man . . . it faces difficulties that other regimes have avoided." (AD 23) But it is also a regression. If we "must keep the capitalist refusal of the sacred as external" (AD 23), we must be exceedingly vigilant that the elimination of "transcendent" authority does not lead us to forget that we are not "the source of our own being," and so, as Marx does, reincarnate in a symbolic system not

only "the fanaticism of the bourgeois," not only its "work ethic," but the obsession with the absolute Other when the routes of access to it are closed. This is no longer the presumption of the ideal religion that would deliver us from the absolute Other deciding our salvation by letting us take the Protestant God in hand and even have him in our pocket. It is rather a mutation of this presumption, the positing of capitalism and history as a ready made solution that would deliver us from the Other of symbolisms by letting us take ourselves in hand in a coincidence of proletarian with proletarian, of self with self.

What history teaches us, Merleau-Ponty says, is "that certain solutions are impossible." (AD 22) Hitler steps forward and demonstrates that the symbolisms of civilization, language, history, art, economics, politics and religion are not man's because man is rational. On the contrary, man is rational or civil because language, history, art, economics, politics and religion have him. Marx's choice could not in fact strip us of any of these symbolisms. But the damage dealt to de-centred authority in all of them, and most of all in politics, was enough, in combination with other choices, to introduce a deadly mutation. The authority that had been inscribed upon the body of the people by the American and French Revolutions, that Marxism and the people's democracies of the East respected by insisting upon a coincidence between Party and proletariat, remained in effect. But power was reincarnated in one man who was unlimited by grace of the denigration and reduction of all the mediating and limiting institutions that stop a President, that even stopped Stalin to a degree, from having a monopoly on the will of

the people. The Fuhrer was the German people and so *the* authority on every cultural question. Or more precisely, he was the presumption of this. But what is not in accord with this presumption is by definition not the German people and may be treated according. With the foreclosure of "social division" in the symbolic system of politics, we open a symbolic system of concentration camps wherein "division, [i.e.] opposition, is viewed as emanating from the outside - from the Jews, cosmopolitans, foreign agents, mad people." (CM 193) The Fuhrer demonstrates that even a few steps towards the transparent rationality of coincidence is not merely naked irrationality but unholy Terror. "History," Merleau-Ponty says, "eliminates the irrational." (AD 22) But it does so through the lives of men, which, by a merciless justice, is only fitting for man in his choices very often should have known better. Nazism demonstrates, if we care to look at and learn from history's horrors rather than simply wishing them away, the same thing that Pascal, the Garden of Eden and the myth of Prometheus taught us differently, and so much less dearly. It demonstrates that Promethean rationalization pushed to its rational conclusion is beastly, is the fall from grace, is repeated torture and death. The rationality and reason that Calvin, among others, chose for us, cannot be our possession, rather forever possesses us, is a rationality *within* irrationality, a "reason *within* unreason" (IPP 98). We who have seen rational man even partly disrobed must learn once and for all that under all the pretensions or without all the folds of differential fabric he is but a beast.

The Adventures of the Dialectic would bring the "liquidation of the revolutionary

dialectic to its conclusion." (7) This entails re-articulating or pushing further the differential articulation of man. He is neither the root nor at the mercy of an absolute Other. Man participates in the articulation of his fate. This involves the re-articulation of philosophy. There is no *con-frontation* or dialectic between subject and object or spirit and matter. There is one *flesh*, and this *flesh* is primary. It is where the differential articulation of subject and object, of spirit and matter, begins and remains. This involves the re-articulation of the philosophy of history. History is not the history of spirit or of matter, or of any positivity, but of the *flesh*. The subject of history is the plurality of styles of being, the plurality of institutions of the *flesh*. Each one of us is in fact a style, an institution, but a style and institution within styles and institutions of being, within the *flesh*. The *justifiable* exercise of choice in the re-inscription of styles and institutions is always presumptive but far *unjustifiable*. A history of choices that prove and reprove themselves to be irrational awaits political man. But political man must bother to consult the adventures of humanity. Political man must give up the pretensions of and longing for absolute creation, creation independent of *authority*, the dream of man as his own *authority*. This is the price political man must pay if he would help his fellows and himself escape not the meaningless - but the *senseless* - repetition of history's horrors, of ruinous *histories*. Truth in politics may well be, as Merleau-Ponty says, only the "art of inventing what will later appear to have been required by the times." (AD 29) But let us not flatters ourselves. It is an art we are only barely beginning to learn, to relearn, to always relearn - never to master. For Merleau-Ponty what Weber teaches most of all is

this:

If history does not have a direction like a river, but has a meaning, if it teaches us, not a truth, but errors to avoid, if its practice is not deduced from a dogmatic philosophy of history, then it is not superficial to base a politics on the analysis of the political man. (AD 28)

This is what liberalism as an *indirect* or institutional approach to politics has always done, even if Merleau-Ponty sometimes suggests otherwise. In the epilogue we turn to the liberal ontology and the politics of the *flesh* that Merleau-Ponty might have written were it not for the tragedy of his early death. If Merleau-Pontean liberalism is tragic, it is for no other reason than this. The heroism and tragedy of Weber, of Marx and Hegel, even of Calvin, are for those who would mourn the passing of modernity. Merleau-Ponty only wanted to learn from modernity - that he might not repeat its errors again.

1. *The Adventures of the Dialectic*, trans. Bien (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973 [1944]), p. 11. Hereafter cited as AD.
2. Schmidt, more than anyone, is responsible for charting, *qua* philosophical detective, the vision that guided the "coherent deformation" (S 91) that Merleau-Ponty effected in his most inspired reading of Saussure. (cf. "*Speech, Expression and the Sense of History*, PS 102-154) This coherency is pushed further by Flynn and by us, and by Lefort independently.
3. *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language*, trans. Silverman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973 [1964]), p. 100. Hereafter cited as CAL.
4. Merleau-Ponty says of Husserl in "The Philosopher and His Shadow": "With regard to a philosopher whose venture has awakened so many echoes, and at such an apparent distance from the point where he himself stood, any commemoration is also a betrayal - whether we do him the highly superfluous homage of our thoughts, as if we sought to gain them a wholly unmerited warrant, or whether on the contrary, with a respect which is not lacking in distance, we reduce him too strictly to what he himself desired and said." (S 159)
5. Although Derrida is difficult to pin down on the point, he seems to exude an extreme and disquieting confidence that would rule out the surprising transformation to which subjectivity might succumb once 'infected' by a style of thought such as that of the late Merleau-Ponty. Derrida says: "however [the category of the subject] is modified, however it is endowed with consciousness or unconsciousness, it will refer, by the entire thread of its history, to the substantiality of a presence unperturbed by accidents, or to the identity of the selfsame [*le propre*] in the presence of self-relationship." (G 68-9)
6. See Flynn for a discussion of the two bodies of Christ, the Pope and the king, and the secularization of this differentially articulated authority. (CM 80-2 & 180-1) Flynn develops and discusses, in particular, Kantorwicz's *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* and Lefort's "*L'image du corps et le totalitarisme*" and "The Permanence of the Theologico-Political?" We return to these matters in the epilogue.
7. Such an extension into "infinity" is in fact the theatre of the absurd called "'permanent revolution'" (AD 206). The show goes as follows: man as the root, revolutionary man in all his transparency, on being delivered by history from institutions, feels compelled to refuse victory and instead ingenuously proposes a non-aggression pact with historical being, the latter lending the former the institution of government, even letting it be called "revolutionary," in return for the permanent deferral, or so historical being is led to believe, of the revolution that would once and forever overcome history and difference, in particular, that between ruler and ruled. By comparison, Stalin's non-aggression pact with Hitler is the height of lucidity.

8. *Les Temps Modernes* operated from within the "dubious" space of lingering simplifications and reunifications that the Resistance had embodied in the face of Nazi rule. The Resistance was that moment when Marxists of every sort were united in one body - from those who remained in the Party after Stalin's non-aggression pact, to those who left it, having until that moment been taught to preach and believe in a Soviet-Western alliance against Nazi Germany, to those who had left the Party much earlier with Trotsky, to those, like Merleau-Ponty, who had no Party, along with, we might add, Gaullists, centrists of every stripe, and even a very healthy number of conservatives. It was the place where politics was reduced to just war. It was history simplified to indisputable evil loosed upon civilization. It was, in the most literal terms, Hell to pay as the price for the sublime and still presumptive moment of coincidence in the body politic. We say "presumptive" because it is not even clear when one resists and when one collaborates. What of the proletarian who must work in the munitions factories to eat? What of the bourgeoisie who can participate in, bankroll and lend what support he can to the Resistance only by keeping his place in the system, by tacitly or even openly supporting the Nazis and Pétain? What of the bureaucracy - of the police? Does the *gendarme* abandon the terrain to those who willing serve the Nazis or does he work among them, sometime saving the men and women of the Resistance, sometime delivering them to torture and death. It is little wonder that the *préfecture* was often first to start the insurrection in the face of the advancing American, British and Canadian troops. Not because it had the arms to protect itself for a time, but because there the innocent were the most guilty. Everywhere there was space for mystification and self-delusion. By day everyone collaborates. One collaborates in almost everything one does. It is only at night that one resists here and there. The political space for the most bitter disagreements existed even in the Resistance. To the credit of the *résistants*, who were very much a divided unity, the record shows that they rose above such bitter disagreements, only to not understand political success when it was easiest and thereby gave tacit assent to an end of politics presumptive of eternity.
9. But to be fair, the very fragmentation of Hegel's fanatical history teaches the end of something in philosophy. Marx's silence, one tormented by a crisis at the end of his life and broken in the work of Lefort who finds along side the fanatical history a very different one, is the silence of Marx's death. It is Heidegger alone who outlives what could presume to be his political child and yet learns from Nazi Germany's death only that the direct expression of political nihilism is better concealed in a theory of technology that swallows up all of our values, in a theory of technology that is profoundly anti-humanist because Heidegger treats technology as nothing more (and nothing less) than the logical unfolding of subjective thought itself. In the end, Heidegger regrets the

prose which raised him.

EPILOGUE / POLITICAL MAN & THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE *FLESH*

The problem is to find institutions which implant this practice of freedom in our customs.

-Merleau-Ponty, "Tomorrow . . ."

Merleau-Pontean liberalism is liberalism without illusions, liberalism without illusions which liberalism perhaps never even had, and crucially, liberalism without the illusion that it is without illusions. It is liberalism which "does not ingenuously consider itself to be the law of things," but "perseveres in becoming such a law, through a history in which it is not predestined." (AD 9) It is liberalism with a history. It is liberalism presumptive of the future and whose authority is its past wherein our present is inscribed. The liberalism to which Merleau-Ponty surrenders, that he might take it up anew and tear novel meaning from it, is a style, an institution, a communicative space, a politics of the *flesh*.

Merleau-Ponty's liberal ontology is, as we said, unwritten. It is true that Merleau-Ponty would recognize himself in what Lefort and Flynn, his student and a student of his student's work, have written of political advents. It is to their work that we eventually turn to draw out, through the recounting of the history of the *flesh*, the meaning of the traces Merleau-Ponty leaves us. When Merleau-Ponty says in a working note that "metaphysics is a naïve ontology," Lefort's *Machiavelli* is cited as embodying a style displacing it, as "structural" history from *within* the advent it would think, as

history of philosophy from "within an *interrogative* ensemble," as a "philosophy situated within the hieratic ensemble of Being" (VI 187). It is not only from Saussure's linguistics and Weber's religious-economic history, but from Lefort's politico-historic philosophy, that Merleau-Ponty would borrow that he might articulate an ontology of *interrogation* that is nowise tempted to array any symbolism of the *flesh* as any object before a subjective gaze from nowhere, from outside the *flesh* of history. This is the price of the "intra-ontology" (VI 227), of the "ontology from within" (VI 237), that *The Visible and the Invisible* would have been had Merleau-Ponty not died young. But we would be too generous and not generous enough were we to suggest that Merleau-Pontean liberal ontology either is what Merleau-Ponty himself thought, somehow *re-presented* and salvaged from the tragedy of his death by Lefort, Flynn and ourselves, or is but a presumption to speak in the name of what was irrevocably lost in an all that much more tragic death. We say this not simply to do justice to all involved. Merleau-Pontean liberal ontology is a style that possessed Merleau-Ponty, a style presumptive of all that he might have but did not get the chance to say or even would not have brought himself to say.¹ In a working note Merleau-Ponty says:

a philosophy, like a work of art, is an object that can arouse more thoughts than those that are 'contained' in it (can one enumerate them . . . count up a language?), retains a meaning outside of its historical context, even *has* meaning only outside of that context. . . . Does this lead to conclusions that are always relativistic? that is, that will be overthrown by another time? No, if the philosophies in their integrality are a *question*, the interrogative thought which makes them speak is not overcome by what will come later (Lefort on Machiavelli). (VI 199)

This is crucial because Merleau-Ponty's "interrogative thought" speaks directly of liberalism very little and never graciously prior to *The Adventures of the Dialectic*. We begin with the little that he does say.

Can it be maintained that there is a Merleau-Pontean liberal ontology? The humanist path through phenomenology and Marx and the exhaustion of phenomenology and Marx to liberalism is perhaps the most critical, the most *dis-enchanting*, the most *dis-illusioning* - of liberalism's humanist illusions no less than of Marx's humanist illusions - path that exists. This is to say that Merleau-Ponty's work is nowise consistent with liberalism as a collection of positive theses that might be voted upon or more simply instituted if one only had the power. It is nowise consistent with liberalism misconstrued as that mawkish, muddled, mildly socialist *politique* frequented by American intellectuals.² Merleau-Ponty's work is consistent with liberalism as interrogation, as thought and doubt about man, as thought and doubt about rational or civil man, as thought and doubt about the liberal interrogation of political man. Merleau-Ponty tells us what his "new liberalism" (AD 225) is not:

it is not a question of returning to an optimistic and superficial philosophy which reduces the history of a society to speculative conflicts of opinion, political struggle to exchanges of views on clearly posed problems, and the coexistence of men to relations of fellow citizens in the political empyrean. (AD 225)

Merleau-Ponty does not say whom he and Marx might have in mind. When he adds that this "kind of liberalism is no longer practised anywhere" (AD 225), we wonder if it ever was. Or more precisely, the one place where it strikes us as existing - not in F. A.

Hayek, not in Lord Acton, certainly not in the practice and thought of James Madison and Thomas Jefferson - is in the thought of academics utterly removed from anything resembling the terrain of politics, among them Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls, in the thought of academics working, as it were, from behind a veil of self-imposed ignorance.

Whatever the case in this regard, Merleau-Pontean liberalism starts from *and remains with* Montesquieu's "separation and balance of powers" (S 348). This, Merleau-Ponty insists in the essay "On May 13, 1958," is not to say that the words of Montesquieu are some sort of religious incantation by which France might be saved from the problems of the Fourth Republic, from its lack of leadership, of "genuine strength and personality" (S 348-9), of "initiative, movement, and novelty" (S 344), culminating in the military rebellion and threat of civil war that is the Algerian Crisis. The separation of powers, and "the citizen's permanent polemic against those in power" made possible by the separation, is no solution. (S 348) Merleau-Ponty asks, "what do checks and balances mean when there is no longer any action to check and balance?" (S 348) The separation and balance of powers is merely that without which no solution is possible. It is what Charles de Gaulle must creatively take up anew if there is to be a Fifth Republic that does not reincarnate the Fourth Republic's irrationalism, its "politics of decadence," which threatens to "rot tomorrow's institutions as well as yesterday's" (S 337). Merleau-Ponty says: "Today it is necessary in continuing the criticism, to reorganize the power." (S 348) But does de Gaulle understand the subtlety of this? Is he capable of differentially articulating that reversible *chiasm* of criticism and action, of legitimacy and power, that

is France's hope? Having noted that de Gaulle's sense of the political is "far less personal and original than he is himself" (S 344), Merleau-Ponty says:

This communication between the statesman and the nation, which . . . no longer submits to a destiny but recognizes itself in what is done in its name - there, I greatly fear, is something that General de Gaulle has never known or felt, except in the 'great circumstances' of 1940 and 1944. . . . It would take a lot to rob me of the respect I bear for General de Gaulle. But we owe him something other and better than devotion: we owe him our opinion. He is too young to be our father, and we are too old to act like children. (S 345)

What Merleau-Ponty fears - not as the return of fascism, but as the return of the Fourth Republic's political void only differently - is de Gaulle's "metaphysics of the arbitrator and the people, one above and the other beyond parties" (S 344), each cut of different fabric - nowise of one interrogative, communicative *flesh*. Merleau-Ponty says: "I am afraid that between the arbitrator's secret mediation and the muffled response of the referendum, French politics will lack air as much as or more than before." (S 344) Merleau-Ponty bluntly, almost unconditionally, states his commitment - and it was precisely the lack of this from all sides that was the Fourth Republic's death - to liberalism: "What General de Gaulle does not admit to himself, or does not say to Frenchmen, is that if there are solutions they are all liberal." (S 346)

Merleau-Pontean liberalism starts from *and remains with* Parliament. In a statement addressed to his Party friends, but not only to them, to France's Socialists, to her Right, to de Gaulle, to all who in one way or another through their non-commitment to Parliament denigrated the institution, Merleau-Ponty says:

As for the limitations of parliamentary and democratic action, there are those which result from the institution, and they should be accepted, for Parliament is the only known institution that guarantees a minimum of opposition and of truth. (AD 226)

This is not to say that Parliament is the only solution. Merleau-Ponty insists "that there must be a means of exceptional action for the proletarian class, the strike" (AD 225). We might add that there must be a means of exceptional action for the bourgeoisie, tax revolt, for the accused, the judiciary, for individuals and groups, the call for rights and civil disobedience, for the victim of Parliament, the Supreme court, for sober second thought, the executive veto, for the Republic itself, constitutional reform, and for the very space of the political, revolution. Concerning revolution however, let it be noted that those revolutions which have succeeded or were presumptive of success did not start by envisioning themselves as revolutions, as the American Revolution, the fall of the East and Tiananmen Square demonstrate. France knew too well what she was looking for and consequently required nearly two centuries of repeated quasi-interrogations for it to find her. Such is also the case with Russia, with the difference that she is yet to be found by what she is looking for.³ As Merleau-Ponty says in 1958, Parliament is not only not the only solution, it is no solution at all to the problems of the Fourth Republic. It is precisely the paralysis of Parliament, the "paralysis of liberal government, and the erosion of powers" that is the Fourth Republic's problem. (S 340) He says that the "Fourth Republic will not be reborn" and that "it is not worth regretting, having been only the shadow of a republic." (S 348) Nevertheless, that the Algerian Crisis is resolved through

de Gaulle's imposition of "a liberal policy" not *merely* in exchange for the "consolation" of giving "in to a general" rather than to the "Left-wing government" from which it is borrowed, *but* in exchange for a general "anti-parliamentarian gong-beat," is profoundly disturbing to Merleau-Ponty. (S 344) It is so because what "falsified democracy" (S 346), what paralysed Parliament and the liberal institutions on loan to the Fourth Republic, is not being thought. And worse, it is not being thought by making that without which "a minimum of opposition and of truth" is not possible, the scapegoat. Without Parliament, there is no hope of a Fifth Republic. Merleau-Ponty, perhaps extravagantly, deems there to be at this moment "no longer any theoretical or practical freedom in France." (S 348) But what is fascinating is his diagnosis of this long prepared crisis:

The French crisis is a result of the fact that if there is a solution to our problems it is a liberal one . . . We are living on the leftovers of eighteenth-century thought, and it has to be reconstructed from top to bottom. (S 348)

This is to say that liberalism cannot *qua* religious incarnation exorcise the ghosts that haunt the Fourth Republic, but that liberalism is that without which there is no hope. If you ask me where is political man, he is here. Or more precisely, he failed to be here in the Fourth Republic, necessitating the extraordinary and risky signing over of France's hope to de Gaulle once more. Who says history does not repeat itself? Liberalism as an institution and stage is only as good as the political actors who play on it. They must constantly take it up anew if it is to live, and this is precisely what they failed to do.

Who were these absentee political actors? France's democratic malaise,

Merleau-Ponty says, does not, contrary to de Gaulle, have its source in "the diversity of parties and the 'division of Frenchmen'" (S 346). The democratic malaise has its source in the lack of significative differences between the parties once they have abstracted themselves from the political terrain of France. One recalls the economist who demonstrates that under analysis capitalism and communism are formally the same. The problem is that no one lives them, nor do they themselves live, under such abstraction.⁴ Merleau-Ponty observes: "from Tamanrasset to Dunkirk, we see only Frenchmen who are daydreaming, creating intoxicating situations in order to forget the real problems, and going straight to a sort of political nothingness rather than a civil war." (S 337) Politics in France was dying from (unthought) abstraction, something that the Anglo-Saxon world with its (unthought) 'common sense' has never given itself over to in the way the French do and the Germans do differently.⁵ Merleau-Ponty says: "Democracy was falsified by the Right's political indigence coupled with a reeling Communist policy" (S 347). To summarize his account, the Right, without ideas, defined itself as the absolute Other of the Communists, who, with their abstract ideas, defined themselves as the absolute Other of the bourgeoisie and so of past and present France, with the Socialists being torn between joining the Communists in their political *elsewhere* and a policy of reform equally null and void before both the Communists who were simply not interested and the Right who rejected anything coming from the Left on principle. (S 337-350) This, Merleau-Ponty says, "has gotten French politics assigned to unreality and condemned it to paralysis." (S 347) De Gaulle see the problem, but backwards. He "calls *party rule*

into question," proposing "union outside of parties." (S 345) But this, or at least *dis-union* outside of parties, is already a *fait accompli* and the very problem. There "*are no longer parties*" Merleau-Ponty says; there "are '*pressure groups*.'" (S 347) Left and Right "exercised joint pressures on the régime and together overturned ministries, but neither accepted responsibility for French political life." (S 347) Let us not, however, say that this problem comes to democracy from outside, from Algeria or Marx. The French Right and the French Communists are, after all, of France and of the French democracy. This is problem of French democracy, of democracy in general. This is the problem of an entire generation of French Rightists, of a fear mongering bourgeoisie, who could only hate their fellows and conspire to formally - but certainly not democratically - remove the Party from the terrain that it had already, for all intensive purposes, abandoned.⁶ This is the problem of an entire generation of French workers and French philosophers who could not raise themselves, or to be precise, the latter discouraged the former, so as to recall the Party from the future to the terrain of France. (S 340) This is the problem of those who bear the mantle of leadership, of de Gaulle. Merleau-Ponty observes that de Gaulle has been led in recent years by an undifferentiated "polemic against the 'system' . . . to refuse to take part when some republicans were trying to tear the Republic out of its political nothingness - and more recently to refuse to repudiate the movement at Algiers." (S 344) As Merleau-Ponty says, and not just in regard to de Gaulle, "if the 'system' is Evil, all that tends to destroy it [is] relatively justified." (S 344) *Signs* ends with a question: "Where are the counsellors of the people, and have they nothing to offer

us but [the political self-effacement of] their regrets?" (350)

Merleau-Pontean liberalism begins with *but takes up anew* Weber's liberalism.

Weber's liberalism, Merleau-Ponty says,

is brand new because he admits that truth always leaves a margin of doubt, that it does not exhaust the reality of the past and still less that of the present, that history is the natural seat of violence. (AD 9)

Merleau-Ponty insists upon the originality of Weber: he "heralds an epoch in which liberalism is conscious of its own limitations, recognizing that action, even in its liberal forms, contains an element of force" (TD 24-5); he is the moment "when liberalism stops believing in eternal harmony, legitimizes its adversaries, and conceives itself as a task." (AD 7) If it is in Weber's history that Merleau-Ponty finds a politics that is the end of France's abstract Left, it is in his liberalism that Merleau-Ponty finds a politics that is the end of France's abstract Right:

It recognizes the rights of its adversaries, refuses to hate them, does not try to avoid confronting them, and, in order to refute them, relies only upon their own contradictions and upon discussions which exposes them. Though [Weber] rejects nationalism, communism, and pacifism, he does not want them outlawed. (AD 26)

This liberalism, as Merleau-Ponty says, "lets even what contests it enter its universe, and is justified in its own eyes only when it understands its opposition" (AD 226), which is not to say that it is aimed at consensus, that it can always justify itself, *a la* Habermas, in the eyes of the other. But at least it does not delude itself, it "does not demand a political empyrean, it does not consider the formal universe of democracy to be an absolute" (AD 26). What Merleau-Ponty says in taking up Weber's liberalism as his own

and in combination with what he has said of liberalism on the terrain of France, persuades us that there is indeed a Merleau-Pontean liberalism, that Merleau-Ponty understands liberalism very well, and understands it very well without having read very much of it. Perhaps in Weber the themes of liberalism are drawn together as nowhere before . . . perhaps. But a great many of them are to be found in the thought and even more so the practice of the political actors of 1775 who began an advent that continues to grow as the place of our political world's inscription. Merleau-Ponty himself says that it is only in theory that "parliamentary institutions" are founded on "classical liberalism" (TD 24). Since the brief history of their Parliaments, founded before much of classical liberalism was written and being very much of a religious origin, was not entirely lost to the Thirteen Colonists, we should think that the best of them were not unaware of this and much else besides. But if the American Revolution was among those liberal texts that Merleau-Ponty never opened, he at least realized that "Parliament" and the "French Revolution," as much as "Vermeer," were "institutions," were an instituting of "a structure" or "a style," and in particular, a "modulation of [human] relations." (S 61) The French Revolution, he says, "precipitated and transformed into institutions, into acquisitions, a new idea of social relations." (AD 220) Or at least it was the mutation that opened a space wherein France would long struggle to do this. But what exactly is this new idea or style? What exactly does the regicide mean for political space? Merleau-Ponty does not say. We meet the silence of his death.

Let us present the last traces that Merleau-Ponty leaves us of Merleau-Pontean

liberalism. In *The Adventures of the Dialectic* he concludes that "there is no dialectic without freedom." (227) In *Signs* he says that there "is no freedom in submission to each shiver of opinion." (349) Freedom "requires something substantial; it requires a State, which bears it and which it gives life to." (S 349) This, Merleau-Ponty says, implies an institutional analysis beyond a limiting "philosophy of judgement and decision" (S 349). Among his last political words, he expresses the hope that his philosophy "will inspire a politics." (TD 12) And perhaps most interesting of all, he admits that the classes are all but dead, asking "what will make us *wise and profound in spite of ourselves* as the classes once did" (TD 13), suggesting that the "chaos of our politics may be derived from the disappearance of a ruling class." (TD 13) It was Alexandre Kojève who, rather more extravagantly, raised this point, stunning the French Left by declaring that Marx's classless society had been realized - it was America. Perhaps Merleau-Ponty's last political word to us, found in a working note, is this:

No *absolute* difference . . . between philosophy or the transcendental and the empirical . . . the ontological and the ontic. No absolutely pure philosophical word. No purely philosophical politics . . . no philosophical rigorism . . . Yet philosophy is not immediately non-philosophy . . . which would reduce history to the visible, would deprive it of its depth under the pretext of adhering to it better: irrationalism, *Lebensphilosophie*, fascism and communism, which do indeed have philosophical meaning, but hidden from themselves. (VI 266)

His last political word in particular insists on the *interrogative* intertwining of politics and philosophy, an intertwining that amounts to a liberal ontology and a politics of the *flesh*.

What might be drawn from these last traces by way of a 'detour' through the

work of Lefort and Flynn? Democracy, for Lefort, "is instituted and sustained by the *dissolution of the markers of certainty*."⁷ It is instituted by the symbolic regicide which kill the divine body of the king. This may or may not involve killing his corporeal body, which, if alone killed, fails to kill the king, the king's divine body surviving a mere assassination, taking another corporal body, usually the dauphin's, and rising once more, crowned yet again by the Church. The "*dissolution of the markers of certainty*" arrives when *the people* affirm the severing of their fate from the religious discourse that the king interprets to them through his divine body and as his *raison d'être*, discourse to whose authority even he is subject in the person of his corporal body, in his mortality. The king so understood, as presiding *over* the religious world from *within*, should remind us of someone. Drawing on Kantorowicz and his discussion of an anonymous 12th century Norman text in which the king is characterized as "a *twin person*, one descending from nature, the other from grace" (CM 81), Flynn traces the history of this institution:

The doubling of the body is an effect of the grace of consecration by which the king is inserted in a chain which leads back to Christ but does not really originate with him, because, according to the anonymous Norman, the kings of Israel also participated in this doubling; however, not as representatives of Christ but rather as anticipation of him. (CM 81)

Flynn, thickening the plot further, notes that what "was most scandalous to the thinkers of the Enlightenment" was nothing other than "the doctrine of Christianity" and, in particular, "the belief that man Jesus was the Son of God." (CM 180) Why? Without looking too closely, the Enlightenment understood all too well what Christ and his

representatives, the Pope and the king, meant. Flynn says: "to believe in the divinity of Christ would be to admit that reason submits itself to authority, to heteronomy." (CM 180) Christ, with a divine body *and* a mortal body, presides *over* the religious world *only* from *within*. Christ is no voyeur. He is born of woman and dies with men, the voice of God - reason - everywhere submitting to the style of the carnal, to the institutional authority of this world, even if it is but a shadowy reflection of the next. Flynn says, and this is why Lefort raises the matter in the first place, the "figure of the God-man would constitute a radical obstacle to the project of reason's immanence to itself." (CM 180) To admit to being caught up in this historical advent would be to admit that reason, like freedom, requires something "substantial," that reason not only was inscribed *within* institutional authority, but still is, though differently now, for there is no longer an origin and "permanent ends" (CM 191), no longer the gold standard of religion. This is "the chaos of our politics," which, as Merleau-Ponty said elsewhere, is a "communication . . . which . . . no longer submits to a destiny but recognizes itself in what is done in its name." It is the chaos of a politics which, as Flynn says, "forms its own image of itself historically," wherein its "image" remains "floating" (CM 191), wherein, as with paper money, too much may be printed in the name of *the people* or not enough, bringing on inflationary crises of legitimacy and deflationary crises of inaction. And as the Austrian school of Economics, as much as Merleau-Ponty's study of the Fourth Republic shows, the pair tend to feed off each other.

The God-man, and representatives, mediates between God and man, between

transcendent and carnal, between the place of the Other and society. Between these pairs there is less a reversible *chiasm* than a relation of shadowy *re-presentation*. We can ask, with Marx, which is a *re-presentation* of which, though this merely put things on their head. The Christian as well as the philosopher who took Plato's Cave as it was intended - literally - could not.⁸ It is by grace of this mediation between transcendent and carnal, Flynn says, that "social divisions - the articulation of law, power, and knowledge - are determined from *another place*." (CM 187) The mediation lends God a state whereupon his divine law, power and knowledge are reflected, and lends man law, power and knowledge which basks in the legitimacy and certainty of divine reflection. Drawing upon Lefort, Flynn says:

Religious discourse fixes social determinations as natural and dissimulates 'social division in the representation of a division which is massively affirmed - in the representation, that is, of another world, of a materialized invisible.'⁹

This "invisible" is not that of Merleau-Ponty, but a transcendent invisible, an external or *re-presented* invisible, a presence elsewhere. Here the symbolic systems of law, power and knowledge constitute a symbolic system of social divisions that belongs to the Other as the *positings* of the Other, religious discourse having a *subject*, unlike historical discourse, or at least Merleau-Ponty's *flesh* of history. And these *positings*, the social divisions - the articulation of law, power and knowledge - "are certain," Flynn says, "in that no discourse can contest them." (CM 187) It has been said that man is not free outside of society. This goes further. Man is not man outside of society. Outside of the

religious state, when this is where society is, he is but a wolf. This symbolic system constitutes the very space in which man lives and reasons, a space whose fundamental contours only the Pope and the king plus their invested servants, the priests and the bureaucrats, may in any way alter through the interpretation of the divine from *within* the very religious discourse of the divine. Flynn insists that the Pope or the "king as the mediator between the body politic and the divine is not a theory." (CM 181) Rather this mediation "opens the very space in which one can distinguish between the true and the false in social and political discourse." (CM 181) Religious discourse is "the social space within which class conflicts can operate and within which one can distinguish between the legitimate and illegitimate uses of power." (CM 181) Flynn notes: "Religion poses, in its own way, the non-identity of society with itself, the *écart* which defers society's identity with itself." (CM 187) The religion state, as the body of the Pope or as the body of the king¹⁰, is a body of law, power and knowledge that by not being identical with itself - being man and Other - is open to interpret and reason upon itself, is a freedom or a reason *within* religious discourse, a freedom or a reason *within* institutional authority.

That the Pope and the king are irrefutable is no guarantee that all will not implode or secondary elements steal the show. The Pope and king must respond, must exercise freedom and reason, must take up anew law, power and knowledge to maintain the integrity of the divine *re-presented* on Earth, keeping secondary elements in their place, ensuring the unity and the vital meaning of the ensemble. That the Enlightenment was thinkable, that thinkers such as Kant could demand that the use of reason be made

public (CM 180) - which amounts to, if not demanded with subtly, an undifferentiated attack on reason *within* institutional authority - shows how far law, power and knowledge had, by his time, managed to re-inscribe themselves *within* religion and *within* the state, and in one exceptional instance outside the state, *but* in defiance to both the Pope and the king. Protestantism is an instance of the re-inscription of law, power and knowledge *within* religion *but* in defiance to the Pope as well as to the king.¹¹ Protestantism colonizing economy is an instance of their re-inscription *within* the state *but* in defiance to the king as well as to the Pope.¹² And Protestant sects fleeing to colonize the wilds of America, where a constitutional tradition will be born of religious compacts,¹³ is the exceptional instance of their re-inscription *within* religion alone beyond the state. But why start with the Reformation when there is the Renaissance? The Renaissance is most politically significant, looking back, for it is there that secular knowledge and secular art before it, both indebted to the flood of pre-Christian antiquity brought out of the fall of Constantinople, have their beginning in the unruly inscriptions of such politically ambivalent figures as da Vinci, Machiavelli and Galileo. Can the interpretation of divine law, power and knowledge lodge these figures within the Church without them being the advent of disharmonious secondary elements that threaten to de-centre the system's very meaning? The Church seems to have had a problem only with Galileo. But perhaps the Church could have taught science subtly and science have remained peaceably lodged in the Church for a time. The Jesuits tried, but Galileo was not interested. He insisted on an interpretation that contradicted the scriptures, insisted that his discourse was no mere

method, that it, as much as religious discourse, was in the business of *re-presentation*, and so implied a rival discourse opening upon nature as a rival god. The persons of da Vinci and Machiavelli may have slipped by unnoticed, but was not their work the advent of more dangerous questions? That the French Revolution could find nothing better to do with the Louvre than turn into an art museum and that it becomes the adoptive and secular home of the Renaissance Masters by way of Napoleon, says something, especially when a collection of the nation's new technology was awarded nothing more than the religious edifices of St-Martin-des-Champs. Da Vinci and Machiavelli posed their questions to the visible too well, discerning in it a depth that was not elsewhere but that structured the field, thereby threatening the very coherency of *re-presentation*, calling forth works that interrogate painting and politics without begging the question by presuming that these fields will ultimately say God. If you like, they are the humanists of the Renaissance, but their humanism is restrained, almost silent. In Luther and his disciplines this almost silent humanism joins forces with a nascent scientism. These Catholic interpreters of the divine - men best placed to change the fundamental contours of the world - submit the Church itself to an interrogation, to a phenomenology that everywhere, or at least in more places than the Pope can admit, fails to find God, and so they end up seeking a rival, much more distant God, through a 'rationalizing' of religious discourse that "coherently deforms" the very meaning of the symbolic system, tearing it in the North from the hands of the Pope and the Catholic king. But it is only the symbolic regicide enacted by the Thirteen Colonists and repeated by the French after

them, as the last act in a fabulous history of choices, that makes it be that Luther, the Italian Renaissance figures, even the fall of Constantinople and the arrival of Greek antiquity, are of one politico-historic *flesh*.

What exactly does the symbolic regicide mean for political space? If the blow struck by the Thirteen Colonies is, looking back, long prepared, foreshadowed by nothing less than a symbolic papicide, the blow in France *seems* to come from nowhere, falling with incomprehensible swiftness. What man *re-presents*, the transcendent, a massively affirmed presence elsewhere, is cut away with the head of Louis XVI. The treasures of the Church are pillaged and its property nationalized as if both were only so much gold, for torn from their place in religious symbolism, they are but secular significances in the symbolic system of political economy. What becomes of social divisions - the articulation of law, power, and knowledge - no longer "determined from *another place*"? The regicide, Flynn says, constitutes "an erosion of all guarantees of certainty for social division." (CM 187) This is not to say anything goes. Certain solutions are impossible and others possible only through the work of political man taking up differently the symbolic system of the lingering religious state that *seems* to be only so many ruins awaiting the unending night of history. The symbolic regicide, however, is a mutation, not an end of the symbolic system. Flynn says: "the place of social identity becomes an empty place." (CM 187) Promethean reasoning, reasoning that would put man in the place of the dead king, counts among the impossible solutions. This reasoning, having "noted the disappearance of discourse on 'another place,' . . . concludes that society is

intelligible radically in terms of itself." (CM 189). What it misses is that the regicide "effaces the *figure* but not the *dimension of the Other*." (CM 189) The religious state and religious discourse returns, minus its positing subject, as the democratic state and democratic discourse. The Other is disincarnated, destroyed as an object, no longer a presence elsewhere that man might *re-present*, returning as the indeterminate place or field wherein political man is inscribed. Before the regicide there was the visible, man, the invisible, the Other, and their 'point' of mediation, the king. The regicide cuts away the transcendent, the external or *re-presented* invisible, introducing a more subtle relation wherein man and the Other are no longer opposed as Sartrean subjects, each threatening to reduce the other to an object.¹⁴ The regicide instigates nothing less than a more subtle weave of the visible and invisible wherein *the people* are not more visible than invisible. Flynn says: "The source of legitimacy in a democratic regime is *the people*; but the people remains indeterminate." (CM 190).

Political man invokes the *people*, but this is always presumptive. Here we find Weber's "margin of doubt," or better, Merleau-Ponty's "chaos." The Pope or the king as mediator between the visible and the external invisible is irrefutable. On the contrary, political man, of whatever class or party, constantly risks being wrong, risks being out of touch with *the people*, and being dealt with accordingly, democratically, within the style of the institution. But when he succeeds in speaking and acting in the name of *the people*, we find the same sort of unity *within* difference through unending interrogation that makes there be one history. There can be a nation if political man makes and re-

makes all the 'right' separations (*écarts*) - each embodied in the thickness of an institution and all intertwined into a reversible chiasmic ensemble of action and criticism, of power and legitimacy - so as to constitute authority wherein political man remains free to submit authority to unending criticism and interrogation.

This instituting of unending criticism and interrogation is the difference between symbolic regicide, totalitarianism and democracy. Symbolic regicide merely effects the "*dissolution of the markers of certainty*." Totalitarianism - regretting not the regicide but its meaning, the "*dissolution of the markers of certainty*" and so secretly wishing to be a new religion - is not merely the wish to restore "*the markers of certainty*" but the actual illusion of doing so, the illusion of being certainty's second coming, of driving chaos back to Hell, of being the absolute Other and rationalizer of capitalism or of Bolshevism, for an ever more profound silence accompanies the power accumulated in the name of certainty, power's accumulation being the destruction not of chaos but of the separations of power that are the very instituting of communication, of public criticism and interrogation.¹⁵ Democracy, on the contrary, aims to lead a civil, sustainable, interrogative, communicative life *within* the chaos that is the "*dissolution of the markers of certainty*" and by way of its instituting of unending criticism and interrogation. This chaos *within* institutional authority, this action that submits itself to criticism as one continued institutional advent, is precisely the institutional politics Merleau-Ponty called for beyond not only "each shiver of opinion" and a limiting "philosophy of judgement and decision," but beyond the "limiting-idea" of coinciding, transparent rationality. This

action which submits itself to criticism as one continued institutional advent is something with "thickness," something "substantial," and not only in the person of State, in person of Parliament, in person of liberal tradition, but in the persons of - when they are at their best - a presidential term of office and a political man's *politique*.

Do statesmen still exist? Perhaps they are among us and it is the task of history to name them. We do not have such a high opinion of political man today - neither in his votes in Parliament nor at election time - but neither do we think that political men are all dogs, either too young and stupid or too old and set in their ways to learn old tricks differently. Merleau-Ponty, in his worries about how political man, and de Gaulle in particular, will take up anew and breathe life into liberalism, leaves us traces of what his philosophically inspired liberal ontology of political man is and is not. Among other things, political man, when in power, "rules," Merleau-Ponty says, by which he means,

draws along and transform the country in action, instead of leaving it as it is and behind its back conceiving of a grand political design which [he] do[es] not try to convince it about but simply invite[s] it to say yes to. (S 345)

Merleau-Pontean liberal ontology permits no short cuts through personalities, even if great personalities, bearing mantles of authority borrowed from other spheres, are sometimes the only hope of articulating differently, differentially, the longer paths through liberal tradition. De Gaulle, Merleau-Ponty says, "is not changing the life of France, because that is not the business of one man *alone*, because one man alone always has too simple an idea of the system." (S 338) But Merleau-Ponty also insists that a great many "stupid

things are said against 'personal power' or 'strong power'" (S 348). History will have to decide whether de Gaulle, in differentially articulating a Fifth Republic, rose above the "metaphysic of the arbitrator and the people, one above and the other beyond parties" to give France the communicative space that it needed. Jacques Chirac, the Fifth Republic's latest President, has expressed symbolically, and in more than one way, a favourable judgement on de Gaulle. But history awaits Chirac too. As for American personalities, Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton understood - and that by itself is worth something - that communication with the *people* is the Republic's hope. And to see a vice-president, let alone a Democratic one, defending Free Trade to *the people*, to see an actual campaign that organizes the public use of reason in the face of a metaphysician of arbitration, is proof that all is far from lost.¹⁶ Perhaps what is most clear in Merleau-Ponty's position concerning Merleau-Pontean liberalism is that in one sense Marx's critique of formal democracy could not be more right. The institution of liberalism solves nothing. It is man who solves things.

But let us understand this time what this means and does not mean. The man who solves his plights is political man. And political man is of a symbolic space, of a political *flesh* that is nowise reducible to self or society. This political *flesh* is where rational, civil, interested, opposed, divided institutions - among them individuals and groups - are inscribed. If it is political man who takes his plight in hand, he does so only through the Other of difference, through his inscription in the symbolism of the political, an inscription that leaves him open to this very symbolism by his not being identical with

it or it being identical with him. Democracy, inscribed within the advent of the religious state, inherits, takes over, transforms and mutates, "the non-identity of society with itself, the *écart* which defers society's identity with itself." When political man forgets that his politics is a mediated politics, that it is not and cannot be a pure politics, he multiplies his plights and throws "away the arms of critical thought." (TD 7) Merleau-Ponty observes that "society is not transparent even for Marxists," and consequently the "'suppression' of philosophy would be historically false." (TD 7) Since Marx wished to be an ideal politics that would deliver us from politics to ourselves - to an end of politics - that has since failed, the suppression of liberalism would not only be "historically false," it might be, as Merleau-Ponty came to realize, deadly.

Liberalism is the place where man seeks solutions. In what we admit is a tragic, wonderfully ambivalent statement, Merleau-Ponty says:

To estimate the real costs of production, needs, and possibilities of consumption, the market economy is a worn-out tool adapted in a muddling way to unforeseen practices. It is the only one available so far. (S 307)

Merleau-Ponty's sobering interrogation of the Khrushchev Period's quasi-reflections convinces him that "planning does not plan." (S 301) It convinces him that there is no future in a régime wherein "dictatorship is asked to challenge itself without letting itself be eliminated, and the proletariat to liberate itself without rejecting the dictatorship's check on it." (S 302) There is not a reversible intertwining of power and legitimacy either politically or economically in communism. Merleau-Ponty says:

The system is torn between its two principles (the Party is always right and no one can be right in opposition to the proletariat) because the exchange between Party and proletariat, and the revolutionary mediation, have not functioned. (S 287)

And he does not believe they can function. The tragic-comedy of Marx's choice of Promethean rationalism is perhaps simply that "there can be no mediation by dictatorship, no mediating dictatorship, no authoritarian historical creation." (S 291) And for a simple reason, man is not the root, reason submits to institutional authority, reason is not at one with itself, is yet another "coïncidence différ  ."

We would end with a question. Lefort and Flynn argue that "psychoanalysis is inextricably linked to the disappearance of any form of certitude generated by a relation to the [divine] world." (CM 186) This is to say that psychoanalysis is inscribed in political space, in the democratic advent, that it is the fruit of the affinity of choices that come together in the symbolic regicide. To be radical would be to ask: just as Christ was born of woman, was not the *flesh* born of the political, is not the *flesh* - even in taking it up differently, differentially - *of* politics, *of* history, *of* the American and French Revolutions? Would this not be the price of "intra-ontology?" If so, the political returns not so much at the heart of philosophy as in all that the philosopher would say. This would be a responsibility condemning philosophers to ever vigilant "political *virtue*" (S 211). Philosophers would have to give up their political faiths, would have to wake up and think, would have to accept responsibility for the political *flesh* from which they speak.

1. Merleau-Ponty admits in the 1960: "What we call disorder and ruin, others who are younger live as the natural order of things; and perhaps with their ingenuity they are going to govern it precisely because they no longer seek their bearings where we took ours." (23) An example of a symbolic system wherein Merleau-Ponty saw only "disorder and ruin," yet that has been taken up by Madison in a Merleau-Pontean style, is market economy. But as we shall see, Merleau-Ponty still has surprising and carefully overlooked words for those who believe that what remains undying is his scorn of capitalism.
2. We might add that the relevance of this academic *politique* barely exceeds the academic votes the Democrats may have by repeating political nonsense that they, as politicians, wisely forget after elections. This is not to mourn the cause of the Republicans, but the cause of the Republic. This is not to pronounce free thought dead among America's academics, but to criticize its uncritical, self-destructive exercise. What is the source of this political stupidity among otherwise thoughtful, and well paid to be that, people?
3. In a working note, Merleau-Ponty broaches an understanding of philosophy, literature and politics of the *flesh* wherein each is not "total and active grasp, intellectual possession, since what there is to be grasped is a dispossession." (VI 266)
4. There is something to be learned from the fact that it took economists a fabulously long time to understand this, and in fact, some have yet to come to terms with it. It was the insight of the Austrian School of Economics, of von Mises but most of all Hayek, that economists, like Saussureans and objectivistic historians, are the prisoners of an overly abstract and, more crucially, profoundly unthought methodology.
5. We wonder if French and German idealism united in their difference with English empiricism can possibly be held together today in the sort of Europe one hears its leaders waxing on. The French seem to believe that the European Community is essentially a European Free Trade Pact, which belongs to the possible, and a permanent, prearranged alliance against America, the unity of which America and even smaller powers have quite easily reduced to difference. But this is not what the leaders say, as the English have long realized, a contradiction which tears the Tory party apart on a daily basis. The Germans may be determined to have Europe by consensus, unified currency and all, but this strikes us as the height of idealism, since no one has ever figured out how Germany's laudable monetary policy is ever to be unified, let alone in two years, with the insanity of its Italian counterpart, as Italians who took out loans valued in that absurdity called the European Monetary Unit can testify. Perhaps the only thing more idealistic than this is how the German and Italian mind, let alone all the others, can be united in their difference in long term policy that means and does something. We are mixing water and oil here. As for the

smaller countries, they look to extract as high an economic price as possible (Belgium is doing well) for running the risk, which they must lest they be shut out of the trade pact, of the cultural-political reduction to the same that neither the English nor the French will themselves put up with. But the French have yet to realize the risk. Perhaps their hesitation before open borders in the face of the banal risks of clandestine immigration and drug traffic, Amsterdam being a train ride away, belongs to a more profound awakening. It is the extreme French right, ironically and unfortunately, that is gaining the most by stating the obvious: the attempt by Eurocrats to bring French *brie* in line with 'proper' standards is no isolated incident; it is the Hegelian state testing the waters before it tries to swim. We expect it to sink. The same but different is not a political anything goes. We do not expect a violent break up, but something more farcical, as the French Revolution of 68 (1968) was a farcical, turned upside down return, Madison has observed, of the French Revolution of 89 (1789). In the end, perhaps something good will come of all this. The Thirteen Colonies - unified by a language and, to a degree, by a religious way of life - needed two tries to get the United States right. A United Europe will need at least as many.

6. S 347. America has known such reprehensible, anti-democratic thought in the paranoia of its Red Scares.
7. "The Question of Democracy," *Democracy and Political Theory*, trans. Macey (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 19 cited in CM 191.
8. Lest the reader protest that Plato's Cave was intended to be a metaphor, we would ask what this metaphor was supposed to bring to our attention? Was it not to bring to our attention how *things really were*, the literal? But was not how 'things really were' the work of Plato's metaphor and especially the work of drawing a distinction between the metaphoric and the literal, between metaphor and the content of metaphor? If this is so, the whole metaphor-literal distinction occults at the same time it constitutes *re-presentation*.
9. CM 187 & Lefort, Claude. "Outline of the Genesis of Ideology in Modern Societies," *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism*, ed. Thompson (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), p. 198.
10. Recall Louis XIV: *L'état, c'est moi*.
11. One can and should read the history of France not as a collection of kings strangely given to a mixture of Machiavellian, gratuitous, and fanatical violence against Protestants. It is the *histoire*, containing all three to be sure, of the Catholic king who would institute the law, power and knowledge of God, that is, the Catholic God, across the land. What Catherine de Medici could not achieve through her sons and the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre of the Protestant leaders, an attempt that went so badly astray that Henri de Navarre not only succeeded to the crown but some years later was able to tear from the

symbolic system an official place for his Protestant kin by way of the Edict of Nantes, Louis XIV, the Sun King, the king who was the height of the French monarchy, achieved with the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. It is with Louis XIV that history ends, and so re-begins differently.

12. The worship of money is a challenge issued to Heaven itself.
13. This compact tradition, contra contractarians, is between subjects who are rational not 'in and of themselves' but under merciless eyes of their God. If one strips them of their religious *flesh* and later their secular *flesh*, one is left with the dead who have not slightest need let alone ability to strike a compact. Such applications of vitriol are the effacement of not only religious and political man, but the Other.
14. Hence the Old Testament prohibitions concerning how man may look upon God. These are prohibition against a mortal gaze that would reduce God to and posit him as an object, as the work of a power of *re-presentation* belonging to the human subject. The New Testament gives man in the person of Christ an image of God that can be *re-presented*, for it is his corporeal body, which man shares, that licences the presumption, leaving God in his pure divinity untouched.
15. Merleau-Ponty, in "The U.S.S.R. and the Camps," sketches the growth of this uneasy silence - finally bursting forth in the voice of the revolution of 1989 - sketches the gradual transition from NI DIEU, NI ÉTAT, NI CAPITAL to NI CIVILIZATION: "It seems probable that the evolution which leads from October, 1917, to millions of slaves, and which beneath the permanence of forms or words gradually changes the system's meaning, happened little by little without deliberate intention, from crisis to crisis, expedient to expedient, and that its social significance escaped its own creators. Faced with the alternative, each time more imperious, of aggravating it [driving the remnants of public criticism and interrogation further underground] or disappearing politically [failing the absolute Other], they go on without understand [having deafened themselves] that the undertaking is changing beneath their hands. For lack of a background to see it against [only faith in the absolute Other - not criticism and interrogation], the best are no doubt astonished by these crisis of hatred [what criticism is reduced to] which come to them [by definition] from the capitalist world" (S 266) - from the outside, from the persistently lingering petty bourgeois mind.
16. But on the other hand, we are reminded of a sign from a recent march on Washington by the Women's Movement. The sign, protesting the Republican House and Senate, cut through all the political ambiguities to the heart of the problem by declaring that "the Republicans eat their babies." We are not sure which this falsifies more, the Republicans, the Democrats, the party system, the Women's Movement, public criticism or the very terrain and space - bought

with the lives an unthinkable large number of mothers' children - of politics. We are tempted to say the latter, for the author's presumption would seem to be that given the power the solution is clear. This is the sort of American liberalism that must stop. That it is conceivable that no one exercised the political freedom of telling the author something like this, and letting the author consider whether this sort of free expression is consistent with free expression, suggests *everywhere* an abysmal comprehension of what freedom is. Freedom may be the right to make an idiot of oneself in public as well as in Parliament. But it most certainly is not the right to be protected from being told that one is doing so. It has become impolite to tell people when they are behaving like idiots, except, of course, when we try to entrench definitions of idiocy in those rules of 'rationality' called political correctness. The false courage and irrationality of the second is the lack of courage, thought and political rationality of the first. Such rules would deprive us, for example, of a fine word that is welded to a history that must be taken up anew. We will not here defend the word "man" itself, but rather a word that neither "politician" nor "statesperson" can replace. "Statesman" is a promissory note with an entire symbolic order at its call. "Statesperson" calls an entirely different order forward, effacing, perhaps as intended, that of which we would speak.

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