

PROLEGOMENON FOR AN INVESTIGATION OF (THE) *FLESH*:  
CARNAL HINGE OF ONTOLOGY

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CARNAL HINGE OF ONTOLOGY

BY  
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For Ann,  
who was always immanent,  
and for our son, long awaited.  
Neither I thought any longer  
possible.

ABSTRACT

*FLESH: ONTOLOGY'S CARNAL HINGE*

—*It is very odd to say, there's a truly strange incoherence in saying man has a body... we have pushed to an extreme degree the identification of man with his knowledge. It is very strange to be localised in a body... which that idiot*  
*Descartes had cut in two—*

Jacques Lacan

—*[We must ask] what sense does to discourse if sense exceeds significations... in the sense of the assumption of a responsibility for and to this excess—*

Jean-Luc Nancy

—*hair standing on end, flesh laid bare with all the intellectual profundity of this spectacle of pure flesh and all its consequences for the senses... There is a mind in flesh, but a mind quick as lightning—*

Antonin Artaud

These three epigraphs suggest themes for the major divisions of this work (dialectics, the sensuous, and the poetic) and also function to foreground the ontological component within the broader tradition of existential phenomenology in the 20th century. Specifically I want to reflect upon the urgency of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical considerations of what he called *carnal* and *brute* ontology, new concepts which, it seems to me, warrant closer scrutiny and continue to provide deeper, more profound alternatives for contemporary critical philosophies. Merleau-Ponty's attempt to reconfigure the exhausted philosophical formulation of subject-object-meaning was cut short by his untimely death, leaving unfinished his critical work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, which described anew an ethics borne upon key notions of *divergence*, *reversibility*, *alterity* and (the) *flesh*.

I want to accomplish three things. (1) Take up the difficult problem of Merleau-Ponty's effort to reconcile the sense of consciousness and the sense of reality by exploring the manner in

which traditional philosophy treats the difficult issue of the nature/subject relationship. Merleau-Ponty's response is that these are not mutually exclusive terms but can be described as *intertwined in the chiasm*, and developed in a chapter of *The Visible and the Invisible* under the same heading. As Husserl had recognized before him the difficult if not impossible project for phenomenology is that it amounts to a choice of *being-subject* or *being-thing*. Thus, when Merleau-Ponty rejects the antinomial polarity of subject/object, he is required to reconsider the very language of philosophy or to exacerbate the paradox of philosophical expression's limit conditions. (2) Next, I want to show how the traditional debates pertaining to Merleau-Ponty's ontology and reversibility suggest a critical approach to sense—sense that, in the words of Jean-Luc Nancy, exceeds significations. This will have profound implications for my third and final section through which I hope to illustrate that the traditional dialectical ground framed in (1) fails to be adequate to the task of accounting for what has been called (the) *flesh*. (3) The last section will endeavour to denude (the) *flesh* from its definite article, and insists that this *bare* or *naked* term, in the words of Merleau-Ponty, constitutes a new and brute ontology or *wild Being*. Of course the question remains—mindful of Merleau-Ponty's own admonition that “there is no metaphor between the visible and the invisible”—Does (the) *flesh* merely become another metaphor for general *Being*? I want to conclude with the claim that the term *emblem* will provide not only a better understanding of (the) *flesh*, but also of Merleau-Ponty's own assertion that the presence of the world is precisely the presence of its *flesh* to my *flesh*; what is outside of the subject is already inscribed within its own corporicity, denotative ex-scription is the place (the) *flesh* already occupies, and is always already another. Within the broader context of continental philosophy in the 20th century, Merleau-Ponty's

application of the term (the) *flesh*—a term without equivalence in the history of philosophy—picks out of the carnage of this century the very *emblem* which compels us to rethink humankind and the humanist project in a deeper more penetrating manner.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The fallacy of correspondence is surely never more clearly marked than in the effort to adequately express one's gratitude for the generosity and tradition of mentorship. It seems always to be a failed enterprise—borne upon the very impoverishment and limits of language—to express one's indebtedness to those who represent the best of the tradition and hand it down secure in the knowledge one will keep it well. Prefaced with an apologia for such failings I express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Caroline Bayard, my principle supervisor, for her selfless generosity which has proven to be particularly inspiring given extraordinary circumstances. She remained critically engaged throughout and, among other things, proved to be scrupulous, meditative, impetuous, unwaveringly patient, she championed curiosity and most importantly remained inquisitive and open. I count Dr. Brigitte Sassen, my second reader, among those to whom I remain indebted for asking often challenging questions that provoked a deeper probing of my considerations. Finally, and by no means least, my third reader Dr. Gary B. Madison—who, so many years ago when I was an undergraduate student, introduced me to philosophy and was always a staunch supporter of my artistic endeavours—continues to be a central figure not only to my own philosophical development and work on Merleau-Ponty but should also be acknowledged as championing the forgotten primacy of the problem of first questions for phenomenological ontology.

Certainly no gesture of appreciation can be complete without acknowledging the

unmitigated altruism and tenacious support of family, in particular my father and mother. Their generation never enjoyed the privilege and opportunity of higher learning, they are not so much lovers of wisdom, but rather can show us the wisdom of loving.

And finally she who gives meaning to it all, my wife Ann...

*If we raised ennui... to the dignity of a deductive  
elegy, if we offered it the temptation of a  
glamorous sterility... the soul collapses into the  
flesh—and physiology becomes the last word of our  
philosophic*  
STUPORS

*I have never been able to find out what being means,  
except sometimes in eminently nonphilosophical*  
MOMENTS

*But rationality is neither a total nor an immediate  
guarantee. It is somehow open, which is to say it is*  
MENACED

*The computer, says Jeff Goldblum in a scene from  
David Cronenberg's *The Fly*, is giving us an  
interpretation of a steak rather than reproducing  
it... the flesh... the flesh should make the computer  
crazy like... like old ladies who pinch babies,  
something is lost in the*  
TRANSLATION

POETRY

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ONE

PRE-FACE

—*Incompletion, the wound, and the pain that has to be there if communication is to take place—*  
Georges Bataille

—*There was no one in him; behind his face—*  
Jorge Luis Borges

*Incompletion*, the face. It seems odd indeed that one is convoked to begin with forgetting—a *preface*—that which pre-figures, before embodiment, before carnality, before any brute appearances. It is precisely what the *preface* means for us to do—to make some-thing come into presence, that is, from *not-being*, no-thing<sup>1</sup> to being. And thus the question with which one is faced is whether such endeavour is possible. Is it not the case that, as Merleau-Ponty says,

It is still saying too much of nothingness to say that it *is not*, that is pure negation: that is to fix it in its negativity, to treat it as a sort of essence, to introduce the positivity of words into it, whereas it can count only as what has neither name, nor repose, nor nature. By principle, a philosophy of the negative cannot start from “pure” negation, nor make of it the agent of its own negation.<sup>2</sup>

Neither can a dialectical concept of the faceless, the unrepresentable or no-thing-ness (as a myth of beginnings or the ends of consciousness)<sup>3</sup> account for and express the sense one has of this (or

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<sup>1</sup> The terms some-thing and no-thing should be understood in its Platonic and Aristotelian formulation, that they are apodictic of *thingness* or its absence. For an example of the theories of how things come into being, see the work attributed to an eclectic Peripatetic, “De Melliso, Xenophane, Gorgia,” in *The Works of Aristotle*, W.D. Ross, ed., Vol. vi, 974a-980b, (London: Oxford University Press, 1913). Henceforth, both terms will appear without emphases.

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Claude Lefort, ed., Alphonso Lingis, tr., (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 88. Hereafter as *VI*. Later in my analysis I should also like to come back to this quotation and pose another, more difficult issue pertaining to the works of Walter Benjamin and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe. Both authors, in their own way, address the immensity of the problem of philosophy’s attempt at self-criticism.

<sup>3</sup> Emile Cioran’s collection of aphorisms, *The Trouble With Being Born*, illustrates this sentiment poignantly, “We have lost, being born, as much as we shall lose, dying. Everything.” Cioran, E.M., *The Trouble With Being Born*, Richard Howard, tr., (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1998), 56.

that) body—that one is *incorporated*, woven as Merleau-Ponty would say, into the fabric of the world,<sup>4</sup> the world's *flesh*. But there is however something which subordinates even the face (identity), interpellating a subject for whom the call arrives out of what is a primordial fecundity—it *necessarily* subordinates the sensuous con-figuration of the *real*, or coincidence with an identity-based post-phenomenological datum<sup>5</sup> as we shall *see*. Is it the case, that the *what is* before me, springs forth from a synthesis of the *that-there* before my brute existence, out of a truly nothing, an empty, pre-predicative silent abyss—a pre-face? Does not my pointing however—my use of *what is* (*what-ness* is the thing that *is*)—belie some *qualia* or signification which exceeds the fatuous claims of absolute beginnings *ex nihilo* as it already resides in the representation of apodicticity? My body's postural *dis-position* is not merely an object but a *means*, its “motor possibilities...for example, its perceptual deformations, are inscribed in primordial experience, *before all science*”<sup>6</sup> and, like phenomenological ontology, is not only before science, but also opens on the very question of *where* and most importantly *how* to begin.

But doesn't absence, or pre-figuration also occasion some-thing? This other side of identity and the *real* is a difficult paradox that needs to be carefully considered by looking at another example which might suggest what if anything, gives us some *sense* prior to the appearing of a body, an identity, the face. This *prior to* is something less, as impoverishment, though already too

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<sup>4</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, John Wild, ed., Richard McCleary, tr., (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 15, 167. See in particular his introduction. Hereafter indicated as *S*.

<sup>5</sup> Dorian Cairns, *Conversations with Husserl and Fink*, Richard M. Zaner, ed., (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976). The ultimate problem of phenomenology says Husserl, is the explication of the structure of the living present....In it we find the constitution of unity, but not identity. The latter requires active recollection. 92.

<sup>6</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Texts and Dialogues*, Hugh J. Silverman and James Barry Jr., eds., (London and New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1992), 164. Hereafter indicated as *TD*.

much for sense, surpassing it. Perhaps such an example might follow thusly, “[a] shipwrecked man who, washed ashore on an island and immediately noticing a gallows, instead of being alarmed was reassured.”<sup>7</sup> With delicious irony and calculated lucidity Emile Cioran—said to be Nietzsche’s last great disciple—brings us face-to-face, that is, *prima facie* with the seemingly double and contradictory demand for figuration even while his very *corpus* is elided. But how is it this spectre arises *ex nihilo* in the very absence of a face? After all what Cioran’s voyager comes upon is only a gallows. This haunting absence is, let us say, *impressed*, (a hollow) as the space between disappearance and arrival, though not a *nothing* it seems to be paradoxically enough by way of solicitation and provides a clue as to the minimum requirements for a robust ontology.<sup>8</sup> The question here is one of the *what* and *how* of appearances, what Husserl’s theory of the phenomenological reduction sought in first order appearances in the *hyletic flow* or brute material appearance<sup>9</sup>—while the more problematic term, *blosse Sachen* (bare or naked things), which to some extent follows from this, I will have to revisit later.<sup>10</sup> But for the vestigial evidence of his having passed

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<sup>7</sup> Cioran, *Being Drawn and Quartered*, Richard Howard, tr., (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> The term “impressed” or “impression” is specific to the purposes of my thesis, and one which, as the text will bear out, critical to an understanding of Merleau-Ponty’s concept of “ontological relief,” “incarnation,” and “flesh.” What is *impressed*, as I shall illustrate, has to do with a broader, more fundamental, and often overlooked concept in Merleau-Ponty’s thinking, that is, his notion of the *emblem* and all that this term subsumes in “The Intertwining—The Chiasm,” VI. See also S., 15, Merleau-Ponty says, “the table *presses* upon perception...*presses* upon every glance.” It is in this sense that the primacy of *what is* for consciousness can be construed by what I want to term a *robust ontology*.

<sup>9</sup> The major thrust of Husserl’s phenomenological reduction seeks first order causes (the hyletic flow) that give rise to consciousness. But in a strange inversion the external world gives rise not to an understanding that there is a primacy in perception, but rather emphasizes the thetic function, that the objects in our phenomenal field are intended by a conscious subject, that is, a projected noetic as-real and external. This is Husserl’s natural attitude, which, Merleau-Ponty illustrates is paradoxical and untenable, S., 164, and furthermore says of Husserl’s claim of intentionality, that it cannot function as a “transcendent preordination...or of an ‘institution of nature’ (in the Cartesian sense).” 167. See also S., 178-179 for Merleau-Ponty’s commentary on Husserl’s intentional analysis in *Ideen II* and the bind it leads to for Husserl’s phenomenology. Husserl’s early work sees these primary appearances as “hyletic data,” from the Greek *hule* meaning matter, the mere unformed materiality of things. It is Martin Heidegger’s 1939 paper, “On the Essence and Concept of *φύσις*,” in *Pathmarks*, William McNeill, ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), that sets the stage for how nature appears in its appearing as a function, not of the concept of *hule* but rather *morphe*, form. See section 4 for a more extensive explication.

<sup>10</sup> S., 162-163, although the text translates the key term *blosse Sachen* as simple things, I prefer the more

(into an irretrievable past—finitude), or his pending arrival (immanence), there is nothing to indicate an encounter with the human *per se*—only some spectral harbinger always-already configured elsewhere, offered up as human fragility and finitude in the *face* of the conditions from which one might obtain the possibility of a fundamental renewal of the onto-logic. It seems a peculiar phenomenon that the traveller would find reassurances in the very punitive device that marks the radical and absolute limit of the human; that is, the place of his finitude, the ritual spacing where the boundary conditions of law-founded *civitas* are enacted—a dialectic of inside and outside, friend and enemy, reason and barbarity. Now where one expects a vertiginous fear to grip the weary traveller, instead of *being alarmed*, he was *reassured*. The wanderer is in fact, and quite clearly *re-assured*; the prefix *re*, indicating a return or turning to some previous state. In the very exigencies of the doubling here evinced, there is already the sense of a *hinge*, of something returning—a coiling back upon and gathering. The threshold which delimits the chiasmic relationships of inside and outside, *ipseity* and alterity, oneself as another is grafted onto this very place I inhabit, the limen which *I am* as the sensing-sentient in the *ek-stasis* of the limits where the spectre of a world appears and meets me.<sup>11</sup> This limen is the place where language appears and touches sense. Furthermore, this unformed elemental renewal, “a meaning which is everywhere figural,”<sup>12</sup> is the boundary-transgressing *ek-stasis* of *wild Being* and recognizes, that “I shall never meet myself again.”<sup>13</sup> I shall never meet myself again because there is no identity which is immutably fixed

§ resonant ontological complexion of “bare or naked things/stuff.” Of course the ethical dimension of this translation is in keeping with what hereunder Giorgio Agamben has termed *bare life* in *Homo Sacer, Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Werner Hamacher and David Wellbery, eds., Daniel Heller-Roazen, tr., (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, Sandra Buckley, Michael Hardt, and Brian Massumi eds., Michael Hardt, tr., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 68.

<sup>12</sup> S., 181.

<sup>13</sup> Cioran, *A Short History of Decay*, Richard Howard, tr., (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1998), 61.

and which will guarantee the historicist with illusory correspondence. *He*, the *I-past*, who I have left behind, I will never again meet—nor will I ever in the pure immanence of an infinitely renewable present-passed that is always *other*. I am not it, nor is it with me, nor are we correspondent with the other, we merely recollect or express in lightning moments of lucidity where we have passed one another and have brushed against the other as a fluttering whisper against an open wound. Let's cease then to invoke identities when they tell one so little about the phenomenon—however fashionable it may seem in the current entitlement claims of a pluralist agenda—as they will have already taken one too far from *how* the *what* appears from the ontic register. In a remarkable phenomenological passage, Giorgio Agamben traces the movement from Heidegger to Merleau-Ponty, implying that the experience of the limit condition one is *is* a chiasmic intertwining, that is, “the experience of being-*within* an *outside*. This *ek-stasis* is the gift that singularity gathers from the empty hands of humanity”<sup>14</sup> and the always potential of my own enigmatic arrival, as another, which “is on the brink of everything, and addressed to no one,”<sup>15</sup> what is otherwise a *general manner of being*.<sup>16</sup>

Given the account I have briefly sketched above, what is the difference between *being is* and philosophy's double negation *nothingness is not*—between the *no-thing* of the *pre-face* (writing in the face of silence) and the immanence that always stands in relief (even as that immanence *stands* as an absence) a *no-body* on the empty gallows? Merleau-Ponty side-steps such formulas of totalizing thought and contends “One does not arouse being from nothingness, *ex*

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<sup>14</sup> Agamben, *Coming Community*, 68.

<sup>15</sup> Cioran, *Drawn and Quartered*, 169.

<sup>16</sup> *VI.*, 147.

*nihilo*... because there is something—a world, a something, which in order to be does not first have to nullify the nothing.”<sup>17</sup> Merleau-Ponty holds that meaning is everywhere figural, and that such “configurational meaning...is in no way indicated by its ‘theoretical meaning’....[others] were already there along with the simultaneity of things.”<sup>18</sup> Meaning, for Merleau-Ponty is always borne upon the “fabric of the perceptible world...the flesh of my flesh....[a] distance [that is at once] a strange proximity,”<sup>19</sup> a figure-ground relationship. What then, makes it possible to excavate the *what* and *how* of appearances? The *there is* (*something-as-appearing*) is the principle foundation for the ontological, whose defining moment is not philosophy’s ubiquitous meditation upon the negative that is, nothingness is not, but rather a field of appearances cast into relief for a consciousness. Like Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Luc Nancy too understands how *Being* is exigently cast and maintains “The *sense of ‘being’* is the transmission of the act that *there is*.”<sup>20</sup> And it is to the notion of casting and relief, or a *casting into relief* that I shall return in due course.

There are three major themes suggesting divisions of my work—dialectics, phenomenal appearing, and the impoverishment of the carnal-poetic—while the latter functions to foreground the ontological component within the broader tradition of existential phenomenology in the 20th century—adumbrated in Merleau-Ponty’s later writings as the visible/nature/logos.<sup>21</sup> Specifically I want to reflect upon the urgency of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical considerations; what he called *carnal* and *brute* ontology, new concepts that warrant closer scrutiny and continue to provide

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<sup>17</sup> *VI*, 88.

<sup>18</sup> *S*, 181.

<sup>19</sup> *S*, 15.

<sup>20</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, Jeffrey S. Librett, tr., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 27.

<sup>21</sup> *VI*, 274.

deeper, more profound alternatives for contemporary critical philosophies. Merleau-Ponty's attempt to reconfigure the exhausted philosophical formulation of subject-object-meaning was cut short by his untimely death, leaving unfinished his major work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, which described anew an ontology borne upon key notions of *divergence*, *reversibility*, *alterity*, *ipseity* and (the) *flesh*. Merleau-Ponty's renewed approach to phenomenological ontology might better be described as (the) *flesh/in-visible/wild-Being*. Distinguished philosopher and Merleau-Ponty scholar Gary B. Madison is, according to Herbert Spiegelberg<sup>22</sup> one of the preeminent thinkers carrying forward Merleau-Ponty's extraordinary project. Madison's contribution focuses explicitly on the notion of (the) *flesh* and the deeply ethical implications this term obtains for understanding Merleau-Ponty's efforts at decentering and re-thinking the subject. The function of (the) *flesh* according to Madison seeks an "overcoming of modern subjectivism and modern solipsism in general, and of the Husserlian philosophy of consciousness in particular."<sup>23</sup> I quote at length Madison's succinct and finely wrought appraisal of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical programme:

[(the) *flesh*] allows him to hold on to a renewed conception of subjectivity, one that, precisely, introduces *alterity* into the very definition of subjective "self-sameness." For what is the flesh, qua *reversibility*?...it is nothing other than *the presence of the other in the same*. The flesh is the trace of the other, the inscription of the other, in the subject's own selfhood—in its very flesh. What "flesh" "means" is *the the subject is for itself an other*. Otherness is that without which the embodied subject would not be a subject; it is constitutive of ipseity itself.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Herbert Spiegelberg, author of the extensive study, *The Phenomenological Movement, A Historical Introduction*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982)

<sup>23</sup> Gary B. Madison, "Flesh as Otherness" in Galen A. Johnson, and Michael B. Smith, eds., *Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990), 31. The text comprises essays delivered in response to Claude Lefort's Distinguished Lecture at the 1987 annual meeting of the Merleau-Ponty Circle.

<sup>24</sup> Madison, "Flesh as Otherness," 31.

I want to accomplish three things suggested by the major divisions of this work. (1) Take up the difficult problem of Merleau-Ponty's effort to reconcile the sense of consciousness (subject) and the sense of reality (object) by exploring the manner in which philosophy treats the traditional issue of the nature/subject dialectic. Merleau-Ponty's contends these are not mutually exclusive terms but can be described as *co-variant*. Husserl had recognized that the difficult, if not impossible project for phenomenology, amounts to a choice of being-subject or being-thing. Thus, when Merleau-Ponty rejects the antinomial polarity of subject/object, he will want to reconsider, or exacerbate, the internal paradox of philosophical language, one already given over to the positivity of words. (2) Next, I want to show that traditional epistemology fails to be an adequate formulation to account for Merleau-Ponty's renewed ontology—in one's approach to sense, sense will always *exceed significations*. This will have profound implications for the distinction between two phenomenologies; descriptive and hermeneutical. I hope to illustrate that the dialectic framed in (1) fails to be adequate to the task of accounting for what Merleau-Ponty sees as the ontological precondition that is (the) *flesh*. (3) The last section will endeavour to wrest (the) *flesh* from its definite article. I will suggest furthermore that this subsequently denuded term is constitutive of the primal condition for the possibility of *wild Being* or as I will later suggest, is the ontological hinge of embryochthonic appearing which functions like the infinite coiling of the neutral infinitive mood of the verb-form but for which "there is no metaphor."<sup>25</sup>

In order to embark on this investigation—to bring me to the necessary question itself—I

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<sup>25</sup> VI, 221-222. Metaphor, says Merleau-Ponty, "is too much or too little." For example, it is interesting that the neutral infinitive mood of the verb, such as *to run*, *to speak*, *to see* is the infinitely distended possibility before expression or free will.

should like initially to frame the fundamental currents of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. I expect this will take us on a substantial detour before I can return to the question of (the) *flesh*—if it is a *site/sight* one can return to at all—for it requires that one remain mindful of the manner of *how* one's *arrival* might be construed and whether, through this detour, one has not already erred in one's philosophical excursion(s).

So that the general thrust of my inquiry here is adequately grounded I will have to trace the more generalized structures of the phenomenological project. Chapter 2 outlines Merleau-Ponty's anti-Cartesianism and his challenge to the reductive philosophical schema of subject, object, meaning (man/nature/God), in particular his analysis of the place occupied by the German Gestaltists in theories of perception and what obtains from this for not only the positive sciences but certainly for his formulation of a philosophy of perception. The latter is where Merleau-Ponty's analysis is pushed to the limit-conditions of language.

Chapter 3 will reflect upon various contributions to how one might understand *nature*, those that either err in their assessment of the concept of nature in Merleau-Ponty's difficult philosophical programme, or that begin to approach his ephemeral, philosophico-poetical work in a far more penetrating manner. Among others the ground-breaking thinking of Martin Heidegger—evinced for example in his penetrating essay, “On the Essence and Concept of Φύσις,”<sup>26</sup>—presents a perspicacious analysis of φύσις or, appearing essences. *What* is appearing, and *how* does it appear for us? is a foundational question that prepares the ground for much of Heidegger's later thinking who draws upon the extant fragments of Heraclitus' writings. Therefore, to approach

what appearing had meant for philosophy's earliest thinkers I turn to Martin Heidegger and Eugen Fink's critical, hermeneutic analysis in the *Heraclitus Seminar*<sup>27</sup> of 1966-67 at the University of Freiburg.

I think it essential to foreground Merleau-Ponty's more enigmatic formulation of brute ontology by addressing key concepts in foundational works such as *Signs*, and the *Visible and the Invisible* as well as the responses these works have given rise to. Among others, Heidegger provides a key contribution to the fundamental question informing our understanding of ontology and facticity.<sup>28</sup> Merleau-Ponty's assessment of Husserl's phenomenological reduction in *Ideen*, exposes the paradoxical bind of what he terms the *natural attitude* and submits what is at stake in the shift from the notion of a mechanistic organism acted upon by nature and merely reacting, to one that intervenes with intentionality, is fundamental to understanding the expressive features that arise from forever asymmetrical relations and fragile knowledge in the face of multiple appearances where identity fails to garner placeness. This divergence, *écart* which is at the first day installed as the primordial relation can never be subsumed under any theory of correspondence or a philosophy of reflection. This Merleau-Ponty alleges, and as I discuss in Chapter 2, is central to grasping the vexing polarization of *being-object* or *being-subject* and begins to suggest an avenue out of a passive, nature-causal condition that might be found in the *manner* through which (the) *flesh* is installed, in the unformed *chora*, between the subject and its body and its world.

The current status of the debate regarding Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological ontology

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<sup>27</sup> Martin Heidegger and Eugen Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar*, Charles Siebert, tr., (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993).

<sup>28</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Ontology—the Hermeneutics of Facticity*, John Sallis, ed., Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, trs., (Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1999).

and alterity among scholars of a more traditional philosophical approach will be tendered in Chapter 4. Particular weight will be conferred upon the collected essays titled *Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty*. These essays form core of responses to translator and Merleau-Ponty scholar Claude Lefort's essay "Flesh and Otherness." Contributors include eminent scholars such as Galen Johnson, Patrick Burke, Robert Bernasconi, Martin C. Dillon, and Gary B. Madison. It is the response by Madison which proves most germane to the discussion here adumbrated and will, when I pursue what obtains for Merleau-Ponty's notion of (the) *flesh*, make necessary connections in the dialectical relationship between philosophy and, more critically, the place of philosophy's expressive function. The latter, it seems to me has been overlooked by many scholars. In order to provide a provisional argument supporting the exigency of this claim I should like, for the moment, to point to the subtle but exceedingly astute shift from Lefort's use of the conjunction to the deployment of the relative pronoun in Madison's essay title. The respective title treatments of these essays already belie the decisive nexus where Lefort and Madison part ways—Madison replaces the unfortunate use of Lefort's conjunction "and," with the far more nuanced and discriminating relative pronoun/adverb "as"—"Flesh *as* Otherness" as opposed to "Flesh *and* Otherness." The insightful response of Madison also begins to alert us to what Merleau-Ponty had in mind for a project construed as a radically ontologized phenomenology and the manner of its potential expressibility and is summarily treated in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6 turns on a critical assessment of (the) *flesh* which will be explicated by way of the term *emblem* from the Latin *emblema* meaning inlaid work, a raised ornament, and proceeds furthermore from the Greek *emblema*, whose definition is insertion, from *emballein*, thrown in or

to insert. It is with this particular term in mind that the poignant ontological blueprint of Merleau-Ponty's meditation is *thrown into relief*.<sup>29</sup> I want to suggest as well that the term *ἄβραστος*—the unboiled and raw (a wound?)—evinces the very condition that the term emblem itself connotes. I will then conclude with a cursory treatment of the poetic and (the) *flesh*, intertwined within the ontological dimensions of a Gordian density that is *poetry-flesh-life-astonishment*, posed against the poverty (or a certain *aporia*) brought forth in the sensuous, voluptuous excesses of, for example, Georges Bataille and Tadeusz Kantor's writings.

The problem of a philosophy *before the philosophical* has the potential to draw one into the staid, institutional tradition of logical and formal philosophical deductions—the insouciant boys game of epistemological, axiological, and methodological *proofs*—those that sanction the performance of a mendacious and metaphysical inversion by making of reflection *the real*, and then projecting this back onto the world as some external and “natural” *veritas*.<sup>30</sup> The phenomenological reduction of intentional analysis that, Husserl maintains posits an intentional object is, according to Merleau-Ponty in “The Philosopher and His Shadow,” a false ontology.<sup>31</sup> Rather than the potential arrival of a being who stands on the brink of a maelstrom of indeterminacy which is our world—in Heidegger's formulation *Dasein*, or in Merleau-Ponty's thinking, an essential *écart*, divergence and alterity—the purely self-reflective and solipsistic *cogito* abjures its responsibility

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29 VI., 147. Merleau-Ponty says “We must not think the flesh starting from substances...[it is] an *element*, as the concrete emblem of a general manner of being.” Emphasis added.

<sup>30</sup> Leo Rauch, “Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and the ‘Hole in Being,’” in *The Debate Between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty*, Jon Stewart, ed., (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998). This essay explains the manner in which Merleau-Ponty wishes to reconcile the object subject distinction, which, Sartre had said leads to self-contradiction. Moreover Merleau-Ponty had also wanted to propose a reconciliation (one that Husserl thought impossible) between the objective sciences and “the excessively subjective Cartesianism of philosophy....they posit the world as external and real, while they ignore the act of metaphysical positing and then attempt to refer the meaning of our experience of the world to that posited world itself.” 9. It is this inversion that Husserl had called, pejoratively, the *natural attitude*.

<sup>31</sup> S., 163.

in its ascendancy to idealism. As a result of this passivity, subjectivity has its meaning conferred by an ordered, rationalized Euclidean schema of mere intellectual synthesis. Merleau-Ponty however seeks to return to the basic experience of the world prior to synthetic, second order analyses of reflective and idealist philosophies, to experience which is brute, pre-reflective, and pre-predicative—*wild Being*. The principle of a this brute datum as the precondition for true *episteme* is implicitly appealed to in Aristotle's introductory remarks to his *Metaphysics*:

All men naturally desire knowledge. An indication of this is our esteem for the senses; for apart from their use we esteem them for their own sake, and most of all the sense of sight. Not only with a view to action, but even when no action is contemplated...The reason of this is that of all the senses sight best helps us to know things, and reveals many distinctions.<sup>32</sup>

Philosophical reflection, according to Merleau-Ponty, has forgotten the primordial source of our experience, of that which is always appearing<sup>33</sup> and for which, logically, there can be no reflection: "we must rediscover the structure of the perceived world through a process similar to that of an archaeologist. For the structure of the perceived world is buried under the sedimentations of later knowledge."<sup>34</sup> Merleau-Ponty described the major thrust of his project in a paper addressed to the *Société française de philosophie*, November 23, 1946, "The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences," in which he suggests:

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<sup>32</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, G.P. Goold, ed., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933), A. I, 1-2.

<sup>33</sup> Nancy, *Sense of the World*, 17. Jean-Luc Nancy's assessment of what constitutes phenomenology is situated within a Husserlian account of the world of sense as expressed in his *Cartesian Meditations*, and thereby unsatisfactory. Nancy seems to capitulate to Husserl's claim that the being of the world transcends consciousness and thus collapses back onto a need for objective certitude. Nancy becomes inculcated in the erroneous notion that perception and meaning then stops at the object. "But it still irresistible convokes us to the pure presence of appearing, to *seeing*. For this reason, despite everything, it does not yet sufficiently touch on the *being* or the *sense* of appearing." There is a fundamental question of the *coming of sense* which I want to pursue in a more sustained manner in Chapter 5.

<sup>34</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, James M. Edie, tr., (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 5. Hereafter indicated as *P*.

But this does not mean that reflection should be carried away with itself or pretend to be ignorant of its origins. By fleeing the difficulties it would only fail in its task....Thus what we tear away from the dispersion of instants is not an already-made reason; it is, as has always been said, a natural light, our openness to *something*....It is not a question of reducing human knowledge to sensation to make it as sensible as the sensible, to recover the consciousness of rationality....We call this level of experience 'primordial.'<sup>35</sup>

Against the forgetting of what is essentially unreflected, philosophy prematurely takes for its *object* that which is already reflected in the *cogito* of mere intellection, and presumes to begin where no such beginning is possible; that is, in the very meditation on an absence which is pure irrecoverable anteriority. What then is the object of philosophy when it bemoans the loss of the *real* while insisting on the absence of the sensuous nonetheless? This melodious seduction of the Sirens has brought an insouciant, forgetful philosophy upon their barren rocks and is lost to most, save perhaps only the *very few*, among them, Merleau-Ponty. In a meadow piled high with the carnage of bodies—the vestige of their elemental carnal homes—the skeletons of men on which their withered skin still hangs, adorns them as a lugubrious testament to the wisdom gained. This is ironically the very wisdom the Sirens<sup>36</sup> say that men who are entreated by their song gain; that is the true ends of knowledge and philosophy. The only truth gained betraying Descartes' privileging of synthetic intellection, is that the *cogito* is radically finite, whose realization of its own finitude is the tragic *peripitaea* of the ungraspable, irredeemable, and unknowable. The last word of the philosopher is perhaps not a word at all, conceivably it is but the sigh of Oedipus at Colonus.

In the course of this investigation the philosophical *ex nihilo* account of origins borne upon formal rules of rhetoric and speculative synthesis calls for nothing short of what Merleau-

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<sup>35</sup> *P.*, 19-25.

<sup>36</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, E. V. Rieu, tr., (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1946), Book xii, 37-203.

Ponty had said was not only a necessary return to ontology but the “elucidation of philosophical expression itself.”<sup>37</sup> Merleau-Ponty says that philosophy justifies itself even in its weakness, that it limps, for “It is not content with what is already there. Since it is expression in act, it comes to itself *only by ceasing to coincide with what is expressed*, and by taking its distance in order to see its meaning.”<sup>38</sup> This *bestowing*—the one history and one world thesis—Merleau-Ponty takes to be “the Utopia of possession at a distance.”<sup>39</sup> The fatuous philosopher, like the *ressentiment* of Cioran’s wounded man whose anguish of the mortal, decaying body comprehends that the “most terrible and most futile sufferings are begotten by that crushed pride which, in order to face up to Nothingness, transforms it, out of revenge, into Law.”<sup>40</sup> To this end Merleau-Ponty explicitly states that what is at stake in his ontological formulation of dehiscent *wild Being* is a critical re-elaboration of the philosophical presupposition of subject, object, meaning (Truth), or in other words, man, world, God. Merleau-Ponty says “we cannot subject our perception of the world to philosophical scrutiny without ceasing to be identified with the act of positing the world.”<sup>41</sup> Contemporary philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy sympathetically echoes Merleau-Ponty saying that this requires nothing short of philosophy’s own deconstitution, “that truth must expose itself to sense,”<sup>42</sup> or its limits and suggests furthermore an inversion of a tradition that convokes one to liberate a festooned philosophy from its constricting material garlands.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> VI, 167.

<sup>38</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays*, John Wild, James Edie, John O’Neill, trs., (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963), 58. Hereafter indicated as *PrP*.

<sup>39</sup> *PrP*, 58.

<sup>40</sup> Cioran, *A Short History of Decay*, 154.

<sup>41</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Colin Smith, tr., (London: Routledge Press, 1962), xiv. Hereafter indicated as *PhP*.

<sup>42</sup> Nancy, *Sense of the World*, 19.

<sup>43</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, T. M. Knox, tr., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), Vol. II, 1236.

More than one hundred years after Nietzsche's death, the concept of sense and the sensuous—as a serious philosophical enquiry—remains enigmatic. What sort of pressure would such an inclusion impose on traditional philosophical method, and are troubling concepts such as Merleau-Ponty's notion of (the) *flesh* or Heidegger's *earth* to be thought of as beside the point? This question it seems to me is not only critical, insofar as it may give one cause to rethink the possibility of philosophy, but is also germane to my investigation here. What is apparent and visible, and subsequently re-presented in plastic forms of expression (as appearance) is, in Hegel's transcendental idealist account, a vitiated or corrupted form of the *Idea*. However, if one were to move from an assumed correspondence with the universal to the infinite diversity of the particular, an inversion that grounds one's experience and wonderment—even if it be indeterminate and agonistic—what might this enquiry look like? But this would bring one to Husserl, whose reduction would, in the final analysis, re-install one in the very school of transcendental idealism—an insistence upon the assumed primacy of all that is un-reflected in noematic reflection, those intentionalities which are themselves already the product of reflection. In his desire to arrive at what he termed the *noematic core* of things in nature; Husserl's phenomenology ended by being not a philosophy of nature but of reflection. In other words, to save the subject from mere epi-phenomenalism (like Kant's desire to rescue reason and science from a vexing relativism), the subject now reflects on intentioned meaning before nature—Husserl has ventured too far and perhaps not far enough. "Subjects are not the initiators, pure interiorities over against things. Nature is [the] chance offered to corporeality and intersubjectivity."<sup>44</sup> Merleau-Ponty exposed Husserl's transcendentalism and returned to

the question of what it is in nature that becomes manifest in its appearing. This is what begins to give shape to our fundamental philosophical efforts. I am suggesting that it is not a philosophy of nature as such, but instead the *nature of philosophy*—the nature of philosophy as such is concomitantly and co-dependently inculcated in phenomenal appearings, an interlacing of both nature-as-appearing and, its phenomenal counter-part, the very appearing of *how* language and philosophy express its sense in appearing. Desiring to conjoin vision with knowledge and to bring expression to the enigmatic epistemological formulation of what seeing is, Merleau-Ponty says, “It is the things themselves, from the depths of their silence, that it wishes to bring to expression.”<sup>45</sup>

By thinking through what obtains for philosophical expression, its *mannered expression*, one may begin to better elucidate the question of philosophical first questions, “as the expression of what is *before expression*.”<sup>46</sup> The thrust of this enquiry will, I hope, bring us back to the possibility of what is therefore fecund for perception—in the terms of Merleau-Ponty, a *nascent logos*, that is, *an incarnated mind*, “*Self-manifestation*, disclosure, in the process of forming itself...”<sup>47</sup> Thus, Merleau-Ponty will say that “Our point of departure shall not be *being is*, *nothingness is not* nor even *there is only being*—which are formulas of totalizing thought, a high-altitude thought—but: there is being, there is a world, there is *something*.... One does not arouse being from nothingness, *ex nihilo*; one starts with an ontological relief.”<sup>48</sup> Still, there remains the question of the *what* and the *how* of this relief and its *casting*. Heidegger had already postulated what *thrownness* meant for *Dasein* in its quest for the formulation of the question of *Being*, and echoing Nietzsche’s

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<sup>45</sup> VI., 4.<sup>46</sup> VI., 167.<sup>47</sup> VI., 91.<sup>48</sup> VI., 88.

call for an *Ursprung* suggested that “The leap, the most daring move in proceeding from ineptual thinking, abandons and throws aside everything familiar.”<sup>49</sup>

Perhaps one might return to the notion of *casting*, that is, a throwing, to cast or make an image, to insert. And it is with this notion one enters into the problem of what turns upon terms such as *hinge* or *emblem*. Merleau-Ponty’s ontological hinge—the *flesh*—like the coiled spring of a clock or its metaphor, the lemon peel in the vanitas paintings of the Dutch 17th century expresses that “Time is corroded from within, exactly like an organism, like everything that is stricken with life. To say *Time* is to say *lesion*, and what a lesion!”<sup>50</sup>

Embarking upon a writing which hopes to respond adequately to Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of (the) *flesh* is, it seems to me, to be prematurely writing the end of philosophy and its dualistic constraints of idealism and empiricism, thereby precipitously claiming our enigmatic arrival at some fixed, Archimedean point. The problematic of self criticism is wonderfully expressed in the words of Maurice Blanchot who, also recognized that the unreflected is a form already cast.

To write, ‘to form,’ where no forms hold sway...Absent meaning (and not the absence of meaning or a potential or latent but *lacking sense*)...is perhaps to bring to the surface something like absent meaning, to welcome the passive pressure which is not yet what we call thought, for it is already the disastrous ruin of thought.<sup>51</sup>

And it is thus that “I approach poetry: but only to miss it.”<sup>52</sup> because it is not merely poetry—the poetic is not the last word because the last word is the problem of the last man’s expression. It is

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<sup>49</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, trs. (Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999), §115.

<sup>50</sup> Cioran, *A Short History of Decay*.

<sup>51</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, Ann Smock, tr., (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 41. Emphasis added.

<sup>52</sup> Georges Bataille, *The Impossible*, Robert Hurley, tr., (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1991), 159.

the result of the inaccessibility to the excess of *what is*, that I embark upon a detour for “What is loathes the verbal embrace.”<sup>53</sup> This detour is, in the words of Georges Bataille, poetry and, “through it I escape[ed] the world of discourse, which had become *the natural world* for me; with poetry I entered a kind of grave where the infinity of the possible was born from the death of the logical world.”<sup>54</sup> It is this death which—if one is to found a renewed ontological hinge, the wounded (*la blessure*) impoverished carnal hinge of *wild Being*—must *take place*.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Cioran, *A Short History of Decay*, 48.

<sup>54</sup> Bataille, *The Impossible*, 163. Emphasis added.

<sup>55</sup> What I present here is merely a series of primary meditations and essays forming core concepts of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical endeavours—those which anticipate a subsequently more detailed analysis of his call for a renewed conception of philosophy as well as opening upon a new theory of expression which obtains from the former.

## TWO

### NATURE AND MAN, MERLEAU-PONTY'S ANTI-CARTESIANISM

—*The law of constancy cannot avail itself, against the testimony of consciousness, of any crucial experiment in which it is not already implied, and wherever we believe that we are establishing it, it is already presupposed—*

M. Merleau-Ponty

—*Why philosophers are slanderers—The treacherous and blind hostility of philosophers towards the senses—how much of [the] mob and middle class there is in this hatred!—*

F. Nietzsche

—*The "in-itself" is even an absurd conception; a "constitution-in-itself" is nonsense; we possess the concept "being," "thing," only as a relational concept—*

F. Nietzsche

The re-examination of fundamental ontological concerns provides an exemplary account of what, it seems to me, is precisely at stake in the ennui of contemporary philosophic debate. Furthermore, it provokes an examination of whether the basic concept of *Being* and Nature is adequately explicated by the fatigued classical formulation subject, object, meaning/Truth. The Cartesian bind this problem evinces prompted Merleau-Ponty to refute the dialectical relationship or ontological opposition between the subject and the world (the *seer/flesh* and the visible) while sketching a coherent anti-foundationalist, anti-idealist project to rethink anew *ipseity* and *alterity*, Being and nature. Moreover, in this light I dispute the mystical transcendentalism of Emmanuel Levinas that the return to questions of fundamental evidence in ontology is a “reckless undertaking.”<sup>1</sup> The result is that not only are founding questions seen as beside the point, but it commensurately abandons the subject in favour of a one-way obligation to an absolute (O)ther and runs counter to the

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<sup>1</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, Adriaan Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi, eds., (Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1996) 2.

phenomenological project. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology doesn't stop with mere data, or things; nor is it merely a descriptive project as the logical inference of Levinas's criticism would suggest. What is fundamentally evident is precisely the appearing of the other(s) in one's visual field—in one's infinite appeal to community in the Gordian density of postmodern existence—and this *other* occupies the same carnal home which I inhabit. The ethical implication in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of reciprocity and recognition, what Gary Madison has maintained is a hermeneutical ethics, suggests that such an ethics is necessarily one of communicative rationality which refuses to be abrogated for the sake of an ethics of unilateral obligation or for that matter the Habermasian notion of an ideal speech community. Both Gary Madison and Michael Yeo have launched an incisive critique against Levinasian mysticism and transcendentalism,<sup>2</sup> while the former's poignant inquiry is instructive here cutting to the core of Levinas's troubling concept of obligation—an ontologized Kantianism:

An ethics...characterized by a fundamental asymmetry, and by verticality rather than horizontality. Let us call this sort of ethics an 'ethics of obligation'....it centers not on the *call* that one desiring, embodied subjectivity makes to another, and vice versa, but rather on the unconditioned *demand* that some sort of capital-O Other (Being, God,...) makes, from the outside, on the self "man". For Merleau-Ponty the "other" is not some sort of transcendent, *dues ex machina* Other...but is rather my equal...[which] provides the basis for a politics of democratic, egalitarian praxis.<sup>3</sup>

Merleau-Ponty is critical of all systematic accounts of *meaning* and that, among other

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<sup>2</sup> See Gary Madison's "The Ethics and Politics of the Flesh," in G. Madison and M. Fairbairn, eds., *The Ethics of Postmodernity, Current Trends in Continental Thought*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 174-190, as well as Michael Yeo's "Perceiving/Reading the Other: Ethical Dimensions," in Busch and Gallagher, eds., *Merleau-Ponty, Hermeneutics, and Postmodernism*, 50.

<sup>3</sup> Madison, "The Ethics and Politics of the Flesh," 182. Gary Madison's incisive analysis suggests that the seeds of a full-fledged egalitarian ethics inheres not only in Merleau-Ponty's general notions of hermeneutical phenomenology but, latent also in his philosophy of (the) *flesh* and his philosophy of language and communicative process.

things our century's philosophical crisis<sup>4</sup> will require a revitalized conception of ontology, one that is characterized by the indeterminacy of the chiasmic structure of sense, language and the world. Merleau-Ponty goes to the very heart of deterministic reductions by taking on the presumed positivism of scientific realism's descriptive project on one hand, while on the other transcendental philosophies of epistemological truth claims. The most compelling feature of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is his ambitious task of setting the stage for a new expression in philosophy—the ends of philosophy or its rebirth?<sup>5</sup>

I should like to establish the three essential features in the epistemological trajectory of theories of perception and how Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology better elucidates the more radical characteristics of a primary ontology that proffers, not claims of correspondence between knowledge and the sensing subject, but the possibility of a renewed ontology for a deeply fragmented and displaced subjectivity ensnared within the multiplicities of the postmodern condition<sup>6</sup> by (1) grounding the philosophical question of perception and its relationship to nature and the sciences. (2) Sighting the shift from an object-centred empirical world to a subject-centred one and what obtains for, (3) the phenomenological characteristics of perception and the manner in which sense rises concomitantly with the brute incarnation of the subject—the carnal hinge on which *ipseity*

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<sup>4</sup> VI., 165.

<sup>5</sup> VI., 165.

<sup>6</sup> Of course I borrow here from the title of the ground-breaking work by Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, trs., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) in which a theory is put forward that holds legitimization of truths rests upon the modern meta-narrative, whose ultimate collapse ushers in the fragmentation and regionalisms of postmodern narrative indeterminacies. See also Gary B. Madison apropos of epistemology in, "The Moral Self and the Anonymous Other," in *Arob@se. Journal of Literatures and Humanities*, Vol. 4, no 1-2, Fall 2000, 231-250. I think Madison correctly identifies the necessary exigent shift from traditional concerns of epistemology, to that of ethics when he describes that such a shift would yield a more robust question of Self and Other in such a manner that they "are freed to emerge as a genuine issue," 233.

and alterity turns, a project remaining unfinished and never realized. The latter is a key notion to which I will return with concentrated focus in Chapter 6.

I will begin by tracing a general historiographic outline of Merleau-Ponty's critique of *a priori* constructed idealist philosophies (mathematically based conjecture as one example), that are deemed to provide scientism with the foundationally decisive *proofs* that external, objective reality exists as ontologically correspondent with a *seer/subject*, even before terms such as *subject* and *nature* have been adequately problematized. The scientific *realist* account suggests, in short, that the abyss between the *res extensa* and *res cogitans* has been sutured. With nature having been *naturalized* through the mathematical axial organization of Euclidean space and the human subject rendered transparent in the medical and psychological sciences and technologies,<sup>7</sup> nature as *Nature* has become the correspondent term not of a subject but *The subject*.<sup>8</sup>

If, as the above argument suggests for example, under the banner of rationalism's apotheosis, the body of the subject becomes but a palimpsest—under erasure—it surely has something to say about one's epistemological journey into the modern.<sup>9</sup> The genesis of the modern, rational body in the distant past was already anticipated by the Enlightenment which marked a profound break with the *ancien régime*—the specular stage of the scaffold was transformed into the Modern

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<sup>7</sup> In this regard I direct you to an excellent post-structuralist treatment of specular corporeality and the beginnings of a modernized body in the seventeenth century by Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body, Essays on Subjection*, (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1984).

<sup>8</sup> See Martin Heidegger's *The Question Concerning Technology*, William Lovitt tr., (New York, Harper & Row Publishers Inc., 1977), in which he probes the relationship between *Being* and technology. His particular concern has to do with what he terms *enframing*, which functions not as we might think, as a bracketing or separation, but instead more on the order of a state of mind that fails to take *Dasein's* quest after the meaning of *Being* into account as it is entangled within the very machinery of technology's own ends and perfectibility.

<sup>9</sup> Recent developments in technological, digital and data-based *realities* have re-defined the already dissolving contours of the contemporary body and one's inhabitation of corporicity.

theatre where a different performance of corporeal dramaturgy was enacted. This break with the past re-calibrates the epistemological compass of scientific rationalism. With the Janus face now turned toward a future, the eye and light of its refocusing epistemological lens is historically marked by the famous painting *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp*, 1632,<sup>10</sup> by Rembrandt van Rijn.

What is truly remarkable in Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson* is its *expression* of a performative deixis. What does Rembrandt's painting perform exactly? Deeply indebted to the expressive, epistemological conventions of picture making—it is traditionally acknowledged that representation's telos is to wrest from nature the palm of victory of the real, what Norman Bryson has called the *essential copy*<sup>11</sup>—Rembrandt, perhaps unconsciously, exposes the very contingencies of an epistemic register of sense-knowledge within the practice and logic of representational narrative. Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson* marks two seemingly incommensurate moves which turn on the question of conditional narratologies as they approach the cusp of a burgeoning scientism—a new *episteme* that dispenses with, and is skeptical of whether the sensuous or sense-knowledge serves *true* knowledge at all. It is perhaps not terribly ironic that while Rembrandt was working on this commission in Amsterdam, Descartes himself was frequenting the hawkers' stands for fresh

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<sup>10</sup> Much has been written about this extraordinary painting by the Dutch master and I direct you to a more complete account of its place within the genre of anatomical representation, and pictorial history in general, for it falls outside the purview of the current study. For an account of Rembrandt's enterprise and the place dissection holds in pictorial representation in Renaissance culture in particular, see Jonathan Sawday's insightful study, *The Body Emblazoned, Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture*, (London: Routledge Press, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Pliny proffers a remarkable anecdote about the genesis of painting: Zeuxis the greatest of all the painters is rivalled by Parrhasius who, when Zeuxis had produced so dexterous a painting of grapes that birds flew down to eat of the painted vine, himself painted a curtain, so lifelike, that Zeuxis requested the curtain be drawn back so that he might look upon Parrhasios's efforts. Zeuxis gave up the palm of victory saying that, whereas he managed only to deceive birds, Parrhasios had deceived the artist. Pliny's account is recollected in Norman Bryson's wonderfully rich and critical analysis of the logic of the gaze in, *Vision and Painting, The Logic of the Gaze*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

carcasses for the purpose of dissection.<sup>12</sup> Now what seems to be *prima facie* represented in the *Anatomy Lesson* is the partially dissected corpse of the criminal Aris Kindt, surrounded by Dr. Tulp and his attending medical students. However a subtle shift begins to occur in one's reading of this carnal narratology, indeed including those well established pictorial conventions ensconced within the lattice of what it is that constitutes looking at pictures—the picture shows us *this* while performing a deictic torsion toward and expression of *that*. The *fact-of-the-matter*, of Kindt's flayed and specularized flesh now begins to occupy a paradoxical new register. Kindt's body falls not within the *natural* Euclidean stage of *seeing* what is in the *visible*, but rather it becomes a palimpsestic de-materialized corpus under the gaze of modern scientism. The epistemological shift from the old constraints of scopic determinism and illusionistic pictorial convention in Rembrandt's painting transforms the splayed-open viscosity of Kindt's body into *modern flesh* affecting a transubstantiation of the *what* that is pictured—into a *re-presentation as* Modern flesh. Kindt's corpus is effaced by two critical devices in the painting: the Cartesian diagram of a dissected hand, held up by one of the students (Rembrandt himself), and the medical text, turned open, at the foot of the corpse—a wonderfully ironic pun on the footnote, that is, the footnote as textual verification and validation of what is *already evident*, as standing on its own ground. The *mise en scène* of these secondary *texts* are not pictorial as one would expect from the nature pictorial-narrative tradition, but now become the primary sites of knowledge acquisition upon which *all* the gazes of the students in the painting are directed, rather than the carnal evidence

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<sup>12</sup> On Descartes's life during the 1630's, see John Cottingham, *Descartes*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986),

laying splayed open before them. The positive deictical operant of *that* or *this* thing, feature, or sign, loses its denotative property and takes on rather a connotative function. This transition from denotation to connotation marks an important moment that is materially expressed in the *Anatomy Lesson*, within a practice epistemologically and historically invested in denotation and description. The exposed gross anatomy of Kindt's corpse, its green pallor, and acrid putrefaction, so terribly close becomes but a glass body,<sup>13</sup> disappearing from the representational register of visible, sensuous incarnation, and enters a world of pure abstraction in the absolute transparency of the scientific text where one now witnesses the modern drama of (the) *flesh* made word.

The constitution of the *real* world beyond the body in Husserl's formulation collapses back into the fundamental tenets of Cartesianism. This *Welt-vorstellung* as the positing of a synthesized *Idea* occurs at the expense of not only the world itself but the performance of an incarnated, situational subject who traverses the caesura from nature and appearances to a world and consciousness, not as a natural extension or a natural attitude (as arbitrary and doxological) but who, as Fink said, is *Weltbefangenheit*—entangled in the world.<sup>14</sup>

The transcendental idealist thrust of equating the temporal and intelligible, co-eternal with the *Idea* in philosophy, arrogates nothing other than a rhetorical dodge that seeks to dispense with the still troubling concerns central to the primary phenomenological feature that the nature of consciousness is consciousness-of *something*: "what is first 'given' is what is Other than Self...it is a primary datum."<sup>15</sup> This clearly reflects Merleau-Ponty's anti-Cartesian turn as well as a rejection

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<sup>13</sup> For a complete account of the epistemological transmutation brought about, to some extent by "Descartes's textuated science," Cf., 11 above.

<sup>14</sup> Cairns, *Conversations with Husserl and Fink*, 95.

<sup>15</sup> Madison, *Arob@se*, "The Moral Self and the Anonymous Other," 232.

of Husserl's reduction for it marks the move from the notion of a noematic core or thetic formulation to what is *primarily given* for consciousness. But in point of fact our philosophers continue as theologians who pour over scriptures for *truth*, thinking that a *positum* exists in these articles of faith.<sup>16</sup> Having already gone too far in the forgetting of what phenomenon offers by way of our fundamental ontological grounding they have instead opted for the *thou shalt* of the text. The inexhaustible quest for transcendental correspondence between philosophy and empiricism, mind and the external world, in the *positum* of the text—as *the* site too often arrogated as the brute datum of epistemological evidence—is what Gary B. Madison has called in “The Moral Self and the Anonymous Other,” a mere psuedo-problem, the scandal of philosophical obfuscation and irresponsibility.<sup>17</sup>

Admittedly I have made a quantum leap which I will now have to retrace by foregrounding how Merleau-Ponty arrives at his more enigmatic formulation of *wild Being* that stands on the very site of an *Ursprungsklärung*—a clearing which comes with the primal leap. To do so will require a gloss of his earlier foundational works, whose efforts attempted to arrive at an interpretation of pre-ontological concealed meaning, such as *The Primacy of Perception* and *Phenomenology of Perception* as well as the responses these works have given rise to.<sup>18</sup> Among others, Heidegger provides a key contribution to the fundamental question informing our under-

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<sup>16</sup> Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, see particularly his analysis of what is constitutive of a *positum* in “Phenomenology and Theology,” 39-62.

<sup>17</sup> Madison, *Arob@se*, “The Moral Self and the Anonymous Other,” 232.

<sup>18</sup> For a comprehensive examination of Merleau-Ponty's oeuvre, from his earlier work, more explicitly bound to Husserlian subject/world dualism as well as his transcendental subjectivity and phenomenal immanence, to his last work, *The Visible and the Invisible* in which he overcomes transcendental idealism of Husserl by insisting upon Being as the locus of the sensible-sentient whose flesh functions as the single tissue; a new ontology of undivided Being, see in particular Gary B. Madison's *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty*, (Athens: University of Ohio Press, 1981).

standing of ontology and facticity.<sup>19</sup> When Heidegger wants to understand relational being he, like so many philosophers before him, returns to the primacy of connections with the milieu of all beings (*ὄντα*—entities, things)—now however, in the view of Heidegger, a mode of being-conjoined or *Mitsein* (being-with).<sup>20</sup> The key unwavering concern that motivated Merleau-Ponty to the end of his life in 1961 was what had always been considered a fundamental cleavage between sense and knowledge whose coincidence in the subject, as he had said, can *only be ever imminent yet never realized*.<sup>21</sup> Merleau-Ponty's renewal of subjectivism, like Albert Camus's Sisyphus, whose unremitting toil brings about not the nihilation of the expansively exhaustive and mortifying desert, demands rather the "lucid invitation to live, and to create, in the very midst of

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<sup>19</sup> In particular see Heidegger's *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, James M. Edie, ed., Albert Hofstadter, tr. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1982), and *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, John van Buren, tr. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1999) as well as his discussion of what obtains in a positive science in the Introduction to *Being and Time*, §7 and *Pathmarks*, "Phenomenology and Theology," (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 39-62.

<sup>20</sup> Of course the enormous breadth of Heidegger's corpus and, in particular, his theorizing on ontology requires a project which is quite other than I have the ability to pursue here. Suffice it to say, Heidegger's concept of *Dasein* and *Being* is often misunderstood, notably Emmanuel Levinas who, in the essay "Martin Heidegger and Ontology," begins where Heidegger has already arrived via a circuit that has taken him to a place *before* being, consciousness and the theory of knowledge. Yet Levinas is content to begin with "the problem of the meaning of being," question which also impoverishes the ontological dimension by holding the absurd notion, in "Meaning and Sense," in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, that "the given... as this or that... [is given] as meaning." This contention short-circuits the essential characteristic of phenomenology that Husserl took great pains to adumbrate: *phenomena are for consciousness, and it is consciousness of the real*. Furthermore, liberties are taken here in translation such as translating *Geworfenheit*, as "dereliction"(!). Regarding such liberties taken, Levinas's specious transcendentalizing in his critique of ontology, "Is Ontology Fundamental?" in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 1-11, translates *Dasein* as *etre ici-bas*, that is *being here-below*. Thus in a single manoeuvre Levinas creates the very conditions of transcendentalizing thinking which sets up a fundamentally dialectical relationship between an empiricist-rational ground, and a metaphysical one, one that will open onto the obligation one is *called to* by, in terms of Levinasian neologism, the One, God. Levinas says of the primacy of ontology that, "To question this fundamental evidence is a reckless undertaking," 2, emphasis mine. We must be mindful however, that the very interpretations of *Dasein* as existence, or as having any correspondence with object states is false insofar as, and Merleau-Ponty himself recognizes this in *Primacy of Perception*, they have "misconstrued his views on the human situation as he [Heidegger] described it. In both cases, commentators have missed what, from the Preface to *Sein und Zeit*, was the declared aim of his thought: *not to describe existence, Dasein (which has been incorrectly translated in French as 'human reality'), as a fundamental autonomous sphere—but, through Da-sein, to get at Being... because man is the interrogation of Being*," 177. The Levinasian passivity of conscience on the phenomenological plane Paul Ricoeur says in *Oneself as Another*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), must be opposed. He illustrates quite clearly that both Heidegger, "who holds attestation is primordially injunction... risks losing its moral or ethical significance," and Levinas, whose philosophy takes, "that the injunction is primordially attestation... risks not being heard and the self not being affected in the mode of being-conjoined." In the latter case, "With this aporia of the Other, philosophical discourse comes to an end." 355.

<sup>21</sup> *VI*, 9.

the desert.”<sup>22</sup> However unlike Camus, Merleau-Ponty disabuses existentialism of the malaise of solipsism and sees the subject instead within a distended field of carnal thickness pressing from within vision in a field of the visible—a field of *ontic* plenitude whose sensual appearing is the arising of sense within the sensing-sentient, the silent-vocative and the distended positive thickness of σιγή (a silent abyss).<sup>23</sup>

The detour above locates key conceptual concerns that were left summarily treated by Merleau-Ponty at the time of his death, those I will return to later in finer detail. How Merleau-Ponty arrives at the difficult concept of *reversibility* and fundamental *écart* already begins to be adumbrated in his early writings, those which I will turn to now in order to provide a more lucid understanding of how Merleau-Ponty comes to formulate concepts of primordial in-corporation, the co-presence of *man* and *nature*, two terms which he says have yet to be defined and analyzed more closely.

As early as 1933 Merleau-Ponty outlines a proposed course of study on the nature of perception<sup>24</sup> where he already offers the embryonic structure of his later, mature thinking. This study is given full form and brought to fruition in his *Phenomenology of Perception* 1945, and later revisited in *The Primacy of Perception* 1960. In this early essay he wants to establish a framework that accounts for the place of perception in our epistemological tradition and its relationship

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<sup>22</sup> Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1975), 7. I direct you to a particularly wonderful account of the myth of Sisyphus by Surrealist Alfred Jarry who, Gilles Deleuze, in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco, trs., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), called “an unrecognized precursor to Heidegger,” 91-98.

<sup>23</sup> The relationship between wild Being, poiesis and the Abyss is to be found in Patrick Burke’s informative essay, “Listening at the Abyss,” in *Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty*, Galen Johnson and Michael Smith, eds., (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990), 81-97.

<sup>24</sup> *TD.*, “The Nature of Perception: Two Proposals,” Forrest Williams tr., 74-84.

to nature simply put. Merleau-Ponty is already aware at this juncture of the monolithic problems obtained by such a philosophical undertaking. He will primarily frame the question of perception as it pertains to the positive sciences like physiology, psychology as well as philosophy. Merleau-Ponty cunningly draws perception back into the sharpened focus of philosophical inquiry proper—to epistemology and ontology—by taking from Heidegger’s *Basic Problems* the concern for the primacy of the *what* and *how* of such appearing-questioning for philosophy. Not only is there already an elucidation of the primacy of the relational schema in a visual field, but a wresting from scientific *realist* efforts the fundamentally flawed dialectic of Being-an-object. All three terms are moreover bound to the very “mediating operation”<sup>25</sup> of what Merleau-Ponty considers the primacy of the perceptible field, thus the essay “The Nature of Perception” is organized into three sections: the physiology of perception, the philosophy of perception, and the psychology of perception. Perception is of course of “nature [that] is at the first day,”<sup>26</sup> and in his methodological project the three sciences, each espousing perception as its subject, are tested for the veracity of their claims in this cursory investigation. I return to the opening lines of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* in order to illustrate the scope of Merleau-Ponty’s project, those in which Aristotle claims the epistemological primacy of visual sense perception by stating “of all the senses sight best helps us to know things.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed Aristotle later says, invoking the question which was by then already preponderant and takes us to the root of Merleau-Ponty’s own undertaking, “the question which was raised long ago, is still and always will be, and which baffles us—‘what is Being?’ ...and practically our

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<sup>25</sup> *TD.*, 74.<sup>26</sup> *VI.*, 267.<sup>27</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 980a 25-30.

only concern is to investigate the nature of 'being' in the sense of substance."<sup>28</sup> I will have more to say in Chapter 3 with regard to how one defines what is potentially at stake in recasting the definition of nature's relation to becoming-man for Merleau-Ponty by way of a detour via the methodological features Heidegger's path to hermeneutic phenomenology begins to make available. One ought to take note that Aristotle says it is a question of the *nature of being*, a question which Merleau-Ponty himself will endeavour to reformulate as the *nature of perception*. For perception is a troubled operation as Merleau-Ponty says: "If it seems difficult in a general way to distinguish a matter and a form in sense knowledge, it appears even more difficult regarding the perception of one's own body."<sup>29</sup> What is evident here is that Merleau-Ponty already sees a complicating confluence between matter and form (ὕλη and μορφή) and that for the sensing-sentient, as the hinge by which experiencing-being can be brought into expression, it is an even more troubling question, one that fully anticipates the *stuff* of entities—a manifesting of the thing in its material form whose arrival for conscious perception can never be retraced. Thus when Merleau-Ponty conjoins the three sciences, philosophy, physiology and psychology in his study he wants to establish that given "the present state of philosophy there are grounds for attempting a synthesis of the results of experimental psychology and neurology with respect to the problem of perception, to determine through reflection its precise meaning, and perhaps to recast... philosophical notions."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1028b 1-10. However, if by substance one understands *ousia* or matter simply put then one runs the risk of the regress of Husserl's own reduction which founders when holding up the notion of a noematic core to account for *hyletic* data, that is, the veritas of the matter beyond the entity's form. Chapter 4 will hope to provide a more adequate account of the nature of being through Heidegger's analysis of φύσις, as well as suggesting how this sets up Merleau-Ponty's requirement of a *wild Being*.

<sup>29</sup> *TD*, 75.

<sup>30</sup> *TD*, 75.

Merleau-Ponty feels one can attain a new understanding of the nature of perception by engaging in what, at the time, were burgeoning scientific theories of perception, in particular the synthesis of neurology and psychology as seen in the new German *Gestalt* psychology of perception. In a discussion of the various efforts to understand perception Merleau-Ponty concludes that the sciences are already shot through with philosophical presuppositions; furthermore the problem of perception for these sciences cannot be “completely elucidated without resorting to the philosophy of perception.”<sup>31</sup> A philosophy of perception asks what is the *there is* rather than always presupposing (positing) it. In so doing Merleau-Ponty cites Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology as a new direction that attempts to rid philosophy of its psychologistic adherence which, as he says, “continues to insist on the ‘reduction’ whereby one passes from the natural attitude, which is that of psychology as of all the positive sciences, to the transcendental attitude, which is that of phenomenological philosophy.”<sup>32</sup> In his analysis of Husserl’s reduction—based upon Husserl’s psychological analysis of perception and his comparison between phenomenology and psychology with mathematics and physics in *Ideen I* and *II*—Merleau-Ponty understands that Husserl looked to “the development of his philosophy for a renewal of the principles of psychology” which lead him to the threshold of *Gestalt-psychologie*.<sup>33</sup> The renewal of these questions concerning perception, as Merleau-Ponty rightfully contends, is a matter of renewing psychology “on its own terrain”<sup>34</sup> by exposing philosophically the methodological paradoxes endemic to such positivist efforts that attempt to fix contingent meanings such as representation, memory and

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<sup>31</sup> *TD.*, 77.

<sup>32</sup> *TD.*, 77.

<sup>33</sup> *TD.*, 77-78.

<sup>34</sup> *TD.*, 78.

experience. What it fails to do however, and where Merleau-Ponty must ultimately part company with Husserl, is that although philosophical method has renewed psychology's ability to scrutinize perception more effectively, it has done so by grafting itself onto philosophy thereby subsuming philosophy under the aegis of what are deemed to be more credible inductive or scientific methods whose conjectural positings are antithetical to the primacy of phenomenological ontology. Scientism's claim to self-validation (thetic closed systems), fails to provide adequate correspondence with an empirical datum, yet it is precisely what the scientist claims he can do as a corrective for the indeterminacies inherent in philosophical language. Owing to Husserl's efforts however, the phenomenological movement has had profound effects on psychology by "bringing to life *the methods proper to it*,"<sup>35</sup> with the provision says Merleau-Ponty that the very new question this relationship gives rise to "can assist us in revising the very notions of consciousness and sensation...conceiving differently the 'cleavage' of consciousness."<sup>36</sup> Merleau-Ponty however will admonish philosophers for reducing consciousness to the mere sum of impressions leading him to consider an older branch of *Gestalt*-psychology as perhaps providing a better understanding of the primitive figure-ground constellation of perceptions. That is he says, "primitive perception bears rather on relations than on isolated terms—*visible*, not *conceived* relations."<sup>37</sup> One senses now why Merleau-Ponty would find in *Gestalt*-psychology a foundational principle suggesting a manner in which a subject begins to be instantiated and expressed, not conceptually, but as a positivity within a field which is both of pure *visibility*, one where I am *in*

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<sup>35</sup> *TD.*, 78.<sup>36</sup> *TD.*, 78.<sup>37</sup> *TD.*, 79.

a constellation, and where I arrive *in-visibility*. Merleau-Ponty says of *Gestalt*, the following: “The *Gestalt* is a spontaneous organization of the sensory field which has supposed ‘elements’ dependent on ‘wholes’ which are themselves articulated within more extensive wholes.”<sup>38</sup> Careful not to misconstrue the salient factor of how one arrives at an understanding of the nature of perception Merleau-Ponty will distinguish the organizing proclivities of the subject (in Heideggerian terms, *logos*) and the sensations which arise in them to formulate such a constellation of relations saying, “This organization is not like a form imposing itself upon a heterogeneous matter; there is no matter without form; there are only organizations, more or less stable, more or less articulated.”<sup>39</sup> Already Merleau-Ponty is keenly aware of the relative danger of holding that sensations—as primary data—are *of consciousness*, and in an anti-Cartesian move these phenomena he says, are rather, *for* consciousness; not as in the former, projected upon and synthesizing a world of heterogeneous matter for there are always and primarily beings, things which are—that is, forms which exist in relation to an incarnated horizon of all other beings intertwined and co-valent with the subject. This expansive field of visibility says Merleau-Ponty is not merely “a mosaic of qualities but of an ensemble of distinct objects.”<sup>40</sup> Nor does an array of objects stand out because of memory or prior experience, inhering meaning *in* and *of* itself, but instead exists within the spatialization and constellation of *figure-ground*, what Merleau-Ponty in the *Visible and the Invisible* will call

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<sup>38</sup> *TD.*, 79. See also Aron Gurwitsch’s study of consciousness and *Gestalt theory* in *The Field of Consciousness*, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1964). Gestalt theory, says Gurwitsch, “replaces the traditional conception of parts and wholes in terms of elements by a functionalist conception. Parts are defined as constituents or ‘whole-parts.’ They are conceived of as essentially determined and qualified by the functional significance which they have with respect to each other and, hence, for the whole of Gestalt contexture into which they are integrated. The whole is accordingly considered as the equilibrated and balanced coexistence of its functional parts in their thoroughgoing interdependence....On the grounds of the functionalist conception of wholes and parts, no priority of wholes or parts can arise.”

<sup>39</sup> *TD.*, 79.

<sup>40</sup> *TD.*, 79.

ontological relief.

Merleau-Ponty's *Primacy of Perception*, "A Prospectus of His Work," begins with the claim that perception initiates one to truth, primarily a perception of appearing bare/naked things (*blosse Sachen*) for a subject whose vision is an entangled co-variant of the *in-the-visible*. Merleau-Ponty prepares the way for understanding the ground of one's communication with others, or apropos of his ontology, a *modality of existence*. Communication however, is seen by Merleau-Ponty as not merely reactive or vocative, but also *expressive*, situational, and postural. Because the latter obtains through the signifying properties of our bodies it is not enough to say that the pressures of perceiving sense lie within the purview of the mind alone, nor are they the result of pure exteriority at the expense of consciousness. Rather, Merleau-Ponty maintains one must rethink the relationship between the mind and body, that in fact, the perceiving mind is an incarnated mind: "I have tried, first of all, to re-establish the roots of the mind in its body and in its world, going against doctrines which treat perception as a simple result of the action of external things on our body as well as those which insist on the autonomy of consciousness."<sup>41</sup> In Merleau-Ponty's explication of his development as a philosopher, in "An Unpublished Text by Merleau-Ponty: A Prospectus of His Work,"<sup>42</sup> he begins by pointing to his early investigations in the field of psychology and physiology in order to establish the relationships "which obtain between the perceiving organism and its milieu."<sup>43</sup> Notice that Merleau-Ponty is content to leave aside causation—what and how this entity *is*, or comes *to be* through its relationship or modalization

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<sup>41</sup> *P.*, 3-4.

<sup>42</sup> *P.*, Arleen B. Dallery, tr., 3-11.

<sup>43</sup> *P.*, 4.

(or *mondialization*—that is, a an expression of world) with its milieu. In so doing he endeavours to situate perception centrally within what is already *out there* and how nature bears upon *an organism* within such a system. The inadequacy of the nature-causal condition, which holds that nature operates as an agent upon an organism—that it is transcendental and ordered rationally *a priori*—limits the organism to the status of a reactive physiological, epiphenomenal container. Considered in other terms it regards (1) the external, *natural* and bio-mechanistic equation, or (2) the autonomy of consciousness; either project one might assert, amounts to a philosophy of forgetting which opts for either pure exteriority or pure interiority which are both highly speculative constructions. Necessary to his critical reformulation Merleau-Ponty recalls:

When one attempts, as I have in *The Structure of Behavior*, to trace out, on the basis of modern psychology and physiology, the relationships which obtain between the perceiving organism and its milieu, one clearly finds that they are not those of an automatic machine which needs an outside agent to set off its pre-established mechanisms. And it is equally clear that one does not account for the facts by superimposing a pure, contemplative consciousness on a thinglike body....[mere] Behaviours reveal...certain *elementary* situations...as if there were an '*a priori* of the organism,' privileged conducts and laws of internal equilibrium which predisposed the organism to certain relations with its milieu. At this level there is no question yet of real self-awareness or of intentional activity.<sup>44</sup>

It is clear from the preceding quotation that the organism assumes a strictly passive posture, unifying it with the natural ends of its environment, while the organism's predestination resides firmly on the side of nature-as-agent. Merleau-Ponty wants to suggest however that the subject cannot be properly explicated by a forced, and hence erroneous dialectical relation of a philosophy of inside and outside. The incoherence of a *natural* model which holds that one is passively

present at the emergence of a subject, its body, and its world must be shown to be untenable for a theory of perception. For what the quotation suggests is that even before the subject becomes a subject he is already *the subjected*, an idealized, epi-phenomenal, Archimedean point within a larger pre-determined organon.

Having taken up the analysis of the *naturalized* subject as the mere epi-phenomenal extension of nature's purpose and given that we still need to establish what this thing nature *in fact* is, Merleau-Ponty's investigation turns from the presumed determinism of an ordered, rationalized nature—given to an elevated consciousness by scientific-realist presuppositions—to the primacy of perception in his foundational work, *Phenomenology of Perception*, stating unequivocally that “we are no longer [merely] present at the emergence of perceptual behaviours; rather we install ourselves in them.”<sup>45</sup> In order to develop a more robust theory of perception Merleau-Ponty will have to make the move from the side of nature and its passive subject (*the* subject) to intentionality and agency that is preponderantly on the side of the human, from the merely *ontic*—an undifferentiated field of things—to the ontological.

Merleau-Ponty will have to reformulate the benign causal-dependence evinced in the *natural attitude* in order to liberate and rethink a conscious subject who, in the words of Heidegger is, *selbstgegeben*, one who is consciously comported to self-givenness as the mediational cusp between being-self and being-thing. A few remarks by way of conclusion then will set up the bridge from what generally obtains in the dialectical process that assumes only Being and the *not-thought* to an interrogative or hyper-dialectic which takes as its own the prepossession of Being as

its anchorage in a dialectic without synthesis. Thus far I have tentatively traced earlier positivist and empiricist efforts that “invented ‘facts’ out of supposed elements and inferences for whose occurrence in perception there is no evidence,”<sup>46</sup> and in their own way have struggled with perception and nature, those from which Merleau-Ponty departs in order to address in a far more nuanced manner the question of appearing, an *appearing for*, and now an appearing-self—the latter, a question Herbert Spiegelberg maintains has often been overlooked in phenomenological studies.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore it is this question of the *how* of appearing for consciousness to which Merleau-Ponty will now have to turn in order to excavate a deeper, more radical phenomenological enterprise. His characteristically anti-Cartesian stance holds that before there is a reflective world-constituting consciousness there is always first and foremost the fact that there is *something*, not necessity, but facticity.<sup>48</sup> This is of course counter to the Kantian conception of consciousness which embraces and constitutes the world and whose self-reflection transcends the phenomenon of appearing entities and consciousness—the primacy of thetic intent assumes consciousness can provide a corrective for what it sees as the flaw of indeterminacy in phenomenon. And yet there is still a remnant of Descartes’s thinking which Merleau-Ponty takes to be salient, “an element of final truth in the Cartesian return of things or ideas to the self”<sup>49</sup> that poses the still difficult problematic of how these entities appear for conscious beings. The difficulty Merleau-Ponty faces is to provide an account of sense which, he understands, is not an either-or proposition—as is the case with the

<sup>46</sup> *TD.*, 148.

<sup>47</sup> Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, 703.

<sup>48</sup> *PhP.*, 344.

<sup>49</sup> *PhP.*, 369.

often misinterpreted title, *Sense and Non-Sense*<sup>50</sup> (by which one should not take it to mean a lack of sense)—but a sense of the thing, not concealed behind or beneath appearances, but incorporated in the very appearances themselves. It is in this specular field and mute datum that the existence of the sensing-sentient is entangled for “consciousness takes flight from itself and, in them, [beings] it is unaware of itself.”<sup>51</sup> Merleau-Ponty is clear on this point, wanting to preserve the Cartesian or Pascalian anxiety of indeterminacy saying “One cannot say that everything has sense or that nothing has sense, but only that *there is sense*.”<sup>52</sup> Once the break is made says Merleau-Ponty, between appearance and reality within the subject it is irreparable, yet the consequence of this is the absurdity that the teleology of consciousness presumes it can convert into truth.<sup>53</sup> Merleau-Ponty remains cautious recognizing that on the side of intellection and theories of mind a *natural attitude* prevails. The *natural attitude*, whose antecedents we recognize in Helmholtz’s postulate and the constancy thesis, holds that perception can be explained as a physical-causal theory: the universe is conceived within the determination of the physical sciences, a *true* and *scientifically valid* universe, and that the human organism as a physical system is *acted upon*. Consider how Merleau-Ponty adumbrates, in his introduction to *Phenomenology of Perception*, “Traditional Prejudices and the Return to Phenomena,” the problem of a subject-nature-perception relation: “The law of constancy cannot avail itself, against the testimony of consciousness...wherever we believe that we are establishing it, it is already presupposed.”<sup>54</sup> Consciousness says Merleau-

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<sup>50</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, Herbert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus, trs., (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964). Hereafter indicated as *SNS*.

<sup>51</sup> *PhP.*, 369. For a comprehensive outline for the theory of consciousness in phenomenology see Aaron Gurwitsch’s study, in particular “Merleau-Ponty’s theory of Perceptual Organization,” in *The Field of Consciousness*, 295-305.

<sup>52</sup> *PhP.*, 296. Emphasis added.

<sup>53</sup> *PhP.*, 295-296.

<sup>54</sup> *PhP.*, 8.

Ponty, “is neither the positing of oneself, nor ignorance of oneself, it is not concealed from itself, which means that there is nothing in it which does not in some way announce itself to it, although it does not need to know this explicitly.”<sup>55</sup> Consciousness resides in the *chora*, that space between *episteme* and phenomena which is also the web spanning the very *écart* that is Being-an-object.

To conclude then, the *solutions* arrogated by theories of perception and of philosophy (those that go beyond facticity and perception) as the positing of a transcendental world and ideas is an emerging crisis in humanism insofar as it verges on the “point of forgetting the contribution of perception to our idea of truth....Nor does critical thought even define the positive steps of thinking or its most valid accomplishments.”<sup>56</sup> Merleau-Ponty shone the light of Diogenes’ lantern before him and exposed a fundamental incommensurability at the heart of the empiricist enterprise where a universe of perception always slipped out of the grasp of the universe of science.<sup>57</sup>

Indeed it is with the clarity of Madison’s insight that we find Merleau-Ponty on the dehiscent and conditional threshold of the possibility of phenomenological procedure’s next step, one that, according to Herbert Spiegelberg, Husserl’s idealism and phenomenal reduction never encouraged<sup>58</sup> because it extended beyond normative description and what is given to the normative force of rational, deductive method. However it was the embryothonic possibilities that lay in Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology—which asked the question, what remains unthought in the appeal to things themselves?—that informed Merleau-Ponty’s earlier efforts. This *unthought* turns out to be the deeply reflective, interpretive move brought about in the sensing subject’s silent

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<sup>55</sup> *PhP.*, 296

<sup>56</sup> *P.*, 3.

<sup>57</sup> *TD.*, 75.

<sup>58</sup> Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement, A Historical Introduction*, 712.

appeal to its own constitutive divergence, that which has been passed over in the mere description of experience, leaving doxa intact as the uncorroborational source of epistemology. The purely descriptive account of epistemic correspondence—a metaphysical inversion that arrogates meaning and extension—has always constrained a phenomenology that Spiegelberg contends has not proven to be very encouraging in expanding its project, while the hermeneutic method of Paul Ricoeur potentiates a phenomenological programme that opens on to an enriching interpretive experience of human existence, and philosophical self-examination. Short of this says Spiegelberg, “we will have to fall back on the standard method for the indirect verification of hypotheses as practiced in the inductive sciences.”<sup>59</sup> Ironically Spiegelberg’s warning is peremptory, for what he sees as the redemption of phenomenology is at the same time its indictment—he prematurely announces that “Perhaps it [hermeneutic phenomenology] should not even sail under the flag of philosophy.”<sup>60</sup> But this is question begging of the worst kind and forgets that Merleau-Ponty had already embarked on an ambitious project to formulate a third philosophy bound to carnal expressibility. However, hermeneutic phenomenology’s methodology—a fundamental ontology proper to the science of philosophy according to Heidegger—provides the stage for an investigation into the modes of appearances (as opposed to, in Hegel for example, *appearances*) that is, a manner or mood (*Stimmung*) that calls on new and vital expressions hitherto unheard—the possible renewal of philosophy. Spiegelberg holds that phenomenology’s importance is dependent upon the extent to which its spirit permeates other philosophies. In other words it asks to what extent

<sup>59</sup> Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, 714.

<sup>60</sup> Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, 714.

phenomenology is correspondent with, or vies for a privileged place among the pantheon of the other positive sciences and branches of philosophy *proper*. The implications this has for phenomenology is that it acknowledge philosophy's internal rules of construction and to benevolently genuflect to precepts and philosophical canons, those fields of study whose "blind adherence to outworn notions, [breeds a] pathological suspicion of any form of critical self-examination."<sup>61</sup> Are the conventional features of philosophy adequate to the task Berlin sets before it or as Spiegelberg notes, can phenomenology invest the rest of philosophical method with its own spirit—as though it is a *matter of geist* in the first place. We may be too quick in assuming a sentiment in these two assertions that *seem* generously inclusive. However is it not the case that one can be duped into thinking of *spirit*, *essences*, *Ideals*, or *transcendentals* too readily if one fails to read closely enough their sophistry? I take it as yet another attempt at out-flanking what is necessarily *there* for philosophy, for Merleau-Ponty's project, and for a phenomenology which as a truly modern philosophy, has been too readily dismissed.

Phenomenology, *how* it investigates its object, seeks not knowledge about philosophy rather, Heidegger says it enables one to philosophize<sup>62</sup> and is always already the principle philosophical science that is "propaedeutic to philosophy, preparing the ground for the proper philosophical disciplines of logic, ethics, aesthetics, and philosophy of religion."<sup>63</sup> The contention Heidegger will make next, and the question he sets out to answer in the *Basic Problems*, is not only

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<sup>61</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Concepts and Categories, Philosophical Essays*, Henry Hardy ed., (London, Pimlico Press, 1978) 11.

<sup>62</sup> Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 3. I wonder if Heidegger's thinking isn't flawed here; though claiming phenomenology is primary, his assertion that one asks the question of "whether philosophy is at all possible," and yet that the question can "be only decided by philosophy itself," 4.

<sup>63</sup> Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 3.

germane to my investigation here but also, it seems to me, hints at the fulcrum on which Merleau-Ponty's philosophy balances. As a preparatory science says Heidegger phenomenology takes over the traditional stock of philosophical disciplines however without considering whether or not these disciplines are called into question or "eliminated precisely by phenomenology itself."<sup>64</sup> That is, its validity should never be tested for its correspondence with other philosophical disciplines nor for that matter whether one can reconcile phenomenology as the overcoming of traditional philosophies which would require one to acknowledge the validity of their discursive formations.

The enterprise is not as cynical as that though. Merleau-Ponty's humanist project engages the urgent appeal for the revitalization of a situated philosophy by reconnecting that which had always been proper to it, the ontological *positum* in the phenomenal field. The best way to frame the exigence this project obtains is to quote at length the summarizing words of Merleau-Ponty himself from the working notes of *The Visible and the Invisible*:

Our state of non-philosophy—Never has the crisis been so radical—The dialectical "solutions" = either the "bad dialectic" that identifies opposites, which is non-philosophy—or the "embalmed" dialectic, which is no longer dialectical. End of philosophy or rebirth? Necessity of a return to ontology—The ontological questioning and its ramifications: the subject-object question...the question of inter-subjectivity...the question of Nature. Outline of ontology projected as an ontology of brute Being—and of logos....An *Ursprungsclarung* is needed.<sup>65</sup>

It is from Merleau-Ponty's principle emphasis upon a chiasmic relational dynamic between the subject/consciousness and nature/entities that one must now turn, to not only a phenomenology of perceiving but ultimately toward a phenomenology of the subject's immanent

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<sup>64</sup> Heidegger, *The basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 3.

<sup>65</sup> *VI.*, 165.

arrival in history, language, art, and ethics. It still leaves the problem of appearance rising up for us as a phenomenon while one looks upon oneself as already another who is installed in a life-world as the pre-conscious, yet operative *hinge* between beings—between phenomenology/experience and truth/knowledge, that is not a dialectics of forced correspondence but instead a *good ambiguity* and a determinate arrival at thinking the question of community. The exigency for phenomenological ontology is its interpretive feature which seeks in expression a new philosophical rigor on the order of invention. Merleau-Ponty asks in a 1960 seminar on phenomenology and analytic philosophy whether “there is *invention* in that which has to do with thinking? Because it seems to me...that the limits of philosophy...leave no place for an inventive function.”<sup>66</sup> What Merleau-Ponty means by expression and what this obtains for a being who is the hinge occupying the enigmatic space between phenomena and knowledge will be subject to closer scrutiny in Chapter 6, as well as a more extensive study elsewhere focusing on the appeal to an expression of what is before expression for a subject who, in a “surpassing...does not leave its field of origin,”<sup>67</sup> a horizontal Babel as the necessary condition for any possibility of a *relational concept*.

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<sup>66</sup> *TD.*, 66.<sup>67</sup> *VI.*, 153.

THREE

δηλον

THE SEARCH FOR EVIDENCE IN THE WAKE OF WANDERING DELOS

—*If we have stressed the problem of nature, it is from the double conviction that it cannot by itself solve the ontological problem but that neither is it a subordinate or secondary element in any such solution—*

M. Merleau-Ponty

—*What exists, I see with certainty. What does not exist, I shall create, if I must.... But the suffering of the prenatal is there—*

A. Artaud

—*"To accede to the thing itself" can no longer mean "to arrive at the constitution of an ordinary signification," but to hold the step of thought suspended over this sense that has already touched us—*

J-L. Nancy

*If we have stressed the problem of nature*, as I have attempted to do in the previous chapter, what obtains from such an excursus must certainly be the question of Delos.<sup>1</sup> The pursuit for evidentiary truths of *what is* has always troubled human consciousness, a consciousness that is the very space between experience and phenomena and the proclaimed primacy of intellection and unequivocal *episteme* (knowledge). The fundamental coordinates of this antagonism, claims Merleau-Ponty in the essay "The Founders of Philosophy,"<sup>2</sup> produce and re-produce one another. The Greeks, who did not possess a sense of subjectivity, understood this question as constitutive of philosophy bringing to "light all the presuppositions of life and knowledge... [and this] extreme point of... the rediscovery of the abrupt upsurge of being prior to reflection, [is a] radical knowing [which] rediscovers unknowing."<sup>3</sup> For Western civilization the inauguration of consciousness is the very

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<sup>1</sup> Delos, the birthplace of Apollo, from the Greek δηλον meaning evident or manifest.

<sup>2</sup> *TD.*, 123-125.

<sup>3</sup> *TD.*, 124-125.

divergence of these two moments, in Merleau-Pontyan terms it is the *écart* of *being-subject* and *being-thing*, what I see and how I know it to be so, nature and consciousness, oneself and another.

But it is evidence we seek, something which propaedeutically provides one with the positum of one's inquiry while acknowledging as well the Realist debate it engenders.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, in my search for what is evidentiary I should like to turn first to the mythological account of Delos' appearing as the *what is* of evidence. "Neither heaven nor earth nor sea was open for this goddess...until Delos, pitying the wanderer, said to her: 'You are a vagrant on the land; I, on the sea,' and gave her a place that never stood still...an island, lightly floating on the sea."<sup>5</sup> And so the story is told that Leto, daughter of the Titans Coeus and Phoebe, after having joined with Zues as a quail, is pursued through the world by Heras' charge, the serpent Python. In order that Leto be granted a place to birth her children, the twins Artemis and Apollo, Zues tied Delos down to the ocean floor with adamantine chains. "Delos, hitherto a floating island, became immovably fixed in the sea and, by decree, no one is allowed either to be born or die there,"<sup>6</sup> a place that is timeless, atemporal presence. The island of Delos, tethered, no longer wandering and leaving no factual evidence of its having passed in its perpetual appearing and waning, is the sanctuary of Apollo—god of light, meter, reason, Apollo the purifier—a sanctuary of pious devotion where earth and

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<sup>4</sup> For example, traditional claims hold that external reality provides no epistemic ground, and that external physical bodies is merely the result of perceptions, that is, subjective occurrences in our minds. What is presented are impressions, ideas, representations, experiences, or sense data, all of which originate in the mind as pure noema. It seems that more recent thinkers—among them pragmatic realists for example, like Hilary Putnam—such as A.J. Ayer, G.E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, are inculcated still in the philosophies of Descartes, Locke, Berkeley and Hume. Although I take him to be terribly problematic in his assessment of normativity (instrumentalist and idealist), and the inferential force he takes to follow pragmatically, see Hilary Putnam, *The Many Faces of Realism: The Paul Carus Lectures*, (La Salle: Open Court Publishing, 1987), as well as his new publication, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, G.P. Goold ed., Frank Justus Miller, tr., (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1916), Bk. VI 186-191, 333-335.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1955), Vol. I, 14.a.

heaven, mortals and gods commune.

This anecdote may seem not to have anything to do with the foundational question of *how* or *what* one knows the nature of entities to be but it does exhibit (albeit through the mytho-poetic narrative) the basic features of the conditions which set epistemological concerns into play, not to mention of course, the fact-of-the-matter which informs how phenomenology gets at the question of the first science of beings, ontology.

*Episteme*, according to Socrates—which philosophy presupposes it can determine, and access out of the disclosing-concealment of the nature of τὰ πάντα ὅν (the all which is)—remains at odds with things that do not hold their place. In what manner then is one able to assert any correspondence with natural entities at all for the problem here, as Heraclitus certainly conceived of it, is that things in nature are moved, and that the *everything that is* is moved according to its relatedness to ὄντα (things that actually exist), λόγος (gathering), and γνώσις (inquiry).<sup>7</sup> Eugen Fink and Martin Heidegger's seminar on the Heraclitus fragments illustrates how Heraclitus' philosophy formulated the fundamental grounding question of one's primal relationship with the world, while investigating how the very problem of epistemology is posed by a thinker who, says Fink "we have not overtaken...even now."<sup>8</sup> Their analysis of the fragments yield a comprehensive account of the elusive and contingent character of entities in their appearing. Fink and Heidegger turn to the fragments, not in an effort to reconstruct Heraclitus' lost *magnum opus* Περὶ Φύσεως (*On Nature*), but to adumbrate the inner coherence of these fragments which speak to a cosmology

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<sup>7</sup> I am using Heidegger's translations here; in their methodological significance they bring us into the very breach of an already full-fledged philosophy and sheds light on the troubling place ascribed to τὰ πάντα in Heraclitus Fr. 1 which is postulated to be an extant fragment from his lost opus Περὶ Φύσεως.

<sup>8</sup> Heidegger and Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar*, 3.

and the role nature plays in one's contact with an *Urheimat* (primal home).

In the discussion of Heraclitus' theory of the *one* (ἓν) and the *many* (πάντα), Heidegger places particular emphasis upon πάντα. He returns over and over again to this singular idea because he understands it as a horizon that comprises all ὄντα. Furthermore, he wants to get at how *the many* might be understood to appear in its appearing prior to one's reflection upon it. Heidegger says that τὰ πάντα are "thus not a whole, present in front of us, but entities in movement."<sup>9</sup> This will prove particularly germane to his reading of the concept of φύσις in short, the essence of appearing.

In their *Heraclitus Fragments*, Heidegger and Fink say Fr. 1 speaks to a movedness of πάντα and must be seen in relation to λόγος which emphasizes the distinctness of the "individuality of πάντα...[and] are spoken of as moved, that is, in accord with λόγος,"<sup>10</sup> and this move necessarily incorporates λόγος (gathering), the term that in its grasping identifies these entities as connected though not yet differentiated—before predication and the name. Heidegger will also say that, "πάντα are thus related to γνώσις [inquiry], to grasping humans,"<sup>11</sup> *interpreting animals*. As a *mode* of inquiry, to which is grafted the prefix διὰ (through), one enters the sphere of a consciousness which spans the space where entities appear to it, that fundamentally human feature defined by the deictic function expressing the *whatness* of entities. *Diagnosis* says Fink, is "sharpened in regard to smoke as a distinction-obscuring phenomenon,"<sup>12</sup> echoing Heidegger's notion of the relationship of *Da-sein* to self-disclosing concealedness.

One cannot then, hold to a merely descriptive account of *the all which is* without inquiring

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<sup>9</sup> Heidegger and Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Heidegger and Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar*, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Heidegger and Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar*, 18-19.

<sup>12</sup> Heidegger and Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar*, 18-19.

into the relationship between *πάντα* and *ὄντα*—how *ὄντα* come to be distinct and the manner in which their movedness might be better understood. I intimated that phenomenological method is not a zero sum game—as a mere descriptive project (an apodeictic gesture pointing to consciousness as teleological)—but that its more radical feature speaks to a double phenomenal appearing (subject/consciousness—nature/world constitution), appearances which are co-valent with a forever appearing/waning world. *Πάντα* are spoken of as moved in Fr. 1, co-determined with, and related to *λόγος*. In the same fragment—and here one confronts the full-blown significance of Merleau-Ponty’s later work—the “relationship of humans is also mentioned *in so far as humans do not understand the λόγος in its moving relatedness to the moved πάντα*.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, what is already understood is the paradoxical double appearing of *πάντα* and *λόγος* for a single sensing-sentient. The crucial consideration though, ramified throughout Fink and Heidegger’s discussion, is the primary endeavour to remain clear on what *τὰ πάντα* might mean for a subject—as Heidegger *a fortiori* claims, while *πάντα* are seen in their reference to *λόγος* (gathering), it “is not of [a] human character....[insofar as] *διαγνοίεν* is an indication that *πάντα* are characterized as what is distinguishable [all which is], *but not what is already distinguished*.”<sup>14</sup> This pre-ontological feature Merleau-Ponty will say, cannot itself solve the problem for phenomenology as mere description only, nor on the other hand, is it subordinate to any solution.<sup>15</sup>

Put another way, perhaps more in keeping with the spirit of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, one can say that *πάντα* (the all which is) is itself already an entity (a being) and that its distinctness

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<sup>13</sup> Heidegger and Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar*, 18-19.

<sup>14</sup> Heidegger and Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar*, 18-19. Emphasis added.

<sup>15</sup> One is still deeply ensconced in what figures as the pre-ontological datum before any robust hermeneutic phenomenology of perception. Merleau-Ponty’s “The nature of Perception: Two Proposals (1933),” *TD.*, 74-82, recognizes

as some-*thing* is at the same time not a plurality of predicates and actual things but a distinct singular impression-phenomenon against which ὅντα—singular things—stand out in relief for one's consciousness and coalesces. It follows then that ὅντα is not a predicate or particular quality that describes πάντα, for the *one* cannot describe the *many*, but instead added to what is already there in the content of πάντα: let us say, contends Merleau-Ponty, "that the thing is taken up into a sort of individual haze."<sup>16</sup> It is critical to Merleau-Ponty's own perspicuous resistance to traditional formulations of dialectic, as well as the suggestion being made here of a renewed *matter* (expression/language) of philosophy, that one resist the urge to infer from Pre-Socratic thinking a purely bivalent condition of nature/appearing and man/consciousness as is traditionally held. Rather, what I want to impress here is that the closely intertwined relationship of *being-object* and *being-subject* can be said to be a co-valent condition necessary for the appearance of *wild Being* who is always already present and rooted in the astonishment of the first day(s).<sup>17</sup> If *panta* is a component of the pre-condition for a subject's interpretive modality—as it moves through the ontic register, itself yet another component of those conditions—then the sharpening focus in the words of Fink, of diagnosis' individuation of both *panta* and *logos* will open upon the possibilities that pure immanence promises subjectivism. However against the too immediate privileging of

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a similarly construed primary ground of data while illustrating the short-fall of Gestalt psychology to explain such phenomena adequately. One will however get the sense for certain parallels between Heraclitus' theory of nature and how entities come to be distinct and Gestalt psychology's formulation of a sensory field from which an object comes to stand in distinction "because it possesses in our perception a special structure: the structure of 'figure-ground,'" 79.

<sup>16</sup> *TD.*, 165.

<sup>17</sup> Merleau-Ponty holds that a philosophy of negation, transforming the unknown into the known as *its object*, that is, the object of philosophy, is a lacuna that can never be filled for brute being and coexistence are already thrown when one has expressed it—a "thought which lets the perceived world be rather than posit[ing] it." Furthermore he maintains that language in forming itself expresses an ontogenesis, "from this it follows that the words most charged with philosophy are not necessarily those that contain what they say." *VI.*, 101-102.

context specific subjectivism which erodes into the non-liberal posture of pluralistic difference claims and the attendant vague political discourse of malcontents, I want to urge that a closer scrutiny is required because, for example, even primary perceptual formulations resist reduction and are not distinct or particularistic enough as the fundamental condition for the solipsist whose self-reflection is taken to be identity-constituting.

For consciousness the agonistic relationship (or in the terminology of Heidegger and Fink, *strife*) between a world that is flux and *episteme* (how can we guarantee knowledge of what appears to consciousness, and what are the necessary conditions for such knowledge) is, in part, illustrated by Platos' *Meno* and *Euthyphro*. Though ostensibly a dialogue which holds the proposition, *if virtue can be taught*, Platos' *Meno* suggests an analogy between circular arguments (*doxa*) and Daedalus' moving statues, as a means to uncover true *episteme*:

*Meno*: That must be so, I suppose. In that case, I wonder why knowledge should be so much more prized than right opinion, and indeed how there is any difference between them.

*Socrates*: I shall tell you the reason for your surprise...It is because you have not observed the statues of Daedalus.

*Meno*: What makes you say that?

*Socrates*: They too, if no one ties them down, run away and escape. If tied, they stay where they are put....If you have one of his works untethered, it is not worth much; it gives you the slip like a runaway slave. But a tethered specimen is very valuable... And that, I may say, has a bearing on the matter of true opinions. True opinions are a fine thing and do all sorts of good so long as they stay in their place, but they will not stay long. They run away from man's mind; so they are not worth much until you tether them by working out the reason. That process, my dear Meno, is recollection [*anamnesis*]...Once they are tied down, they become knowledge and are stable....What distinguishes one from the other is the tether.<sup>18</sup>

Meno wonders that *episteme* should be preferred to right opinion (*doxa*)—or why they should

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<sup>18</sup> Plato, "Meno," 97d-98b, in *Plato, Collected Dialogues*, Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds., W.K.C. Guthrie, tr., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).

even differ, and Socrates responds by saying that right opinions require to be fastened, for when they are bound in the first place they have the nature of knowledge (essential correspondence); and in the second place they are abiding. Thus knowledge stands fast, on the formal denotative plinth of sculptural works, or the determinacy of conviction brought on by the rules of rhetoric.<sup>19</sup> And this is why knowledge is more honourable, good, and well formed than true opinion, because fastened by a chain.

*Episteme* like the proper name presupposes some essentially transparent correspondence with some-thing. Yet even Socrates sees the problem of naming as arbitrary for, as he says, “he who follows names in the search after things, and analyzes their meaning, is in great danger of being deceived.”<sup>20</sup> The implication of Socrates’ claim is that the name, whether it is considered denotative or connotative, turns on the error of naming which in the first instance corresponds only to itself—the name names only itself in the duration of naming. One can express this problem as follows:

δῆλον [ name/thing ] δῆλον

What the preceding formulation hopes to do, while making no allusion to logic, is to illustrate

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<sup>19</sup> *Cratylus*, B. Jowett, tr. In particular I direct you to Socrates’ discussion on the origins of language, proper names, truth, and criticizing the human propensity to construct arguments out of nothing at all. The contention that language can express meaning so as to leave no doubt about its object of inquiry is also rigorously pursued in “Eidos: Universality in the Image or in the Concept?” by Ronald Bruzina. See *Crosscurrents in Phenomenology*, Ronald Bruzina and Bruce Wilshire eds., (Den Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 144-165. Bruzina poses the following question which echoes Socrates’ charge in the *Cratylus*: “Can meaning be expressed in such a way as to be *universal* (i.e., accessible as the same meaning to anyone who follows its expressive articulation) in ‘images,’ or is the universal accessibility limited to articulation in the form of *conceptual* expression? Is there a universality of *image* just as much as a universality of *concept*?” 146. The proposition this argument holds for the relationship between *episteme* and universal truths is, as Bruzina holds and, which, it seems to me, is the error which Merleau-Ponty sought to rectify contra Husserl’s *ideality*: “knowing things in terms of universality, in terms of meaning articulated as the universal in a thematic way, precisely requires divestiture of the sensuous,” 161.

<sup>20</sup> *Cratylus*, 436b-d.

through the use of square brackets what is internal and external to the condition of naming—here I use the square brackets in their denotative function eliding the connotative function which directs one to an appearing being, or the *what is* of brute datum. In the first equation the name is adequate to itself within the denotative grammatical function/fiction of the square brackets. In the second instance however, having bracketed out of the formulation that which is evident in its appearing for naming, I want to shift the signifying weight of the square brackets from a denotative one to a connotative expressive function by restating the formula as follows:

$$\delta\eta\lambda\omicron\nu ] \text{ name/thing } [ \delta\eta\lambda\omicron\nu$$

The second formulation signals an emphasis upon the name as the bearer of a connotative expressive function which one assumes inheres a universal validity and for which either side of the equation are its natural, corresponding predicates. However neither formulation for naming can function as an *adequatio ad rei* because the name, holds Socrates, when in one's mouth remains unchanged while what it presumes to name is no longer the same thing at all, no longer in the same state. Thus, that which has no state one cannot know and for which one cannot formulate a name that is proper to it. The realist debate this engenders is still deeply inculcated in the epistemic validity claims which balance on the non-question of which comes first, names or things?

The vexing problem for epistemology—and more importantly the *object* of philosophy—is that nature of beings is not a knowable state thus one can have no absolute and verifiable knowledge of it. There must be something other which can rise above the indeterminacy of the name and the error of a merely descriptive apodicticity. The guarantee of knowledge rests on an absolute knowledge of the *Idea* and in the *Seventh Letter* of Plato the enormity (and irony) of

philosophy's paradoxical chasing of its own tail is brought to bear in its full weight. The main thrust of Plato's excursus is to expound on the question of the thing itself, that is, What is *the thing of thinking*? Each being writes Plato, "are three classes of objects through which knowledge about it must come; the knowledge itself is a fourth; and we must put as a fifth entity the actual object of knowledge which is the true reality."<sup>21</sup> What obtains from this is that intellection must first posit the thing itself, that the thing of thinking is not the *what is* of appearances but rather thought which thinks itself—the primacy of reflection which is always-already a *poor* object.

Indeed an idea of the *Idea* accompanies one's agonistic search for meaning and substantiation or *in-corporation*, not as a positing activity but instead as an aspiration of what is possible. The task of philosophy says Giorgio Agamben "is to come with speech to help speech, so that, in speech, speech itself does not remain presupposed but instead comes to speech."<sup>22</sup> It is to this idea of expression, as it pertains to Merleau-Ponty's renewal of a philosophy of ontological phenomenology, that I will return later. While writing is seen as a further corruption of the *Idea*,<sup>23</sup> its connotative expressive function—as sensuous materiality (evidence)—represents the *matter of thinking*. This substantialization of what is on the cusp of expressibility is what is necessarily the *fact-of-the-matter* appearing from the abyss of writing's silence.

Heidegger's effort to return to first questions is aptly illustrated by the contention that it "does not concern me to interpret Heraclitus by Heidegger,"<sup>24</sup> rather to take heed, first and

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<sup>21</sup> *Letter VII*, L.A. Post, tr., 342a-b.

<sup>22</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities, Collected Essays in Philosophy*, Daniel Heller-Roazen, ed., and tr., (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 35.

<sup>23</sup> *Letter VII*, 343a.

<sup>24</sup> Heidegger and Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar*, 67. Though Heidegger makes much of listening to the ancients

foremost of what “is unsaid in the said....of what kind is the foundation of the interpretive step.”<sup>25</sup>

It is noteworthy that Heidegger’s sympathies lie not with a conciliatory enterprise to force a correspondence between appearing things and *Truth*, but rather takes up the challenge to reformulate the very question too often presupposed—what is the foundation, that is, the brute positum, of the interpretive step, the turning of the interpellated subject toward an appeal, a call, a demand?<sup>26</sup> Fink, in a similar fashion, proposes that the interpretive struggle can be summarized in the term *τροπή* (turning), whose inference calls on an obligation for the Janus-faced oscillation of *γνώσις* or inquiry, while Merleau-Ponty’s 1957 lecture on “Husserl’s Concept of Nature,”<sup>27</sup> cites Husserl as having correctly recognized that the “subject is not indifferent in the sense of being inactive, but its activity is *turned toward the erscheinendes Sein* [being as it appears].”<sup>28</sup> The relationship, one might contend, between the *one* and the *all which is*, evinces a life and death tension the result of which indicates “a certain anthropological key for the non-anthropological foundational relatedness of *ἐν* and *πάντα*.”<sup>29</sup> To echo once again Heidegger’s understanding of Heraclitus, that *the all which is*, is *not what is already distinguished* and that its gathering is not of

§ with Greek ears, requiring one to be deeply rooted within the paratactic proto-grammatical cadence of early Greek, what is distinctive about his claim is that it will locate him squarely within the tension between two hermeneutic perspectives. For Heidegger it will always be a question of “first questions,” and origins of primal astonishment when *Da-sein* expression touches upon the opening of *Being*. However questions of the “authenticity” of *Da-sein*, for example, fall within the the polarity of two distinct interpretive conventions, those that Paul Ricoeur has made a sustained study of: in the first instance the hermeneutic endeavours to provide an all-encompassing, comprehensive account of the epoch in which the text was produced (what Ricoeur has called the romance with historicism), on the other hand, and what Heidegger’s etymological turn suggests, is the positivist illusion of the autonomy of the text. This double-bind Heidegger had never really freed himself of, for first questions are already post-epochal and deeply indebted to the very manner in which the span of time has been bridged by our own interpretive conventions.

<sup>25</sup> Heidegger and Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar*, 67.

<sup>26</sup> For a compelling account of theories of subject formation and its debate, and in particular the discussion on Althusserian interpellation and the subject’s coming into being as a conscious agent through language see Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power, Theories in Subjection*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

<sup>27</sup> *TD.*, Drew Leder, tr., 162-168.

<sup>28</sup> *TD.*, 163.

<sup>29</sup> Heidegger and Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar*, 96.

a human character presents the threshold or non-foundational condition “of our spatiality... the seat of our *Urhistorie* [primal history], *an originary insertion*,”<sup>30</sup> the *emblemata* of the sensing-sentient in the richness of embryochthonic meaning a *wild Being* responding to expression’s silent appeal.

In George Pattison’s *The Later Heidegger*, Presocratic Greek—a term preferred by Nietzsche and endorsed by Heidegger—“was a Greek in which neither the sentence structure nor the manner of conceptualizing meaning can be assumed to be familiar.”<sup>31</sup> One can say with some degree of certainty that due to the suggestion that *πάντα* are moved in accord with a like-moved *λόγος*, inquiry or the *logos* will not provide a transparent, descriptive account of phenomena. Like Delos before her Leto, and *episteme* will remain a wanderer, forever a vagrant. Conventional translation of Greek texts presupposes the syntactic unification of sentences (presupposing narrative meaning *a priori*), however parataxis effaces this tendency, that is to say that clauses in a text are placed one after the other without terms to indicate narrative co-ordination or subordination, and will amount only to an inadequate synthesis whereby two elements—subject and predicate, x is y—will defy any presupposed unity. Here too, Fink is on point, for he holds that *ὅντα* are in no way predicate of *πάντα*, for how could the thing which actually exists provide a transparent, correspondential account of *the all which is*? If, according to parataxis, there is no clear subject and no determinate predicate, then one cannot assert meaning in an absolute sense; moreover one could contend that paratactical proto-grammar may indeed function as the profound ontological substrate, or *logos endiathetos* (meaning before logic), that turns on the fundamental hinge of

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<sup>30</sup> *TD.*, see also *VI.*, 167, 259.

<sup>31</sup> George Pattison, *The Later Heidegger*, (London and New York: Routledge Press, 2000), 138.

reversibility and alterity in a fully Merleau-Pontyan sense.

Admittedly, I have provided only a most rudimentary explication of their seminar proceedings, however one ought to begin to get a sense that the relatedness between the *one* and *all which is*, is not only subject to diagnosis (an interpretive turn), but the distinctions brought to bear on these entities through inquiry also sets λόγος in motion as an indeterminate deixis. Already with Heraclitus the object-subject correspondence are co-terms of intertwining contingencies in a single eventing for a connotative expressive that is the foundational *what is there* of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Heidegger's unfinished work, *Sein und Zeit*, opens again upon *the* beginning of the history of philosophy, and proceeds upon a path which he believes has long since been abandoned—the always foundational question of *evidence*. This question appears on the phenomenal threshold of renewed beginnings—beginning the unthought (the *sigetic*) of beginnings whose fleeting shadow of original Being is cast across the manner and swaying of our existence, that is, *Dasein's* comportment and modality (*Stimmung*). Heidegger begins the preface of *Sein und Zeit* with a momentous single term, δῆλον,<sup>32</sup> and so doing he hopes to direct a subject to *what is*: what it is *that is* or makes itself evident in the very being-called-upon that is *Da-sein's* questioning and path.<sup>33</sup> It is not the timeless fixed sanctuary, but the floating, wayfaring island of Delos that Heidegger will find himself on. His analysis of the concept of φύσις (nature) in Aristotle's *Physics* suggests that φύσις is a self-originating which is not *no-thing* for one is “not able to think that

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<sup>32</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 1.

<sup>33</sup> I self-consciously use the hyphenated form of *Dasein*. The move from *Dasein* to *Da-sein* is critical insofar as it indicates a move from a more egalitarian conception of *Dasein's* questioning of Being to a more atomistic and transcendently insular subject that faces interminable crises in the make-up of *Da-sein's* Being.

which is nothing, they [human beings] are surrounded by an infinite plenitude; when they set about thinking, the die is already cast: to think, it is necessarily to be.... For the concept of nature that we have referred to is in fact that which reveals to us its essence as evident.”<sup>34</sup> There are first and foremost forms, entities—Heidegger suggests that φύσις is the self-originating of form and can not, as is all too often claimed, provide one with *episteme* erroneously predicated upon a forced correspondence between matter (as experienced) and forms (as their consequence).

Δῆλον (evident, or what appears to us as evidence) comes to us from the root δηλω, to show or make manifest. Now to make manifest is not only δηλω, but one can say it is also φανερός, a manifestation φανέρωσις. What sort of significance can this have for Heidegger’s inquiry? Heidegger will say that the meaning of *Being* is “still veiled in darkness”<sup>35</sup> so that in the return to φανερός (what is manifest in a field of entities) it leads one to infer that what is evident, plain, clear, what is transparent, is crucial if one is to understand how its root in φανάρι, lantern or lamp, can show itself to be linked to the notion of a being’s self-disclosing concealment and how, furthermore, *Da-sein* is inculcated in this movement as the movement which is inquiry (the interpretive step-over silence)—*diagnosis* according to Fink and Heidegger.

The problem of what one can describe as the brute *whatness* of an external world is taken up by Heidegger’s analysis of φύσις—nature is the condition of appearing *before* there is any world-constitution as such, before the guise of a human mask<sup>36</sup> which confers (posits), presupposes,

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<sup>34</sup> *P.*, 136-137.

<sup>35</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §I: 1.4.

<sup>36</sup> *VI.*, 136. What Merleau-Ponty implies here one can infer from a more complete citation: “When we speak of the flesh of the visible, we do not mean to do anthropology, to describe a world covered over with all our own projections, leaving aside what it can be under the human mask.” That is, *wild Being* before expression in its carnal co-determination with a likewise corporicity of the world before humanity takes its name and face from our Enlightenment predecessors.

prescribes, the necessary condition of indeterminacy for meaning in expression *qua* expression. Therefore, Heidegger stipulates, “when we speak of the ‘nature of things,’ we mean *what* things are in their ‘possibility’ and *how* they are, regardless of whether and to what degree they ‘actually’ are.”<sup>37</sup> That is, what things are in their possibility is informed by *nature*, a pre-predicative coming into appearing anterior to language and representation—*appearances* (representations) in, say, the Hegelian sense. Thus, when Merleau-Ponty suggests that *nature is at the first day*, he is echoing to some extent the spirit of Heidegger’s first proposition regarding *φύσις*. In his introductory comments to his essay “On the Essence and Concept of Φύσις,” Heidegger poses what he takes to be the necessary first step to any understanding of philosophical foundations:

Whatever range has been attributed to the word “nature” in the various ages of Western history, in each case the word contains an interpretation of beings as a whole, even when “nature” seems to be meant as only one term in a dichotomy. In all such dichotomies, “nature” is not just one of the two equal terms but “essentially” holds the position of priority, inasmuch as the other terms are always and primarily differentiated by contrast with—and therefore are determined by—*nature*.<sup>38</sup>

However the key to his analysis of nature appears in an interpolation that he introduced into his own 1939 text which demarks the very conditional relationship of the subject to nature in the Nietzschean sense and one which Merleau-Ponty will divine as the keystone to his theory of brute ontology: Heidegger’s notes, “But the *perspective* within which the distinction itself is made is ‘being.’”<sup>39</sup> This has the effect of pushing our thinking back into an underlying positem, not the positem of *cogitata* but rather a primordial world of things in their self-disclosing *for consciousness*.

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<sup>37</sup> Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 183.

<sup>38</sup> Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 184.

<sup>39</sup> Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 184. Emphasis added.

Quite simply, that is to say the brute datum with which one must now be concerned is perspectival and expressive *qua wild Being*.

One must not be too hasty though in the leap to subjectivism for as I have already mentioned it too carries with it the odour of having been embalmed; and this exquisite corpse—this reliquary—is brought out for successive ostentations (like the shroud of Turin) in turn by such belief-based philosophies as analytics, idealism and transcendentalism. One does have to proceed however, though henceforth with cautionary overtones in the negotiation of presuppositions concerning concepts such as *the body* and *identity*, while foregrounding the distinction between a subject and *The subject*.

Consider what Merleau-Ponty has to say in “The Philosopher and His Shadow,” and how he attributes a brute positivity to what would otherwise be pejoratively labelled as the indeterminacy and *ab-grund* of a *solus ipse*, the haze of an anonymous life:

if we could really cut the *solus ipse* off from others and from Nature (as Husserl, we must admit, sometimes does when he imagines that first mind, then Nature is annihilated, and wonders what the consequences are for mind and nature)—there would be fully preserved, in this fragment of the whole which alone was left, the references to the whole it is composed of. In short, we would still not have the *solus ipse*.... True, transcendental solitude takes place only if the other person is not even conceivable, and this requires that there be no self to claim solitude either.... The solitude from which we emerge to intersubjective life is not that of the monad.... and the barrier between us and others is impalpable. If there is a break, it is not between me and the other person; it is between a primordial generality we are intermingled in and the precise system, myself-the others. What “precedes” intersubjective life *cannot be numerically distinguished from it, precisely because at this level there is neither individuation nor numerical distinction*.... The corporeality to which the primordial thing belongs is more corporeality in general... [it is] both transitivity and confusion of self and other [self and world].<sup>40</sup>

Thus, my effort to begin again, is suspended somewhere between Husserl's appeal that phenomenology, as a rigorous science, accept nothing given in advance, Heidegger's question; What remains unthought in the appeal to the things themselves? and Merleau-Ponty's disengagement from the delimitations of such appeals suggesting that in the dialectic between *natural* expression and *cultural* expression, "we should seek a third philosophy beyond this dilemma,"<sup>41</sup> one that is not merely a negation but concurrently "the very same inquiry restored to its vital sources,"<sup>42</sup> that is, its *ab-negation*.<sup>43</sup> Such appeals call for a return to beginnings, to perhaps on one account, things themselves<sup>44</sup> in their underlying identity-positings or for a return to the question of the unthought that is, second beginnings in Heideggerian terms,<sup>45</sup> as well as phenomenology's return to what is constitutive of its own fundamental grounding. John Sallis suggests that phenomenological inquiry amounts to "a recurrent movement of return to beginnings...that makes of the phenomenologist a perpetual beginner"<sup>46</sup> who will always be surpassed by the degree-zero originating founding. The ambiguity of a primary *écart* as renewed beginnings is the Merleau-Pontyan formulation of the modes of givenness, of authentic phenomena, and are given not only for

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<sup>41</sup> *PrP.*, 79.

<sup>42</sup> *PrP.*, 169.

<sup>43</sup> A nihilating existentialism is not endorsed by Merleau-Ponty as he always begins with the notion of being and beings, thus the negation is not one that opens onto a nihilating abyss, instead it is the negation of the *ab*, the nonentity or negation of entity, as already a thing—that is, as it already has the character of possibility—it is not a no-thing.

<sup>44</sup> See Dorian Cairns, "An Approach to Phenomenology," in *Philosophical Essays in Memory of Edmund Husserl*, Marvin Farber, ed., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940), republished under the title "An Approach to Husserlian Phenomenology," in *Phenomenology: Continuation and Criticism, Essays in memory of Dorian Cairns*, F. Kersten and R. Zaner, eds., (Den Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 223-238. In the same volume see also V.J. McGill's, "Evidence in Husserl's Phenomenology," 145-166.

<sup>45</sup> See in particular Pattison's *The Later Heidegger*, "The first and second beginnings of philosophy," 129-157. It is the particular thesis of Heidegger's work, *What is Called Thinking*. In *Contributions to Philosophy: From Ereignis*, Heidegger says, "The 'other' beginning of thinking is named thus, not because it is simply shaped differently from any other arbitrarily chosen hitherto existing philosophies, but because it must be the only other beginning according to the relation to the one and only first beginning." §1.4-5.

<sup>46</sup> John Sallis, "Things Themselves," in *Research in Phenomenology*, XII, 1982, 113-126.

phenomenology but for a genuine philosophy as such. The latter, in its Scholastic formulation, represented by such thinkers as Levinas, Foucault and Derrida among others, arrogates a systematic desubstantialization of the subject; a subject for whom, as Heidegger understood, the question of *Being* has been forgotten as well as, and more tragically, the forgetting of what has been forgotten in its *having passed*.

It must continue to be the case that the questioning *subject* for whom “the evidence of the world, which seemed indeed to be the clearest of truths, [now] supported by the seemingly most sophisticated thoughts, before which natural man now no longer recognizes where he...[stands],”<sup>47</sup> is the self-creative precondition for *our* question—not *the* question in the employ of some absolute *Other*, but for an otherness who is already alien to myself at the first day(s) *as myself*. This is not to say however that one seeks mere things themselves, that one’s perceptions stop there, and are bracketed insofar as that operation may guarantee epistemic certitude in subject-object correspondence. Without reflection, and more importantly *hyper-reflection*, perception becomes mere consciousness devoid of volition and subject to the nature/organism co-dependence—in Merleau-Ponty terms an *ideality* for a subject sealed up in a succession of private solipsistic events.<sup>48</sup> In the parabolic leap back to Husserl and Heidegger as the traditional fulcrum of the phenomenological debate, or the premature leap forward, beyond the subtly nuanced, and penetrating thinking of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of phenomenology, what is pervasively forgotten is

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<sup>47</sup> VI., 3.

<sup>48</sup> VI., 30. However, this insular *ipseity*, according to Merleau-Ponty is impossible, and therein lies its possibility for a renewed expression of a world. He says in his 1957-58 lectures on Husserl’s concept of Nature that, “the term solipsism is not entirely accurate: a true solipsism (if it were possible) would not know that it is isolated, would be unaware that it is alone,” *TD.*, 165. Or, as he says elsewhere “Solipsism is a ‘thought-experiment,’” *S.*, 173-175, or an “illusion,” *VI.*, 143.

the fundamental question of *what* appears and the *manner* in which things appear—as Aristotle said, it was a question raised long ago, one that still baffles us.<sup>49</sup>

The questions one ought to ask then proceeds not from philosophies but rather from the very things one inquires into and the problems such inquiry raises as perpetual self-beginnings, while the latter exists within the epistemic *skene* of the philosophical tradition itself. Philosophy is too often ensnared in interstices between a naïve descriptive account of phenomenology and a semantic game (the propositional bias of epistemology's relative truth-claims). In other words, as Merleau-Ponty's assiduous criticism of dialectic maintains, "Hegelianism situates this relation [phenomenology of living relations with the world] in the past in order to subordinate it to the systematic vision of the philosopher. Now phenomenology is either nothing but an introduction to absolute knowledge, which remains a stranger to the adventures of experience, or phenomenology dwells entirely within philosophy."<sup>50</sup> As I have already indicated in Chapter 3, it is not so much bringing philosophy before its own tribunal to be judged by the adequacy of its adherence to the formal function of its laws, but instead understanding that in its deterministic self-reflexivity it hands over "the whole of thought to one generic procedure."<sup>51</sup> According to Alain Badiou this constitutes the *suture* which simply grafts philosophy on to "one of its conditions."<sup>52</sup> This amounts to inverting the epistemological tradition, removing its fundamental keystone and making of philosophy a secondary system subsumed under a causal-explanatory account, what Madison has

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<sup>49</sup> Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, VIII, 1028b1-10 and 1029a26-84.

<sup>50</sup> *PrP.*, 112.

<sup>51</sup> Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, Norman Madarasz, ed., and tr., (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 61.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

otherwise called “*empiricistic realism*.”<sup>53</sup> In his essay “The Purpose of Philosophy,”<sup>54</sup> Isaiah Berlin rejects the mistaken initiatives of “those who wish to dismiss it [philosophy] as a pseudo-science...to be consigned together with theology and other speculative disciplines to the museum of curious antiquities.”<sup>55</sup> Like Merleau-Ponty’s own analyses of the cognitive sciences, and his testing of whether they are adequate to a philosophy of perception, Berlin too understands that “subjects or fields of study are determined by the kind of questions to which they have been invented to provide the answers. The questions themselves are intelligible if, and only if, we know where to look for the answers.”<sup>56</sup>

What follows is an effort to *de-suture* the object/subject/Truth (meaning) relation in such a manner as to allow for a renewed, albeit ambiguous expression, or expressions. What does a fixed representation of opposite terms mean—what is Truth? To this fatuous proposition Nietzsche simply responds that this reconciliation means “Inertia; that *hypothesis* which gives rise to contentment [the] smallest expenditure.”<sup>57</sup>

From Descartes to the present philosophers have been obsessed with the problem of establishing decisive proof for the existence of an independent, objective reality—the external world. I have already noted that the brute fact of the matter—of what is before expression of the *out there*—has been described in Heidegger and Fink’s seminar on the Heraclitus fragments as a fundamental antagonism between *the all which is* and *the one*, τὰ πάντα and ὅντα. In the dou-

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<sup>53</sup> Gary B. Madison, “Flesh as Otherness,” in *Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty*, 32.

<sup>54</sup> Berlin, *Concepts and Categories, Philosophical Essays*, 1-11.

<sup>55</sup> Berlin, *Concepts and Categories, Philosophical Essays*, 1.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>57</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, trs., Walter Kaufmann, ed., (New York: Random House, 1967), 537.

ble ontology of *natural light* and *natural inclination* there is a natal bond<sup>58</sup> which interlaces these seemingly mutually exclusive appearances into a single, co-substantial appearing. There is no one *thing* which can stand alone in self-referentiality, devoid of a context (or container as Fink says) of other entities which provides it with a certain armature. Nor nor can the thing describe, or function as a predicate to all of those things *which are* and represent an external world in its totality, nor for that matter can it tell us anything at all, I hasten to add, about the sum of massive corporeal presence within a singular scopic field of vision-in-the-visible.

A construction-crane for example, embedded in its concrete footings fails to stand-fast-in-place within its field. It appears (as already *having-appeared*) as some-thing, eroding the *there is* of what had been originally given. In the vertigo of the *real* perception slips away from my grasp, slipping away from the *I think* of thought which might have posited the thing as an *it is such*. When I then question myself and the *eidos* constructed out of my perception I become decentred as the originating thing resists naming in the very reflection upon what *has-been-reflected-upon*. However, this in no way vitiates the *real* as meaningless because the “breakup and destruction of the first appearance do not authorize me to define henceforth the ‘real’ as a simple probable, since *they are only another name for the new apparition*.”<sup>59</sup> This dis-illusion Merleau-Ponty suggests, is the loss of only one evidence in the acquisition of another evidence.

Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of the place of reflection in philosophy (reflection *as* philosophy) exposing the internal contradiction of reflecting upon perception, expressed as the *there was* of the

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<sup>58</sup> *VI*, 32 as well as, and more critically as it pertains to a subsequent discussion, 267.

<sup>59</sup> *VI*, 40.

thing: “in fact I should say that there was there a thing perceived and an openness upon this thing which the reflection has neutralized and transformed into perception-reflected-on and thing-perceived-within-a-perception-reflected-on.”<sup>60</sup> A philosophy of reflection erodes the factual world of brute evidence and replaces it with a *being-thought*.

Reflection poses a problem for Merleau-Ponty as the universe of thought opened by reflection arrogates that everything is contained in it and accounts even for first beginnings which, as a mutilated thought, “is only the ladder one pulls up after oneself after having climbed it....But if this is so, there is no longer any philosophy of reflection, for there is no longer the originating.”<sup>61</sup> This is not to say however that Merleau-Ponty is willing to jettison reflection all together for the sake of the immediate which ultimately only leads to the problem of the *in-itself* again whereby something is retained by way of a Cartesianism for a subject that is both reflective and interpretive. The issue still needing to be broached therefore is of course the place ascribed to the subject in the ontological schemata. I will say for the moment that reflection in a Merleau-Pontyan sense turns on a deeper probing by reflection, one that encroaches on what he has called the silent abyss, *σιγῇ*. What reflection forgets in its ascendancy is one’s natal and “muted relationship with the world, within an initiation into the world upon which it rests and which is *always already accomplished*”<sup>62</sup> when reflection intervenes. In such an archaeology reflection “must appear to itself as a progression toward a subject X, an appeal to subject X,”<sup>63</sup> which is to say that through a hyper-reflection—of the first order—there is a lamination or vulcanization of double appearings that is

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<sup>60</sup> *VI*, 38.

<sup>61</sup> *VI*, 35.

<sup>62</sup> *VI*, 35. Emphasis added. Also Cf. 13 and 14 Ch. 4.

<sup>63</sup> *VI*, 34.

the carnal intertwining of *being-thing* and *being-self*, a menaced space between the *cogito* and *cogitatum*. Merleau-Ponty holds that:

The philosophy of reflection [will never] be able to install itself in the mind it discloses, whence to see the world as its correlative. Precisely because it is reflection, return, re-conquest, or re-recovery, it cannot flatter itself that it would simply coincide with a constitutive principle already at work in the spectacle of the world, that, starting with this spectacle, it would travel the very route that the constitutive principle had followed in the opposite direction....The reflection finds itself therefore in the strange situation of simultaneously requiring and excluding an inverse movement of constitution...it should have to acknowledge itself to be a retrospective construction...an order of idealization and of “after-the-fact” which is not that wherein the world is formed.<sup>64</sup>

Nor can one assume a default position of mere perceptual faith against a reflection that “reflects back to it only its own light,”<sup>65</sup> for it evades the problem of a nihilating solipsism that lies at the extreme terminus of a teleology of mere description. Both the descriptive and reflective postures lead to a quietism; in the former a quietism of self-enclosed abdication on the order of a liberal doctrine of political correctness or pluralism, and in the case of the latter, the rarefied philosophical quietism of an interior, privileged perspective.

What I have suggested thus far is only a most provisional account of the *there is* of primary encounters in one’s field of experience from; mytho-poetical narrative foundations in a world of flux, through earlier theories of epistemology and how these efforts, have in their own *manner* —for it is *expression* (mannerism) I have been asserting all along—pursued correspondence-based *episteme*, seeking to uncover what nature is and to what extent one’s relationship with it defines a *being-self* (privileging the side of *The* subject). In the preceding chapter however I

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<sup>64</sup> *VI*, 45.

<sup>65</sup> *VI*, 34.

maintained an allowance for what I termed the co-valence (in Merleau-Pontyan terms, co-variance) of dialectical terms in order to let their incommensurability and deeply racinated ambiguity show through; from Merleau-Ponty's testing of empiricist claims and scientific realist deductions, and his reply to Husserl's concept of nature; to his ultimate rejection of a causal-descriptive account of phenomenon. Indeed, in both these chapters there is a preponderance of a spectral subject who, and as yet, also remains indeterminate and errant in the equation of *prima facie* appearing, one who is, as I will illustrate, always-already woven into the web of the dramaturgical wings of the agon of *Being*. To borrow a device from Derrida, while also pointing to what is elided in the philosophical account, I want to say,

] δῆλον [

But what is *evident*. Evidence above is bracketed by infinite passing and infinite arrival, like the immanence of the *pre-face* evinced in Cioran's empty gallows. It marks also infinite indeterminacy and that very indeterminacy is *finite* as its ownmost condition and yet concomitantly infinite for possibilities which are borne on the sigetic that the condition of the carnal hinge for ontology also inheres—that which is exterior is co-incorporated with an interior in an inverse self-sameness. Thus, I can more clearly stipulate that the *I* functions as the emblem of a chiasmic repetition-as-difference of concatenated point-events framed by infinite ellipses by stating the following:

...] δῆλον [...

A fundamental question still remains unanswered: what obtains for philosophy from a renewed understanding of the categories *nature* and *man* and what follows from the notion of an *a posteriori*, pre-ontological assumption about one's relation with an always appearing world?

The positum under investigation is not merely what one takes the human subject to be—as an already fully formed entity like Athena from the head of Zeus—but, in Heidegger’s formulation must come about through, and a thinking out of *φύσις* which turns on an investigation into the positum to the extent it bears upon the appearing existent—the interpretive act, the investigative diagnosis into *φύσις* (what is appearing). Marking a critical and necessary transition from the notion of an intuitive relationship with a world and what one knows (one could argue still too much indebted to a veiled nature-causal schema) to his chapter “The Intertwining—The Chiasm,” Merleau-Ponty suggests that “an original manner of aiming at something, as it were a *question-knowing*, which by principle no statement or ‘answer’ can go beyond and [is perhaps]...the proper mode of our relationship with Being.”<sup>66</sup> The *I* of epistemological certitude (or the *ich kann*, or self-identity of Husserl), flutters forever in a directionless wind over an abyss that is the *ab-grund* between immanence and transcendence, appearing and appearances, myself and an other, sense and expression. To better illustrate the result of what Merleau-Ponty calls bad dialectic, its merely reflective mood for a philosophy that reflects upon reflection (a posited *real*) in point of fact effaces the ontogenic, one’s primal corporeal adhesion *with-in-the-visible*. A philosophy of reflection states Merleau-Ponty in “Interrogation and Dialectic:”

if it is not to be ignorant of itself, is led to question itself about what precedes itself, about our contact with being within ourselves and outside of ourselves, *before all reflection*. Yet by principle it can conceive of that contact with being only as a reflection before the reflection, because it develops under the domination of concepts such as the “subject,” “consciousness,” “self-consciousness,” “mind,” all of which, even if in a refined form, involve the idea of a *res cogitans*.<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty's assessment of Husserl's phenomenological reduction in *Ideen I*, speaks to the problem of the concept of subjectivity, a subjectivity *of* and *for* reflection only:

To reflect is to unveil an unreflected dimension which is at a distance...which we cannot doubt that reflection attains, since it is through reflection itself that we have an idea of it. So it is not the unreflected which challenges reflection; it is reflection which challenges itself. For by definition its attempt to revive, possess, internalize, or make immanent has meaning *only with respect to an already given terminus*...In other words, reduced thought concerns nature as the "ideal meaning of acts which constitute the natural attitude"—Nature becomes once more the noema it has always been, Nature reintegrated to the consciousness, which has always constituted it through and through.<sup>68</sup>

Reflective philosophy is therefore impossible because it brings with it all that is un-reflected even the datum that appears for consciousness, that is to say, because there is no correspondence between *noema* and the thing. My reflections *here* on what is evident while impossible (as reflection brings with it a new apparition), nonetheless seeks to write against its very impossibility, even while the brute positivity of the signifier as an obfuscating palimpsest usurps the place of thinking. It is these lapsarian uncertainties which perform the chiasmic entanglements, the excess of sense, the wound one is (finite incompleteness and vulnerability), in the exigencies of writing against writing, philosophy against itself, sense against truth—a *writing asunder*.<sup>69</sup> My reflections here—writing the already written—only amounts to realizing the systems that I...construct will never equal my cries: the cries of a man engaged in remaking his life in the paradoxical "surpassing that does not leave its field of origin."<sup>70</sup>

One is still and always-already in the interpretive, hyper-reflective mood that is

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<sup>68</sup> *VI*, 161-162.

<sup>69</sup> Nancy, *Sense of the World*, 19. Cf. 23, provides a complete description of what Paul Celan means by *auseinandergeschrieben*, meaning, literally, written asunder, 177.

<sup>70</sup> *VI*, 153.

hermeneutic phenomenology proper, whose indeterminacy or certain absence is a *prototype of Being*<sup>71</sup> opening upon the very paradox of expression proper to a renewal of philosophy that is characterized as the “reconversion of silence and speech into one another,”<sup>72</sup> like the tension (or strife) of Merleau-Ponty’s reversibility and alterity, like the notion of *auseinander*, literally, out of each other. Not having satisfied the quest for evidence, and still immured in the paradoxical bind between *cogito* and *cogitata* Merleau-Ponty holds that it is a problem, “and we will not avoid it—to determine how the sensible sentient can also be thought. But here, seeking to form our first concepts in such a way as to avoid the classical impasses...do we have a body—that is, not a permanent object of thought, but a flesh that suffers when it is wounded.”<sup>73</sup> Is it not the case that (the) *flesh*, quite simply is the wound *that has already touched us*?

FOUR

LOGOS ENDIATHETOS AND THE EMBYOCHTHONIC

—Continental philosophy is not afraid of its own methodologies or its stylistic flourishes....Continental philosophy wants...to be able to act....[and] declines to make political moves that will bring it hegemony on the academic scene...to omit the political is to omit the activity....seeking to say and write what demands to be said, what demands to be written.—

Hugh J. Silverman

—He recovers his own being to the extent to which he runs into danger...when every second of continuing life is as miraculous as a birth, he feels invulnerable because he is in things at last—

M. Merleau-Ponty

—Philosophy is everywhere...and nowhere does it have a private realm which shelters it from life's contagion—

M. Merleau-Ponty

*Continental philosophy* is not so much a name nor does it claim for itself the hegemony of institutional privilege; it seeks instead to “have an effect, to expand the space for writing, to write where writing is called for.”<sup>1</sup> In short, it seeks to bring into the realm of expressibility the philosophical as well as the manner in which that *who* turns toward the silent appeal. For the most part philosophers forget that they are writers too, one may be granted that observation for, in their turn philosophers have also forgotten that human life is not played on a single scale,<sup>2</sup> they like Theseus, hope to be brought back to reason out of the labyrinth of dreadful indeterminacy and a threatened

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh J. Silverman, ed., *Philosophy & Non-Philosophy Since Merleau-Ponty*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 7. Nor is it in fact adequately represented in contemporary academe.

<sup>2</sup> This monism is taken up by Isaiah Berlin in *Four Essays on Liberty*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969). He considers the self-withdrawal endemic to philosophical quietism. The emancipation from all incommensurability in seeking the security of an inner sanctum is the “logical culmination of the process of destroying everything through which I can possibly be wounded is suicide. While I exist in the natural world, I can never be wholly secure. Total liberation in this sense is conferred by death,” 140. For an analysis of what is termed Berlin’s *incommensurability thesis* (really a Continental sensibility) or his thesis of *value-pluralism* which leads to an *agonistic liberalism*, see John Gray, *Isaiah Berlin*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). For a critique of philosophy’s attempt at constructing a unifying principle see Walter Benjamin’s wonderfully considered essay, *The Theory of Criticism*, in *Selected Writings, 1913-1926*, Vol. 1, Michael W. Jennings, ed., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

life and know well, like Odysseus, to stop their ears with a little piece of wax. The tragic death of Merleau-Ponty brutally interrupted *a profound thought in full possession of itself*—a thought forged out of the carnage of this century, political shifts of tectonic proportion, an East-West schism accompanied by a new existential malaise of failed utopic Marxism—a fully matured Continental sensibility of a philosopher who *is in things*. “One must live in a universe where all is meaning, politics as well as literature: one must be a writer. Literature and politics are linked with each other and with the event.”<sup>3</sup> The vicissitudes of a threatened life co-mingled with the sensuous—of being *in, and co-present with things* as represented—is generally occluded from the accounts of students of philosophies and speaks to a dangerous dilletantism endemic to the academy which in turn has become an impoverished place for that very reason. It is the sort of quietude which Merleau-Ponty himself struggled with over the course of his career, recognizing that a supporting cast of writers and theoreticians gladly function as the moral guarantee of colonialism.<sup>4</sup> But it is not only the West hiding behind its lofty liberal principles that Merleau-Ponty wanted to expose, but later in his career, by the time he is writing *Adventures of the Dialectic*, the violence of revolutionary communism proved to him that it too had to give up its veneer of good intentions. In his Translator’s Introduction, Joseph Bien argues that the dialectical relation between Party and proletariat plays itself out in an equally attenuated and sedimented form of the

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<sup>3</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures of the Dialectic*, John Wild, ed., Joseph Bien, tr., (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 201. Hereafter indicated as *AD*. For an illuminating account of the stakes of writing the political, the extent to which writing is risk-taking, endeavouring to free itself from ideological constraints, see Claude Lefort, *Writing, The Political Test*, David Ames Curtis tr., and ed., (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000). Political writing, Lefort reminds us, would be mistaken if it wanted to retain the mark of mastery for, as he says of his mentor, Merleau-Ponty was the master who avoided the position of master, writers are never masters of their own speech. 250. This is clearly demarked in the Stanford Press, Meridian series “Crossing Aesthetics,” which endeavours to provide a forum for a discussion of the aesthetico-political as well as the burgeoning relationship between literature and philosophy as opening upon a renewed ethical dimension.

<sup>4</sup> *S*, 325.

historical: "We appear to be torn between elitism, on the one hand, and either historical determinism or scientific predictability on the other."<sup>5</sup> Not only is a disappointed Merleau-Ponty wedged between competing ideologies of East and West but he also faced the disillusionment brought about by the break between philosophy and politics; and will therefore demand of his discipline that it be situated even while some critics continue to allege he suffers from the despair of what seems to be irreconcilable political relativism. It is a demand not that alien from his theories of the situatedness of a perceiving subject outlined in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, nor for example, from any articulate account of the dialectic of a capitalist theory of the state, the working class, and consciousness, knowledge and experience.<sup>6</sup> The struggle with providing a coherent situational account of the contradictions and tensions of the post-revolutionary schism between the political and the philosophical is clearly expressed by Merleau-Ponty in his Introduction to *Signs*, "*How different—how downright incongruous—the philosophical essays and the ad hoc, primarily political observations which make up this volume seem!*"<sup>7</sup> Merleau-Ponty's introductory comments are critical to his phenomenological ontology, a philosophy committed to and situated deep within the world: world-meaning which is at once natural and cultural, crossing the locus of a perceiving, interpreting self as both body-subject and social-subject all of which, rather than seeking a utopic

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<sup>5</sup> *AD.*, xxv.

<sup>6</sup> In this regard see Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri, *Labour of Dionysus: A Critique of the State-Form*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). The following quotations bear out the dialectical and materialist relationship between capital and the quest for self-representation within the state-structure: "The development of capital are determined by and follow behind the struggles of the working class. This analytical claim carried with it an ontological affirmation of the power of collective subjectivity as the key not only to the development of history but also—and this is the most important element—to the determinate functioning of the institution," 23. These forces of production (and they certainly include the imagination) are no longer expressed in a unidirectional manner. Rather, the co-dependence of productive forces is seen in "the organization of the State and its law [which] are in large part tied to the necessity of constructing an order of social reproduction based on labour," 10.

<sup>7</sup> *S.*, 3.

suturing of their deep ambiguities or indeterminacies holds out the immanence of the possible and *necessary*.<sup>8</sup>

I have already suggested that this existential, situational, and postural mode of being in the thick corporicity of the world is not antithetical to his phenomenological ontology in the least: "Philosophy is not a science, because science believes it can soar over its object and holds the correlation of knowledge with being as established, whereas philosophy is the set of questions wherein he who questions is himself implicated by the questions....[in a] radical examination of our belongingness to the world *before all science*."<sup>9</sup>

However the salient feature is Merleau-Ponty's cultural-humanist effort to confront Marx and Marxism in terms of his notion of *ipseity* and *alterity* (already an agonistic dialectics which holds out the promise of, as Agamben has echoed, the *coming community*) and the demands placed on thinking to think anew the subject's total relationship with the world.<sup>10</sup> Merleau-Ponty's own *thinking-through* dialectical Marxism, historical materialism,<sup>11</sup> and the notion of the Party and

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<sup>8</sup> I hope it has been enough to provide the briefest account of Merleau-Ponty's political thought without writing a historiography of the first half of this century. What I should like to do is situate Merleau-Ponty's fecund thought against the backdrop of Western political history leaving the latter as the grounding condition from which Continentalism springs forth, trusting it does not warrant detailed scrutiny even while those grounding (or un-grounding) conditions are irrevocably threatened by a self-interested class, an impoverished pedagogy, and the fatal narcolepsy of philosophical quietism.

<sup>9</sup> *VI*, 127. It should be noted that this is not at the exclusion of the spectre of ideologies, the imagination, false consciousness, materialism or the unconscious as many have suggested, among them Lefort and Westphal to name only two, but already implicates them in his phenomenology and brute ontology. Emphasis added.

<sup>10</sup> Gary B. Madison, "The Ethics and Politics of the Flesh," in *The Ethics of Postmodernity, Current Trends in Continental Thought*, 176.

<sup>11</sup> For an insightful note on dialectical materialism to the section titled "The Body in its Sexual Being," Cf. *PhP*, 171-173. This section also serves as the foil for a balanced analysis of feminism's relation to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy by Elizabeth Grosz, "Merleau-Ponty and Irigaray in the Flesh," in *Merleau-Ponty Interiority and Exteriority, Psychic Life and the World*, Dorothea Olkowski and James Morley, eds., (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 145-163. In particular it stresses Irigaray's reading of Merleau-Ponty's concept of sexuality which at times is seen as phallogocentric. It seems to me that to do so is to obtain from his efforts to provide a more generous ontological schema for philosophy an indictable offense of filiation with a discipline seen as gender-biased.

proletariat, ultimately lead him to refute the conclusion of Lenin, Lukacs and Trotsky's<sup>12</sup> utopian assumptions for the sake of the idea of a new, more inclusive definition of the subject whose central feature according to Joseph Bien includes not only history but also culture,<sup>13</sup> that is, not in its transcendental idealist configuration but instead, in all of its potentially self-expressive and representational force. The historical rupture of self-affirming and self-valorizing, creative processes grows not out of an equilibrated consensus, but the displacements and burgeoning mobile sites of social contestation/production and non-Archimedean reticulated territories, including of course desire and the imagination. "Marx considered the value of labour not as a figure of equilibrium but as an antagonistic figure, as the subject of a dynamic rupture of the system,"<sup>14</sup> thereby ascribing contingency to both elements of value and labour contrary to Lefort's contention that Merleau-Ponty levels out political asymmetries. Though one might argue that the historical materialist finds solace in solipsistic or transcendental self-consciousness (like the Hegelian self-consciousness of the contemporary bourgeoisie basking in the aura of alienated labour), particularly in its causal formulation, it does not however exclude the possibility (perhaps the necessity) of expressing it in another manner. It might certainly be the case, as Marx theorized, that the value of labour lies in its production of desire, the imagination, requiring the self-erasure of the inscription of labour as

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<sup>12</sup> In the case of each, Party and proletariat play a role in the drama of history. Their dialectical relationship is something which Merleau-Ponty sought to better understand. For example Lenin's position was that the Party would lead the proletariat to the revolution, Lukacs believed in dialectical, or reciprocal mediation, the Party mediates between the proletariat and history, while the proletariat mediates between the Party and history, while Trotsky, for example believed in the spontaneity of the proletariat's upsurge with the party playing only an incidental role. In all the above examples however, the dynamic and the phenomenology of these relationships are determined by the potential of the proletariat's productive-expressive force. It is the capacity to grasp the contemporary processes of the production, not of exchange-value or commodities, but instead, social subjectivities, sociality, and society itself. It is this understanding of the *what* of expression that aligns itself with Merleau-Ponty's ontology.

<sup>13</sup> See translator's introduction, *AD.*, xxvii.

<sup>14</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Labour of Dionysus, A Critique of the State-Form*, 7-8.

a necessary condition. At the denotative core of the commodity-form therefore, there is a hollow, carving out an excessive deficiency of signification while in the realm of the production of signification and abstraction however, connotation overcomes mere formed materiality, what Tadeusz Kantor had otherwise called the decontextualized *poor object*.<sup>15</sup> What Merleau-Ponty has to say about historical materialism for example should prove illustrative:

One can no more get rid of historical materialism...by impugning 'reductionist' conceptions and causal thought...[and] could be expressed in another language. It consists just as much in making economics historical as in making history economic. The economics on which it bases history is not, as in classical economics, a closed cycle of objective phenomena, but a correlation of productive forces and forms of production, which is completed only when the former emerge from their anonymity, become aware of themselves and are thus capable of imposing a form on the future. Now, the coming to awareness is clearly a cultural phenomenon.... 'Historical materialism,' in the works inspired by it, is often nothing but a concrete conception of history which brings under consideration, besides its obvious content (the official relations between 'citizens' in a democracy, for instance) its latent content, or the relations between human persons as they are actually established in concrete living.<sup>16</sup>

For the existent then, existence is performed not merely against the foil of nature, history, or the political, but culture as well. As Antonio Negri so aptly puts it, performativity highlights the production of signifying or discursive practices.<sup>17</sup> It seems that causal models—nature-cause, history-cause etc.—fail to proffer an entirely compelling description of the coming into existence of a subject *qua* determinate, *qua* absolute (regardless of realist claims to the contrary). Certainly the claim that the subject is correspondent with history, nature or the *cogito*, has been largely

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<sup>15</sup> Tadeusz Kantor, "The Poor Object," in *A Journey Through Other Spaces, Essays and Manifestoes, 1944-1990*, Michal Kobiak, ed., and tr., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 74.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. 1, *PhP.*, 171.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. 4, Ch. 4. See also John Gray's "Agonistic Liberalism" in *Isaiah Berlin*. Berlin makes the case, says Gray, for self-creation in the face of a threatened life, a life rooted in the incommensurability and indeterminacies of the world "For Berlin, self-creation through choice-making is forced upon us by the uncertainty...and by the diversity of rivalrous incommensurable values we inescapably encounter in our experience," 143.

inadequate and argued away as an improbability to say the least, and a fiction certainly.<sup>18</sup> Merleau-Ponty had said that the dialectic must pass through errors, that is, it must return to dialectic as an object or thing because, as he continues, “The world and history are no longer a system with several points of entry but a sheaf of irreconcilable perspectives which never coexist and which are held together”<sup>19</sup> as the opposing sides of a hollow, folded skin of the body’s *flesh*.

I will have more to say about (the) *flesh* and its incarnating-expression later while noting that (the) *flesh* or corporicity is not an end for Merleau-Ponty, but that its most compelling feature is that it functions as the precondition for the possibility of expressive, postural sign-emitting, and subsequently leads to, as Madison says citing Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible*, “a gesturing and *speaking body*.”<sup>20</sup> But this particular move apropos of (the) *flesh* and body is a little too hasty as it implies too determinate a cause and effect relationship for (the) *flesh* and the body thereby prescribing a conscious-projection and thetic character which naturalizes (using this term ironically) or re-absorbs the notion of *wild Being qua* potential-expressive. Madison I think, is too quick to side with Merleau-Ponty who himself had left unfinished the immense problem of (the) *flesh* in his own work and could only suggest most tentatively the elemental condition of the subject,<sup>21</sup> its *logos endiathetos* (meaning before logic)<sup>22</sup> for whom there is no “for-Oneself for-the-Other antithesis, [rather]...Being as containing all that, first as sensible being and then as Being

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<sup>18</sup> *AD.*, 205. In this regard see also Nietzsche’s truth and lie in the extra-moral sense, as well as Foucault’s notion that life is what is capable of error—the subject is rooted in the errors of life. In this regard I also draw your attention to the well wrought essay by Gary B. Madison, “The Moral Self and the Anonymous Other,” 231-248.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Bien, “Man and the Economic: Merleau-Ponty’s Interpretation of Historical Materialism,” *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy*, III, 1972, 121-27.

<sup>20</sup> Gary B. Madison, “The Ethics and Politics of the Flesh,” 178. Also *VI.*, 144-145.

<sup>21</sup> *VI.*, 219.

<sup>22</sup> *VI.*, 169.

without restriction.”<sup>23</sup> It is this last quotation that sets up the necessary pre-logical condition—before speech which “takes flight from where it rolls in the wave of speechless communication”<sup>24</sup>—of Being-in-the-visible or *wild Being*. Being which contains all and is without restriction then can neither be *gesturing* (intentional apodicticity which is what I take gesturing to infer), nor a *speaking body* which envelopes one in the formal syntactical and grammatical structures of discursivity and communicative rationality of meaning for another resulting from reflection upon what is given to *écart*, a deeply fissured subject. It is my suggestion then, one which reflects Merleau-Pontyan thinking, that one is always within the domain of sensuous and on the cusp of expression—our common substance. The concrete cultural and historical world, calls not for a restoration of a scientific realist position inimical to our very sensuous intertwinings, but reflects upon the origins of contestational practices of which theories of labour are but one component, in one’s continual efforts to express what is already pure excess in the field of *logos*.

It is not inconsistent with Merleau-Ponty’s thinking to expand the chiasmic, reticulated world of the subject, amplifying the relations which for too long have been subject to a *reductio* as the shaping characteristic of dialectic or logical deductive reasoning, by adding another, consciousness. Consciousness is a term that goes to the heart of Merleau-Pontyan subjectivity, history, dialectic, and existence, because for him it is always consciousness of *some-thing*. Hugh J. Silverman’s essay on Merleau-Ponty’s 1956 publication, *Les Philosophes célèbres*, “Is Merleau-Ponty Inside or Outside the History of Philosophy?”<sup>25</sup> asks what place Merleau-Ponty might have

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<sup>23</sup> *VI*, 215.<sup>24</sup> *VI*, 17.<sup>25</sup> Hugh J. Silverman, “Is Merleau-Ponty Inside or Outside the History of Philosophy?” in *Chiasms, Merleau-*

ascribed to himself in the pantheon of the history of philosophy. Specific sections in Merleau-Ponty's 1956 publication included brief introductory remarks two of which, according to Silverman, deal with concepts of invention and discovery as they pertain to history and subjectivity but to which one must add, political economy and philosophy itself. For Merleau-Ponty, "the *discovery* of subjectivity is also the *invention* of subjectivity,"<sup>26</sup> that which is always already there for consciousness. Merleau-Ponty asks: "What is this contact of self with the self before the self is revealed?"<sup>27</sup> One can infer from the preceding quotation Merleau-Ponty's main organizing principle which runs beneath Husserlian phenomenology; that is, after phenomenological reduction and the phenomenological epoche (for reflection), one again finds oneself back-*within* the carnal presence of things as an obvious fact. This brute, carnal facticity produces a stoppage beyond which one cannot continue, because as Merleau-Ponty's pains have arguably made clear, there is not *nothing* before subjectivity (subjectivity would, in this instance, be impossible), history or, for that matter philosophy, for the singular being "*is everything he happens to think*."<sup>28</sup> The subject is everywhere always embodied, always with his body and never external to it—a transient, situational vision-sensing-sentient that *is* (the) *flesh*. Silverman in an interesting turn says that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is a process by which the discovery of subjectivity and history clears a space for a renewed dialectic (in Hardtian terms the performance of mobile sites of social construction,

<sup>§</sup> Ponty's *Notion of Flesh*, Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor, eds., (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 131-143. Merleau-Ponty's history of philosophy was published as, *Les Philosophes célèbres*, (Paris: Editions Mazenod, 1956). Cf. 37, Ch. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Silverman, "Is Merleau-Ponty Inside or Outside the History of Philosophy?" 135. Emphasis added.

<sup>27</sup> S., 152-153.

<sup>28</sup> S., 113.

signification, and expressive formulations of conflict/strife), a hyperdialectic that hinges on “a dialectic of existence *and dialectic*.”<sup>29</sup> The Mobius doubling here clearly illustrated is one which leads not to a certainty of ends or an absolute telos but a compelling ambiguity:

His dialectic is such that he finds the philosopher encountering what is already there; his dialectic is one of experience and philosophy becoming that experience, philosophy interrogating what is and finding itself there in what is interrogated. His dialectic is more of a tension between existence and dialectic, an ambiguity between the two.<sup>30</sup>

The doubling back of dialectic upon itself, the paradox of discovering/inventing that which has always been there; the self (consciousness and even proletarian false consciousness), seemingly alien and nonetheless excavated as what one has known all along in a flash of recognition and astonishment—consciousness of, including though not exclusively, Party and proletariat, as well as history, culture, consciousness and dialectic itself. To Silverman’s question whether Merleau-Ponty is inside or outside the history of philosophy one cannot answer unconditionally—only that such a diversionary red herring does nothing by way of clarifying the project for Silverman has already said it is the concept of invention and discovery that lies at the heart of Merleau-Ponty’s investigation into history and subjectivity. We read this against the foil of representation(s) that hold sway in a traditional discursivity but that must be overcome in order to divine a third way that is the domain a renewed concept of subjectivistic expressibility—perhaps in Nietzsche’s formulation of Zarathustra, the symbol maker *par excellence*.

Political philosopher Claude Lefort and hermeneuticist G.B. Madison, each in their own

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<sup>29</sup> Silverman, “Is Merleau-Ponty Inside or Outside the History of Philosophy?” 138. Emphasis added.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

manner, attempt to describe the fundamental notion of reversibility and what obtains for a subject through Merleau-Ponty's concept of (the) *flesh*. The political dimension of Merleau-Ponty's reversibility—*ipseity* and *alterity*—is either explicitly discussed, as in the case of Claude Lefort's concluding remarks in his Distinguished Lecture at the 1987 annual meeting of the Merleau-Ponty Circle<sup>31</sup> or implied as one of the more inclusive and foundational principles of Merleau-Ponty's thought as discussed in G.B. Madison's response in the published volume of the same proceedings, as well as his more sustained appraisal of Merleau-Ponty's ethical programme in "The Ethics and Politics of the Flesh."<sup>32</sup> There are two matters I think will more effectively elucidate the relative stakes in Merleau-Pontyan scholarship—matters which initially seem to be discordant but nonetheless bear out some of the salient features of Merleau-Ponty's ontology and the not unrelated problem of what it is that necessitates expressibility. It is with particular attention to the minutiae within what is taken to be conventional language usage that one arrives at a deeper level of what obtains from Merleau-Ponty's later philosophical style, a style that is unequivocally self-conscious, self-critical and may provide a key to the renewal of the philosophical discipline *qua* expression.<sup>33</sup> In the first instance the high-stakes debate between philosophers seeking a comprehensive, robust definition of the subject is already marked by the relative titles of Lefort's essay and Madison's insightful response; in the second instance I want to make an argument which obtains from the first, that is, what one takes from *the what* and later, *the how* of expressive form for a phenomenological ontology of a bare or *wild Being* and becoming-subject. The latter will

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<sup>31</sup> Claude Lefort, "Flesh and Otherness," in *Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty*.

<sup>32</sup> Madison and Fairbairn, *The Ethics of Postmodernity, Current Trends in Continental Thought*, 174-190.

<sup>33</sup> See for example Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, "Philosophical Style," 16-21.

require a brief revisit to some of the fundamental questions framed in Heidegger's phenomenological analysis.

As I have noted, while Lefort makes explicit what he deems to be Merleau-Ponty's naive political perspective indicting him for the ambiguity of his notion of (the) *flesh* and *alterity*, Madison has opted instead for returning to Merleau-Ponty's (the) *flesh* as *alterity* to remind us of the irreducible ethical principles which provide for a renewed conception of identity and otherness, one that is not projected (thetic intent) but rather is described as "the inscription of the other in the flesh of the same."<sup>34</sup> It should be clear from this quotation that Madison is re-articulating the main thrust of Merleau-Ponty's "The Intertwining—The Chiasm" from *The Visible and the Invisible*, where a theory of (the) *flesh* is understood as the enablement of otherness as an internal phenomenon—not an internal projection says Madison,<sup>35</sup> and not solipsism, but the elemental precondition for a shared commonness that is a single *structure* folded back upon itself. Indeed it may be the case that this formulation is subject to certain ambiguities for no system is closed or absolute, but the conceptual tensions that inhere any dialectical system does not necessitate its disqualification rather a more sustained search for a different mode of *Being's* expressibility; in particular if the notion of the reversibility of (the) *flesh* is a concept whose possibilities already acknowledge the feature unique to it, *alterity*. This feature—the phenomenon of otherness as an interpellation of the subject in an Althusserian sense,<sup>36</sup> the *Ur*-founding of the political—is not as Lefort claims the result of something outside of (the) *flesh* which would lead one, confronted by the face of the

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<sup>34</sup> Madison, "Flesh as Otherness," 33.

<sup>35</sup> Madison, "Flesh as Otherness," 33.

<sup>36</sup> Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power, Theories in Subjection*.

Other, to an anti-liberal ethics of obligation in a Levinasian terms. The tension between Lefort's misinterpretation of Merleau-Ponty's notion of (the) *flesh* (according to Madison) and Madison's perspicacious response is clearly expressed in their respective essay titles and, as I have said, reflect the stakes in Merleau-Ponty scholarship. I want to make the suggestion that the shift in philosophical focus hinges on the distinction evinced in the use of the conjunction *and*, in Lefort's "Flesh and Otherness," and the use of the adverb/relative pronoun *as* in Madison's "Flesh as Otherness," and obtains for the further argument I want to make apropos of the expressibility of phenomena for an understanding of ontology when both the ontic and the phenomenon are tied together and co-determined by a third term of contingency, *logos*.

The critical ontological dimension of these essays on Merleau-Ponty's philosophy are already fully articulated by specific grammatical usage in the titles and I will concentrate on this key feature as opposed to a close reading of the arguments they inhere. When Claude Lefort uses the conjunction *and*—the conjunction connects or binds together words and clauses—he implies a distinction between terms that are to remain exclusive of one another such as, for example *this* and *that*, the *here* and *there*, *myself* and *other*. The use of conjunctions to connect words and clauses implies that, although they are mutually exclusive they occupy the same locality as two vectors crossing at an intersection and though they may be brought together in the intellect, that is, conceptually there may be no property or characteristic they necessarily share at all, and thus no reversibility per se need obtain from this. The conjunction can also be expressed mathematically as the additive expression, *plus* (+), while the verb *be* or *is*, for example can be expressed as a correspondence of a state or quality by the use of *equals* (=). When Lefort contends there is

something which encroaches from *out-there* (a third term who mediates between a world of ideas and things) as a necessary condition for the possibility of the state of reversibility and alterity, he is in effect saying that this other term or thing is neither adequate to, nor correspondent with the first term, conscious being. Lefort contends that Merleau-Ponty overlooks the experience of the infant for whom there is no outside, no other ego, but whose world is undifferentiated and therefore *not* reversible. Lefort's error of interpretation resides in his having not seriously enough accounted for the basic premise of Merleau-Ponty's exigent effort to remind us of the errors bound to metaphor. Lefort insists instead on invoking, from the extemporaneous working notes for *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty's use of embryochthonic terms of primary natal relations to express phenomenal appearing. Yet, in Merleau-Ponty's project to overcome the formal discursive logic of deduction or idealism in order to open a renewed space for expressing what is before philosophical expression, he maintained from the first that there can be no metaphor because:

thought involves quasi-locality that has to be described...by [an] elastic tie...the thought involves quasi-locality that has to be described...by [an] elastic tie...the originating locality, even in what concerns the "things" or the "direction" of a movement of things is not identifiable in ob-jective space either, not a relation *in* ob-jective space—A *direction* is not *in* space: it is in filigree across it.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore when Lefort infers infantile experience from Merleau-Ponty's note that begins with, *Nature is at the first day*,<sup>38</sup> he is missing what Merleau-Ponty in fact says about a birth to presence (borrowing the phrase which forms the title of Nancy's book, but in fact already theorized by Merleau-Ponty himself in 1960).<sup>39</sup> It is a question says Merleau-Ponty of "finding in the present,

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<sup>37</sup> VI., 222.

<sup>38</sup> VI., 267.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. 40., see Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery, eds., Brian Holmes and others, trs., (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993). Though the text describes, or struggles with the

the flesh of the world an 'ever new' and 'always the same'"<sup>40</sup> and in this paradoxical expression that hinges on (the) *flesh* one hears the echo of Husserl's phenomenological pedigree: "The ultimate problem of phenomenology is the explication of the structure of the living present....In it we find the constitution of unity, but not identity."<sup>41</sup> Certainly Madison is in concert when he endeavours to excavate (the) *flesh*, asking what it is *qua* reversibility: "What 'flesh' 'means' is that *the subject is for itself another*."<sup>42</sup> That is to say, from Husserl and Heidegger to Merleau-Ponty and Madison the main phenomenological thrust from which the possibility for a new ontology emerges has to do not with a speculative return to founding origins (the appeal to something beyond the phenomenon), but instead embryochthonic beginnings within the very complexities of lived experience—the astonished witnesses we are in the perpetual renewal of a world of universal particularities lacking essential names. Lefort's importing of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory apparently serves to drive home the point of the political dangers inherent in value-neutral reversibility. Indeed this is a justifiable claim, however as a critique of Merleau-Ponty's political philosophy in particular and his phenomenological ontology in general, it seems to me to be misguided and ill-considered. There is far too much Lefort leaves out of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to make it do the work he wishes, most importantly, the *mirror stage* as formative for what

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 notion of presence, in particular the manner in which presence forms the zero-condition of perpetually being born, the language used to describe his project of a birth which is not the constitution of an identity, "but the endless departure of identity from, and from within, its other, and others" echoes Merleau-Ponty's foundational work 4 decades earlier!! (See in particular *The Visible and the Invisible*, and *SNS.*, 70 among many other examples.) What is particularly galling is that the language in fact is Merleau-Ponty's (alterity/otherness, Husserl, Heidegger and the question of presence etc.) and he is not even acknowledged for the work he has contributed to the project of phenomenological ontology. This is also the case with Jean-Luc Nancy's *Sense of the World* where Merleau-Ponty doesn't even appear in the index. I find this not only scandalously poor form, but disingenuous and shabby scholarship.

<sup>40</sup> *VI.*, 267.

<sup>41</sup> Cairns, *Conversations with Husserl and Fink*, 91.

<sup>42</sup> Madison, "Flesh as Otherness," 31.

inheres in the dialectic between the ego and its objects, the ego (and here he misunderstands Freud's still confused thinking about primary narcissism and conflates it with Lacan's),<sup>43</sup> and the theory of desire made manifest in the *fort-Da*, repression of the desired object and the return of the repressed.<sup>44</sup>

Admittedly I have verged on a complexity which I am not able to pursue adequately here, however if Lefort's wish is to foist upon Merleau-Ponty the status of political *raconteur* then I am compelled to suggest otherwise and, in keeping with Madison, Merleau-Ponty's admittedly oversimplified political expression is nonetheless founded upon firmly rooted principles of ethical philosophy. Lefort contends there is no inside/outside distinction for the pre-Oedipal child, the child who is *infans*, and requires a mediator (the law-giver) between himself and the world even though Lacan's theory of the *mirror stage* already accounts for this divergence and specular alterity. The *mirror stage* holds that the uncoordinated *infans* (without speech) exhibits a pre-linguistic identification of a world external to himself while, in short, mapping the organism and its *reality*, the *Innenwelt* and *Umwelt*. When Lefort holds that what is missing from Merleau-Ponty's account is a value-assigning mediator "who is the true representative of irreducible and irreversible

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<sup>43</sup> For one of the most comprehensive and insightful works on Lacan and his relationship to Freud's psychoanalytic theories see Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *Lacan, The Absolute Master*, Douglas Brick, tr., (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991). The extant materials on this topic are daunting and correspond to an equally and exceedingly nuanced debate pertaining to psycho-sexual human development ones that, if Lefort's argument is to be convincing require a far more sustained and detailed investigation. It should be noted that while Merleau-Ponty's efforts to rethink subjectivity through a more radical ontology, his project was heavily invested in troubling the classical formulation of dialectic, the dialectical method passed down from Hegel through to Kojève and his student Lacan. See in this regard *PrP.*, 121-129.

<sup>44</sup> Borch-Jacobsen, *Lacan, The Absolute Master*, 103-104. He outlines the asymmetrical relation between desire and absence. "Desire, Kojève says, is the nothing (the negation) of everything that is. Thus, Lacan concludes, repression (which negates, denies, reneges, and so on) constitutes its paradoxical 'representation'... Thus, for Lacan, desire 'reveals' itself always and only through the negation that makes a thing present by its absence." It should be clear that even with the unconscious desire for the desire of the Other (that is, correspondence) there is already a primordial asymmetry at the heart of the subject, a desire whose negation is the positive representation of what is cast off and repressed only to return as a failed object like the anecdote of Sartre's crescent moon, 199-205.

otherness,"<sup>45</sup> in effect he is arguing this has consequences insofar as it illustrates the difficulties for Merleau-Ponty's relativistic political philosophy and his "failure to admit an asymmetrical and irreversible separation between political forms of society especially between modern democracy and totalitarianism."<sup>46</sup> There are two fundamental problems at issue here among others, the first is that if, as Lefort maintains, there is no interior/exterior distinction and thus no possibility of recognizing alterity but only pure correspondential reversibility; then the second, which obtains from the first assumption, because the child is auto-erotic one must infer he is a self-sufficient *solus ipse*, exhibiting no capability for judging or weighing values and lacking the critical language to generate any value at all. He is the truly solipsistic being who flees to the embry-ochthonic condition guaranteed by Rousseau's garden and who Freud had called *His Majesty the Child*. But surely this is not what Merleau-Ponty intended in his theorization of *logos endiathetos* or brute, natal relations within the *visible* of an appearing world that is at the first day. The fundamental moral feature which holds that *ought implies can* of course requires a fully fledged subject in language, for without the *logoi* one cannot bring value, interpretation, judgement to bear on the *ontic* in its phenomenal appearing(s). The pre-linguistic child can hardly function as a *meaning-full* model for Lefort's counter-example of alterity and reversibility in Merleau-Ponty's writings (political or otherwise), or even a single stage in a subject's coming into being for that matter. Lacan understood the *mirror stage*, for example, not so much as a stage or a phase at all but instead a constant pursuit and illusory unity.<sup>47</sup> And therein lies the central theme of phenome-

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<sup>45</sup> Claude Lefort, "Flesh and Otherness," 9-12.

<sup>46</sup> Galen Johnson, "Introduction," *Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty*, xxii.

<sup>47</sup> Borch-Jacobsen, *Lacan, The Absolute Master*, 48.

nology as articulated in Lacan's formulation of the mirror stage (as only one example), mapping the founding relationship between the organism and an *out there*, or its *other*, what he had called the ontological structure of the human world,<sup>48</sup> even though this still held on to an objectivist ontology of the Cartesians.

Lefort grafts his argument on to the theme of an originating condition, a natal relationship with a world, what was needed Merleau-Ponty said was an *Ursprungsklärung*.<sup>49</sup> But Lefort's argument turns on an interpretation of the most simplistic and highly speculative kind, one that merely reasserts as Madison says in his response, an "empiricistic realism."<sup>50</sup> What is the experience of the pre-linguistic infant and what does it hold out for us by way of meaning, is to appeal to something beyond the phenomenon of reversibility and is as salient says Madison, as asking what it is to think like a bat.<sup>51</sup> Although Merleau-Ponty had said that *nature is at the first day*, which both Madison and Lefort consider an unfortunate claim, it should be noted however that Merleau-Ponty immediately follows this with the proviso, "This does not mean: myth of the original indivision, and coincidence as *return*,"<sup>52</sup> thereby anticipating the problems such a claim might raise. The search for origins is a frequently attempted project for philosophers all of whom get caught in the non-productive regress of absurd speculation, which in this case includes Lefort himself, for after all "We have lost being born."<sup>53</sup> To be conscious Merleau-Ponty had said, "= to

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<sup>48</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, Alan Sheridan, tr., (New York: Norton Press, 1997).

<sup>49</sup> VI., 165.

<sup>50</sup> Madison, "Flesh as Otherness," 32.

<sup>51</sup> Madison, "Flesh as Otherness," 31.

<sup>52</sup> VI., 267.

<sup>53</sup> Cioran, *The Trouble With Being Born*, 56.

have a figure on a ground—one cannot go back any further.”<sup>54</sup> When Lefort therefore insists on re-introducing into the complex of Merleau-Ponty’s reversibility and alterity—a non-foundational examination of a renewed phenomenological ontology—the infant’s world for whom the other is undifferentiated and thus a world devoid of alterity, in essence he runs counter to the entire thrust of phenomenology by appealing to thetic intelligibility. But reversibility is not a bi-valent or bi-lateral condition, it is already inscribed in subjective self-sameness *as other*, Merleau-Ponty was clear on this point: “If one wants metaphors, it would be better to say that the body sensed and the body sentient are as the obverse and the reverse, or again, as two segments of one sole circular course which goes above from left to right and below from right to left, but which is but *one sole movement in its two phases*.”<sup>55</sup> Lefort’s re-formulation of (the) *flesh* and otherness to include infantile experience is he argues, evidence of Merleau-Ponty’s incomplete and unsatisfactory thesis of reversibility as it fails to account for a necessarily asymmetrical structure of value ascription, and that only an authentic asymmetry (with the introduction of the primary law-giver) can bring about the first order principle of political and moral judgement. Given Lefort’s social and political bent in his own philosophical writings, it is extraordinary that he should so unwittingly collude with the tired incantations of an Austinian account of sovereignty and coercion—that is, law is a command of the sovereign, and he alone is able to invoke the threat of sanctions and make sovereign declarations dictating boundaries of inside and outside. Therefore it is only coercion or something analogous to Burke’s corrective under the cane that allows for authentic alterity, alterity

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<sup>54</sup> VI., 191.<sup>55</sup> VI., 138. Emphasis added.

either held in contempt or erodes into a solipsism where subjectivity retreats into the dream garden of Polyphilo.

The above considerations suggest four possible moves: (1) either infantile experience is absorbed into our own comprehension reducing the “child’s experience to our own, at the very moment one is trying to respect the phenomena,”<sup>56</sup> to think it “as the *negation* of *our* differentiations.”<sup>57</sup> That is to say, the infant’s pre-linguistic formulations are taken to be primary and meaningful *for us* in the solipsistic inner *domus* of mere self-reflection. (2) In keeping with Lacan’s re-theorizing of Freud’s psychoanalytics, infantile experience *is* understood as a primary *écart*, however it still leaves the question open however as to the determinability of its meaning for (3) pre-linguistic infantile experience which is neither competitive with, nor provides for a deepened understanding of Merleau-Ponty’s thesis of reversibility and alterity. (4) In order to side-step these problems all together, siding with Madison’s incisive perspective on Merleau-Ponty’s scholarship may be the most logical and productive enterprise in the long run.

As I have attempted to suggest the relative philosophical perspectives of Lefort and Madison already hinge on the subtle distinction between *and* and *as*. Lefort’s argument *apriori* balances on the use of the conjunction *and*, from which a lengthy mis-interpretation obtains. *And* may presuppose alterity but only as an additive function for intellection and a bridging meta-concept, or serves a knotting function where one term is added to another in a forced correspondence. *And* is the *ana-logos* between two terms, that is the silence or absence of signification

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<sup>56</sup> *VI.*, 203.

<sup>57</sup> *VI.*, 203. In this light Merleau-Ponty’s ontological principle also inheres when he says that “Nothingness is the difference between identicals,” *VI.*, 263. The success of correspondence with the *Idea* leads only to the systematicity of utopic non-differentiation.

between two properties, becoming the indexical marker for the condition of absent signification whereby one property or state is grafted onto another, however, whether in fact it holds that reversibility of terms then follows is a matter for mere speculation.

Finally then, arriving at the cusp of ontological expressibility is Madison's use of the adverb *as* which truly reflects the issue at the heart of Merleau-Ponty's theory of reversibility and alterity. The adverb *as* means a shared character or property (*to the same degree as*), an adverb of degree or measure that modifies a verb; as such one might say it expresses a modality of time, amplitude, attribute, and state, if you will, it is connotative-expressive of reciprocal entanglement, of a shared becoming. *As* functions not only to indicate alterity but also, because of the relative degree to which these terms converge, reversibility, and this is the critical feature which distinguishes these two essays from one another and points to the subtle nuance of expression which I want to take up next. In "The Phenomenological Path of the Hermeneutics of Facticity," Heidegger balks at any description of phenomenology—in the manner say that Lefort scientistic-realist pre-disposition intends—and is mainly concerned with terminological sedimentation as well as the irreducibility of the signifier: he argues that "Any explanation of this kind is not simply a matter of supplying a word with an already established meaning...it will necessarily be an interpretation of the history of the meaning of the term in question."<sup>58</sup> The double hermeneutic here evinced seeks to get behind the already interpreted of that which comes to the ear of the abyss and bursts out of the silence as an expression of that very silence—contradiction or a *wild Being* caught in the chiasmic and seeking expression? Rethinking philosophical expression is at the heart

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<sup>58</sup> Heidegger, *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, 53.

Merleau-Ponty's anti-foundationalist programme, emerging from the exigencies of a more radical ontology, in opposition to philosophical creation, "resting on itself—that cannot be the final truth."<sup>59</sup> His renewed phenomenological ontology sought to bring expression back to—in a manner not unlike Heidegger's endeavour to plumb the depths of the problem of expression armed with conventional tools only to recognize in the very method of phenomenology that one faces the same problem (or hope) of renewed beginnings—the question of "how every philosophy is a language and nonetheless consists in rediscovering silence."<sup>60</sup> Silence, says Karmen MacKendrick in *Immemorial Silence*, "will not allow itself to be kept."<sup>61</sup>

As the promissory note I held out earlier intimated, the issue now is to confront the *how* of phenomenological ontology—how it finds expression through that other phenomenon, the appearance of language against the foil of the signified. I grant quite readily that the *what* of phenomenological ontology's investigation still seems ephemeral, tantalizingly close and yet leaving only a *vestigium* of its appearing and waning. Can one expect anything other for a self-creating, ethically comported consciousness which is the suspended step between sense traversing the *ab-grund* to agonistic expressibility? What can phenomenological ontology hold out for a subject who is the intersection of reversible and double appearances—sense and sentience—and is this perhaps the *only* brute positivity one can be sure of: the *expression* of this deep, embryochthonic wild condition?<sup>62</sup> It is, Merleau-Ponty argues, the fundamental principle of ontology:

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<sup>59</sup> VI., 174.

<sup>60</sup> VI., 213.

<sup>61</sup> Karmen MacKendrick, *Immemorial Silence*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 38.

<sup>62</sup> Heidegger, *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, 56. Heidegger clearly articulates the hermeneutic and existential condition arising from phenomena: the phenomenon is "not primarily a category, but initially has to do with the how of access...initially nothing other than a *mode of research*."

*being in indivision*. Merleau-Ponty's seminal chapter on "The Intertwining—The Chiasm,"

anticipates the discussion that follows, and here I must quote at length:

As there is a reversibility of the seeing and the visible, and as at the point where the two metamorphoses cross what we call perception is born, so also there is a reversibility of the speech and what it signifies; the signification is what comes to seal, to close, to gather up the multiplicity of the physical, physiological, linguistic means of elocution, to contract them into one sole act...And, as the visible takes hold of the look which has unveiled it and which forms part of it, the signification rebounds upon its own means, it annexes to itself speech that becomes an object of science...We shall have to follow more closely this transition from the mute world to the speaking world....When silent vision falls into speech, and when speech in turn, opening up a field of the nameable and the sayable, inscribes itself in that field, in its place, according to its truth—in short, when it metamorphoses the structures of the visible world and makes itself the gaze of the mind, *intuitus mentis*—this is always in virtue of the same fundamental phenomenon of reversibility...In a sense, if we were to make completely explicit the architectonics of the human body, its ontological framework, and how it sees itself and hears itself, we would see that the structure of its mute world is such that all the possibilities of language are already given it...we do not have to reassemble them into a synthesis: they are two aspects of the reversibility which is the ultimate truth.<sup>63</sup>

The phenomenon says Heidegger is "that which shows itself as something showing itself.

This means that it is itself there and is not merely represented in some manner [appearances *qua* representation], examined indirectly [analogies and causality], or somehow reconstructed [intellection and synthesis]....'Phenomenon' means a distinctive mode of being-an-object."<sup>64</sup> Perhaps the pursuit of the question of *how* might garner greater purchase in one's task to secure Delos or, is it perhaps not as with the case of Apollo and Daphne, the object metamorphoses and is transmuted within the very grasp of the eyes; the whole experience passing into a past, undergoing a transubstantiation, and sublimated into the phenomena of a larger occurrence for an immanent subject in the non-thematized *Lebenswelt*?

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<sup>63</sup> VI., 154-155.

<sup>64</sup> Heidegger, *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, 53.

The concern I want to take up here serves to mark the preliminary move to my concluding chapter and is articulated by Merleau-Ponty as the distinction between λόγος ἐνδιάθετος (meaning before logic) and λόγος προφορικός (oral or verbal expression). The difficulty of the move as described by Merleau-Ponty, was to rethink anew and overturn what has long been essential to reason—the signifier exceeding the signified.<sup>65</sup> Reason’s proposition was thus predicated on an overcoming of all *relative* data which, it held, provided no guarantee for epistemology. The fundamental thrust of phenomenological investigation in a Merleau-Pontyan sense, is an anti-foundational approach to overcoming the problems of classical ontology through the installation of *wild Being* in a “horizontal totality which is not a *synthesis*.”<sup>66</sup> The key feature of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological ontology is to clearly locate the *ab-grund/chora*/pre-condition ascribed to an emerging logos, the hinge, or pivot which binds together the ontic and the phenomenal; whose main proponent Heidegger elaborated that it was “impossible to make out anything about phenomenology or obtain a definition of it from this philosophical industry.”<sup>67</sup> Heidegger’s preliminary efforts—those which, it seems to me Merleau-Ponty took great pains to expand upon in *The Primacy of Perception* and *The Phenomenology of Perception*—illustrated that historical phenomenology was characterized by four specific appropriations or misconceptions, those which all duly imposed upon it the limits of their own presuppositions: (1) the theme of consciousness which entered into phenomenology as transcendental idealism and its counter movement, realism, both of which failed to raise “the radical question of whether epistemological questions might not

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<sup>65</sup> VI., 168.

<sup>66</sup> VI., 211.

<sup>67</sup> Heidegger, *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, 58.

in fact be meaningless in phenomenology.”<sup>68</sup> (2) Investigations carried out in the field of logic were also applied to a “limited fund of phenomenological distinctions.”<sup>69</sup> (3) The drive to systematize what in effect cannot be a system—cannot not be the irreducible method denoting the singular multiplicity that make up πάντα, but a modality of phenomenological research *as a basis*, and a connotative-expressive regional situationism. Apropos of the preceding three constraints placed upon phenomenological research Heidegger concludes, (4) most importantly what resulted from “the escalation of these three moments and from the infiltration of traditional terminology into phenomenology is a general watering down....everything absorbs phenomenology....All such tendencies are a betrayal of phenomenology and its possibilities. The ruin can no longer be halted!”<sup>70</sup> However in this same lecture, which Heidegger held were really the preparatory notes for *Sein und Zeit*, he maintained that phenomenology is “a distinctive *how of research*....‘phenomenon’ means a constant *preparation of the path to be travelled*.”<sup>71</sup> When one is confronted with what is constitutive of sense—and its other, non-sense—for phenomenology, philosophical sub-disciplines such as those mentioned above in their mis-appropriation of phenomenology, are “without methodical exploration of phenomena [and] would end up with nothing but formal truths, which is to say, errors.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Heidegger, *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, 57.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>70</sup> Heidegger, *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, 58. The appropriational strategies of the positive disciplines to garner farther-reaching epistemic validation, such that fundamental philosophic issues as nature, essence, art, the real, and phenomenon are either enlisted in the service of their telos or else banalized for a consumptive post-war industry predicated on the neurotic search for lost difference and manifest in the titles which preponderantly begin with *The Art of*, *The Science of*, *The Nature of*, and of course *Zen and the Art of* where the inclusion of an ascetic imperative is equated with self-emancipation and a refusal to participate. Heidegger’s formulation of this predilection or mind-set is *enframing* or in more postmodern, Oedipal terms, sublimation in the face of repressed desires that return nonetheless in the guise of the return of the repressed.

<sup>71</sup> Heidegger, *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, 58-60.

<sup>72</sup> *SNS*, 95.

Likewise, Merleau-Ponty's pursuit, his archaeology of a *manner* for expressing what is salient before philosophical expression has to contend with the ossification of language and somnambulant comfort couched in tired metaphor. By way of an example and what I had earlier ventured to illustrate as the tentative and stumbling entry into the *how* of phenomenology, Chapter 4 offered a Derridianism suggesting that any effort to hold evidence within the sharpened focus of philosophical epoche or reduction was only a return to the misconstrued project of transcendental idealism<sup>73</sup> (and its offshoot metaphysical realism) and doomed to failure. I imposed on the term  $\delta\eta\lambda\omicron\nu$  reverse square brackets, flanked by an infinite series of ellipses wanting to indicate the place implicitly ascribed to evidence as the sensuous matter-of-fact by philosophy and expressed it as [...]  $\delta\eta\lambda\omicron\nu$  [... Denied denotation and beyond the grasp of connotation what is evidentiary is the infinite task of unfinished thought by incomplete man.

The square bracket turns on itself and performs—or exacerbates—the connotative, as that sign which expresses some property or state that pertains to first order experience or implies a consequence; and the denotative, which means to distinguish or designate. The symbol of the square brackets distinguishes material added to a quotation, but also what information is missing from cited works; therefore it denotes or designates that very material which was heretofore errant. Furthermore, though the conventions of this particular symbol appear in any lexical account of language usage its connotative function serves to mark an absence in philosophical discourse as well as a certain immanent plenitude of expressibility because as Merleau-Ponty had said, “Man is not an end...[but] each time slides into the void of a new dimension opened.”<sup>74</sup> But it also sig-

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<sup>73</sup> *TD.*, 168.

<sup>74</sup> *VI.*, 265.

nifies that the specifically connotative function—which is what interests me here—is one of implicature or consequence.<sup>75</sup> I want to suggest that the square brackets are representative of a peculiar turn—that they can be, in fact, turned—and subsequently serve not only a formal grammatical, additive function but an inherently deictical, expressive one as well. The suggestion that this sort of punctuation can have any bearing on philosophical meaning is, I'm sure to some, not entirely germane. However, it is not without precedent either, nor without the possibility of its pressuring our understanding of traditional philosophy and its potential renewal: I have already illustrated what obtains from the semiotic performativity on which the Lefort and Madison debate hinges. That the sign potentiates an expressive-connotative function is critical. Among philosophy's expressive elements—or those which contribute to an understanding of philosophy *qua* expression—according to Agamben's writings on Gilles Deleuze, is punctuation which, as he says, can take on a particular function for philosophy.<sup>76</sup> Like Heidegger's formulation of the concept of *Being* and *world* (*Being-in-the-world*), the hyphens connote what since Descartes' conviction of *res extensa* and *res cogitans* had been thought impossible to bring to expression: it is not only the most dialectical of punctuation marks says Agamben but “it unites only to the degree that it distinguishes and distinguishes only to the degree that it unites.”<sup>77</sup>

Agamben's analysis of the place ascribed to punctuation in Gilles Deleuze's later philosophical writing—which in French, according to Deleuze also holds for *and*—explicates the

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<sup>75</sup> In Chapter 3 I also made use of the distinction between denotation and connotation in reference to the epistemological shift that I argued was so well represented in Rembrandt's painting of the *Anatomy Lesson*, as well as tying this into Merleau-Ponty's anti-Cartesian turn away from the nature of a *true* and *scientifically valid* universe as the determining system acting upon a human organism.)

<sup>76</sup> Agamben, *Potentialities*, *Collected Essays in Philosophy*, 222.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

conjunction *and* for example, which “takes the place of ‘is’ [*est*] and disarticulates ontology.”<sup>78</sup> If by *disarticulation*<sup>79</sup> Deleuze means a mumbling or stuttering—language which is not quite yet a representation, not yet *logos* (*logos endiathetos*)—the inference one might draw then is a return to transcendental immanence in the realm of a re-sutured ontology as the direct consequence of rending apart (again) ὄντα and λόγος. However the *ontic* and *logos*—since Plato’s *Seventh Letter*—are always already in conflict through the incommensurable validation claims of *doxa* and which, according to the *Meno* and *Euthyphro* Plato sought to overcome with his theory of the *Idea* as the corrective to other forms, or *matter* of knowledge which cannot lead to proper *episteme*. Nothing is therefore gained by the argument that the conjunction *and* critically bears upon an already lapsarian and alienated language—deeply entangled in error and indeterminacy—in any more profound a manner, unless of course one has granted philosophy some privileged status of having already made explicit the realm of the ontological and rendered transparent the troubling bind of *being* (thing) and *being-self* (subject). The Being whose home is language says Merleau-Ponty “cannot be fixed...especially since it is upon it that the positivity of the invisible rests. There is no intelligible world, *there is* the sensible world.”<sup>80</sup> Whence the *in-fans*?

The primacy of the science of ontology and its grounding discipline phenomenology, Heidegger contends, has always been the concern of a primary philosophy. More specifically the

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<sup>78</sup> Agamben, *Potentialities, Collected Essays in Philosophy*, 222. It seems to me this amounts to nothing short of a new metaphysics.

<sup>79</sup> It is perhaps more in keeping with Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the *intertwining* and the *chiasmic* to opt for a term closer to a phenomenological ontology, a term that more specifically reflects the spirit of Merleau-Ponty’s doctrine, that is *reticulation*. Reticulation is the crisscrossing pattern or weave of lines or vectors, from the term *reticule* meaning a netted bag. This term nicely reflects not only Merleau-Ponty’s own idea of my flesh and the world’s being woven and co-determined as the tissue of the ontologic, but also verges on Deleuze’s own theory of the *rhizomic* in *A Thousand Plateaus* for example.

<sup>80</sup> *VI*, 214.

phenomenological ontology of Merleau-Ponty seeks to find an adequate form of philosophical expression, pointing to an alterity that is “being in indivision”<sup>81</sup> as its *Ur-ground*. But is it not the case that to employ the selfsame lexical markers of a formal system that one is already indebted to it, immured within the proscriptive conventions of its internal logic? How then can one write against discursive and rhetorical conventions without naming them? This paradox Frege expressed as: *a term cannot refer to something and, at the same time, refer to the fact that it refers to it*. This is not to say however that it is an either/or proposition, that it would lead, as with the Derridean grammatological project to a destruction of the sign or on the other hand to an irreducibly sedimented signification. Any element of signification then must always exceed—indeed express the excess, the excrescence—and survive the signifier whose incompleteness is only the repetition of de-scribing recurrent boundary conditions for expressing *that thing there* which appears for us and before *logos*. Within the excess of sense (at its limit) of that which escapes signification, life occupies the domain of error—incommensurability of the propositional certainly—life, Foucault writes, “is what is capable of error...With man, life reaches a living being who is never altogether in his place, a living being who is fated ‘to err’ and ‘to be mistaken.’”<sup>82</sup>

I had wanted to mark two things suggested by the use of ellipses and the reverse square brackets. Primarily, the main issue I wanted to point to was not only the difficulty philosophy faces in providing a representational schema (language of correspondence) for perception of the *there is*

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<sup>81</sup> *VI.*, 208. See not only Agamben’s “Paradoxes” in *Potentialities* wherein he discusses the bind of reference and self-reference through the medieval distinction between *intentio secunda* [the intention of the sign] and thought according to the scheme of *intentio prima* [reference to an object], but also Derrida’s *Speech and Phenomena* as well as *Of Grammatology*.

<sup>82</sup> Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 4: 763, in Agamben, *Potentialities*, 220.

since Plato's excursus in his seventh letter on the five features of *how* we know *what* we know, but philosophy's disputation of the sensuous-concrete—as is the case with the difficult notion of Merleau-Ponty's (the) *flesh*. The mendaciousness of philosophy has to do not with rescuing one from metaphysics but its reverse, re-installing a metaphysical need by liberating one from what it deems is the indeterminacy of the physical and the sensuous instead of granting it the truly robust status for consciousness in the ontic field—not a transcendental immanence, but the determinability of immanence as an infinite series for the empty hands of humanity. Berlin summarizes the exigencies of this recent turn away from an agonistic, fragmented condition experienced by a subject—to which I would add professionalization and the echo-chamber of the specialist-solipsist—as the flight toward self-emancipation which demands more than the freedom to choose: it is “perhaps a deep and incurable metaphysical need; but to allow it to determine one's practice is a symptom of an equally deep, and more dangerous moral and political immaturity.”<sup>83</sup> What follows is an effort to tentatively outline the move from the *what* of phenomenon to the *how* of phenomenology. It is the methodological shift I am interested in pursuing for the remainder of this work and to what extent the promissory note of Merleau-Ponty's (the) *flesh* is an adequate condition for the serious philosophical investigation that is phenomenology proper—a renewed expression of phenomenology which de-installs the idealist telos of ontology.

In what follows I want to explicate in greater detail the sort of weight one can—or ought to—attribute to the expressive or connotative function of the symbols that frame ....] *δηλον* [.... and the reason for my having chosen them for their performative properties in the first place. In so

doing I return to the effort to re-incorporate its philosophical significance into an expressive, pre-logical formulation of *wild Being* and ultimately a philosophy of (the) *flesh*.

Theatre “is being created” in the midst of reality and life /1943/:...theatre (a building, a stage, and an auditorium), a site of centuries old practices, indifferent and anaesthetized...the least suitable place for the m a t e r i a l i z a t i o n of drama....Theatre, drama, art, and spectacle, which are supposed to be *believable*, can only appear in a place that is not legally sanctioned or reserved for them....<sup>84</sup>

In its stead Kantor says, “I called for a real place that was part of reality. It was a ‘poor’ place that was on the margin of life’s practice. Rooms destroyed by war...”<sup>85</sup> philosophy destroyed by expression, and *the* subject destroyed by (the) *flesh* while destruction is itself destroyed by an undoing of emerging renewal. When Merleau-Ponty talks of the idea of a universality (its possibility) which one must affirm or deny, he places the spotlight on whom the burden of expressing this idea falls.

And it is here, in this menaced, uncertain terrain, that I am “summon[ed]...to the tasks of knowledge and action.”<sup>86</sup> This hinge or fulcrum between two relativities—in a field of beings—that marks (the) *flesh*, neither inside nor outside, performs the modulation and expression that is its ownmost condition, held out as it were and “generously meeting the other in the very *particularity of a given situation*.”<sup>87</sup> The situation of which Merleau-Ponty speaks is, as he says, given in the *ek-static* limit conditions *for Being (wild Being)*—in the words of Giorgio Agamben it is the experience of the limit itself, “the experience of being-*within* an *outside*. This *ek-stasis* is the gift that singularity gathers from the empty hands of humanity.”<sup>88</sup> The enactment of giving

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<sup>84</sup> Kantor, *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, 75-76.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *P.*, 25.

<sup>87</sup> *P.*, 26.

<sup>88</sup> Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 68.

expression to, marks the enigmatic ontological hinge where the limen of an "I" and the world are intertwined, entangled in the *chiasmic* reversibility that is installed *before* "the cleavage operated by reflection...where 'there is' something."<sup>89</sup> It is within the depths of incomensurability, where a wound never heals, that a "freedom comes into being in the act of accepting limits and to which the least perception, the slightest movement of the body, the smallest action, bear[s] incontestable witness."<sup>90</sup> An *incontestable witness* means not the ruse of absolute transparency, but finds expression in a taking possession of, or having. Does not possession have a weight, a weight of responsibility in its very possessing that might be characterized as ownership, proprietorship or, even that one has been charged with its care in the duration of one's holding?

Gabriel Marcel had said "being having"<sup>91</sup>—*having* that is, grafted to (the) *flesh* of anguish, the freedom of having choice within the limits freedom brings about, and the very *expression* of that agonistic freedom, not within a solipsistic private realm but the pathogenic condition which is *life's contagion*.

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<sup>89</sup> VI., 95.

<sup>90</sup> SNS., 70.

<sup>91</sup> Gabriel Marcel, "Outlines of a Phenomenology of Having," *Being and Having*, (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1949). Phenomena as *having* for Gabriel Marcel, says Spiegelberg, overcomes the mania of "reducing the phenomena to 'nothing but' something else." Marcel's notion that possession is caught between having and being, and that this nexus is in fact my own body whose status is ambivalent. This will prove key to the basic understanding of Merleau-Ponty's *écart*. Though Marcel's thinking has metaphysical affinities, and certainly, as Spiegelberg rightfully claims, Marcel's phenomenology was "only a step in his metaphysical reflection," he nonetheless exhibits all the indexes of core phenomenological concepts which are outstanding in their "freshness, its perceptiveness, and its tentativeness." Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, 448 and 466.

FIVE

THE IDYLL OF SLEEP:  
PHILOSOPHY TAPS ITS HEELS THREE TIMES

—*If man's an occurrence, what occurs isn't the answer to a question—it's the occurrence of a question. We ask questions and can't close a wound opened by hopeless questioning in us—*

G. Bataille

—*Method means doing violence to habits of relaxation—*

G. Bataille

*If man's* ground of experience is an always shifting, tectonic condition which must find, even a convulsive expression in language—*what* appears primordially *at the first day*, before thinking-saying—then the very question of *how* one expresses the *what* of appearing needs to be carefully considered. In an interview with *CBC Radio One*, contemporary poet Ken Babstock said that “words are a second home.”<sup>1</sup> It seems wholly appropriate to begin with the portentous insight of a poet whose claim is not at all antithetical to Merleau-Ponty's ontology where one's “mute world is such that all possibilities of language are *already given in it*.”<sup>2</sup> Georges Bataille, a temporary and controversial member of the Surrealists under its founder Andre Breton, touches on the very notion of subjectivistic epistemology and expressing concordance with Merleau-Ponty's sensibility holds that; “*Poetry is not a knowledge of oneself, and even less the experience of a remote possible (of that which, before, was not) but rather the simple evocation through words of inaccessible possibilities.*”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with poet Ken Babstock, *CBC Radio One*, “Out Front,” October 24, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> *VI*, 255. Emphases added.

<sup>3</sup> Bataille, *The Impossible*, 162. See Heidegger's *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Albert Hofstadter, tr., (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1971), where he says that *language beckons us*, 216.

Resisting the Sartrean existential formulation of *ipseity* and nihilation he asserts instead that, “while I hold on to the circle of ipseity, I trace it as well,”<sup>4</sup> that is to say, though not understood in its immediate everydayness, it touches upon, founds, and represents the factual evidence of *ipseity*, its sensuous manifestations appearing in its evocating-tracing. *Tracing*, whose etymology we can find in the Latin *tractus* or drawing, serves as a particularly salient trope for hermeneutics as well as Merleau-Ponty’s search for a renewed expression of subjectivity. Not only does vision trace a world beginning with the seer-already-in-the-visible (drawn or rendered with light, *photographia*), but speech (*la Parole*)—like the positive, postural expressivity of our body—in its vocative expression also functions as the sumptuous and enigmatic trace of *ipseity* because all “uses of language can be understood only if language is a being, a world—only if Speech (*la Parole*) is a circle.”<sup>5</sup>

Our speech enters into most profound human relations, an egalitarian reciprocity of the double helix of myself with others (as another), which “obliges us to introduce an essential mutation in speech [expression], namely, [and also] the appearance of writing.”<sup>6</sup> This phenomenon, or appearing to writing of sense is the “unfinished thought (*impense*) [that] must be shown to be present through the words which circumscribe and delimit it,”<sup>7</sup> that is, the latency of thought coming into presence with the world as the excess of sense (or its poverty), never contained or concluded by the indeterminacy of the written word which, of course, includes philosophical writing.

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<sup>4</sup> *TD.*, 141.

<sup>5</sup> *TD.*, 141.

<sup>6</sup> *P.*, 187. In this regard I draw the reader’s attention to one of the more plausible formulations of liberty by Isaiah Berlin—what he calls *agonistic liberalism*. Cf. 14 in *The Visible and the Invisible*, “the problem of the other is a particular case of the problem of others...the access to the other is an entry into a constellation of others,” 81.

<sup>7</sup> *P.*, 182.

The phenomenology of speech and its poverty of correspondence provides an approach to language which, John O'Neill states, "is ultimately an introduction to the ontology of the world."<sup>8</sup> Insofar as we are language, that it *expresses* our tentative relationship with not only the world (which, since the *Phenomenology of Perception*, is no longer exterior, and in which we are merely objects), but a feeling that thought "creates truth rather than finds it."<sup>9</sup> But that selfsame language such relationships are borne upon is chiasmically knotted within the tissue of our primary perceptions: Merleau-Ponty says of the literary modulation of language and its relationship to the phenomenon of appearing that "The writer's thought does not control his language from without; *the writer himself is a new kind of idiom...inventing ways of expression...Great prose is the art of capturing meaning which until then had never been objectified...a poetry of human relations...is, the call of each individual freedom to all the others.*"<sup>10</sup> This relationship is however, already obtained within the primary matrix of ontology, that is *onto-logos*. Heidegger will define such a relationship through a basic and necessary understanding as follows; "the science of beings, of whatever is, [are]...*ontic sciences* [things], and *the science of being*, the ontological science, philosophy."<sup>11</sup> Our language however, is not a natural object, nor an entirely artificial object as logic would have it, "It is full of ambiguity and in general far too luxuriant for the taste of positivist philosophers."<sup>12</sup> The utopic dream of transparency is a deluded quest for the holy grail

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<sup>8</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *Prose of the World*, Claude Lefort, ed., John O'Neill tr., (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), xxxi. Hereafter indicated as *PrW*.

<sup>9</sup> *P.*, 22.

<sup>10</sup> *P.*, 8-9.

<sup>11</sup> Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 41. The very function of *logos* is tied to making distinct *what is there*, or as Heidegger often uses the term, a gathering. *Logos* makes distinctions in the realm of entities possible such that *logos* allows for that shift from beings to being that *is* the ontological.

<sup>12</sup> *PrW.*, xxxiii.

of logical correspondence with the *real*. The outcome of such a pilgrimage we see clearly illustrated in Borges' "Parable of the Palace,"<sup>13</sup> where "reality was one of the dream's configurations."<sup>14</sup> The story tells of the Yellow Emperor's punitive retribution against a poet of his court:

the poet...recited a brief composition...There are some who contend it consisted of a single line; others say it had but a single word. The truth, the incredible truth, is that in the poem stood the enormous palace, entire and minutely detailed...the Emperor exclaimed, "You have robbed me of my palace!" And the executioner's iron sword cut the poet down.<sup>15</sup>

The parable holds that there can never be two things alike in the world nor that any single word can contain the universe. But this story can also tell us something quite other, rather than illustrating the tragic fate of the poet, it expresses the possibility of a space for philosophical expression, restoring to philosophy as Husserl had said, its "power to signify, a birth of meaning."<sup>16</sup> That is to say the connotative expressive function of philosophy fills the impoverished hands of humanity while the merely descriptive, mundane, denotative function of adequacy seeks utopic correspondence with the nothing—it seeks to fill the nothing with its analogue and thus negates that very negation which has always had and still has a positive characteristic. It is the self-effacing nihilation which leaves truly nothing, the silence of oblivion. If this dream forms the *Idyll* of the discipline then philosophy might do well to tap its heels together three times.

This very writing here, shall we say, is the already-written. Writing, as the material, sensuous representation of sense rising within the sense of the perceptible world can only be a

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<sup>13</sup> George Luis Borges, *Dreamtigers*, Mildred Boyer, and Harold Morland trs., (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964).

<sup>14</sup> Borges, *Dreamtigers*, "Everything and Nothing," 46.

<sup>15</sup> Borges, *Dreamtigers*, "Parable of the Palace," 44-45.

<sup>16</sup> *VI.*, 155.

third order reflection of the having appeared. *Being-speech (spoken)*, *being-seer (seen)* is, Merleau-Ponty would say “the highest point of philosophy...perhaps no more than rediscovering these truisms: thought thinks, speech speaks, the gaze gazes. But, between the two identical words there is each time the whole *écart* one straddles in order to think, speak, and see,”<sup>17</sup> and culminates in the signifying practice of the written word (sensuous expression and representation *qua* the figural/*wild Being*). This can be positively expressed—rather than the dismissed as the negativity of mere *doxa* or corrupted Forms—as the basic dictum that informs the thrust of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology which opens upon the immanence of a convulsive, postural realm of expression. If words are a second home then they have already taken us too far, to someplace other, caught within the idiom that is language, to a place beyond my question of the *where* and *how* of beginnings, that is, too far from the place Merleau-Ponty described as *before philosophical expression*.<sup>18</sup> In a recently translated volume of Maurice Blanchot’s *Faux Pas*,<sup>19</sup> a collection of essays on literature/poetry and language, he sets out primarily to frame the existential anguish of a writer who writes in the face of nothing. What continues to be troubling is the Sartrean spectre of thetic intentionality which falsely construes correspondence between the nothing, and a sensuous material form of writing, however “There comes a time when the author who writes from fidelity to words writes from fidelity to anguish,”<sup>20</sup> which in some sense re-defines the space of writing (philosophically or otherwise) for “Merleau-Ponty pushed intentional analysis to its breaking

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<sup>17</sup> S., 21.

<sup>18</sup> VI., 167.

<sup>19</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *Faux Pas*, Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery, eds., Charlotte Mandell tr., (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001). The central theme of his essays revolve around the existential condition of *anguish*. That they were written in 1943 may shed some light upon Merleau-Ponty’s own foray into political theory which I take up in Chapter 4.

<sup>20</sup> Blanchot, *Faux Pas*, 4.

point.”<sup>21</sup> And this *breaking point* itself (caesura/*écart*) begins to present itself as the *object* (the positivity of an *ab-grund*) of enquiry as well as the clue to a renewed phenomenological ontology. But such is the paradox of writing, *here* (already within the domain of the philosophical), of *that* place having passed which is now not situated as the *that-there* of apodicticity, but situational as pure philosophical expression. The fantasy of an originary quantum tempts many to embark on a course of infinite regress endeavouring to lay bare that which cannot (or must not) be thought—what appears *before* reflection, *before* expression *before* the sensing of a seer-seen who is in a body that is only “shadows stuffed with organs.”<sup>22</sup> It is this aspect of my project that aligns itself explicitly with Merleau-Ponty’s own efforts to seek another form of expression for the brute ontological grain of a being who is between something appearing and expression, being-subject and being-thing—one that challenges the philosophical claim that there is some pure, idealized correspondence between subject, object, and meaning, even while the idiom I employ here is forever pressured and collides with that other idiom—the formal language of philosophical method. “I have never been able to find out what being means,” says Emile Cioran, “except sometimes in eminently nonphilosophical moments.”<sup>23</sup>

Babstock says *words are a second home*, which is to say that he has a sense for, or *senses* a primary home, a place that, *in pricipium* is a true, more authentic *oikos*. This writing of estrangement which is out of place, and alienated, is ultimately a “common residence, the place of...reciprocal interpretation”<sup>24</sup> that gathers back into itself the very caesura which it is forever obligated to

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<sup>21</sup> Madison, “Flesh as Otherness,” 32.

<sup>22</sup> *VI.*, 138.

<sup>23</sup> Cioran, *Drawn and Quartered*, 171.

<sup>24</sup> *AD.*, 204.

traverse. The writer, says Merleau-Ponty, “takes everyday language and makes it deliver [its] pre-logical participation.”<sup>17</sup> That is, the philosopher-writer brings a guttural, contingent and convulsive speech into the place of language/meaning in order to disabuse it of its lofty pretenses, to perform its ruination while employing it at the same time—Paul Valéry had said, *A distress that writes well is not as complete as one that keeps something of its ruin.*

Indeed as Merleau-Ponty himself has remarked, apropos of his suggestion for what is at stake in understanding his ontology and (the) *flesh*, we need to elaborate the traditional philosophical presuppositions of transcendental subjectivity. Such an elaboration “would involve an elucidation of philosophical expression itself...as the expression of what is *before expression*.”<sup>18</sup> This suggests the entire problematic of his more radical project, one which poses ineluctable difficulties for philosophers inculcated in the staid tradition of dialectics and metaphysics. In *Sense of the World* Jean-Luc Nancy too questioned the inadequacies of traditional philosophic expression, a style he contends, that must respond to its constitutive founding and “must pass by way of its own deconstitution...that truth must expose itself to sense....[and] presupposes a different relation of philosophy to its own presentation.”<sup>19</sup> In the view of eminent Husserl scholar Dorian Cairns the thetic intentionality of idealist philosophies are insouciantly absorbed into taking the “conceptual stuff already on hand and fashion[ing] a cloak for objects *in absentia*, then call them in for partial fitting—that is at best only a way to botch together an ingenious misfit.”<sup>20</sup>

I would like to suggest that the question of the *how* of our arrival through philosophy, at

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<sup>17</sup> *P.*, 93.

<sup>18</sup> *VI.*, 167. Emphasis added.

<sup>19</sup> Nancy, *Sense of the World*, 19.

<sup>20</sup> Cairns, “An Approach to Husserlian Phenomenology,” 4.

a place where one might present a more nuanced account of the truly difficult problems Merleau-Ponty's ontology inheres, needs to be carefully considered and mapped. The very *how* of one's arrival then is ramified through, and begins with, the very enigma of the footprint left in passing—the *vestigium*, the gallows, a pre-face, the trace of writing and describes, it seems to me, the spacing pre-condition of the ontological. Merleau-Ponty's own efforts to rethink ontology realizes that "ontology is the anticipation of philosophy,"<sup>21</sup> and is echoed by the project explicated by Giorgio Agamben's notion of *bare life*.<sup>22</sup>

Philosophy's originary polarization of *truth* and *sense*, and its subsequent privileging of the former, has virtually guaranteed the *aporia* of the latter, casting it off into the abyss of mere doxa or a corrupt representation that is the realm of the aesthetic, literary, and poetical. This tension, according to Heidegger, already existed in ancient philosophy and is deeply racinated in Aristotle's *Physics*. One can get some sense of what Heidegger wants to say apropos of the epistemological error in the subject/object split and thus gain greater insight into what one has forgotten; that is, the unique character of *φύσις* and appearing. In his finely wrought essay of 1939, *On the Essence and Concept of Φύσις*, Heidegger suggests:

From this we infer what 'being' meant for the Greeks. They address beings as the 'stable' [*das "Standige"*]. 'The stable' means two things. On the one hand, it means whatever, of and by itself, stands on its own, that which stands 'there'; and at the same time 'the stable' means the enduring, the lasting. We would certainly not be thinking like the Greeks if we were to conceive of the stable as what 'stands *over against*' in the sense of the objective. Something 'standing over

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<sup>21</sup> VI., 198.

<sup>22</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer, Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Agamben's brilliant thesis suggests, among other things, that the concept of *bare life* always already exists in a state of exception (between inclusion and exclusion), and as such is the fissuring site between subjection and politicization. Certainly one might contend that *bare life*—"the natural sweetness of *zoe* (life)"—too is implicated in the project of humanization as defined in philosophical terms, that is, life or the subject caught between immanence and transcendence.

against' [Gegenstand] is the 'translation' of the word 'object.' But beings can be experienced as objects only where human beings have become subjects, those who experience their fundamental relation to beings as the objectification—understood as mastery—of what is encountered. For the Greeks, human beings are never subjects, and therefore non-human beings can never have the character of objects (things that stand-over-against). *Φύσις* is what is responsible for the fact that the stable has a unique kind of standing-on-its-own.<sup>23</sup>

What is it that resides between these beings then if not *bare life*, a carnal hinge installed between agonistic expression and (the) *flesh* of *wild Being*. One must think (the) *flesh* says Merleau-Ponty “as the concrete *emblem* of a general manner of being.”<sup>24</sup>

The *concrete emblem* of a general *manner of being* ought to provide not only a more compelling account of what obtains for a notion of (the) *flesh* as a way out of the doomed project of philosophy's efforts to overcome itself (like the dog perpetually chasing its own tail), but may also serve to clarify Merleau-Ponty's own assertion that the presence of the world is precisely the presence of its *flesh* to my *flesh*—*flesh* and nothing other, the expressive instantiation and manifestation of an exteriority that is already a constitutive dimension of my own *flesh*, and an excess of sense, sense whose meaning is my meaning, my own incorporated *other* as the selfsame. Within the broader context of continental philosophy in the 20th century, Merleau-Ponty's application of the term *flesh*—a term without equivalence in the history of philosophy—picks out of the very carnage of this century the very emblem which compels one to rethink humankind in a deeper more penetrating manner, beyond one's *habits of relaxation*.

<sup>23</sup> Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 188-189.

<sup>24</sup> *VI.*, 147. Emphasis added.

SIX

DENUDING (THE) FLESH, CARNAL HINGE OF MERLEAU-PONTY'S ONTOLOGY

—Each of us takes on himself that unit of disaster which is the phenomenon man. And the only meaning time has is to multiply these units—

Emile Cioran

—Without resorting to an order superior to the soul, the soul collapses into the flesh—and physiology becomes the last word of our philosophic stupors—

Emile Cioran

—A distress that writes well is not as complete as one that keeps something of its ruin—

Paul Valéry

Each time one says *the flesh*, one raises it above the embryochthonic condition that Merleau-Ponty means for this emblematic term to signify. The use of the definite article *the*, elevates *flesh* into the realm of realist positivity that denies it its expressive postural feature, denying (the) *flesh* its connotative spacing between epistemology and appearing sense. The emblem that is (the) *flesh* thusly elevated, above the primacy of appearing phenomenon, recuperates or sutures together the two opposing relativities of a fold—as Merleau-Ponty had said the *hollow*<sup>1</sup>—which is the *écart* of being-self (subject) and being (thing). One must not think *flesh* says Merleau-Ponty “starting from substances, from body and spirit—for then it would be the union of contradictories—but we must think it as we said, as an element, as the *concrete emblem of a general manner of being*.”<sup>2</sup> Merleau-Ponty’s consideration of (the) *flesh* sought to revivify the question of the possibility of the first step toward an antifoundationalist approach to a philosophy of expression and is the critical nexus for pursuing *phenomenologically* a primary and more robust ontology.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example VI., 147, “the visible body provides for the hollow whence a vision will come.”

<sup>2</sup> VI., 147. Emphasis added.

This concluding chapter then will take up Merleau-Ponty's effort to begin again, to begin with (the) *flesh*, to begin where silence is not non-articulation but entangled with that where something is always already appearing. I say quite consciously *to begin* because the neutral infinitive mood of *begin* is an anxious inertia, not an absolute state of non-movement which even the ancient Greeks did not subscribe to, but a robust contact with a world which is never a zero-condition but an oscillating hinge—my own visibility in-the-visible already a non-nihilation making impossible any solipsistic opting-out. *To begin* is the always-already robust field of relief where one who is in things always returns upon the hinge that is (the) *flesh*—the pre-condition which solicits incomplete man to always begin again.

I have made some general assertions thus far by way of introducing (the) *flesh* which I want to briefly summarize. I have said that (the) *flesh* occupies a critical juncture between two terms, object and subject, as well as between experience and epistemology, and that this intersection or hinge—if one could describe it as such—has as its basic feature an event-horizon spanning the divergence of being-self (subject) and being-thing (object) as well as the very manner of appropriating its expressibility. Several considerations come to mind. The event-horizon, or event pure and simple, like the *all that is* in Heraclitus' account does not present itself, nor is it representable. Like the pursuit of *episteme* and the attribution of its proper name for example, such an undertaking is subject to the weakness of the *logos*. Plato's *Cratylus* points to the very schism between the signifier and signified:

Must not the same thing be born and retire and vanish while the word is in our mouths?...Then how can that be a real thing which is never in the same state?...for you cannot know that which has no state.<sup>3</sup>

That is to say, the only manner in which *logos* can satisfy epistemological claims of correspondence with things (which can never have a state, that is, as irreducibly fixed) is to graft itself to the event by its use of the pronoun, for example, *it* or *that*. As I have already suggested the use of the definite article, like the pronoun, arrogates the fixity of certain *qualia* or an event—more paradoxically an event-horizon—the former delineates the thing under the ruse of pure and transparent apodicticity while the latter is ahistorical, periodizing what it is that is appearing. In either case the phenomenon is elided to an irretrievable past as part of an idealist or universal cause-effect theorem, its rational *a priori* organization taken as given and correspondent with a reflective philosophy of beings.<sup>3</sup> Πάντα (all which is) like the point-event-horizon is an excess of sense which is not non-articulation but for which language (the signifier) will never be correspondent.

I want to suggest that (the) *flesh* expresses the very pre-condition necessary to an antifoundational epistemology, an antirealist ontology (contra scientific *realist* claims) and an antidualist philosophy of mind. Moreover, in order that (the) *flesh* be understood as the necessary pre-condition for a renewed conception of philosophy, as Merleau-Ponty had wanted, I would suggest that (the) *flesh* be divested of its definite article—in short I would like to denude (the) *flesh* which is perhaps a tautology.<sup>5</sup> Can, or ought one even invoke *flesh* as a descriptive term for the enigmatic

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<sup>3</sup> *Cratylus*, 439d-440a.

<sup>4</sup> One must take as primary says Merleau-Ponty, “the spatializing-temporalizing vortex (which is flesh and not consciousness facing a noema)...[there is] no *absolute* difference, therefore, between...the ontological and the ontic—no absolutely pure philosophical word.” *VI*, 244, 266.

<sup>5</sup> In some sense I want to make the case that divesting (the) *flesh* of its definite article begins to illustrate more clearly the fundamental punctum of contact with phenomenon before expression as well as the necessary condition

arrival of a subject who has, paradoxically not left his field of origin?<sup>6</sup> (The) *flesh* as the axis or juncture of object and subject says Merleau-Ponty “is not *elsewhere*, but one cannot say that it is *here* or *now* in the sense that objects are.”<sup>7</sup> This is the deep ambiguity that Merleau-Ponty’s concept of (the) *flesh* obtains—knowing in one’s unknowing, the place I once occupied, I occupy no longer, nor have I ever in fact occupied it even when I did. My temporalizations are lost with the passing of its co-valent term, time.<sup>8</sup>

In previous chapters I had started to sketch a summary account of the philosophical scheme for rethinking the paradoxical divergence of experience and subjectivity in the hopes of beginning to construct a possible scenario for understanding the necessary features of a renewed philosophical expression—as Merleau-Ponty’s own concern clearly illustrated: “This new reversibility and the *emergence of the flesh as expression* are the point of insertion of speaking and thinking in the world of silence.”<sup>9</sup>

I think it enough to say *flesh*, which is not in any one place in particular but already expresses an entanglement, a self-estrangement in the primacy of *ipseity* and *alterity*. *Flesh* is an

§ before predication that is the condition of phenomenological ontology proper. That is, I want to undress *flesh* and ascribe to it the status of bare life (in keeping with Agamben’s thesis), or as concatenated event-points within the field of all beings that is *blosse Sachen*, bare or naked stuff.

<sup>6</sup> VI., 153.

<sup>7</sup> VI., 147.

<sup>8</sup> See for example Giorgio Caproni in Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death, The Place of Negativity*, Karen E. Pinkus and Michael Hardt, trs., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 98.

*I returned there  
where I have never been.  
Nothing has changed from how it was not.  
On the table (on the checkered  
tablecloth) half-full  
I found the glass  
which was never filled. All  
has remained just as  
I never left it.*

<sup>9</sup> VI., 145. Emphasis added.

incomplete but infinitely distended term (like the neutral infinitive mood of the verb) whose brute and carnal condition is the necessary condition for undertaking phenomenologically the quest for its primary feature ontology which is the “anticipation of philosophy.”<sup>10</sup> One cannot say (installed on the hinge of multiple appearances and armed with the transcendental principles of idealist philosophy), *the* or *that-there*. Having done so however one has not so much approached the positivity one pursued but instead forgotten the merely thetic source of such hasty positings—precisely, I would suggest because of the *having done so* and thereby holds up an entirely other *object* for consciousness, an object upon which I reflect yet which is other than what I had known it to be. With the loss of origins or originating data/sense, thought enters into the *having-been* (of first moments) which is ironically a thought of the last. It is therefore the case that this other object is not a contribution to *thought* but arrives only because *flesh* is the condition, a style “elusive and elliptical like every style.”<sup>11</sup> The definite article is not some *qualia* or predicate which modifies or concretizes the contingencies of primordial experience, rather it bypasses those questions of the *how* of the *what is* altogether. In keeping with Merleau-Pontyan thinking, *flesh* is neither here nor there, nor can one subscribe to the apodicticity of absolute placeness because it is the very *écart* (divergence) that is the condition known as *flesh* and emblematic of a *general manner of being*—prior to specific entities. A key term under consideration here is the term *manner* and its filiation with *flesh*. When one says something exhibits a certain *manner* one holds that there is some affect or a connotative-expressive which potentiates the particularity of the representational force of the

subject *qua* universalizable.

I should like first to make a few observations pertaining to *flesh* and skin before embarking on a discussion of its con-figuration<sup>12</sup> as the carnal hinge of phenomenology proper, the embryochthonic condition for a principle philosophy that is at the first day always deeply ontologized and nothing but. Merleau-Ponty's own thinking of the inside-outside dialectic assumed by philosophy and psycho-physiological sciences, compelled him to introduce the fundamental notion of *alterity*, where I am already for myself an other, and an outside which is already situated within the very *écart* of the subject's relation with itself. If one can assert anything at all about this primordial relationship it is that physiologically there is no outside *as such*. There is no outside because its dialectical opposite doesn't exist on the order of the physiological nor can one ascribe any force of positivity to it as irreducibly outside. There is no interior topography *qua* inside nor has there ever been other than what philosophy *reasoned* in its appeal to an *interior* which serves only as an asylum from the anguished awareness of the world.

I want to suggest what I think does hold to be empirically true without equivocation. In denuding *flesh* one encounters the possibility of a renewed thinking apropos of the profound depth that is at the same time pure limen and appearing—the absolute exteriority that one always is. It is a question of the *matter-of-fact* of skin, skin that is not a distinct phenomenon of an appearing embodiment but rather co-substantial with *flesh*—always present and *presentable* and expressible. But in this case shouldn't I prefer to say, as Madison would, co-substantial *as flesh*? The Merleau-

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<sup>12</sup> I am italicizing figuration to flag those epistemological assumptions regarding concepts of embodiment which speak to constructed cultural and historical forms and types rather than primary conditions of phenomenology and *flesh* that obtain for the fact-of-the-matter for ontology.

Pontyan theory of reversibility would hold that neither term exists as an absolute other to be synthesized in reason through the unification and reconciliation of dialectical opposites.<sup>13</sup> Simply put, one's skin—what Merleau-Ponty in *Signs* alludes to by usage of terms such as web or tissue by which the world's *flesh* is woven or interlaced with my own flesh<sup>14</sup>—is skin all the way down, a Mobius-like complexity which is all boundary, a desubstantialized limen which is the juncture where interior an exterior touch in compresence.

It may seem at first blush—blood rushing toward the epidermis, flushing the skin, lifting it away from its interior architecture in its phenomenal appearing as a distinct organ—the excavation of *flesh* yields some transcendental substance that provides one with absolute evidence of that which has remained hidden under a merely sensuous layer of false appearances/representations/gestures.<sup>15</sup> What holds as empirically unequivocal is that we are skin all the way down and co-extended with exteriority, co-extended and co-determined with the world's *flesh*. The dermal layers of the body hide nothing says Mark Taylor, “nothing but other dermal layers.”<sup>16</sup> In the early stages of the fertilization ovum cells multiply exponentially, as these cells continue to multiply through division they create a hollow sphere known as a blastomere. Eventually the sphere collapses back into itself to form a lined pocket, a doubled skin comprised of two layers, endoderm

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<sup>13</sup> This conclusion obtains from Hegel's speculative scheme—consciousness, self-consciousness and their synthesis in reason—a scheme which is insistently Cartesian. In general terms the coincidence of subjectivity an objectivity, in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, A.V. Miller, tr., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), holds that the general principle of rationality sees the outer as the expression of the inner. This is the error Husserl himself will continue to make and Merleau-Ponty critiques in his lectures on Husserl as the *natural attitude*.

<sup>14</sup> Merleau-Ponty will speak not of subject or object, the in-itself or for-itself, but rather a *connective tissue*, VI, 174, as well as our perceptions which he says are “my twins or the flesh of my flesh,” S, 15.

<sup>15</sup> See Mark C. Taylor's treatment of the creative possibilities opened up by a meditation on the skin as a metaphor for surface and the postmodern negation of depth, *Hiding*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> Taylor, *Hiding*, 12.

and ectoderm. The primordial structure is much like the Mobius complexity of an indistinguishable inside which is outside and vice versa—the invaginated blastomere is principally skin whose hollow is nothing other than exteriority grasped, and enfolded within skin.<sup>17</sup> Next, the two layers partially peel away from one another to form a third surface called the mesoderm. From these three dermal layers the mature organism will begin to grow. What is truly enigmatic about this is that from these basic dermal structures the whole of the organism's complex physiology and functions begin to be generated in a process governed by preprogrammed DNA—and all this from simple basal cells.

From this basic dermal structure a further differentiation occurs: the endoderm forms the blood, the internal organs and all inner linings; the mesoderm generates skeletal matter, connective tissue, muscles and the vascular system; and the ectoderm forms such structures as the nervous system, hair, nails and epidermis. Since the organism as a whole is formed of nothing but basal skin cells says Taylor, “the body is, in effect, nothing but strata of skin in which interiority and exteriority are thoroughly convoluted.”<sup>18</sup> This then is the *matter-of-fact* of a reversibility which is not predicated upon the contrived philosophical dialectic of inside and outside *as reasoned*, but instead upon sensuous, brute, and simple carnality.

Here one encounters the complex question of fundamental ontology, one that has yet to be adequately formulated. Merleau-Ponty's principle philosophical effort sought to reformulate this

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<sup>17</sup> My description anticipates the distinction between Merleau-Ponty's concept of Being and that of Sartre. Rather than the nihilating *hole in being* as implied by Sartre's philosophy Merleau-Ponty says it is a hollow which conjoins one as both *being* (thing) and *being-self* (subject), VI, 146. For a comprehensive discussion of the relationship between Merleau-Ponty and Sartre see Jon Stewart, ed., *The Debate Between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty*.

<sup>18</sup> Taylor, *Hiding*, 12.

question which resides suspended between the sigetic of mute matter and the manner in which one brings it to expression. In a seemingly unremarkable little book whose extemporaneous meditations on prose and other simple forms of story-telling comprise the *Idea of Prose*, Giorgio Agamben holds up two sides of the caesura or the *ab-grund* between sense and *logos* indicating the *matter* bearing upon the limit conditions of a subject's possible expression: "The decisive experience, so difficult to talk about, it is claimed...is not even an experience. It is nothing more than the point at which we touch the limits of language....Where language stops is not where the unsayable occurs, but rather where the matter of words begins."<sup>19</sup>

This is a project of thresholds, and such a threshold defines the prolegomenon also, that is, what is *there* before language (*pro-lego*), beyond the stoppage one can not go. Merleau-Ponty himself had already formulated the difficulty of having to begin at the threshold of beginnings—the *emblem* of that threshold *flesh*, he maintains, is expressed as the "point of insertion of speaking and thinking in the world of silence,"<sup>20</sup> the world of mute matter, the world of sense, of sense sensing sense. Nietzsche had proffered a view on the notion of the body and its relation to an epistemological tradition stating that *evidence* of the body is manifest in the enigmatic arrival of expressing the inaudible. It is the human body says Nietzsche "through which and over and beyond which a tremendous inaudible stream seems to flow."<sup>21</sup> This is precisely what the prolegomenon to (the) *flesh* hopes to adumbrate, the very movement from sense to *logos*, from the

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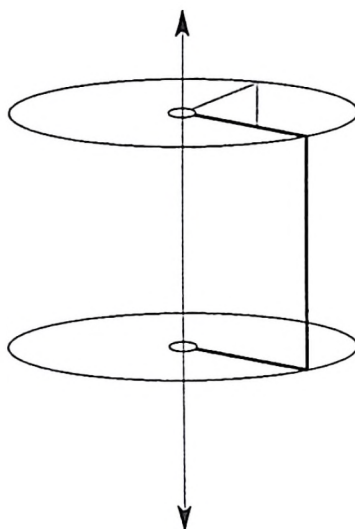
<sup>19</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Idea of Prose*, Michael Sullivan and Sam Whitsitt, eds., (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 37.

<sup>20</sup> VI., 144. In this regard see also Agamben, *The Coming Community*, in which he dispossesses the dialectic of its delimiting logic, the threshold says Agamben is not "in this sense, another thing with respect to the limit; it is, so to speak, the experience of the limit itself, the experience of being-*within* an *outside*," 68. That is to say the experience of the very limit conditions that inscribe themselves as vectors across the hinge that is (the) *flesh*.

<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 659.

realm of entities (the ontic) to the *onto-logos*, from phenomenon to the question of the methodology of *how* one arrives at understanding through the primary discipline of phenomenology and asks the question, of what nature is this spanning, this bridge, this hinge?

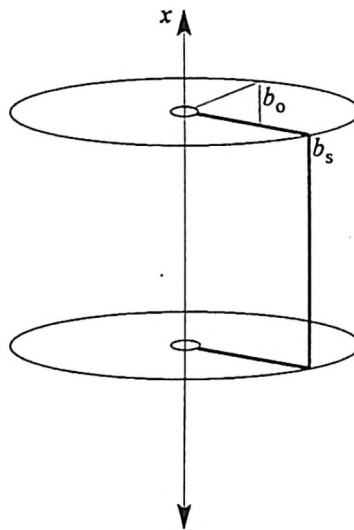
Against the *Bilderverbot* or representation of *flesh* I have nonetheless endeavoured to represent the unrepresentable, the pre-condition for phenomenological ontology. How can one write or illustrate a pro-legomenon to *flesh*, or anything at all for that matter (for it is not an issue of *matter* at all) when the degree-zero is already elided—as Merleau-Ponty aptly contends, “There is no intelligible world, *there is* the sensible world.”<sup>22</sup> I hope therefore that my failure here to clarify where one’s thinking of *flesh* may better provide for thinking beginnings or, for that matter, the ends of infinite point-events. Merleau-Ponty poses the problem of *flesh* as an ideality that has an axis, depth and dimensions: one experiences he says, “as often as I wish—the transition and metamorphosis of the one experience into the other, and it is only as though *the hinge* between them, solid, unshakeable, remained irremediably hidden from me....[but] not an ontological void...My *flesh* and that of the world therefore involve clear zones, clearings, about which *pivot* the opaque zones, and the primary visibility.”<sup>23</sup> Could such a hinge-condition be described as follows?



Indeed the question of fundamental ontology must be approached with the understanding that it is a coiling over itself, an interrogation of the moment where perception is *of perception* and as a subsequently conscious *taking-hold* of—the very place where the subject holds up two seemingly distinct relativities. It is what the diagram illustrates albeit not in an entirely satisfying manner. However it does begin to tentatively describe the turning-condition of hermeneutic phenomenology about the carnal hinge of Merleau-Ponty's renewed ontology. Such an interpretive step—which does *not leave its field of origin*—necessarily opens upon the possibility of philosophy as a primarily propositionless interrogative:

(i.e. as disposition, around the this and the world which *is there*, of a hollow, of a questioning, where the this and the world must *themselves* say what they are—i.e. not as the search for an invariant of language, for a lexical essence, but as the search for an invariant of silence, for the structure) can consist only in showing how the world is articulated starting from a zero of being which is not nothingness, that is, in installing itself on the edge of being, neither in the for Itself, nor the in Itself, at the joints, where the multiple *entries* of the world cross.<sup>24</sup>

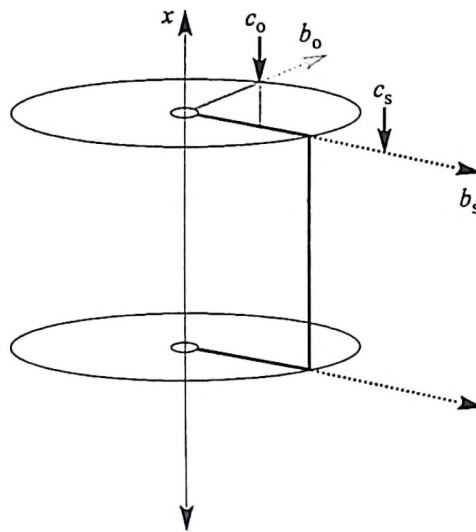
Figure 2 complicates my initially austere illustration<sup>25</sup> by identifying key features  $b_o$  (being-object) and  $b_s$  (being-subject) which are tied together on the axis  $x$  that is *flesh/hinge* and designates the amplitude of potential expressibility. This diagram doesn't tell one much more other than to merely describe the Cartesian dualism, on one side of the hinge the object, the other the subject, the ontic and the onto-logos.



It seems to me, that in order to provide a more fulsome account of how *flesh* ought to operate for Merleau-Ponty's situational ontology, the illustration of the hinge needs to be further disseminated with a view to a truly phenomenological turn.

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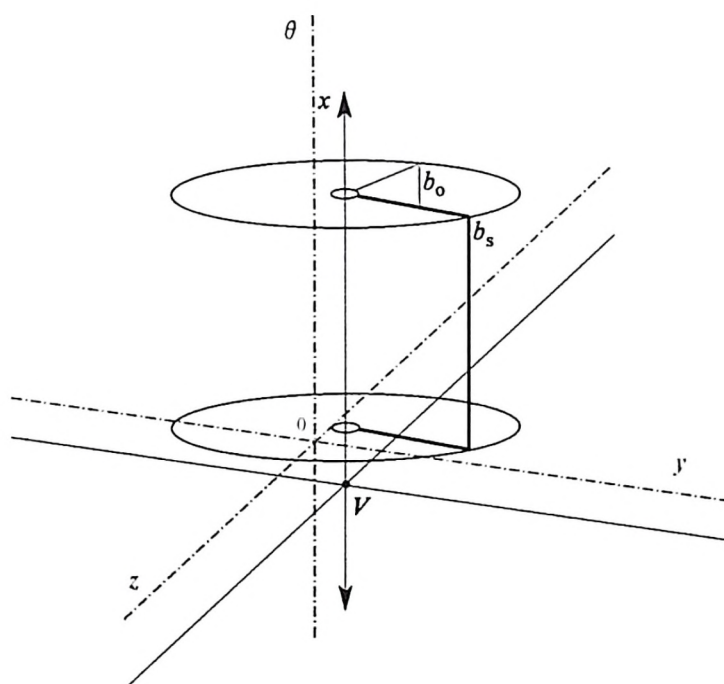
<sup>25</sup> All diagrams are subject to over-simplification, idealizations and failures. It is necessary therefore to understand that the elements comprising these *figures* are not locatable but point-events—phenomena.



In figure 3  $b_o$  (being-object) and  $b_s$  (being-subject) are now represented as horizontal extensions, both terms now include the factor  $h$  as an indication of their proximity to both  $x$  and a horizon of the subject's perceptual field. Furthermore the relationship of  $b_o$  and  $b_s$  exists as a conditional, that is, a contingency of possible expressibility relative to  $x$  and its horizon. This condition is not however correspondential where  $b_o = b_s$  but rather they are proximately related to the distance point of the perceptual field's horizon and expressed as  $c_o$  and  $c_s$ . Their relative proximity cannot then be reconciled by a single term or proper name—for each singular moment where one finds the condition adequate to explicating  $b_o$  or  $b_s$  a different expression is required. Thus to describe this condition in the spirit of Merleau-Ponty's ontology,  $b_o$  and  $b_s$  do not extend beyond the limit-condition of  $h$  the *in-visible*, they do not occupy the zero-condition of  $x$ , nor can they occupy absolute oppositional points on  $180^\circ$  axis, which is to say they lie beyond the limits of one's peripheral field.

I have proffered merely a descriptive account of the conditions that obtain from the principle notion of *flesh* but in no way a complete one for understanding its situational condition.

Figure 4 hopes to illustrate—as much as I can, or dare without falling victim to fictions—the fundamental pre-condition of *flesh*. The entire figure of the hinge-condition (*flesh*) must be grasped as dimensional and therefore must be situated within the very proximal condition that is *being-in-the-visible* evincing a contingent apodicticity that is always subject to the specificity of the phenomenon and thus *for* ontology as its effect or, more precisely, its *expression*.



This last figure is a more complete illustration of the notion of *flesh*—insofar as *flesh* is representable at all. That is not to say however that one seeks a genesis for *flesh* as the primordial condition which makes possible phenomenological ontology, rather it is the sum of conditions, pressures, proximities and amplitudes that cross over where my *flesh* is in this world, in this world *as* other, *as-a-fact* not yet intelligible but already meaning-full. Further to my illustration the hinge marks the chiasm upon the axis  $x$  whose originating point  $V$  marks the value-condition where  $\theta \neq 0$ ,  $y \neq 0$ , and  $z$  also  $\neq 0$ . What one can know about  $x$  for example is that there will be no, nor can there be, absolute correspondence between  $x$  and either  $b_o$  and  $b_s$  as originary points—it is always

a matter of the proximity to either  $b_o$  or  $b_s$  and how one expresses this quantity or condition. It is the case holds Merleau-Ponty:

our mute contact with things, when they are not yet things said....the real is coherent and probable because it is real, and not real because it is coherent...to think the true by the false, the positive by the negative—and it is to ill-describe indeed the experience of dis-illusion...The breakup and the destruction of the first appearance...*are only...[other names]...for the new apparition...is the loss of one evidence only because it is the acquisition of another evidence.*<sup>26</sup>

It must also be the case that  $x$ , as the figure shows, is a finite quantity whose originary point and end point can be given no fixed empirical quantity—there is no absolute zero-point (as originary) nor a no-thing beyond which can be articulated/represented in language and which furthermore has no epistemological correspondence. The only thing one can say with certainty about  $x$  is that it has a finite amplitude that expresses a spanning of the two limit conditions both of which are factual and as such are features of the deictical functioning of the hinge that is Merleau-Ponty's *flesh*. The specifically ontological thrust of deixes inheres in true dialectic, one that Merleau-Ponty holds celebrates and even exacerbates the paradoxical marvels of a being between its object and subject potential. These paradoxes he says:

enlighten only when one grasps them in our experience, at the junction of a subject, of being, and of other subjects: between *those* opposites, in *that* reciprocal action, in *that* relationship between an inside and an outside, between the elements of that constellation, in that becoming, which not only becomes but becomes for itself, there is room, without contradiction and without magic, for relationships and with double meanings, for reversals, for opposite and inseparable truths, for sublations, for perpetual genesis, for a plurality of levels or orders. There is dialectic only in that type of being in which a junction of subjects occurs, being which is not only a spectacle that each subject presents to itself for its own benefit but rather

their common residence, the place of their exchange and of their reciprocal interpretation....It is a though which does not constitute the whole but is situated in it.<sup>27</sup>

The reciprocal exchange Merleau-Ponty speaks of above, occurs for a being who is the junction of subjects and, to which one must add other beings as well. This junction marks, it seems to me, the ethical dimension of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, in its own right the cornerstone for an agonistic liberalism. I alleged from the beginning that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is one of exemplarity, it seeks to uncover a renewed philosophical expression while utilizing the exceedingly limited tools of formal discursive logic. What is performed in the quotation above then is the marking of the ethical junction by deixis, that is, that being who demonstrates or directs one to something by stating *that*, *those*, or *this* and *here* or *there*. The discerning use of deixis in Merleau-Ponty's own writing is a testament to his conscious effort to confront anew philosophy *qua* expression while the self-consciously crafted writing style provided the necessary methodological first-steps toward a renewed ontology.<sup>28</sup> It remains that language says Merleau-Ponty "in forming itself, expresses...an ontogenesis of which it is part. But from this it follows that the words most charged with philosophy are not necessarily those that contain what they say."<sup>29</sup>

It has always been the case that Merleau-Ponty's renewed doctrine of ontology is one that is suspended in the vortex of multiple appearings in the com-presence of perception-imperception that is the condition of the becoming-consciousness—infinitely concatenated point-events and

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<sup>27</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures of the Dialectic*, 203-204.

<sup>28</sup> Merleau-Ponty himself italicized the deictic terms in the quotation above in order to pressure the fallacy of correspondence between one's experience of beings and other subjects and one's claims of epistemic irreducibility. One of the effects of language says Merleau-Ponty is to "efface itself to the extent that *its expression comes across*," *PrW.*, 9.

<sup>29</sup> *VI.*, 102.

foldings that is meaning before logic—it is as Merleau-Ponty suggests, *logos endiathetos*.<sup>30</sup> Responding to the dangers of relativism that obtain from an antifoundationalist account of *brute* or *wild Being* where everything is always pre-reflective,<sup>31</sup> Merleau-Ponty argues, “No matter. *One does have to begin.*”<sup>32</sup>

In an abstract for a lecture course in 1957-58 Merleau-Ponty had already expressed the enigmatic bind that obtains for a deeper phenomenology of double appearings: “the two meanings of the word nature (nature in the sense of ‘natural light’ and in the sense of ‘natural inclination’) adumbrate two ontologies (an ontology of the object and an ontology of the existent).”<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, I think it reasonable to suggest that there are two specific moments intertwined in a single compresence and this is the complexity that also adumbrates the necessity of disabusing critics of phenomenology that it is a merely descriptive enterprise. Nature as some lighting essence and the natural inclination of the existent appear in the space Merleau-Ponty has called the point-event.<sup>34</sup> Hinging these two ontologies is man himself and the call to rethink subjectivity anew—more properly, it is *flesh* that marks this embryonic doubling, the *agon* of *wild Being*. In the double ontology of *natural light* and *natural inclination* there is a natal bond<sup>35</sup> which interlaces these seemingly mutually exclusive appearings into a single, co-substantial appearing.

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<sup>30</sup> VI, 169. See also Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of Husserl’s concept of nature in S, “The Philosopher and His Shadow,” 159-182, as well as the lecture which informs this essay, TD, “Husserl’s Concept of Nature,” 162-168.

<sup>31</sup> VI, 168.

<sup>32</sup> VI, 168. Emphasis added.

<sup>33</sup> VI, Cf. 3, 166.

<sup>34</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy for example has also indicated that this moment constitutes the non-event where everything passes but time itself as the succession of punctual presents, that is, concatenated impossibilities. See *Sense of the World*, 64.

<sup>35</sup> VI, 32, 267. The latter forms the core of Lefort’s misinterpretation which I have treated in greater detail in Chapter 4. Lefort misses the principle thrust of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological ontology, what I have termed *embryo - ochthonics*.

However, though one may be perched on the threshold of the abyss that separates the objective body from the phenomenal body one cannot go back any further regardless of the difficulties that obtain for philosophical semantics. The traditional and theorized correspondence of the body with knowledge—what the *there is* and how one knows it to be so—is a problem difficult to avoid (but only insofar as one subscribes to historiography), while a clue to its necessary demise resides in the implicit structure of Merleau-Ponty's argument which runs through the whole of *The Visible and the Invisible*. Though there is not a *nothing* for consciousness, or experience, empirical realism nonetheless “founded upon transcendental realism is still a thinking of experience against the ground of nothingness,”<sup>36</sup> while this absurd incantation turns experience into an abstract dilemma. Merleau-Ponty's call for expressing what is before philosophical expression, which is not no-*thing*, seeks to form “first concepts in such a way as to avoid the classical impasses, we do not have to honour the difficulties that they may present when confronted with the *cogito*, which itself has to be re-examined.”<sup>37</sup> Exteriority—the surface of all phenomena—Tadeusz Kantor had said, “should be treated with all due respect,”<sup>38</sup> and is the pre-condition which compelled Merleau-Ponty to seek an expression for how to “replace the notions of concept, idea, mind, representation with the notion of *dimensions*, articulations, level, hinges, pivots, configuration.”<sup>39</sup> Like *flesh*, which is not a *fact* or a sum of facts, *logos* and in particular philosophical language, are not the “sum of statements or of ‘solutions,’ but [it is] as a veil lifted, a verbal chain woven....”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> VI., 162.

<sup>37</sup> VI., 137.

<sup>38</sup> Kantor, *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, 35.

<sup>39</sup> VI., 224.

<sup>40</sup> VI., 199.

Here Merleau-Ponty appropriately concludes by not concluding, he draws his thinking out, from the use of the indefinite article *a* and attenuated into an ellipsis, that connotative which explicitly expresses the chain woven but ever incomplete, a vocative which reaches out of the silence and the arrival of a subject, while it deposes the power of syntactical ties and narrative closure.

Such is the embryochthonic primacy of the direct contact Merleau-Ponty strove to articulate in the primary questions and concerns regarding a radically reflective approach through the concept of *flesh*. Merleau-Ponty had said that the “highest point of philosophy is perhaps no more than rediscovering these truisms: thought thinks, speech speaks, the gaze gazes. But between the two identical words there is each time a whole *écart* one straddles in order to think, speak, and see.”<sup>41</sup> The neutral infinitive mood of the verb as Merleau-Ponty uses it here, expresses a subject’s pending arrival in the interval between some-thing and consciousness, devoid of the proposition,<sup>42</sup> the hinge of a revitalizing indeterminacy and potential expressibility. Indeed the very point of our departure—the chiasmus or threshold—for an analysis appropriate to phenomenological ontology says Heidegger, “requires that it be secured by the proper method, just as much as does our *access* to the phenomenon, or our *passage* through whatever is prevalently covering it up.”<sup>43</sup> What is this passage then from sense sensing sense to a philosophy which uncovers silence and erupts out of *wild Being* if not the performativity and postural expressive force of *flesh* the hinge-condition of ontology?

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<sup>41</sup> *S.*, 21.

<sup>42</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, trs., Constantin V. Boundas, ed., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 184-185. His remarks are decisive for a consideration elsewhere of language and surface: the infinite verb he says, “expresses the event of language—language being a unique event which merges now with that which renders it possible.”

<sup>43</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §7, ff. 36.

From the classical conception of subject/object/meaning or man/world/God a renewed formulation of subjectivity must take its place, one that assumes the full brunt of its vertical (veridical) existence—(the) *flesh* (hinge)/in-visible (reversibility)/wild Being (expression). This renewal is necessary insofar as the place of the stuff (the *Sachen*) of a world of brute sense, corporicity or *flesh* has rarely been engaged as an equally distended and *meaning-full* locus of postural (dis)-positions and significations. The abyss of non-sense is impossible as its very description inheres localizations and can only be thought precisely because one occupies a ground, the “abyss is not nothing; it has environs and edges”<sup>44</sup> says Merleau-Ponty. There can be no meaning without a world, this too is the *matter-of-fact* quite simply as *what is* foremost part of one’s *first question* of not only *what* is thinking but *how* and *where*. The inertia of one’s first thoughts or questions is bound to the vexing paradox of multiple appearances, the hinge-condition of *flesh* even while “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 3 phenomena are *simultaneous*.”<sup>45</sup> What makes phenomenological ontology at all possible is the act of recovery and self-recovery in the face of such appearances—not as the folly of agnostic description but one’s agonistic and ubiquitous quest for understanding even while “what stands in view here is *not yet* ‘constituted’ as *what it is and how it is present*.”<sup>46</sup>

What Merleau-Ponty calls the *fragility of the real* “does not belong definitively to any particular perception, that in this sense it lies *always further on*; but this does not authorize me to

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<sup>44</sup> *S.*, 14.

<sup>45</sup> *VI.*, 250.

<sup>46</sup> Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 187. Emphasis added.

break or to ignore the bond that joins them one after the other to the real....the meaning of the 'real' is not reduced to that of the 'probable,' but on the contrary the 'probable' evokes a definitive experience of the 'real' whose accomplishment is only deferred."<sup>47</sup>

In his translator's introduction to *Prose of the World*, John O'Niell said expression—that is, the connotative use-value language acquires in its institution of new meanings as Merleau-Ponty theorized in *Signs*—is of the order of "an act of self-improvisation."<sup>48</sup> Interpretive self-improvisation is an always-beginning-again *qua* universal, *qua wild Being* and is where "The being of the world and of the Other is something that calls for neither doubt nor proof; it is the primary datum of consciousness."<sup>49</sup>

Nature (*φύσις*), says Merleau-Ponty in one of the last notations before his death, is at the first day.<sup>50</sup> *Nature* is not understood by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty however as the Moderns understood it, handed down as some-*thing* to be rationalized and fixed within the logic of absolute transparency. The Cartesian bias of such Enlightenment thinking, philosophical *first questions* has yet to rid itself of. Traditionally the epistemological trajectory that lead to the relativization of the category object necessarily lead to a destitute subject (the Hegelian idealization of the ontological priority of pure interiority) while the desubstantialization of the subject opened onto the nihilating abyss of lost mediation *a la* Kierkegaard. A third consideration however—not of irreducible

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<sup>47</sup> *VI*, 41. What consciousness therefore can only express, phenomenologically in Heideggerian terms, is the logos of that-which-shows-itself, is the deferral of the *real*. When Fink responds to Husserl's difficult concept of phenomenological reduction in *Conversations with Husserl and Fink*, he touches upon Merleau-Ponty's notion of the *real*: the phenomenological investigation says Fink, "cannot, after the phenomenological reduction, proceed as if in a homogeneous field...The phenomenological field is not 'there' at all, but must first be created. Thus the phenomenological reduction is creative, but of something which bears a necessary relation to what is 'there.'"

<sup>48</sup> *PrW*, xxxiv.

<sup>49</sup> Madison, "The Moral Self and Anonymous Other," 232.

<sup>50</sup> *VI*, 267.

transparency or Truth but of a distinctively postural and universal *singularity-with*—finds its *figuration* in Merleau-Ponty's ontology where "one of the effects of language is to efface itself to the extent that *its expression comes across*"<sup>51</sup> *qua* expression. In such effacement the fallacy of the correspondential bond between experience and *episteme* is severed and man remains a term which is forever incomplete and threatened.

*Flesh*—the sensuous, irreducible, primal signifying hinge of ontology—is of us while existing simultaneously and paradoxically elsewhere in (the) *flesh* of the world, *flesh* that is always other. I want to say *flesh*, that which is ἀβραστος, the unboiled, raw, a wound; always on the cusp of becoming, and in anticipation of a subject's enigmatic and always deferred arrival.

There is perhaps no other word in the lexicon of our language that has the brute resonance, the status of pure, visceral *adhesion*<sup>52</sup> as does the word *flesh*. This word evinces the primordial matter of one's subjecthood and functions to express, or bring into expression the *ab-grund* out of which *wild Being* is configured. There is no other term that so ineluctably *enfolds* one with such immediate and aggressive taking hold or *setting upon*, not even what one takes to be the privileged enunciative moment of individual self-legislation—the "I" of speech. Indeed Merleau-Ponty will say of *wild Being* in "Interrogation and Intuition," that "the presence of the world is precisely the presence of its flesh to my flesh, that I 'am of the world' and that *I am not it*, this is what is no sooner said than forgotten."<sup>53</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, the subject is a *hollow* that conjoins one as being (thing) and being-self (subject) and is already the asymmetrical schism between a subject and the

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<sup>51</sup> *PrW.*, 9.

<sup>52</sup> *VI.*, 78.

<sup>53</sup> *VI.*, 127. Emphasis added.

irrecoverable otherness that he already is and will never be sutured whole. Reversibility is “always imminent and never realized in fact,”<sup>54</sup> Merleau-Ponty holds, *I am not it*, not correspondent with *it*—with the world, thing/being, or any otherness at all. It is always *another beginning*, that moment which constitutes an expansive and limitless carnal thickness which is impressed and *impresses* upon us as a folding back upon an enfolding/unfolding limen that effaces the distinction between the interlacing of exteriority and interiority.

The difficulty here is the the question of *flesh* and how to pose the question in the first place against the limits traditional epistemologies and methods imposes. Thus I am compelled to return to *flesh*—*arriving* through it—to “the revival of a tension internal to all philosophy, a tension that originates with philosophy, and that is the very tension between sense and truth,”<sup>55</sup> even while keeping *something of its ruin*.

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<sup>54</sup> *VI.*, 147.<sup>54</sup> Nancy, *Sense of the World*, 20.

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