SILENCE AND PHENOMENOLOGY: THE MOVEMENT BETWEEN NATURE AND

LANGUAGE IN MERLEAU-PONTY, PROUST, AND SCHELLING

by

SEAN WILLIAMS

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Confirmation of Approval and Acceptance of Dissertation prepared by:

Sean Williams

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This dissertation has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Department of Philosophy by:

Peter Warnek, Chairperson, Philosophy
Naomi Zack, Member, Philosophy
Ted Toadvine, Member, Philosophy
Jeffrey Librett, Outside Member, German and Scandinavian

and Richard Linton, Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies/Dean of the Graduate School for the University of Oregon.

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Original approval signatures are on file with the Graduate School and the University of Oregon Libraries.

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Sean Williams   for the degree of   Doctor of Philosophy

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SCHELLING

Approved: _____

Peter Warnek

The question of the present study concerns the relationship between language and

nature as it has been taken up in the history of Western philosophy. The goal of this study

is to show how language and nature are held together by thinking the transition between

them, through the figure of silence. I will show this by drawing primarily on the work of

Merleau-Ponty, who, as a phenomenologist expressly concerned with the senses, the body,

and language, attempted to describe and understand the passage between language and

nature in a manner that could maintain their ontological continuity. Silence was the hinge

of this passage, in which language, in its emergence from the silence of nature, turns back

to disclose nature as already expression. Merleau-Ponty's late interrogation into how

philosophical language might both emerge from and return to silence turned on the

example of Proust's literary language. This study will also draw on Proust's meta-

novelistic awakening to his literary calling, as it is recounted near the end of *Le Temps Retrouvé,* which discusses explicitly how Proust's language makes a turn through silence in order to emerge as literature. This provides an example of the emergence which Merleau-Ponty describes. I will then make the case that Merleau-Ponty's late philosophy can be read as the thinking of being as nature, and that it begins to think how language roots human beings in nature as it blossoms out of nature's soil. I will show how Merleau-Ponty repeats a structure of thought traversed by Schelling in his essay on freedom, which will further show how philosophical attention to language discloses nature as a radical excess. Finally, I will discuss how the negotiation between language, nature, and silence, as it is practiced by Merleau-Ponty, Proust, and Schelling, is another turn in a long story of the human place in language and in nature, a story which is at least as old as the mythical thought of ancient Greece.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Sean Williams

PLACE OF BIRTH: Birmingham, Alabama

DATE OF BIRTH: July 22, 1980

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

     University of Oregon, Eugene
     Pomona College, Claremont, California
     Simon's Rock College of Bard, Great Barrington, Massachusetts

DEGREES AWARDED:

     Doctor of Philosophy, 2010, University of Oregon
     Master of Arts in Environmental Studies, 2003, University of Oregon
     Bachelor of Arts in Geology, 2001, Pomona College
     Associate of Arts, 1998, Simon's Rock College of Bard

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

     Phenomenology
     19th and 20th century Continental Philosophy
     History of Philosophy
     Philosophy of Nature

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

     Graduate Teaching Fellow, Department of Philosophy, University of Oregon, Eugene, 2004-2010

     Field Instructor, National Outdoor Leadership School, Lander, Wyoming, 2003-2010

     Graduate Teaching Fellow, Environmental Studies Program, University of Oregon, Eugene, 2001-2003

GRANTS, AWARDS AND HONORS:

> Graduate Teaching Fellowship, University of Oregon, 2001-2010

PUBLICATIONS:

> Williams, Sean. "Chiasmic Wildness." *Environmental Philosophy* 3 (1, 2006), 6-12.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"What do I know?" is not only "what is knowing?" and not only "who am I?" but finally: "what is there?" and even: "what is the *there is*?" These questions call not for the exhibiting of something said which would put an end to them, but for the disclosure of a Being that is not posited because it has no need to be, because it is silently behind all our affirmations, negations, and even behind all formulated questions, not that it is a matter of forgetting them in its silence, not that it is a matter of imprisoning it in our chatter, but because philosophy is the reconversion of silence and speech into one another..." (*VI* 169/129).

A good book is like the world itself. The interrogation of such a book is unlike the reading of all those books that are to be taken up, argued with, mined from, accepted or rejected, and finally abandoned. It is a call to meditation, a task of sustained disclosure, a reconversion of the silence beyond what the book says into our own thought, and perhaps into our words. Our response to a good book, and to the work of a great writer and thinker, is likewise an attentive reconversion of that work, a work which always requires more from us than it gives straightaway. Having read the phrase "philosophy is the reconversion of silence and speech into one another," a phrase taken from Merleau-Ponty's book *The Visible and the Invisible,* we do not yet know what philosophy is. Neither do we know what *silence* is, or speech, or the manner of their mutual reconversion. And least of all do we know what being is, beyond an empty phrase, what this being is that must be disclosed, but already lurks silently behind speech.

The overall question of the present study concerns the multivalent relationship between language and nature, a relationship that, in all its valences, rocks back and forth from unbridgeable difference to absolute identity throughout the history of philosophy. The simultaneous truths of the proximity *and* distance between language and nature are held together by the thought of the transition between them, through the figure of *silence.* The following dissertation attempts to show this togetherness through transition in the work of Merleau-Ponty, Proust, and Schelling. My claim is that the theme of excess which drives Merleau-Ponty's thought should be thought of as *nature*, and that the figuration of this excess as silence provides an image through which to think the human work of language as it blooms forth out of, returns to, and yet utterly affects, the excessive character of nature.

The question of the proximity and distance of language and nature could very well be the oldest question in philosophy, and the very question that begins philosophy in earnest, at least in the form in which it has been preserved as the history of philosophy. Premonitions of it resound in Parmenides' poem, beginning in the title, *Peri phuseôs,* On Nature, and perhaps most provocatively in Fragment Three: *tò gàr aùto noein èstin te kaì einai.*[1] It is the same to think and to be. No being without thinking, no thinking without being – yet when the fragment is taken from the level of bare assertion to a reflection on this assertion, a difference already cracks open the claim of sameness, for now we are *thinking* about the identity of thinking and being. And is this thinking without language,

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[1] David Gallop, ed. and trans. *Parmenides of Elea: Fragments.* Footnotes will give author, title, and page or section number; full references are to be found in the bibliography.

and this being other than nature, or are language and nature already there when thinking and being are asserted in their identity or difference?

Heraclitus, supposedly on the opposite side of the battle between the one and the many, wrote that nature loves to hide, that identity flows like a river, that the change and destruction of fire and the strife of war[2] are what always are. From this it would seem that the determinative character of language, the apparent fixity of words, will never catch nature's movement, if that is what they are supposed to do. Yet another Heraclitean fragment tells its readers to listen to the *logos,* and to know that all is one, and moreover, that *phusis* is *logos.*[3]

It is Plato's Socrates, however, who puts the question in the exact terms in which it will sail forward through the history of philosophy. In the *Phaedo,* at the scene of his death, Socrates explains how as a young man, he had been "wondrously desirous of that wisdom they call 'inquiry into nature.'"[4] But after studying the nature-philosophy of his time, the various and contradictory stories told about which substance or being was the cause of all the others, he found that all of the "looking" directly at nature, though it gave plenty of facts, had no way of encountering the causes of anything if those very causes could not be observed directly. So Socrates made his famous "second sailing in search of

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[2] Paul Potter, trans., "Heracleitus' 'On the Universe," Fragments 10, 20, 36, 41, 81.

[3] Ibid., Fragments 1, 2.

[4] Plato, *Phaedo* 96a.

the cause,"[5] the turn to *logos* as a method for the study of nature, when the direct method had failed. Nature in its truth turned out to be inaccessible without a detour through language. This detour, it would seem at first glance, would put nature at one remove from philosophy, insofar as philosophy is a work of language. Indeed, when Socrates introduces his own turn to the *logos* in the *Phaedo,* it seems at first that he is proposing the necessity of *logos* as a way to nature at one remove, a second-best way: "I feared I might be totally soul-blinded if I looked at things with my eyes and attempted to grasp each of them by the senses. So it seemed to me that I should take refuge in *logoi* and look in them for the truth of beings."[6]

Yet Socrates immediately qualifies this image which he has given of the *logos* as a second-order reflection of an originary nature. The very next sentence reads: "Now, perhaps in a certain way it isn't quite like what I'm likening it to. For I don't at all concede that anyone who looks into beings in *logoi* looks at them in likenesses to a greater extent than one who does so in actions."[7] This qualification is itself ambiguous; it is not at all clear, and Socrates does not go on to explain, whether he who looks into beings "in actions" *also* looks at them through "likenesses," that is to say, indirectly, or

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[5] *ibid,* 99d. The second sailing refers to the use of oars when the wind fails. See Sallis, *Being and Logos,* 38-43, for a discussion of the turn to *logos* as the way to beings that reminds us of our own ignorance, or of the necessarily hidden and limited way in which beings are disclosed: "the way of *logos* is to 'mediate' the difference between the things that can be manifest and that which lets them be manifest, i.e., that it is such as to let man maintain himself within the dispersion of this difference; it is to say also that the way of *logos* is such as to institute the appropriate restraint against seeking a grasp on things as they are immediately manifest, i.e., that it is such as to open up that distance in which things can become more truly manifest, manifest in their proper being" (42). The truth of beings is not manifest in a direct and immediate way, but manifest *more truly,* as they really show themselves, through the *logos.*

[6] *Phaedo,* 96e.

[7] *ibid.,* 99e-100a.

whether in fact one who goes through the *logos* is somehow looking "directly" as well. In fact this difference between immediacy and reflection is far too simple. The turn to the *logos* is not a matter of an indirect likeness, reflection, or representation of nature in-itself, which then would be more true, more original, even if inaccessible. Instead, it is an original and necessary mode of nature's disclosure.

This issue continues throughout the history of philosophy, although the terms change. A brief historical overview might serve to provide a handle on the issue by showing, in very rough form, how it has been passed down from Plato to the twentieth century. Put in the very simplest historical terms, terms which over-simplify and distract from the phenomena of language and nature as we live them, but which are no doubt useful as a way of fixing two words which move around like a shell-game which could just as easily contain nothing, the relationship between language and nature at stake here might be thought as a matter of the difference and relation between the Natural Attitude and the Transcendental Attitude. These words deserve to be capitalized because they might as well function as proper nouns, as if they were official schools to which we might assign various philosophers.[8] It should go without saying that this assignation must be somewhat forced, and that a more nuanced reading of most of these thinkers'

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[8] A choice between many dual terms presents itself. Merleau-Ponty, and many commentators, have used terms such as realism/intellectualism (Barbaras, *Being of the Phenomenon, xxxiii,* 6, 13, 20, 23-24) and immanence/transcendence (Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology,* 35-50) to trace a similar history. The general theme of these studies is to show the way to a more subtle space between these truths. Detractors of Merleau-Ponty have said that, like all of phenomenology, he is too much on the side of the Transcendental Attitude, or conversely, by basing his thought on perception, he is too much on the side of a version of the Natural Attitude, too much concerned with the silence of things, which in the end negates philosophy insofar as, being language, it is the opposite of silence. John Sallis raises the latter concern, more as a warning against certain anti-philosophical readings of Merleau-Ponty than a detraction against his work itself, in the last chapter of his book on Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology and the Return to Beginnings.*

texts would show that they hardly thought nature and language in so reified a manner. Despite this, it is useful to identify and name very strong tendencies, in order to situate the present question in the history of philosophy.

The Natural Attitude, famously described by Husserl as that which the phenomenologist must reduce and eliminate from his work in order to make it transcendental, tells us that things are things, nature is nature, in itself and having nothing, necessarily, to do with us. As Schelling put it in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, "the one basic prejudice, to which all others reduce, is that there are things outside of us," a prejudice that "makes claim to immediate certainty," and is "innate and primary," but "no less a prejudice on that account."[9] The extent to which the apparent opposite of this prejudice, that there is nothing outside of us and thus that we are everything, does a little violence to common sense even in the philosophical reader only demonstrates the thorough-going extent of the Natural Attitude in all of us, or as Schelling says, its status as the "most natural" of prejudices.

But of course nothing is so simple. The proponent of the Natural Attitude must admit that human beings are certainly part of this supposed nature-in-itself, which is supposed to be outside of us, and that human language, rather mysteriously and, it would seem, fortuitously, functions in this world of brute things. We name things, talk about them, and would rather not wonder why this should be so, or what language has to do with nature and its things, which seem to rest in-themselves without it. Nature as a collection of things has the conceptual priority here, to the extent that language can be

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[9]Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism,* 8.

explained, quite satisfactorily within this realm of inquiry, as a physical and social

process for which the theory of evolution provides a compelling account.

The Natural Attitude is widespread and obvious because it seems to work, as far

as it goes. Of course things are things, and nature is a collection of things, most of which

have nothing to do with language, except for us. Maybe we humans will be a little lonely

in the cosmic sense, but at least we have each other to keep company, and we have nature

to talk about. The most important truth here for comparison with the Transcendental

Attitude is the germ of *exteriority* in nature, its excessive relationship to language. It is a

germ which resists the transcendental purification, but will not undergo it without a

fundamental change. As Merleau-Ponty puts it in the Preface to *Phenomenology of

Perception,* "The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the

impossibility of a complete reduction" (*PhP* viii/xiv). After the reduction, when this

lesson has been learned, when the Transcendental passage has been undergone, the germ

leftover on the other side is not the simple exteriority of the Natural Attitude. It is an

excess whose recognition required a passage through language. The recognition of this

excess, the necessity of a movement between language and nature for its recognition, and

finally the kind of language that communicates this awareness, rather than smothers it

over, is the theme of the present work.

This is the question of Socrates' second sailing, in which the experience of the

impossibility of the first sailing, of looking directly into nature, opens up the necessity of

a "sailing" towards nature that goes through the *logos,* but then reaches a different sort of

nature than the in-itself that the first sailing had set out to find. This different nature is

not the simple excess, in essence nothing else but a "larger amount," of nature as the stuff over there which has not yet been described, that which the Natural Attitude leads us to think is "before" or "beyond" language and thus, to use Schelling's terms, "outside of us." Rather, its excessive character is somehow tied to the necessity of language in its disclosure.

The Transcendental Attitude takes its life from the reflective exercise which forces us to admit that language or thought, which are not easily separated,[10] color all of nature for us, so thoroughly that the nature-in-itself assumed by the Natural Attitude is a dream or a mirage, a hypothetical reality situated on the other side of the impenetrable wall of language. Socrates' second sailing is a move in this direction, as are Platonist theories of the ideas which govern nature, and Descartes' vision of discoverable natural laws ruled by a mathematical system accessible to thought.[11]

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[10] And which, in being artificially separated, would lose touch with the historical constellation at stake here, which runs between these terms and benefits from their proximity in its historical transmission. Descartes and Kant, for example, do not discuss language, but speak of thought as if it had nothing to do with words. Twentieth-century philosophy's obsession with language, on the other hand, tends to give up thinking "thought" without thinking "language," and moves the locus of the event at stake to language rather than thought alone. For the present purposes, it should be clear that today we no longer conceive of ourselves precisely along the lines of Descartes' invention of a Mind holding Ideas before itself, Ideas which have nothing to do with language. Rather, we find it difficult to conceive of abstractions called Thoughts or Ideas which do not almost immediately become words, or which are not supported, held as it were, by language.

[11] Many studies of Merleau-Ponty's inheritance from Husserl, including almost all book-length treatises on Merleau-Ponty, emphasize some version of Merleau-Ponty's decisive movement beyond the Transcendental Attitude as found in Husserl. See, for example, Françoise Dastur, "World, Flesh, Vision" for a particulary thorough and textually grounded exposition. Merleau-Ponty is, of course, a consummate, generous, and very critical reader of Descartes, devoting chapters to him in both *Phenomenology of Perception* and *The Visible and the Invisible,* both of which bear on the impossibility of such a rigid separation between the language/invisible/thought/*cogito* realm and the nature/visible/sensible realm. It is the mediation of the body, in both of these works, that makes the rigid separation unthinkable.

The Transcendental Attitude takes its name and its thoroughgoing formulation from Kant, and receives its radicalization in Hegel. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (on the first page of the introduction, no less), Kant asserts that empirical experience (of nature) provides no universal knowledge, and that universality in knowledge is provided only by *a priori* cognitions; that is, from necessary structures of thought not based on the empirical experience of nature.[12] The very first line of the Introduction to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* introduces the necessity of understanding "cognition" (*das Erkennen)* before reaching "what truly is": "It is a natural assumption that in philosophy, before we start to deal with its proper subject-matter, viz. the actual cognition of what truly is, one must first of all come to an understanding about cognition, which is regarded either as the instrument to get hold of the Absolute, or as the medium through which one discovers it."[13] These structures of *thought*, in their accessibility, are articulated, in the pages of the *Critique of Pure Reason,* the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* and everywhere else, only through *language,* although this necessity of language had not become an object of inquiry in Kant or Hegel's time in the way that it is today. What this means, for the purposes of the present simplification of the historical problem, is that the universal and necessary, as it is accessible to the human, occurs in human thought (and thus language), not in nature. Thus thought, including its necessary intertwining with language which is only emphasized after well Kant and Hegel, is valorized over nature in the philosophical search for the universal, necessary, and certain, because the universal and necessary

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[12] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* 127-128, A1-A2.

[13] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* 46.

structures of human thought and language, if they could be isolated and identified, would inescapably color or determine the impermanent experience of nature. It becomes, then, pointless to talk about nature as something in any way exceeding the structures of thought and the language that articulates them; nature is always-already a matter of thought, or to use Kant's specific terminology, a matter for the more restricted understanding. It is as if, as Merleau-Ponty put it, "the effective world were a canton of language" (*VI* 130/97).

Hegel deepens the transcendental insight by thinking the *becoming* of thought at the same time as its necessity, putting nature at a very early stage in the game, which is quickly overcome, and taking over the experience of becoming, which since Heraclitus had been the truth of nature, as a conquest of *Geist*. But this overcoming was perhaps not as easy as it seemed.[14] Much of the tradition which follows Hegel, starting with Schelling and including Nietzsche, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and most of the rest of 20th century continental philosophy, has faced the necessity of the germ which remains, what Schelling called the indivisible remainder (*F* 456/239).[15] Yet all of this tradition has upheld the insights of the Transcendental Attitude and refused to return to the naïve obviousness of the Natural Attitude.

Part of the Transcendental lesson, then, is that language gives nature to us just as surely as vision or touch, but none of them ever give nature-in-itself, the "stuff over

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[14] Not that it was all that easy; the strain of thinking along with *The Phenomenology of Spirit* attests to its difficulty.

[15] See also Slavoj Zizek, *The Indivisible Remainder*. "Indivisible" is a potentially misleading translation; the German is *nie aufhedende Reste*, perhaps closer "the remainder which never emerges." "Indivisible remainder" does provide an elegant mathematical image of that remainder that cannot be integrated into the operation being carried out, but misses the sense of what does not *emerge* from the *ground*, which is so important in Schelling.

there" of the Natural Attitude. The sensible is always already mediated by language, such that a pre-linguistic nature, the existence of which is obvious on naturalistic terms, is impossible on phenomenological terms, just as the "stuff over there" is unthinkable when sensibility is understood as communication with the world, as Merleau-Ponty described again and again. Language and nature, especially nature as what is given in sensibility, are not divisible. Yet neither are they identical. In their equation, or in the reduction of "the effective world to a canton of language," in the transcendental move, something escapes, which is why the story does not end in complete linguistic reductionism, or even solipsism. It is this escapee, this insistent yet elusive remainder, that the post-Hegelian inheritors of the Transcendental Attitude have been confronted with.

A general schema presents itself to describe the situation between nature and language at this point, when the Natural Attitude has been overcome by the Transcendental move, yet the elusivity of that which remains refuses the Transcendental clarification. It is much like the image of the second sailing in the *Phaedo,* 2,000 years later. We might conceptualize it as a 3-step process:

1) 1st Sailing: Nature in-itself, the attempt to say what it is directly. Fails in *aporia*: for Socrates, the contradictions and lack of evidence of the pre-Socratics; in the late-modern era, because of the lack of the structures of thought/language/perception through which nature is always presented.

2) 2nd Sailing: Turn to the *logos* as focus of philosophical inquiry.

3) Return to nature, but not to nature-in-itself; rather, to nature as it gives itself to the human: through an apprehension of the world saturated with meaning, and thus with language. Recognition of the necessity of this turn to language and return to nature in order to reach "nature-as-it-really-is." The only way nature "really is" is as it is for us, and the apprehension of this requires the thinking of language. This move, in turn, reveals the true "excess" of nature, which is no longer its truth as "outside of" or "beneath" language. Rather, it is given in the transition between the sensible presentation of nature and literary and philosophical language.

The focus of the present inquiry is Step 3, the step which Socrates already forecasts in the *Phaedo*, if I am correct in insisting on the force of his qualification that the turn to *logos* is not a matter of reflecting a prior nature in-itself in a second-best way, but thinking nature in its truth.

Merleau-Ponty's frequent imagery of the expression of what is otherwise silent, is, I believe, a move to think Step 3. It is potentially easy to misread as a sort of Step 1 expression, as a direct speech of or from nature. I hope to show, especially in Chapters II through IV, that this is not what he means, and that most of Merleau-Ponty's use of the words "language" and "silence" is working at Step 3 in the schema above.

This schema should serve as a conceptual outline to return to for each chapter that follows. Hopefully, the present work will end with a better understanding of Step 3, through the examination of the step in Merleau-Ponty, Proust, and Schelling. This, in turn, should provide a better, both more sophisticated and more true, understanding of the

circular proximity and distance of nature and language. Although this schema is intended to serve as a conceptual structure, and while each chapter will show how this structure is at work in Merleau-Ponty, Proust, and Schelling, it should be emphasized that the identification of this structure alone is not the goal of the present work. This schema should be familiar to anyone who is a careful reader of the Western philosophical tradition, as discussed above; merely identifying it again does not add much to the conversation. The conceptual structure is worth returning to and re-stating only because it discloses something essential about human life as it is immersed in nature and in language. What I wish to point out in Merleau-Ponty, Proust, and Schelling is the force with which *the sensible* discloses itself as already carrying that excessive remainder which is also reached, at Step 3 of the second sailing, in the return of *logos* to nature.

Meanwhile, some precision is required about these words, "nature" and "language." Both have the confusing tendency to mean almost everything, which is very close to meaning almost nothing. In the present work, then, I intend them to be read as follows.

"Nature" is an especially all-or-nothing word, because it can come very close to meaning The All. A wide enough conception of nature puts everything that is within its bounds, so that it becomes quite compelling, to say that everything is nature, and nothing is outside of nature, including human beings, and including language.

This, however, means very little. First, "everything is nature" only empirically; transcendentally, one might as well say "everything is language," and it is of course the movement beyond this distinction that is at issue. In either case, if we are talking about everything, then we are not talking about anything, or any thing; we must reach the level of differences between things if we are to talk about them at all. For the present purposes, then, nature is much closer to "the sensible" – but precisely *not* as it is thought in a sensible/intelligible dualism. I intend to speak of nature as the world that presents itself sensibly, not as it is hypothesized to exist invisibly; rocks and trees and sky rather than sub-atomic particles, in other words. Yet "the sensible" may also miss something absolutely essential, that which occurs at Step 3 of the schema above. Nature as it presents itself sensibly, "that which really is," always presents itself saturated with and giving rise to elements that we are not used to thinking of as primarily sensible: meaning, language. The latter, of course, *is* sensible, either audible or visible, yet the meaning in language is not simply a matter of what is seen or heard. Merleau-Ponty and his favorite example, Proust, are interesting and somewhat distinctive precisely because, while the 3-step process outlined above could be applied, with some stretching, to much of nineteenth and twentieth century philosophy, Merleau-Ponty and Proust give incredible attention to how the sensible both carries and becomes language. Since he begins with perception, Merleau-Ponty cannot avoid the necessity of this kind of attention and inquiry. This, as I hope to show in Chapters II and IV, is the central concern of *The Visible and the Invisible,* not to mention, with some gain and loss in the transition from sensible/language to visible/invisible, the meaning of its title.

Nature is, then, close to the sensible, especially if we think the sensible as Merleau-Ponty attempts to. Language, then, is in a peculiar place with respect to the sensibility of nature. Of course it is sensible and natural, visible or audible. Yet the meaning-space of language seems to float somewhere, at once carried by the natural, and not identical to it. If language were identical to the natural in its sensible presentation, none of the present problems would exist, and neither would the history of philosophy. There would be no "invisible." Yet for us humans, nature, as Step 3 of the schema sees, is full of language.

This is the sense of language which the present work will address: a field for meaning and communication in which human beings live and share their lives, and which is an essential moment in the presentation of nature to human beings, a moment without which our lives are unthinkable. Terms like "thought" or "idea" or "concept" require language to have any currency; none of them get very far in human life without language, although we might quibble about whether we have certain thoughts or images in our minds that have nothing to do with language. This is why language is a better term than "thought" for the broad sense of human meaning-making and communication which I intend. I do not mean, by language, a system of signs in the structuralist sense, or any particular spoken language, or a physical capacity given by the shape of our vocal cords, or any system of communication between beings, in the sense that bees or whales or ants or practically anything living thing might be said to "have language." Language, in this sense, is not something we have, but something we *are*, something essential to the *being*

in human being. It is also something essential to the givenness of nature, after the failure of the 1ˢᵗ sailing.

Hopefully this precision serves to restrict the words "nature" and "language" from some of the confusion they could potentially lead to. Yet, as words, they remain essentially unruly, especially with respect to a conception of philosophical rigor that would see them tamed. Merleau-Ponty himself moves freely between *the visible, the sensible,* and sometimes *nature,* and *the invisible, the sentient,* and *language.* Sometimes this movement helps to keep his conceptual reach sufficiently broad to grasp the phenomenon he is talking about, but sometimes it leads to potential confusions between terms, and perhaps even misleading problematizations. One of the challenges of reading Merleau-Ponty is to tell which of these is happening at any particular moment, especially when, as Chapter II below shows, Merleau-Ponty explicitly and very clearly rejected, and even condemned, a practice of philosophy that would both prefigure its own results and miss the truth in the phenomena at stake by restricting the power of words to what it already understands. [16] He called for and attempted to practice philosophy as

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[16] This was true for Schelling as well. Schelling's vision of how philosophy might proceed in such a manner is a consistent theme throughout Jason Wirth's study of Schelling, *The Conspiracy of Nature.* Writing of Schelling's warning in the *Freedom* essay to those who might not be prepared to read it, in a discussion of Schelling's understanding of his work at this point as almost a dialogue with nature, "a dialogue between bodies and their animas, between the light and its concealed, indwelling darkness," Wirth writes, "The will to the hard word and the unswerving determination, the bread and butter of the *Verstandesmensch,* will not only lead one astray, but those who would enter this kind of dialogue and who must make those kinds of determinations should abandon Schelling's project altogether... A strong contrast between these two types emerges in the treatise. On the one hand, there is the dialogical word, always *in medias res*, caught up within a mobile or 'living' *Wesen,* that attempts to address this very *Wesen,* but can do so only through a kind of stammering, through incomplete determinations and a certain kind of turbidity that can never free itself from an integument in the living forces of darkness and obscurity. On the other

interrogation, as a questioning-knowing that would attend to the silence in things and bring it to language, in the Step 3 sense as outlined above. Schelling demanded that philosophy proceed from the utter loss of its own ground, from its utter inability to recapture its own beginning. Both of these demands, in rough form, amount to a move beyond the Transcendental Attitude, a move to think the transition between language and nature such that their togetherness and their distance are not simply opposites, indeed a move to think the excessive character of nature transcendentally, and not as the naïve "outside" of the Natural Attitude. This move requires that the struggle not be pre-empted by thinking in advance that we know what we mean when we say "nature" and "language." These words are unruly, and it is the task of the philosopher to follow them, not to lead them. Hopefully, this following will lead somewhere, and we will benefit from a richer understanding of "nature" and "language" after doing this kind of work. It is unlikely, however, that we will end up with fixed delineations of the meaning and function of these phenomena, such that we could add them to the storehouse of knowledge and move beyond their thorny problems.

Nevertheless it is tempting, and satisfying to philosophical instincts honed since the time of Socrates, to distinguish and categorize the meanings of these words in

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hand, there are those who demand sharp distinctions and exact definitions. They should, from the outset, abandon Schelling" (159-160). The *Verstandesmensch* is Schelling's term for those workers of the intellect who compile information, those who do not take part in the struggle of thinking, a struggle which certainly has no guaranteed outcome and must be undergone to be understood. Wirth makes the strong case that Schelling, both early in his career and more strongly later, understood his work very explicitly as a thinking along with the movement and germination of nature, of its conspiracy, an understanding which explains Schelling's off-cited, first by Hegel, "failure" to finalize his "system." Proust, perhaps not surprisingly as someone who chose the novel as his form, holds a similar opinion of what he calls the "intellect" and its prospects, which is discussed in Chapter III below.

systematic fashion, so that their meanings could be rigidly corralled into a systematic argument that would function like a mathematical formula, describing, predicting, and controlling the natural state of affairs. This tendency requires a little more attention here. It is essential to understand that this would be to make an early decision in favor of the Transcendental Attitude, to think that words like these, and, more to the point, phenomena like these, work best when meanings are unilaterally assigned them by the writer so that they serve his purposes. It is the germ of excess that gives life to these words. Working with such words becomes more difficult when we must attend to the multiple meanings which arise from them, rather than stripping them of this multiplicity in advance so that they become definitive.

It must be emphasized that this is not at all a matter of abandoning the distinctions between words. Another, more phenomenological approach would be to work through the distinctions in the manner called for by the phenomena at hand. At times, this may call for strict precision, which may disclose the phenomena more clearly, or may show the inadequacy of our distinctions in a demand for some new way of speaking. At other times, it may call for the transition between words, for attention to how they work together and slide into one another, or how two or more words recall some shared aspect which itself lacks a single word, but which is communicated in many words. The power of the word "nature" lies in its confluence of the sensible, the non-human, the human in its belonging to nature, and perhaps even being-as-a-whole. This potential contradictions of this confluence, such as that between the "non-human" and "that to which the human belongs" may require attention to the distinction between meanings, or may require the

insistent holding together of apparently different meanings. It is impossible and misleading to commit in advance to a categorical methodological preference between distinguishing the meanings of words and moving between words. Thinking, of course, works both through distinctions and through gatherings. It is quite disingenuous to fear that the possibility of one or another of these two precludes the necessity of the other, as if we would either collapse all distinctions into a meaningless humming sound that would no longer be language at all, or on the other hand, write a dictionary instead of a work of philosophy. All one can do is attend to the phenomena at hand, and remain willing and open to think in whatever manner they demand.

So much for broad narratives in the history of philosophy and for the laying out of methodological expectations. The point of the present work is to suggest that silence, understood as an excess in its relation to language, has a place in thinking the relationship between language and nature, specifically as the linchpin of the transition between them in human expression. I will make this suggestion by drawing primarily on the work of Merleau-Ponty, who, as a phenomenologist expressly concerned with the senses, the body, and language, attempted to describe and understand the passage between language and nature in a manner that could maintain their ontological continuity. Silence was the hinge of this passage. Silence, like nature and language, is a figure for a constellation of words, including Proust's *darkness* and Schelling's *Ungrund*, all words which connote

absence, loss, and distance, but which function positively in effecting the passage between language and nature.[17]

The matter of silence and its intertwining in language, as well as in the intertwining of language and nature, is thus the phenomenological task of the present study. The English word "matter," as it takes its present meaning from the senses of *material, stuff, substance, reality,* is like the German word *"die Sache,"* as in Heidegger's use of the phrase *"die Sache Selbst."*[18] Heidegger speaks in the lecture entitled *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit,* regarding the task of philosophy, of "the matter itself, which has remained the same from Parmenides to Hegel," and which is Being, even where the question of Being is forgotten. Schelling addresses *die Sache* in a similar sense near the end of the *Freedom* essay, as something of power and substance that goes beyond, or underlies, the definition of a word: "The name means nothing; everything depends upon the matter" (*"Der Name tuts nicht; auf die Sache kommt es an"*) (F 506/279). *Die Sache,* or the matter, is not just a subject for conversation or the topic for a piece of writing. It is not merely a problem to be addressed and resolved. A *matter* is a matter of substance, a question and an experience coming out of something with a certain weight in the world.

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[17] The word "silence" sometimes functions in Merleau-Ponty in a more restricted fashion to connote forms of expression which are not language, such as painting, which is described a silence in "Cezanne's Doubt" and "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence." Commentaries on Merleau-Ponty which deal with the word "silence" sometimes do so in this narrow form, for example Gary Madison's *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty,* pp. 86-89. Most, if not all, commentaries mention silence once or many times, if only because it is a word that figures in so many of Merleau-Ponty's evocative passages on language and philosophy. The role of this word usually remains at the level of a silence of nature or the sensible that *somehow* becomes language, a silence that, as Merleau-Ponty tells us and as the commentaries tell us again, philosophical and poetic language must express in their work.

[18] *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit,* 13/18.

It is something that partakes of reality so deeply that our life is utterly shot through with the matter of which we speak. It designates the sense that there is a certain excess over language and of the web of meaning in which philosophical terms function, a certain *something,* and something of substance, which we try to reconvert *into* language.

As such an effort, the present study hopes to remain faithful, and will argue that Merleau-Ponty always remained faithful, to an earlier, perhaps more naïve but by no means less genuine, Husserlian sense of phenomenology as the bringing to word of the mute world, of the *logos* of phenomena It is language cutting close to the bone, coming close to the matter at hand. Indeed, directly following the passage quoted above, ending the chapter of *The Visible and the Invisible* entitled "Interrogation and Intuition," is the famous brief passage regarding the task of philosophy from Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*: "It is the experience… still mute which we are concerned with leading to the pure expression of its meaning."[19] Husserl's vision of the "pure expression of meaning" has, even by Merleau-Ponty's time, already changed into halting attempts at *reconversion,* of evocation and indirect language.[20] The purity and directness of the

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[19] Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations,* 77/38-39. It is cited in the Preface to *Phenomenology of Perception* as well, pg. *viii/xiv.* It is significant, in a transcendental sense, that Husserl wrote "mute experience," *Erlebnisse stumm,* not mute nature. The transcendental truth, of course, is that nature is given only in experience, and that its muteness is always a matter of a muteness-for-us, not a muteness-in-itself.

[20] Indeed, one can see already in Husserl's "The Origin of Geometry" (Appendix VI to *The Crisis of European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology)* that the expectation of a pure statement of original meaning, in this case the confrontation with the original self-evidence of geometry, but also for "all spiritual structures which are to be taken as unconditional" (377) has already become impossible purely on historical terms, for, as Husserl begins to think towards a sense of philosophy as historical, as in-time, he begins to see that the task of cataloguing the passage of an idea through history to its original self-evidence to be an infinite task. "Making geometry self-evident… is the disclosure of its historical tradition. But this knowledge, if it is not to remain empty talk or undifferentiated generality, requires the methodical production, proceeding from the present, of differentiated self-evidences… Carried out systematically, such

Husserlian project are no more, but the practice of phenomenology, as the logos of *phainomena,* of the shining-forth appearing of things,[21] remains the same. I wish to continue in that spirit, with the goal of bringing the matter itself, the intertwining of language, silence, and nature, to some kind of philosophical language.

The present study is at once an inquiry into the matter of silence and language through Merleau-Ponty's late philosophy, *and* an inquiry into the late Merleau-Ponty through the ideas of language and silence. The intent is thus dual, both original and interpretive. First, if the interplay of language and silence is a particularly powerful and essential moment in Merleau-Ponty's late thought, an inquiry focused in these terms will serve as a gateway into the whole of his thought, a whole which bears on nature, ontology, and the future of phenomenology and philosophy. Second, the *matter,* the real practice, of "the reconversion of silence and speech into one another," the coming-into-being of speech and the reticence of silence, may be interrogated.

The task of this introduction, then, is to establish, in a preparatory way, the value and possibility of such an inquiry, and to lay out its plan and its terms.

Why think about language? It has certainly been thought about before, thoroughly, for a long time, and without consensus. One could make the case that language is *the* philosophical problem of the past hundred years at least. If a single word could draw together the disparate strands of the philosophical traditions of the twentieth

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self-evidences result in nothing other and nothing less than the universal a priori of history with all its highly abundant component elements" (371).

[21] As discussed in Heidegger, *Being and Time* 29/25.

century, the word would be language. The thought of language ranges from an acknowledged obsession of philosophy, to a barely-mentioned element which quietly exerts its force, to a question mark arrived at, and repeatedly interrogated without fixed result.

Much, if not all, of the analytic tradition turns on the matter of language, in large part through its self-conception as an attempt to rigorously establish the rules of permissible speech so that the scientific cataloguing of the world can proceed in clear terms, so that empirical science can avoid tripping over its own feet, as it were. The difference between Merleau-Ponty and this effort is vast, yet the importance of language as a primary task for philosophy, if for different reasons, is paramount in both, and this wide parallel is worthy of note. A grasp of the rules of speech and the possibilities for speech to make sense and to describe the objective world is understood in the analytic tradition as critical to the Western project of science as rigorous knowledge. This could be understood as a certain response to a task first articulated by Kant in the First Critique, as a continuation and continual update of the effort of the Transcendental Analytic, combined with an insistence on banishing the confusions of the Transcendental Dialectic.[22] Merleau-Ponty quickly puts these efforts aside, calling them the "positivism of language," criticizing them for taking language, that which structures being as a whole, as an ontic object which could be described and understood through scientific

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[22] As Jason Wirth puts it aptly in the different context of the Kantians of Schelling's time, "Rather than confront the disorientation of Kant's severing of the umbilical cord between thinking and nature, they rebuild the village of thought around the tower of thinking's transcendentally deduced structures" (*The Conspiracy of Nature,* 81). Contemporary "philosophy of language," in its focus on introspectively or logically established rules of speech, is a Kantian project of further consolidating the basis of science as rigorous knowledge.

methodology (*VI* 130/96, *PW* 7-14, 3-8). Frege's efforts to distinguish between the sense and nominatum, or the meaning of a statement, which carries communication, from that to which it refers, is another source for the analytic tradition, which in its own way also seeks what Merleau-Ponty calls, in *The Prose of the World,* "the specter of a pure language," in this case the clarity of the connection, which must exist but which is hard to pinpoint, between sense and nominatum.

The apparent optimism of Frege and Kant seems to dwindle as more recent philosophers in the analytic tradition, rather than accumulating a systematic body of knowledge, have instead added up problems and confusions that threaten the Kantian and Fregean bases of their projects. These range from Davidson's and Rorty's moves to downplay the connection of language to the extra-linguistic world in favor of working within the rules of language itself,[23] to Quine's and Hempel's doubt about the possibility of establishing rigorous rules of language that would not accidentally borrow from either empirical facts or metaphysical speculation.

Much of the continental tradition of the past hundred years, including Merleau-Ponty, has engaged in a continual fascination with the insights of Ferdinand de Saussure, whose work can be taken as at once a cipher and preview of much, if not all, of the linguistic philosophy of the twentieth century. The basic idea that there is no necessary connection between signifier and signified was a door to freedom for philosophers eager to escape the bonds of the signifier or of the signified structure. Meanwhile, the concept

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[23] These studies are reminiscent of the problematic weakness of the connection between language and the sensible in Kant, and the pivotal role of the transcendental imagination, which receives so little attention in the Critique. See Heidegger's *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* and John Sallis's *The Gathering of Reason.*

of the generation of meaning in the changing relations between signs became the basis of both structuralism and post-structuralism. This project of freedom and excess over the structure of the sign is the basic vision of Irigaray and Foucault; and both see it as fundamentally a matter of language. Deleuze's project of the logic of sense and of the power of difference also takes its impetus from the sign-structure of language, most importantly for the present study in *Proust and Signs*. Derrida's decades-long meditation on the necessary absence in all presence is very much a thought of language, of the multiple orders of remove between speech and being, and a constant castigation and suspicion of claims to presence and immediacy in speech.

These examples should serve more for a sense of the breadth and density of the inquiries into language than for any decisive evaluation of their character, success, or importance. At a certain level, no doubt, *language* is simply a word. The permutations of this word are so wildly varied that it would of course be fair to say that nothing at all, much less a century, is unified by a word so empty that it can be filled with whatever anyone puts into it. Nevertheless, *something,* or some things, in the hazy nebula of *speech, meaning, communication, words* demands to be thought, and causes its echoes to resound in ever-widening circles, everywhere, from Frege to Foucault and from Davidson to Derrida.

For that reason alone, approaching a philosopher of the contemporary era through the thought of language affords one some chance of coming close to what is contemporary in their work, and to understanding how their originality will echo in the history of philosophy. In a certain manner, it may be the case that, due to his constant

insistence on the perceptual faith, and on what will be described in the following pages as an emphasis on the *excess* of the sensible to language, Merleau-Ponty may run somewhat against the grain of the dominant tendency in the thought of language in the twentieth century, which is to find an increasing, perhaps unbridgeable, distance between language and the sensible.[24]

The *essential togetherness* of language and nature is the goal of this work. In the sense of the Transcendental Attitude, this togetherness has already been suggested in introductory form. Yet despite the glaring obviousness, which Merleau-Ponty constantly emphasizes, of the fact that language does indeed speak of the sensible world, despite the fact that this togetherness is not something we must work at or accomplish, we must at the same time admit that in an obvious ontic sense, language is oddly out of place in nature. It seems to have no *phenomenal* place, because the events of expression, sense, and meaning,[25] which, as speaking human beings, we live in constantly and irremediably, do not, apparently or as far as we are accustomed to notice, occur outside humanity.

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[24] Douglas Low, in "Merleau-Ponty's Concept of Reason," makes the argument, similar to that made by Martin Dillon in *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology,* that Merleau-Ponty forges a path between a positivist/analytic conception of language as the double of the world, and an equally hopeless, according to Low and Dillon, "postmodern" conception of the world as nothing but language. According to Low, it is Merleau-Ponty's idea that "language is a sublimation of the body's openness unto the world and others," an idea which, just as I wish to show here, makes language and nature (the body and the world) continuous, that accomplishes this middle way. Apart from the problems with throwing aside the "postmodern" arguments so blithely, a tactic which could be nothing but a refusal to take seriously the permeation of our world with language, it is possible that both Low and Dillon emphasize the easy, natural togetherness of language and the body too much. Language and nature are still a *strange* togetherness, and the goal of thinking their togetherness should not solve all problems and paper over all aporias by precluding their strangeness.

[25] It is, of course, a major concern of Merleau-Ponty's *Nature* lectures in particular and of his "turn to expression" in general to show that this is not at all true, that expression and sense are alive in nature, and that human language borrows and grows from structures already present.

Yet this seeming, if empirically and ontically straightforward, is perhaps transcendentally and ontologically meaningless. If the brief history above gives a sense for the force of the transcendental turn insofar as it shows that nature is unthinkable without language, then this apparent placeless-ness of language would appear to be a sort of ontic illusion, a mistake of the Natural Attitude. If, as the Transcendental Attitude shows, and indeed as Step 3 of the second sailing schema that I have outlined claims, nature's truth as it discloses itself is full of language and given in language, then the simple observation that non-human nature does not speak in words seems to simply miss the transcendental point.

This may very well be, and in that case, this persistent concern is naïve, ontic, pre-transcendental, and thus has no place in a dissertation such as the present one. However, a major intention of the present work is to show how Merleau-Ponty, Proust, and Schelling think the intertwining between language and the sensible by thinking how the sensible carries, supports, and gives birth to the invisibility of language. A potential consequence of this is that there *is no* merely empirical, merely ontic sensibility – the natural attitude itself is the illusion. To move beyond the empirical or the ontic is not to cast aside the sensible; it is to interrogate the ontological significance of the sensible. On this logic it is not impossible that an observation about the occurrence and lack of language as it presents itself throughout the sensible, the observation that only human beings speak and that the rest of nature is silent, has some significance beyond the "merely empirical." Returning to the sensible *without* the prejudice of the natural attitude, thinking the sensible not as the empirical, or the merely ontic, is perhaps, to

borrow and modify a phrase from the beginning of Merleau-Ponty's lectures on nature, to think the sensible in its very sensibility as the soil which already carries the excessive germ revealed in the undergoing of language.

The suggestion I wish to make is that the apparently "merely ontic" strangeness of language in the natural world, the facticity of the silence of nature and the speech of humans beings, may also have something to do with the excessive germ that remains after the transcendental move.

As will be made very clear in Chapter II below, the purpose of this investigation is as much, or more, to make a reading of Merleau-Ponty *through* the thinking of language, rather than to arrive at a conclusive grasp of the view of language that he may articulate. The matter to be thought is thus not only "language" as an ontic object among others, about which one could hold certain hopefully accurate views. There may very well be a Merleau-Pontian "philosophy of language," and it will be an important part of the present task to understand what this is, but this will be the beginning of the inquiry, rather than the goal.

The focus for this work will be on the last works of Merleau-Ponty's life, because this is when Merleau-Ponty's thought reached its greatest originality and radicality in thinking language ontologically, and in practicing philosophy in a manner that had learned its way from the matter to be thought. As Barbaras puts it, language was already at the center of Merleau-Ponty's thought at the time of *The Phenomenology of*

Perception, but Merleau-Ponty didn't know it yet.[26] After Merleau-Ponty's studies of

literature and painting in the fifties, the thought of language, and expression, became the

key to pass beyond the problems of the subject that, as Merleau-Ponty himself said

repeatedly, remained in the earlier book.[27] It is in the later work, especially in *The*

Visible and the Invisible, that language, silence, nature, and excess become primary

matters for thought, rather than received ideas or regional sub-questions.

Merleau-Ponty's own trajectory throughout his career, and the trajectory of many

insightful secondary studies,[28] all tend to converge toward language as a defining

problem of his work and of philosophy as a whole. The matter of language receives only

a single chapter in *Phenomenology of Perception* ("The Body as Expression and

Speech"), and this editorial structure emphasizes the thought of language in that book as

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[26] I would like to avoid, or ignore, the long-standing debate on whether there is more continuity, or more of a distinct break, between the early and late Merleau-Ponty. All the analyses of the changes throughout his career are certainly important, but choosing whether to call them "continuous" or identify "a major break," seems to me quite impossible, even though definitively distinguishing between these two options would, if it were possible, certainly orient one's thought. Barbaras, for example, claims that he recognizes continuity, but consistently emphasizes a break, leaving one to wonder whether it would not be better to simply make a reading of Merleau-Ponty's trajectory rather than qualify it as continuous or radically re-oriented at some point. For analyses that show convincingly that the more radical, explicit statements about language and the subject in Merleau-Ponty's late work *are* continuous with his early work, especially *Phenomenology of Perception,* see Douglas Low, "The Continuity Between Merleau-Ponty's Early and Late Philosophy of Language," and Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology,* 85-150.

[27] See also Thomas Holler, "The Limits of Language and the Threshold of Speech," which sees the locus of a shift toward language specifically in Merleau-Ponty's reading of Saussure. Holler tries to show that it was the reading of Saussure that led Merleau-Ponty to reconsider the of primacy of perception in favor of a primacy of language. It seems to me that it goes too far to say that there is no primacy of perception for Merleau-Ponty after the early 1950s; *The Visible and the Invisible* is full of references to the fundamental nature of perception for its analyses, and its central chapter begins with an analysis of perception *before* moving on to language. Instead, we might think of it as a co-primacy of perception and language which requires us to think them together, rather than arguing for the primacy of one or the other.

[28] For example, Barbaras' *The Being of the Phenomenon,* Carbone's *The Thinking of the Sensible,* Madison's *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty,* Waldenfels' "The Paradox of Expression," Sallis' *Phenomenology and the Return to Beginnings,* to name a few of those which focus heavily on language as a defining theme, not just in one section or chapter but throughout each text.

an ontic matter, as one region of human life which can be opened and closed in the space of one chapter. It is a very important chapter in the structure of *Phenomenology of Perception* as the book develops its argument, because the chapter comes at the end of Part One, devoted to the phenomenology of the body, before the investigation of "the world as perceived," the title of Part Two. Yet, as Chapter Four below will show,[29] the movement between body and world in expression is hardly articulated here, despite comments such as "the analysis of speech and expression brings home to us the enigmatic nature of our own body even more than did our remarks on bodily space and unity," (*PP* 230/197) and the line that ends Part One (but in a summary of the whole Part, not in the context of expression and speech), "Obscurity spreads to the perceived world in its entirety," (*PP* 232/200). Language is left in an ontic role, as a region of the body-subject, and the insights of the gestural theory of expression are not taken outside of this region until the studies of painting and language undertaken in the 1950s. Throughout this period, language becomes more and more the explicit focus, up to the point of *The Visible and the Invisible,* which is engaged in a constant meditation on language. It will be the task of Chapter One below to articulate how the vision for philosophy that comes out of *The Visible and the Invisible* is intertwined with the thought of language.

The final reason for the present focus on language as a term with which to work is that, despite the ontological goals of the present work, putting the project first in terms of language may help to avoid a too-hasty move into thinking in terms of ontology, at least in a facile manner, in terms of "being is X." While Merleau-Ponty was manifestly and

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[29] see also Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon* 5-14, 41-48, 50, 60.

clearly in the process of, as he puts it, elaborating "an ontology" in his final years, at the same time he found it necessary to undertake an intense interrogation of the practice and possibilities of philosophy. With the task and the stakes of philosophy so profoundly in question, it seems necessary to begin by taking a step back, to think through the meaning of philosophical speech, the place of the human in nature, and the relation of philosophy, language, and nature, before saying "being is X." For example, one might read the last chapter of *The Visible and the Invisible* and feel inclined to say quite straightforwardly that "Merleau-Ponty thinks that the structure of being, or what he calls 'the flesh,' is a chiasmic relationship between sensible and sentient or visible and invisible." Yet this would be an empty phrase, or worse, an ontic image of some substance structured in such and such a way. Thinking these strange terms would instead require a prior thinking of how the phenomena of language and expression lead Merleau-Ponty to create such an "ontological" image, and more importantly, would require undergoing the interrogation of the meaning and practice of philosophy which attention to these phenomena end up calling for.

Philosophy has repeatedly, in times of confusion, made a sort of retreat of this kind, from Socrates' second sailing, to Descartes' methodical doubt, to Kant's critiques, to Heidegger's necessity, in *Being and Time,* to think the being of that being who questions about being, before thinking the being of Being itself. Even more apropos for the present project is Heidegger's later tendency to further abandon propositional language about beings or Being, in favor of meditations, suggestions, and silence, centered on the matter and task of language. As Heidegger says in the first paragraph of

Being and Time, regarding Plato's and Aristotle's explicit investigations into the since-then-forgotten question of Being, "what then was wrested from phenomena by the highest exertion of thought, albeit in fragments and first beginnings, has long since been trivialized."[30] In Heidegger one finds not only an incomplete attempt, in *Being and Time,* to finally reach the possibility of speaking directly about the question of Being itself via the necessary starting point of the being of the human, but the subsequent abandonment of even this indirect approach. Speaking very generally, the vast volume of philosophy that comes in Heidegger's wake is extremely reticent in speaking directly about Being; indeed, Merleau-Ponty uses this language more than most.

Nevertheless, in the past eighty years, philosophy after Heidegger overflows with the thought of ontology. It is the practice of its elaboration that changes. As a self-described work of ontology that uses both the language of "being is X" and simultaneously attempts to elaborate a thinking of language and a practice of philosophy that would be different, *The Visible and the Invisible* is a work under tension in this respect. The present study thus seeks to be cautious and to move slowly by restricting itself, as much as possible, to an interrogation of language, rather than of being. As I will suggest in Chapter Four, even the matter fundamentally at issue, as being, flesh, nature, or language, remains unclear. Using the word "being" as a quick placeholder for a matter that has yet to be thought would be to take part in the historic trivialization which it was Heidegger's lifelong task to point out. One should take the advice of Aristotle, who usually gives good advice, in Book B of the *Metaphysics*: "It is profitable for those who

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[30] *Being and Time* 1.

want to get through something well to do a good job of going over the *aporias*."[31] It is

not the intent of this inquiry to cross over the *aporia* of the question of being.

The preceding, then, should provide an at least provisional answer to the question,

why language? But the next question is, why silence?

The whispering of silence runs through, behind, and underneath the history of

philosophy since the Greeks. Silence is an old, old figure in philosophy. It is the

necessary opposite of philosophical *logos,* and thus cannot fail to appear wherever one

looks, whether it is the abyss of dark, mute nature that must be filled with speech, or the

always-beyond of speech, which both sets a limit and marks out a task. As the opposite

of *logos,* silence, as a matter for thinking, is as old as philosophy, or older. It plays

various roles, sometimes coming to the aid of speech when speech fails us, sometimes

standing, darkly, outside the circle of speech as that which we essay to illuminate, or as

that which sometimes gives birth to speech. In the long strain of philosophy which has

tried to recuperate silence, to successfully think silence, or at least to let it come into

thought, the matter of silence often makes a sort of anti-philosophical gesture, or at least

an anti-*logos* gesture. It starts in myth, in the silence of the gods and the oracles, which

thunders forth to human ears only occasionally, and with the obscure authority of

language that is not the *logos.*[32] As Roberto Calasso puts it in *The Marriage of Cadmus*

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[31] Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 995a24.

[32] See the discussion of the peculiar non-*logos* authority of myth in Jean-Luc Nancy, "Myth Interrupted."

and Harmony, "a god is never a constant presence,"[33] and the absences and mystery of a

world shot through with divinity functions as a kind of silence, a silence of (divine)

nature that only finds its way to speech through the uncertainty of myth, through a form

of speech that leaves much unknown, a form through which silence speaks.

The Platonic dialogues are filled with myth, often as a way around *aporias,* myths

that are brought up when the subject at hand cannot be addressed through the *logos,* and

must have recourse to a *mythos.* One of the cruxes of Plato's *Republic,* the image of the

sun for the good beyond being, of which "a god doubtless knows if it happens to be

true,"[34] ends in a failure of speech, in what of which Socrates cannot speak and Glaucon

cannot hear:

> You wouldn't be able to follow, my dear Glaucon," I said, "although there
> wouldn't be any lack of eagerness on my part. But you would no longer be seeing
> an image of what we are saying, but rather, the truth itself. [35]

Silence interrupts Socrates' speech because what *must* be spoken of *cannot* be

spoken of, except in images, and this is as far as the *logos* of the good beyond being gets

(or has ever gotten).

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[33] Robert Calasso, *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony,* 19. Many passages in this book capture the explosive sudden appearance of the gods on to the human scene, and their equally sudden disappearance. Perhaps the *most* explosive is Dionysus, bound to the erotic and violent as he is: "Dionysus is the river we hear flowing by in the distance, an incessant booming from far away; then one day it rises and floods everything, as if the normal above-water state of things, the sober delimitation of our existence, were but a brief parenthesis overwhelmed in an instant" (45). One of Calasso's meditations, indeed the theme that gives the book its title, concerns the chronological movement in Greek myth from an early conviviality between gods and humans, to a relationship of distance and sudden exchange typified by the image of rape: "The image of rape establishes the canonical relationship the divine now has with a world matured and softened by sacrifices: contact is still possible, but it is no longer the contact of a shared meal; rather, it is the sudden, obsessive invasion that plucks away the flower of thought" (54).

[34] Plato, *Republic* 517b

[35] Plato, *Republic* 533a

There's a several hundred year-old Romantic tradition of opposing silence to speech, which goes along with a sometimes naïve and metaphysical[36] opposition between *logos* as "logic" and its many Others. In this vein, speech, or at least philosophical speech, undergoes a tragic failure when confronted with some root wildness that it cannot grasp, cannot put into words or thought. Nietzsche and Schelling are particularly rich, and far from naïve, examples of this line of thinking, where silence, as the impossibility of at least certain *kinds* of speech regarding the most serious matters, stands as a mark of finitude. Thus the recourse to myth and story, as *more* true than philosophical *logos*, or as opening a realm for human thinking inaccessible, at least to the conceptions of philosophy heretofore attempted. Nietzsche tells the story of Zarathustra, and thinks the eternal return as "what if," while Schelling's constant effort, from the myth of God's birth in the *Philosophical Investigations Into the Essence of Human Freedom* to the *Ages of the World* and the "Divinities of Samothrace," is to accomplish, via narrative, a grand synthesis that would think the trauma, or the unspeakable silence, at the creation of the world.[37]

The goal of the present work, to think language according to a certain silence, will require a constant dialogue with the history of philosophy as it has engaged in a continual working over of silence, for the matter of silence as it is broached in Merleau-Ponty

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[36] Metaphysical in the precise manner that Heidegger, in the *Nietzsche* lectures, found Nietzsche (justly or unjustly) to be the highest expression of metaphysics, even as he began its overturning. The reversal that values the sensible or the in-articulable over the *logos,* understood as rational, is metaphysical because it lives from the divide between the sensible and the intelligible, or as Merleau-Ponty would put it, the visible and the invisible.

[37] See Chapter V, below. See also David Farrell Krell, *The Tragic Absolute,* for many beautiful chapters of attention to Schelling's attempted synthesis, which Krell takes to be a matter of expressing the fundamental languor, *Sehnsucht,* at the heart of the world.

stands in and emerges from this tradition. However, it is not enough to say again what

Merleau-Ponty said, what Heidegger said, what many others have said time and time

again, that there is a silence beyond speech, the silence of Being, or Nature, or the

Visible, words that would be capitalized to emphasize their obscure authority. We have

already been told, many times and by many illustrious philosophers, that it is the task of

philosophy to heed this silence and to carefully bring it to Word, also capitalized. To

avoid this self-silencing debacle, in which nothing more will be able to be said because

one would be trying to say *silence* itself,[38] it is perhaps better to start in another place, to

refuse to tackle silence directly from the beginning, for two reasons.

First, it is the claim of the present work and a focus of its investigation that

Merleau-Ponty offers the beginnings of a grasp of philosophy which would not have to

fail in the face of silence, or at the very least, would fail in a very different way than the

failures of *logos*-as-rational speech. In short, and in the broadest terms, if the history of

philosophy, when it has experienced silence at all, has experienced it as a sort of trauma,

as failure and as a mark of the tragic, Merleau-Ponty may help us to think silence and

speech in a more peaceful relation, one which would not have trauma and failure as its

primary character. Second, by beginning from another place, by abstaining from

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[38] John Sallis' book *Merleau-Ponty and the Return to Beginnings* ends with a warning against the tendency that a reader of Merleau-Ponty might have to valorize silence at the expense of speech, without attending to the subtleties of the closeness of speech, silence, finitude, and determination as it is practiced by philosophical speech. To abolish speech in favor of silence, Sallis points out, is to eliminate the distance between them that is essential, while to eschew the determining function of speech is to forget the tie between determining speech and the finite, as Kant and Fichte realized. Part of what makes finitude finite is the necessity to determine what is properly indeterminable, the necessity to name. The book points out that Merleau-Ponty is not so naïve as to eschew the necessity of determination of language for a mysterious silence which would conveniently avoid this problem.

speaking about silence *ad nauseam* for 150 pages or more, this study will attempt what

Merleau-Ponty intended by "indirect language,"[39] approaching the matter laterally, by

diffusion from coordinated issues, by following out a necessity to think silence that will

be revealed through a study, not of silence itself, but of language.

Insofar as a grasp of "Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of language" is a prerequisite

for the wider goals outlined above, the obvious place to start will be the various

examinations of the task of philosophy which Merleau-Ponty makes in his late years. It

is here that the matter of language comes most explicitly to the fore, because the

possibilities of language as it becomes philosophical speech, and also as it works as

literary and poetic speech, are here directly in question. This process, already at work in

Phenomenology of Perception, becomes more pronounced in Merleau-Ponty's writings of

the 1950s. The essay "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence" seeks to understand

how painting, literature, and philosophy express what is silent by an indirection or a

lateral meaning, by finding a way to express "the allusive logic of the perceived world"

(*S* 71/57). A similar reference to the necessity of an indirect method for ontology is made

the course summaries compiled in *Themes from the Lectures from the Collège de France,*

in the summary of a lecture dealing with Heidegger (*RC* 156, *TFL* 156). The course

notes, recently published in French but not available in English, of Merleau-Ponty's last

courses in 1958-59 and 1960-61, "The Possibility of Philosophy Today" and "Cartesian

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[39] *RC* 156/156; "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence," in *Signs*, 95-103/76-83; *The Visible and the Invisible*, throughout.

Ontology and the Ontology of Today," as well as "Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology," involve thinking toward the task of contemporary philosophy as articulating a relationship of humanity and being around the multiple loci of absence, language, and nature.[40]

The most sustained and focused interrogations of language in Merleau-Ponty's corpus occur in all four chapters of *The Visible and the Invisible,* and many of the individual Working Notes bear on this question. The first three chapters, in their dialogue with Descartes, Husserl, Sartre, and Bergson, all dance around the issue of the proper mode of philosophical speech, or the mode of language that would correspond best to the matter at hand in philosophy and to the necessities of its interrogation. The fourth chapter, in sketching out the thought of the chiasm and the flesh, repeatedly attempts to think the movement between sensibility, carnality, and speech, and to imagine and practice a philosophical speech that would bring this movement to word. The task of philosophy is most closely a matter of language, and of silence, its "most difficult point" "the bond between the flesh and the idea, between the visible and the interior armature which it manifests and which it conceals" (*VI* 193/149).

In this text there is an attempt to imagine and practice a philosophical speech that would bring to word the movement between the silence of the sensible and language, to understand this transition and to interrogate the point when silence becomes language. It is not only an attempt to discuss this movement, but to outline a practice of philosophy

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[40] See the essays in Mauro Carbone, *The Thinking of the Sensible* for readings of the course notes oriented in this direction.

that *could* discuss it. In Merleau-Ponty's text there is an understanding of philosophy as a certain manner of passing through this bond, a manner that is subtly, if perhaps not fundamentally, different from its cousins, literature and poetry. This will be the goal of Chapter II below, to begin the overall task of thinking the passage from things to word in the most direct way possible, through Merleau-Ponty's explicitly stated "philosophy of language" and practice of philosophy. The principal claim of this chapter will be that the motif of silence is a key to thinking this passage, both in the silence of the sensible and in the necessity for philosophical language to remember this silence, to find ways of speech which do not only erase it.

It is clearly Merleau-Ponty's view that part of this practice of philosophy should be an openness to learning from literature and art, at times even a borrowing of literary modes of expression, at the very least a weakening of the sense of strict division between the philosophical and the literary. Thus it is reasonable to turn to literature for an example of the practice of language which Merleau-Ponty is after. The example of Proust runs throughout Merleau-Ponty from the beginning. It is so dense in the fourth chapter of *The Visible and the Invisible* that one could almost say that chapter turns entirely on Proust's thought of the sensible idea, expressed most clearly, for Merleau-Ponty, in the experience of the "little phrase" of Vinteuil's sonata which strikes Swann so powerfully, and which the narrator finally comes to understand as well. Proust stands here as an exemplar because Proust's ability to transform the experience of the sensible into language, to understand it *already* as language, and to move fluidly between the realms of the word, the sensible, the affective, and the concept is singular and impressive.

Proust writes phenomenologically, in the sense to which Merleau-Ponty returns again and again, of describing the appearing and shining forth of the world, at once as *what* appears and as the *appearing* itself. Merleau-Ponty mentions Proust frequently but always briefly, never devoting a thorough exposition or reading to him. Thus Merleau-Ponty provides the starting points for a reading of Proust that might carry further Merleau-Ponty's own themes of the transition between silence and language, and the necessity of a passage through silence in creative expression, themes to which Proust devotes explicit attention. A chapter on Merleau-Ponty's inheritance of Proust is worthwhile here in order to understand more precisely what Merleau-Ponty learns from Proust and how this marks his project, to follow "what Proust knew very well" (*VI* 198/153) about the sense of language and its intertwining in the sensible, and perhaps even to take Proust as a sort of *ethos* of the conversion of attention into language, of the reconversion of silence and speech into one another. What Deleuze calls Proust's "apprenticeship,"[41] the life (and 3,000 page) long process by which the narrator comes to aesthetic and ethical terms with his life as a "man of letters," or more broadly, as a thoughtful and sensitive human being, will be thought here as the enrichment of life through attentive speech, or phenomenology. Proust's own inquiry is most precisely focused near the very end of the *Recherche*, when the narrator, separated by years from most of the events of the book and disillusioned by his failures as a writer, undergoes the final event of involuntary memory that motivates a sudden barrage of insights into life, experience, and most importantly, writing. The narrator realizes that his own task, what Proust himself so clearly excels at,

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[41] Deleuze, Gilles, *Proust and Signs,* 3.

is to bring his life to word, to practice the very passage between thing and word which is the focus of the present work. The narrator's description of and interpretation of this process, and of its ethical dimensions as a way of life, are best given in a passage of about 35 pages, which is the focus Chapter III below. If the practice of philosophy must learn from literature and art, Proust is understood by Merleau-Ponty as a great teacher, and the chapter will seek to understand what Proust appears to learn himself and how his experience reflects on the present reading of Merleau-Ponty. Proust is an example of Merleau-Ponty's own effort of "the expression of what is before expression *and sustains it from behind*" (*VI* 219/167). Furthermore, Proust accomplishes this expression of the silent excess before expression not against, but *by virtue of* a fundamental obscurity and passivity, the obscurity of depth, time, and silence, as well as the passivity, and necessity, of coming *after,* of remembrance. Thus Proust helps to show the necessity of traversing the obscurity, or what I wish to call silence, out of which language emerges and which it must then re-inscribe in its practice.

Merleau-Ponty's last courses at the Collège de France involved literature (including a section on Proust), art, and the practice of philosophy on the one hand, and nature on the other. The togetherness of these two questions, which, as must be shown, is not just coincidental, lies, again, in the passage from nature to word, thought in the course on nature as a *logos* already present in nature. Continuing Merleau-Ponty's interrogation of nature as the soil from which we grow should further clarify and deepen the issue of this passage, now to be thought as the passage from the muteness of nature to the reverberations of language, eventually of philosophical language.

If Proust figures as an example of the effort to bring the intertwining of sensibility

and idea to word, then the *basis* of this effort is a thought of nature as already expression,

arrived at during the same late years as the investigations into the task of philosophy

today.[42] The thought of nature as expression, elaborated in the *Nature* lectures, helps to

bring the matter of language and expression to the foreground of Merleau-Ponty's

ontological thinking.[43] But despite outlines in the Working Notes describing sections of

a larger work to be devoted to nature, mentions of nature in *The Visible and the Invisible*

are only occasional and oblique. Thus taking the thought of nature beyond the *Nature*

lectures to the radicality of *The Visible and the Invisible* becomes a task for interpretation

today. The goal of Chapter IV is to make a case for reading Merleau-Ponty, occasionally

against himself, as a thoroughgoing thinker of nature. To do this, the chapter will have to

start with the thought of nature as expression and language, and build on this to think

nature as the *excess,* perhaps the excess of silence, which lies beyond and sustains

sensibility and philosophy in the thought of *The Visible and the Invisible*. Continuing

Merleau-Ponty's interrogation of nature as the soil from which we grow should further

clarify and deepen the issue of this passage, now to be thought as the passage from the

muteness of nature to the reverberations of language, eventually of philosophical

language. If Merleau-Ponty, and much of the philosophical and literary traditions with

which he is intertwined, from French post-structuralism to Heideggerian phenomenology

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[42] Carbone's *Thinking of the Sensible,* pgs. 28-38, gives a brief analysis of the parallels between the lectures on Von Uexkull's concept of biology as melody, on Proust's little phrase, and on the thought of the invisible as a dimension in *The Visible and the Invisible*.

[43] See Renaud Barbaras, "Merleau-Ponty's Concept of Nature."

and its Romantic predecessors, is engaged in an attempt to work with something which is in a certain way beyond language, an excess, or a remainder, then perhaps it is possible to name this excess as nature.

The necessity and difficulty of this naming may be illuminated by a parallel with Schelling. Schelling also struggles with a naming of the excess beyond the most primordial categories of his thought. In the *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, Schelling elaborates the most powerful version of the creation myth that repeats itself throughout his work, in which God, as the power of language to say the world, is preceded and prefigured by a "dark longing," *Sehnsucht,* which comes from nature.

Tracing a heritage of Schelling in Merleau-Ponty, who cited and discussed Schelling occasionally but never thoroughly, is apropos because Schelling marks a major step towards the recuperation of an effort to practice philosophy in relation to a certain excess, or perhaps silence, and to think this nature as this excess. Merleau-Ponty is certainly a part of the tradition which has been fascinated by this excess at least since the reaction to Hegel motivated a thinking beyond the interiorizing power of the concept and of thought.[44] The evidence for this necessity of naming nature as the excessive ground at the root of thought is perhaps even more powerful in the case of Schelling than in

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[44] For this formulation of the reaction to Hegel, see David Farrell Krell, *The Tragic Absolute,* and Dennis Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks* for historical overviews and analyses, as well as Derrida's "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism Without Reserve," in *Writing and Difference.* The work of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Bataille, Derrida, and Sartre all work out of and against what they see as a Hegelian domination of *der Begriff,* the Concept, or of Reason, as the highest work and necessity of *Geist.* As Jason Wirth puts it in *The Conspiracy of Life,* "Hegel had decided to favor the moment of speech and hence was not silent enough about silence." But, as Wirth continues, the opposite pole would be a stubborn refusal to speak at all, a muteness before stubborn facticity (15).

Merleau-Ponty, so the experience of Schelling in this regard should provide an

illuminating and forceful parallel for the present claim concerning nature in Merleau-

Ponty.[45] Specifically, Chapter V will try to show that, running throughout and

underneath Schelling's beginning of thought in nature is a sort of crypto-thought of *place*,

which functions both in a concrete sense, and in a sense like the *chora* of Plato's

Timaeus, as the place which is required for any beginning. This reading will make use of

certain passages in Schelling's dialogue *Clara* by focusing their suggestions on the birth-

scene of the *Freedom* essay in order to show this place/*chora* at work.

Running through each of these interrelated issues is a reticent silence.

Throughout there is the peculiar demand that silence be heeded, brought to word,

maintained as silence, and finally, discussed in philosophy. As already stated, the present

work will not seek to address silence directly, from the beginning to the end. But each

chapter will end up pointing toward the necessity of thinking silence, as the opposite of

speech and as the form of excessive nature, as that which comes to word. Chapter II will

show that the practice of philosophy requires a "reconversion" between silence and

speech, a bringing the silence of the sensible to language. Chapter III will show how

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[45] Two pieces in the secondary literature come close to this sort of parallel between Merleau-Ponty and Schelling. One is Antje Kapust's "The So-Called 'Barbarian Basis of Nature' and its Secret Λογος,", which makes the claim that Merleau-Ponty's reading of science in the *Nature* lectures moves beyond a Schellingian equivocation between nature as the *Ungrund* that supports thought and nature as that whose whole meaning is exhausted by thought, because Merleau-Ponty tries to explain the secret *logos* of nature. My claim is rather that it is precisely this unresolved equivocation, or ambiguity between nature and thought, that drives both of their philosophies and that maintains the tension that I wish to bridge through the theme of silence. The other is Marcio Suzuki's "Le double enigma du monde: Nature et langage chez Schelling et Merleau-Ponty," which describes the doubling of nature as both creator and created, as effect and as ground, as a mirror of the doubling of language as active, creative language and as passive, received, sedimented language. Suzuki finds both of these doublings in Schelling and Merleau-Ponty.

Proust accomplishes this reconversion both by writing phenomenologically, and by making a claim for the necessity of a passage through obscurity, darkness, and silence before the flowering of language can occur. Chapters IV and V will show, by applying the findings and methods of *The Visible and the Invisible* to the thought of nature and by learning from Schelling, that the obscurity or excess in question at the root of Merleau-Ponty's thought should be named as nature. In terms of the relation between nature and language, the form of this excess may be thought through the figure of silence. A silence in nature, more precisely, a lack of speech, is both the soil of language, that from which is springs, and the *matter* which it is always trying to express. The essential task in Merleau-Ponty, Proust, and Schelling, is thinking and enacting the being of language in a way that does not cover over or forget the obscure silence form which it springs, but which, in a higher form of reflection, *remembers* the silence of nature in the speech of human beings.

For Schelling, the necessity of silence, and the way to think the excess of language, leads back, beyond the Greek beginnings of philosophy to Greek myth. The obscure origin and multiple repetitions of mythic tales maintained a silence at the heart of meaning, while the Gods figured as the otherwise impossible combination of the excess of nature and human language. What are we to make of Schelling's insistence on the necessity of mythic telling for matters of philosophy? Is there anything in the divine-nature-human-language structure of mythic existence, to the extent that we can surmise anything of such an existence today, that might show something of the between of nature and language?

Chapter VI will show that this ambiguity and withheld silence that is still sought, and sometimes found, in literature and art, as Merleau-Ponty explains it, and in the practice of philosophy that Merleau-Ponty elaborates, is the heritage of myth. Thus the present work concludes with an attempt to show how, along the lines of the interpretation of Merleau-Ponty so far established, philosophical practice, like literature and art, can be thought as a link in the strange togetherness of human language and silent, excessive nature, a strange togetherness that has defined the situation of Western thought since the mythic time of the Greeks.

CHAPTER II

THE PRACTICE OF PHILOSOPHY

Roberto Calasso, in *Literature and the Gods,* digs up a fascinating comment made

by Antonin Artaud on Lautrèamont: "he couldn't write a simple letter without feeling the

epileptic shudder of the word."[1] I am not interested in Artaud, Lautrèamont, or epilepsy,

but in the image of an uncontrollable shudder, a spasm that could be fatal, on one hand,

or that one might pass through and come out almost the same on the other end. It seems

to recall an experience of speech that is at once dangerous, excessive, but at the same

time quotidian, insofar as language is part and parcel of our everyday reality, of writing a

simple letter, for example. What I wish to interrogate in this chapter is Merleau-Ponty's

focus on this radical strangeness in language that runs right alongside, or underneath, its

everydayness. It is this strange and difficult upsurge, which so often fails, which does not

always do what the phenomena seem to ask, that what I wish to situate as the

fundamental undergoing of language in its relationship to nature and to silence, an

undergoing which, as Merleau-Ponty begins to show, is at the center of philosophical

practice.

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[1] Calasso, Roberto, *Literature and the Gods,* 92. Artaud, Antonin, "Lettre sur Lautréamont," *Suppôts et supplications,* in *Oeuvres complets,* XIV/7, 32.

This chapter will organize its inquiry with an attempt to organize the results of Merleau-Ponty's most sustained interrogations of language in his later work. It will begin by making clear how Merleau-Ponty's reflections on language have nothing to do with what he calls the "positivism" of language, which thinks language only ontically, as a region of being whose functions might be mapped and charted. Next, it will take up the question of "indirect language," but only with the result that the concept of indirect language remains unclear in Merleau-Ponty's work. The chapter then turns to the point in *The Visible and the Invisible* just *before* language becomes that book's chief concern: the discussion of Sartre and dialectic. An extensive interrogation of dialectic and what Merleau-Ponty calls "hyper-dialectic" lays the groundwork for the turn to language and to the creative work in the last chapter of *The Visible and the Invisible*. This interrogation also necessitates a confrontation with Hegel, and a treatment of the sense of philosophy as movement and as the interrogation of a being which is already philosophical, which Merleau-Ponty claims that we learn from Hegel. The goal of this chapter is to explore the sense of language which Merleau-Ponty opens in his late work, and to take seriously the visions for the practice of philosophy which come out of that sense of language.

"He couldn't write a letter without feeling the epileptic shudder of the word." As much could be said of Merleau-Ponty, as well as of Heidegger and most of the post-Heideggerean, post-Nietzschean tradition in French thought, of Derrida, Blanchot, and Lacoue-Labarthe, for example, although the focus and form of this shudder, and where it

strikes the event of language, would differ for each. An "epileptic" shudder is only a rough image for whatever runs throughout this undergoing of language, but an apt image nonetheless. Throughout this tradition, language is something much more than a means of the transmission of thought, a sort of unproblematic translation. Its stakes are high, yet it is also utterly normal, for we speak and listen everyday. Like epilepsy, which strikes the epileptic suddenly and with unforeseeable consequences, the realization of the power and consequences of language provokes a sort of incapacity, an failure to describe and understand this strangeness, or to work it into the familiar categories of philosophy.

"The epileptic shudder of the word" would name, in Merleau-Ponty at least, the birth of language in every attempt at creative speech, the event of crossover from silence to language and back again, which sometimes resonates in literature and philosophy. It is both the recognition of this shudder and the response to it, or more precisely, the attempt to *think* it, that motivates language as a theme in Merleau-Ponty. Artaud's phrase is again apropos here because the silence beneath the word is a matter of *darkness*, a sense of something great, unimaginable, and perhaps frightening, a matter to make one shudder. Thus the silence beneath language is not just the lack of sound, but something abyssal. Something dark. This alone is reason enough that Merleau-Ponty, especially when he is coming close to describing this passage between silence and language, becomes quite hard to read, as if something very difficult is going on which succeeds only indirectly.

The question of language in Merleau-Ponty's later work is always entwined with the question of the practice of philosophy; indeed the question is precisely how philosophy is to be practiced, or is to conceive of itself as a practice, in the space between

silence and language, the space of an epileptic shudder. That the two questions, of language and of the practice of philosophy, should revolve around each other is not surprising, even before all considerations of shuddering and abysses. Philosophy is made of nothing more than words; it is perhaps even exemplary among human pursuits for the extent to which its substance and product remain a matter of words, words, always more words, and, directly at least, nothing *more* than words. The reverberations of the shudder of the word, and, historically speaking, the reverberations of philosophy's attention to this shudder, should make the *practice* of philosophy reverberate as well. The character of our undergoing of language, its strangeness, difficulty, or its ease and grace, once we attend to it, should inform our conception of philosophy and the manner in which we practice philosophy. That is part of the reason why Merleau-Ponty turns his attention to philosophy as practice and to the form of this practice, why he is no longer content to simply modify and continue the project of Husserl, for example, or to continue in the same vein as a contemporary such as Sartre. Philosophy as a practice must be rethought in light of the shuddering of language.

The failure of much of what goes by the name of philosophy to think its own substance and product, to meditate on language in a manner that would be true to the our undergoing of the event of language, the "decadence of express philosophy, and the philosophic character of art, of literature, etc" (*NC* 39) becomes, for Merleau-Ponty, a motivation to think both language and the practice of philosophy itself differently.[2] What

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[2] On Merleau-Ponty's attempt to re-think philosophy along the lines of literature, see Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, "'That which has no name in philosophy': Merleau-Ponty and the language of literature," which concentrates on the ethical ramifications of philosophy as literary expression, as well as Robert J.

philosophy is and must be has to emerge from a meditation on language, and conversely, can shed light on a thought of language that is by no means clearly established. It would seem that the practice of philosophy, and its character as a *practice,* should take their cue from a thinking of the place of language in relation to nature, from the character of the event of speech as a shudder, a trembling. The goal of the present chapter is to lay out, and attempt to take seriously, the outlines of the undergoing of language and the practice of philosophy as they are thought late in Merleau-Ponty's career.

It is simple enough to say that philosophy depends on language. But what can be said about philosophy, based on our own undergoing of language, based on a sort of phenomenology of language, a second order *logos* of the *logos* of *phainomena*? First, it must be clear that the dependence of philosophy on language is not completely grasped through a positivistic explanation, one that would determine the possibilities of philosophy through an empirical study of language. This is perhaps the simplest and easiest error in thinking the importance of language in the task of philosophy, an error that Merleau-Ponty calls "the positivism of language." It is quickly dismissed over the space of a few paragraphs in Chapter II of *The Visible and the Invisible.* In elaborating the importance of *some kind of* thought of language for the practice of philosophy, one would do well to get the positivism of language out of the way as summarily as Merleau-Ponty does.

Morrison's "Merleau-Ponty and Literary Language," which is concerned with parallels in style and substance between Merleau-Ponty and various nineteenth and twentieth century novelists and poets.

The positivism of language is the empirical study of the function and rules of words and speech. "The question concerning the meaning of the world's being is so little solvable by a definition of words – which would be drawn from the study of language, its powers, and the effective conditions for its functioning – that on the contrary it reappears within the study of language, which is but a particular form of it" (*VI* 129/96). This objection to a positivistic approach is essentially Heideggerean; it sees the unanswered, and even unaddressed, question of Being reverberating within ontic questions, those which would purport to elaborate the world of beings, in this case, the function of language conceived ontically.[3] The problem, as Merleau-Ponty explains, is even a relatively simple matter of Saussurean linguistics: a positivistic definition and outline of language would require clear and unequivocal significations for words like "world" and "thing," which in fact take their force from a "halo of signification" which makes "the meaning of the word itself into an enigma" (*VI* 130/96).[4] It is this halo, this working with powerful words like *language, thought, reflection, nature, the sensible, the visible* in a manner that allows them to live through the enigma of this halo, that allows, and perhaps even compels, Merleau-Ponty to move between these words without always demarcating the meaning of one from another in a clear manner which we might follow. Such a demarcation, though it might make things seem more clear by making them appear more

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[3] The "Introduction" to *Being and Time* is a good explanation of this method, as a well as *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, sects. 3-5, a lecture course which begins with the simple and brazen claim, "We assert now that *being is the proper and sole theme of philosophy*" (11).

[4] This brief argument recalls the much longer "exchange" between Derrida and John Searle published as *Limited Inc,* in which Derrida tries to show that words such as "meaning," "speech-act," "signification," which Searle's effort to rigorously establish the rules of speech-acts requires to be clear and univocal, are in fact multiple and essentially out-of-control.

controlled, could work to push us back toward the ontic function of words, the sense that these words refer to a more or less clearly defined region of a being which we essentially understand. It is this that, in the case of language, Merleau-Ponty explicitly and repeatedly warns against.[5]

Thus one should not be misled by the still vague sense that the thought of language holds the special key to philosophy: it is not a simple matter of explaining the function of language in order to set forth the rules, limits, and requirements of philosophy, and not a simple matter of laying down the laws of language so that its connection to nature, which would also be clearly understood, could be mapped. As it is put more simply in the course notes of 1959: "for philosophy, the problem of language is not a regional problem" (*NC* 123). This is so in two ways: first because it is as much coming to terms with language that will bring philosophy to a clearer knowledge of itself as it is a matter of "philosophy" approaching the problem of language to better explain it, and second, because a philosophy that would understand language as a function and understand itself as operating according to strict rules and limits according to that function has not yet grasped language as a total problem that implicates all of philosophy.

Despite the statement that language is not a regional problem, but *the* problem, a problem implicated in all other problems, one will not find a work or passage where a

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[5] But which, as discussed in Chapter I above, should not raise the anti-philosophical specter of a undemarcated and undisciplined mish-mash of meaningless words. At this point, the problem Merleau-Ponty is raising is essentially structural: if a positivistic study of language requires perfectly reliable and clear definitions, this system is unattainable if the perfection of these definitions is unattainable. That does not, however, mean that we do not attempt definitions, demarcations, and distinctions, or that any of this is not helpful or worthwhile or even essential to the work of philosophy.

definitive Merleau-Pontian philosophy of language is laid out, outlined, or even clearly proposed. This is not to say that Merleau-Ponty did not write at length about language, or that the phenomenon of language is not the explicit concern of multiple books and essays and an implicit or major concern everywhere. Nevertheless, there is no final result of all this, no last word, no "philosophy of language." In a sense, this is as it should be, if language is not to be taken as an ontic object to be explained by a philosophical view from above. Instead of this, one finds suggestions, often at the ends of chapters in *The Visible and the Invisible,* and in enigmatic working notes, of how language might be thought. The closest thing to a direct and thorough treatment of language as a subject might be the essay "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,"[6] yet its results, in terms of the being and force of language, are vague and fleeting, a bare beginning to what will be fleshed out much more in *The Visible and the Invisible.*

"Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence" begins, literally on the first line, with Saussure: "What we have learned from Saussure is that, taken singly, signs do not signify anything, and that each one of them does not so much express a meaning as mark a divergence of meaning from other signs" (*S* 4/39). The import of this lesson from Saussure is the same for painting as it is for language, and makes up the essay's conclusion about language and silence: like painting, "all language is indirect or allusive – that is, if you wish, silence" (*S* 54/43). The essay speaks of a "second-order language," hidden in everyday language, "in which signs once again lead the vague life of colors" (*S*

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[6] As well as the unpublished text *The Prose of the World.* Much of this work is a long chapter, "Indirect Language," which presents this phenomenon in a similar manner to the published essay. Another chapter is a long reflection on Saussure, and two chapters arguing against ontic explanations of language.

56-57/45). Although Merleau-Ponty doesn't mention it here, this is certainly reminiscent of the "original, creative language" of *Phenomenology of Perception,* where new meanings occur, as opposed to everyday language, which is a repetition of worn out meaning (*PhP* 214/184). The language that leads the life of colors is Saussurean, and to understand language, one must hear the unspoken concatenations that hover around what is said, must listen to a sort of silence (*S* 58/46). This unspoken halo is silent, but it is an active silence, indeed a very loud silence. The work of the writer is like that of the painter (*S* 56/45), in that it evokes and lives from "our sheer power of expressing," and questions "how we can be grafted to the universal by what which is most our own" (65/52). The painter grafts himself and the art lover to the universality of vision, to the constant birth of a sensuous world. But to what universal, and to what that is most our own, are we grafted by the writer, by the work of language? Is the reconversion of silence and speech indeed a sort of grafting to the universal, a movement between individual speech, perhaps what is most our own, and anonymous silence? The essay leaves this unclear.

Without detracting from "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence" as an overall work, and as a key work for Merleau-Ponty's theory of painting, it must be said that it does not take the matter of language and silence much farther than what is stated in the title. Language evokes indirectly what otherwise must stay silent; language is a sort of silence, or works by silence; in that it is like painting, which is obviously "silent." But how, why, with what implications for philosophy's future and practice?

Merleau-Ponty makes much the same brief and open claim in the course summary of 1959: philosophy must seek an indirect method to express being, because it is impossible, or inappropriate, to say being itself. Is this simply a case of refusing to speak directly of some matter about which we have a clear idea, because the idea is bound to be inadequate, or in this case, intellectually taboo? Not exactly. In indirect language, one does not know what would be said if it could be said directly. Whatever is direct is misleading, and direct speech is here sometimes impossible. It is not perfectly clear here what "direct" means; it seems close to "propositional," or even "declarative," and it is at least clear that Merleau-Ponty is suggesting the impossibility or inappropriateness of a form of ontological speech that would declare, "Being is X." But how else, really, do we ever speak?

All this is simply to say that "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence" is no more, and perhaps less, of a thorough-going interrogation of the question of language and silence than *The Visible and the Invisible* or any of the course notes, even though it has "language" in the title.

Much as that essay speaks of language and art as "how we can be grafted to the universal by that which is most our own," a working note to *The Visible and the Invisible* describes creative language as the only sort of "adequation" that occurs in language, as an adequation that is at the same time creation: "A creation that is at the same time a reintegration of Being: for it is not creation in the sense of one of the commonplace *Gebilde* that history fabricates: it knows itself to be a *Gebilde* and wishes to surpass itself

as pure *Gebilde,* to find again its origin. It is thus a creation in a radical sense: a creation that is at the same time an adequation, the only way to obtain an adequation" (*VI* 247-248/197).

The simple thought of language as the adequation of words to things, linked to the history of "truth-as-correctness" that Heidegger revealed,[7] is already incommensurable with any kind of indirect language, where a simple adequation is clearly impossible. Yet language's creativity, and the individual work of expression, "what is most our own" as "Indirect Language" puts it, is not foreign to the things, indeed is exactly the kind of adequation they call for and the only kind available. This tension is certainly an old matter for thought, old and thoroughly worked over: philosophical language knows itself to be a creative construction, but wishes to surpass itself and to find its origin in adequation, in *saying being itself.* Yet Merleau-Ponty, even in the "re" that prefaces "integration" in the "reintegration of being," is not out to think a simple "return to the origin" of speech in being, or in silence, or in things; this would be, to use the conceptual schema of Chapter I, a kind of first sailing. Rather, the creative adventure of language will continue to be haunted by this tension, already present in the first epileptic shudder of the word, the tension of the *where* of language's origin: from the human or from the things? A few lines later, the same working note calls for "an analysis of literature in this sense: as *inscription* of being" (*VI* 249/197). The "adequation" of "creative adequation," the inscription of being in language, whether in literature, philosophy, or anywhere else,

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[7] See, for example, *The Essence of Truth,* 1-17, 85-104, and 220-229; *Parmenides,* 10-49, *Being and Time* sect. 44.

is at least a Step 3 process in our schema, the revelation of being, nature, the things, *through* language.

Surely part of the violence of the "shudder" comes from the awesome responsibility of the creative aspect of language, a responsibility only increased by the loss of pure or direct adequation as a hope and a goal, by the failure of the first sailing. It is this responsibility that helps to characterize philosophy as a task, as a work which must find a way to conceive itself and to put itself into practice.

Again, at the very beginning of *The Visible and the Invisible*: "philosophy is not a lexicon... it does not seek a verbal substitute for the world we see" (*VI* 18/4). It does not, Merleau-Ponty goes on to explain, even seek to install itself in the order of words. "It is the things themselves, from the depths of their silence, that it wishes to lead to expression" (*VI* 18/4). This, on the second page of the book, is the first definition of the practice of philosophy, and it holds throughout the text. The movement from silence to speech is the very being of philosophy. "Lead" in the French text is *conduire*, for which "to lead" is a good translation. It is also close to the English "conduct." A subtle difference should be noted from the more common English phrase "to bring to expression" – here it is perhaps more that the things themselves *come* to expression, but require guidance, or a path, a conducting, through philosophy. Philosophy will conduct the things themselves to expression.

Here there is both continuity and a subtle change from the first paragraph of the preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*: "phenomenology... is also a philosophy for which the world is always 'already there' before reflection begins – as an inalienable

presence; and all its efforts are concentrated upon re-achieving a direct and primitive

contact with the world, and endowing that contact with a philosophical status" (*PhP*

i/vii). Continuity because it is always a matter of making philosophy out of a direct

contact with the world, but change because the temporality of this contact and this

philosophy are stated differently. It is no longer a matter of *re*-establishing something

primitive and forgotten, something "already" and "before." More simply if less certainly,

it is now only to "bring the things themselves to expression." Perhaps for the first time,

or more likely, perhaps, again, in a sort of eternal repetition. Philosophy, as we have

seen, is not to be an act of proper adequation, but a creative event which brings to word

and enacts the strange proximity-distance between individual and universal already

spoken of, if we can take "individual" as each person's capacity for and immersion in

language, and "universal" as nature or the sensible things. Indeed, as we see in what is

one of the main themes of the chapter entitled "Interrogation and Intuition," "the

philosophical language which we seek is not to be a perfect coincidence of language and

world, a coincidence so perfect that it would be an abdication of language, a sort of quiet

contemplation" (*VI* 165/125). It is true that "language lives only from silence, everything

which we cast to the others has generated in this mute land which we do not leave" (*VI*

165/126). But it is the manner of this living from silence that must be interrogated.

"Because he has experienced within himself the need to speak, the birth of speech as

bubbling up at the bottom of his mute experience, the philosopher knows better than

anyone that what is lived is lived-spoken, that, born at this depth, language is not a mask

over Being, but – if one knows how to grasp it with all its roots and foliation – the most

valuable witness to Being, that it does not interrupt an immediation that would be perfect without it" (*VI* 165/126). What is lived is lived-spoken, not lived prior to speech and then requiring recapitulation by speech. Language is "born at this depth," a matter both rooted and foliating, and the world is already shot through with this speech. Philosophy knows this because of its own experience, because of what it has undergone, in the bubbling rise from silence to speech that all creative language undergoes. Attention to this very undergoing, then, should show, at the least, that language is not fundamentally *other* to nature, or to its silence. Rather, language comes *from* the silence of nature, "born at this "depth" of "this mute land which we never leave."

Philosophy is continually spoken of, especially in *The Visible and the Invisible,* as a matter of bringing to word the world that is already prepared for speech, but is silent at the same time. Such a philosophy would be the result of what Merleau-Ponty proposes as *sur-réflexion,* that reflection that would "take itself and the changes it introduces into the spectacle into account" (*VI* 60/38), which would have to take up the "perhaps difficult effort" using the significations of words "to express, beyond themselves, our mute contact with the things when they are still not things said" (*VI* 60/38). This effort must "plunge into the world," it must "make it say, finally, what in its silence it *means to say*" (*VI* 60/39). The hints and suggestions which sketch the outline of this new practice of philosophy, of what it will be and what it must not be, and of the thought of language on which it turns and which it must in turn try to think, are scattered throughout *The Visible and the Invisible,* and become more focused in the last chapter.

The discussion of language in *The Visible and the Invisible* begins in earnest near the end of Chapter II, a chapter which is taken up mostly with a discussion and criticism of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. From the end of Chapter II to the end of the unfinished text, language and the practice of philosophy are a constant theme on almost every page. It is worth paying some attention to this transition, from the critique of *Being and Nothingness* to the explicit consideration of language, since the move to language as an theme in the text's progression emerges from the problems which Merleau-Ponty finds in *Being and Nothingness*.

The discussion of Sartre ends on the matter of how to understand the dialectic, which in *Being and Nothingness* takes a form too rigid, almost ossified, so that the movement that is integral to it is only possible in a precise pattern that leaves out the transitions and crossings *between* Being and Nothingness. It is these transitions, and the possibility of a between-space which they require, that, to Merleau-Ponty, are closer to human life. The chapter is thus an attempt to think, or rather re-think, the very old question of dialectic, and it is this question that provides the bridge to the interrogation of language which takes up most of the rest of the unfinished text. Merleau-Ponty's reading of Sartre takes up forty pages of *The Visible and the Invisible*. The generosity in the nuance of its exposition makes its eventually very harsh judgment of *Being and Nothingness* all the more compelling. Since this is not the present subject, the following will be only the briefest of summaries in order to provide a background for the transition to language in the movement of *The Visible and the Invisible*. Thus it will necessarily

fail to communicate the richness of Sartre's text, which could easily take up forty pages or many more, in the way that Merleau-Ponty's exposition does.

In what Merleau-Ponty calls the philosophy of the negative, "One seeks being and nothingness in the pure state, one wishes to approach them as closely as possible, one aims at being itself in its plenitude and at nothing in its vacuity, one presses the confused experience until one draws the entity and the negentity out of it, one squeezes them as between pincers" (*VI* 117/86). It is precisely the "confused experience" that one thus misses in one's haste to find the purity of Being and Nothingness, a purity that, conveniently, can be isolated in clear and distinct philosophical terms whose relation can follow a rigorous logic. Yet despite this compelling logic, one misses the "confused experience" of human life: "Far from opening upon the blinding light of pure Being or of the Object, our life has, in the astronomical sense of the word, an atmosphere: it is constantly enshrouded by those mists we call the sensible world or history, the *one* of the corporeal life and the *one* of the human life, the present and the past, as well as by a pell-mell ensemble of bodies and minds, promiscuity of visages, words, actions, with, between them all, that cohesion which cannot be denied them..." (*VI* 115/84). Merleau-Ponty's choice of words, "enshrouded," "mists," "promiscuity," "cohesion," can hardly be casual. These words carry the sense of a movement that occurs somewhere *between* the ideal poles of everything Sartre means by "Being" and "Nothingness," the movement and confusion that is our life as it is lived, which never reaches the pure Being or the pure Nothingness. The sensible world and history, time, the faces of others, language, and action form an atmosphere which never reveals any "pure Being" or "pure Nothingness."

Such a thought as Sartre's in *Being and Nothingness*, which structures itself by a constant back-and-forth, a sort of dialectic no doubt, between two ideal poles, does not come from a description of human life, but from a logic too attached to its own form.

Yet the power of this dialectical movement is one that Merleau-Ponty does not underestimate; indeed he devotes almost thirty pages to a convincing and exciting reiteration of it,[8] one that is so convincing as one reads it that it is difficult to tell that all this is only the explication of a thought that ultimately fails. If dialectic, in the Sartrean sense (a descendant of a certain Hegelian sense) which Merleau-Ponty is working with here, is a matter of thinking *movement*, then the problem is to think dialectically in a way that can think the character of movement which we find in human life, confused as it is, in the border between language and the sensible.

The basic form of Merleau-Ponty's argument against Sartrean ontology and Sartrean dialectics is that it is not close to life, that the thinking, the writing, and the arguments used do not arise from, and fail to give a sense for, much less explain, the in-between spaces, the ambiguity of human being, in all the manners in which it does not conform to the sparklingly dual logic laid out by Sartre. The form of the argument against *Being and Nothingness* is thus reminiscent of the Platonic sense of dialectic outlined by Socrates in the *Republic*. The dialectical man, Socrates says, is he who

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[8] Dialectical thought in general, rooted in Hegel, was always a concern for Merleau-Ponty, and perhaps a principal focus of the changes in his thinking towards the end of his life. See Mariana Larison, "Autour du concept de nature dans le derniere Merleau-Ponty," for a reading that situates Merleau-Ponty's vision of the "good dialectic" in the context of post-war French Hegelian thought, between Kojève and Tran Duc Thau, and for a brief argument that Merleau-Ponty's explicit concern with nature as an ontological problem grew partly out of the dialectical problems of thinking the source of negativity as not only human consciousness. This analysis seems to be supported by passages in the *Nature* lectures, which speak of a "non-Parminidean being of the negative" in the nature disclosed by science.

"grasps the *logos* of the being *(ousia)* of each thing."[9] The *logos,* in this earlier dialectic, should by carried out in a way that fits with the being of each thing, with the substance *(ousia)* of the matter, [10] and not with an imposed form. The dialectic of visible and invisible will have to think the movement between visible and invisible as it occurs in human life, and it will be a matter of ambiguities, of slipping from one to the other, of being both at the same time, more so than the back and forth between *Being and Nothingness.* "The sort of being to which [the dialectic] refers, and which we have been trying to indicate, is in fact not susceptible of being designated positively. It abounds in the sensible world, but on condition that the sensible world has been divested of all that the ontologies have added to it" (*VI* 124/93). The dialectic, as a *logos* of beings, must maintain itself close to beings in order to remain itself, but "it has never been able to formulate itself into theses without denaturing itself." Yet paradoxically, philosophy has been full of theses at least since Socrates first laid down the nature of the dialectic, in the form of a thesis. Thus it becomes another task of the dialectic to be "autocritical," to become a practice of self-awareness. But, "it is also essential to it to forget this as soon as it becomes what we call *a philosophy*" (*VI* 124/92).

A philosophy of ambiguity, Merleau-Ponty tells us, can expect to lose the particular form of philosophical rigor that results in fixed terms and in clear paths between the terms. Indeed, it may even lose the name "philosophy." "The bad dialectic does not wish to lose its soul in order to save it" (*VI* 127/92). The changes required of

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[9] Plato, *Republic* 534b.

[10] See John Sallis, *Being and Logos,* Chapter 5, especially Section 5d, for a thorough reading of the "divided line" section of the *Republic.*

philosophy, apparently, are such that it must be prepared to lose its name and its soul. Or, more precisely, to remain philosophical means to abandon the pretense of laying down "a philosophy," and to save the true soul of philosophy by being prepared to abandon what seems to be most at its heart. Philosophy, as we are told in *The Prose of the World,* "begins with the awareness of a world which consumes and destroys our established significations but also renews and purifies them" (*PW* 25-26/17). Perhaps it is also at risk of consuming and destroying its own established significations, including its self-conception. In Chapter II of *The Visible and the Invisible* it becomes clear that philosophy as *sur-réflection* must also consume and destroy itself, even as it is renewed and purified.

What, then, will these changes look like, and what, at the heart of philosophy, is to be abandoned? We can say, at least, that such a philosophy will no doubt have a strange relationship with its own results and conclusions. The auto-critical *sur-réflection,* which immediately puts in question the answers to which it arrives and always seeks to go beneath itself, even at the risk of unearthing itself, of losing its soul in order to save it, will, at the very least, understand all of its thought as fundamentally *temporal.* It will have to come to grips with its own eternally provisional nature, even when it gets written down in a book, rather than becoming tricked by the apparent permanence of the written, and even spoken, word, of which *Phenomenology of Perception* warned (*PhP* 221/190).[11] Philosophy's status as a search for eternal answers has been in question forever, but the

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[11] "For speech implants the idea of truth as the presumptive limit of its effort. It loses sight of itself as a contingent fact, and takes to resting upon itself; that is, as we have seen, what provides us with the ideal of thought without words, whereas the idea of music without sounds is ridiculous."

problem, for Merleau-Ponty, is now to practice philosophy, to speak and write philosophically, in a manner informed by ambiguity and temporality.[12] Philosophy "must tell us how there is openness without the occultation of the world being excluded, how the occultation remains each instant possible though we be naturally endowed with light" (*VI* 48/28). Philosophy must think our position between darkness and light, and must practice in a manner appropriate to this position. "How the occultation remains each instant possible though we be naturally endowed with light" – *we* are here in question, the light that is the basis of vision, the *phainomenon,* the shining, in phenomenology. "Philosophy is the set of questions wherein he who questions is himself implicated by the question" (*VI* 46-47/27). As the implication of the questioner, philosophy is not just the effort to find an answer, to accumulate another bit of positive knowledge. It is better thought of as a *practice,* as in the practice of an art, a discipline, or a spiritual practice.

Hegel stands, for Merleau-Ponty and for the history of philosophy since Hegel, as a point of departure both for thinking the proximity and continual re-encroachment of philosophy and experience, *and* for the path away from this proximity into the rigidity and formalism of philosophy as a system of science. In *The Prose of the World,* Merleau-Ponty summarizes his view of the importance of Hegel in the following sentence: "In the center of his thought is the moment in which the internal becomes external, that turning or veering by which we merge with others and others in us" (*PW* 119/85), a phrase echoed in a haunting working note, "There is that line, that frontier surface at some

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[12] One result of this will be a consistently interrogative approach to the history of philosophy, as discussed in the working note of June 4, 1959: "a philosophy, like a work of art, is an object that can arouse more thoughts than are 'contained' in it... Does this lead to conclusions that are relativistic? that is, that will be overthrown by another time? No, if the philosophies in their integrality are a *question*" (*VI* 250/200).

distance before me, where occurs the veering I-Other Other-I—" (*VI* 311/263). The proximity and encroachment of the Outside, of what is excessive, whether that is the Other in some sense, or the excessive character of the absolute over thought and experience, is what Merleau-Ponty learns from Hegel.

In the 1961 course on Hegel,[13] Merleau-Ponty reads Hegel as opening the way to the philosophy that would practice the proximity of the absolute and experience[14] (*NC* 275-278). He focuses especially on the famous line from the "Introduction" to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: "From the beginning, the absolute: 'was already in and for itself close to us of its own accord' [*an und für sich schon bei uns ware*]" (*NC* 296). The "goal" of philosophy, whatever would be the product or the result of philosophical work, or perhaps whatever place or status it would finally reach, is already close to, or already present in, raw experience or brute being. The entire *Phenomenology of Spirit,* but especially its "Introduction," is especially attuned to the becoming of thought *out of* the unreflective, and thus attends carefully to the closeness of thought and the unreflective, to the seed of thought in the unreflective, and to the constant backwards-reference to prior stages in the development of thought towards the Absolute. As Merleau-Ponty sees it, in Hegel, the final resting place of thought in the system of science becomes more

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[13] English translation "Philosophy and non-philosophy since Hegel," in *Philosophy and non-Philosophy Since Merleau-Ponty,*" Hugh Silverman, ed.

[14] Merleau-Ponty tends to use the Hegelian terms "absolute" and "experience" in this course, but occasionally switches them with other doublings, all along the lines of "invisible" and "visible," without laying out precisely what is gained and lost in these terminological interchanges. I will follow Merleau-Ponty's lead in recognizing a history between the Hegelian thought of the Absolute and the Merleau-Pontian thought of the invisible, despite the very uneven matching of these terms.

predominant in his later works, so that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* comes to be seen as nothing but a preliminary, a stage to be surpassed and left behind.

What Merleau-Ponty sees as so valuable in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is an ambiguity and fragile equilibrium between reflection and the unreflective, or between thought, or language, and nature, or the invisible and the visible. On Merleau-Ponty's admittedly brief reading of Hegel in the *Notes de cours*, this ambiguity is lost farther down Hegel's path toward purely thinkable being.[15] But what we learn from the experience of Hegel, and of reading Hegel, is that the results of philosophy are not to be a clarification or a higher version of experience, but a form of experience itself. If philosophy were to mean the attaining of the absolute as system, then phenomenology would be a-philosophical: "Thus the phenomenological theme [phenomenology not just on Merleau-Pontian terms, but already on the terms of Hegel's Introduction to *Phenomenology of Spirit*] (*erscheinende Wissen*, the blossoming of knowledge) seems to imply an overthrowing of philosophy" (*NC* 304). Merleau-Ponty summarizes the importance of Hegel most succinctly as the practice of a form of philosophy, that is, phenomenology, that is a-philosophical, in the sense that it conceives of the absolute, to use Hegelian terms, not as something to attain but as "the other side of the *Ersheinung* or the phenomenon" (*NC* 304). It is the blossoming of knowledge as phenomenological movement, between the phenomenon and the invisible. Or, it is the return to nature by a

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[15] I follow Mauro Carbone's outline of these points from Merleau-Ponty's course on Hegel in his essay "Ad Limina Philosophiae," in *The Thinking of the Sensible*. Carbone also points out Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the transition precisely in paragraph 15 of Hegel's "Introduction," where the task of philosophy, which had been a form of "pure seeing," becomes erroneous, blind, and in need of the clarification of philosophy ("Ad Limina Philosophaie," 20, and *NC* 308n).

passage through language, by a passage that would reach the invisible in the visible not directly, but as a way of access to "the other side."

This leads to the question of "How the occultation remains each instant possible though we be naturally endowed with light," the demand of *The Visible and the Invisible*. Our endowment of light, the possibility of *phainomenon* and phenomenology and also the coming to word of nature through philosophical practice, whether Hegelian or Merleau-Pontian, is inextricably intertwined with occultation, with the raw unreflective, that which lies at the beginning of this movement. Hegel attempted to think the possibility, necessity, and meaning of this intertwining, and pursued this thought in the direction of, and perhaps to the limit of, the continual brightening of the light of reason until all darkness would be obscured and forgotten. We might say that this means pursuing light to the point of blindness, looking directly at the sun. The point, for Merleau-Ponty, is to think, in the manner of *sur-réflection,* the *between* of reflection and the unreflective, or of language and nature. As Mauro Carbone puts it: "The affirmation of a reversibility between unreflective life and reflective life implies that philosophical expression, traditionally conceived as a progression from the dark polymorphism of the unreflective to the conceptual consciousness of the reflective, is always doubled by a regression from conceptual consciousness toward the dark unreflective."[16]

It is this doubling that interests us here, this appearance of a regression. This doubling is the true dialectic, in the ancient sense, discussed by Socrates in the *Republic,*

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[16] "Ad Limina Philosophae," *The Thinking of the Sensible,* 27. See Chapter V below, and Marcio Suzuki, "Le double enigma du monde: Nature et langage chez Schelling et Merleau-Ponty" for a reading of this doubling in Schelling.

of the *logos for* the being, given by the human, that is the *logos of* the being itself, that which most belongs to it.[17] It is "true" as true to life, as the *logos* of the being, the being in question being the movement of philosophy. It is also the good dialectic in the Merleau-Pontian sense of the *sur-réflection* that immediately doubles back on itself to interrogate its own origins *in the dark unreflective.* This interrogation is what Merleau-Ponty calls for in the practice of philosophy.

This practice, this interrogation, could be thought simply as bringing language and silence closer to each other. Each doubling of reflective and non-reflective, the absolute and nature, the visible and the invisible must pass through silence, through a point where language bursts into bloom, or vanishes into the inexpressible. Silence is a moment in the doubling, where there is a passage out of silence and back into silence, or where silence, once left behind, returns to overtake philosophical language.

Thus the constant recurrence of the figure of silence in the end of Chapter III of *The Visible and the Invisible,* the part of the text which makes a transition between Merleau-Ponty's attempts to make a start through a critical re-working of Husserl, Sartre, and Bergson, and his move in Chapter IV toward a radically original thought.

Philosophy is "called forth by the voices of silence," (*VI* 166/127), and knows that "language lives only from silence; everything we cast to the others has germinated in this great mute land which we never leave" (*VI* 165/126). It is the life of language in this great mute land that is the point of reversal between the light and darkness. Philosophy must find its practice in this point, at the first few paragraphs of the *Phenomenology of*

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[17] Plato, *Republic* 534b; see also John Sallis, *Being and Logos,* 443.

Spirit. The necessity of remaining close to this point informs Merleau-Ponty's plan for *The Visible and the Invisible* in a working note of February, 1959. "What is at issue is to operate the reduction, that is, for me, to disclose little by little – and more and more – the 'wild' or 'vertical' world... we will close the circle after the study of logos and history as Proust closes the circle when he comes to the moment where the narrator decides to write. The end of a philosophy is the account of its beginning" (*VI* 228-229/177). The practice of phenomenology, operating the reduction, should disclose, not all at once but little by little, by cumulative effect, the silence of the wild, the vertical world. Proust's work is a work of remembrance, of coming closer to the source of his own words in the obscure depths of his life, and likewise, philosophy, and Merleau-Ponty's text, will press closer and closer to the obscure transition point of silence and speech, which should contain, in germ, the beginning of philosophy, or the possibility and necessity of philosophy, just as Proust's great work ends with the thought of its own genesis (See Chapter III below). It is the task, a Schellingian task, of "the expression of what is before expression and sustains it from behind" (*VI* 219/167). That is to say, a task of the expression of silence.

Philosophy, as such a process of uncovering what is below itself, must be "an original manner of aiming at something, as it were a *question-knowing*, which by principle no statement or 'answer' can go beyond and which perhaps therefore is the proper mode of our relationship with Being, as though it were the mute or reticent interlocutor of our questions" (*VI* 168-169/129). Thus philosophy, as a practice, must be indirect language, as in Zen practice – it must not rush forward wishing to procure direct

results, but must move along half-sideways, as if it were talking to itself, to come at what it will learn obliquely, indirectly.

Philosophy is thus the expression of silence, "the disclosure of a Being that is not posited because it has no need to be, because it is silently behind all our affirmations, negations, and even behind all formulated questions, not that it is a manner of forgetting them in its silence, but because philosophy is the reconversion of silence and speech into one another: 'It is the experience... still mute which we are concerned with leading to the pure expression of its own meaning'" (*VI* 169/129).[18] Merleau-Ponty, returning to his own beginning of sorts, here borrows from Husserl for the last line of *The Visible and the Invisible*'s Chapter III, in a formulation of the practice of phenomenology. But how to express what is silent? Should this be thought of as an impossible task?

The answer to this is no – the task, rather, is to understand the paradox by which the "reconversion of silence and speech into one another" does in fact occur. Quality, the character of phenomena, "appears opaque, inexpressible, as life inspires nothing to the man who is not a writer. Whereas the sensible is, like life, a treasury ever full of things to say for him who is a philosopher" (*VI* 300/252). This passage is from a working note entitled "The philosophy of the sensible as literature." Philosophy must understand the conversion of silence into speech, and the enrootedness of speech in silence, which appears impossible, but which occurs in creative language, and whose possibility hovers there where words will not quite come, where the phenomena rest, quivering, wanting to

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[18] The quote is from Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 77/38-39. It is also quoted in the Preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*.

become speech. Such philosophy is to be "painstaking as the work of Balzac, Proust, Valéry, or Cézanne." It is to the second of these authors that we shall turn for an example of the practice of speaking silence, and for an awareness of the necessity of traversing something obscure, some kind of silence itself, to reach the true sensible, not "in-itself," but as it presents itself already full of reflection, or full of the invisible.

CHAPTER III

PROUST

Real books should be the children not of daylight and casual talk, but of darkness and silence (*R* 2,286/III 934).

What should occur in a book? This is a central question of *À la recherche du temps perdu,* a central question of the narrator's life, a source of his anguish for most of both. It is a question that, as we shall see, is not very far from Merleau-Ponty's question of what should occur in philosophy, and this proximity is proof of the intermingling of philosophy and literature that Merleau-Ponty suggests and Proust practices.

The previous chapter, through its attempt to focus the Merleau-Pontian question of language by reference to indirect language and to the question of dialectic, ended up insisting that creative language must somehow traverse a sort of silence, must reconvert silence and speech into each other. It suggested a Merleau-Pontian vision of philosophy as the expression of silence, indeed of the silence of nature, disclosed in Step 3 of the famous second sailing of Socrates, as discussed in the schema outlined in Chapter I. Yet it remains unclear what this looks like in practice. The present chapter will turn to one of Merleau-Ponty's most frequent examples of the literary language from which philosophy must learn: Proust. Proust's use of language, as this chapter will show, not only discloses

nature and the sensible as that which carries and opens up language, thought, and memory, but constantly reflects upon this disclosure and takes it up as an explicit concern of Proust's narrator. This happens in the frequent explorations and descriptions of the sensible idea. The present chapter attends to a long passage late in Proust's *Recherche* where the narrator takes up these questions explicitly, and tries to explain how Proust's language is ultimately phenomenological. It argues that a reading of the sensible idea in Proust is the hinge of a critical turn in the final chapter of *The Visible and the Invisible*, and emphasizes, partly through a critical reading of Deleuze's work on the sensible idea in *Proust and Signs*, that the sensible idea is not to be taken as a conceptual system to be decoded and organized, despite some passages in Proust and in Merleau-Ponty which make this seem to be the case. The chapter ends with a sustained illustration of the role of silence, darkness, and forgetting in Proust's prose, which is intended to show how attention to this passage through silence is critical in thinking how sensible nature carries and motivates language.

The question of what should occur in a book is very much a question of philosophical practice, and Proust's statement quoted above, that real books come from darkness and silence, addresses the same phenomenon of the language/nature intertwining which comes out of the late Merleau-Ponty.

The question receives a resounding, clear, and even aggressively worded answer at the end of Proust's *Recherche*. The end is precisely where one would expect to find the answer, if the novel is read as a *Bildungsroman*, or as Deleuze puts it, the story of an

apprenticeship.[1] As such, it is not just an academic question, a question of the curious intellect that can find any answer it wants, and thus never confronts necessity, as does the artist, in the essential difference between intellect and art which we finally learn with Proust's narrator at the end of *Le temps retrouvé* (*R* 2,272/R III 914). It is the question of a *life*, and thus a question of the *ethos* according to which that life, even while not knowing it, has been lived. The answer comes near the end of life, and indeed makes it possible for life *to* end, gives "a joy which was like a certainty and which sufficed, without any other proof, to make me indifferent to death" (*R* 2,263/R III 900). As the end of an apprenticeship *and* as the meaning of a life, the question is also the meaning of a vocation, and of the successful merging of life and vocation. This merging comes with the realization that, despite not having had worldly success in literature up until the end of his life, the narrator finds it possible to say that "my whole life up to the present day might and yet might not have been summed up under the title: A Vocation." (*R* 2,288/R III 936).

Thus the stakes, for Proust, are high. As the fluttering vision on the steps at the entrance to the Guermantes' party seems to say, at the end of the book where the answers to these questions come, "'Seize me as I pass if you have the power, and try to solve the riddle of happiness which I set you.'" (*R* 2,263/R III 899). The stakes are thus the living of a happy life, the complete good of ethics, as Aristotle tells us, the only good that is pursued for itself, and not for the sake of some other, higher good.[2]

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[1] Deleuze, Gilles, *Proust and Signs*, 3

[2] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095a 17-20, 1097a 28 – 1098a 7.

The stakes are also high for Merleau-Ponty. We shall first have to make clear these stakes by showing precisely how the insights of Proust, cited so frequently but rarely discussed at length, figure into the thought of language and silence in Merleau-Ponty, the way in which Merleau-Ponty interprets Proust explicitly and works from these interpretations into his own thoughts. But beyond this, a reading of the insights of Proust's narrator about the task of a book and the *ethos* of his life will reveal the argument that both may be understood as a sort of Merleau-Pontian phenomenology themselves, and thus are a sort of example of the kind of language which Merleau-Ponty is addressing, which I have tried to lay out in the previous chapter. Proust writes phenomenologically: he describes the appearing and shining forth of the world, at once as *what* appears and as the *appearing* itself, as its form and manner, as its character. Proust offers a sort of *ethos* of the conversion of *attention* into language, and of the reconversion of silence and speech into one another. What Deleuze calls Proust's "apprenticeship," the life (and 3,000 page) long process by which the narrator comes to aesthetic and ethical terms with his life as a "man of letters," or less specifically, as a thoughtful and sensitive human being, is the enrichment of life through attentive speech, which is very close to a broad conception of phenomenology.

This coming to terms is most precisely focused near the very end of Proust's *Recherche*, when the narrator, separated by years from most of the events of the book and disillusioned by his failures as a writer, undergoes the final event of involuntary memory[3]

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[3] "Involuntary memory" is the process, repeated throughout the *Recherche* (5-11 times, depending on importance, according to Samuel Beckett's *Proust*, p. 23), through which some everyday and innocuous event of perception, a madeleine dipped in tea, a hawthorne hedge, the steeples of churches, the feel of a flagstone beneath the narrator's feet, provokes an overwhelming upsurge of images, memory, and feeling,

that motivates a sudden barrage of insights into life, experience, and most importantly, writing. The narrator realizes that his own task, what Proust himself so clearly excels at, is to bring his life to word, to practice the passage between thing and word.[4]

It could be argued that the final chapter of *The Visible and the Invisible* is the crux, hinge, and highest elaboration of Merleau-Ponty's thought.[5] I have also made the suggestion that the chapter turns on Proust, and specifically on what Merleau-Ponty calls the "sensible idea," with the example of the little musical phrase of the composer Vinteuil which plays a major role in *Swann's Way*, and reappears from time to time throughout the rest of the *Recherche*. Thus an explicit, if brief and limited, interpretation of Proust lies at the very center of Merleau-Ponty.[6] It will be the task of this chapter to show how

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and drive large sections of text and major events in the narrator's life. Part of Proust's task, as he realizes it in *Le temps retrouvé,* is the expression in prose of these memories, their effects upon his life, and the mysterious transition from sensual perception to idea which occurs in these flashes.

[4] Gary Madison, in *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty,* makes much of this reflective turn in Proust, or as he calls it this "book of a book." As Madison puts it, "In addition to being the search for a covered over, hidden logos, Proust's work is itself the *reflective consciousness* of this search. Its theme is not only life but its author's reflection on life" (135). In a brief account of Proust (pp. 127-137), part of a larger section devoted to language in Merleau-Ponty, Madison shows how Proust's book both brings the shining appearance of the world to language, and at the same time reflects on this very process. It is this "transcendental" level of reflection in Proust which Madison uses to "bring out what for Merleau-Ponty is the essence of the expressive act" (128).

[5] It will perhaps be said, and probably should be said, that picking out a particular work as the highest point of someone's career is a questionable and potentially distracting rhetorical practice. This can be true, perhaps most importantly because it can diminish the importance of reading any other aspect of that author's work. For example, the commentaries on Merleau-Ponty which have been most important for the present work have *not* drawn as much from the final chapter of *The Visible and the Invisible* as from various other sources, primarily the Collège de France course notes. Nevertheless, when it is the case that the depth of thought and the illumination of the obscure matter to be thought shines most brightly in one place, it behooves us to turn our attention to that place, notwithstanding the possibility that even greater results *could*, hypothetically, just as easily come from somewhere else if we had chosen to look there instead.

[6] Proust figures prominently in the 1959-1961 Collège de France lectures as well, again mostly in discussions of the sensible idea. I do not see his treatment there taking such a prominent place in the course of the lecture as it does in the argument of *The Visible and the Invisible,* where it provides a key turn, and perhaps we cannot expect a series of lecture notes to have the same sense of overall structure and progress

Proust not only provides an example of, but reflects on and examines, how a passage through silence, darkness, and forgetting is necessary for writing the silent speech of the things, for effecting in art the transition from nature to language in a manner which remembers and re-inscribes the silence of nature in its very presentation. Proust's writing relies on the carrying of meaning by the silence of the things; this is the experience of the sensible idea and of involuntary memory. In the context of a novel, Proust gives, in effect, a phenomenological description of these processes.

Proust shows how language itself is *recherche,* as Proust's narrator comes to understand *recherche* as the task of art of *traversing a depth to the silence of phenomena.* Just as the past brings life and joy to the present in the involuntary memory that moves the novel, but that can only be shown by the traversal of a certain depth in time, in memory, and in language, the things come to life in speech as phenomenology. The range of the French word *recherche* is thus more apropos than the likely English translations "remembrance," "research," or "in search of," since it combines the passivity and obscurity of remembrance with the determination of a quest and the rigor of a scientific research. The past comes back *to* Proust, but the things come to word *in* Proust, and it is in this manner that Proust stands as an exemplar for the thinking of language and silence in Merleau-Ponty.

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that even an unfinished book might have. The treatment of Proust in the lectures comes in the context of the course on literature as contemporary philosophy, and it appears in the lectures that the sensible idea is Proust's main contribution. See *NC* 49-50, 191-198.

The last chapter of *The Visible and the Invisible,* at the center of which lies the reading of Proust, takes the following structure. The first ten pages or so are a beginning, a phenomenology of the sensible that will "form our first concepts in such a way as to avoid the classical impasses" (*VI* 178/137). As always in Merleau-Ponty, the grounding and launching of thought returns to the simple question, the demand, "yes or no: do we have a body – that is, not a permanent object of thought, but a flesh that suffers when it is wounded, hands that touch?" (*VI* 178/137). The description of the life of this flesh is the starting point for all the philosophy that will follow. The ten introductory pages here elaborate the character of sensible life, the synaesthesia that characterizes it and that opens the boundaries of sensibility outside the limits of the body, and finally reach the suggestion of a "flesh" of things. In this lyrical series of pages, Merleau-Ponty, just like Proust (only the effort is more obvious in Merleau-Ponty, because he is trying to come closer in words to the bottom of the depths, to stare more directly, at what Proust evoked more casually and perhaps with greater skill, but more obliquely and at leisure, for thousands of pages), is engaged in an *effort* of language, an exertion, to let sensibility become word. One can feel the struggle in Merleau-Ponty's prose, the visceral difficulty in finding words for an elusivity gliding below every sensual moment of our life.

Yet it quickly becomes clear that this is a re-working of thoughts already begun at least as far back as *Phenomenology of Perception,*[7] a description of the movement between sensible and sentient in perception, and that the novelty of the chapter will come with the turn to the invisible, about ten pages in, around the following phrase: "And

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[7] For example, *PhP* 246-248/212-214.

henceforth movement, touch, vision, applying themselves to the other and to themselves, climb back toward their source and, in the patient and silent labor of desire, begin the paradox of expression" (*VI* 187/144).

The movement into the thinking of the invisible, and its emergence in and lining of the visible, is not a clear break in the text, but a slow spiraling closer toward "that central vision that joins the scattered visions, that unique touch that governs the whole tactile life of my body as a unit, that *I think* that must be able to accompany all our experiences" (*VI* 189/145). Over the next few pages, it becomes necessary to think the bond and transition between different moments of experience, between perceptions, the "clear zones, clearings, about which there pivot opaque zones" (*VI* 192/148). Husserl's thought of the exterior and interior horizon of things, "that darkness stuffed with visibility of which their surface is but the limit" (*VI* 193/148) is the image that brings us to "a new type of being, a being by porosity, pregnancy," one that could include the "fold" of the visible which is seeing.

It is here that we arrive at what Merleau-Ponty calls the most difficult point, "the bond between the flesh and the idea, between the visible and the interior armature which it manifests and which it conceals," indeed the point that gives *The Visible and the Invisible* its title. And it is here that Proust comes in.

"No one has gone further than Proust in the fixation of the relations between the visible and the invisible, in the description of an idea that is not the contrary of the sensible, that is its lining and its depth" (*VI* 193/149). The explicit discussion of Proust which follows concerns primarily the thought, which Proust continually returns to, of the

sensible idea, that which is communicated in art and literature, and which lives in a peculiar and necessary relation to the sensible.[8] The best example is always the first one in which it occurs in Proust's novel, that musical phrase of the composer Vinteuil which Swann hears when he is pursuing Odette in the Verdurins' salon, and which captures Swann's whole love for her in a manner which he could never put into words, and which he never evens *grasps* in any way, since he is continually and thoroughly deluded about his love for Odette, which is only jealousy for his rivals and turns to nothing when they are finally together for life. Years later, having heard Swann try to speak of the power of the little phrase and not finding much of note when he himself has heard it played, the narrator finally hears it again, and grasps the structure of the sensible idea which had enabled the little phrase to speak a world for Swann.

Here is Merleau-Ponty's reading, which provides such a key bridge in the structure of *The Visible and the Invisible,* quoted at length:

> Literature, music, the passions, but also the experience of the visible world are, no less than is the science of Lavoissier and Ampère, the exploration of an invisible and, also as much as them, the disclosure of a universe of ideas. Simply, this invisible, these ideas, unlike theirs, do not let themselves be detached from the sensible appearance and be erected into a second positivity. The musical idea, the literary idea, the dialectic of love, and also the articulations of the light, the modes of exhibition of sound and of touch speak to us, have their logic, their coherence, their points of intersection, their concordances, and here also the appearances are the disguise of unknown 'forces' and 'laws.' But it is as though the secrecy wherein they lie and whence the literary expression draws them were their proper mode of existence. For these truths are not only hidden like the physical reality which we will not have been able to discover, invisible in fact but which we will one day be able to see face to face, which others, better situated,

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[8] See Luco Vanzago, "Presenting the Unpresentable: the Metaphor in Merleau-Ponty's Last Writings," especially page 10, for a discussion that ties the sensible idea to Merleau-Ponty's practice of metaphor. Vanzago sees, aside from the traditional, Aristotelian concept of metaphor which understands it is *re-*presenting something that could be presented non-metaphorically and straightforwardly, a Merleau-Pontian concept of metaphor which presents the non-presentable in the manner of the sensible idea, as the only way it *can* be expressed.

could already see, provided that the screen that masks it is lifted. Here, on the contrary, there is no vision without the screen: the ideas we are speaking of would not be better known to us if we had no body and no sensibility, it is then that they would be inaccessible to us; the 'little phrase,' the notion of the light, are not exhausted by their manifestations, any more than is 'an idea of the intelligence'; they could not be given to us as ideas *except* in a carnal experience. It is not only that we would find in that carnal experience the *occasion* to think them; it is that they owe their authority, their fascinating, indestructible power, precisely to the fact that they are in transparency behind the sensible, or in its heart (*VI* 194/150).

This passage introduces what, again, is to be the most difficult point, "the bond between the flesh and the idea," towards the thought of which no one has gone further than Proust. In the first ten pages of the chapter, which serve as a beginning, it would seem as if the sensible and the flesh, so laboriously described, were mute. Merleau-Ponty's prose here is like watching a silent movie, where the life on the screen is so obviously filled with speech that its silence can only be experienced as a lack, as an eerie quiet. But the transition into speech which then occurs is hard to think in a manner that does it justice. Just how it is that "literature, music, the passions, but also the experience of the visible world are the exploration of an invisible and the disclosure of a universe of ideas" remains obscure, and must be thought through and described. The gift of Proust is that he succeeds in describing this transition, and describes it over and over again, most explicitly in the "little phrase," but also in the taste of the madeleine that reminds him of Combray, or in the texture of the flagstones and his own movement over them that, at the resolution of the novel which it will soon be our task to investigate, captures the essence and meaning of the narrator's life.

Merleau-Ponty again describes this work in a long passage in *The Prose of the World*,[9] in the chapter dealing with "indirect language": "Given an experience, which may be banal but for the writer captures a particular savor of life, given, in addition, words, forms phrasing, syntax, even literary genres, modes of narrative that, through custom, are already endowed with a common meaning – the writer's task is to choose, assemble, wield, and torment these instruments in such a way that they induce the same sentiment of life that dwells in the writer at every moment (*PW* 67/48)." Proust not only accomplishes this work, as many writers do, but understands his own work in precisely this way, structures his masterpiece expressly around it all the way to the title, and, finally, provides an analysis of how and why this work occurs and what it has meant for the conduct of his life.

If the transition between the flesh and the idea, between the sensible and language, remains difficult and obscure, the *point* of the transition is clear. "The musical idea, the literary idea, the dialectic of love, all have their logic, their coherence," but this "cannot be detached from the sensible appearances and erected into a second positivity." The comparison here is to the ideal laws of science, which, once proven and articulated in speech, do, or so the theory goes, manifest such a second positivity, a solid and clear structure of thought which fits perfectly, or almost perfectly, to the visible world, but which can be detached as if it rested in itself.[10] The sensible idea cannot be detached

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[9] For a thorough summary of *The Prose of the World,* see David Michael Levin's "Language, Thought, and Truth in the Works of Merleau-Ponty (1949-1953)."

[10] This conception is, of course, too simple and full of problems: we would have to look at least as far back as the many conflicts in Kant's first Critique, or perhaps to Plato, to wonder about the perfect fit of ideal laws to the empirical world. But the point, for Merleau-Ponty here and for us, is that the sensible idea *does*

from its sensible appearance: while Swann can dissect the experience of the little phrase into the notes that make it up, which are "convenient for the understanding" as Proust puts it, he then no longer has the little phrase itself; its meaning, its existence as sensible idea, has disappeared. As Merleau-Ponty says, these ideas "could not be given to us as ideas except in a carnal experience," and "it is not that we would find in that experience the *occasion* to think them; it is that they owe their authority, their fascinating, indestructible power, precisely to the fact that they are in transparency behind the sensible, or in its heart" (*VI* 194/150).

Somewhere in the in-between of flesh and language floats the sensible idea, a dimension "in terms of which every other experience will henceforth be situated," not invisible because it is hidden behind something else, or because it has nothing to do with the visible, but "the invisible *of* this world, that which inhabits it, sustains it" (*VI* 197/151). This thought, of the invisible that inhabits the sensible, makes possible the transition to a discussion of language, the discussion on which the published text of *The Visible and the Invisible* abruptly ends, a discussion which, to be sure, is barely a suggestion. Once the thought of the invisible at the heart of the visible, the sensible idea which animates the meaning of sensible life, has been introduced, indeed has come to thought by a sort of necessity, both in Merleau-Ponty's text and in Proust, it becomes *the* task for thinking. "Once we have entered into this strange domain, one does not see how there could be any question of *leaving* it" (*VI* 197/152), and indeed the rest of the chapter

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not claim to be detachable from its sensible manifestation, as does the scientific idea, for better or for worse.

becomes an interrogation of language, but one that barely begins, and one that leaves much more to be thought.

Though Proust provides the thought for a key turn in *The Visible and the Invisible,* the reading of Proust here is extremely brief, only a page, and focused on the matter of the sensible idea, or the possibility of a sort of *logos* carried by the sensible. Given that the explication of Proust and the sensible idea is so brief and so obviously experimental, it remains quite open how we are to take it. Is the import of Proust for the late Merleau-Ponty restricted to the insight of the sensible idea, which is the only matter that Merleau-Ponty discussed, or is a further reading of Proust possible, a reading which would carry the interpretation of Merleau-Ponty farther? Is the sensible idea to be taken as a call to a sort of rigorous science, a sort of organization and categorization of the ideas, as when Proust's narrator says "To this contemplation of the essence of things I had decided therefore that in future I must attach myself, so as somehow to immobilize it" (*R* 2269/R III 909)?

This is the reading given by Deleuze in *Proust and Signs.* At first glance it has much in common with Merleau-Ponty's reading, when the latter follows Proust in saying that literature and the musical and sensible idea "have their logic, their coherence, their points of intersection, their concordances, and here also the appearances are the disguise of unknown 'forces' and 'laws'" (*VI* 194/149). It would seem to be necessary, and it would seem that Proust took it upon himself, to "immobilize" these "forces" and "laws" in order to understand them. It would seem to be insufficient to just grasp them fleetingly before they slip away. Proust's whole effort is between this insufficiency and this task of

immobilization: the narrator grasps the sensible ideas as they slip away throughout his whole life, indeed he says that this is "the only genuine and fecund pleasure I had known" (*R* 2269/*R* III 909), and finally sees that his task as a writer, his task of language, is to put these sensible ideas to word. This, as Deleuze sees it, is the peculiarity of the artist, who is the only one able to put the sensible ideas to word, so much so that "there is no intersubjectivity except an artistic one"[11] because the artist founds communication as it lives from the sensible ideas.

It is probably the case, as Mauro Carbone observes, that Merleau-Ponty tends to emphasize the continuity between the sensible and art while Deleuze tends to emphasize the discontinuity,[12] which is why Deleuze focuses on the difficult task of immobilizing the sensible ideas in language – such an immobilization, for Deleuze, is unlikely and rare, if also absolutely necessary. Yet the manner of their "immobilization" is obscure. We should take caution from the fact that Merleau-Ponty puts 'forces' and 'laws' in scare quotes, and even more from the fact that Proust's narrator is never a model of self-clarity when it comes to the task of his work – if he says that it is his task to "immobilize" the sensible ideas, it remains to be seen if this is really his task or if this is what he accomplishes at all, or indeed if what is at stake is a matter for immobilization in the first place.

Deleuze's effort is worthy of note here as an example of this reading of Proust. The thesis of *Proust and Signs* is that *À la recherche du temps perdu* may be read as the

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[11] Deleuze, Gilles, *Proust and Signs,* 42.

[12] Carbone, Mauro. "The Mythical Time of Ideas: Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze as Readers of Proust."

explanation of the workings of systems of signs in life, signs which, like the sensible

idea, are never directly explicable, but whose meaning is hidden. In this manner,

Deleuze's book might be read as a attempt to fulfill a task which Proust set for himself, in

the manner which we alluded to above of immobilizing the meaning of signs, "to

interpret the sensations as signs of so many laws and ideas, by trying to think – that is to

say, to draw forth from the shadow what I had felt, to try to convert it into its spiritual

equivalent" (*R* 2271/R III 912). Proust's narrator continually unfolds the meaning of

various signs, and it is this that allows him to gradually succeed in life and happiness, and

to write his novel. He decodes the signs of class and the signs of love, climbing the

social ladder, learning how to use the previously unattainable signs of the Guermantes'

social circle with ease, and, to a lesser but still considerable extent, learning how to

communicate in the signs of love with Albertine, and even further, how to read his own

love as it occurred in the past. This is what the narrator learns in his apprenticeship, and,

as Deleuze tells us, "learning is essentially concerned with *signs*."[13] In the same vein,

Deleuze essays to classify and organize the types of signs in Proust's work, and to

provide examples of their workings. For instance, the signs of love:

> We cannot interpret the signs of a loved person without proceeding into worlds that have
> not waited for us to take form, that formed themselves with other persons, and in which
> we are at first only an object among the rest. The lover wants the beloved to devote to
> him her preferences, her gestures, her caresses. But the beloved's gestures, at the very
> moment they are addressed to us, still express that unknown world that excludes us. The
> beloved gives us signs of preference, but because these signs are the same as those that
> express worlds to which we do not belong, each preference by which we profit draws the
> image draws the image of the *possible world* in which others are or might be preferred.[14]

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[13] Deleuze, Gilles, *Proust and Signs,* 4.

[14] Ibid., 8.

Like sensible ideas, the signs of love communicate not just by their overt

meaning, but by their references to other, unknown signs, references which must be

decoded, and which are never sure. Indeed, Proust's narrator never devotes much

attention to, or puts much confidence in, the simple meaning of what anyone actually

says, but, like a neurotic with an over-active imagination,[15] immediately plunges into the

task of interpretation, which becomes guessing, wondering, a search for truth which, as

Deleuze puts it, is a sort of manipulative violence.[16]

Deleuze's effort, as a reader and interpreter of Proust, is to unravel the signs, to

show us how they function, and to categorize them for our benefit. To some extent this is

also the effort of Proust's narrator as he makes his way (and tries, usually successfully, to

get his way) in the world. Yet this is not the effort of Proust the writer of *Á la recherche*,

nor indeed the *fulfillment* of the narrator, the true work of his life, as he finally sees in *Le*

temps retrouvè. Indeed, it is more like the narrator's efforts, which always fail and are

rather comical, to find happiness by learning the secret signs of his affective life, and of

his love life, and manipulate them to create the desired result. Indeed, these efforts at

affective self-control and self-manipulation fail precisely because they treat as clear the

play of emotion and sensation that always remains partly in shadow; the narrator behaves

as if it is possible to decode these signs, yet his decoding consistently fails.

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[15] As Benjamin says, never has there been such a radical attempt as self-absorption, but of a self like a crater: "It was a matter of perceiving the silence at the bottom of this crater, whose eyes are the quietest and most absorbing" ("The Image of Proust," *Illuminations*, 213). This "self-absorption," as an intense work on the self, is the result of the relentless pursuit of an *ethos*, a quest for happiness. See below for more on Benjamin's reading of Proust's search for happiness.

[16] Deleuze, Gilles, *Proust and Signs*, 19.

The Deleuzian effort to categorize the system of signs in Proust, to penetrate beyond the literary experience to find the organization of ideas hidden therein, seems to miss the point of this irrepressible darkness, this impossibility of bringing fully to the light and manipulating the signs of affect and sensation. It becomes pedantic, becomes what Proust, in a diatribe coming in the midst of his revelation in *Le temps rètrouvè*, calls "theory": "A work in which there are theories is like an object which still has its price-tag on it" (*R* 2274/R III 916). It suffers "from the temptation for the writer to write intellectual works – a gross impropriety" (*R* 2274/R III 916).[17]

The point is that a work such as Deleuze's, despite accomplishing an admirable clarification and organization of the jumble of ideas in a long and complicated novel, loses those ideas by lending to them a purely rational[18] signification while missing the *sensible idea,* the meaning of the work carried in its "mesh," as Merleau-Ponty puts it. Proust says it like this: "When an idea – an idea of any kind – is left in us by life, its material pattern, the outline of the impression that it made upon us, remains behind as a token of its necessary truth. The ideas formed by the pure intelligence have no more than a logical, a possible truth, they are arbitrarily chosen" (*R* 2272/R III 914). The necessity, what Merleau-Ponty, in the passage already quoted, called the "authority" and "fascinating, indestructible power," is given in the impression itself, given in its recollection, and *sometimes* given in language. Proust's point seems to be that when

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[17] To be fair, Proust gives no basis for categorizing who is a "writer" and who is responsible for "intellectual works"; perhaps Deleuze, as a "philosopher" and not a novelist, should practice theory and write intellectual works. Yet Merleau-Ponty's insistence that literature is a more active field of philosophy than "express philosophy" itself seems to belie that straightforward excuse.

[18] "Rational" in that the sensible idea or the signs of love would function like the signs in an equation, which should be able to be decoded and laid out, plain to see, in a perfect ratio.

these ideas lose their mooring in the sensible, they lose their very claim on life, to become an "arbitrary" categorization at the disposition of the "intellectual writer." Writing, thus, in its bringing to word such sensible ideas, must somehow communicate the sensible origin of these ideas, at the same time as their necessary silence, the distance between the sensible and language, a distance which is their only true proximity. It is, again, a writing after the second sailing.

Thus neither should we read Merleau-Ponty's interest in Proust, and thus the intention to think the invisible and its intertwining in the visible which turns on a reading of Proust, as an attempt to set down the forces, laws, and structures of the sensible ideas, although certain of Merleau-Ponty's turns of phrase lend credence to this reading. But then the question becomes, again, how the necessity and authority of the impression, of the sensible which carries its invisible as a lining, is so powerfully held in the impression itself, and how it is sometimes brought to word, how language lives from this lining like plants live from the sun. Understanding this relation will show the movement from Step 1 to Step 3 of the second sailing, a movement beginning and ending in the sensible.

An answer to this question lies in Proust's forty-odd page revelation in *Le temps retrouvè,* in a rambling discussion that runs from the quality of good literature to the quality of a good life. The meeting of these two, of good literature and a good life, is not fortuitous or coincidental. "Real books should be the offspring not of daylight and casual talk but of darkness and silence." What is it that makes some books "real," and how does this require a birth in darkness and silence? What does this show about the passage

through silence between nature and language, and the practice of philosophy which would think this passage?

Immediately after this line, which I take as the directive insight for this chapter, comes the following: "And as art exactly reconstitutes life, around the truths to which we have attained inside ourselves there will always float an atmosphere of poetry, the soft charm of a mystery which is merely a vestige of the shadow which we have had to traverse, the indication, as precise as the markings of an altimeter, of the depth of a work" (*R* 2286/R III 934). *As art reconstitutes life*: Proust's art of language is a matter of bringing to word a life already lived, a *recherche*. The same quality of *depth*, which marks a life as having not merely been passed through, but having been *lived*, marks art, or here language. Real books, real art, real language, like real lives which are recalled in *recherche*, are marked by "an atmosphere of poetry, the soft charm of a mystery which is merely a vestige of the shadow which we have had to traverse." The soft charm of mystery, which gives poetry its power, is an effect of *time* and *forgetting*, the shadow which a life traverses, and which language must traverse if it is to bring life to word, as it does in the work of Proust. This, Proust's narrator realizes, is his task, and *À La recherche du temps perdu* is the result.

Of the truths "which the intellectual faculty gathers in the open," we are told in the next paragraph that, irrespective of their value in full daylight, they "have very straight contours and are flat; they have no depth because no depths have had to be traversed in order to reach them, because they have not been re-created" (*R* 2287/R III 935). This is why, Proust says, there is no necessity in such truths. The truths of art,

having been *re*-created according to the truths of life, undergo a certain passivity. Proust defines "the artistic sense" as "submitting to the reality within oneself" (*R* 2274/R III 917). Of the truths which he seeks to bring to language in the work of *recherche*, "church steeples or wild grass growing on a wall" and the "magical scrawl" of heterogeneous impressions which they carry, he says that "their foremost character was that I was not free to choose them, that such as they were they were given to me" (*R* 2272/R III 913).

Thus the *depth* that distinguishes art from dry theory is a mark of language that has confronted the necessity of "traversing a shadow," the obscurity of forgetting and the passage of time. This obscurity manifested itself for Proust's narrator in part in his inability, until the end of his life, to begin writing, and in part in his inability to intentionally re-create the joy that, when he did experience it, was fleeting and out of his control. The narrator is comical in his continual self-deception, trying constantly to figure out ahead of time what will make him happy, and to create such a situation at all costs, only to find that when everything goes off just as he planned, his feelings bear no relation to the joy and fascination which swept him away on the original impression, or leave him in a sadness "like that I had had, the day I had been presented to Albertine, having taken pains, small to be sure, in order to obtain a thing – knowing this young girl – which seemed small to me because I had obtained it?" (*R* 2269/R III 909). The greatest example is Albertine; by the time he has her as a prisoner in his house, he is no longer in love with her, and even by the time he manages to be introduced to her, the pleasure of her acquaintance seems small.

For the person suffering and seeking happiness, there is little solace here. Reflecting on his own despair, the narrator remembers consoling himself, hopelessly, with his ability to catalogue impressions in his memory like a collector, saying to himself that at least in his life he had seen some beautiful things. But the thrilling joy of involuntary memory, of the immediate plunge into the depth of time and things that makes them shine forth in all the power of appearance, is nothing like this. Rather "these three memories which I had just had, instead of giving me a more flattering idea of myself, had almost caused me to doubt the existence of that self" (*R* 2267/R III 906). The suffering of life, of the fruitless search for happiness, is hardly alleviated by the realization that the truest joy is only found in remembrance, in art, and in the bringing to word of impressions *which have already passed,* and which, if they held any joy when they were present, only did so by virtue of their own obscure connection to impressions still further in the past. It is the distance to the impressions, to the things, to the happenings of a life and the elements that fill a memory, that makes the traversal of an obscure depth necessary.

In the famous involuntary memory, Proust's narrator undergoes the vividness and power of such a traversal, when the truth of an impression, like Vinteuil's little phrase, the taste of the madeleine, or the cobblestones, traverses the depth of time and opens up the richness of a life, in a joy so great that it can be called the *only* joy (*R* 2269/R III 908). The task of language becomes the "re-creation" of the power of things and of the richness of life, a bringing to word of that possibility opened up by involuntary memory. Thus the work of Proust, as *recherche,* is like involuntary memory itself.

"The duty and task of a writer is that of a translator," (*R* 2218/R III 926), a translator of things to word. In a word, phenomenology, the logos of *phainomenon.*

What else is Proust doing, everywhere and for 3,000 pages, for example and in the simplest way, in the following:

> An image offered to us by life brings with it, in a single moment, sensations which are multiple and heterogeneous. The sight, for instance, of the binding of a book once read may weave into the characters of its title the moonlight of a distant summer night. The taste of morning café-au-lait brings with it that vague hope of fine weather which so often long ago, as with the day still intact and full before us, we were drinking it out of a bowl of white porcelain, creamy and fluted and itself looking almost like vitrified milk, suddenly smiled upon us in the pale uncertainty of the dawn. An hour is not merely an hour, it is a vase full of scents and sounds and projects and climates, and what we call reality is a certain connection between these immediate sensations and the memories which envelop us simultaneously with them (*R* 2280/R III 924).

This is the simplest way because it is simply the bringing to word of sensations and images, of appearances, and the following through of their connections, of their heterogeneity. The entire *Recherche* moves in this tone, flowing like thought itself, or more specifically, like remembrance itself. In this passage, in a relatively (and unusually, because it is being used by Proust as an example) confined space, we have only the fleeting beauty of impressions, but the work of *recherche* takes up thought, ideas, and the character and passions of many human beings. These, however, could not be brought to word in a direct and plain manner, in full daylight, as it were. They require the traversal of a great depth, of the depth of a very long novel, of many, many extraneous and wandering reminisces, and of the life of the author. That is why the revelation of the truth of Proust's narrator's work comes at the end of his life, *after* he has undergone, and to his chagrin, failed to grasp, the depth of what he was passing by. It is no mistake that

the revelation comes after an abrupt passage, in the time of the novel, of many years. The bulk of *Á la recherche* details the life of a young man, but we are suddenly thrust forward decades in the middle of *Le temps rètrouvè,* and this sudden thrust is when we feel the nearness of the end of the novel, of death, and, before the revelation, of the hopelessness of all that has been traversed so far. The facticity of this passage of time is further reinforced by the aging of all of the narrator's old friends who he now sees again after a long time.

The "immobilization of the essences" that Proust sought, the essences that he only glimpsed in the random flights of involuntary memory, does not occur in a matter of a few sentences, in a concise theory, in a manner that could be grasped quickly by a sufficiently adept intellect. If that were possible, the narrator would have had success in his countless attempts as a young man to forcefully create the happiness he had sometimes glimpsed. Proust's point of the requirement to traverse a great depth is perhaps made most forcefully by his requiring us to read on for thousands of pages, pages that, no less, have no plot or clear theme, to finally come to terms with what we have been doing (probably for years, because who can read all of Proust straight through?) and learn what he has to share. It is also, perhaps, why his sentences are so long, why he ranges from volubility to breathlessness: each marathon sentence, by virtue of its capability to end in a place very remote from where it began, and to have stopped off at more than one place along the way, is a miniature version of involuntary memory, of the traversal of a depth. Each sentence, in the resonance of its language, must draw the reader in just as the narrator is drawn in by the force of involuntary memory, by *re-*

creating, bringing to word, the world. Moreover, it is almost the case that this effort of language here, this work of phenomenology, is the only *point* of reading Proust. There is no plot, there is no clear moral or political point aside from the enjoyment of a brutal satire that takes no prisoners and makes fun of everyone equally.[19]

Proust's *Recherche,* his whole effort of traversal, is unimaginable without the sensible. To be sure, he also practices a phenomenology of sociality, of "human passions and character and conduct," (*R* 2286/R III 935), as well as a deep introspection, an honest bringing to word of his own depths. But the invisible lining of the sensible with meaning, the sensible idea, the ability to spark the recollection of *carnal* impressions, lies at the center of his every effort, and it is this that is most important for the present investigation. What Merleau-Ponty sought to think, what he came to see that philosophy must find room for, is what carries Proust's work. The transference and intermingling, the proximity and distance, between visible and invisible, the things and ourselves, and the past and the present all partake of the same field. That is why, in Proust's work, any one of these provokes the memory of another, and the provocation can move in any direction (making a linear plot entirely inconceivable). For example, in a sentence that began ten lines earlier at the restoration of the narrator's faith in literature, and did not hesitate to pass through the career of one of the Prince de Guermantes' butlers as well as a selection of *petits fours* and a glass of orangeade:

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[19] An enjoyment entirely worthwhile in its own right. Benjamin's claim that Proust *does* make a clear political point through his criticism of snobbery and of the class system is not entirely convincing, simply because in *À la recherche* no one, and no class, is clearly spared from such criticism. "The Image of Proust," *Illuminations,* 209-210.

…a new vision of azure passed before my eyes, but an azure that this time was pure and saline and swelled into blue and bosomy undulations; so strong was this impression that the moment to which I was transported seemed to me to be the present moment: more bemused than on the day when I had wondered whether I was really going to be received by the Princesse de Guermantes or whether everything round me would not collapse, I thought that the servant had just opened the window on to the beach and that all things invited me to go down and stroll along the promenade while the tide was high, for the napkin which I had used to wipe my mouth had precisely the same degree of stiffness and starchedness as the towel with which I had found it so awkward to dry my face as I stood in front of the window on the first day of my arrival at Balbec, and this napkin now, in the library of the Prince de Guermantes's house, unfolded for me – concealed within its smooth surfaces and its folds – the plumage of an ocean green and blue like the tail of a peacock (*R* 2264/*R* III 901).

This is a primary effort of phenomenology, the *phainomenon,* the shining forth of appearance, become *logos*. The words here give the things, the azure plumage of an ocean together with the invitation of a beach or a Faubourg family, the fear or joy of a young human being at that invitation, all from the starchedness of two napkins in two parts of France, separated by tens of years.

Proust is thus an example of Merleau-Ponty's own effort of "the expression of what is before expression *and sustains it from behind*" (*VI* 219/167). This is why it can be said that "no one has gone farther than Proust," but not only in describing the *possibility* of a sensible idea. Proust's work is exemplary because it is the coming to word of sensible ideas, a faithful, indeed salvatory, effort of phenomenology in traversing the depth of time and the depth of things, in lingering near "the bond between the flesh and the idea," in cutting close to the bone. It does this not against, but *by virtue of* a fundamental obscurity and passivity, the obscurity of depth, time, and silence, and the passivity, and necessity, of coming *after,* of remembrance.

These are the multiple axes of obscurity, which, together, make it necessary that real books should be the offspring of darkness and silence. Their insistence and their secret, that which gives the "atmosphere of poetry" to memory and to the important impressions of our lives, is what requires an effort of phenomenology, Proustian phenomenology if you will, to be brought to word. This is why Proust is exemplary for phenomenology, for "the reconversion of silence and speech into one another" (*VI* 169/129). The words come from this silence, but silence, that which is of the utmost obscurity to language, is not only language's birthplace, but its very environment, its home. As Jean-Noël Cuille puts it, "silence is not only the condition of possibility of our linguistic gesticulations, but also their own milieu."[20]

Yet for Proust, it must be said that this is *more* than a task of truth, of properly "fixing the relations between the visible and the invisible," as Merleau-Ponty puts it in one place. It is the task of an *ethos,* of a way of living in language, a way that may lead to happiness. Benjamin sees this clearly. He quotes Jean Cocteau,[21] who says that Proust's voice followed "the intonation of night and honey." This, says Benjamin, was the only way that Proust was able to conquer what Proust himself once called[22] *l'imperfection incurable dans l'essence même du present,* that yearning behind what,

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[20] "Le silence du sensible: Éléments pour une esthésiologie dans la pensée du Merleau-Ponty, " 145. This excellent and thorough article, starting with a strong skepticism of the Romantic undertones and straightforward contradictions of a philosophy of silence, situates Merleau-Ponty with respect to the beginnings of the liberation of sensibility from the rational mind in Kant's *Critique of Judgment,* then moves through Merleau-Ponty's considerations of expression in the nature revealed by modern science to an appreciation of the interweaving of silence and language in literary works through the sensible idea, especially in Proust.

[21] Benjamin gives no reference for the quotation from Cocteau.

[22] Again, Benjamin gives no reference.

Benjamin says, should be at the center of any study of Proust, what he "sought so frenetically" and what was "at the bottom of these infinite efforts": his "blind, frenzied quest for happiness. "[23] This is why Proust's reflections at the end of *Le temps retrouvè* become a matter not only of art, language, and memory, but of *life*. "We have to rediscover, to reapprehend, to make ourselves fully aware of that reality, remote from our daily preoccupations... that reality which it is very easy for us to die without ever having known and which is, quite simply, our life" (*R* 2284/R III 931). That enrichment of life by awareness, which happens in passing, passively, in passion, during the *living* of life, can be rediscovered in remembrance, in a work of language, of bringing to the things to word. Thus Benjamin, again: "*À la recherche du temps perdu* is the constant attempt to charge an entire lifetime with the utmost awareness."[24] The form of this awareness, the only form it can take and the form it must take, is language. The fleeting images of the past are not sufficient, and even the arresting power of involuntary memory must be "immobilized," which only means *spoken,* written down, brought to word. Language, in Proust, is thus a form of utmost awareness, a practice of awareness that traverses a depth to the silence of things, to that place where things become affect, feeling, the idea, and language. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, the sensible ideas that "stream forth along the contours of the aesthesiological body... lead their shadowy life in the mind only because they have been divined at the junctures of the visible world" (*VI* 197/153). Proust, with

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[23] "The Image of Proust," *Illuminations,* 211.

[24] *ibid.,* 211.

the intensity of awareness that becomes *ethos,* brings words to these junctures of the visible world, to that point, paradoxically, from which words came.

It must become a question, for the intentionally philosophical reader of Proust, how anything that would be called "philosophy" can be something other than the dry and random ideas of the intellect which Proust so vehemently decries, as we have already seen and as we have, somewhat self-consciously, questioned as well. Indeed this tension runs high within Proust, for along with his rich evocations of a remembered life, which supposedly bring the essences of things and people to word, he is also liberal with theories and explanations, not only of his own task at the end of *Le temps retrouvé,* but of anything and everything, throughout the entire novel. And of course, it is substantially from these more overtly "theoretical" reflections that I have been quoting.

Merleau-Ponty, of course, is in a similar situation, only perhaps more intensely, because he is explicitly devoted to, and in debt to, the history of philosophy, even if its manner of language has become inadequate. Yet *The Visible and the Invisible* especially, and its last chapter in particular, is an almost Proustian effort of evocative language, of bringing to word the matter at hand, the flesh and the fluid lines between visible and invisible, like that intimacy, as close as the sea and the strand, between us and the things which opens the chapter (*VI* 170/130). As Bernhard Waldenfels remarks, the *voir* of *Phenomenology of Perception,* the work of philosophy as a straightforward look at the matter for thought, becomes a *faire voir* in *The Visible and the Invisible,* a labor of

language, a *doing* as much as a direct *seeing.*[25] Yet it is also a structured argument, certainly a matter of the intellect, and no doubt a book with theories, which should make it, as Proust says, like an object with its price-tag still on it, its presentation so shallow, flat, in outline only, without the depth of a real thought.

It should be clear, then, from the foregoing but moreover from any reading of the texts themselves, that both Merleau-Ponty and Proust are working at the verge of literature and philosophy.[26] The late Merleau-Ponty is full of images of verging, veering, one thing sliding into another and both taking part in the same field, the same flesh. The visible and invisible become one another, as do the body and the world, carnality and language, and the "veering I-Other Other-I" referred to in a working note of November 1960 (*VI* 311/263). It is no doubt appropriate to consider here a verging of philosophy and literature, in the form of a verging and veering into one another of "theoretical" language and the language of *recherche,* of the supposedly shallow and one-dimensional language and the language that traverses a depth and speaks from a silence. Proust the novelist makes theories and gives explanations all the time, and Merleau-Ponty the philosopher conducts his own kind of *recherche,* a reaching of words across the foam of the surf into the sea of the things. If Proust, as we have argued, and Merleau-Ponty as well, are in a fundamental way working toward the enrichment of *awareness,* the

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[25] Waldenfels, Bernhard, "Faire voir par les mots: Merleau-Ponty et le tournant linguistique," 59.

[26] Jason Wirth, drawing on Heidegger's and John Sallis's readings of Kant's reticence on the crucial link between noumenon and phenomenon made by the transcendental imagination, shows that Schelling operated on a similar veering plane, that between madness and intellect: "One must have a touch of madness. Otherwise, reason is tyrannized by the dogmatism of the intellect and the clarity of shallow understanding, or it collapses into the chaos of sensibility utterly detached from the intellect" (*The Conspiracy of Life,* 89).

awareness that takes form in language, then both are, in an ancient sense, engaged in *theoria,* in witnessing, in the oldest kind of theory.

Thus Merleau-Ponty's experiments in language are not just a rhetorical technique or an option chosen to communicate something difficult, something which might have been better pinned down through the rigidity of defined terms, carefully manipulated. They are the reaction to an ontological state of affairs, a reaction that learns much from Proust. It is a matter of the expression of the sensible idea, or the metaphor, as the practice of a different ontology. The sensible origin of language is not a new idea; one finds it in Hegel, who worked towards the progressive release of the concept from its origin in the sensible, and one finds it as a central theme in Nietzsche, in his many variations on the thought of truth as a fable.[27] But this focus on *origin* in philosophy is often like the unmasking of an original sin, whether one seeks to climb out of the sin, as in Hegel, or to invert it and call it a saving grace, as in Nietzsche. The sensible idea, in Proust and Merleau-Ponty, *perhaps* makes a new beginning, a difference from this sort of unmasking and reversal. It perhaps thinks and speaks in a manner that responds to a different structure of being, to a different relation between language and the sensible wherein they are necessarily intertwined and given together.[28]

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[27] Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power,* note 539. The first chapter of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's *The Subject of Philosophy* is an excellent, concise, and compelling exploration of the consequences of this thought with respect to the difference between literature and philosophy at stake here, the sense of truth at work in philosophy, and, just as in Merleau-Ponty, the future of philosophy in this new land where it is not enough to just *say what is.*

[28] See Vanzago, Luco, "Presenting the Unpresentable: the Metaphor in Merleau-Ponty's Last Writings". As Vanzago puts it, Merleau-Ponty's "renovated" ontology has to do with this conception of the metaphor as something that does not simply *represent* previously given objects in a different way but rather *presents* objects, brings them to the fore, uncovers them from a concealment that is not a veil but something that as such cannot be given, since it is not a thing.

It is perhaps not necessary, or perhaps futile, to define the exact space of their togetherness, of the "awesome birth of vociferation," the "point of insertion of speaking and thinking in the world of silence" (*VI* 188/144-145). It would not be quite correct, then, to say that Merleau-Ponty and Proust witness this birth, that they somehow pinpoint and immobilize the passage between that remains so obscure. It is enough to say that they come close. In that closeness, the togetherness of language and nature is at stake, for the "sensible" which carries the idea, and which language must return to itself in a new form, is also nature.

CHAPTER IV

NATURE

Proust is exemplary because he gives word to the silence of things, in a manner

philosophical and *true* in the ancient sense of truth: he unveils. The *lethe* that covers the

things, making them mute and estranged from *logos,* is cleared away, so that the things

shine, at least for a moment. Proust tells us, repeatedly and at great length in the passage

treated in the previous chapter, how literature must show this very silence and hiddenness

of things, of the past, of the sensible, even as it discloses them in a momentary shining.

Thus Proust's work is among that literature and art with a philosophical character that

seems to have replaced "official" philosophy, which is decadent and inessential, as we

are told in Merleau-Ponty's *Notes de cours.*[1]

"Our state of non-philosophy" – this is the title of the first section of the Collège

de France course of 1958-59, which focused mostly on Husserl's and Heidegger's

struggles to think the contemporary practice of philosophy. The continuation of this

course, in 1960-61, took up "the ontology of today" as it is found in art and literature, in

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[1] "Of the 1) decadence of express, official philosophy; 2) philosophical character of literature, of art, etc.
My thesis: this decadence of philosophy is inessential; it is that of a certain manner of philosopher
(according to substance, subject-object, causality). Philosophy will find help in poetry, art, etc., in an even
closer rapport with them, it will thus revive and reinterpret its own past of metaphysics – which is not past"
(*NC* 39).

comparison to Cartesian ontology. In between, in 1959-60, Merleau-Ponty taught a course on nature, leaving the notes collected under that name.

Thus we have, on one hand, an inquiry into philosophical and literary language and practice and the ontology they express, and on the other hand, the ontology expressed by nature. What is the meaning of the togetherness of these two approaches – why do they come one after the other? The proceeding chapters have been engaged with an investigation of the first, hopefully without forgetting that when language and the sensible are in question, nature is also at stake, given the force of sensibility in the conception of nature with which we are working. The present chapter seeks to explore the second, to begin thinking the togetherness of nature, language, and philosophy, the togetherness which is demonstrated performatively by Merleau-Ponty's choice, or perhaps necessity, of subject matter in his last courses. The intent of this chapter is, quite simply, to take Merleau-Ponty's interrogation of nature beyond the lectures on nature to the radical level of his interrogation of language in *The Visible and the Invisible*. Thus it will involve an insistent pushing beyond the letter of some of Merleau-Ponty's statements regarding nature, and also an attempt to take seriously some other passages which seem to cohere better with the practice of philosophy and the understanding of language explored in the previous chapters. This chapter will include an explication of the sense of expression found in nature in the 1956-60 lectures, a criticism of the understanding of nature as a region of being, and a final suggestion, expressed with the deepest reservations, that Merleau-Ponty is beginning to think being as nature, and thus as primordially sensible and earthly.

When one thinks of Merleau-Ponty's significance in the history of philosophy, some variation on the theme of nature is likely to come up. On a general level, with Merleau-Ponty, we learn again to think those elements that have been called "natural" – the body, sensibility, the perceived world – together with those elements that have been estranged from what is called nature: thought, language, spirit. This slow, cautious, but momentous *rapprochement* had been going on for at least another hundred or so years *before* Merleau-Ponty – Schelling, Nietzsche, and Heidegger all come quickly to mind; many others would do as well – but Merleau-Ponty surely deserves our attention on at least a centennial scale, for his radical insistence on the sensible basis of human life, and for his efforts to bring the intertwining of sensibility and thought to word.

If it is fair to think of Merleau-Ponty's historical significance in terms of nature, then one surely ought to seek out the places in his works where he takes up this theme explicitly. This, however, is not the same thing as assuming that these are the same places that provide the richest of his reflections on this theme, as we will see. It is necessary, rather, to think through how the matter of nature is to be interrogated along the lines of the practice of philosophy. While Merleau-Ponty's role in the history of philosophy is very much to be thought in terms of nature, this is not to be pursued in the manner of a "philosophy of nature," because the practice of philosophy which I have tried to describe in Chapter I should preclude such an approach.

I will take as my guiding thought the following passage from the course notes on nature:

> The theme of Nature is not a numerically distinct theme.-There is a unique theme of philosophy: the *nexus,* the *vinculum* "Nature"-"Man"-"God." Nature as a 'leaf' of Being, and the problems of philosophy, are concentric.
> Nature as a leaf or layer of total Being – the ontology of Nature as the way toward ontology – the way that we prefer because the evolution of the concept of Nature is a more convincing propaedeutic, [since it] more clearly shows the necessity of the ontological mutation.
> We will show how the concept of Nature is always the expression of an ontology – and its privileged expression (*N* 265/204).

Is nature the way toward ontology, or is it the ontological field itself? In the tense passage quoted above, it is both: a leaf or layer of "total" being, a way toward ontology, but at the same time, "not a numerically distinct theme." The unique theme of philosophy is the *vinculum.* A *vinculum,* in Latin, is variously a bond, fetter, tie, or chain. It is the mathematical term for the grouping of elements in some ways distinct but also bonded, and is represented by a line above the terms to be thought of as a group. It has a cartographic function as well, as a symbol showing two land parcels owned by the same person. Likewise, the *vinculum* in the course notes is a set of terms, including nature, which are not only tied together, but at the same time that they are three terms, are also to be treated as one term. The challenge laid out by this cryptic passage is to try to think this *vinculum,* to take it seriously, through the thinking suggested in *The Visible and the Invisible.*

The whole problem is condensed and suggested in the passage above, in which nature is understood, entirely ambiguously, as an element of a *vinculum,* not numerically distinct, but also as a leaf or layer, as a concept which will lead to a higher concept of being. Yet the thinking of *The Visible and the Invisible,* taken radically, doubles back on

the thinking of nature as a "region of being" to disclose a being that has no regions, strictly speaking. The flesh manifests itself in certain beings, perhaps, but in a manner in which the whole field is inscribed in each one: to speak in terms of the *vinculum*, we would have to say that the human and nature are all god, god and nature are all human, and the human and god are all nature. Thinking how this can be, without contradiction and without the distinctions between these terms being muddled, will require philosophy to become interrogation – the questioning and evocation of being, rather than the positing of an ontology, for "every analysis that *disentangles* renders unintelligible – This bound to the very meaning of *questioning* which is not to call for a response in the indicative – " (*VI* 316/268).

In the lecture summary for the second course on nature, Merleau-Ponty presents his choice to study the nature described by science as a method of indirect ontology. "The study of nature is here an introduction to the definition of being, and in this respect one might just as well have started from man or God." The question of being is "raised in this instance from the standpoint of a certain sector of being, because it is perhaps a law of ontology always to proceed indirectly, and to lead up to being in general only through particular beings" (*RC* 156/156). Nature is here understood as a "sector" or region of being which will reveal being in general. Since man or God might just has well have provided the indirect way to ontology, one might wonder why nature would "provide its privileged expression." Presumably the structures of being could be grasped in any of the three regions.

Renaud Barbaras explains that the concept of nature, as presented by certain interpretations of modern science, is privileged by a kind of strategic advantage over a phenomenology that cannot help but struggle to think being without the transcendental necessity of consciousness. [2] As Barbaras tells the story, Merleau-Ponty's turn to nature arose from his theory of institution, which is briefly described in *Themes* (*RC* 59-65/107-113), and had been evolving since the gestural theory of language and the idea that speech accomplishes thought, elaborated in *Phenomenology of Perception* (*PhP* 219/178-179). Merleau-Ponty's theory of expression and truth is intimately bound up with a philosophy of perception: just as the being of the perceived is the unity of a style through which it presents itself, the being of truth and expression lives in the unity of a style which is created in an act of instituting consciousness, rather than *constituting* consciousness (*RC* 60/108). A creative act of expression consists in the taking up of already existing instituted styles and shifting them, to create a new meaning, which will henceforth be understood by others when they grasp its style in turn. These constantly

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[2]Barbaras, Renaud. "Merleau-Ponty's Concept of Nature." In "The Ambiguity of the Flesh," Barbaras goes considerably farther in finding too much residual consciousness and perception in *The Visible and the Invisible* as well. Even the problematic category of the flesh, he points out, includes a moment of perceiving and a moment of being perceived, and thus re-institutes the very dualism which it is supposed to avoid, rather than going ahead with the thought of expression throughout nature and being, expression as not only a strictly human category. There is, no doubt, a duality remaining in *The Visible and the Invisible,* and a duality throughout Merleau-Ponty's thought insofar as it *is* always reliant upon perception as a primary category, even when expression becomes primary as well. But perhaps the contemporary haste to see dualism be finally crushed leads one to avoid an honest appraisal or the presentation of experience as far as we can see it – perhaps there is something unavoidable in the doubling of the world between sensible and sentient. If there were, the task would be to think through nature and language in a manner that would not insist on avoiding all dualism, but would make their appearance, as doubled, thinkable at all.

evolving institutions of human expression, however, require some sort of foundation,[3] some soil from which to spring.

The foundation is nature, understood as the non-instituted (*N* 20/4), "what has a meaning, without this meaning being posited by thought: it is the autoproduction of a meaning" (*N* 19/3). Nature is a sort of *phusis* of meaning, a self-generating expression.[4] The study of the life sciences reveals the being of organisms as always already perceived being (*N* 247/189), so that the nature of being, as being-perceived, is not given entirely by the constituting consciousness of Husserlian phenomenology.[5] Nature, "our soil... that which carries us" (*N* 20/4), the foundation of human expression and institution, is revealed by the philosophical interpretation of modern science as already expressive and full of sense. As the privileged expression of ontology and its most convincing propaedeutic, nature has the same ontological structure that will be revealed, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, by a phenomenology of perception and a radicalizing of interrogative philosophy – but without the problematic possibility that this structure is

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[3] Barbaras, Renaud, "Merleau-Ponty's Concept of Nature," 27.

[4] The question of the expression of nature and its relation to human expression in art is given direct attention, although in a different manner, in Dominic Willsdon's essay "Merleau-Ponty on the Expression of Nature in Art." Willsdon points out the potential romanticist problem of thinking the expression accomplished in art as the direct expression, or coincidence, of the artist with the nature that is effectively expressing itself through him, and provides what he sees as a deconstructionist critique of this from both art-historical and philosophical perspectives. The philosophical perspective comes in the form of Derrida's interrogation of Rousseauian expression in *Of Grammatology*, where Derrida famously finds a *différance* emerging between nature and artist at the closest moment of their mutual expression. Willsdon points out similar themes both in Merleau-Ponty's theory of gesture in *Phenomenology of Perception*, where gesture, as the primordial human expression, already asserts and is based on the space between the body and the expressive act, and in the later work, where this space becomes a main focus of inquiry. See also Bimbenet, Etienne, "'L'Être interrogative de la vie' : la historicité de la vie dans le cours du Collége de France (1957-1958)."

[5] Barbaras, Renaud, "Merleau-Ponty's Concept of Nature," 27

entirely borrowed from human perception. This will help to show that being, as the flesh of which consciousnesses, meanings, and expressions are hollows or folds, is a being which we are already *in* and *of* (*VI* 298/248), and not a being constituted, in the end, by consciousness.

Thinking nature as *expression* thus marks a step toward resolving the central difficulty of the present work, the problem of the continuity and co-emergence of human language and nature. If the expressive character of language already exists, in another form, in nature, then the radical schism between the "rational animal" and nature, so easy to take for granted, becomes less compelling.

Tristan Moyle makes a similar point in "Re-Enchanting Nature: Human and Animal Life in the Later Merleau-Ponty."[6] Moyle points out that the conception of nature as expression, or more specifically, life as expression, does much more to resolve these tensions than Heidegger's conception, which attempted to think both humans and animals outside of a modern ontology of being-as-presence. As Moyle puts it, Heidegger's way of thinking removes the ambiguity between a human being which is obviously natural but also speaks by thinking humans and animals as not at all "natural," in the modern sense. However, in Heidegger's reflections, an abyss between humans and animals is re-inscribed by the impossibility of describing the *worldliness* of animal life, an ambiguity almost deeper because of its closeness. Moyle makes the case that the concept of life as expression helps one to think both the difference between humans and other natural beings as various modalities of expression, while also thinking what even

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[6] See especially page 177, where Moyle puts the argument in precisely this form.

Heidegger grudgingly recognized as the shared world between humans and animals.

Moyle's line of argument is certainly a close parallel to what I am attempting here, in that

it consists of an attempt to think the sameness and differences between human and nature

which are both phenomenally obvious in our lived experience, and it requires a radical re-

working at the ontological level to accomplish this.

We should be wary, however, of arguments, and phenomenologies, too closely

concerned with specifically *animal* experience, or more precisely, with the experience of

other animals. This is a problem with Heidegger's analyses of animal life in *The*

Fundamental Concept of Metaphysics, with Merleau-Ponty's attempts to think animal life

following von Uexkull and others in the *Nature* lectures, and with many secondary

sources commenting on the *Nature* lectures. The tendency to focus on animal life,

especially big mammals, is perhaps not surprising, given the phenomenal and

evolutionary closeness of these animals to humans, as opposed to plants, or, say, lichens

or jellyfish. However, there are two problems. First, even an attempt like Moyle's to

describe the differences between humans and animals as differences between forms of

expression has the possibility to re-inscribe the thought of humans as "nature plus

something else," here in the form of the various levels of complexity and spontaneity in

expression that one could attempt to catalogue, ranging from human language and society

to, perhaps, lichen patterns on rocks, or whales making noise underwater, or whatever

one chooses. Second, and tied to the first, a *phenomenology* of non-human life, or nature,

is impossible. We cannot become a moose, a lichen, or a weather pattern and describe

the appearing of the world from that perspective, and we cannot even share a phenomenal

world with these beings because we cannot speak to them, nor they to us.[7] This is perhaps closer to the truth of Heidegger's insistence on the gulf between humans and animals. It is a gulf centered on their essential and stubborn *silence*.

Our own work of language, as we saw in Proust, dances with the silence of nature and brings our lived experience in it to word – but this is not the same as a phenomenology of "life" in the manner of, for example, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* or the *Phenomenology of Perception.* The titles of those works are good titles because they describe what the works accomplish: *Geist* appears as itself in a *logos,* and the phenomenon of perception comes to *logos.* But for such a category as *life,* the same thing is not possible, because, even as life too is shot through with *logos* and *logos* is inconceivable without life, a certain impasse separates the two, life being a much larger category than human *Geist* or human perception, a category which *logos* cannot access, or traverse in its entirety, in the same manner.

The expression in nature, then, is not just a matter of animals doing things that seem similar to humans that makes us think of some vague idea of kinship. The soil that carries us (*N* 20/4), nature as phenomena and as concept, is already expressive in its own perceiving structures. Nature carries us, and it is structured as flesh, yet phenomenologically, it remains fundamentally obscure, even opaque. Perhaps this is

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[7] Moyle suggests, very briefly, that one should be able grasp some sense of animal life, especially of large mammals who are more like us, essentially by watching closely and repeating their gestures (pgs 178-179). This might be true, barely, with a lot of attention. The ontological ramifications of what might be, at best, a fleeting, very vague sense of the bodily movement of, say, a caribou bolting at the smell of a person would then remain to be thought.

why it is easier, for Merleau-Ponty as for almost everyone else, to think nature as always a *region* of being, the region of animals and plants and minerals and atoms. As a regional problem, the opacity and silence of nature is less problematic and less disturbing. Its stubborn silence can be ignored.

As a supposed region of being, nature is thought as distinct, in some senses at least, from the regions of the human and the divine, in the passage quoted above. Whether nature is the non-instituted, as in the analysis of biology explicated by Barbaras, or the final excess, the *Ungrund*, the barbaric principle or wild abyss of being prior to reflection, as in the reading of Schelling in the nature lectures (*N* 59-71/37-45), or the "'something' at the heart of human existence that does not properly *belong* to the human subject: a ground (*Grund*) of its constituting capacities, that is at the same time a non-ground or ungrounding (*Ungrund*), a capacity that evades constituting reason,"[8] it is always a region of being which the human, ambiguously, is both rooted in and transcendent to.

Yet does not the thinking of flesh, the philosophical practice and the ontology of *The Visible and the Invisible,* have to turn back from this common, ancient, and convenient figure of speech, from this sense of nature as a region of being, as a category or inquiry? Perhaps this sort of nature no longer makes sense, and philosophy must make

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[8] Bernet, Rudolph. "The Subject in Nature: Reflections on Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception.*" Antje Kapust ("The So-Called 'Barbarian Basis of Nature' and its Secret Λογος") tries to show that this Schellingian nature as *ungrund* is also at work in Merleau-Ponty's reading of science, which would consist in an effort to explicate its secret *logos*. Kapust shows that Merleau-Ponty goes beyond what Kapust calls Schelling's equivocation between nature as the ungrund that supports thought, and nature as that whose whole meaning is exhausted by its being thought (*N* 68/43). Unfortunately, Bernet's analysis, taken from *Phenomenology of Perception*, would also be stuck in this supposed Schellingian circle, referring nature, even in its abyssal character, to the constituting capacities of the human. But perhaps there is more to Schelling's "equivocation" than Kapust leads one to believe.

this habitual thinking vibrate until it disjoins (*VI* 136/102). Merleau-Ponty's study of scientific nature, taken as the non-human stuff of the world, has disclosed perceiving and expressive being, a "non-Parminidean being, a form which escapes the dilemma between being and non-being" (*N* 239/183), hollows and folds which work in being – in a word, flesh (*N* 270-271/209, or the same being whose folds allow the sensible idea to interlace the visible and the invisible. The description of perception which is taken up again in the last chapter of *The Visible and the Invisible* and also in "Eye and Mind," leads to the same flesh, to the power of perception in one's own body which lives from the anonymous field of visibility, itself lined and supported by the invisible. As far as nature goes, this generality of the visible and invisible flesh "exists between different organisms… Their landscapes interweave, their actions and their passions fit together exactly: this is possible as soon as one ceases to define the primordial qualification of sensibility as the belongingness to one same 'consciousness', and as soon as we rather understand it as the return of the visible upon itself, a carnal adherence of the sentient to the sensed and of the sensed to the sentient" (*VI* 185/142). It is this field of generativity, this *phusis* of expression in things, that, in "Eye and Mind," the painter is able to show (*EM* 69/181), and that, as we find in a note inserted in brackets in the text of *The Visible and the Invisible*, provides for thinking as the invisible of the *il y a* (*VI* 188/145), or the German *es gibt*.[9] Expression, thinking, language, all live from the same flesh as the things: "We will therefore have to recognize an ideality that is not alien to the flesh, that gives it its axes, its depth, its dimensions" (*VI* 197/152).

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[9] Heidegger, Martin, "Letter on Humanism," 238.

As the same note explains, thought, in a certain sense, already occurs in the dehiscence of the sensible into sensing/sentience. "The thinking we have introduced was *there is,* and not *it appears to me that…* (appearing that would make up the whole of being, self-appearing)" (*VI* 188/145). This is to think thinking *not* as the presence of thought to the thinker, *not* as intentional consciousness, but as the effort of the *there is*, of being, of the flesh, of nature, doubling itself up to create a hollow, a lining of invisibility, which is the depth or dimension of the visible. "This thinking we have introduced" is an ideality in the things, in nature, in *phusis,* what Proust sought and finally learned to express, the language of the waves and the forests. More precisely, then, this field of generativity is *phusis.* Nature, *phusis,* is precisely what gives *there is,* what "is" *es gibt.*[10]

Nature, then, that which carries us, also speaks in us. It demands and already carries language. Nature speaks – that is, the sensible immediately dehisces, the visible is lined and given its depth by the invisible, while at the same time carrying and opening up the depth of the invisible. This is what Proust knew, that the sensible, and language in particular as sensible, catches "a meaning in its own mesh" (*VI* 198/153). [11]

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[10] See Morris, David, "Animals and Humans, Thinking and Nature," for an attempt, inspired by Merleau-Ponty and by Renaud Barbaras urging to think nature as phenomenal, rather than phenomena as scientist nature, to think the group behavior of certain animals as a sort of thinking, or a sort of sense. This is a more specific example of what I am claiming here to be a general ontological structure.

[11] This is what makes possible what Galen Johnson, after Bachelard, called "sensing the material imaginary." The ocean, through the saltiness of our own tears and blood, and the sensual support of the buoyant salt water, which almost makes us lose ourselves in a manner sometimes blissful, in its warm rocking, or terrifying in its cold vastness and depth, communicates the *sense* of our own origins in what is not human. The sense of our origins explained by evolutionary theory, as creatures that crawled out of the sea, or of origins in the sense of the salty, watery elements that make up our body, are both carried by our sensual engagement with the carnality of the ocean. Galen Johnson, "In the Timber Yard, Under the Sea," 252-253.

When expression, language, thought, are all carried by the visible, their hollows already opened up in its dehiscence; when the so-called natural world, even observed and objectified scientifically as it is in the studies Merleau-Ponty draws on in the *Nature* lectures, shows itself to be already expressive, when its being is being-perceived;[12] when, in painting, so close to the generation of sense in the visible, "it is impossible to say that nature ends here and that man or expression starts here" (*EM* 87/188), it no longer makes any sense to speak of the human or of nature as an entirely distinct ontological field. *Nature is the whole field*, and everything that has been meant by the human – ideality, language, expression, consciousness – is already nature. As Barbaras puts it, perception and expression are unified,[13] both in the human body and in nature, since both are being-perceived and expressive at the same time, in the same way, through the same flesh.[14]

That is why it makes no sense to look for "Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of nature." As he tells us in the last working note to *The Visible and the Invisible,* a note which describes a plan for the completion of that text: "(the 2nd part [Nature] is not nature in itself, a philosophy of nature, but a description of the man-animality intertwining)" (*VI* 322/274). A note to the *Nature* lectures includes a long quote from the anthropologist Evelyn Lot-Falck concerning the shifting identity between humanity and animality in Inuit masks, from which Merleau-Ponty claims that "mythical thinking

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[12] If one can take this to be the whole point of the analysis of biology in the Nature lectures.

[13] Barbaras, Renaud, "Merleau-Ponty's Concept of Nature," 27

[14] See also Barbaras' "Merleau-Ponty aux limites de la phenomenologie," which puts the same thought in terms of a negativity introduced by Merleau-Ponty into Being itself, rather than Being as a fully positive structure to be confronted with the fundamental negativity of the subject. The latter was the case, according to Barbaras, throughout the history of philosophy up to Husserl.

indicates best the humanity-animality relatedness that we have in sight" (*N* 277/214). This sort of indication does not point to anything that might be called "philosophy of nature," in the sense of a philosophical elucidation of a particular region of being. What it points to, the "man-animality intertwining," is itself a function of the back and forth movement between language and nature made possible by thinking "nature" as already lined and supported by the invisible, by the field of meaning which eventually becomes language. In the conceptual terms of the present work, by the nature disclosed after the second sailing.

There is no philosophy of nature, to be disclosed by scientific data and given in a set of lectures, aside from the philosophy of expression and perception. To follow Barbaras again, the problems of the phenomenology of perception, the tendency to incarcerate expression and ideality in consciousness while maintaining this consciousness in a natural body which remained, in the bad ambiguity of Cartesianism, foreign to it,[15] necessitates a "return to the perceived starting from the knowledge from the study of expression,"[16] which will become a turn to nature in order to find the *logos* and perception already there. The turn to nature was driven by the previous turn from perception to expression,[17] all in a sort of Merleau-Pontian second sailing, like that of Socrates in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. Just as Socrates, faced with the tautologies of

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[15] Barbaras, Renaud, *The Being of the Phenomenon*, 44.

[16] Barbaras, Renaud, "Merleau-Ponty's Concept of Nature," 27.

[17] Barbaras, Renaud, *The Being of the Phenomenon*, 48.

"inquiry into nature," turned to the *logos* in order to interrogate its reflection on nature,[18] Merleau-Ponty deepens and radicalizes the questions of nature, expression, and perception by finding each implicated in the other. The turn to expression itself becomes a further turn back toward nature – but not to the same nature.

If we take the intertwining of the visible and the invisible seriously and radically, then ontology, while inspired and informed by the study of non-human nature through science, doubles back on our understanding of nature, of ourselves as human, and of the possibilities of ontology itself. If the flesh is fundamentally lacunary, if its "reality of the negative" (*N* 271/210) is the non-Parmenidean being of hollows or folds, blind spots of invisibility which hold open its depth, then ontology will not be the laying out of a structure with sectors or regions like Nature, Human, and God: "philosophy can no longer think according to this cleavage: God, man, creatures" (*VI* 322/274). The meaning of the vinculum, from the passage that opens the *Nature* lectures, is that each of these regions holds all of being, including the other regions, within itself, which is why the Inuit masks make sense, enabling a human-animality transition which is possible if each "region" holds the other within itself. That is why it is not going too far to say that *being is nature* – or at the same time, that nature and the gods speak, are held up by an invisible depth that includes ideality, just like the human; or that nature and the human are the gods.[19] This has to be a thought of non-contradiction: all three are true at once, by a sort

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[18] Plato. *Phaedo* 99b-e.

[19] It is not at all clear from the text of the *Nature* lectures why Merleau-Ponty feels the need to throw God in the vinculum, but it is certainly suggestive. Perhaps it would mean that nature and the human have their being also, even completely, in the being of the divine. It seems notable that even Heidegger, a champion of Being if ever there was one, at one point makes a similar suggestion in a reading of Hölderlin's hymn,

of chiasm in the hollows of the flesh: perhaps one could say that the gods and nature exist in the hollows of the human, and the human and the gods exist in the hollows of nature, and nature and the human exist in the hollows of the gods.

Thus we could speak of nature rather than of being. I put this forward more as speculation, as the possible implication of the foregoing analysis, than as a clearly justified claim. Nature is immediately understood as moss and rain, clouds and rocks; that is, as fundamentally *visible*, its invisibility actually carried, not just concealed, by the visible things. Merleau-Ponty does, at times, move freely between the words nature and being, as in the Working Note of March 1959, where the "Becoming nature of man which is the becoming-man of nature" slides into the question of the hiddenness of being (he mentions *Verborgenheit* in Heidegger) and human language as an expression of the world: "It is not we who perceive, it is the thing that perceives itself yonder – it is not we who speak, it is truth that speaks itself at the depths of speech" (*VI* 236/184). The becoming nature of the human and the becoming human of nature is certainly a matter of language, of the expressiveness of nature as it reveals itself in the depths of human speech. Yet "being" is also approached as a matter of language and a matter of perception, indeed as explicitly interchangeable with perception as a term: "The brute or wild being (= the perceived world)" (*VI* 221/170)."

Nature as being, if that is the thought that Merleau-Ponty makes possible, reveals a thinking of being that is not quite like the ontological difference that Heidegger (and

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"As when on feast day...". Heidegger, "On the Essence and Concept of *physis* in Aristotle's *Physics* B 1," 184.

Plato and Socrates) tried to think, the capital-B Being that is fundamentally hidden

behind beings but supports them all.[20] It is not like the sun of the *Republic* that grants

visibility and is thus the greatest of the visible things, but is itself invisible, since we

cannot look at it directly:[21] as Merleau-Ponty sees in Proust's supposed Platonism,

"These ideas are without an intelligible sun, and appear in the membrane of the visible"

(*NC* 194). Ontological difference means that being is primordially hidden, primarily

invisible, like Socrates' sun in the *Republic,* that which gives light but cannot be seen

directly. The hiddenness of nature, the invisible, thought according to Merleau-Ponty, is

the depth that is given right there *through* visibility itself, an invisibility that literally lives

through the visible.

The separation of being from beings is perhaps too easy to think as an ontological

diplopia, as fully positive and present beings versus, by default, being as absence or as

negativity. To take over the diplopia, to remake the monocular image as Merleau-Ponty

puts it in another lecture summary (*RC* 159/158), would mean to understand the flesh as

simultaneously presence and absence, identity and difference, to understand nature as

present, as *being*, through hollows and folds, "that carnal being, as a being of depths, of

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[20] See, for example, Heidegger, Martin, *Parmenides*, 95, 101; "Letter on Humanism," 234. Throughout Heidegger's works, Being is essentially hidden, extra-ordinary, though perhaps one could say that through the trajectory from *Being and Time* to the later works, Being is thought more and more as near to the everyday and to beings, or rather, its nearness and farness become no longer strictly opposed. See also Barbaras, *Being of the Phenomenon* 301-309, in which that book concludes with a discussion of ontological difference in Merleau-Ponty as simultaneously absolute identity. Barbaras' discussion is close to mine in that he also sees Merleau-Ponty emphasizing being's givenness in and through the sensible, in a hiddenness that is simultaneously the most visible. This is one of the ways in which Barbaras claims that Merleau-Ponty carries Heidegger's thought forward, just as he often described himself as carrying Husserl's thought forward.

[21] Plato, *Republic* 508a-509b.

several leaves or several faces, a being in latency, and a presentation of a certain absence… of which our body, the sensible sentient, is a very remarkable variant, but whose constitutive paradox already lies in every visible" (*VI* 177/136). Barbaras again puts it well: "nothingness must be thought as absence of the thing in relation to pure determination, as the thing's self-absence. And this absence, this character of indetermination that is proper to experience, does not conceal a negation of presence but mingles with presence."[22] Being beyond beings is such a sort of negation of presence – being is always hidden. It is not being that is indeterminate and thus leads speech to silence, while beings would remain determinate in the everyday: it is the things themselves, nature, whose very presence slips into absence. The flesh is right there as nature, not hidden behind beings.

In the summary of his lecture course "Philosophy Today," Merleau-Ponty questions the necessity of the "silence which from time to time breaks into Heidegger's essays." This necessity of silence, the impossibility to speak being directly, results from Heidegger's search for Being hidden behind beings, a search that is necessarily impossible to conclude: "But does not this [silence] come from Heidegger's search for a direct expression of what is fundamental at the very moment he is showing its impossibility?" (*RC* 156/156). Merleau-Ponty would evade this lapse into silence by practicing ontology indirectly, through beings, or regions of being, "to lead up to being in general only through particular beings" (*RC* 156/156). This almost sounds like one *would* eventually arrive at being, at a fully elaborated ontology, if one only took an

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[22] Barbaras, Renaud, *The Being of the Phenomenon,* 100.

indirect path, which is a strange way of stating things from a philosopher who has reminded us, again and again, that from our position within being, it will be impossible to elaborate being-as-a-whole, as if from the outside. This is maintained from *Phenomenology of Perception*, which disclosed the simple fact that the body-subject never has a view from above from which to grasp the whole field of perception at once, to the ontology of the flesh, which exhorts us to philosophy as interrogation, as a question-knowing that does not seek to grasp being, but to open upon it. Indeed, if language is the reflexivity of nature, the activity of the hollows in the flesh that we are, an activity which is not entirely ours, if it is "called forth by the voices of silence, and continues an effort of articulation which is the being of every being," (*VI* 166/126-127), then it seems appropriate to seriously question the tendencies of philosophy, including, at times, of Merleau-Ponty and some who follow him, to take up the expression of nature, or being, as elaboration and explanation, to seek ontology as a structure of being with one part called nature, a structure which might almost be diagrammed on the page.

Even further, if the effort of philosophy is to say what *is*, *and* if to speak is to engage and respond in the field of expression which is nature's and not our own, we might ask ourselves, and ask nature, how it would demand to be spoken. As a nature of lacuna, of hollows of depth which are the home of the invisible, including language, this nature in whose midst we live in might require allusion and evocation rather than elaboration and explanation, a speaking that could cast itself into the depth of the invisible, rather than measure nature as if it were entirely visible. "Language in forming itself expresses, at least laterally, an ontogenesis of which it is a part. But from this it

follows that the words most charged with philosophy are not necessarily those that contain what they say, but rather those that most energetically open upon being, because they more closely convey the life of the whole" (*VI* 137/102). Language, in what it means to say and in the activity of its saying, is expression as the *phusis* of nature. Language communicates, as Merleau-Ponty learned from Proust, by a sense that is not always the same as what it means to say, by a gestural meaning: "The meaning is not on the phrase like the butter on the bread, like a second layer of 'psychic reality' spread over the sound… and conversely the whole landscape is overrun with words as with an invasion, it is henceforth but a variant of speech before our eyes… as Valéry said, language is everything, since it is the voice of no one, since it is the very voice of the things, the waves, and the forests (*VI* 201/155)."

Philosophy as explanation and elaboration carries an ontological intention that is in conflict with the thinking of nature that Merleau-Ponty is engaged in, a meaning that fails to think the flesh of things and the invisible in the visible. The speech of the landscape overrun with words, language understood as a field we are inside of, as the lining of nature, would have to be a speech that evokes an excess: nature itself. As a speaking out of a hollow of the flesh itself, it would have to be a speaking around a corner of sorts, some kind of echo of nature – that is, an eminently indirect sort of ontology, if this could be called ontology at all.

No doubt this entire discussion of nature is at once preliminary and somewhat forceful: it can only be an introduction, as an outline of a task, and at the same time is

only possible through a strong reading and through certain deliberate combinations of Merleau-Ponty's texts, emphasizing certain passages over others. Merleau-Ponty only suggests some obscure vinculum of *Human-Nature-God*, and that only in a lecture note transcribed by a student. It remains to *think* this vinculum, to think the sort of three-way chiasm that seems to be called for here, and to find a way to bring it to word. Merleau-Ponty does this only sporadically. For the most part, as the above has argued, he remains at the level of a *concept* of nature, at an attempt, the attempt which he always claimed to practice since *The Structure of Behavior,* to find the philosophical lining in the concepts of a nature given by empirical science. That is why the bulk of the *Nature* lectures consist of the explication of selected aspects of past and contemporary science, somewhat like *The Structure of Behavior* and *The Phenomenology of Perception* used evidence from psychiatric studies to motivate and support their philosophical arguments. This approach is thoroughly and repeatedly argued for and supported through Merleau-Ponty's conception of phenomenology and its relation to scientific studies. However, its limitations, and likewise the possibilities of thinking nature which are necessarily excluded by starting from empirical science, are never thoroughly discussed, although they *are* hinted at, gestured toward, in extremely powerful language.

One of these passages is the suggestion of the vinculum. Another is the thought which opens the *Nature* lectures, that of nature as our soil, a thought which is phrased even more provocatively in the first few pages of the *Notes de cours* from 1959-1960, the course dealing with language, literature, Husserl, and Heidegger, which was interrupted by the course on nature. In the introductory section of this course, entitled "Our State of

Non-Philosophy," at the end of a brief and general discussion of the "entirely humanized and entirely inhuman" (*NC* 42) nature of the technological and atomic age, comes the following thought: "rediscovery of a nature-for-us as *soil* of all our culture, in which is enrooted in particular our creative activity which is nevertheless unconditioned, which maintains culture in contact with wild being, at the confrontation with it" (*NC* 44). Nature-for-us is the root of creative activity, in other words of the literature and painting which carry a profound philosophical character in the midst of the decadence of "official" philosophy (*NC* 39). Creative activity maintains culture in contact with wild being, with the excess that demands and eludes expression. Surely this nature-for-us requires a thought that would not arise *only* from the results of scientific methodology, requires a *more* phenomenological nature, the nature that we touch, eat, and breathe. Or if not that visceral nature exactly, then a nature-for-us, rediscovered philosophically, that can let the ground and the air enter the labor of the Concept.

But how? Such a rediscovery of nature, or of the *phusis-logos*-History junction which is the stated goal of the last courses given by Merleau-Ponty (*NC* 37), would surely require an indirect method. One could say that Merleau-Ponty indeed practices such a method with regard to nature, in two ways. First, the readings of science produce a lateral effect of a new grasp of nature not possible through a direct scientific reading or through a direct phenomenological description. Second, Merleau-Ponty's rare but intensely evocative passages on sensible nature, such as "my saturation with this limitless blue" in *Phenomenology of Perception* (248/214), and the intimacy between the sea and the strand in *The Visible and the Invisible* (*VI* 171/130-131), perhaps motivate the

beginnings of a thought of nature illuminated by the very concepts of perception and chiasm that the passages themselves are supposed to illustrate. Nevertheless, these passages are short, and barely graze the edge of what they seem to want to disclose. It remains the case that the method is almost *too indirect:* it risks losing nature out of the corner of its eye. Perhaps a closer turn would have come if *The Visible and the Invisible* had been seen through to completion – the matter of nature certainly finds a prominent place in the various proposed outlines found in the Working Notes.

Thus it would seem that one is obliged to proceed toward the philosophical turn back towards nature with somewhat limited resources on the part of Merleau-Ponty. With such limited resources, how is one to carry forward the interrogation of nature that Merleau-Ponty promises, but barely begins to carry out? A richer and more properly Merleau-Pontian thinking of nature must perhaps seek insight outside of Merleau-Ponty's own work, either by interrogating a similar experience of language and nature in another thinker that yet takes a different turn, or by looking deeper into time for the threads of nature in Merleau-Ponty's philosophical predecessors. So we turn to Schelling.

CHAPTER V

SCHELLING

Nature is the soul of Schelling's thought, its center and its deepest point – and

unlike in the case of Merleau-Ponty, this is not at all difficult to show. Schelling's effort

is similar to Merleau-Ponty's, and his philosophical path is one that likewise suffered

from a reticence in moving from a *concept* of nature to a *phenomenology* of nature, a

genuine bringing to word of the matter at hand. Schelling's proximity to a radical

thought of nature, and the equivocation that his thought suffers at its height (or depth),

not only at the level of what he might have been willing to write, but at the level of what

appears as possible to think, is profoundly similar to and profoundly instructive for the

kind of Merleau-Pontian thought of nature that we are seeking. Succinctly, Schelling's

thought, throughout his career but quite forcefully in the *Philosophical Investigations*

Into the Essence of Human Freedom, undergoes the twin difficulties of thinking the

intertwining of language, nature, and history, or Merleau-Ponty's *phusis-logos*-History

junction, and finding a practice of language that could bring this intertwining to word.

Schelling ends up taking a radically indirect method, demanding of philosophy that it

think as literature, or more precisely, as myth. The present chapter will focus on the

point of God's birth in Schelling's *Freedom* essay, on its allusion to Plato's *Timaeus,* and

on a few evocative passages in Schelling's dialogue *Clara* to make the suggestion that the attempt to "think Nature as living Ground" at the center of Schelling's thought relies, like Timaeus relies in the dialogue bearing his name, on thinking *place*, as sensible nature, which rests, in a very strange way, beneath the ground, to use a Schellingian phrase, supporting the birth of God that is also the birth of language in Schelling's story.

Hopefully, a brief inquiry into Schelling will serve to push Merleau-Ponty further.[1] One will have to be both patient and careful with their differences - Schelling has an extremely different tone than Merleau-Ponty, a tone that is not just a matter of preference in writing style, and some different preoccupations as well. He is a German idealist through and through: dark, tragic, mythical, coming from a Germany that in his time was still, as Roberto Calasso puts it, "the enchanted forest at the heart of Europe,"[2] rather than Merleau-Ponty's less arboreal enchantments of post-war Paris. But he is dealing with exactly the same thing, in terms strikingly similar to Merleau-Ponty: the fundamentally excessive character of nature and its implication in the human as that which connects us to wild being. Or as Merleau-Ponty puts it in more general terms in his lecture on Schelling in *Nature,* "What inspires this idea of *erste Natur* in Schelling is the opposition to reflexive philosophies for which Being is contemporary with reflection,

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[1] Several articles have laid out various connections between Merleau-Ponty and Schelling, and given a reading of Merleau-Ponty's explicit references to Schelling. See Robert Vallier, *Être Sauvage* and the Barbaric Principle: Merleau-Ponty's Reading of Schelling"; Marcio Suzuki, "Le double enigme du monde: nature et langage chez Schelling et Merleau-Ponty"; and Antje Kapust, "The So-Called 'Barbarian Basis of Nature' and its Secret Λογος". The present intention is not to provide this sort of inventory of all plausible connections, but rather to focus on a few passages in Schelling which relate directly to the problem of the forgetting of nature as excessive ground.

[2] Calasso, Roberto. *Literature and the Gods*, 9. Calasso quotes Madame de Stael's travelogue *De Allemagne* to develop this milieu of wildness and myth in the Germany of two hundred years ago, and its difference from the more urban and agricultural France of the time, during a discussion of Hölderlin.

the feeling that Being is anterior to all reflection on Being and that reflection comes second" (*N* 61/38). Put blithely like this, if we are willing for the time being to ignore the confusions surrounding the form of this priority (for as Chapter I of the present work explains, it is hardly straightforward, not a matter of the first sailing) Schelling is working on the same phenomenological problem that Husserl (also taken up in the *Nature* lectures) opened, the problem of the pre-reflective world or *Lebenswelt.*[3]

The tone is different, but the matter for thought is the same, and indeed part of the difference in tone between Schelling and Merleau-Ponty results from their different reactions to the same matter. Schelling writes and practices philosophy in the tragic tradition: a reading of Greek tragedy is at the center of his thought, and the painful rending in the experience of the tragic, of being pulled apart by an impossible decision or forced to continue in impossible circumstances, informs his response to the aporetic experience of forging words to think what he will call the *Ungrund.*[4] Merleau-Ponty, confronting the same problem of excess and *Ungrund* and the same call for a radical change in both the thought and practice of language, responds with the tone of urgency that is more and more evident in his later works and lecture notes, but also with the tone of wonder that permeates all of his *oeuvre*. Merleau-Ponty's wonder, and the sense of impasse that he reaches, the sense that he is groping blindly to find his way around something which it is hardly clear if he successfully circumvents, is tied to the impasses

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[3] See *N* 102-108/70-79 and Suzuki, Marcio, "Le double enigme du monde: nature et langage chez Schelling et Merleau-Ponty, " 236. The first few pages of this essay summarize and restate Merleau-Ponty's comments on Schelling in somewhat clearer terms than the lecture notes themselves.

[4] On the importance of the tragic for Schelling and others including Hegel, Hölderlin, and Nietzsche, see David Farrell Krell's *The Tragic Absolute* and Dennis Schmidt's *On Germans and Other Greeks*.

of the tragic, and yet quite different in the comportment of its response. Nevertheless, Schelling's darkness and Merleau-Ponty's luminosity are not fundamentally opposed in their essentials.[5]

In many ways, Schelling went as far 200 years ago as anyone since in practicing philosophy as literature (or for him, as myth) and in grappling with bringing excess to word. Thus a focus on Schelling here should be, at the least, illuminating. Perhaps, as in Plato's *Theaetetus*,[6] the side-story on Schelling will bring out something even bigger on nature and language than what we had seen before, or clarify the results of the earlier chapters. Very little that Schelling says, however, is straightforward. Thus a lengthy and elaborate excursus into Schelling's texts and terms is required, in order to eventually circle back around to nature, language, and silence.

An explicit intention to think nature is present in Schelling's most succinct formulation of his task, which means, as for any good German Idealist, the task of all philosophy and of all History itself. This task is "to think Nature as living Ground." This thought was formulated in part as a step in a running, even lifelong, discussion and competition with Hegel, and Schelling indeed becomes a sort of inversion of Hegel: while Hegel's thought expands further and further *outward* until the power of the Concept subsumes everything, Schelling's thought, when it is most interesting, dives

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[5] Neither is it necessary to read Schelling exclusively as a thinker of darkness, of tragedy, of a certain kind of failure. Jason Wirth makes the persistent case that Schelling can be read as a thinker of irrepressible life, of a kind of brightness. See *The Conspiracy of Life*, which returns to this throughout.

[6] Plato, *Theaetetus* 172B.

further and further *inward,* deeper and deeper, as it experiences the necessity and the impossibility of thinking *origin* and *ground.* Schelling seeks, and was always seeking, not only the tightest kernel of thought and of time, the first movement of God when He was in the womb, so to speak, but also the *expression* of this kernel. This search ends up finding nature: literally, "Nature as living Ground."[7]

Yet Schelling's thought, despite its radicality and its ruthless and rigorous striving to investigate every turn of thought, to not only graze past difficult thoughts, but grind them through the wheels of philosophical expression, does indeed miss one turn, as I shall try to show. It is this missed turn that is most relevant to the argument above on the centrality of nature in Merleau-Ponty. This missed turn is like a black vacuum, wordlessly sucking in everything, waiting to be recognized, supporting the whole thought quietly, as if taken for granted. In the thought of "Nature as living Ground," Schelling, much like Merleau-Ponty when he discusses nature, tends to not think much about "ground" in terms of *the ground,* ground as sensible, visceral, phenomenal nature, the earth, which, as Proust would know, carries its own Concept, or idea, and requires a strange practice of language to bring that Concept to word. Nevertheless, the sensibility of nature plays a powerful and pivotal role in Schelling's deepest attempts at grounding. The role it plays can be thought most succinctly through the matter of *place.*

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[7] This search was hardly exclusive to the *Freedom* essay; in fact it is repeated, with variations, throughout Schelling's corpus. As Jason Wirth puts it in *The Conspiracy of Life,* speaking of Schelling's work as a whole, "In these texts, Schelling led each discursive project to the incomprehensible origin of its own discursivity, attempting to demonstrate that that the first principle by which a discourse can be founded cannot, in its turn, be founded. Hence, each and every one of these principles, themselves the progenitors of their respective systems, is brought face to face with the ruinous opacity of their own provenance, an opacity that evades all efforts at constituting it and which remains as the ground of all that exists" (8).

In *Clara,* Schelling's philosophical novel which takes the form of a running dialogue between a priest, a doctor, and a rather morose but richly imaginative young woman named Clara, Clara says at one point to the priest:

> You spoke so often about places and areas in the invisible realm, and also about places midway between our visible world and the one that is truly invisible; but then you also spoke about a place that was the highest of all, to which only a very few go immediately after death. Now, at the very least, we would so much like to get some idea about this place, the true and actual heaven; or where else should the passion come from that seems to be able to open up to us to some extent and with which everything, albeit still having so very much the appearance of illusion, is received? And even your calling that abode a "place" is very puzzling. Can spirits, too, be in a place?
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> [The priest replies]: Indeed, I said, this is one of the most puzzling things of all, for it's based on the mysteriousness of place and space in general, and now I just can't refrain from really putting down some of the foundations (*C* 93/67).

Indeed, we must ask, in response to Schelling and to Clara's priest, how would one *put down the foundations* of place itself, how would one ground "the mysteriousness of place and space in general?" Schelling's thought can at times be considered as a sort of foundation building, even while the possibility of such a practice, of thinking as a *system* that would benefit from a firm foundation, is beginning to crumble at the edges, or rather to implode from an emptiness at its center. This can be seen in the fact that Schelling never produced a satisfactory final version of his philosophy. Unlike Hegel, who, having finished the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* could take its insights for granted, as the most secure of foundations, and proceed to elaborate everything else under the sun, Schelling continued to try to think the beginning, forever. He never succeeded, at least

not in the manner of putting down an unshakable foundation on which to rest, and on which to continue to build.

The beginning of the problem is that the *poeisis* of foundation building, if the image of the building and of the foundation can carry us further, must necessarily *take place* in a place which precedes it, that the building sits on the ground in a place. So the still greater difficulty is to think place as *founded* by thought. This is what should be required if thought is to build a system, from the bottom up, and be responsible for it. Yet the constant undertow of Schelling's texts pulls us towards a glimpse of the birth of *everything*, even God, *out* of a *place*. Even God undergoes this failure to ground the place from which he is born. Yet against the strength of this undertow, we have an effort of thought to think the *place* of its birth: to think nature, to think the earth. This necessary doubling of thought, both of/about/determining place and out of/thanks to/always lacking place, is what Schelling's God suffers in the story of his birth in the *Freedom* essay. This is what I will try to show in the present chapter. In short, it amounts to showing how *place,* in its very sensibility as the nature that supports us, erupts in the *Freedom* essay, even though it is not taken up as a theme. Schelling's thought, in effect, points beyond itself, all the way through to Step 3 of the second sailing schema. Schelling, of course, who described the difficulty of escaping the natural attitude of Step 1 at least as well as Husserl, was always a thinker of the second sailing, indeed a phenomenological thinker, of a way to think nature not as the in-itself, but as it presents itself for human beings, full of language and given to thought. That is at least Step 3. The goal of the present chapter is to show how *place,* specifically in its

sensibility, taken quite literally as *actual places*, motivates a move to Step 3, to thinking the sensible excess of nature as that which gives birth, essentially, to Merleau-Ponty's invisible.

Thus perhaps it is possible to read Schelling's entire philosophical effort as a thinking of place, with the full force of the double genitive. We think into place, and out-of-place, as place thinking, or even in response to place's thinking - or all of these at once. Schelling's creation story, the story of God's birth which begins the *Freedom* essay in earnest and which is repeated again and again, in various permutations, in so many of Schelling's works, never tells backwards beyond the beginning of place, the place out of which God was born. This is not entirely clear; Schelling did not address "place" as a major concept or theme. But it will require only a slightly forceful reading to show that, despite God's efforts (with the faltering help of Schelling) to integrate the place from which he was born into the order of his intentional production, place remains an excess which refuses straightforward integration, just as nature, in Merleau-Ponty, refuses to be integrated as a region of ontology.[8]

In rigorously thinking back-into-place to the limit, in following God's tracks back down to the ground of place, perhaps we can help to answer Clara's question, which motivates the last few exchanges in the dialogue that bears her name:

> Where does that deep devotion to Earth come from, independent of all enjoyment we call earthly happiness and consisting of a full appreciation of the invalidity of this life? Why, if our heart is indeed numb to

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[8] See Marcio Suzuki's "Le double enigme du monde: Nature et langage chez Schelling et Merleau-Ponty," for a reading that draws a parallel between the doubling of nature as both product of a divine builder and as creative ground, and the doubling of language as active and creative and as passive and sedimented. Suzuki shows both of these doublings throughout the works of both Schelling and Merleau-Ponty.

everything external, and considers it with pleasure only as a sign and picture of our inner being, why, even if we are firmly convinced that the other world far exceeds the present one in every way, is there nevertheless the sense that it's hard to part from this Earth? (*C* 106/76).

That this question comes at the end of a dialogue which has been constantly concerned with the spiritual, the otherworldly, the disembodied, the inner, at the end of what could be read, ungenerously of course, as yet another Christianized, Platonist, life-hating mistake, only serves to affirm the fundamental *earthliness* of Clara's wondering. Clara's priest, as usual, attempts an answer, which ends very quickly in a pointedly non-dualistic failure: "Yet this seems to lead to such wondering entanglements of the internal and the external that I do not trust myself to develop this speech any further" (*C* 110/78). Just a few lines above, he had said, "And one could even add, I think, that language, as we know it, is something special to Earth" (*C* 109/78). I take these passages to indicate that everything in *Clara* is grounded in a deep earthliness, which, as is occasionally stated explicitly, is the same as the *spiritual* of which the characters speak so falteringly. This dialogue thus makes a different attempt to think Merleau-Ponty's *vinculum*.

Our thinking of place, along with Schelling, should follow Clara's example in returning to and starting out again from place not only in its conceptual necessity, but in the power and gravitational pull of *actual* places: of ground as *the* ground that supports us, as rocks and hills. The dialogue *Clara* takes place on walks, mostly outside, its constant lingering theme of life-and-death always situated by the change of seasons: it begins in fall and ends in spring. The sadness that hangs over the whole dialogue is not only the sadness of Clara's impending death, but of the death that every autumn brings, of the impending darkness of winter in the north, and of the life of spring that will only

circle back to falling leaves next year. The boundedness of birth and death to place is strongly figured in the dialogue's attention to this change of seasons and its emotional weight. Clara's questions about place seem to come directly from her attention to the sensibility of the place where she is; they do not arise as strictly conversational responses to her interlocutors, but equally as questions motivated by a sort of sensible idea, which the texts conveys through its descriptions of the natural places in which the dialogue *takes place*.

The action immediately before Clara's question quoted above reads thus: "At that moment we stepped out from the trees of the church and the whole area lay once more before us in a mild transfiguration" (*C* 106/76). *Once more transfigured*. What is the repetition here, perhaps the memory, that reminds Clara of a devotion to the Earth which she speaks of as if it had *always* been present and operative, even if momentarily ignored, or forgotten? Perhaps Schelling's effort to think in narrative, mythologically, with a conceptually rigorous *story* of creation, could be read as an effort to remember a groundedness in place that sustains even God: God's and our own irrepressible rootedness, like plants, in the ground of the earth. Thus Schelling's injunction to philosophy: to think nature as living ground.

Nature, ground, God; all Schellingian terms par excellence, but place? If Schelling speaks of place, it is not as a clear concept which would play a role in the System he never finished revising, but almost by accident - as if he could not help, in speaking of nature, ground, or God, to refer them to place. This seems especially clear in *Clara,* but it also occurs in the *Freedom* essay. Schelling constantly moves between

several words whose force, in his work, lives from their ambiguous status as partly

distinct, but in some senses overlapping at the edges, words with function in a vinculum

of sorts. Such overlappings would shift the sense or meaning at stake, but in a manner in

which the sense of one word draws its force from another, rather than from its clear

distinction from the others, precisely as, in Merleau-Ponty for example, we see a

movement, without explicit deliminations, between "invisible," "thought," "absolute,"

"language," etc. The basic pantheistic thesis is the "God is nature," yet Schelling thinks

both the birth of God from nature and God's own effort at grounding himself in nature,

which of course requires the distinction between the two. Nature is indeed the ground,

but at the same time God is the ground insofar as it is his task to ground himself in nature.

Place, meanwhile, offers a sense of ground as sensible ground, and also as nature.

Perhaps, if Schelling had finished his System and presented it for all to see, it

would have been easier for us to delineate precisely why and where these terms function

as distinct or as ambiguous - but he didn't. The words *nature, God, longing,* and *ground*

circle one another endlessly in Schelling's work, sometimes rigorously distinguished

from one another, sometimes becoming one another, and sometimes shifting back and

forth despite the attempt at rigorous distinction: *Nature as living ground*, or,

pantheistically, *nature as God,* or, *the longing felt by the eternal one* (God? Nature?) *to*

*give birth to itself (*Nature as *phusis*, becoming out of itself?). Through Schelling's early

work and his occasional reference to Plato's *Timaeus,* and from the unmistakable

parallels between Timaeus's story of creation in that dialogue and Schelling's own, such

that Schelling's work could almost be called a repetition of the *Timaeus*, it almost

unavoidable to read the word *chora* when Schelling speaks, unspeakably, of God's birth-place.[9]

Place would be such a word which is barely spoken at all - Schelling uses it relatively rarely, perhaps most often through the voice of Clara in the passages already quoted. Yet if all the above words must be thought *from* place, in some sense from earthly places, then Schelling's reticence in using this word, even if unintentional, speaks to the difficulty of thinking place as ground, as God, as *chora*, and to the limit-character of this movement of language toward its origin from the earth. Since what is to be said, what even *longs* to be said (*F* 456-457/239), only flees from the sayability that marks the first movement of God as the possibility of predication,[10] whatever is said least, or with the most difficulty, perhaps lies closest to the matter at hand.

Whatever is trying to be said, whether it is place, *chora*, nature, ground, God or whomever, is repeated, again and again, throughout Schelling's work, as that work as a whole is a repetition of Timaeus's necessity to retreat, *anachorein*, to the *chora*, the place "which always *is*, admitting not of destruction and providing a seat for all that has birth,

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[9] Very briefly, most of the *Timaeus* consists of Timaeus trying to provide a complete story of creation. He gets stuck, essentially around the problem of origin, of how there is to be something that *originates from itself*, without having been born of something else which must then be explained in turn. Amusingly, Timaeus tries various different stories as a solution, and none of them really work. Generally they involve some form of *production*, where a "demiurgos" makes the world, and thus are similar to Aristotelian and monotheistic cosmology. The problem, however, is the demiurgos' origin, or in the monotheistic inheritance of this tradition, God's origin. To explain this, the story that ends up working best in the *Timaeus* is the one in which everything was born out of something called *chora*, a word which can mean womb or *place*. Timaeus' story is thus a forced transition, forced by the failure of its preliminary attempts, from thinking of the creation of the world as a matter of production, *poeisis*, to a matter of birth, more like *phusis*. See John Sallis, *Chorology*, and Jacques Derrida, *Khora*. For a brief inventory of Schelling's apparent references to Timaeus' *chora* ("The figure of the *chora* operates tacitly throughout Schelling's entire corpus, taking on many different names"), see Jason Wirth, *The Conspiracy of Life*, 86-88.

[10] Schelling, *Stuttgart Seminars, 199; Identity Philosophy, 143.*

itself graspable by some bastard reasoning with the aid of insensibility, hardly to be trusted, the very thing we look to when we dream and affirm that it's necessary somehow for everything that *is* to be in some region or occupy some space, and that what is neither on earth nor somewhere in heaven is nothing."[11] Timaeus retreats (in the argument) to the *chora*, which is not graspable directly but only by some bastard *logos*, to find a sort of *resting place* for his story in the very idea of *place* itself, in the necessary *placedness* of all being. In a sense then, the argument rests on the earth.

The way to place in Schelling is slightly more involved, although Timaeus' speech up to this point in the dialogue is certainly very long and convoluted itself. Schelling's speech, and our own, is on Timaeus' terms also a bastard *logos*, the *logos* of God's birth taken over by human beings - but it is very questionable if God himself is the proper father of this thought, the thought of that from which he is born. The repetition of this thought in the *Freedom* essay requires a sort of bastard reasoning to say the ground of God, a turn to terms more accessible, but presumably less proper: "If we wish to bring this being closer to the human, then we can say: it is the longing [*Sehnsucht*] felt by the eternal one to give birth to itself" (F 455/238).

It is in the space of this longing, articulated in the *Freedom* essay, that Schelling's unthought-thought of place can be followed.[12] Strictly speaking, at least in one direction, Schelling *has* no thought of place, because place lies underneath thought, as its own *chora*, as birthplace, if you will. Perhaps this is why Schelling uses the word rarely.

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[11] Plato, *Timaeus* 52a-b.

[12] On this moment in the *Freedom* essay, see Robert Vallier's "*Être Sauvage* and the Barbaric Principle: Merleau-Ponty's Reading of Schelling," 97-100, and Slavoj Zizek's *The Indivisible Remainder,* throughout.

Perhaps we shall see that thinking place, as thought *of* place in the sense of thinking what already is, is more properly place thinking[13] - or that the failure to think place, even as it is enacted unintentionally in Schelling's failure to use the word very often or in our own necessity to think it through a 2,500 year old Greek text, is the more appropriate way to attempt this thought.

The birth of God and the creation of the world as Schelling tells it cannot be thought without thinking at least *spatially*, even if not yet as place. Schelling begins his story[14] in the *Freedom* essay with the following thought, which contains, in germ, the entire problematic of the excessive character of place: "Since nothing is prior to or outside of God, he must have the ground of his existence within himself" (*F* 454/237). This ground, that which grounds God but is already within him, is nature, as we find in the next sentence. But first, let us note that "within" is a word of spatiality. This wonderful entanglement of the interior and the exterior, as Clara's priest would say, is precisely the spatial headache of thinking nature as living ground of God. Nature is with*in* God, but God, in his birth out of the ground, must grow *out* of nature - out of what is within him. It defies everyday geometry.

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[13] Precisely as Merleau-Ponty wrote, time and again in his later work, that Being or Language speaks more than we speak of Being or Language. See, for example, *VI* 188/145, 228/176, 236/185, 241/190.

[14] After the long introduction establishing the character of pantheism.

God[15] exists, he is actually, and everything that exists needs a ground, a place to rest. But the peculiarity of God, or the all, is that he/she/it must have his ground within himself. Thus, "since nothing can have being outside of God, this contradiction can be resolved only by things having their ground in that which is in God, but *is not God himself*" (*F* 456/238). This hardly makes things simpler or more palatable: God's ground, which is inside him, is not him. God's existence is grounded on something inside him which is not himself. God, from day one, is internally divided, or exists only by virtue of an otherness inside himself - nature. Nature occupies an odd place inside God, while God is placed "on" nature, on the ground.

Here we require, Schelling says, terms more accessible to human beings. It will be necessary return to this so-called accessibility, which, apparently, allows us to speak of God's ground without saying it properly, in a sort of bastard *logos*. This being, nature, the ground of God, is understood by us human beings as "the longing of the eternal one to give birth to itself" (*F* 456/238). *Sehnsucht*, longing, languishing, desire - a longing at once erotic and sick, destitute, necessitous, and at the same time the source of love. This longing is *the first* - Schelling, before describing this longing, has given us nothing, has told no story. He has, so far, only set the stage: pantheism, God as the all, which must exist and have a ground, yet must hold this ground within itself. But nothing has

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[15] This could simply be read: God is all. Schelling thinks God pantheistically, which is in large part why the importance which he attaches to God is important for us as well – "God" is not the monotheistic personality in the sky with a beard, but the very fact of existence, of all-ness. In this sense, we could almost dispense with the word "God," and thus rid ourselves of 4,000-odd years of monotheistic distraction which serves mostly to muddy the waters. We could just think "the all." But this might be too hasty, and would certainly disrespect Schelling's terminology, so we will have to be satisfied with the reminder that God is not only the Good Father who creates and commands, but the all, everything, pantheistically.

happened: the first to step onto the stage of creation is *longing*. That is, *nature*, understood more accessibly by human beings as longing.

We see in the next few lines that this longing is *willing*, and thus the first instance and the deepest root for an essential concept in this essay on human freedom. But it is willing without understanding. Understanding comes on the scene presently, with God's gift of predication - God says what *is*, predicates, "A is A," and thus the *order* of the all is established and secured. But not yet. First there is only longing.

> But the ruleless still lies in the ground as if it could break through once again, and nowhere does it appear as though order and form were original, but rather as if something initially ruleless had been brought to order. This is the incomprehensible basis of reality in things, the indivisible remainder, that which with the greatest exertion cannot be resolved in the understanding, but rather remains eternally in the ground. From this non-understanding is born understanding in the true sense. Without this preceding darkness there is no reality of the creature; the gloom is its necessary inheritance (*F* 456-457/239).

Remains eternally in the ground, buried, in the earth. This gloom, the impassable darkness of the ground which we walk on, which supports us eternally, is our necessary inheritance. God, in Schelling's story, will soon take on his proper role as the stage director of *Genesis*, or the demiurgos of Timaeus (who himself needs *chora* to get started, even if Timaeus forgets it for awhile), the producer/craftsman who knows what he is doing as he shapes reality. But the longing in the ground beneath/*inside* God is ruleless, knowing no plan, and can always break through again. Indeed it breaks through all the time, in our own experience of longing, perhaps our own pantheistic participation in God's ground, which makes this story so accessible to us. We may not know God, or know the all, but we all know longing.

We should pause a moment and try to think the sense of the eternal, and the sense of narrative in Schelling's story, which is at work here. Schelling cautioned us a page beforehand, while introducing God's need for a ground for his existence, to avoid thinking either God or his ground as *prior* to the other: "As far as this precedence is concerned, it is to be thought of neither as precedence in time, nor as priority of being. In the circle out of which all things become, it is not a contradiction that what engenders one thing is itself generated by it. Here there is no first and last, because all things mutually presuppose each other; nothing is the other, and yet nothing is without the other" (*F* 455/237). In a sense, this is the thought of God's dependence on a ground which is *inside* him, as the all - he depends on it, but it depends on him, since it is inside him. We need to take seriously Schelling's insistence on the simultaneity, or the interdependent co-arising, of all things which might assert themselves as in some sense *prior*. In the preceding paragraphs, Schelling hasn't just cleverly pointed out that God isn't such hot stuff after all, he isn't really the producer, the master and commander of everything, but instead has always depended on a dark ground which he can never control. That would be too easy, and would simply deify, or reify, the dark ground which is supposed to be always a remainder, an excess - instead of God being God, the dark ground would really (*really!*) be God. But this is nothing more than taking the figure of God as simple origin and pushing it one step back, then proclaiming this new point, the dark ground, as the new origin. Nothing would really have changed.

The deeper point is that God, the all, that which suffers nothing to be outside of itself, *never* has an adequate grasp of itself such that it could claim its own priority. In

the essay on identity philosophy, Schelling had claimed that duration, or time, does not apply to God.[16] God is outside of time, and thus his birth is also outside of time. Yet as outside of time (if that thought is possible at all), the saga of God's birth is an eternal event, always happening, coterminous with all other events in time. In this way, then, the entire creation "story" must be thought as an eternal return, as reenacted in every moment of time, forever. Perhaps only God can suffer to undergo the longing that lies below his own birth in every moment, forever. That sounds very hard. At some moments in the *Freedom* essay, God is the unity of the "dark principle" which is in the ground and the "light principle" which is in the understanding (*F* 459/241), and the human is the possible difference between these two principles, or the actuality of evil. God, or the understanding, after being born, "raises up the unity hidden in the divided ground" (*F* 458/240) - sometimes Schelling seems to say that God understands, retroactively as it were, the longing in his own heart, the longing in nature.

As we speak in terms of time in Schelling's creation story, in a narration of events, we should therefore think the eternal character of what is said. In Timaeus's words, it is "the third kind - that of *chora* - which always *is*, admitting not of destruction" (*Timaeus* 52A-B) that we are seeking. Schelling's casual, off-handed mention of "Plato's matter" helps to explain the already "more accessible" thought that we are trying to think, the longing of nature on which God rests, or which rests (restlessly) inside God. It follows a serious of images which remind us that light always comes from darkness: "All birth is a birth from darkness into light; the seed must be buried in the earth and die in

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[16] Schelling, *Identity Philosophy,* 155

darkness" (*F* 456/239). One has to envision darkness as the permanent basis, the unformed matter, in a sense, of the all, and light primarily as a privation of darkness - but of course one could *not* en*vision* such darkness if vision only occurs through the light. The longing, the earthliness of nature as the ground, which is in some sense "accessible," as darkness precisely cannot be envisioned by us at all. But *chora*, we should remember, is only "itself graspable by some bastard reasoning with the aid of insensibility" (*Timaeus* 52B). So the difficulty of thinking this longing is not surprising. Schelling continues, introducing "Plato's matter": "Thus we must represent original longing to ourselves in this manner: it directs itself towards the understanding, which it does not yet know, as we in our longing desire an unknown, nameless good, and it moves pre-sentiently like an undulating, surging sea, similar to Plato's matter, following a dark, uncertain law, incapable of forming something lasting by itself" (*F* 456/239).

It requires a bit of generosity and a certain hermeneutic fearlessness to make much at all out of "Plato's matter," for which Schelling gives no citation from the Platonic texts. It seems possible that he intended the *Timaeus,* since there are two obvious candidates for interpretation as "matter" at the center of this dialogue: *chora* and *hyle.* The latter comes in the following passage of the *Timaeus,* after Timaeus has introduced *chora,* the wandering cause: "So then, now that the kinds of causes have been sifted out and lie ready to hand for us, like wood for builders, out of which we must weave together the account that remains..." (*Timaeus 69A*). *Hyle* is wood in the sense of trees in the forest, which will become for Aristotle, but already is here in Plato, matter in the sense of what is to be formed through *poeisis.* Schelling's frequent thought of God as

the understanding that gives form to nature, a basically Platonist thought, seems to fall in line with Timaeus's thought of the *demiurgos,* who forms the all in accordance with his divine plan, like a craftsman. In a sense this is all it takes to understand the whole history of nature in the Aristotelian and monotheistic tradition: matter is lumber.

Yet perhaps one could take the liberty of reading *hyle* more as "the woods" than as "wood for building," although it is clearly the latter sense that *Timaeus* has in mind. After all, lumber comes from trees, and trees grow out of the ground, as nature in the sense of *phusis.* Any and all building, to push Timaeus's image farther, uses materials that grew in a place or form the ground of a place; in this image the place is the forest. Anyone who has stepped into a great forest with eyes and ears open should know, without *knowing,* the wild excess, the indivisible remainder, the *matter* and the ground beyond and underneath any practice of building which would, of necessity, receive its *hyle,* even as lumber, as a gift from that place. In this sense, *hyle* is not so far from *chora*, and it may be possible to read these two at the same time, as place of the earth, as *material* place. Since Schelling gives no citations, he can't blame us for taking advantage of his ambiguity. This would, at least, be a provocative reading, whatever Schelling's and Timaeus's intentions actually were; both texts are open enough to invite such provocative readings.

The dark, uncertain law of the undulating sea of "Plato's matter," or longing, "which as the still dark ground is the first rousing of divine existence, has as its counterpart a reflexive representation engendered in God... God beholds himself in his own image" (*F* 456-457/239). A reflexive representation, a re-presenting of self, not

produced by, but engendered in, God. In the difficult terms of identity philosophy and the Stuttgart seminars, God, initially, is only "A" by itself. "A=A", the statement of identity, the first act of predication, of the joining through the copula, is the possibility of time and of the revelation of God. The reflexive character of the first predication, "A=A," the "is" as a saying of the same that repeats itself in every predication, in all speech, is *engendered* in God as a *counterpart* to the longing of nature/*chora*, the dark force in the ground. Language is a response to the longing. In the words of Clara's priest, "language, as we know it, is something special to Earth" (*C* 109/78). Or, a few lines later in the Freedom essay, "This representation is at the same time the understanding - the *word* of this longing" (*F* 457/239). A footnote supplies the clue to thinking "the word of this longing": "In the sense that one says: the word of [the solution to] a riddle" (*F* 457n/239n). God's Word, the original predication, language per se, is the word of longing not in the direct sense of the word as the possession of longing, such as human beings are said to possess speech and we can say "Schelling's word," for example. It is the word of longing (of nature) as a riddle calls for, demands, a word in response. It is the word of silence, but a word engendered in and demanded by what is silent - nature. Or as Merleau-Ponty put it apropos of Proust, "The call to write thrown out by the things" (*NC* 49). As we have seen, in Proust especially but also in Merleau-Ponty, this call of the things could easily be called a longing, *Sehnsucht*, or in the translation put forward by David Farrell Krell, languor.[17]

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[17] Krell, David Farrell, *The Tragic Absolute.*

One would have to point out that if the word is a response to wordless longing, and that longing is the ground that is inside God and us, then perhaps we are not precisely in possession of that word either - for how could one be in possession of something that arises, is engendered, as a response to a ruleless longing from the depths of what is silent? Again, we are in the same realm of the dispossession of speech by the human and its ambiguous, lacunary place in nature which Merleau-Ponty attempts to think.

Despite Schelling's and Timaeus's obsession with the God of *poeisis*, neither of them can escape the thought, in their own speeches, that God cannot produce nature, he cannot produce his own place, because he is born out-of-place (and thus, oddly enough, is rooted in place while being necessarily out of place, at least a little bit). Timaeus's demiurgos requires a *chora,* a place/space/receptacle/womb/matter to be in or, at the very least, to work with. Schelling's God is born as a response to a wordless longing of nature, a wordless longing that is inside God himself. God may go on to produce rule and order, to speak the Word in a way perfectly adequate to this order as human beings perhaps can never do, committed as we are to the finitude of language and nature that are not identical, that do not achieve perfect adequation. God may even try to grandfather the wordless longing into his order by claiming to have thought and produced his own birth, as Schelling attempts to claim on his behalf. But if production requires a plan, and a plan requires language, and language was engendered only in response to a longing, then no one could have produced the longing itself, without the language which requires that same longing. When the cards are down, Schelling's God can never erase the

longing which will always support him as his ground, and always open up as an emptiness inside of him.

Now, if this is inquiry is to be anything besides a skeptical deconstruction, we have to keep up the inquiry into longing, to try to think it through, for it is here that we will find the most illuminating lessons for the study of Merleau-Ponty. In a sense, Schelling's efforts to think God's re-appropriation of that longing is itself an effort to think the longing itself. God's failure is precisely an experience of the obscurity of this longing to language. But perhaps, with Timaeus, we can here retreat again to the beginning. "If anyone is to declare how the all was genuinely born, he must also mix in the form of the wandering cause - how it is its nature to mix things around."[18] Timaeus' retreat is an effort to think *chora*. Our retreat is an effort to think longing as place, in place.

The effort to think "nature as living ground" reveals the longing at the heart of nature. Perhaps another effort to think this longing can reveal a thought of place. A part of place is certainly *space*. There is the space of nature *inside* of God, and the birth of God *out of* nature. God's Word, the birth of language, opens up the *space* of predication, the space of the copula between "A" and the repetition of "A." The copula requires a certain sort of space. Space, by itself, if that can be thought at all, is simply openness, or emptiness. The longing is what *opens* God, and to the extent that the longing cannot be recuperated by God as an instance of the fullness of his productive will, it is an *emptiness*

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[18] Plato, *Timaeus* 48a.

inside of him. The saying of pantheism, the thought of God/human/nature/all as the same, the temporal thought of the simultaneity of each "moment" in Schelling's creation story, both require, for their identity, an odd spacing between them, as repetitions of the same. *Chora* is required by Timaeus and his demiurgos in one sense simply as the *space,* the emptiness, that all beings need in order to be: "the very thing we look to when we dream and affirm that it's necessary somehow for everything that *is* to be in some region and occupy some space, and that what is neither on earth nor somewhere in heaven is nothing."[19]

Space, moreover, easily slides into *place*. Clara, in the passage which opened this essay, noted the strange necessity of thinking "the higher" and "the other realm" as a *place,* when earthly places would seem to be the opposite of whatever is "the higher," as the visible is, in a simple way, the opposite of the invisible. The movement of Chapter V in *Clara* goes, in a sort of inversion, from this observation of the necessity of thinking place in order to think what might have been supposed to be most *distant* from earthly places, to the even stranger necessity of thinking the spiritual power of grounded, sensible earthly places: the doctor says, "Weren't even the ancients' oracles tied to certain areas, even to particular places, and shouldn't we draw the general conclusion from this that locality isn't as irrelevant to the higher as generally supposed? Indeed, don't we feel a certain spiritual presence in every place?" (*C* 105/75). This leads to Clara's thought of our deep devotion to the Earth, and the priest's hesitation, which ends the unfinished dialogue, in the face of "such wonderful confusions of the inner and the

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[19] Plato, *Timaeus* 52b.

outer." "Plato's matter" in the *Freedom* essay, as either *hyle* or *chora*, refers to place, and this reference is the closest Schelling comes to thinking the longing in the ground of God.

Most compellingly, and following Clara's example in returning again and again to real *earthly place*, how can we think "ground" at all, *Grund* as the grounding reason for the being of a being, without thinking *the ground* we all rest, stand, and walk on? Quite literally, the ground of God and anything else, as a concept, takes its life as a conceptual image from the sensible supporting ground underfoot: sticks and leaves, rocks and hills.

Finally, *that* ground, if it speaks, does not speak in words. The ground of all, Schelling says, that on which all rests, *longs* for the Word. Doesn't our speech, conversely, our thought, suffer an identical longing for the sayability of the ground - of nature, of *places*? And is not that sayability, when it can be found, always at a remove, in a relationship of discontinuity, like Proust who could only begin to write later, or who only felt the death of his grandmother months after the event, upon the demand of the things?

Schelling tries to think how God, while holding the dark ground, or the longing of nature, within himself, already has the Word of that longing. God would possess the speech of nature, and only we humans would remain in longing. Whether one can think this, or whether one finds only *aporias* which just reinforce the obscurity of that longing, makes at least a slight difference in how one reads what Schelling calls "the highest point of the entire investigation," (*F* 502/278), the unground, or indifference. Schelling's text started with the distinction between the existence of a being (God) and its ground

(nature). Throughout the investigation, these two took turns being the same and being different from one another. Either they are different, and one thinks dualism, or they are the same, but still surreptitiously different, so they fight for precedence (*F* 502/276). The way to resolve this vacillation, says Schelling, is to think a being *before* the difference between ground and existence. This is the unground, or the indifference, the ground under erasure *under* the ground, or the difference before difference, which "has no predicate except predicatelessness" *(F* 502/276). Lacking predication, lacking the Word with which God was born out of the dark ground, *un*ground or *in*difference is *un*sayable except as the negation of sayability. This is nothing but the repetition of ground with the addition of an explicit denial of its sayability: ground as silent. Yet we long to say it, or, it longs for us to say it.

If the original ground was also unsayable the whole time, if it was not accessible to speech at all, but already abyssal, then "unground" is precisely the ground of which we have already (failed to have) spoken. Or, if God could say the ground but can't say the unground, then the same condition holds now. With the thinking of unground at the end of the *Freedom* essay, it no longer makes any difference whether God could say the longing or not. If he could, he can't now, and if he couldn't, then "ground" was "unground" from the very beginning.

"Un"ground, then, is not the opposite of the sense of ground as nature, longing, or silent place. Its "un" is the indeterminacy of *chora* as "receptacle" of all,[20] but determined, as itself, by nothing: "it's shapeless with respect to all those looks that it's

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[20] Plato, *Timeaus* 49b.

going to receive from elsewhere,"[21] thus a sort of *everything* that is *nothing,* or at least

nothing that can be determined by speech. Thus the meaninglessness that one slips into

in trying to *say* it, the meaninglessness and inadequacy that dogs Timaeus.[22] *Chora,* like

the longing of place, is elusively resistant to being caught in the net of determinative

language, yet it calls for language nonetheless. It must, then call for another language -

perhaps Schelling's necessity of using a "more accessible" thought, or perhaps

Schelling's entire effort of thinking the birth of the all as a creation story, as a sort of

mythos, could be read as an attempt at such an other-saying. Place, nature, the earth,

perhaps doesn't like to be integrated into produced speeches, just as God cannot be the

producer, through predication, of the (un?)ground from which he is born. Yet the earth

longs for and even bears and supports speech, even while turning away our speeches, in

perhaps a different sort of indifference.

This is what painting shows, according to Merleau-Ponty: "Painting gives what

nature wants to say and does not say: the 'generative principle' that makes the things and

the world be, 'first cause,' 'mind or heart of creation', 'absolute knowing' the principle

older than God himself (Schelling), wild being" (*NC* 56-57). Painting, as a form of

expression if not literally as the language of words, is also, potentially, at Step 3 of the

second sailing, at the presentation of the peculiar excess in nature, like the language of

Merleau-Ponty and Proust. Schelling, in a different way, is also at Step 3. He reaches it

by confronting the necessity of what he calls the indivisible remainder, which, as I hope

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[21] *ibid.* 50d.

[22] See John Sallis's *Chorology,* 111.

to have at least suggested, lives in multiple ways in *Clara* and the *Freedom* essay from the sensibility of nature, from the sensibility of ground, matter, *chora,* as place, and from the longing of this place for language. But he reaches it in a different way than Proust and Merleau-Ponty: they attempt a practice of language that can itself present the silence, the obscurity, the hiddenness of nature, while Schelling attempts a conceptual rigor that reaches its end by breaking down, by revealing its truth in the impact with *aporia*.

CHAPTER VI

SILENCE

Near the end of the Freedom essay, Schelling speaks of the human inability to grasp its own condition, to think or say its own necessity - perhaps, in a word, to speak for nature, to announce its own place in nature. "This is the sadness clinging to all finite life, and if in God, too, there is a condition which is at least relatively independent, then within him there is a well of sadness, which, however, never comes to actuality, but serves only for the eternal joy of overcoming. Hence the veil of despondency spread over all of nature, the deep, indestructible melancholy of all life" (*F* 495/271). The condition of irrevocable commitment to the unsayable seems, indeed, sad, like the necessity to row with oars instead of sailing by the wind is disappointing. Silence seems to bar speech from *saying* the nature that is its deepest ground.

The attempt of the last four chapters has been to think the intersection of nature and language in Merleau-Ponty, Proust, and Schelling, and to come as close as possible in this thought to the passage between nature and language. The singular goal of this attempt has been to think the togetherness of human life and nature, a togetherness that, as we have seen in Proust's emphasis on the darkness and obscurity necessary to the writer's task of remembrance, and in Schelling's mythic plunge into the dark ground at the heart of language, is nevertheless a kind of strangeness. The essential problem is to think the place of human life in nature in a manner that can think both the depth of their bond, as deep as it may be, *and* the genuine opening between them, in the event of language. In each case, thinking language has turned back on the thinking of nature to disclose it, in a circular fashion, as that which, while it provides the place for language to begin, does not "precede" language in a linear sense. Rather, nature, whether Proust's sensible, Schelling's hidden place, or Merleau-Ponty's nature as being, is already expressive, already calling for a language which, in disclosing it, will not hide, but will in fact *show,* its very silence.

This is not a new thought. The intermingling of language and nature, the density and obscurity by which nature eludes language and the longing with which it calls for words, the unique disclosure of nature in language, is not a matter for thinking unique to Proust, Schelling and Merleau-Ponty. It is a problem no doubt as old as language itself, as old as the experience of the failure to find the right words, those that fulfill the call of the sensible, or conversely, as old as the fulfillment when the sensible idea, as Proust says, is carried on in words, in successful creative language.

To grasp the history of such a problem, or to grasp such a problem *as* history, one can take recourse to philosophy, and to that which precedes philosophy in Western history: myth. Many myths tell stories of the origins of language, and account for some kind of transition between the silence of the things and the language of human beings. Many philosophies have tried to think the togetherness of language and nature, or to come up with an excuse for their seemingly inexcusable opposition. In the end, many of the philosophies tell tales, and many of the myths are philosophically rich; they are hardly opposites, despite the long history of a *logos/mythos* opposition in philosophical thought.

It is one of the philosophically rich myths that I wish to attend to now, in order to think the historical depths of the passages between nature and language on which Merleau-Ponty, Proust, and Schelling focus some of their reflections. To think the problem historically, indeed, to think it *as history,* and not as some kind of topical question incidentally raised by a few authors, requires an appreciation of the changing form of the problem over the course of the history of philosophy, from its beginning to the present. A rough outline of this for the past several hundred years has been givein in Chapter I, but the historical beginning, of course, is in myth, in that form of telling from which history emerges. By suggesting how this problem might have taken form long ago, I hope to at least to suggest the greater historical consistency of the relationship between nature and language as it has been explored here in Merleau-Ponty, Proust, and Schelling.

Roberto Calasso tells of a Greek myth which, at the time of its currency, spoke of those predecessors of the Athenians who were even *then* mythical, who were to the Athenians like the Greeks are to us, ancient forebears about whom one knew only vague stories. As such, it is a story, for us today, of a kind of *Ur*-origin, of the mythical *before* of those very people, the Greeks of Athens, who so often play the mythic role of the beginning of Western civilization, and especially of philosophy. These pre-Athenians were called the Pelasgians. The Pelasgians, apparently, were the ancestors of the Athenian Greeks, but were utterly different from them. The difference came down to their language – Greeks couldn't understand Pelasgian at all. Calasso describes these strange people thus:

> Pelasgian man is elusive. You can never pin anything on him: he is always the mute "neighbor" *(pélas),* the thing language and history have split away from. Without dwelling on the point, Herodotus remarks that, "being Pelasgian, the Athenians changed their language when they were absorbed into the Greek family." Thus the Athenians made two claims about themselves: that they were autochthonous, born from the soil, because they were Pelasgian; and at the same time that they had rejected the language of the soil, the lost Pelasgian language.[1]

The Pelasgian language is *the language of the soil,* directly, or so it seems. Perhaps it would be the language of the earth itself, "of the things, the waves, and the forests," *(VI* 201/155) which Merleau-Ponty calls for but does not produce, which Schelling goes beyond and beneath God to find, and which Proust perhaps understands better than either one, because he takes for granted the necessity of distance, obscurity, and remembrance in his bringing of the things to language. Like in Schelling's myth of the birth of God, the language of the soil, of the *ground,* or of nature, is something that

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[1] *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony,* 317.

cannot be remembered, at least not directly, in the sense of straightforward recall. The

explicit rejection, or impossibility, of this remembrance (for the Athenians could not

remember how to speak Pelasgian) yet remembering precisely the impossibility of this

remembrance, combined with the paradoxical claim of being *authochthonous,* being *of*

the land, is, as Calasso goes on to show, a founding myth of Athenian civilization. I use

the present tense because it is still a paradoxical foundation of our own civilization; we

are in the same situation today. It is the same problem as the phenomenological

disjunction between our bodily rootedness in nature, and the apparent foreignness of

language to a nature that is always silent, a foreignness that is only mitigated, brought

into some form of thinkable proximity, when we think the necessity of this passage

through silence in language's return to nature, in Step 3 of the schema proposed at the

beginning of the present work. We are of the land, but cannot remember its language.

Only rarely do we remember this forgetting.

But the Pelasgians themselves were silent, in a way. This, at least, is what

Herodotus learns from the three priestesses at the temple of Dodona, where the oracle of

the oak tree speaks the mind of Zeus, about one fateful occasion when the Pelasgians had

consulted the oracle regarding the arrival from Egypt of Cadmus, who, so the myths tell,

brought the names of the gods and the letters of the alphabet to Greece.

> Hitherto, the Pelasgians had 'offered sacrifices of every kind to the gods and
> prayed to them, but without distinguishing between them with names and titles,
> because they didn't know that such things existed.' Now some sailor or other had
> come back from Egypt bringing the names of the gods with him... The story the
> three priestesses of Dodona told Herodotus is also the fable that ushers in the
> opposition and superimposition of *nómos* and *phýsis,* law (or convention) [and,
> eventually, name] and nature, and hence the underlying structure of all thought
> from then on. Only that day, in Dodona, did the Greeks become Greek: if by

Greek we mean nothing more than the coexistence of a dark, obscure background, like the rustling of a tree, dedicated to any and every power, with a sound that comes from a foreign land and forever superimposes on that background the sovereign caprice of a name.[2]

"The rustling of a dark, obscure background, like the rustling of a tree," and "a sound that comes from a foreign land." Calasso's retelling of the myth speaks of the strangeness of language, the foreignness of language to nature and to the original "natural" Pelasgians who did not use names, and were thus silent in a certain way. The determination of names for the gods is an apparent caprice of the linkage between language and nature, which occurs after the obscurity of a barely remembered past when the language of the soil was supposedly spoken. It is the same story told here to Herodotus by the priestesses of Dodona, the same story told by Proust, Merleau-Ponty, and Schelling. The rustling of the tree in the story is the rustling of the leaves of the oak tree at Dodona, through which the oracle of Zeus was interpreted. It is a sound that is almost silent: "His voice, the rustling of the oak, is the closest thing imaginable to an undifferentiated sound, a voice that more than any other on earth recalls the sea."[3] An undifferentiated sound is a sound as far as possible from the infinite play of differences in language. A sound that is mute, that is silent. A sound that was once turned into words

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[2] *Ibid.,* 317. Calasso's passage continues: "The Pelasgians went from a mute homage to the gods to an homage in which they evoked those gods with foreign names they knew nothing about. Thus did the Greeks tense their metaphysical bow; such was their style as they raised it to their shoulders." And thus does Calasso see the metaphysical problem of language, or of the name, and the dark obscurity of nature, a problem which begins as least as early as the myth of the Pelasgians and continues to this day. Calasso also points out that the figure of the oak tree and the oracle at Dodona, the oak tree which was the voice of Zeus, shows the odd requirement of an absolutely sovereign power, the greatest of the gods, in establishing the authority of the name, of linking language to nature through the figures of the gods: "The oak tree told them that the names were right and that it was right to use them. Zeus is the god who allows the other gods to be named. Zeus is the god who allows things to appear" (317).

[3] *Ibid.* 317.

by an oracle, based on a principle of turning the undifferentiated sound, or the silence, of nature into language by thinking nature as gods.

Calasso makes much of the physical location of Dodona, on a flat, apparently rather boring and useless plain, neither prominent and strategically important like Delphi, or blissfully alpine like Olympia. The generality of the place is like the undifferentiated sound, which supports all the rest: "All the other gods have their shapes, their signs, their profiles. Zeus has the background, and the background noise. Zeus is the commonplace supporting the unique. The unique cannot exist alone without that support. But the support can exist alone. The unique tends to be jealous, because there are things that don't belong to it. The support tends to be indifferent, because everything rests upon it."[4]

The figures of the unique and the indifferent stand in for many here: the other gods and Zeus, the human and nature, Schelling's God and nature, or the infinite articulations of language and the silence of nature that underlies it. The jealousy of the unique, and its dependence, characterize all these relations, as does the indifference of the support. This indifference could be the mute refusal of nature to speak, the endless rustling of the oak tree, or Schelling's indifferentiation at the origin of God, the indifference before the difference invoked by language, by the very speaking of the Name.

Thus at the origin of *logos* and History, at the moment where the Greeks become Greek, there is nature and *logos*, or rather only a *myth of a myth* of nature's *logos,* of the

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[4] *Ibid.* 318.

"coexistence of a dark, obscure background with the sovereign existence of a name,"[5] the undecipherable Pelasgian language of the soil. For the Greeks who told the myths, such a coexistence was itself a myth, a dream, the dream of their own origins. This is an indication that language and nature for them suffered much the same estrangement and longing as they do for us today, and that the pure and perfect coexistence of the obscure with the named can only be thought, at least in the Western tradition, as a myth of irretrievable origin.

But as Schelling knew, the Greeks had one thing that we don't have, one thing that could help to bridge the *aporia* between language and nature, to satisfy the longing of nature for words and likewise to plumb the depth of nature with words: they had gods. They had a manner of conversion between the rustling of the oak tree and their own language, between the indifference of nature and their own yearnings, strivings, and meanings. Although who knows how effective a conversion it was, or how much it really helped.

Gods are dangerous things, especially when they are introduced into philosophical work. It is tempting to offer a sort of apologia for "turning to the gods," perhaps by saying that one absolutely affirms that the path of myth is now closed, and that one introduces myth only as a historical example, or as a form of philosophy. But this is at once too cowardly and too arrogant, both for the same reason: that when we speak of myths, and gods, and the divine, we *barely know what we are talking about*. It is too rash and too difficult, unnecessarily so, to say whether the "time of myth" was past and can

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[5] *Ibid.*, 317.

never come again, or if it ever existed as we describe it now, or exactly what would have fundamentally and permanently changed, passed into the *past,* and what on the other hand has not changed, or still persists despite its own changing. These are the difficulties that drove and plagued Hölderlin and Heidegger, two of those thinkers who chattered on the *most* about "the gods," probably doing more harm than good to their reputations in the process.

Yet the philosophical problems which are articulated, if not as "philosophy," in Greek myths, like the problem of language and nature that we have just seen broached by the myth of the Pelasgians, vibrate, shudder, and echo throughout the history of Western thought, *and* throughout the history that walks on its feet, if one believes that the problems of philosophy walk the streets in how we live each day. That is one reason for taking up a philosophical discussion with Greek myth, or any other myth that has a place in history.

The other reason, the reason that will be outlined in the paragraphs that follow, is based on the assumption[6] that myth has always been a vehicle for self-understanding. Thus, at this level, the *mythos* is always a *logos,* and belongs to the history of philosophy, as well as, more obviously, to literature. As a vehicle for self-understanding, we see ourselves in the stories of myth, and see our problems in the stories, even, possibly, to the extent of making our concerns their concerns, of, most likely, reading the philosophical problems raised in myths differently from how they have been read before. The

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[6] And necessarily an assumption, never a certainty, simply by virtue of the vast historical distance that separates us today from mythical time. This historical distance, however, is strangely mitigated by a phenomenological proximity, as the present chapter tries to show.

problems are more or less perennial, or at least very old. This means that the identity of

the problems themselves is a problem – one can say that we undergo the same difficulties

in a very different way in the 21st century than they were undergone in the 5th century

BC, or in the time before counting centuries became the thing to do.[7] This phenomenon,

which is no less than temporality, is what makes the *re*telling of a myth current. This is

why a book like Roberto Calasso's, which speaks of what people supposedly believed

and told each other 2,500 years ago, can be a comparable literary event to those people

telling each other those stories themselves. Stories that were never really theirs either,

because they were always *stories,* retellings of events that may or may not have occurred

in such a way, depending on who is doing the telling.

Thus: nature, language, silence, excess, Proust, Schelling, Merleau-Ponty, and the

gods. The goal of what follows is to understand and conclude what we have seen in

Proust, Schelling, and Merleau-Ponty by thinking through how it has all happened before.

We see in all of these thinkers an attempt to bring the excess of nature to word, in a way

that maintains the strange hiddenness of this excess in the work of language itself, rather

than covering it over or forgetting its necessity. This togetherness and strangeness, of

nature and language, of hiddenness and showing, has always been a theme and problem

of philosophy. The question, then, is how did this happen in the time before philosophy

as such, in the time of the gods?

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[7] See *The Visible and the Invisible,* 250/199, on the continuity of philosophical problems through history, and the requirement it makes for thinking philosophy as history of philosophy, rather than as a series of problems to be resolved.

One can approach an answer to this with another question: what is it that gods fundamentally do? What is their role in human life, aside from providing entertainment via endless family feuds, sensational violence, and illicit sex?

One answer is that the gods bring the excess of nature to word, essentially in the same Step 3 manner which it has been the goal of the present work to describe. They are the meeting of nature's radical excess, indifference, and underpinning of human life and language, and of language itself. This is the case superficially, in that the gods embody powers of nature, and take the forms of nature, but also take human form and speak in human language. But it is also true phenomenologically, true at the level of nature as *phainomenon*, as the shining-forth-appearing of the world. The point here is not to show that stories of the gods are nothing more than figures which represent something ineffable in nature, any more than it is to say that nature is, in fact, not nature but gods. The point is to think them as the same, to think the gods and nature interchangeably. The oak tree at Dodona *is* Zeus, in the manner of appearing not as a barrel-chested, grey-bearded, thunderbolt-wielding philanderer, but as an oak tree which rustles in the wind, as the undifferentiated sound that is silence. Light *is* Apollo; chaos, hallucination, and sex *are* Dionysus. Beauty, brightness, is divinity. In the time of Homer, *dios,* the adjective translated as "divine" which modifies gods and heroes alike throughout the *Iliad,* meant

"clear," "brilliant," "glorious."[8] It is the brilliance of vision, of the sensible. "To appear in Zeus is to glow with light against the background of the sky."[9]

The manner of the presencing in language of nature through the figures of the gods is such as to maintain and reinforce, to remember, the silence of nature, its refusal of a direct language, that refusal which is the fundamental problem which motivates godliness, *theos,* a word that has a predicative function, designating *something that happens,* an *event*.[10] The character of this event, in its coming to language, is to re-inscribe an obscurity of origin, a mythical time, in the very necessity of a myth's retelling, through different voices, none of them authoritative. "A god is never a constant presence," and the mode of presentation of the gods, both in their sudden appearance and disappearance onto the scene *within* myths, in the narratives themselves, but more so in the necessary non-presentation of story and image, reinforces this. Myths tell of events whose "happening" is obscure, events in the deep past, stories of the divine, but in whose happening the present world is at stake. Events, thus, that cannot be simply passed over as false, as purely fictional, just as Socrates understands myth in the *Phaedrus,*[11] as tales not to be refuted as false, but to be told and interrogated. But how were they told? *We are told that it was thus:*

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[8] Calasso, *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony,* 102. Calasso further characterizes this sense of brilliance as the bright light of high noon over a Mediterranean sea and the clarity of line of an island against the horizon.

[9] *Ibid.,* 102

[10] Calasso, *Literature and the Gods,* 5. Calasso attributes this observation to the linguist Jakob Wackernagel.

[11] Plato, *Phaedrus* 229e-230a.

No sooner have you grabbed hold of it than myth opens out into a fan of a thousand segments. Here the variant is the origin. Everything that happens, happens this way, or that way, or this other way. And in each of these diverging stories all the others are reflected, all brush by us like folds of the same cloth. If, out of some perversity of tradition, only one version of some mythical event has come down to us, it is like a body without a shadow, and we must do our best to trace out that invisible shadow in our minds.[12]

A "myth" is not *a* myth but "a fan of a thousand segments," stories different with each telling, stories whose fundamental unknowability, their necessity of variance, is the shadow that makes the body real. "The repetition of a mythical event, with its play of variations, tells us that something remote is beckoning to us."[13] That remoteness is preserved, and given, in the repetition-with-variance of myth, that manner in which the stories of myth are different than the claim to definitiveness, the one-chance-is-all-you-get, misleading as it may be, of a novel, a sacred text, or a philosophical tome.

So the telling of myth tells silence as well, tells the obscurity beneath and behind human life and nature.

The obscure non-presentation of *theos* in myth is like the mythic time which Merleau-Ponty sees in Proust, the obscurity of a past whose remembrance makes the present vivid. The past which Proust remembers and evokes "belongs to a mythical time, to the time before time, to a prior life, 'farther than India and China' [Proust's phrase] (*VI* 296/243). Mauro Carbone puts it this way:

a time that flashes in the simultaneity to which the ontology implicit in contemporary thought (and Proust's work itself) attempts to give expression. That is to say, we are dealing with a time flashing in the "relief

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[12] Calasso, Roberto, *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony, 147-148.*

[13] *Ibid.,* 136.

of the simultaneous and of the successive" [VI 153/114], which founds, in our experience, the chiasm between anticipation and retrieval, as in a melody, the chiasm between the first and the last note. A time flashing precisely *in* those chiasms. It is precisely in a time thus characterized, rather than in a Platonistic eternity, that Merleau-Ponty sees the life of the sensible ideas described by Proust, ideas which he in fact qualifies as "the eternal in the ephemeral" and immediately after defines as the "ciphers of the singular." Even if ephemeral, our first encounter with these ideas is such that – Proust explains – "so long as we are alive, we can no more bring ourselves to a state in which we shall not have known" those ideas, since for their part they have "espoused our mortal state." In Merleau-Ponty's terms, the singularity of that encounter anticipates itself as a generality – a "cipher" – and as such it is sedimented in the memory of our body. The dimension which has opened up is thus "by now *inalienable*, the *initiation* irreversible" [Merleau-Ponty's phrase].[14]

The sensible ideas are "the eternal in the ephemeral," which do not present themselves directly, but, as we have already discussed, are barely retrievable through a work that traverses the obscurity of time. Yet as Proust himself finds, "so long as we are alive, we can no more bring ourselves to a state in which we shall not have known those ideas," they have "espoused our mortal state," and the dimension of the sensible ideas, of the vivid invisible in sensual life, or, as we have argued, simply in nature, is *inalienable*. The initiation to this realm is *irreversible*.

The sensible ideas are like the gods, "never a constant presence," but also refusing to just disappear, just like the *life,* the vividness of expression, that bubbles beneath the surface of a nature otherwise domesticated, quantified, and theorized. Now there are perhaps no gods, or if there are, their presence is weak, occasional, vague, undefined, fugitive. Yet the initiation to *theos* is irreversible, if we can understand the Proustian sensible idea, the Schellingian *Ungrund*, and what I have tried to express as Merleau-

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[14] Carbone, Mauro, "The Mythical Time of Ideas: Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze as Readers of Proust," 26.

Pontian nature partake of the same event which long ago was called "the gods." We do

not, perhaps, need to call it by that name, but that does not mean that it has disappeared.

Thus the epileptic shudder of the word, the unbalanced, groundless character of

contemporary thought, a thought which has taken up the challenge of thinking and

bringing to work the event of *theos* without the help of gods and myths. Once again we

shall turn to Calasso:

> There is a very strong and very ancient emotion that is rarely mentioned or
> recognized: it is the anguish we feel for the absence of idols. If the eye
> has no image on which to rest, if there is nothing to mediate between the
> mental phantasm and that which simply is, then a subtle despondency
> creeps in. This is the atmosphere that reigns in the first dream of which
> we have a record, a dream told by a woman, Addudûri, overseer of the
> palace of Mari in Mesopotamia, in a letter etched on clay tablets more than
> three thousand years old. "In my dream I had gone into the temple of the
> goddess Bêllit-ekallim; but the statue of Bêllit-ekalim wasn't there! Nor
> were the statues of the other divinities that normally stand beside Her.
> Faced with this sight I wept and wept." The first of all dreams speaks of
> an empty temple… the statues have been carried off, deported perhaps,
> along with the people who worshipped them. That kind of thing happened
> then. Loss precedes presence: every image must abide by this rule. And
> this helps us to understand why literature, guardian of these phantoms, has
> so adroitly searched out those fugitive idols and restored them to their
> pedestals.[15]

The image, the myth, makes the passage between the *theos* of nature and human

life and language not only the idiosyncratic pursuit of wild-haired mystics or Romantic

philosophers, but a regular, founded, communal practice. The anguish for the loss of

idols, images, myths, is the anguish of having no way to mediate between the

togetherness and strangeness of humanity and nature. Even the image, of course,

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[15] Calasso, Roberto, *Literature and the Gods*, 120. Quoted passage from J.-M. Durrand translation, in *Archives épistolaires de Mari*, Recherche sur les civilizations, Paris: 1998, vol. I/1, 478.

preserves the strangeness through its necessary distancing, by embodying a sensible idea: "Loss precedes presence: every image must abide by this rule."

The gods provided a portal between the human and what exceeds it. They negotiated between silence and language, letting in rapture and wonder. No doubt this is an essential negotiation in being human. The note of anguish which Calasso emphasizes has been a common response to the problem of how to relate to excess *without* the figures of the gods, or more precisely, without a space made sacred by ritual and community, in a world governed by modern ontology. This was the problem of Hölderlin,[16] and partly through him, one of Heidegger's problems. It was also Nietzsche's. The excess, nature, maybe the gods, are still with us. But the manner of their presentation is not clear.

Calasso's claim is that literature is now the home of the gods, a principal conduit between humanity and its excess. "This has become the natural condition of the gods: they appear in books."[17] The excess in contemporary literature takes the form not necessarily of gods and myths, but of "a certain vibration or luminescence of the sentence,"[18] as well as a sovereign and fearless flouting of convention, a willingness to

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[16] The second chapter of Calasso's *Literature and the Gods* is mostly devoted to conceptualizing Hölderlin's work in this way. Calasso takes pains to emphasize that this effort is an effort to think a relationship between humanity and the gods which has never ended or disappeared, but ebbs and flows: "Hölderlin knows the gods can't reappear in a circle of statues over which the heavy curtains of history will suddenly rise. That was the neoclassical vision, which Hölderlin was the first to distance himself from. No, like figures on a carousel gods and human follow the back-and-forth of a secret movement that takes them now closer together, now farther apart. Everything lies in grasping the law that governs that movement" (44-45).

[17] *Ibid.*, 22.

[18] *Ibid.*, 175.

widen the cracks that exist in the conventional style that makes the world go round.[19] It is not so different from Merleau-Ponty's theory of creative expression. As in Merleau-Ponty, these cracks are gaps where excess seeps into daily life, like the appearance of the gods, or the simple existence of oracles, or of caves leading to the underworld. Describing the intertwined action of gods and heroes in the Homeric poems, Calasso writes, "Every sudden heightening of intensity brought you into a god's sphere of influence... every encounter occurred in parallel, in two places. To tell a story meant to weave those two series of parallel events together, to make both worlds visible."[20] The same excess still finds its way into human life today.

There is no need to confine the event of excess to literature; although we have been following Calasso and this happens to be his focus, he makes no such claim of exclusivity. No doubt Merleau-Ponty would insist the same is true of painting, in the manner that the painter paints the becoming of appearance itself, the becoming which we take from granted in daily vision. Heidegger makes a similar claim for poetry. Others would probably claim the same thing for music, as the young Nietzsche did for Wagner when he claimed, in *The Birth of Tragedy,* that Wagnerian music evoked the same sense of tragic excess as the ancient experience of tragic theater.

But what about philosophy? How is philosophy to engage with silence, with nature, bringing them to word, as myth did and as literature still does?

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[19] *Ibid.,* 177. Calasso also makes the point here that what he calls "absolute literature" is also a sort of natural metaphysics, and that the very fact that there can be cracks in convension is a metaphysical proposition. Here he also is in agreement with Merleau-Ponty's theory of expression as creative language.

[20] Calasso, Roberto, *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony,* 95.

The necessity of philosophy coming to some form of self-understanding is balanced by a certain ludicrousness in our insistence upon this requirement, a certain very genuine sense that this requirement has been at least partially met if we are practicing philosophy at all. This is as much to say that the meaning and purpose of philosophy is never more than a step in a hermeneutic circle, that its meaning is always already partially known through its practice, through that feeling of the fire of thought which one must know if one is to love thinking, and if one is to move forward in thought. On the other hand, the articulation and explicitation of that meaning, if done well, can also move the practice forward. Husserl said as much, on the last page of the last appendix to the *Crisis*:

> I know, of course, what I am striving for under the title of philosophy, as the goal and field of my work. And yet I do not know. What autonomous thinker has ever been satisfied with this, his 'knowledge'? For what autonomous thinker, in his philosophizing life, has 'philosophy' ever ceased to be an enigma? Everyone has the sense of philosophy's end, to whose realization his life is devoted; everyone has certain formulae, expressed in definitions; but only secondary thinkers, who in truth should not be called philosophers, are consoled by their definitions, beating to death with their word-concepts the problematic *telos* of philosophizing.[21]

I have tried to make some steps in identifying one aspect of the "problematic *telos* of philosophy," of its enigma, as the bringing together of nature and language through the thinking of silence as their point of transition. Thinking philosophy as *Stiftung*, as institution, in the Husserlian manner taken up by Merleau-Ponty, perhaps helps one to avoid beating it to death with word-concepts. In this manner, the meaning of philosophy is not what it is, or what it should be, or what it must become if it is to fulfill itself,

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[21] Husserl, Edmund, *The Crisis in the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, 394.

someday or as soon as possible. Rather, one must ask, what does philosophy do, what is its practice, and how, as *Stiftung,* has it been handed down through history? What is needed from it, and for what is it called upon? Finally, one must admit and remember that, in Merleau-Ponty and in the whole tradition, at least since Nietzsche, perhaps even since Kant, probably even since Plato, there has been a tendency to worry that philosophy is somehow less sure of itself, and thus more prone to suspicion, than the practice of myth, or literature or art, as if the grass is greener on the other side, as if philosophy is more obscure to itself, and requires repeated attempts at clarification. But one should no doubt remember that none of these practices is ever perfectly clear to itself. One should most of all remember that even in the age of myth, which was so long ago that one can conveniently put into it whatever one wishes one had in the present, we have no reason to believe that any of these problems were any easier to endure.

The name "philosophy" is already misleading, to the extent that it designates a tradition strictly distinct from literature and from myth. If it did designate such a tradition, we would suffer from a confusion of "philosophy" with a history of thinking that has lost a relationship to silence, Merleau-Ponty's "decadence of express philosophy." The history of philosophy that is relevant here is the history of a thinking that reaches to excess, that attempts to think it, or think the possibility of thinking it. If the history of philosophy is interpreted generously and creatively, it can be an inclusive history. Heidegger perhaps had the greatest level of intellectual courage, single-mindedness, and impudence, to make a consistent and compelling case for conceptualizing all of the history of philosophy as the pursuit, if often obscure to itself, of

the question of being, a question which he found combined, throughout history, as the progressive forgetting of being. This single-minded orientation in Heidegger's reading was accomplished, as Heidegger was the first to point out, only by a vigorous, creative, and indeed violent re-reading of that history, of a reading that made clear its intentions of taking its own terms to each work, even as it claimed a genuine openness to thinking. I have tried to suggest here that the problem of the togetherness and strangeness of nature and humanity, a togetherness and strangeness centered on the intertwining of language and silence, is also a reading of the history of philosophy.

Heidegger was great on the history of the forgetting of being, but less clear on the future, on the practice of thinking as the thinking of being itself. One would like to have a little more meat on the bones of philosophy, a clearer vision of how silence is to be thought, for example. But taking Husserl's advice, perhaps that is too much – perhaps a manifesto is not what philosophy requires. For Heidegger, just articulating the problem of philosophy as the problem of being was a step, perhaps *the* step, in the practice that he followed.

Perhaps it is enough, both programmatic enough and provocative enough, to say that phenomenology, broadly, simply, but also *traditionally* considered, *is already* a practice of negotiating between the silence of nature and the language of philosophy. By phenomenology broadly, simply, and traditionally considered, I mean the practice of a *logos* of *phainomenon,* of speaking, through description, distinction, or argument, of the appearing, of the brightness shining-forth that is the world.

I have already made the case that Merleau-Ponty thought phenomenology in precisely this way from *Phenomenology of Perception* through *The Visible and the Invisible*. One has only to read again the passage from the preface to the first book: "phenomenology... is also a philosophy for which the world is always 'already there' before reflection begins – as an inalienable presence; and all its efforts are concentrated upon re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world, and endowing that contact with a philosophical status" (*PhP* i/vii). The same impulse goes straight through to the first chapter of *The Visible and the Invisible:* "It is the things themselves, from the depths of their silence, that it wishes to bring to expression" (*VI* 18/4). Much changes, but also nothing. The inalienable presence of nature, the initiation to its silence which has always already occurred, and the thinking of that direct and primitive contact through the conceptual rigor of philosophical work, has been the intent of the present piece of writing.

It is a matter of the same epileptic trembling of the word that Calasso observed in literature, combined with the peculiar form of rigor that is the rigor of the concept. It does not mean that all being passes through the trembling of the word and becomes the concept, in the manner that Heidegger said Hegel accomplished the completion of metaphysics.[22] Rather, it is the *sur-réflection* of the silence beneath the trembling of the word, that trembling itself, and the concept that it may become. That means that the concepts of philosophy dive back in to the silence beneath them. This is how Merleau-Ponty practices philosophy as phenomenology, as conceptual work, *logos* as argument,

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[22] *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* 17/12.

which continually returns, through *logos* as the trembling of the word, or even as literature, to the silence of nature, the shining-forth appearance. Nature finds, not its fulfillment, but a current made explicit in the peculiar language of philosophy.

Myth, as we have seen, was once a way to conjoin human language and the silence of nature in a manner that, through the variation and obscurity of mythical telling, kept the fundamental silence and obscurity of nature in mind - or at least, for this is all that we, not being mythical people, can say, it held that conceptual possibility. A phenomenology that continually dives back into the things themselves, that *remembers* them as Proust did, that struggles with the very *placing* of speech as Schelling did, should be able to keep in mind what is at stake in the becoming of language and of the concept, what underlies them, grounds them, and what gives to speak while refusing to speak itself. This is nature, the silence of rocks and hills, the rustling of the oak tree.

This remembrance has always been active in Merleau-Ponty through the continually maintained thesis of the primacy of perception. This primacy continues right through to the last chapter of *The Visible and the Invisible* where Merleau-Pontian phenomenology and ontology reach their highest point, both in a lyrical description and in a conceptual ontology of the flesh and the chiasm that arises from it. This chapter begins in and relies on a description of the nature of perception. It is based on the same principle as all of *Phenomenology of Perception*. Language partakes of the same excess which vision knows, through which the senses function, through "this talisman of color, this singular virtue of the visible that makes it, held at the end of the gaze, nonetheless much more than a correlative of my vision, such that it imposes my vision upon me as a

continuation of its own sovereign existence" (*VI* 171/131). The excess that imposes itself on vision, that guides the palpation of the look, is the excess of sensual life, which is nature. Language comes from this, which the movement of the chapter makes clear. After the description of the sensible comes "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" (*VI* 188/144-145).

A working note of June 1, 1960 calls, probably for the first time in the history of philosophy, for a "transcendental geology" to replace, or merge with, "transcendental history:

> For history is too immediately bound to the individual praxis, to interiority, it hides too much its thickness and its flesh for it not to be easy to reintroduce into it the whole philosophy of the person. Whereas geography – or rather: the Earth as *Ur-Arche* brings to light the carnal *Urhistorie* (Husserl – *Umstruz...*) – in fact it is a question of grasping the *nexus* – neither historical nor geographic, of history and transcendental geology, this very time that is space, this very space that is time, which I will have rediscovered by my analysis of the visible and the flesh... (*VI* 307/259).

History, including, no doubt, the history of philosophy, is still too much the philosophy of consciousness, or too much the work of language that knows nothing of its *Ur-Arche, Urhistorie, Urstiftung.* The nexus of "transcendental geology" and the history of philosophy would be the meeting place of the person and anonymity, of language and silence – the *thought* of the rustling of the oak tree.

APPENDIX

ABBREVIATIONS USED FOR PRINCIPAL WORKS CITED

For works translated into English, the French or German page numbers are given first. Quoted passages are based on the published translations, with minor changes where necessary. All citations of authors other than Merleau-Ponty, Proust, and Schelling, are given with the author, title, and page number in footnotes, and the full reference in the bibliography.

Merleau-Ponty

VI   *Le visible et l'invisible.* English translation *The Visible and the Invisible.*

PhP   *Phenomenologie de la perception.* English translation *The Phenomenology of*

       Perception.

NC   *Notes de Cours au Collège de France 1958-1959 et 1960-1961.*

N   *Nature.* English translation *Nature.*

EM   *L'oeil et l'esprit.* English translation "Eye and Mind."

S   *Signes.* English translation *Signs.*

PM   *Prose du monde.* English translation *Prose of the World.*

RC   *Résumés du Cours, Collège de France, 1952-1960.* English translation "Themes

       from the Lectures at the Collége de France 1952-1960."

Proust

R   *Á la recherche du temps perdu.* English translation *Remembrance of Things Past.*

Schelling

F   *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände.* English translation *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom and Related Matters.*

C   *Clara.* English translation *Clara.*

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