On the Public Spaces of Resistance:

Merleau-Ponty, Derrida, and the Material Conditions for Critique

by

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<u>Abstract</u>

In this dissertation I adopt a broad phenomenological perspective in order to develop in outline a 'new materialism' that facilitates the thinking of public space as a condition for political resistance. The project is motivated by recent movements such as Occupy, Black Lives Matter, and #MeToo that in various ways trouble some traditional as well as more recent theories of public space, thus indicating the need for renewed thinking of the notion of public space, as well as of the work of critique as a public project. A driving hypothesis is that recent literature in the philosophical fields of phenomenology and deconstruction offers resources to develop a materialist framework that would yield useful correctives in conversation with traditional Marxian thinking (e.g. Marx and Lukács) as well as with neo-Marxian approaches of critical theorists such as Habermas and Honneth. I pursue this hypothesis in two broad steps.

First, and remaining largely within relevant literatures of phenomenology and deconstruction, most centrally the work of Merleau-Ponty and Derrida as well as recent commentators (e.g. Barbaras, Naas) I establish a materialist approach to public space as a basic condition for intersubjective relations between critical individuals. Where there is broad agreement within phenomenological thinking as to a 'primacy' of intersubjectivity as a condition for human engagements in a world, I emphasize that this intersubjectivity must be thought in terms of materiality. At the same time, and where even Merleau-Ponty appears earlier in his work to grasp materiality, and so intersubjectivity, as a synthetic structure, I argue for a notion of materiality that requires attention to a more radically fractured structure of intersubjective relations. As a result, I argue that a "public space" is best conceptualized as a field of relations not prefigured by any one set of terms for engagement, and which therefore tolerates apparently radical contradictions between differing claims made to it.

Second, by bringing this phenomenological-deconstructive notion of a 'primacy of intersubjectivity' into conversation with the thinking of Marx, Honneth, and Habermas, I more explicitly develop my own materialist account of political engagement, that is, of a 'primacy of the political.' While the eventual account of public space arrived at owes a great deal to each of these thinkers, the essential divergence concerns the thinking of materiality as a medium for political relations: Whereas an inheritance from Marx is a tendency to think this medium as something to be appropriated by a public on collectively established terms – whether these terms are arrived at via the decisive work of revolution, or over the course of the discursive work of debate and consensus – I argue that no such collective claim is possible. As a result, I argue that a public space is best conceptualized as a space of resistance and *dissensus*, where the terms of political engagement are not fully established.

A central conclusion that follows from my approach is that we have to be able to account for acts of political resistance in spaces that we would not traditionally call "public," even where we might on traditional terms be reticent to call these acts "political." The materialist approach that I propose in outline here is equipped to carry out precisely this sort of critical analysis, which explicates political tensions without reducing them to a single common situation, institution, or narrative.

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References/Abbreviations

Author	Title	Abbreviation
Aristotle	*Physics*	Phys.
Barbaras, Renaud	*The Being of the Phenomenon*	BP
Butler, Judith	*Bodies that Matter*	BM
Casey, Edward	*The Fate of Place*	FP
…	*The World at a Glance*	WG
Michel de Certeau	*The Practice of Everyday Life*	PEL
Derrida, Jacques	*Acts of Literature*	AL
…	*Acts of Religion*	AR
…	*Chora L Works*	CW
…	*The Gift of Death*	GD
…	*On the Name*	ON
…	*The Politics of Friendship*	PF
…	*Positions*	P
…	*Voice and Phenomenon*	VP
…	*Writing and Difference*	WD
Heidegger, Martin	*Being and Time*	BT
…	*Introduction to Metaphysics*	IM
…	*What Is Called Thinking*	WT
Hornet, Axel	*Reification*	R
Husserl, Edmund	*Crisis of the European Sciences*	CE
…	*Ideas II*	HUA III
Irigaray, Luce	*Speculum of the Other Woman*	SW
Kristeva, Julia	*On the Revolution in Poetic Language*	RP
Lukács, Györg	*History and Class Consciousness*	HCC
Malpas, Jeff	*Heidegger and the Thinking of Place*	HP
Marx, Karl	*Capital*	C
…	*The German Ideology*	GI
Merleau-Ponty, Maurice	*Adventures of the Dialectic*	AD
…	*Humanism and Terror*	HT
…	*Institution and Passivity*	IP
…	*Nature*	N
…	*Phenomenology of Perception*	PhP
…	*The Primacy of Perception*	PrP
…	*Signs*	S
…	*The Visible and the Invisible*	VI
Naas, Michael	*Miracle and Machine*	MM
Plato	*Republic*	Rep.
…	*Timaeus*	Tim.
Sartre, Jean-Paul	*Being and Nothingness*	BN
Schmitt, Carl	*The Concept of the Political*	CP

Introduction

"There is, for essential reasons, no zoology of peoples. They are spiritual unities; they do not have, and in particular the supranational unity of Europe does not have, a mature shape that has ever been reached or could be reached as a shape that is regularly repeated. Psychic humanity has never been complete and never will be, and can never repeat itself. The spiritual *telos* of European humanity, in which the particular *telos* of particular nations and of individual men is contained, lies in the infinite, is an infinite idea toward which, in concealment, the whole spiritual becoming aims, so to speak."
-    Edmund Husserl, "The Vienna Lecture," CE 275

"[… humans] begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organisation. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their material life. […] This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce. Hence what individuals are depends on the material conditions of their production."
-    Karl Marx, "The German Ideology," GI 37

Although there are any number of ways of characterizing the break that phenomenology makes

with the Kantian critical project, a particularly compelling distinction is at work in the claim that

'critique' names a process that is historically immanent. As a result, critical revelation of the

conditions of lived experience depends in the first place on the historical emergence and

development of a critical subject, and these 'world-historical' conditions cannot be considered as

wholly distinct from the conditions of experience. On these terms, critique at least in part, but

perhaps at its core requires a work of revealing the place of the critical subject in the world and

in relation to others. By extension, the metaphysical and epistemological concerns of critique

cannot be grasped apart from ethical and political critique: Phenomenology is not limited to the

Kantian hope that the pure and practical projects coincide, because phenomenology begins by

demonstrating how both projects have their origin in the subject that would carry them out from

within their own historical situation. Implicitly there is no project of self-understanding that does

not return the critical subject to a world that transcends it. Critique in this sense cannot only be a mode of thinking in an abstract-theoretical context, but suggests a mode of living with others in a material-historical situation. Critique as a project of self-examination on these terms is a communal project, and the space in which this critical project is carried out must be a public space.

We can locate various versions of this attention to the historicity of critique throughout the works of Husserl, but the more concertedly political implications of this appeal are given clear expression by the time of *Ideas II*, and all the more evidently in the later "Vienna Lecture" as well as *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. In these texts, Husserl emphasizes the historical immanence of the critical subject as also necessarily a material and embodied immanence: In the Vienna lecture, for example, Husserl argues that the human spirit or *psychē* "is grounded on the human *physis*,"[1] akin to his claim in *Ideas II* that consciousness is from the outset bound to a material world as a "causal nexus" via the human body.[2] Critique in this sense consists, in part, in a revelation of precisely this causal nexus – the material world – in its broadest sense, that is, as providing the necessary conditions for the emergence of a subject that can attend to the material world in a manner that this world on its own does not, namely with a critical attitude of understanding. At the same time, for Husserl critique is also a process of establishing the critical subject apart from the material world, since in the moment that a conscious subject attends to this world "in a grasping way,"[3] consciousness

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[1] CE 271
[2] HUA III 146. "The Bodily itself is again given as interwoven in the causal nexus of physical nature. Here the human being is a *human being in nature* and is in nature only because, first and foremost, the Body is a material thing in spatial nature. Psychic reality is constituted as reality only through psychophysical dependencies."
[3] HUA III 6

recognizes in itself the power of constituting both a self and a world that are no longer material

strictly speaking, but which as entities are principally ideal or 'psychic.' Implicitly there is no

direct access to the material-historical world except in everyday experience, but everyday

experience is not critical; the critical subject is therefore destined towards a world-historical truth

that is given in its own experience, but this truth is always given 'in concealment.'

Husserl's approach, in particular his interpretation of a historical materiality as a

condition of phenomenological givenness, raises two crucial questions that motivate this

dissertation, although I should state from the outset that it is neither my intention that they be

addressed on the terms that Husserl sets out in his work, nor on the other hand that the

introduction of the work of other thinkers such as Merleau-Ponty and Derrida will exhaust the

questions that Husserl's work raises.

The first question concerns the proper object of phenomenology, which on Husserl's

account is still divided between the psychic and the material. In *Ideas II*, for example, it becomes

clear that the material-historical situation of human beings is necessary, but by no means

sufficient for the emergence of a critical subject: The human *psychē* is "grounded" on the human

physis, but what is ultimately revealed in critique – which after all begins with *epochē* as a way

of critically stepping or turning back from the material world[4] – is that the human *psychē* is

irreducible to its material reality, and for this reason must be self-constituting. Implicitly the aim

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[4] In *Ideas II*, Husserl describes reflection in "an enlarged sense [that] includes not only the grasping of acts but also every "turning back," i.e., every turning away from the natural attitude's directedness toward the Object" (HUA III 7, ft. 1). See section 1.1a below for a more extended discussion of both this notion of reflection, and the notion of constitution as it is at work in *Ideas II* in particular. The Husserlian understanding of reflection is returned to in section 3.3a, and is used to explicate Merleau-Ponty's notion of 'hyper-reflection.'

of phenomenology is twofold: to reveal the self-constitution of critical consciousness, on the one hand, and the material-historical conditions for its emergence in the world, on the other.

The second, resulting question concerns the method of phenomenology as a critical practice. The notion of a double-object for phenomenology is already reflected, for example, in Husserl's eventual distinction between a 'static' and 'genetic' phenomenological method, where the static method concerns itself strictly with the psychic or 'conditional' relations inherent to the critical subject, while the genetic method tries to grasp how these psychic processes can have emerged out of the material or 'causal' relations in which this subject takes part.[5] Implicitly the methodology of phenomenology is again split, and the transparent results of the static method must be maintained alongside the inevitably opaque and conditional results of the genetic method.

Again, the difficulties of a double-object and a double-method must be traced to the central insight of phenomenology, which begins by appealing to the experience of the critical subject as their origin. If, as a result, we even now still return to this insight in order to question it and to rethink it, that is because the nature of this originary synthesis posited in and by us – the emergence of critical, intersubjective relations as an event in the world – still remains to be clarified. Phenomenology in this sense turns on the recognition that the event with which it is

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[5] For the specific distinction between conditional and causal processes, see HUA III 169. For a concise explication of the broader difference between static and genetic methods, see Anthony Steinbock's introduction to his own translation of Husserl's essays on the same topic (Steinbock, "Husserl's static and genetic phenomenology: Translator's introduction to two essays," Continental Philosophy Review 31: 127–134, 1998.) The 'static' method is considered typical of Husserl's early development of phenomenology in *Ideas*; the origin of the 'genetic' method is more debatable, but is clearly operative in major texts such as the *Crisis* and *Ideas II*, and can be identified in still-earlier texts such as the lectures collectively published as Husserl's *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*.

perpetually concerned may in the end be revealed only in the form of a question still to be posed, or posed again, in resistance to readily given answers.

With this question in mind, which is not only one question, I turn in this dissertation from Husserl towards to two of his readers, namely Merleau-Ponty and Derrida, with the aim of again reconsidering the object and method of phenomenology by reconsidering the role of materiality in critique as a historical process. To broadly sketch out the scope of the question, it seems to me that we have at least two readings of materiality in this capacity, and that an ambiguity or undecidability between each of them creates a more radical problem for the critical project than we perhaps anticipate directly in Husserl, even if this problem was in another sense precisely what Husserl was originally attentive to.

Following Derrida in *Voice and Phenomenon*, we could identify as a central concern here the appeal to an "originary giving evidentness" in the experience of the critical subject that, approached critically, lends itself to a knowing or knowledge that is historically immanent.[6] This 'originary giving evidentness' is a condition of the critical subject as a knowing subject, and as historically immanent this condition is inevitably *bound* to materiality – but an originary giving evidentness is nevertheless not precisely or obviously a 'material condition.' Above all this ambiguity follows because an 'originary giving evidentness' seems as if it is to be grasped as itself an object and even the *telos* of knowledge – a human *telos*, where the definitive feature of humanity is an element that is not reducible to materiality, and at its transcendental core not 'reducible' at all. For the knowing subject to grasp its own conditions is precisely for it to grasp itself transcendentally, in the apodicticity of self-knowledge: how then does 'materiality' figure into such a project?

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[6] VP 4

On the one hand, we could say, materiality can be grasped in terms of a *negativity* at stake for the critical subject, viz. as a negative moment to be overcome. Materiality in this sense is a barrier to knowledge, to *logos*, and which must be disregarded – even as we put elements of it into words (e.g. "body," "matter," etc.), and even as material elements allow for the production, inscription, and recognition of words (e.g. seeing eyes, paper/pen, etc.) – in order to reactivate the truth of whatever is given via material media. In this sense materiality functions as a 'condition' for the emergence of the critical subject only in the *logical* sense that the complete reduction of materiality as a whole is a necessary moment on the way to a revelation of the truth of the critical subject as such, viz. as immaterial or irreal. As Derrida suggests, the logoic truth of spiritual humanity emerges only with the full exclusion of "the totality of the body […] the totality of the visible as such and of the spatial as such."[7] On these terms, we should insist that the "infinite idea" of humanity that Husserl speaks of in the *Crisis* is given "in concealment" not because of matter in this negative sense, but rather because of a certain approach to it – one that fails to go beyond *what* is given 'outside' the subject, and so fails to grasp in the given object a broader structure of givenness as immanently operative in and originally proper to the critical subject.

On the other hand, materiality can be interpreted as an *excess* in the sense of a necessary condition for critique that nevertheless cannot clearly or directly be grasped from a critical perspective. As Derrida reads Husserl's discussion in "The Origins of Geometry," for example, it should be possible to consider materiality, in particular the materiality writing, as something other than a hypostasis of and for the ideal; it should be possible to recognize a moment in which

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[7] VP 29

an idea is written or communicated for the first time, and in that sense historically *produced*.[8]

With Derrida's reading of Husserl in 1967, then, we can already recognize in outline the *Spectres of Marx* to which he will appeal more than three decades later: In Husserl, there is a thought of materiality in light of which the conditions of the historical emergence of humanity are themselves within the scope of a productive human work. Yet if the materiality at stake in this project is at stake as an 'excess,' we can also anticipate how the reading is not traditionally Marxian, since by claiming that the idea or truth has necessary material conditions, we nevertheless do not say that the truth thus established *is material*. Rather, we must still affirm that the 'originary giving evidentness' is operative at the level of knowledge, and that 'knowledge' in this sense remains a function of the apodicticity of the critical subject's self-knowledge at the level of the ideal. Yet by saying that materiality is necessary for the original emergence or genesis of the ideal in this sense, we suggest a condition of a very different sort – not a condition for the critical subject *per se*, but no doubt a condition *for the emergence* of the critical subject as a historical event. It must be said that this condition and this event remain foreign to the apodicticity of self-knowledge and an 'originary giving evidentness' – necessarily foreign, since if it were assimilable to the realm of *logos*, or for that matter reducible to an 'outside' of *logos* as in the negative sense of materiality described above, there would be no historical emergence of the truth of the critical subject. Materiality in this (excessive) sense, which retains a relation between the ideal and the (negative) material not in synthesis or unity, but in difference, suggests a 'material condition' for critique in the very unique sense at stake in Derrida's hyper-transcendental – as it were a (material) condition for the (ideal) conditions for the possibility of human experience – or else as I will also argue, a 'material condition' operative

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[8] See VP 22

in the sense that Merleau-Ponty ascribes to what he terms 'the flesh,' viz. as an ontological

condition that is similarly irreducible to human experience. On either reading of excessive

materiality, the "infinite idea" of humanity is given "in concealment" in a more radical sense

whereby the historical emergence and production of this idea depends on a moment that no

critical subject can ever wholly assimilate within the limits of the 'originary giving evidentness'

at stake in their own experience.

This distinction between two readings of materiality will provide a central theme of this

dissertation in its development of a critical materialism – a materialism which, I should announce

from the outset, does not propose to resolve the tension between these two readings, and still less

to assert the primacy of the one over the other. In the assertion of either reading over the other

we can note a temptation that I intend to avoid.

In the reading of materiality as negativity, there is a traditional 'metaphysical' temptation

to reduce the notion of materiality to matter. My concern with this reading is that in this

reduction we will have implicitly opposed the material to the ideal in advance, hence in

complicity with a metaphysical tradition that phenomenology intends to put into question. In

order to take materiality seriously from a critical perspective, materiality must not be reduced to

a moment within the confines of a dialectical structure, and in light of which it can from the

outset be grasped in terms of an implicit or latent affirmation of the ideal to which it was,

perhaps, falsely opposed in the first place.

In the reading of materiality as excess, or in its production of the ideal, there is an

opposing temptation that would refuse any relation between materiality and 'matter.' We find

such a refusal at stake in a certain branch of 'new materialisms' that can be loosely aligned under

the broader heading of 'speculative realism' in its attempt to think the world as without or

beyond the critical subject.[9] Whereas I agree that the limits which critique imposes upon itself

may indirectly indicate a broader materiality than can be accommodated for directly via critique

(this is precisely what I intend by the notion of an 'excessive' materiality), what appears

problematic to me about the speculative *assertion* of materiality in this sense is that it risks a

performative contradiction of what it claims to describe, that is, it risks approaching this radically

heterogeneous materiality as an object that we can know.

     The materialism that I propose here is to be located at the limits of critique, refusing the

merely negative reading of materiality as a condition for knowledge in its reduction to non-

knowledge – but it will also refuse to take this further speculative step of asserting this

exteriority on positive terms. Materiality as excess in this sense cannot be directly thought,

known, or said, but it can and must be approached from within the structures of critical

discourse, if only to be indirectly indicated as a condition for critique operative in the manner of

a limit of critique. A negative materiality, we can anticipate, is at stake in processes of historical

change in the work of *production*, which in turn affirms the notion of historical change as a labor

that is strictly our own. The historical stakes of an excessive materiality, however, is to be

located in a work of *resistance* that attempts to install itself as a non-productive (I do not say

"destructive") force that may indirectly indicate from within the confines of given productive

processes what is not or cannot be fully subsumed in those processes.

     Before clarifying how I take this materialist project to be inherited from the thinking of

Merleau-Ponty and Derrida, I should address certain ambiguities that are immediately apparent

in the appeal to a materiality that is not reducible to human experience. These ambiguities, as I

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[9] I have in mind Jane Bennett's reading in *Vibrant Matter*, as well as Quinten Meillasoux's
reading of materiality, both of which will be discussed in greater detail below. See e.g. p. 131.

will show, are not only terminological, but are also methodological, as well as ontological: It is

not only a question of describing the meaning of the term "materiality" in the sense appealed to

here, but also of reconsidering the methods in light of which this meaning might be revealed, and

finally a question of *what* after all can be meant by the notion of materiality that is not exhausted

by the notion of meaning as at stake in human experience. But let us start, however superficially,

with the terminological question.

Over the course of what follows, I will develop in at least two different ways the

distinction between a negative and an excessive materiality – on Merleau-Ponty's terms in

chapter one, and on Derrida's terms in chapter two. More generally, though, and what is in line

with the appeal to an excessive materiality, a running aim is to establish a notion of "materiality"

that is not reducible "matter." *Matter* for my purposes is deployed more or less in line with the

traditional metaphysical notions of a Cartesian *res extensa,* or alternatively of an Aristotelian

matter as *hylē*, which have two essential features in common: First, both notions of matter define

matter via its involvement in causal relations (but without proposing matter as a cause);[10] second,

they explicate matter as something that can be known (but which does not contain this potential

for knowledge in itself). These two features are crucially connected: Matter implies a material

body that can be known *to the extent* that some external set of causes can be grasped (whether

these are merely efficient causes, or also material, formal, and final); knowledge of matter is a

knowledge of production, so that a full grasp of the cause is already the revelation of the

givenness of the material thing. By contrast, what I call *materiality* implies a kind of remainder

or supplement to a strictly causal process, viz. what is excluded or goes unrecognized when a

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[10] Although is clear that for Descartes matter is inert, the causal role of matter in Aristotle is
more complex; see section 2.3a for a brief discussion of both accounts as they apply to my
position.

certain causal structure or genetic lineage is taken as exhaustive of materiality in general. Materiality in this sense will designate a radical exteriority in the sense of being irreducible to matter in the traditional sense, but also irreducible to the ideal, and finally to any *oppositional* structure of this model. By contrast with the givenness of matter in experience, what is to be indicated is the nongivenness at stake in materiality, where 'nongivenness' suggests what is materially operative in experience precisely in its excess of an 'originary giving evidentness' as either a presence or a presentifying structure. I have already noted that a 'nongivenness' in this sense clearly has a role in structures of givenness, and the term may appear misleading for that reason; what I intend to note is a basic irreducibility (ontological and phenomenological): My claim is that an excessive materiality is operative within any structure of givenness without being exhausted there. This nongivenness is therefore radical in the sense it has a certain transcendental role to play, and yet cannot be *directly* accounted for even at that level. My aim will be to show that the operation of an excessive materiality can still be indirectly indicated in language and via representational or ideal content, but I will insist that this indirect indication is never an 'account,' where such a claim risks in advance the reduction of materiality to the realm it is supposed to exceed.

With the distinction of excessive materiality from negative materiality, or more simply of materiality from matter, we can anticipate a further ambiguity that arises concerning the notion of space. Indeed, the originally proposed focus for this dissertation was space, which is traditionally rendered 'negatively,' either in opposition to time or – as we find in Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger at different moments – in subordination to time.[11] Yet in admitting the role of an

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[11] In *The Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel explicitly thinks space as a formal or abstract negativity whose determinate sense depends upon the further mediation of time (cf. sections 254 and 257). Husserl's account of space should not be reduced to the time-consciousness lectures, since as I

'excessive' materiality, I argue that it becomes necessary to describe the role of an 'excessive' space' that cannot be reduced to a 'negative' space, which in turn implies a distinction between space as a hyper-transcendental or ontological nongivenness and space as reducible to transcendental structures of givenness. As reducible to structures of givenness, I will follow Merleau-Ponty in the identification a 'negative' notion of space at work in the phenomenological notions of a subject-oriented or 'lived' space in everyday experience (e.g. the space of a house) or alternatively of an object-oriented, 'actual' space as its abstract conceptual counterpart (e.g. a geometric plane). As nongivenness, on the other hand, space will be considered as a 'brute space,' as a notion that I initially develop out of Merleau-Ponty's later work in *The Visible and the Invisible* in chapter one, and then lay out more explicitly as an 'excessive' space via Derrida's interpretation of *khōra* in *On the Name,* viz. as a space in which creation takes place, but which is not itself 'created' and cannot be presented or represented via the creative and productive processes it makes possible.

By focusing on questions of space, I do not mean to suggest that space has a more fundamental role to play that time; I simply attempt to problematize the traditional opposition between these two structures. For example, one could just as well invoke the notion of an 'excessive' temporality and arrive at similar conclusions – yet if we can speak of a radical

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have already indicated he already tends especially in later writings to consider a more radical importance for space; nevertheless, we find in that text the description of space as a transcendence that must be reduced in order to recognize the immanance of time-consciousness to itself. Finally in section 70 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger subordinates spatiality to temporality, arguing that the ecstatic structure of temporality is a necessary condition for Dasein's experience of space via de-severance. For discussion on Heidegger's position in *Being and Time*, see e.g. Vallega, *Heidegger and the Issue of Space: Thinking on Exilic Grounds*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003.

"equiprimordiality" of spatiality and temporality in this sense,[12] what we are in truth returned to in any case is the broader question of a material nongivenness and the problems such a notion poses for phenomenology at its limits. More generally, then, the materialism that this dissertation proposes turns on a problematization of the approach to materiality via a conscious and proprietary structure, hence of the appeal to critique as a way of *grasping* materiality.

From the terminological question, then, an overarching methodological question emerges. As suggested, and to state the matter with some oversimplification, phenomenology can be traditionally cast as a critical method (i) of *describing* the experience of a subject (static method), or (ii) of *explaining* the emergence of this experience in the world (genetic method); in both cases, however, it is assumed and indeed required that the phenomenologist in no way intervenes in a material world by the imposition of language. Once, however, a 'materiality' in the sense just described is admitted – a materiality that in being described or known is precisely excluded from the body thus designated – there is no longer any way of denying the phenomenologist's intervention in the material world: The descriptive-explanatory element of critique bears an inevitably performative moment, so that the phenomenologist in a certain sense produces what they claim only to critically observe. As I argue, this performative moment does not rule out the possibility of a critical phenomenology, but requires an additional concerted effort on the part of the phenomenologist to recognize and make evident the possibility and impact of this performative moment to the best of their ability.

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[12] The notion of an equiprimordial temporality and spatiality is one I draw from some relatively recent critiques of Heidegger's approach in *Being and Time*. See e.g. Arisaka, "Spatiality, Temporality, and the Problem of Foundation in *Being and Time*." Philosophy Today, vol. 40, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 36-46, and Baiasu, "*Being and Time* and the Problem of Space." *Research in Phenomenology* vol. 37 (2007): 324-35.

Finally, and as a result of the terminological and methodological concerns, a further ontological question comes into play. By insisting on a materiality as radical exteriority, and by insisting on a performative moment whereby the designation of an experience of materiality in a certain way is both exclusive of materiality in the broad sense and productive of a material body, it becomes clear that phenomenology as a critical method cannot be set entirely apart from an ontological project. This is not to say that the critical method *is* an ontological project, which again risks confusing critique with speculation; by contrast critique can only approach a broadly excluded materiality in its nongivenness, hence as a kind of "ontological resistance" in the sense of what *is*, or in any case *is there*, without being reducible to structures of experience as structures of givenness. As a result, critique interpreted under the banner of materialism that I propose should be seen as additionally burdened with the task of revealing how an ontology is always operative where a *prima facie* 'descriptive' or explanatory process is it work. The challenge of the appeal to materiality in this sense consists in showing how phenomenology interacts with ontology at its limits; a critical materialism demonstrates that neither project is self-sufficient.

I take these three considerations – terminological, methodological, and ontological – to follow from the work of Merleau-Ponty and Derrida, who each in their own way approach phenomenology in its opening onto apparently radical problems, but without simply abandoning the phenomenological position. It can be stated from the outset that I do not intend to demonstrate a simple convergence or divergence of Merleau-Ponty's and Derrida's thinking, since to attempt as much would be to misleadingly present my own thinking as absent from the conversation. Rather, the position that I develop inherits insights from both thinkers by interpreting them in relation to other another, sometimes awkwardly or in ways that perhaps

neither would agree with, although I obviously intend this effort to be respectful of the work of both. The resulting presentation of a critical materialism is necessarily provisional, and should be no more taken as a systematic proposal in its own right than it should be taken for a synthetic meeting of Merleau-Ponty's and Derrida's thinking that requires no third. While I rarely put the two thinkers in direct conversation in this dissertation, then, I should take the time here to identify several themes that keep the two thinkers in contact over the course of this text, even as they tend also to diverge at certain moments to be noted in advance here, and further discussed as they arise.

The first and most obvious theme is the focus on materiality as a way of troubling traditional phenomenological approaches. This is evident in Merleau-Ponty's turn to the body in the *Phenomenology of Perception*; as I argue, however, in this early text Merleau-Ponty's notion of materiality still tends towards a structure of phenomenological givenness. It is in Merleau-Ponty's later work, and in the turn away from a historical 'body proper' towards the broader notion of the flesh, and what I develop in terms of a 'brute space,' that I argue a stronger appeal to materiality as nongivenness can be located. The notion of a brute space in this sense is to be set alongside Derrida's interpretation of *khōra*, which suggests a similar nongivenness, although its implications are in other ways more radical. Specifically, and most centrally, whereas the notion of a brute space suggests a materiality that ontologically *is*, Derrida's notion of *khōra* excludes it even from this ontological qualification; while I argue that there is, as it were, almost nothing in this distinction, its implications arise most obviously in considerations of community and public space to be anticipated shortly.

The second theme concerns a mutual focus on language as bearing a creative moment that threatens to disrupt the notion of phenomenology as, again, a merely descriptive or

explanatory enterprise. In Merleau-Ponty's case, the eventual development of the notion of 'indirect expression' evinces a double-recognition on his part: of the necessity of speaking to materiality, on the one hand, and of an inevitable failure of speech (or even artistic and political expression) to exhaust or genetically 'get back to' its object. Similarly for Derrida, the materiality of *khōra* generates in experience a necessity of speaking, but materiality as such goes unaddressed in the invocation of a spoken or written word that it necessitates. Both thinkers in this sense note a failure of language in the face of materiality to the extent that there are material conditions for linguistic expression that can only be given in language by a kind of modification or working-over of these conditions, which for their part do not yet constitute 'language.' (Consider, for example, the difference between a pen and paper, and a written letter; next, recognize that the words 'pen' and 'paper' were required to observe the first difference, but imply a similar difference in their own right; by beginning this regress, we get a sketch of the problem of establishing a givenness of materiality in the processes of linguistic production it conditions.)

The third point of connection is a mutual focus on a materialism, and specifically their unique readings of Marx. Both Merleau-Ponty and Derrida claim a kind of allegiance to Marx, but both will do so via quite atypical readings that yield atypical accounts of political engagement. In both cases, I will argue, critical materialism requires a unique thought of political resistance, but where political resistance in this sense is recognized as following from the problems of a nongivenness, that is, from the ontological resistance of materiality. Implicitly, the critical political agent must approach the material conditions of everyday life indirectly, much as the painter approaches the natural world indirectly. To 'resist' is not to confront a prevalent, oppressive mode of living head-on, viz. with the counterposition of another mode of living and

new terms of engagement; to resist is rather to critically identify the limits of this prevailing

mode of living, that is, to indicate within a given mode of living that and how *on its own terms* it

does not exhaust the material conditions of its historical emergence. The most obvious

divergence between Merleau-Ponty and Derrida on this point will be their resulting notions of

community: For Merleau-Ponty a materiality that cannot be linguistically given still in another

sense *is*; by extension, a community that refuses reduction of its situation to a prevalent mode of

living can be granted a similar, albeit very thin, ontological status. For Derrida, on the other

hand, even this basic ontological status may not be attributable to what I term a 'community of

resistance/resistants'; nevertheless, I will show, we can still perhaps allow that such a community

is there, operative in its refusal to be dissolved either into the phenomenological or the

ontological as what simply escapes phenomenological givenness.

From even these few points of connection – materiality, language, and politics – enough

divergence is already evident, and it can be anticipated that the dialogue between Derrida and

Merleau-Ponty in this dissertation is not intended as a dialectic with synthetic results. Rather, and

to reiterate, my project of provisionally developing the framework for a critical new materialism

proceeds for the most part without direct address between the two thinkers and so without direct

response, and this failure of address is reflected in the structure of the dissertation as a whole.

Very broadly, there are two parts of two chapters each; the first part takes up the question of

materiality by putting phenomenology in touch with ontology, while the second part considers

materiality by phenomenology in touch with more explicitly political discussions. Materiality in

this sense is intended throughout that tests the limits of phenomenology; Merleau-Ponty and

Derrida, for their part, push phenomenology to the same extent, but not in the same way, and for

this reason each chapter will have an explicit focus that is inherited from one figure or the other.

The limits of phenomenology, as I have already indicated, suggest the node of connection in every case, but there is never any easy passage – from Merleau-Ponty to Derrida; from ontology to politics; from one historical situation to another – and if there is a definitive conclusion to be drawn from this dissertation's considerations of materiality, it is that the promise of such passage is precisely what is to be resisted in the work of critique as a public project. Each of the four chapters arrives at this conclusion via a different route through relevant texts and considerations, and I will briefly outline those approaches here.

In chapter one, the central aim is to link an understanding of space to the materiality of the body, and to grasp this materiality (and by extension space) as a plural structure that does not lend itself to a synthetic, comprehensive account. I arrive at this no synthetic account of materiality by tracing a widely recognized shift – not to say a break or a 'turn' – over the course of Merleau-Ponty's thinking. To summarize briefly: In *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty explicates materiality as the principal object of phenomenology by attending to the experiencing subject's 'body proper;' by the time of *The Visible and the Invisible*, however, Merleau-Ponty's turn towards what he calls the 'flesh' suggests a materiality that by contrast is not reducible to a specific or single structure of experience, and which to that extent resists traditional phenomenological analysis.

The concern in chapter one with the immanence of a lived body in the world is of necessity a concern with questions of space and place. As I argue, materiality in the later sense of the flesh cannot be reduced to a structure of phenomenological givenness, for example space as a formal *res extensa* or even as a 'lived' space; by contrast, and in order to accommodate the notion of a materiality that is radically irreducible to structures of human experience, I suggest the notion of a "brute space" as a phenomenological nongivenness. The arrival at a notion of

phenomenological nongivenness in this sense also suggests, finally, a methodological shift to be tracked. Whether of materiality or of space, I argue that Merleau-Ponty gives a synthetic dialectical account in the *Phenomenology*, by contrast with the "hyperdialectical" approach that he introduces in the *Visible and the Invisible*.

Whereas, in chapter one, the concern is with a materiality that appears excluded from phenomenology and so demands an invocation of ontology, in chapter two the concern is with a materiality that can be excluded, if not by ontology as such, then in any case by the recognized traditions, language, and practice of ontology. The resulting approach, carried out in conversation with Derrida and John Sallis, is to go back to the beginnings of ontology in Western philosophy, in a certain sense before the beginning, as I develop an account of materiality via considerations of the notion *khōra* and the strange role it plays in Plato's *Timaeus*. As I argue, Derrida's reading of *khōra* suggests a useful interpretation of materiality as nongivenness in light of its irreducibility to language, even as this materiality remains at stake in language, and even conditions it, viz. as a kind of inexhaustible surface for inscription. Materiality will therefore be approached via a *double-reading*, viz. as at once (i) a 'strict' exteriority in the sense of a material body that depends for its ontological status on the application of existing ontological categories, but also (ii) a 'broad' exteriority that is operative without categorization in this sense, and finally irreducible to it, hence to any material 'body.'

Again, and mirroring chapter one to some extent, a seeming irreducibility of materiality to the body is borne out in a discussion of space and place. Specifically, a distinction between 'strict' and 'broad' exteriority allows for an analogous discussion of strict and broad exclusion: Whereas a material body can be recognized on the terms of a given ontology, but ('strictly') denied place in a given space, materiality in general is 'broadly' excluded from any given

ontological project, hence from every given space. Setting up more explicitly political discussion in chapters three and four, I conclude by arguing that materiality as phenomenological nongivenness requires the notion of a space that allows for the address of even those who are in this sense "un-placeable."[13]

In chapter three, I return to Merleau-Ponty, specifically his unique reading of Marx, in order to develop more explicitly political implications of the reading of materiality as phenomenological nongivenness. Following up on the claim in chapter one that the appeal to specifically human experience is insufficient for an account of materiality in the broader sense of the flesh, I argue that a de-anthropocized notion of materialism is called for. I therefore begin with Merleau-Ponty's early existentialist interpretation of dialectical materialism in the *Phenomenology*[14] and in *Humanism and Terror*, developing by contrast with this still-synthetic approach what I call a "hyperdialectical materialism." In its departure from the phenomenological ground of human experience in order to speak to the broader ontological context of the flesh, a unique feature of a hyperdialectical materialism would be an appeal to materiality without supposing a structure of even public propriety, if a 'public' in this sense is still human: Rather, under a hyperdialectical materialism, the material conditions of a given human situation can only be revealed, so to speak, insofar as these conditions are not only grasped as the product of a strictly human project.

A pivotal question in chapter three in this sense is the possibility of historical change, and of the kind of work called for in bringing it about. By working with more traditional readers of

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[13] I take the notion of the 'un-placeable' from Nadir El-Bizri in his work with Derrida's interpretation of *khōra* in "'*Qui êtes-vous*, χωρα': Receiving Plato's Timaeus." See e.g. p. 490.
[14] Merleau-Ponty's existentialist interpretation of dialectical materialism is outlined in an extended footnote in *Phenomenology*; see PhP 174/210

Marx such as Lukács, Honneth, and Habermas, I argue that 'critique' for the materialist must be a kind of intervention in the world. Explicit considerations of space at this point take something of a backseat, but they remain at stake in an analysis of the tensions between interpretations of political action as necessarily revolutionary, or as potentially discursive: Whereas Merleau-Ponty's own early materialism seems bound to the work of revolution, I argue, a hyperdialectical materialism suggests a more discursive work of resistance. Resistance in this 'hyperdialectical' sense will be expressed via a radicalization of the Habermasian notion of discursive action, that is, as a work of giving expression to a 'primacy of the political'[15] that precedes the human situation.

In chapter four, I turn to Derrida's work with Marx in order to consider the performative force of language as a possible means of political resistance. Using texts such as "Force of Law," *Spectres of Marx*, and *Politics of Friendship*, I give an interpretation of the sometimes-elusive relation between materiality and discourse in these texts: Building on work in chapter two in particular, I take the position that critical political discourse on Derrida's terms must be in a position to acknowledge the nongivenness of materiality in discourse as such. Such an acknowledgement, I contend, itself suggests a mode of resistance whereby an indirect indication of the radical impropriety of the material conditions would suffice to disrupt or interrupt a historically prevailing and recognized structure of public discourse. What I call an "aporetic materialism" must in this sense grapple with an irresolvable tension between a descriptive "claim" to material conditions and a performative "call" to or from a new historical situation.

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[15] The notion of a 'primacy of the political,' though Merleau-Ponty's own, is developed more specifically for my purposes in conversation with Fóti's "Nature, Art, and the Primacy of the Political: Reading Taminiaux and Merleau-Ponty." I address Fóti's interpretation of the notion most explicitly addressed in section 3.3b

Structurally, there are two points to establish in chapter four. First, appealing to notions of political discourse offered by Arendt and Schmitt, I show how apparently descriptive efforts in political discourse (e.g. the recognition of another as an equal, the identification of another as an enemy) involve a necessarily performative moment. Second, and by contrast with both the Arendtian and Schmittian accounts as I interpret them, I show that there is no possible synthesis or recuperation of this performative moment back into the descriptive work. In short, there is a material force of language that language cannot itself make clear or transparent to itself. If this material force can be deployed in oppressive ways, viz. insofar as the performative moment is supposed to be *given* in an existing system, I argue that the 'same' force can be deployed in politically subversive ways.

As this dissertation follows its various detours through phenomenology (Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Derrida) and political theory (Marx, Arendt, Habermas), a clear risk is that it never arrives at its destination, namely an account of public space as a space of resistance. At the same time, we will find that there is an important sense in which such an account can *only* be anticipated or called for, and if nothing else what I propose here is a certain manner of approaching this call as something that must be seen as at stake in familiar spaces that are not traditionally seen as having a political valence. If there is an intersection of phenomenology and political theory, then, what I hope to be able to indicate is that it occurs or takes place in these unaccounted-for milieux, where precisely what can be resisted is a certain prevailing language or set of institutions whose terms claim to be comprehensive. Thus in the institution of the university, to take Derrida's privileged example, the necessary engagement with tradition carries the perpetual risk of detour – but detour in the uptake of tradition is perhaps better than a simple affirmation or denial, neither of which is sufficient for change, whereas the essential work of

negotiation within an institution hinges on a *dissensus* that does not prefigure the conditions of critical engagement. This radical *dissensus*, which is operative before the terms of the parties involved can be fully affirmed or rejected, and which therefore opens the institution onto a modification that is not a negation, is what I call resistance. In public space as a space of resistance, then – and perhaps that includes the space of the university – everything remains to be justified; a materialism critically attentive to such a space must maintain in the same moment the impossibility of the task that public space sets before us, and the necessity of taking a position there in that excessive space, as there is nowhere else to begin.

Chapter One
From Constitution to Institution: Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Materiality

"Reflection does not withdraw from the world toward the unity of consciousness as the foundation of the world; rather, it steps back in order to see transcendences spring forth and it loosens the intentional threads that connect us to the world in order to make them appear; it alone is conscious of the world because it reveals the world as strange and paradoxical."
  -   Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*[16]

In the preface to his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty summarizes phenomenology

as a project inherited from Husserl by saying that "we will find the unity of phenomenology and

its true sense [*sens*] in ourselves."[17] Merleau-Ponty's words emphasize that phenomenology as a

philosophical method proceeds by self-analysis, specifically a careful and rigorous description of

our own experience, in order to explicate the foundations of what is given there. Husserl's own

description of phenomenology as a return to the things themselves thus carries a necessary

double-valence, whereby a critical approach to the world hinges on a reflexive turn back towards

ourselves; stronger still, and as Husserl emphasizes in *Ideas II* for example, to reflect on our own

experience is also to recognize that the world initially experienced as exterior to an experiencing

consciousness can itself be given, in a modified form, as 'contained' in the first place within

consciousness.[18] Phenomenological method in this sense springs from a tension whereby

experience tells us that we are in the world, a mere part of it, but reflection on this experience

tells us that the world in another sense is *in us*, a part of us that itself speaks to our own role as a

more comprehensive whole.

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[16] Cited hereinafter as PhP by standardized French pagination. See PhP lxxvii/14 for the passage cited here.
[17] PhP lxxi/8
[18] See e.g. section six of *Ideas II*, HUA III pp. 15/14

Phenomenology appears to fail at its origins if it cannot settle an implicit ambiguity of origins in experience; it seems essentially fraught to approach the question of priority between self and world as an undecidable one.

Husserl's appeal to the notion of constitution demonstrates his decision to begin with the subject, which intuitively coincides with the insistence of critique upon the primacy of experience. The appeal to constitution gives an account of the world, in other words, but this account can only be given on the terms of the critical subject. To speak of 'tension' or 'ambiguity' between self and world is therefore misleading, since both after all are given in experience; thus whatever is at the root of experience is at the root of or 'constitutes' both poles and the relation between them. Reflection therefore begins a series of reductions, which in parenthesizing the world as it is given reveals its origin – a structure of *givenness* to be attributed to a transcendental consciousness that not only precedes a given world, but which also logically precedes the psychic Ego or subject to whom a world is initially given.[19] By refusing the primacy of the given, this originary synthesis of self and world at the level of the transcendental is what phenomenology is uniquely in a position to reveal.

For Merleau-Ponty the question of constitution is pivotal in his considerations in the preface to the *Phenomenology*, and in effect guides the project even though Husserl's name is mentioned barely at all in the main body of the text.[20] At the same time, Merleau-Ponty performs

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[19] For a brief summary of reflection, the eidetic and transcendental reductions, and the notion of a transcendental Ego or pure consciousness, see e.g. HUA III pp. 337/325

[20] On my count, Husserl's name is mentioned nine times outside the Preface, excluding notes. In spite of so few direct references, Merleau-Ponty is well known for his ongoing engagement with Husserl throughout career. An exception to Merleau-Ponty's usual unwillingness to explicitly invoke Husserl as an interlocutor can be found in the esaay "The Philosopher and His Shadow," which is perhaps Merleau-Ponty's most explicit discussion of how Husserl figures into his own work, even if as the title suggests Husserl figures into the picture only with a certain spectrality.

his own reversal of the Husserlian notion by an attempt to think constitution, not in terms of

consciousness, but rather in terms of the body, which on Merleau-Ponty's account more clearly

evinces the constituting link or unity of a self-world relation. The necessarily passive and

anonymous character of the resulting notion of the body suggests how Merleau-Ponty's own

thinking of 'reflection' in the preface to the *Phenomenology* is at once inherited from Husserl

while explicitly divergent: The point is still to see how the world is 'in me,' but this I do not by a

reflection that leads to self-knowledge, but rather by a reflection that returns me to the

strangeness of the world; it is the very body that I consciously know as my 'own' that leads me

to an alterity of and by which this thought has always already been possessed.

Whether constitution is grasped as a moment in consciousness or in the body, though,

what is called for in any case is the revelation of a unity that phenomenology takes as its original

object, and as the (embodied or conscious) subject's "own." Constitution in this sense implies a

structure of propriety at the heart of experience; irrespective of what specifically is taken either

as the subject or object, or finally the pivot of appropriation, the thought of constitution is a

thought of oneself. Even as Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the body performs its own reversal of

the Husserlian thought, hence an estrangement of our own origins from ourselves, it remains the

case that *there is a whole* that is proper to experience, even if it is initially given there as an

apparent 'part' of the world. The partiality of givenness is what a constituting subject or object

transcends in experience.

By emphasizing the role of spatiality in constitution, this chapter proposes an extension

of the critique of constitution offered by Renaud Barbaras in *The Being of the Phenomenon*,

where Barbaras makes the point that Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of constitution goes hand in

hand with an emphasis on temporality, no matter the question of the materiality of the body.[21] As I will argue, in particular with the help of Ed Casey, one can locate a similar radicalization of spatiality in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology*, and what must be re-examined in this sense is the materiality of the body proper. I will therefore, and along with Barbaras, argue for an "originary spatiality" with an ontological sense not reducible to already-unfolded spatiality in the sense of sheer extension possessed *a priori* by consciousness. On the other hand, by showing that there is already a kind of identity of space and time in the notion of constitution, I question Barbaras' results, which follow from a turn away from constitution, of an apparently more primordial and ontological identity as expressed in the reversibility of the claims that "space is time" and that "time is space."[22] Indeed the awkward and perhaps forced enjoining of these two claims already suggest the question to be borne out more fully in chapter two, namely the question of that language by which we may explicate an ontological identity of this sort; what is to be considered at that point[23] is the possible role of certain material conditions of the "is" of identity that Barbaras here deploys perhaps too readily.

For now, however, what I must outline is the discussion of a nongivenness of materiality as it will be borne out on specifically Merleau-Pontian terms in this chapter. By focusing on spatiality, I mean to draw out two moments or ways in which phenomenology can approach a structure that appears to exceed the necessary locality of the experiencing and embodied subject.

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[21] For Barbaras, the 'failure' of the *Phenomenology* is in effect to return to the question of the other as another consciousness (BP 36); this failure to think the body on its own terms becomes manifest in Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on temporality (see e.g. BP 218).
[22] See BP ch. 12, sections 3 and 6 for the two claims as section headings to the chapter "Originary Spatio-Temporality."
[23] See esp. Ch. 2, section 1b.

First, we can explicate the restrictions of beginning from 'local' place, and in light of which the world is given to me in part, in terms of what I will call a *phenomenological resistance* of a whole. A phenomenological resistance in this sense does not evade phenomenological analysis, since to grasp a 'whole' (e.g. space) is to grasp a structure of givenness that does not readily show up as such in everyday experience, but which is necessarily immanent there as a constituting force. Phenomenological resistance in this sense suggests the need for phenomenological reflection in order to grasp the world as such. Upon reflection, however, phenomenological method reveals a structure of experience that is itself sufficient as a givenness that was always already, after all, 'given' in my experience, in me, from the outset. Merleau-Ponty's focus on the body, which therefore insists on the irreducibility of one's 'place' in the world, in this sense does not change the process or results of phenomenological reflection as a modification of experience that ideally reveals a universal structure of experience.

Second, however, the disagreement between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty as to *what* constitutes the unity of experience suggests a more radical tension, raising the question of what in the first place must *be* in order that a unity of experience be conceivable, upon reflection, in terms of a structure of givenness – for example, consciousness or a body. By asking for this ontological condition for the possibility of experience, one already risks venturing beyond the limits of phenomenology, as the appeal to experience – reflective and critical or reflective – seems to limit the inquiry to the structure of givenness from out of which the question emerges. The appeal to an ontological condition for a constituting subject, in other words, implies the threat of what Dastur identifies as an 'unconstitutable,' or what I will refer to in a similar vein as an *ontological resistance*, viz. as that which is necessary for a specific structure of phenomenological givenness, but which cannot be reduced to that structure.

Husserl's own turn in his late work to problems of historically immanent genesis of ideal structures suggests his own approach to this question of the infiltration of the ontological into the phenomenological, but Husserl's own thinking will not be my principal concern in this chapter for two reasons: First, Husserl in this later move still insists on the strict method of reductions, which by definition refuse the appeal to an ontological condition; second, Husserl even in later works still focuses on the role of a pure consciousness and as a transcendental condition with a primacy that cannot be called into question in any radical sense. In short, for Husserl the threat of an ontological resistance does not call into question phenomenological method; indeed, and although Husserl struggles with the question throughout, it remains the case even in later works that there is no legitimate appeal to an 'ontological' resistance properly speaking, since to deploy this term in earnest is already to speculate beyond the limits of even a genetic investigation of the conditions of experience.

Merleau-Ponty, for his part and over the course of his work, demonstrates a keen awareness of the tension between phenomenological and ontological resistance, which begins perhaps most obviously with his thorough phenomenological attention to the body – the very spur, as I will argue, towards his later thinking of the flesh on explicitly ontological terms. The methods of phenomenology in this sense are stretched to their limits in Merleau-Ponty's thinking, and perhaps already in the *Phenomenology*, which begins in its preface from the insight, inherited from Husserl but not yet given so radical an interpretation as Merleau-Ponty will supply, that "most important lesson of the reduction is the impossibility of a complete reduction."[24] I therefore take up Merleau-Ponty's work with an elusive materiality in this chapter, and by tracking this shift in Merleau-Ponty's own approach to this materiality, I hope to

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[24] PhP lxxvii/7

indicate some broader implications of this materiality for phenomenological method. There are three themes to be established in this intertwining of materiality and methodology.

The first the concerns the difference between Merleau-Ponty's early and later approaches as framed by Barbaras, viz. as a shift between phenomenology and ontology.[25] As I argue, however, even in the admission of materiality as an ontological resistance, Merleau-Ponty never fully abandons phenomenological methodology, despite the fact that an appeal to the flesh rules out the reducibility of materiality to the structures of givenness at stake in lived experience.

The second methodological shift to be tracked, following Jacques Taminiaux's reading, concerns move from Merleau-Ponty's early thinking of a synthetic dialectics of the body proper, to a 'hyperdialectic' of the flesh.[26] Whereas a synthetic dialectics grasps the body as a (synthetic) "place of appropriation"[27] for self in relation to the world, I argue that hyperdialectics requires us to think an impropriety of the flesh.

Third, and drawing on Don Beith's work, I will illustrate how the shift from the body proper to the flesh implies a shift from Merleau-Ponty's early emphasis on Husserlian constitution to his later thinking of Husserlian institution or *Stiftung*. Whereas Beith, however, locates an explicit turn to institution already in Merleau-Ponty's *Structure of Behavior*,[28] I argue with Barbaras that certain remnants of the model of constitution remain until the *Phenomenology* at least.[29] As I frame the difference, constitution implies a *wholistic* structure of experience that

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[25] The tension between phenomenology and ontology is of course the nominal and prevailing concern for Barbaras in *The Being of the Phenomenon*; for a succinct expression of the tension as Barbaras reads it, see e.g. pp. xxviii

[26] Taminiaux, "Merleau-Ponty, From Dialectic to Hyperdialectic."

[27] PhP 156/191

[28] See e.g. Beith, "Merleau-Ponty and the Institution of Animate Form: The Generative Origins of Animal Perception and Movement," p. 205

[29] See e.g. BP 26-33, esp. 30, for the role of constitution in what Barbaras describes as Merleau-Ponty's "confrontation with Husserl."

institution does not. In particular, I try to show that Merleau-Ponty's own approach to the materiality of the body in the *Phenomenology* in terms of constitution that brings this wholistic model to a head, whereas the later development of institution in the *Institution* lectures helps to think the experience by more strongly emphasizing the implications of a partiality of givenness – a partiality that in this sense indirectly indicates a broader nongivenness.

Structurally, each these themes are drawn out over the course of the chapter as a whole, which more generally tracks the shift in Merleau-Ponty's thinking of space, place, and materiality by following the historical timeline of his own writings.

Section one therefore focuses on Merleau-Ponty's early thinking in the *Phenomenology*. In that text, a focus the body requires an understanding of materiality and spatial relations as inextricably historical structures. A 'history' of the body proper is not only temporal, then, but can be grasped in terms of layers of space; these layers can be tracked back to a spatial origin that Ed Casey interprets as an irreducible *place* of the body. A crucial result for this section is that the irreducible place of the body proper implies a place that is inalienable – a kind of transcendental condition. Place in this sense grounds a broader notion of material space that, even in its presentation of distance and foreignness, is built upon the constituting subject's (explicit or tacit) work of making this apparent foreignness – a historical situation – their own.

Section two considers the dialectics of this constituting body proper, arguing that the notion of the body in terms of a synthetic process borne out in the relation between self and world implies a basic privilege for the experiencing subject. I problematize this synthetic approach by considering the material subjection of a plurality of bodies to one another, arguing that a 'hyperdialectical' grasp of this relation is more fruitful for explicating the differential structure of this plurality of embodied subjects. Merleau-Ponty's account of the body proper as

an existential negativity is crucial here; I link it to Sartre's dialectics of the gaze, arguing that in both cases the dialectics prevent a proper presentation or experience of the alterity of the other (viz. whether or not we suppose there to be another *body*). The negative materiality of the body proper in this sense suggests an implicit sovereignty, which I try to problematize by appeal to Frantz Fanon's own existentialist thinking of the body in *Black Skin, White Masks*. In that text, I argue, we recognize that a more radical alienation of a material situation is possible than Merleau-Ponty's thinking allows for, and that in order to account for this situation of alienation a move away from synthetic dialectics is called for. I therefore introduce the notion of Merleau-Ponty's own appeal to hyperdialectics in *The Visible and the Invisible* as yielding a different notion of spatiality and materiality – a "brute space" – as an ontological positivity that is beyond any totalizing appropriation; as a phenomenological 'nongivenness' in this sense, brute space implies materiality that does not privilege any single historical-material situation, nor by extension any one body.

In section three I clarify how the turn to hyperdialectics can be usefully grasped as a turn to the notion of institution or *Sifting* as Merleau-Ponty interprets Husserl's notion in the institution lectures. Specifically, the phenomenological nongivenness of materiality implies a structure of history not reducible to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of constitution in terms of a body proper. Rather than gaining manifest expression as a synthetic whole, the materiality at stake in a brute space gains only partial and 'indirect' expression as it is instituted in a plurality of ways and in different historical contexts. Insofar as materiality cannot be exhaustively accounted for via the model of institution, I conclude by speculating that critical attention to materiality of a brute space demands an 'epistemic humility.' The non-givenness of materiality in this sense is returned to explicitly in chapter three in order to explain a shift in Merleau-

Ponty's interpretation of materialism – from a synthetic dialectical to hyperdialectical

materialism – considered at length Chapter three.

Section One: Dialectics of Orientation – The History of Space; the Absurdity of the Origin

"A truth against the background of absurdity, and an absurdity that the teleology of
consciousness presumes to be able to convert into a truth, this is the originary phenomenon."
-   Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 310/349

In his essay "What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?" Kant begins with what he

takes to be an illustrative analogy to the title's question, namely spatial orientation. To orient

oneself spatially, he says, "means to use a given direction […] in order to find the others –

literally, to find the *sunrise*."[30] Thus Kant demonstrates an implicit need for certain limits of

experience as a condition of orientation, and in the case of spatial orientation these limits are

experienced as externally imposed – the infinite transcendence of a spatial horizon. For Kant, of

course, this orienting external horizon cannot be "external" in any ontological sense precisely

since it is given to an experiencing subject, and to that extent graspable for them: Really, we can

anticipate already, to be oriented in space is already to be oriented in thinking, as both are only

possible for a critical subject, and the 'limits' are the limits *of* or proper to this subject. The

propriety of spatial limits is already clear when Kant observes that this horizon is not precisely

orienting in its own right, and that in order to establish directions in relation to this horizon, "I

also need the feeling of a difference in my own subject, namely, the difference between my right

and left hands."[31]

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[30] 8:134.

[31] *Ibid*. In this passage Kant is using the example of a perfectly symmetrical (or simply a totally dark) room to show that I have no 'orientation' here merely on account of a horizon, but also require my body to parse out what is given.

The return to the internal experience of the subject from an external horizon is accomplished in two ways: First, and most obviously, with the observation that the materiality of an 'external' space is not in itself orienting, and would even be disorienting[32] without the addition of a 'subjective' element in experience as a condition of differentiating between aspects of what is externally given; second, that this subjective element, which literally gives sense to the objective element, implies the body ("the feeling of a difference […] between my right and left hands") as the necessary link between the internality of the experiencing subject and the externality of the spatial horizon. But, to note it from the outset, affirming the priority of the subject is perhaps not the same as affirming the priority of the body that a subject inhabits: In the notion of an *embodied subject*, there is perhaps more to the question of orientation space than Kant's analogy will ultimately admit.

Kant's concern in his text, in any case, is neither space nor the body, nor finally the problems of whatever historical immanence of the experiencing subject that both an external space and the body might be taken to imply. But it is not so clear that the question of spatial orientation can be secondary to the question of orientation in thinking. From a phenomenological perspective that we can take from Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, for example, the emphasis must almost be reversed, as what Kant seems to take for granted is a "constitution of the world already accomplished" prior to the critical subject's engagement with it;[33] implicitly it is less the subject, and more this world as we find it in our experience that has yet to be explained. Merleau-Ponty's early emphasis on the body in this sense will return us to a more rudimentary insight of phenomenology: that the world is not transparent, and that its 'depth' or

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[32] See 8:135 re: the astronomer that, "if he pays attention only to what he sees and not at the same time to what he feels – would inevitably become disoriented."
[33] PhP 315/355

distance from the subject who experiences it – up to and including that vanishing point of a spatial horizon – implies a materiality of the world *and* of my body that I cannot simply 'know.' Indeed, the recognition of this basic opacity of materiality is a *condition* for critical inquiry, for the emergence of the critical subject, who therefore begins from a moment that is not one of self-knowledge, even if it is also not a critical moment of self-doubt. The critical approach to the subject as well as to this materiality, in other words, begins with this *fact*, that there is a world. This facticity of materiality is what I therefore propose to consider in the discussion of space, as our understanding of the critical subject, of the process of critique more generally, hinges upon how we initially understand the facticity of materiality to be at stake in experience.

What is in at stake in the notion of a materiality that appears to precede the subject – but this *apparent* precedence is precisely what must be clarified – concerns the difficulties of critically rendering the historicity of the critical subject, hence of approaching the notion of a historical *event* out of which the critical subject emerges as such. This is a problem that Husserl was himself wise to in his own work, but if we read Husserl as adhering to a traditional critical approach, then it is a problem that perhaps cannot be approached, since in the evasiveness of this event for an experiencing subject there is perhaps as much a threat to the possibility of critical knowledge as much there is a promise of the same. As Dastur puts this tension, Husserl's philosophical inquiry appears to seek an originary truth, but it may just as well be that the event of the critical subject's emergence "marks the limits of [philosophy's] enterprise of intellectual possession of the world."[34] My contribution in this section will be to follow this tension as initially emerging out of Husserl's thought, which is then radicalized as Merleau-Ponty attempts to think the same historical event in terms of the materiality of the body. By initially taking the

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[34] Dastur, "Phenomenology of the Event: Waiting and Surprise," p. 178.

position that the critical subject is materially *constituted*, in other words, Merleau-Ponty arrives

at the notion of a subject that must understand itself in terms of the very world that 'transcends'

it. Implicitly, there is no 'static' analysis of this subject without a genetic analysis, and the

philosophical 'limits' that Dastur notes are in Merleau-Ponty's case pervasive, since there is no

conceivable transparency of the critical subject to themselves except by a return to the opacity of

a material world. At the same time, I show that Merleau-Ponty's appeal to the structure of

constitution in order to think an embodied subject is still bound to the aim of exhausting the

appeal to materiality in terms of 'limits' that are available for critical access via the experience of

an embodied subject; that is, the opacity of materiality is perhaps still considered, paradoxically,

an object of critical knowledge, reducible to a structure of givenness as immanent in the critical

subject as such.

Structurally, then, I trace a path in the thinking of constitution given by Husserl in *Ideas*

II, and finally radicalized by Merleau-Ponty in the *Phenomenology*, and Ed Casey in *The World*

at a Glance. By taking the approach to materiality in terms of a phenomenological givenness to

its limits, so to speak, the discussion of space in this section is intended to set up a confrontation

between phenomenology and ontology in sections two and three. The questions in these later

sections begin where the lineage traced in this section appears to end, namely with the possibility

of a critical subject that cannot be grasped apart from the obscurity of its material-historical

conditions of emergence. In sections two and three I show that a certain form of critique is

nevertheless possible in the recognition of certain material limitations on the aim of self-

knowledge; this section anticipates that later aim by considering the limits of the model of

constitution in its phenomenological explication of spatiality for an embodied subject.

Section 1a. Immanence, Transcendence, and The Body as a 'Turning Point'

Husserl's appeal to the body in *Ideas II* turns on a double-role the body seems to play in everyday experience as a relation to a material world, whereby the body is at once participating in this world, but must also be operative as a means for the subject's critical recognition of a properly 'spiritual' or immaterial origin. Let us outline the two aspects or moments of this self-world relation, which as we will find ultimately lead us to two distinct 'layers' of the subject, and indeed of the body.

On the one hand, the body keeps a conscious subject pre-theoretically in touch with a world, that is, the body ensures that a world is there to experience, apparently 'before' the intervention of consciousness. This pre-theoretical relation is most obviously at stake in the direct sensation of things that are given in everyday experience as transcending the subject that experiences them. Since whatever is given in sensation appears as "value-charged" with significance *for* the subject that experiences it, however, a simple invocation of transcendence is too quick: The pre-theoretical givenness of a porcelain container before me already yields the recognition of a cup that holds my coffee; *prima facie*, this object's extension in the world suggests that I have no part to play in its presentation, yet since the cup is first of all what I see with my eyes and what I hold in my hands in order to drink from it, the spatiality and materiality of the thing is already imbued with a corporeality with which I am familiar. The thing in extended space, Husserl concludes, "is unthinkable without sensuous qualification,"[35] and the qualities of the material thing are "dependent on my qualities, […] and to be related to *my Body*."[36]

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[35] HUA III 37
[36] HUA III 56

On the other hand, and although my body is a material thing, the same role of yielding

significance for me also suggests for Husserl how the body cannot just be one material thing

amongst others. Indeed, the sensorial schemata that my body imposes (e.g. the 'perspective' of

my eyes and the 'colours' to which they are sensitive, the tactical qualities attributable to things

in light of my skin, etc.) imply that my body is also "the *medium of all perception*."[37] Critical

attention to the body in this sense allows for a turn away from the transcendent world, and back

to an already-intervening subject in the givenness of the transcendent world of material things.

Participating in both the material-causal relations of the transcendent world, as well as in

the psychic-spiritual relations of the conscious subject, for Husserl the body "presents the two

faces of Janus."[38] Yet this double-role of the body does not simply divide or separate the spiritual

and the material; rather on Husserl's account the body is itself the passage or "turning point" that

enjoins spiritual and material processes.[39]

Husserl's appeal to the body in this sense allows him to move beyond the Kantian

difficulty, which as we saw leads him to grasp the embodied subject only in terms of immaterial

conditions. Husserl's account no doubt turns on a radical distinction between formal and material

causality – forces of intention and extension – but what is remarkable for Husserl is that I have

an *experience* of precisely this radical difference: The body is at once a mere part in a broader

causal nexus, and on the other hand provides a "zero-point of orientation"[40] in light of which

anything in this external world can be spatially given. For Husserl, then, attention to the body

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[37] HUA III 56
[38] HUA III 286
[39] HUA III 169
[40] HUA III 56

confirms that the *psyche* of the critical subject has a place or 'seat' in the *physis* of the extended world.[41]

Husserl's well-known example to illustrate a 'place' of the *psyche* builds upon the notion of the double-role of the body, in the experience of a 'hand touching hand:'[42] With my right hand on a table I already have a sense of the difference between myself as a subject and the table as an aspect of the objective world; remarkably, however, I can place my left hand on my right hand, and the original opposition is doubled, so that my right hand is as much (i) the imposition of a certain 'form' on worldly contents, as it is (ii) amongst the contents appearing in that world, viz. *within* the very spatial strictures that my body imposes. For Husserl this experience is evidence that the distinction between the internality of the subject and externality of the extended world cannot be ontologically radical; indeed, the experience of my hand as at once playing part in a material and spiritual causality is itself the means by which I recognize the spiritual as operative in the possibility of grasping, so to speak, one's own body and of the spatial relations it makes possible. Thus the materiality of an extended space is for Husserl to be conceived more originarily in terms of a corporeality.[43]

In spite of presenting the *psyche* with a place in the world, the body as a 'turning point' between material and spiritual causality is not simply or obviously a synthesis of the two. Indeed from a critical perspective, I can bracket a physical sensation in order to recognize its psychical content, but in so doing I precisely deny myself an opportunity of critically grasping the *transition* from the material to the psychical; approached critically, "'tuning point,' which lies in

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[41] HUA III 135. "Here the human being is a *human being in nature* and is in nature only because, first and foremost, the Body is a material thing in spatial nature."

[42] See HUA III 152 and following for Husserl's account of the example about to be discussed.

[43] "By the term spatial (better: corporeal) extension of a thing we understand the *spatial corporeality*." (HUA III 29)

the body, […] is hidden from me."[44] Implicitly the critical understanding of spatial orientation

still remains, so to speak, one-sided: The body indeed entails that I can be oriented within a

given space, so as an extended being I can also grasp more abstract directions (such as the

cardinal directions) – but these more abstract elements, which is to say the relations at stake in

the orienting directionality of (e.g.) "North," are not themselves "extended." It is my body's

unique participation in the "intentional nexuses"[45] of a constituting consciousness that allow for

oriented spatiality, and the upshot of a critical approach to the body is precisely that the

experience of one's own body cannot be explained only by reference to the "causal nexuses" of

the natural world. Space as oriented space, Husserl shows, is not a product of the material world,

but is given first of all in us, transcendentally in consciousness, in order that an embodied subject

experience the spatiality of the material world in which they partake.

More generally, then, the *corporeality* that Husserl describes exceeds *matter* as a simple

extended thing. To still insist that "the Body is a material thing in spatial nature" is only to insist

that the body as it were 'includes' what it exceeds in experience.[46] This corporeality is not yet an

'excessive' materiality in the sense that I will develop the notion since for Husserl it leads

directly back to the transcendentality of a constituting consciousness, viz. to something that is

not material at all. The essential psychic/material opposition remains in place in the body; what

we find via critical analysis however is that a synthesis of the two must have occurred, even if

we cannot say precisely where or when; indeed the very fact that I remain blind to the body as a

turning point is a necessary moment on the way to a revelation of the logical priority of

consciousness as a wholly other 'layer' or level that in the first place has constituted the self-

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[44] HUA III 168
[45] HUA III 287
[46] HUA III 135

world or psychic-physical oppositions as they are initially presented to me in naïve experience, or in the first stage of reflection. The result of critical attention to the body in this sense is that it is possible explicate both a human *psyche* and a human *physis* – but only insofar as we can grant the givenness of *physis* in *psyche*. The material world in this sense is from the outset an object of knowledge, to be 'grasped' in Husserl's sense of the term;[47] by extension, phenomenology may attend to a material world only insofar as it attends to a specifically human history – and this history, as a result, bears the possibility of a complete return to material conditions only as a kind of promise that the critical subject has always already made to themselves. In Husserl's words:

> "[…] historical nexuses, which may light up in a flash, or even logical nexuses, all manifest themselves prior to explication, prior to the actual subsequent establishment of the nexuses. […] The actual nexus is then but a goal grasped in anticipation."[48]

In in odd twist, then, the spatiality of the material world in the sense of *res extensa* is always already given in experience, but given in a deferral and a temporalization. This presentation by adumbrations is why there is a partiality to the material world as it is initially given, but the same structure of givenness also establishes a possibility of total understanding. Space, for its part, is not *res extensa* at all, not physical, and so not given in 'parts' or by adumbrations; irreducible to the material world or to a 'physical' space, space is always already a 'social' space, given first of all in social and intersubjective nexuses.[49] Despite whatever complexities in organization and structure, then, space in each case emerges all at once in a constituting consciousness: an upsurge in experience of a geographic or political landscape against the background of a material world, space emerges as a product that is properly our own.

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[47] See e.g. HUA III 6
[48] HUA III 286
[49] For the notions of 'social' and 'intersubjective' nexuses as psychic nexuses, see e.g. HUA III 240 and HUA III 92, respectively.

Section 1b. The Body as Origin: Being and Oriented Being

"Living wakefully in the world we are constantly conscious of the world, whether we pay attention to it or not, conscious of it as the horizon of our life, as a horizon of "things" (real objects), of our actual and possible interests and activities. Always standing out against the world-horizon is the horizon of our fellow men."
-   Husserl, "The Origin of Geometry," CE 358

To insist that space has a psychic element is not to say that it is simply a concept; rather, as

Husserl recognizes in "The Origin of Geometry," the upsurge of even a 'total' space has a

historical component – an event that requires an interrogation of our own history in order to

explicitly recuperate a previously implicit origin. At the same time, Husserl's account of the

body allows for, indeed requires a separation of this genetic and explanatory analysis of space

from the static and descriptive analysis of space: On the assumption that the material-historical

conditions for the experience of space are 'given' in a constituting consciousness that is not

reducible to this materiality, the analysis of materiality can be grasped as a continuation of the

analysis of consciousness. By critically syphoning off a constituting consciousness from

material-causal relations, the later ambiguities of the genetic analysis do not contaminate the

initial transparency of the static analysis.

In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty returns to the body in order to

consider again its role in the experience of a material world. In particular, Merleau-Ponty will

argue that the body itself, rather than a constituting consciousness, supplies a transcendental

condition for the givenness of a material world in experience – as we can already anticipate, a

specifically *material* condition that Merleau-Ponty locates in "body proper" (*corps propre*) of a

critical subject. By turning Husserl's account on its head in this way, Merleau-Ponty's attempt in

the *Phenomenology* to return the structure of constitution to its feet suggests two points to be

anticipated here. First, the appeal to the body proper as the constituting of a critical subject

brings to a head ambiguity or unknowability of the body at stake in Husserl's account, viz. the

body as a 'turning point' between the psychic and the material. Second, and more strongly, the

Husserlian distinction between a static and genetic method – the possibility of grasping the

critical subject apart from the material conditions for their emergence – becomes blurred, since

the very notion of 'constitution' seems to be conceived on material-historical terms.[50]

     As we will see, however, Merleau-Ponty's thinking of the body still demonstrates a clear

analogy to the double-role of the body in Husserl as at once psychic and material. The concern

with a more radical ambiguity that follows as to the priority of the psychic over the material, or

vice versa, is a point I draw from Barbaras' considerations in *The Being of the Phenomenon*.[51] In

that text, Barbaras suggests that Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of constitution in terms of the

body in the *Phenomenology* slides "back towards a realist conception,"[52] effectively prioritizing

the materiality of the world over against the psychic life of the self. At the same time, it seems to

me that one has at least equal reason to assert the reverse, as Merleau-Ponty himself seems to do

in "The Philosopher and His Shadow," where – notably, while engaging Husserl's position in

Ideas II – we find Merleau-Ponty's claim that the body "is, if you wish, on the side of the

subject."[53] A similar emphasis on the primacy of the critical subject is also reflected in the

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[50] This clear emphasis on a material-historical genesis that I locate in the *Phenomenology* perhaps suggests why Beith argues that Merleau-Ponty in the *Structure of Behaviour* has already eschewed the model of constitution, in favour of a thinking of institution or *Stiftung* that Merleau-Ponty nevertheless does not explicitly develop on these terms until later writing. Though a thinking of institution is clearly latent in, and ultimately necessitated by these earlier texts, my position is that the appeal to a 'body proper' still bears elements of a thinking of constitution; the problems this thinking leads to in the *Phenomenology* are precisely what I argue function in part as a motivation for the more explicit shift to the model institution in later writings.
[51] See BP 6-7
[52] BP 7.
[53] S 166.

Phenomenology, in Merleau-Ponty's description of the body of the critical subject as consisting in a "tacit cogito" – an "I can," if not yet a self-conscious "I think."[54]

Should we decide between Barbaras' interpretation and Merleau-Ponty's? If the body is to fulfill the role of Husserl's constituting consciousness, this already suggests that Merleau-Ponty is right to emphasize a 'subjective' element to the body that would not be reducible to the strictly material world. But if that is the case, then why does Merleau-Ponty insist that this subjective element is genuinely owed to the *body*, rather than to consciousness? On the other hand, if the point is to explicate a constitution of a psychic self that cannot be grasped apart from the material world, the very invocation of this psychic or proto-psychic element suggests that Barbaras goes too far in calling Merleau-Ponty's approach 'realist:' It remains the case that what is sought is some account of the *relation* between a *psyche* and material *physic*, which on these terms returns us to the Husserlian aim of recognizing the one in the other.

The notion of a *psyche* 'in' a *physis* – and vice versa – already anticipates the "reversibility" of the chiasm that Merleau-Ponty eventually identifies, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, in the materiality of what he will call the "flesh." As we will find in section two, however, for Merleau-Ponty this reversibility suggests an "identity without superposition," which as a result can just as easily be called a "difference without contradiction;"[55] The flesh will prove an *excessive* materiality, then, in its irreducibility to the side of the subject *or* object, even as it makes this distinction possible. In the *Phenomenology*, by contrast, I will show how the relation of *psyche* and *physis* is precisely grasped in terms of a kind of superposition, hence in

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[54] PhP 424/463-4
[55] VI 135

terms of a synthetic process of the production of *psyche* 'in' *physis*, and which for this reason has identifiable, indeed knowable origins in the body of the critical subject.

This proposal of a kind of superposition will be illustrated shortly by appeal to the levels of spatiality that Merleau-Ponty identifies by appeal to aspects of the body proper. The phenomenological challenge of this structure of superposition, as we will see, is that we begin, so to speak, at the top or peak of a superstructure (this is what it means to be conscious), whereas in order to critically grasp our situation as conscious, critical subjects we must so speak work our way down, plumbing the material depths of our psychic life. If the *Phenomenology* is still not proposing a 'realist' project, however, it is because of the obvious tension whereby there is no critical work until, on the other hand, a critical subject emerges out of certain material situations; implicitly there is no 'truth' to be found in the material situation until a 'tacit *cogito*' gives rise to an embodied subject that only *then* may consider the world from a critical standpoint.

The ambiguity of priority – of whether the 'origin' of the critical subject is material/real or psychic/irreal – is itself what gives rise to a methodogical difficulty, whereby there is no workable 'descriptive' or static analysis of the critical subject that does not already undertake (or otherwise, and problematically, take for granted) the 'explanatory' or genetic analysis of the subject's emergence. This double-methodology, whereby the critical subject can never grasp themselves apart from material-historical trajectory that is initially – and perhaps radically – opaque in experience, is precisely what we find in Merleau-Ponty's explication of the subject as spatially oriented, which can only describe the experience of spatial orientation by insisting on several "layers" of the body which correspond to analogous layers of space.[56] Let us briefly

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[56] PhP 84/111

follow Merleau-Ponty in his analysis in order to recognize how his appeal to the body radicalizes the import of revealing the material conditions for the emergence of the critical subject.

What Merleau-Ponty calls the *actual body* is the most "objective" notion of the body, designating the body when it is literally taken as an object, viz. a passive extended "thing" in the world. There is already a reversal here: Whereas for Husserl the body as *res extensa* suggests the most basic level – the material as such – for Merleau-Ponty the 'actual body' implies the most abstract of relations. To operate at this abstract or 'objective' is to conceive relations most systematically – but to operate at this level alone is to remain blind to the forces that motivate what is recognizable here. Consciousness proves to be a kind of burden to critique, even if it is also necessary; what is called for critically is a return to more basic, less formalizable processes.

What Merleau-Ponty calls the *habitual* or *lived body*, then, is a more active and dynamic notion of the body – the body understood in terms of a developmental history of "habits" as "gestures of manipulation" as a means of "merging with certain projects, and being perpetually engaged therein."[57] It is at this level that Merleau-Ponty finds room to speak of a "motor intentionality"[58] that has already secured a "hold" on the world,[59] accessing the latter as a condition for the appearance of any "object" in the above sense. The lived body in this sense is perhaps what for Merleau-Ponty "is [...] on the side of the subject."[60]

Finally, what Merleau-Ponty calls the *body proper* [*le corps propre*] is the most basic notion of the body that binds the actual and habitual together. In Merleau-Ponty's words the body proper is the "primordial habit, the one that conditions all others and by which they can be

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[57] PhP 84/111
[58] PhP 113/141, cf. PhP 56/82
[59] PhP 261/298
[60] S 166.

understood."[61] In this sense, the body proper is what allows the integration of bodily habits into a "body schema" as a model for experience in general. In this constituting role, the body proper must be recognized as an "always implied third term"[62] out of which the oppositional pairs of figure-background, subject-object, and self-world will have sprung.

The introduction of the body proper anticipates Barbaras' concerns in *The Being of the Phenomenon*, whereby it becomes particularly difficult to say *what* this 'body' is, if it is supposed to at once constitute the unity of a lived and actual body, but also not simply to dissolve into one side or the other or (as Barbaras puts it) to 'slide' back and forth between them.[63] The question, in short, is how the body proper can offer a universal ground for experience, if this ground is not reducible to either the 'objective' givenness of the actual body, or to the more 'subjective' or habitual givenness of the lived body. Without further clarification, the invocation of the body in order to rethink Husserlian constitution seems precisely to undermine the transparency of constitution as an object of critical knowledge. Indeed, by burying the unity of experience so thoroughly in the depths of a material-historical situation, it is perhaps hard to see how there is any difference between this constituting body proper and the material-

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[61] PhP 93/120

[62] PhP 103/130

[63] Barbaras, p. 305. In this passage Barbaras is critiquing the traditional approach of phenomenology as taking for granted (but not explicitly laying out) the unity of the sensible and the intelligible realms. His conclusion, to some extent following Heidegger, is that the recognition of an "ontological difference" is required in order to think a unity that, for its part, cannot be immanently "given" as either intelligible or sensible. While I think Barbaras' diagnosis of the problem is reasonable (viz. the appeal to unity without a positive explication of a 'third term' as genuinely different from what it unifies), my prognosis – hence my reading of later Merleau-Ponty – will think the 'third term' without an ontological difference, and in way that ultimately discourages the language of unity more generally. See the discussion of the flesh in section three for a notion of the 'third term' as *écart*.

historical conditions of its emergence, even as the body is the necessary means by which any

human being would come to recognize a given material-historical situation as their *own*.

However we are to treat this problem of constitution, which I will return to shortly, we

are already in a position to recognize how Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the body as a vehicle of

history – as the medium by which historical structures are given *and* recognized – suggests a

strong Marxian intuition. To invoke a capacity for self-constitution that is obscured by the same

material conditions that would also bring this capacity to light is therefore not accidental, and

will capture much of the discussion of Merleau-Ponty's early materialism in chapter three.

Attending for now to the role of materiality in the constitution of a space, we can put the

problem in the following way: Merleau-Ponty's insight is that "the constitution of a level always

presupposes another given level,"[64] and that the specifically material-historical development of

each level therefore returns a static analysis of space in every case to a necessarily genetic

component. Thus we cannot account for the oriented space of a fully developed human

independently of the toddler's spatial orientation, nor the toddler's orientation independently

from that of non-human animals and other forms of life. What is to be revealed in *our* experience

is therefore a *hierarchy* of spatial levels that together imply a single, unified history of the

materiality of the body proper; nevertheless, and approached critically, the 'constitution' of this

hierarchy suggests a radical opacity precisely in its material origins thus revealed.[65]

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[64] PhP 262/300

[65] With this recognition of the role of the body as always invoking the same world, we would
have a properly Merleau-Pontian response to Heidegger's infamous argument that, by contrast
with *Dasein* as a being with special access to the world as a whole, the animal is "poor in world"
(see Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics,* section 42). For Merleau-Ponty the
animal has access to the same world as the human, given as a "whole" but at a more basic level
of spatial orientation.

Section 1c. Becoming and Becoming Oriented: The Historical Hierarchy of Space

In Merleau-Ponty's notion that there several levels of the body, there is a radicalization of

Husserl's point that there is a historical genesis of space as we experience it: Beyond the notion

that space is historically given, we must insist on the stronger claim that space is historically

constituted. By extension, it becomes possible to see how historical givenness is not only a

temporal givenness, but can be considered a spatial givenness as well: this spatial givenness is

precisely what is critically unveiled in experience as we recognize the anchorage of more

complex and historically developed spatial structures in more primitive ones.[66]

      In order to illustrate this "anchorage" of a given level of space in a prior and more basic

one, Merleau-Ponty returns to the notion of a "geometrical" space, though if his own intent is to

address Husserl on this point, the dialogue remains implicit. As Merleau-Ponty grasps the notion,

the distinct feature of geometrical space consists in its abstract nature, viz. its appearance in

experience apart from the peculiarities of any object that might be said to occupy it.[67]

Geometrical space is therefore a uniform spatiality, e.g. the abstract 'grid' of a GPS network,

wherein positions (and relations between them) are articulated on purely quantitative terms that

are indifferent to the local peculiarities (e.g. geographical, cultural, or political) of the spatial

areas they nevertheless designate. According to Merleau-Ponty, however, this abstract space has

roots in at least one of the 'things' it appears to transcend, namely the body, and the uniformity

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[66] Though it is not my intention to pursue the point here, my claim that there is a spatial givenness of the history of the body proper, coeval to a temporal givenness of the same, suggests a divergence from Barbaras' position that Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on constitution in the *Phenomenology* demands a still-Husserlian prioritization of temporality (see e.g. BP 217-218). Thanks to Neal DeRoo for pointing out this connection.

[67] See e.g. PhP 55/81, cf. PhP 254/291

of geometrical space is in this sense to be considered in analogy with the indifference of the 'actual' body as delineated above.

With geometrical space, then, we see a similar inversion of the Husserlian hierarchy, whereby the interpretation of space as *res extensa* supplies the notion that is most removed from the causal-material processes out of which the thought of space emerges: To anticipate Merleau-Ponty's materialism as it will be taken up in chapter three, the notion of space as *res extensa*, if space at this level is supposed by a critical subject to be self-standing, suggests an inevitable objectification, if not a problematic reification of prior material relations in the body.

At the origin of the apparent uniformity of geometrical space, however, and as it were 'underneath' it, Merleau-Ponty identifies a "lived" space, the precise composition of which would be contingent upon our differing embodied situations – the finite scope of our sensing organs, the kinaesthetic restrictions of our musculoskeletal systems, etc. Space at this level therefore takes on local eccentricities depending on who or what is at stake in relevant spatial relations: The architect and the painter, for example, can both look at the same empty lot, but have it 'given' in sufficiently different ways that they engage with it and appropriate into their experience in entirely different ways; this difference in spatial givenness depends on the fact that the relevant bodily habits are historically inherited and developed in different ways, and as a result reveal different sets of spatial possibilities.

The constitution of geometrical space in lived space allows Merleau-Ponty's claim that the evidently less systematic structure of lived space – the extent to which it is "non-thetic" and "pre-logical"[68] – is "not a *lesser sense*"[69] of the world. At the same time, the contradictions that

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[68] See e.g. PhP 287/325. "We must […] say that the phenomenal layer is, literally, pre-logical and will always remain so."

[69] PhP 302/341

would follow from taking lived space "as a whole" – as if it somehow transcended particular

experiences that do not fully coincide – should not prevent us from recognizing a wholism in

Merleau-Ponty's account of space in the *Phenomenology*. Rather, what the constitution of

geometrical space in lived space demonstrates is the "'pregnancy' of form in content […] prior

to the subsumption of content under form,"[70] and this potential for the historical emergence of a

formal 'whole' from out of apparently fragmented parts is a potential that is given in the body as

constitutive or productive of the structures in which it discovers itself. Thus every spatial 'level'

has its "dialectical ferment"[71] in a prior level, and at the root of everything we should find the

materiality of the body, no matter how obscure it proves to be. In Merleau-Ponty's words, every

perception presupposes a certain past of the subject, and the abstract function of perception […]

implies a more secret act by which we elaborate our milieu."[72]

The question that emerges from thinking constitution in this way concerns how far a

phenomenological analysis can proceed into the material depths upon which it is established as a

critical project. If the constitution of every spatial level is to be found in 'lower' or preceding

one, and if each level implies a 'more secret act,' how should we approach the possibility of a

first and originary spatial level? As Merleau-Ponty observes the paradox, "the first spatial level

could not find its anchorage points *anywhere*, since these needed a level before the first level in

order to be determinate in space."[73] For this 'first' level to be phenomenologically revealed, in

other words, we face the problem of "allowing the appearance of the conditions of all

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[70] PhP 304/344
[71] PhP 104/131
[72] PhP 294/333
[73] PhP 264-5/302

appearing," in spite of the fact that the historical process of appearance is ongoing,[74] and that spatial givenness in this sense remains *within* a process of spatial becoming.

In the face of this paradox of material givenness, Merleau-Ponty in effect doubles down, emphasizing the role of the body proper as "the *unperceived* term at the center of the world toward which every object turns its face."[75] Implicitly, though, the notion of the body as materially constituting demonstrates its most radical implications at this point, since we cannot suppose that the body proper *is* oriented in space; at most, the body proper is the "site" of orientation that in grounding a spatial becoming precisely *is not*, not yet; the body proper is a "zone of non-being *in front of which* precise beings, figures, and points can appear."[76] If such a body "marks the limits of [philosophy's] enterprise of intellectual possession of the world,"[77] it is because this body does not for its part appear. It is with the body proper, then, that we can recognize how a negative materiality is at stake in Merleau-Ponty's thinking of space.

Despite turning Husserl's notion of constitution on its head, then, the same principal paradox remains in grasping the operation of materiality in a structure of givenness. As a negative materiality – a "zone of non-being *in front of which*…" – the body proper in its most basic material constitution suggests an absence minimally in the sense of what I will call a *phenomenological resistance* as a pre-historicity and pre-phenomenality that we grasp as necessary, in spite of the impossibility of its strict presentation via the structures that it constitutes. A phenomenological resistance in this sense reflects Dastur's paradox of the transcendental – the problem of 'allowing the appearance of the conditions of all appearing.'

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[74] Dastur, "Phenomenology of the Event," p. 181
[75] Emphasis mine, PhP 84/111
[76] PhP 103/130
[77] Dastur, "Phenomenology of the Event," p. 178. See p. xx above

Grasping this paradox in terms of the materiality of the body – that is, in terms of the materiality

that Husserl identifies as opaque in critique – only renders it all the more strange that we insist

on this body *proper* as one's own body, as if a sort of primordial secret with respect to origin of

space is the necessary price we pay for having "placed ourselves at the origin of everything."[78]

Section 1d. Place and Propriety: The Origin of Space

"If I attribute to myself a *locus,* then it is the locus of my Body, too. But do we not sense from
the outset a certain difference, by virtue of which locality belongs to me somewhat more
essentially?"
   - Husserl, *Ideas II* (HUA III 32)

What is ultimately put at stake in Merleau-Ponty's invocation of a constituting body proper,

hence a kind of constituting materiality, is Merleau-Ponty's essential contribution in the

Phenomenology to transcendental phenomenology, which seems to radicalize the difficulties that

Husserl raised in *Ideas II* with the thought of a place for the critical subject in the world they

must still in some sense constitute. Merleau-Ponty's appeal to materiality has suggested a certain

inversion of Husserl's distinction between corporeality and materiality, then, but Merleau-

Ponty's interpretation of materiality in terms of a 'body proper' also seems in the end to return us

to a very similar result that privileges the place of the critical subject in the world. As I will

eventually argue, Merleau-Ponty's thinking of materiality in the *Phenomenology* in terms of a

necessary secrecy should lead us to approach the role of the critical subject without implicitly

affirming an anthropo- or Ego-centric model; for now I will try to show, in conversation with Ed

Casey, how Merleau-Ponty's early approach falls short of the break with the Husserlian

transcendental that Merleau-Ponty in another sense anticipates, and ultimately pursues in later

writings.

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[78] PhP 264/302

In *The World at a Glance*,[79] Casey attempts to emphasize what appears radical about Merleau-Ponty's early emphasis on the body, demonstrating in his considerations of space the dialectical reversal it suggests, viz. a kind of priority of the material world over the critical subject. As a structure of givenness, Casey therefore distinguishes between the Sartrean gaze that dominates its object, and Casey's own notion of the "glance" that from the outset "flees itself" as if from the outset captured by a world it has done nothing to produce.[80]

For Casey the notion of the glance proves a useful tool for thinking limit-cases of spatial givenness, attempting to recognize the body in the world even as both are in a way pre-constituted; thus for example Casey takes up the case of what he calls bodily "unorientation." Casey's intentions on these terms underscore the originary difficulty of exhaustively thinking the hierarchy of levels of spatial orientation analyzed above. The example Casey takes up, namely the loss of consciousness, is intuitive enough: As Casey argues, the loss of consciousness evidently is not a matter of being *without* a body; it is rather a case wherein "I am so much at one with the massive facticity of my unconscious body that orientation is not in question at all."[81] So the body as a structure of givenness is *also*, at its limit, a certain absence in experience; this absence in the subject's experience does not disqualify the claim that the body is their own.

Casey acknowledges that in limit-cases such as the loss of consciousness we do not precisely speak of a structure of *experience*, and that what is at stake in the opacity of an

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[79] Cited hereinafter as WG.

[80] "The glance will not yield its secrets to its own action. No wonder: the glance flees itself. It is exterocentric – it flies off the face of the glancer." (WG 55)

[81] WG 94. Cf. Casey's unconscious unorientation with Merleau-Ponty's notion of the "spatiality of the night," whereby an embodied being is both "cut off from its world" while existing with all-but-effaced personal identity – a "pure depth […] without any distance from it to me" (PhP 296/335). Elsewhere Merleau-Ponty implies that even this 'pure depth' implies a certain sense of self, if only the negativity of one's own body as a zone of non-being, accounting for "the notion of depth as 'existential'" (PhP 267/304-5).

unconscious body is both a de-subjectification of the subject and a de-substantialization of the

material world. On these terms Casey further distills the spatial relation at stake in the materiality

of the body, showing that at bottom we have nothing to say about the body beyond the

undeniable fact that it is *there*, "someplace," as "the minimal kind of place in which I can

exist."[82] This most phenomenologically thin of places precedes even a distinction self and world,

which for their part say too much; before a self-world relation, then, Casey suggests the structure

of a 'here-there' dyad as the most basic unity, even if it seems to no longer be a unity of

experience in the usual sense.

By stripping Merleau-Ponty's analyses of oriented space even more barely down to this

basic place as the original spatial relation, Casey reveals a kind of indissoluble schema – a "place

whose structure is shared by all other places."[83] Thus the fact that this place is not precisely

given in experience does not preclude its role as a structure of phenomenological givenness. The

transcendental is therefore brought into play in this moment where phenomenology anticipates a

model of givenness in what is given, even while admitting that it can investigate what is given

only by taking a certain model of givenness for granted. Thus as Heidegger notes

phenomenology takes an inevitably circular or hermeneutic structure whereby critique always

already possesses the same structure it also aims to elaborate. But for Heidegger it is necessary to

refuse any closure of this circuit – any *identity* of givenness and what is given – and this refusal

is what Heidegger establishes by appeal to an 'ontological difference.' If, on the other hand, the

aim is to approach the difficulty from the side of phenomenology only, the solution is less

obvious. In order for Merleau-Ponty to call the materiality of the body proper irreducible, a

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[82] WG 118

[83] *The Fate of Place*, p. 118. (Cited hereinafter as FP)

twofold claim is required: On the one hand, it has to be asserted that the materiality of the body

proper just *is* the same materiality at stake in other bodies, so that there is no 'ontological

difference' in any useful sense between a material givenness and what is materially given; on the

other hand it has to be asserted that the materiality of the body proper implies a still-broader

structure than that of a lived or actual body on their own, viz. a "pre-personal" history of the

material world that grounds experience precisely because it is still in another sense *not* given in

experience. Thus what Casey calls the irreducible place of the body proper is, as David Morris

puts it, "a kind of non-givenness given right within the given"[84] – yet where this 'non-givenness'

is precisely what leads to the conclusion that place is the necessary origin and constitution of

whatever can be spatially given, that is, "a place whose structure is shared by all other places." It

is therefore the non-givenness of place, in short, that differentiates it from what is given, and

which *for that reason* qualifies it as a model of givenness.

      "Non-givenness" has a transcendental sense that must be qualified in two ways. First, the

'non-' can be grasped in the *negative* sense discussed above in terms of a phenomenological

resistance, viz. that which in its absence from experience suggests a broader schema or condition

for the possibility of experience. That is how I take Morris to read Casey here, and I read Casey

on the same terms. But a 'non-givenness' read in this way is simply the affirmation of the

structure of givenness in the experience of the critical subject at its limits. Morris' wording,

which suggests that this non-givenness can itself be *given* is therefore evidence of a thinking of

the transcendental that sees no paradox of the sort named by Dastur, viz. in the 'appearance of

the conditions for all appearing,' and the refusal of this paradox as such seems to me to be the

essential feature of an appeal to the model of constitution, which still thinks the origin –

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[84] "Casey's Subliminal Phenomenology," p. 55.

historical or otherwise – as an object of possible knowledge. What we can anticipated, however, is that the "non-" of "non-givenness" may also have a second, *excessive* sense, viz. as that which is operative in experience without being reducible to a structure of givenness at all. The excessive sense of nongivenness is what I will argue we find in Merleau-Ponty's later approach to space and materiality, as will be developed in section 2d and throughout section 3 below.

For Merleau-Ponty, a similar refusal of the paradox of the transcendental can be located in his interpretation of the body proper in terms of a 'tacit *cogito*' that constitutes the unity of experience even before there is any being that experiences in the typically self-aware sense of experience. Grasping this materiality as a historical structure, furthermore, yields a distinction between givenness and what is given without invoking an ontological difference – yet this is accomplished, paradoxically, by identifying givenness with non-givenness, and suggesting that the one can be *given* in the other.

In this sense it seems as if the more we press the model of constitution on questions of spatiality – the more we insist that the origin of space be spatially or placially given – the more we expose the nonsense of the notion of givenness we thus invoke. This nonsense, seemingly inherent to the model of constitution, sheds a strange light on Merleau-Ponty's claim that phenomenology is still committed to the notion that, as the one who experiences, "I am the absolute source:" What has to be taken up is how this still-anthropo- and Ego-centric thinking of materiality inevitably prefigures spatial-historical relations in a way that proves to be exclusive of certain other bodies, and other embodied experiences.

Section Two: Dialectics of the Flesh – Ontology without Origin

"It is at the same time true that the world is *what we see* and that, nonetheless, we must learn to see it […] we must match this vision with knowledge, take possession of it, *say* what *we* and

seeing are, act therefore as if we knew nothing about it, as if here we still had everything to learn."

-       Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 4

In the Working Notes of *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty names the critical

assumption at the heart of the *Phenomenology*, saying that "the problems posed in [*The*

Phenomenology of Perception] are insoluble because I start there from the 'consciousness'-

'object' distinction."[85] The appeal to the materiality of the body proper, in other words, was

meant to overturn the transcendental idealism of a constituting consciousness, but by grasping

the body in terms of a negative materiality – a 'zone of non-being *in front of which*…' – the body

remains operative as a condition for subject's interrogation of a world in terms of a structure of

givenness. As a negativity, the opacity of materiality can itself be seen as offering the promise of

knowledge – as if the movement from the unknown to the known suggested a single structure,

and as if in knowledge this structure were merely being clarified or recalled from obscurity,

rather than reinscribed on altogether new terms.

At the same time, Merleau-Ponty's observation in the *Visible and the Invisible* also

suggests how the invocation of a fundamental materiality suggests a more radical problem for the

possibility of expression, which as I will argue concerns a question of dialectical structure. A

negative materiality suggests a synthetic-dialectical structure of expression, in which the origin

of a given process can be exhausted in terms of the discursive movement it initiates: Even if it is

not immediate or guaranteed, negative materiality suggests a structure of knowledge that would

culminate in an exhaustive self-knowledge – for example, the recognition of one's own body as

the constituting basis of the world that one examines in experience. If as I have argued there is

reason to doubt the approach of materiality in terms of constitution, we also have reason to doubt

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[85] VI 200

the synthetic-dialectical structure of material expression presented in terms of the body proper.

On this point I build on Jacques Taminiaux's reading of Merleau-Ponty in "From Dialectic to

Hyperdialectic," where Taminiaux notes an equivocation running throughout the *Phenomenology*

concerning the dual role of the body.

On the one hand, an emphasis on the body is intended to think the body as constituting

only insofar as it yields a subject that is from the outset captured by its world. If in this sense the

critical subject emerges first of all in an experience of 'wonder,'[86] then for Taminiaux the appeal

to the body suggests a dialectic of "ambiguity" in the sense of an "interchange of contraries" that

is not yet synthetic, and so does not yield a clear identity.[87]

On the other hand, in the *Phenomenology* the body remains upon reflection a

transcendental condition for the possibility of any experience whatsoever, and there is no way to

critically grasp the world without having first grasped how the world is itself given in the

materiality of the body that from the outset we call our own. For Taminiaux to think the body in

this way is already to think it via a dialectics of "identity—hence an effacement of ambiguity."[88]

From Taminiaux, I take the point that we cannot maintain both of these conceptions of

dialectic in materiality at once, or in any case that in so doing we teleologize the experience of

ambiguity as being *for the sake* of an eventual recognition of identity. It is in reference to

Taminiaux's distinction, then, that I initially offer the distinction to be established over the

course of this section, as a distinction between two structures of dialectic. First, this dialectics

which either possesses, produces, or in any case tends towards identity will be treated in this

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[86] Cf. PhP lxxvii/14. "Perhaps the best formulation of the reduction is the one offered by
Husserl's assistant Eugen Fink when he spoke of a 'wonder' before the world."
[87] Taminiaux, p. 71
[88] Taminiaux, p. 71

section under the heading of a *synthetic dialectics*. Second, and broadly construed, what Taminiaux identifies as a dialectics of ambiguity will be explicated here under the heading of Merleau-Ponty's notion of *hyperdialectics*.

As I will argue, a synthetic dialectics and a hyperdialectics coincide with what Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible* identifies as a 'bad' and 'good' dialectics. The difference between the two, as I frame it, concerns an approach to materiality, which on the hyperdialectical approach can be recast in terms of a nongivenness and impropriety – the experience of a place or a space, of body or a world, that is not my own. This experience is therefore originary, but in a way that calls for grasping my own origins on terms that I cannot fully assimilate within the structure of my experience. The essential limit of materiality in this sense is a limit on knowledge, and in particular self-knowledge; the difference between a bad and a good dialectics concerns the approach taken to materiality as a nongivenness in this radical sense: The decision for phenomenology is whether a critical subject should acknowledge these limits by surpassing and recuperating them at the level of experience, or whether the critical response is rather to acknowledge these limits as entailing something ontologically and dialectically unsurpassable at the heart of experience. I try to show that Merleau-Ponty's thinking of materiality takes us to this precipice, but also that a hyperdialectics allows for an 'indirect' approach to a materiality that operative in experience and at its origins in the mode of an inappropriable excess. There are three points to establish.

First, in subsection 2a I try to show how a synthetic dialectics operative in the *Phenomenology* turns on the existentialist grasp of materiality in terms of a negativity. By comparison with Sartre, I suggest that in spite of clear differences, Merleau-Ponty's early

thinking of the body still lends itself to the unqualified freedom that manifests itself in the

adoption of a critical or interrogative attitude towards the world.

Second, in subsections 2b and 2c I develop the point that materiality as itself a possible

object of interrogation leads onto more radical problems that those explicitly discuss in the

Phenomenology: Whereas I described the experience of a *negative* materiality as a

phenomenological resistance that calls for a return to origins of one's own experience, the aim

here is to show that materiality is also operative as an ontological resistance that phenomenology

cannot fully recuperate in terms of human experience, that is, as an *excessive* materiality.

Third, in subsection 2d I show how the critical approach to excessive materiality requires

an abandonment of synthetic dialectics in its tendency towards identity, suggesting instead the

model of hyperdialectics that Merleau-Ponty offers in *The Visible and the Invisible*.

Section 2a. Bad Dialectics, pt. 1: The Process of Interrogation and the Logic of Synthesis

"The strict thought of the negative is invulnerable, since it is also a thought of the absolute
positivity and hence already contains everything one could oppose to it. It cannot be shown
wanting nor be found shorthanded. But is this not because it is ungraspable?"
-    Merleau-Ponty, VI 66

What Merleau-Ponty calls the "bad dialectic" is the one that takes a nongivenness as negativity,

and negativity by extension as a necessary moment in a single process that is supposed to make

wholly manifest what initially seems given only in part. Since however negativity is itself what

implies this initially partial experience of the whole, and since the dialectical process does not

introduce anything new, a grasp of the whole must already be latent in the structure of negativity

from the outset. I have already suggested the circular or cyclical nature of this critical model,

whereby knowledge of the material world is destined in advance to the subject as a form of self-

knowledge. The negativity of the body for Merleau-Ponty in this sense has analogies with the

negativity that Sartre, in *Being and Nothingness*, argues is operative in the process of interrogation. By making this analogy to Sartre's account of interrogation, I hope to more explicitly draw out my concern with Merleau-Ponty's early thinking, namely the privileged place of the interrogator, whereby the results of the work of interrogation are prefigured on and by the interrogator's own terms.

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre asserts that interrogation is a way unto being – a way of cutting through what is given right unto the conditions of givenness.[89] For Sartre this project is 'existentialist' because it supposes a certain anonymity of the transcendental field,[90] only in order to reveal the self-constituting role of the subject. Let us briefly summarize this trajectory in Sartre's thinking, which entails a synthetic structure of interrogation that human beings *are*. There are three moments to this synthetic process, laid out on a single page in the first chapter of *Being and Nothingness*.

First, Sartre argues that the human interrogates the positivity of the factical world precisely insofar as they themselves constitute an ontological lack. This initial ontological lack is also an epistemological lack, where both are proper to the human situation – the "non-being of knowing in man."[91] The 'factical' world, as a result, is experienced insofar as it is already given to the subject an object for questioning, hence negatively as non-knowledge. But on these terms we can already see how, second, the subject's questioning of the world implies the world as given to them on the same (negative) terms: the question establishes a 'second negativity' in the sense of a "non-being of being in transcendent being."[92] Third, by not only posing a question, but

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[89] BN 4
[90] Lawlor, *Thinking Through French Philosophy: The Being of the Question*, p. 84
[91] BN 5
[92] BN 5

also demanding an answer, the subject (negatively) posits a *truth* that is no more in the world than it was already in the subject; thus the initial question establishes a 'third negativity' as the moment where interrogation would stop (but has not yet stopped, and which is reducible neither to the subject nor the object of interrogation properly speaking), viz. "the non-being of limitation."[93]

For Sartre, then, the factical positivity of the material world is interrogated by the introduction of a trifold negativity, dialectically culminating in truth as non-being: What 'is' is bracketed or negated by the subject in order to reveal a truth that 'is not.' Sartre's interpretation of this truth as a 'limitation' is in this sense a name for the radical freedom of a critical subject that accesses a positive being by undoing it, and re-making this being in its own image; there is an 'anonymity' to the transcendental field thus established only because the conditions for the possibility of experience are given in and by an interrogative subject that does not exist, but produces themselves over against the factical materiality they interrogate.

Merleau-Ponty in the *Phenomenology* seems to be resisting Sartre's intuition from the outset by emphasizing the fundamentality of the body, and so of the materiality that the Sartrean subject dominates in a synthetic process of self-production. At the same time, we have seen how in the *Phenomenology* Merleau-Ponty also expresses his own 'existential' interpretation of materiality as the body of a critical subject, viz. the body proper as a "zone of non-being *in front of which*…." Thus the anonymity of the body proper suggests a very similar starting point to Sartre's anonymous transcendental,[94] 'constituted' so to speak in both cases by the non-being of the critical subject. In fact, as Leonard Lawlor observes in *Thinking Through Philosophy: The*

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[93] BN 5
[94] Lawlor, p. 88

Being of the Question, Merleau-Ponty never abandons this negativity even in his later thinking;[95] the pivotal question then is only how this interrogative negativity stands in relation to what it interrogates, that is, "whether one's ontology subjectivizes Being."[96]

We must emphasize how for Merleau-Ponty the negativity of the body is supposed to interrogate the positivity of the world without dominating it, and in this sense we might suggest a reverse or inverted structure of interrogation in the *Phenomenology* whereby it is the positivity of the world that first of all calls forth the questioner in the experience of 'wonder.' The problem as we have seen, though, is that an inversion of the Husserlian consciousness-world schema does not ultimately escape its essential dialectical core, and the logic of the body proper is in other words still synthetic. Thus in the *Phenomenology* the critical interrogation of the world is still the work of a *subject* that by the imposition of (their own) negativity passes through an apparently transcendent world only in order to assert this subject's original and propriety right over the materiality of this world as a self-evident truth of identity.

In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty more explicitly addresses Sartre's understanding of interrogation, announcing the need to think a negativity that is not nothing, but is rather something after all – a negativity that positions itself *in* being rather than in opposition to it, and which therefore is in no position to dominate it. Before more fully explicating Merleau-Ponty's counterproposal in that text of a 'hyperdialectics,' though, it must be emphasized at greater length how and why the synthetic dialectical appeal to identity is problematic.

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[95] See e.g Lawlor, p. 34
[96] Lawlor, p. 97

Section 2b. Bad Dialectics, pt. 2: Interrogation and Phenomenological Resistance

The primacy of identity in existentialist interpretation of interrogation becomes most obvious in its treatment of the alterity of the other, and in particular, as Merleau-Ponty's thinking requires, the body of the other. We have already shown how the body implies a kind of 'phenomenological resistance' in the sense of invoking the paradox of the transcendental: The body constitutes a structure of phenomenological givenness within which the body can also in some sense 'appear,' even if it precisely does not appear *as* constituting. An experience of alterity – or, as will be emphasized at length in chapter three, alienation – results from the lack or absence of one's own body in the world. But already on these terms we can see how this alterity is not precisely the alterity of the other, but is already prefigured within a structure of knowledge as identity: Materiality as phenomenological resistance is sufficient to think another body, perhaps even to think the body of the other, but it is not sufficient to think the *other as embodied*, that is, as having a power of constitution that is not identical to one's own.

Thus there we can anticipated a certain 'subjectivizing' of being at work in negative materiality, which can be grasped on Merleau-Ponty's terms by considering the structure of vision and reflection in the *Phenomenology*; this structure is most obviously illustrated for my purposes with the example of an embodied subject interrogating the image in a mirror.

The initial moment of interrogation, as one stares into the mirror, is immediately a doubling, so that the most naïve experience is an experience of two distinct bodies, as well as two distinct histories – one as the object being interrogated in the reflexive glass, and the other as the embodied subject carrying out the interrogation. Supposing that the interrogating subject does not immediately recognize the image in the glass as a reflection of its own body suggests a phenomenological resistance in the sense just mentioned: The subject sees an object *qua* object –

a thing without intrinsic *animus* in the sense of habits or a history – and without this further

recognition there is no revelation for the subject of this image or object as its own body. The

image is a kind of privation of me from myself, as it were at a distance.

But, as I have argued, this privation – the experience of a sheer 'thing' – does not merely

affront the projects of the lived body with an unsurpassable phenomenological barrier; the image

and the distance or depth given in my vision also acts as a call to interrogate, to continue the

work of transcending in a way that may eventually make possible the revelation of the object as

"my" body: The image I interrogate continues to confront me with something I do not recognize

until, in a darting of the eyes or a curling of the lips into a half-smile, I stop seeing a mere object

and begin to recognize the habitual history that has always been implicitly at stake there.

If this dialectical process of 'recognition' is not quite Hegelian, it is any case Marxian, as

the case will be made more broadly in chapter three in conversation with Lukács and Honneth,

which I relate back to Merleau-Ponty's 'existentialist interpretation of dialectical materialism,'

announced in a footnote at the end of chapter five of part one in the *Phenomenology*. The

example at hand allows us to anticipate in outline: In the mirror, there is a materiality that

appears to me to have been worked over in a certain and peculiar way – there is an 'actual body'

that appears as if its productive force were withheld from the body itself – but upon critical

interrogation I find it to be a product of this body that I live and see through; the synthesis of the

two therefore comes to bear in this experience of the 'anonymous' materiality of the body proper

as not anonymous or 'prepersonal' at all, and rather as my own body.

In the two English translations of Merleau-Ponty's '*corps propre*,' then, it seems we

arrive at the doubling of a dialectical structure that concerns Taminiaux: This material-

transcendental field can be a "body proper" if we suppose a dialectics of ambiguity, or it can be

"my own body" if we suppose a dialectics of identity; the claim that it is 'both' stands on a synthetic-dialectical negation or erasure of ambiguity. Merleau-Ponty's existentialist interpretation of materiality seems at times to anticipate precisely such an erasure, as in his claim that "all that we are, we are on the basis of a factual situation that we make our own."[97] Implicitly the being of an embodied subject depends on a continuous process of (re)appropriation or (re)incorporation as a function of the work of interrogation – but this is just to say that in the face of phenomenological resistance the proper response is always to establish oneself as the subject and the object of the process, so that there is no difference between what I do and what I am.

If, on the other hand, being and materiality are not already to be grasped as the property of a critical subject, the aim must be to think a more radical resistance of materiality to the structure of experience in light of which a full appropriation is not even a possibility that I can consider as falling within the scope of my own work: The "I can" of the tacit *cogito*, in other words, is precisely what must be called into question by establishing a more radical difference between materiality and the subject that works it over. What follows from this second reading of materiality as what *exceeds* the 'I can' of one's own body, would in this sense suggest a true nongivenness or 'unconstitutable'; an excessive materiality in this sense suggests what I call *ontological resistance* as a factical being that cannot be fully grasped within or as the structures of experience for a critical subject. An excessive materiality in this sense suggests the need for a different structure of critical interrogation – as I will argue below, a hyperdialectics. In the meantime I will emphasize what I take to be the motivating need for the appeal to such a

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[97] PhP 174/209

structure, namely its tendency to prefigure materiality in a way that risks excluding from critique the experience of the embodied other.

Section 2c. Bad Dialectics, pt. 3: Interrogation and Ontological Resistance

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon acutely illustrates what is methodologically and ontologically suspect about a negative model of materiality as regards the embodied subject. In his chapter five, "The Fact of Blackness," the awkward role of a 'positive' materiality or facticity is immediately put into play. In this chapter one of Fanon's targets is Sartre, specifically the Sartrean notion that any individual would themselves be responsible for a situation in which they grasp themselves as 'objectified' or reduced to positive facticity under the gaze of the other:[98] *Qua* pure negativity, any existing subject who supposes that they can be determined by the other is by definition in bad faith; it would follow that to grasp oneself in the context of a positive historical being is to deny to oneself what is nevertheless a definitive, and as it were inalienable characteristic, namely the radical freedom of self-determination.

On Merleau-Ponty's terms in the *Phenomenology*, the problem that I wish to draw out with Fanon's help concerns the notion of a negative (i.e. pre-linguistic and anonymous) body proper that in this very negativity opens us onto a positive-factical materiality that we can "make our own." The threat for both Sartre and Fanon is that the ambiguity of an anonymous transcendental field becomes a kind of *post hoc* guarantor of any historically emerging identity: If different bodies always imply the same tradition, then there is no radical alienation of an embodied subject from the material conditions of their historical emergence, and the experience

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[98] See e.g. Fanon p. 87, where Fanon takes up Sartre's claim in *Anti-Semite and Jew*, that "they the Jews] have allowed themselves to be poisoned by the stereotype that others have of them, and they live in fear that their acts will correspond to this stereotype… . We may say that their conduct is perpetually overdetermined from the inside."

of alienation as such is really just a kind of bad faith. Meanwhile, and since ambiguity and difference will in every case have tended towards a collective identity that I can express (or at least interrogate) on my terms, we have no reason to admit a genuine ontological resistance in the body of the other.

Fanon's attention to the historical situation of a colonized people helps to demonstrate how the presumption of a synthetic historical identity in this sense prefigures the terms required for a recognition of the other; what follows is a more radical alienation of the subject from their own body than either Sartre and Merleau-Ponty would have predicted. Specifically, Fanon suggests, "blackness" is a fact that can only be imposed from without, in the encounter of the colonized with the colonizing people, hence by the imposition of a certain material history, and by extension an ontology.[99] But the colonizer's material imposition in this respect bears the countermeasure of what we could call a de-subjectivizing force, since the history and ontology brought to bear exclude the experience of the colonized as constitutive of either.

The paradox of this ontology is that it must be at once comprehensive and exclusive, for its claim to exhaust an intersubjective or intercorporeal historical identity is precisely what is exclusive of the black body as a constitutive component of this identity. Thus as Fanon observes the colonizer's history accomplishes the reduction of blackness to facticity in the same sense as the material object that can be interrogated and is always already consumed in a project of self-knowledge; where a positive being has always already been guaranteed to the negative structure of interrogation, "the black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man."[100] On the other hand, as Fanon points out, this alienation of the black person is precisely

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[99] Fanon, p. 171
[100] Fanon, p. 83

experienced or lived; what follows is a moment that the negative structure of ontology cannot

account for on its own terms even as it constitutes a history. Thus "in the *Weltanschauung* of a

colonized people there is an impurity, a flaw that outlaws any ontological explanation."[101]

Phenomenologically, Fanon describes such an experience as, while sitting on a train in

France, a child will find in Fanon only the colour of his skin, so that his body is reduced in a

moment from a "zone of non-being" to the pure positivity of an object:

> "Look, a Negro!" It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I
> made a tight smile.
> "Look, a Negro!" It was true. It amused me.
> "Look, a Negro!" The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my
> amusement.
>
> "Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!" Frightened! Frightened! Now they were
> beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but
> laughter had become impossible.
>
> I could no longer laugh, because I already knew that there were legends, stories,
> history, and above all *historicity*, which I had learned about from Jaspers. Then,
> assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a
> racial epidermal schema.[102]

In saying that "the black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white

man,"[103] Fanon's point is that in the eyes of the child, who has explicitly observed nothing but

the colour of his skin, Fanon himself is already and exhaustively known. In order to have

experienced this 'reduction' initiated by the child, Fanon cannot be considered the subject or

object of interrogation, and still less their constituting synthesis: Evidently alienated from the

side of his own body (which Fanon himself comes to see as strictly objective or factical), the

body he sees through the eyes of the child is similarly alienated. Thus as Fanon suggests his

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[101] Fanon, p. 82
[102] Fanon, p. 84
[103] Fanon, p. 83

consciousness of this engagement, impossible on the child's terms, is sustainable only in the third person,[104] and the awareness of his body amounts to an out-of-body awareness "in a triple person."[105]

A constituting 'racial-epidermal schema' in this sense is intended to explain the awkward recognition of a body in the world that simultaneously is and is not one's own. The child's interrogation of his body is therefore 'subjectivizing' in one sense, but also desubjectivizing in a another sense, and Fanon's experience must somehow bear the tension between these two moment: In order to have experience of his body "given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning,"[106] Fanon must maintain two histories within the same body; the history that for Fanon reveals this body as his *own* is precisely "the history that others have compiled for me."[107] By contrast with the experience of identity promised by the body schema, then, the third person of the racial-epidermal schema escapes the synthetic relation of the body schema altogether, implying an excess without a recognizable body *because* this excess is itself – and in a manner altogether different from the 'negative' materiality that interrogates or is interrogated – material.

In *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon declares his own position as existentialist, and existentialism in its attentiveness to a more radical alienation as in excess of ontology.[108] If Fanon's analysis is correct, there is perhaps nothing philosophy can do in order to approach the

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[104] Fanon, p. 83. "In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness."

[105] Fanon, p. 84

[106] Fanon, p. 86

[107] Fanon, p. 91

[108] Fanon, p. 82. "Ontology—once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside— does not permit us to understand the being of the black man."

excess he identifies: To *grasp* materiality is to grasp it negatively, and ontology as a project of

understanding being is already so thoroughly bound to a *particular* conception of knowledge that

all genuine recourse in relation to an excessive materiality is non-philosophical. As I have

explained the notion, however, an excessive materiality as 'ontological resistance' is not

necessarily a resistance to ontology, so much as it is a resistance to a particular structure of

experience or of knowledge, hence a resistance to being grasped within the parameters of a

single tradition, or of a single body.

If materiality is to be thought via ontological resistance in this sense, then, we must

recognize how an ontological moment is operative at the limits of phenomenological critique,

and that the work of critique therefore requires attention to this ontological moment without

claiming to know it or to have it entirely within the scope of its work. To admit an ontological

resistance in this sense is to admit that there is something ontologically and dialectically

unsurpassable at the heart of experience – but it is also to insist that we have no right to

speculation as a result, and that critical attention to materiality remains a question of attention to

the experience of embodied individuals.

Section 2d. Hyperdialectics as a Critical Approach to Materiality as Ontological Resistance

"If it is true that as soon as philosophy declares itself to be reflection or coincidence it prejudges
what it will find, then once again it must recommence everything, reject the instruments
reflection and intuition had provided themselves, and install itself in a locus where they have not
yet been distinguished, in experiences that have not yet been "worked over," that offer us all at
once, pell-mell, both "subject" and "object," both existence and essence, and hence give
philosophy resources to redefine them."
  -   Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 130

The essential mistake of a 'bad dialectics,' as I have tried to show, consists in its attempt to grasp

the interrogator as always already in a privileged place in relation the world it takes up. The

implicit result of a bad dialectics is a notion of the world that is prefigured by the structure of the

interrogating subject, and where this subjectification of material being implicitly hinges on an alienating and desubjectivizing force that this subject cannot recognize on their own terms.

In a preliminary way, we can frame what Merleau-Ponty calls a 'good dialectics' by suggesting the obverse in each case. First, a good dialectics attempts to question the privileged place of the interrogator in the world, implicitly acknowledging, second, an indomitability of the world in light of which the terms the subject brings to bear cannot be exhaustive. For the subject to approach the world critically in this sense, and third, it must be seen how a desubjectivizing force is operative there in the manner of an 'ontological resistance' that refuses recognition or reduction to the (subject-based) model of synthetic identity.

Put more generally, a good dialectics is one in which a still self-constituting subject is nevertheless able to give indirect expression to materiality that exceeds, and which is therefore operative in terms of what Dastur calls the "unconstitutable."[109] As a response to Sartre in particular, Merleau-Ponty's turn to an ontological excess of this sort in *The Visible and the Invisible* can be reframed by recognizing how he reframes the work of interrogation there, and how this revised structure of interrogation requires a reinterpretation of the negative materiality at stake in the *Phenomenology*.

Merleau-Ponty's initial response to Sartre concerns a turn to what Merleau-Ponty calls 'perceptual faith,' which turns on an assumption that seems either absolutely self-evident, or absolutely naïve: "We see the things themselves, the world is what we see."[110] We must be as careful as possible with the transparency or opacity of this claim, in order not to already read a

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[109] Dastur, "World, Flesh, Vision," p. 24. As Dastur argues when introducing the term, the turn to an unconstitutable in Merleau-Ponty's should be read as a critique of Sartre rather than of Husserl, where for Husserl attention to the problems of a genetic analysis are already leading down paths that Merleau-Ponty arguably simply continues.
[110] VI 3

critical structure of interrogation into it: This faith in the world is, so to speak, unquestioning, and critique – doubt, *epochē*, in general the negativity of the question – can only follow in its wake, emerging as a peculiar tangent of a more originary force, namely the positivity of a primal being. There is a double-movement that we can identify in the critical approach to this originarily faithful attitude towards the world, which in turn suggests two forms to structures of critique – reflection, and what Merleau-Ponty calls *hyperreflection*.

Reflection takes the experience of perceptual faith for granted, in order to put it into question. Thus it takes the form of the various modes of questioning already discussed so far, specifically that negative work of 'bracketing' in order to unveil more comprehensive structures of givenness operative in the original experience. Reflection therefore returns the subject to their role in constituting the world that they see; reflection aims a truth in the sense of *knowledge*, and considers knowledge to be the work of a subject.

Hyperreflection, by contrast, takes this *reflexive* moment for granted, in order to demonstrate how reflection itself is a modification of the original experience, and to open a critical subject back onto the original experience as bearing a necessity of its own. Hyperreflection in this sense aims to show that there is a necessary difference, for example, between (i) a given landscape as it is seen by a painter and (ii) a given landscape as it is painted by the painter; it is this difference between two modes or moments of givenness that hyperreflection attempts to reveal. Hyperreflection in this sense is attentive to the conditions for the possibility of critical reflection; in hyperreflection, then, there still is a kind of questioning and a negative work carried out by a constituted subject, but its purpose is to return this subject to a world indifferent to its constituting moment – to the world as 'unconstitutable.' Hyperreflection in this sense aims at a truth in the sense of *faith*, but the subject does not

accomplish or 'know' truth in this sense; what hyperreflection attempts to reveal is only that

"*there is a true vision*"[111] of the world in its positive being.

In order to further explicate the critical approach that Merleau-Ponty asks us to adopt in

relation to being in this sense, we should turn to his own explication of perceptual faith:

> […] beneath affirmation and negation, beneath judgment (those critical opinions, ulterior operations), it is our experience, prior to every opinion, of inhabiting the world by our body, of inhabiting the truth by our whole selves, without there being need to choose nor even to distinguish between the assurance of seeing and the assurance of seeing the true, because in principle they are one and the same thing—faith, therefore, and not knowledge, since the world is here not separated from our hold on it, since, rather than affirmed, it is taken for granted, rather than disclosed, it is non-dissimulated, non-refuted.[112]

We notice in this passage the inversion of the typical structure of givenness, already noted as an

aim in the *Phenomenology*: Rather than the world being given to us, it is rather the case that we

are, so to speak, given to the world and from the outset captured by it. What is different here is

that this inversion is seen only by way of acknowledging a positivity of the world that precedes

me; hyperreflection in this sense anticipates a mode of critique that no longer begins and ends

with the subject: Rather than revealing how the appearance of the world depends in the first

place on my 'hold' on it, and that in this sense "I am the absolute source,"[113] what is called for

here is a critique the returns the subject to a source that exceeds their grasp. Lawlor explains this

inversion by noting how Merleau-Ponty in the *Visible and the Invisible* seems to propose an

ontology that "begins with Being" rather than with the subject or beings.[114] Perceptual faith in

other words implies a relation between self and world that is not constituted, but which *is* prior

even to the emergence of this critical self and 'their' world; this relation, which no longer begins

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[111] VI 146; cf. "true vision" VI 7-8, 140
[112] VI 28
[113] PhP lxxii/9
[114] Lawlor, p. 106, cf. p. 98

or ends with *my* body or with a given world, suggests a materiality that is reducible to neither

– what Merleau-Ponty calls the 'flesh' as an "element of being" or, "in a word: facticity."[115]

Merleau-Ponty does not use the word 'materiality' to describe the flesh, but he also

contends that "there is no name in traditional philosophy to designate it. […] The flesh is not

matter, is not mind, is not substance."[116] I therefore deploy the term 'materiality' in a unique

sense that is irreducible to each of these (matter, mind, substance) but at stake in all of them, and

which in a certain sense ensures their relation without producing a synthetic identity whereby it

would always be *my* mind, the matter of *my* body, etc. The irreducibility of this materiality to

each of these traditional philosophical terms and the traditional philosophical subject, indeed to a

certain coherence of *tradition* in general if this implies a structure of identity, is what leads me to

term this materiality an 'excessive' materiality. It is as an 'excess,' then that we can indicate the

materiality of the flesh as operating in the manner of an 'unconstitutable' that in the first place is

neither matter nor spirit – nor for that matter the 'seat' or 'place' of spirit in matter – and which

precedes the self-world distinction that it nevertheless also makes possible.

If materiality can be operative in the manner of an excess that I cannot appropriate in

terms of the structure of my own experience, it becomes crucial to explicate in what sense

hyperreflection allows us to approach it with a critical attitude. This methodological question

begins with demonstrating how an excessive materiality can be 'at stake' in my experience

without being fully appropriable there. There are two points here.

First, as nongivenness, the materiality of the flesh is at stake in individual experiences as

a kind of positive limit or horizon at which relations with others would become possible. Since in

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[115] VI 139-40
[116] VI 139

this sense I cannot 'know' the flesh as such, we can at most say that it is operative in the experience of positivity that Merleau-Ponty calls of perceptual faith – but we must add that 'perceptual faith' in this sense does not already imply a structure of givenness, and that everything about this initial moment remains to be explained.[117] The materiality of the flesh therefore suggests something common but not accessible as such via even this 'first' and 'positive' perceptual relation that I have with it. As Merleau-Ponty says, "The sole world, that is, the unique world, would be a *κοινος κόομος,* and our perceptions do not open upon it."[118] In perception, the promise of a 'true vision' hinges on an access to what exceeds me, and to what I cannot claim to have constituted – but the true vision as a result is only a promise; by contrast, a critical approach to the same experience, possible via hyperreflection, should reveal what I will call a *positively limited frame of reference* as a necessary condition in light of which this network of being that exceeds me nevertheless shows up *for me*.[119]

We can illustrate the implications of a positively limited frame of reference by appeal to Merleau-Ponty's example of the experience of the colour red.[120] The colour cannot be granted except within a limited frame of reference since, in isolation from anyone who would see it and from any other visible things, the colour "red" would imply an independent *quale* as "a pellicle of being without thickness."[121] But more is at play than the perceiver and the colour as two poles

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[117] See e.g. VI 3. "[…[what is strange about this faith is that if we seek to articulate it into theses or statements, if we ask ourselves what is this *we,* what *seeing* is, and what *thing* or *world* is, we enter into a labyrinth of difficulties and contradictions."

[118] VI 10

[119] A *positively* limited frame of reference could in this sense be contrasted with a *synthetically* produced frame of reference that hinges on negation – but this 'synthetic' production becomes an artificial term for what I have been calling constitution. For the sake of consistency, then, the language of a 'limited frame of reference' or simply a 'frame of reference' are all intended to indicate a 'positive' limitation, except where I indicate otherwise.

[120] VI 131-2

[121] VI 131

of a relation that already exhausts the medium out of which they are composed: Merleau-Ponty's own example invokes the hypothetical experience of a woman in a red dress, implying that the being of the colour is not radically separable from that of everything else associable with it (the dress, the woman and her surroundings, other examples of the colour, etc.). And yet not *all* of these other elements can be brought to bear in order to establish the specificity (if not the singularity) of the colour red in each case since, the more we include, the more the context they provide for the givenness of the colour approaches the undifferentiated *non*givenness of the flesh 'as a whole.' Givenness, by contrast, amounts to a contingent collection or 'intertwining' of a few material elements in a peculiar way; the same 'intertwining' of these elements implies a 'divergence' or *écart* from other elements.

Thus *this red* can only be given within a limited frame of reference that includes some referents while excluding others in a way that precisely preserves the givenness of the thing as an expression of being (but which is not the same as being). At the same time, *this red* is not given to you as it is to me: The limited frame of reference I bring to bear includes referents such as (to name a few) (i) writing, (ii) Merleau-Ponty, and (iii) a red shirt I wore while presenting (more or less on this topic) at the Merleau-Ponty circle. Someone else, e.g. a reader such as yourself, cannot but have a different encounter with the 'same' thing, since your frame of reference implies a different history, while someone else still could frame the example symbolically (e.g. by reference to things such as blood, fire, the devil, etc.). In general, the variety within and between these limited frames of reference demonstrate that *this red* is no more than the momentary concretization and local intertwining of a few historical threads that could just as easily have strayed apart; as this fleeting historical hinge, it is "less a color or a thing […] than a

difference between things and colors, a momentary crystallization of colored being or of visibility."[122]

Evidently the problem of appealing to a limited frame of reference concerns the difficulty of a critical approach to experience where 'experience' implies givenness by *écart*, and so in turn an insurmountable nongivenness. If the monochromatic colourblind person sees only *this red*, which of us have had the 'true vision'? But this 'counterexample' is only a restatement of the first, and both return us to the critical role of hyperdialectics, and the urgency of recognizing that perception is an access to the world that guarantees no 'possession' of the world, and instead demands of us a constant vigilance in making room for the experience of others whereby, in taking my own experience to its positive limits, I observe – without seeing *for* the other, without being certain of what they see – that we do not after all see the 'same thing.'

"Faith, therefore, and not knowledge"[123] – that is how there will have been a world and a materiality in which I and others partake. But I cannot *have* faith unless I also *know* that there is some facticity to this world that I see, and that this facticity is not exhausted in my experience of perceptual faith; thus my critical approach to the materiality of this world, which I do not see, must always be to recognize the limits of my experience, and not to take a speculative step beyond them. If as Lawlor suggests faith is the pivotal expression of Merleau-Ponty's ontology, then, it must be emphasized for the same reason that this ontology is necessarily incomplete; ontology in this sense also requires a phenomenological moment in the adoption of what we could call a *hypercritical* attitude that does not yet say what or who is and is not, but which is all the more concerned with the conditions of knowledge. In chapter two we will return to this

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[122] VI 132
[123] VI 28

tension between faith and knowledge, but we can already anticipate the difficulty: From within

our materially limited frame of reference, it is impossible to say which of the two comes before

the other, which grounds or possibilizes the other. The force of faith comes with its promise of

knowledge, and the force of knowledge comes with invocation of faith; at this juncture, however,

it may be that critique requires that we resist the desire to choose – to be or to know – since all

critique originates at this intersection and disjunction.

For now, let us at least observe an importance methodological consequence of the turn to

materiality as ontological resistance and nongivenness. What cannot be presumed in the turn to

ontology is a replacement for the answers given in the turn to a self-constituting structure of

consciousness or of the body. In order to approach materiality critically, the first and minimal

requirement is an *epistemic humility* in light of which we attempt by hyperreflection not to

confuse the perceptions and experiences which we call our own for the 'true vision' of the world;

we must accept a difference between my experience and the experience of others, since only then

do we begin to turn towards the materiality that is collectively ours – in difference.

Section Three: Hyperdialectics of Orientation – History Without Origin

"[…] institution means [establishment] in an experience (or in a constructed apparatus) of
dimensions (in the general, Cartesian sense: system of references) in relation to which a whole
series of other experiences will make sense and will make a *sequel*, a history."
   - Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and Passivity,*[124] p. 6/5

In section one, attention to space as a historical structure led to the notion of its origin as a "non-

givenness given right within the given;" the concern with the dialectics of such a claim in section

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[124] Cited hereinafter as IP. This text is compiled from Merleau-Ponty's course notes from 1954-
55; these being left largely as found, there will be, for example, incomplete sentences cited.
Wherever the text has been changed, this is indicated with square brackets; I will indicate
wherever the modification is my own rather than the editor's.

two has shown why this non-givenness, grasped as a negativity or existential lack – the body as a

'zone of non-being' – implies a phenomenological givenness after all, as in the structure of

interrogation whereby the initial lack is presumed to provide the model for all that can be given.

A synthetic dialectics, in short, takes for granted a certain structure of experience in order to

elaborate what is experientially given; in this way the synthetic model prefigures the world it

takes for granted by presupposing the subjectivizing work of a subject in the world's appearance,

rather than asking after the material conditions for this constituting work.

In this section the aim will be to propose a version of what is demanded by

hyperdialectics, namely an account of the conditions for the experience of human individuals that

is critically attentive to an originary nongivenness operative there.[125] Given the notion developed

above, of a 'positively' or 'materially' limited frame of reference, it can already be anticipated

that any such account must be similarly limited in its scope, hence borne out within the structures

of a particular material-historical situation, even if the aim is also to indicate, indirectly, what

exceeds these structures and this situation. In order to accommodate this sort of account, I

propose a turn to Merleau-Ponty's unique reading of Husserlian "institution" or *Stiftung*. In this

regard, I follow Don Beith who, in "Merleau-Ponty and the Institution and Animate Form,"

shows how Merleau-Ponty invokes a notion of passive genesis that implies givenness only "in

retrospect,"[126] with the implication that a genetic origin is not immediately accessible via the

terms or 'institution' to which it gives rise. Evidently in some contrast with Beith, I have so far

argued that Merleau-Ponty is still bound to a notion of constitution in his early thinking, but the

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[125] For the general purposes of this section, and for reasons that will be clear, an 'originary' non-givenness precisely does not imply an 'origin' as in the discussion in section 1d above.

[126] Beith, p. 210, "The origin of an organic form is doubly passive, both in that it comes to be itself without being constituted or constituting itself, but moreover in that its givenness as origin is, paradoxically, not itself given except in retrospect."

question of precisely where – that is, in what text or historical moment – a clear shift to institution because identifiable, seems rather academic. What is by contrast essential for my purposes is to recognize how Beith's and Merleau-Ponty's reading of institution provide a model for the critical approach to material nongivenness, or in other words for an 'indirect' approach to ontology of the sort to which Merleau-Ponty explicitly commits by the time of *The Visible and the Invisible*.[127]

Existing literature on institution often emphasizes the role of temporality, and I will begin below with these interpretations. However, work in sections one and two of this chapter also suggest a similar need for a grasp of spatial relations in terms of a materially limited frame of reference. What I aim to provisionally develop in this sense is the framework for a hyperdialectical critique of spatial orientation, which suggests two moments: First, it has to be shown how spatiality as reduced to the structure of one's own experience nevertheless cannot be exhausted in that structure; second, it has to be shown how 'orientation' in this sense is dependent upon a relation with other embodied subjects, that is, other ways of being oriented. Whether approached temporally or spatially, then, the broader aim in this sense is to provisionally indicate the sort of 'indirect method' in light of which an 'excess' – the histories and experiences of other embodied subjects – can nevertheless be indirectly indicated as at stake in one's own experience.

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[127] See VI 179. In this passage, Merleau-Ponty indicates the possibility of an 'indirect method' in light of which he "will finally be able to take a position in ontology," but only "after the series of reductions the book develops and which are all in the first one, but also are really accomplished only in the last one." To me this somewhat-ambiguous language suggests, if nothing else, how the project of an account of being cannot do without a certain phenomenological critique, and that even if these two projects do not properly coincide, we find each at the limits of the other.

With the observation of a necessary attention to the spatial orientation of others, a final

point emerges, to be explored at greater length via Derrida's thinking of *khōra* in chapter two,

and ultimately pervading the discussion of materialisms in chapters three and four: If there is to

be an interaction, that is, an 'intertwining' and so perhaps a modification of a given historical

situation, that will depend upon grasping the production of spatial limits as a co-production.

Since in this sense the emergence of a new institution hinges on the provisional and indirect

admission of the other as a necessary part of one's own situation, the possibility of this

emergence requires a rethinking of the public-private distinction.

Section 3a. Institutional Time – Orientation of/by Another Time

"Time is the very model of institution: passivity-activity, it continues, because it has been
instituted, it fuses, it cannot stop being, it is total because it is partial, it is a field."
- Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and Passivity* p. 4/3

(i) *Passive Constitution: The Body as a Field of Presence*

The model of constitution, as we have seen, grasps an origin negatively, viz. as something

accomplished in and by the critical subject precisely because the subject does not take its

surroundings for granted, but can put this world into question. Attention to the work of

interrogation as a subjectivizing bracketing or negation of given beings has helped identify an

operative notion of truth at stake in constitution in this sense, viz. as a synthetic result of a

subject-centric process. For the very reason that it implies a *process*, a temporality is inevitably

at stake in the coherence of the subject with itself in relation to a world: Because, in other words,

there is no world except insofar as I interrogate it by way of my body and by moving in and

through the world itself – because, for example, my eyes impose a limited perspective and

require constant movements even to focus on a single object – the fact emerges that this world cannot be all at once; rather, givenness 'takes time.'

Casey emphasizes the necessarily subjective nature of temporality on these terms by taking up the role of memory: That I recall a past that at present *is not*, and that I *am* in so doing, requires that we not only admit that recollection occurs *in* time, but insist furthermore that I myself am "of" time – "so much so that in some significant sense I <u>am</u> it."[128] No doubt a "thoroughgoing wholism" follows, as is suggested in Merleau-Ponty's appropriation of Gestalt psychology in the *Phenomenology*,[129] whereby the 'truth' of my experience that appears in one sense as a result must have already been there, present, in the initial encounter with the world.

Givenness in this sense may not initially be a structure that I recognize as proper to *my* body – yet the synthetic process of interrogation implies that the very manner in which a pre-personal history confronts me as other than me is precisely a call to interrogate, hence a pre-personal communication with the world in a language that my body is already attuned to. As I further interrogate, the fact that the world itself is given in new ways becomes evidence this my interrogation is simply the "execution of a more ancient pact between X and the world in general;"[130] my explicitly personal history can be recognized as the "sequel" to and continuation of the pre-history I had been approaching as other than me. Even the most distant "past" has a sense at all then, in light of my synthetic interrogations here and now, with the result that in some crucial sense the entirety of history must be thought in terms of the field of presence of which I am the origin and genesis.

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[128] Casey, "Edges of Time, Edges of Memory," p. 255
[129] Casey, "Edges of Time," p. 256
[130] PhP 302

The coherence of this temporal field of presence is recognized in and by the subject's own irreducibility to a limited situation within this field. As Beith puts it, the work of the perceiving body consists in a kind of "transcendental constituting act" as an act that is "atemporal."[131] The consequence, in a manner that I have already attempted to illustrate via Fanon, and as Alia Al-Saji in very different context argues, is that the resulting field of presence that the body itself constitutes cannot be "broken up;"[132] implicitly any 'limits' are contingent, and an ontological plurality can only be identified by recourse to a more primary identity and a single structure of givenness.

(ii) *Passive Institution: A "Broken" Field*

Both Beith and Al-Saji propose a turn to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of institution (*Stiftung*) as a way of reframing the structure of history in a way that attempts not to implicitly privilege a particular historical situation or, as I have been putting it, a particular frame of reference. An implicit exhortation that follows, I will try to show, is the need to recognize a possibility of limits of one's own situation or frame of reference, as a step towards an unveiling of other situations in relation to the world. The point of the appeal to institution is precisely not to directly identify some 'broader' or more general field of presence as such; rather, the aim to show that a field of presence in general only has a sense in light of specific histories or 'institutions' within and of such a field. Experience in this sense is only possible in light of an *écart* or fragmentation of the field of presence as a whole, with the essential consequence there can be no account of this field

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[131] Beith, "Institution of Animate Form," p. 207. It should again be emphasized that this reading of Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of the body is what Beith is arguing against; see ft. 8 above.
[132] Alia Al-Saji, "Temporality of Life: Merleau-Ponty, Bergson, and the Immemorial Past" p. 184. (Title shortened hereinafter to "Temporality")

as a whole; rather, critical articulation always takes the form of attention to points of divergence, that is, to the limits of one's own frame of reference within this field of presence.

Al-Saji, for her part, explicates a positive temporal limitation on experience by invoking the notion of an "immemorial past" in the sense of an "originary nonpresence."[133] In line with Dastur's reading of the flesh as an 'unconstitutable' materiality, Al-Saji's immemorial past implies a temporality that cannot be exhausted as an object of interrogation: Unlike the 'pre-personal' history of the body proper, this temporality does not fall within the scope of an "I can;" rather, the extent to which an immemorial past can be given consists in an "I cannot" for the one who experiences it. This "I cannot" takes experience to its limits, indirectly indicating a generality that is not reducible to any one historical situation: The experience of *not* being able to articulate X allows me to approach it in a questioning manner that does not yet suppose an origin for this question; my experience of 'wonder' in this respect evinces the limits of my own frame of reference, tolerating without articulating an ontological resistance at the heart this world that I would have called my own were it not for this *break* or *écart* within it that I experience. The "I cannot" of an immemorial past is therefore operative as an indirect indication of what is not reducible to the structure of my experience. As a result the naïve interrogative attempt to appropriate what shows itself as immemorial is self-defeating: No doubt, by imposing a limited frame of reference I appropriate what shows itself as existing before and without me – I *can* "take[] possession of time and make[] a past and a future exist for a present"[134] – yet we are also

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[133] Al-Saji, "Temporality," p. 184. What Al-Saji calls an 'originary nonpresence' in this text is effectively what I call a *nongivenness*. As I have used the term, 'nonpresence' implies what is absent in experience, but which can still be grasped (e.g. in the form of a future or past moment) in terms of a kind of presentification.

[134] PhP 249/287

able to see that this very attempt indicates how I am not the origin and constitution of the

immemorial past, for I cannot make it present "*as it was*."[135]

By observing this tension, viz. between the 'I can' as a subjectivizing presentation of the

world, and the 'I cannot' as a desubjectivizing limit on experience, Al-Saji offers the means to

develop my own working definition of Merleau-Ponty's notion of "institution." The principal

insight is twofold: First, institution has an active sense, an 'I can' that on temporal terms can be

conceived as the work of 'making-present'; second, however, institution has a passive sense

whereby the work of making-present depends in the first place on the admission of an

unconstitutable nongivenness. We can emphasize in this sense that the passive 'I cannot' of

institution is precisely not the *negation* of an 'I can,' since both must moments must be operative

in order to have an experience of the limits of one's situation. Thus the relation must be

hyperdialectically construed, emerging as a divergence or *écart* within a field of presence that is

not reducible to the structure of givenness at work in the 'I can.' In this sense the hyperdialectical

appeal to institution attempts to think history as a broken field of presence: From within any

historical situation, a specific structure of givenness is and must be conceivable, yet the relation

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[135] "Tempoarlity," p. 186. See also Al-Saji "A Past Which Has Never Been Present": Bergsonian Dimensions in Merleau-Ponty's Theory of the Prepersonal," re: the notion of temporality *qua* an "impossibility as full and instantaneous presence to the world." (p. 47) In general, Al-Saji makes a case for attention to an "originary past" as a natural outgrowth of the project Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology*. Al-Saji's reading here is insightful, and in its attention to the structure of temporality problematizes even more fundamentally Merleau-Ponty's characterization of the body as a field of presence elsewhere in the text; her reading thus demonstrates the extent to which Merleau-Ponty was already struggling in the *Phenomenology* with problems that he does not explicitly articulate until years later in *The Visible and the Invisible*, suggesting an entire arc for the reading of Merleau-Ponty's texts. See also Landes, *Merleau-Ponty and the Paradoxes of Expression*, for a similar attempt to enjoin Merleau-Ponty's early and late thinking along a single trajectory turning on the experience of wonder (see e.g. p. 2-5)

between one situation and another implies no *identity*; and the field itself is only 'common' in the sense of the limit or difference between two situations.

Genesis in terms of institution implies emergence by *écart*, which is nothing that a subject *does*, nor even something that can be given or accessed via the temporal distension of the subject. Institution in this sense frees the interpretation of a historicity from the contortions of, for example, a Heideggerian account whereby history involves a "*handing down* to oneself of the possibilities that have come down to one."[136] By extension an account of history no longer demands the "transcendental origin" that Beith observes, and in light of which the "synthetic unity of passivity and activity in time" could be implied, if not exhaustively accounted for at any given point prior to this ultimate synthesis.[137]

Yet even as institution abandons the notion of a transcendental origin from which a temporal whole can be compiled in the synthesis or transcendence of a plurality of historical situations, it retains a notion of a *field*, as a notion that can be critically developed from within a given frame of reference. This field is not a 'whole' in the sense of a Gestalt, as it can "contain" a multiplicity of historical arcs, none of which would prove exhaustive of the material-historical grounds out of which they emerge. Thus David Morris, for example, points out an apparent necessity, for the possibility of measurement, that time 'as a whole' can have more than one sense or dimension – for example empirical (an objectively existing point of reference) or transcendental (a field of experience); indeed, there must be some sense in which "time is itself

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[136] BT 383-384
[137] Beith, "Institution of Animate Form," p. 205

is an institution,"[138] and as a result can never be freed from some frame of reference. Meanwhile, an 'immemorial past' may not indicate a particular structure of *time* at all.

It is the very notion of a 'whole' that must in this sense be denied to the field at stake, whereas the notion of a 'whole' only has a sense insofar as it is grasped within a limited frame of reference. When Merleau-Ponty says that institution "is total because it is partial,"[139] then, we should precisely not see a 'wholism' at stake, since the very notion of a whole implies an instituting *écart* that this 'whole' cannot comprehend. It is in this sense that institution becomes a useful way of thinking passive genesis – for example the genesis of a new temporal dimension – but as a passive *institution*, where the possibility of activity or 'I can' that follows from this genesis never fully articulates or exhausts *what* it institutes. Implicitly every expression of the flesh as a field of presence is differential: Only even 'given' by *écart*, the truth of an originary non-givenness always has a sense, but sense itself is always "sense by divergence."[140] The model of institution in this sense suggests a mode of presence that cannot be critically grasped by privileging a particular historical situation, and even requires that a critical attitude work towards an opening unto other situations – even if this opening is nothing the critical subject can *produce*.

Two important questions result from these essential features of institution, the first political, the second ontological.

The *political* question asks how (if at all) accepting a plurality of expressions of a more originary field might disarm the imposition of one such expression at the expense of the prevalence of another. Arguably, for example, the notion of a broken field of presence has a

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[138] Morris, "Measurement as transcendental–empirical *écart*: Merleau-Ponty on deep temporality," p. 55. Continental Philosophy Review (2017) 50: 49–64.
[139] IP 4/3
[140] IP 8/7

decentering effect that promotes (or even requires) disregard for a common 'truth' – the threat of 'alternative facts,' for example. Grasped temporally, Alejandro Vallega proposes an example that on the other hand shows how the critical acceptance of a broken field might be productive, as he considers the implications of the *Codex Telleriano-Remensis*: Commissioned by a European and painted by a Mexican in the 17th century, the text has "marks that trace the dates and histories under the planetary movements of [the Aztecs]," but these marks "have been covered over by Arabic numbers in an attempt to match the Aztec calendar to the Gregorian system used then and to date by Westerners."[141] What is remarkable for Vallega is how Aztec 'time' can in some sense be right 'there' with a colonists' time, yet where the very 'sense' of each for the other seems to depend upon a kind of appropriation. The question is whether the appeal to a broken field leads to a critical attitude that attempts to recognize divergence as a condition of experience, or alternatively to a kind of debasement of critique from the outset. The extent to which a given institutional structure can be resisted or changed from within will be a central question running throughout chapters Three and Four.

The *ontological* question is in a sense more simple: To even approach the political question of the dynamics between one institution and another, it has to be explicated how Merleau-Ponty's notion of institution even yields the possibility of this sort of distinction. Since institution implies "sense by divergence,"[142] a sense *of* divergence implicitly requires a quite peculiar ontological ground. This sort of ground is what Al-Saji offers with the notion of an immemorial past, yet to posit such a thing from within a limited frame of reference ironically

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[141] Vallega, *Latin American Philosophy: From Identity to Radical Exteriority*, p. 100
[142] IP 8/7

requires the sort of negative terminology of absence,[143] unconsciousness,[144] hesitation, and

distance. What has to be shown is how this explicitly negative terminology can be transmuted

into a positive ontology concerned with a plurality of institutions. The conditions of doing so are

already intimated by Vallega when he describes the strange layers of time simultaneously at

stake in the *Codex* as both a "palimpsest" and a "space of multiple temporalities."[145] On these

terms Vallega sets up his own analysis of an experience framed by overlapping temporalities as

an inevitably de-centering and alienating experience;[146] his focus on Latin America, furthermore,

demonstrates how this experience is local in character

     At the same time, this emphasis on *locality* returns us to earlier considerations of place

and space, showing how a critical approach to nongivenness via institution must also be borne

out on these terms.

Section 3b. Institutional Space – Orientation of/by Others
"[…] do not overestimate the problem of others and understand it through history, rather than
understand the problem of history through the problem of others."
   -   Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and* Passivity, p. 126/14

The notion of a passive constitution of space has been accounted for in section one. There, I

made the case that Merleau-Ponty's account of 'levels' of space in the *Phenomenology* allows us

to refuse the Kantian notion of space as a transcendental structure that can be given as an

ahistorical 'whole;' at the same time, the genetic project of tracking the emergence of space from

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[143] e.g. Al-Saji, "Temporality," p. 193
[144] e.g. Al-Saji, "Temporality," p. 178
[145] Vallega, *Radical Exteriority*, p. 101
[146] Vallega, *Radical Exteriority*, p. 115. "This is an overlapping of histories that by virtue of the overlapping of lineages decenter and ultimately disseminate any possible idea of an essential or ontologically single origin to which lives must answer [… and] which configure an ana-chronic time-space that is always already exposed to otherness."

a pre-personal historical situation still invoked a peculiar priority of human experience – the

experience of one's own body.

What I have said so far about institution suggests a quite different approach to the work

of analyzing space. It remains that case that I can, by way of reflection, grasp my body spatially

by recognizing the operations of a generalizable model of spatiality – but hyperreflection reveals

that in so doing I fail to return to the *de facto* conditions for this experience that I reflect upon,

namely the materiality of the flesh as operative in an experience of perceptual faith. Where the

hyperreflective question concerns how even the initial critical turn was itself possible, the

question concerning the genesis of space takes on a different form, and indeed takes me to limits

of my experience, so to speak, in order to recognize conditions for the possibility of experience

that are not reducible to whatever structure of givenness I discover via reflection. Implicitly or

indirectly, I must try to observe how there is perhaps a kind of space that precedes me and

persists all the same with or without my critical approach to it. Beyond all the constituted 'levels'

of space identified in chapter one, there is a *brute space* in which any such hierarchy is in the

first place instituted.

I say that brute space is 'beyond' rather than 'underneath' the levels of constituted spaces

in order to emphasize that the encounter with the material world in perceptual faith does not

imply superposition, or a 'ground' that can be recovered and fully expressed at higher levels,

hence recognized as proper to me and my experience. This materiality is not my own – at any

level. The 'beyond' of brute space therefore names an excess that I cannot appropriate via the

structures of my own body, where this body is itself institution of the materiality of a brute

space. But in this sense the structures of my own body do not enjoy a privileged place in the

material world, where the 'same' materiality of a brute space is instituted in other ways and in

accordance with other historical lineages. The hyperdialectical approach is necessary to recognize how my own institution of this materiality of brute space is already a modification of this materiality, emerging in the manner of an *écart* or divergence within it; thus this hyperreflection leads me back to this broader-but-broken field only 'indirectly,' viz. by attention to the limits thus imposed. Hyperdialectical critique in this sense hinges upon the recognition of others at the limits of my own experience – other embodied individuals, other limited frames of reference – as having a role to play in the generation of the space that I experience.

By de-emphasizing the ontological primacy of a hierarchy of spatial levels, it should nevertheless be said that the turn to institution does not propose a 'flat' ontology that would deflate all structures to explanation at the level of the materiality of the flesh. For one thing, we can still legitimately appeal to those 'levels' of space – *constituted spaces* – so long as we recognize that they have differential origins that cannot be fully incorporated. This origin as *écart*, for its part, suggests a spatiality *in which* a constitution of levels or a hierarchy is possible; this *institutional spatiality* suggests the broader totality within which a given hierarchy has its peculiar sense and structure. (In the institutional spatiality of our society, for example, geometric space arguably still plays a significant role; the point is to see that there is nothing *necessary* about this role for geometric space beyond our own limited frame of reference – our needs and material-historical situation. Thus (i) a given spatial hierarchy can always be critiqued within the confines of an institutional spatiality, and shown *not* to reflect our situation in this sense, or more radically (ii) an institutional spatiality can itself be critiqued as on its own terms requiring some new institution of brute space.) A *brute space* itself thus suggests the difficult ontological moment that phenomenology must grapple with: Brute space is *that which* is instituted in a given spatiality, but since the resulting 'whole' is necessarily only a partial reflection of a broader

materiality, the excess of a brute space is also what allows for the operation of other spatial institutions or dimensions of space in simultaneity, and in a certain sense in the same *place*, if 'place' is seen as retaining the constitutional structure laid out in section 1d. In its irreducibility to a particular institution, let alone a given constituted space, brute space can be compared with what Al-Saji refers to as a 'past that has never been present;' the term ' brute space' is in this sense intended to reflect Merleau-Ponty's description of the flesh as 'brute being.'[147]

In line with distinctions made in section 3a of this chapter, we can observe the role of an explicit 'I can' in constituted space, and of an implicit 'I cannot' at the limits imposed by institution. Since the 'I can' of constituted space is the 'I can' of the body, in a lived space, I experience a distance between myself and the cup on my desk in the fact that I must reach out towards it in order to drink my tea (and the force of this 'I can' remains operative, of course, even if there is some more radical prevention here, e.g. I have a broken arm, the cup is a hallucination, etc.). The 'I cannot' is most obviously evinced in relation to others, and the recognition that, for example, there is no way for me to help my depressed friend expand their spatial sense or 'I can' beyond the bedroom in which they have stayed all day. We find institution at the limits of constitution, then, because what institution designates is precisely the material confines of a positively limited frame of reference. What is important here is not only this distinction between the constitutional activity of an 'I can' and the necessary passivity of the originary 'I cannot' of institution, but the recognition that each implies the other – that the 'I can' of my experience entails and is only the other side of an I cannot, and that *both* therefore suggest an opening onto or intertwining with a field that, implicitly, must exceed my limited frame of

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[147] For the notion of 'brute being,' see e.g. VI 57, 157, 165; cf. "wild being," VI 121, and "natural being," S 178

reference. As Merleau-Ponty predicts in the *Passivity* lectures, the other's activity is only the inverse of my passivity, showing that "passivity is necessary," such that it is a "passivity which does not render activity impossible."[148] Thus critical attention to this intertwining, which in attending to a particular situation must always pass through others, puts the critical subject in a position to recognize, however indistinctly and indirectly, the operation of a field that is reducible to no one situation, experience, or frame of reference, but at stake in each case.

To recapitulate, institution is divergence or *écart* within the flesh. Evidently it is impossible to attend 'directly' to a divergence that is generative of my situation, and which I potentially *am*. If there is a 'brute space' operative in the sense of something radically unsurpassable in my experience, this unsurpassable or unconstitutable moment is nothing but the difference between one institutional spatiality and another. Grasping this unconstitutable moment requires the indirect articulation of a space that cannot be 'given' or 'instituted,' not because it transcends institution, is irreducible to it, or really even *other* than it but simply because what a brute space *is* is that which is instituted in a plurality of ways – a broken field of presence. A brute space in this sense suggests a 'transcendental' model for institution in the sense of its operation as an 'originary' *écart* or as it were an '*écart*-in-general' – even if both terms ('origin,' 'in general') lack a certain sense to the very extent that what they imply cannot be given on the terms they make possible: In being instituted, a brute space can never be reduced to one particular institutional spatiality since what is passively generated in each case is rather a new dimension of givenness as a *difference* between institutions.

In the distinction between constituted spaces, institutional spatiality, and brute space, we find means to transition from the problem of the experience of the other to the problem of history

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[148] IP 135/17

more generally. "History" suggests another word for institution, so long as we recognize that this entails a plurality, viz. *histories*; on these terms, any concern with a 'contradiction' in the material conditions for a plurality of interrelated beings, as I will consider at greater length in chapter three, suggests a problem only for a synthetic dialectics. The more radical difficulty brought to bear by a hyperdialectics is that no one of these articulations or expressions of history can be identified as the center of a genuine historical shift or event.

Section 3c. Institution and Revolution – Orientation of/by Irony

"Problem: Is there a field of world history or universal history? Is there an intended accomplishment? A closure on itself? A *true* society? The question is still, as in the history of knowledge, interrogation of history."
-    Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and Passivity* p. 86/63

The essential insight of a hyperdialectical approach consists in the aim of recognizing how the appeal to a particular experience of frame of reference – for example in the manner carried out by critical reflection – is already a modification of the material conditions, and a way of 'working over' one's situation in order to yield a more sensible or meaningful product. Implicitly, however, the phenomenological aim, which will also prove to be a pivotal materialist aim, of 'getting back' to a more general common ground begins to sound misguided. Must we say that a genuine epistemic humility requires that such an aim be abandoned, in order that critique not become speculation? But how then should we ever recognize any impetus for historical shifts, of which (we can say this without speculation) there has been more than one? The question is whether, in short, we can intervene in a situation, or whether on the other hand we have to accept a more radical passivity in order to respect the ontological nongivenness of materiality. We are in this sense returned to the concern with faith, and the notion that

intersubjectivity or this "common ground" that I share with other threatens to be relegated of necessity into a realm of being that I cannot *know*.

The concern with this common ground is a concern with materiality as necessary for our experience of the world on the one hand, and whether critique therefore has a role to play in modifying or working this *excessive* materiality over. Everything about this concern turns on the potential to reveal a passive moment in genesis, and the work of others as neither simply identifiable with my own, nor transcendent or radically other as a result. Still focusing on the experience of space, we can use a brief example in order to anticipate the more general and more pressing point; the example is one I take from my own experience from a summer spent in Berlin, and we will try to see what in my own experience may lead me onto the work of others.

Walking down Linienstraße, I am struck by the way in which the street slowly curves around the implicit center of the city. Indeed, and somewhat to my embarrassment, my recognition of this curvature comes only after the recognition that I am in truth lost, and spatially disoriented. What are the conditions for this experience, this revelation that I am simply not going in the direction that I thought I was? Reflection and hyperreflection reveal two different insights. Upon reflection, I consider the basis for the slight alienation I feel, and track it genetically to the development of earlier body habits and motor-intentions that have been frustrated: Frankly, I am not from here; I grew up in Toronto and spent most of my life in North American cities that take a 'grid' as the model. (I haven't turned onto another street – how could I now be going South rather than East?) Reflection in this sense accomplishes a reduction of my experience of the foreign streets of Berlin to my own limited frame of reference. But is it not, in another sense, an interruption or fracturing of this frame of reference that I should find at the root of my experience of alienation? Further down the street, I notice an abandoned run-down

building sitting next door to an expensive restaurant. My North American expectations would have predicted distinct neighborhoods rather than conjoining door-fronts for this sort of contrast: That I find the two so close together here – is this a result of city planning, geography, politics, or history? There is no single answer, and every possibility that I pursue leads me away from what is readily given to me, indeed from *my* experience; there is a spatiality at work here, with an origin that I am not privy to. What hyper-reflection thus reveals to me is precisely these limits or the 'I cannot' at work in my experience, and so indirectly indicating – without speculatively positing – a space that has a material-historical basis that is for the most part beyond what I can access by reference to my own experiential history. It is true that perceptual faith allows for a sense of the following promise: that *there are* some events or facts that, were I able to exhaustively identity them, would give a proper account of the genesis of this space as it is. But the fact revealed by hyper-reflection prevents pursuit of this promise to its ends, showing that even upon extensive interrogation I would only ever grasp a part of the material-historical field that, worked over in this peculiar way, I still find alienating. Put on other terms, what hyper-reflection reveals is the passive institution or genetic divergence operative as a necessary condition for my experience of this space from within a positively limited frame of reference – but by approaching this *écart* hyper dialectically, I also indirectly recognize the necessary operation of the brute space of this street that, being irreducible to the structures of my own experience, suggest an excess that cannot be prefigured and still critically approached in good faith.

　　If, nevertheless, this brute space can only be approached indirectly, and not exhaustively *explained*, that is due to what Merleau-Ponty's identifies as a 'double-aspect' of institution as simultaneously universalizing and particularizing.

Institution is "universalizing" in the sense that it will have opened a dimension *within* which a variety of things or relations can be given sense, for example a plurality of constituted spaces that all operate on the same institutional grammar, so to speak. Yet as Merleau-Ponty observes, this claim can only be made if we insist that not every relation or space amounts to institution in the most pregnant sense: There must, in other words, be a difference between institution as a collection of historical events on the one hand, and institution as the opening "event-matrices" in which those events could be held in new relations.[149] Thus, for example, there is a difference between the writing of a book that invokes and repeats a traditional and accepted narrative form in a genre while adding only minor alterations, and the writing of a book that so uniquely frames a traditional narrative that the book itself can be retrospectively identified as the genesis or opening of a new genre.

It is, however, the same phenomenological duplicity in relation to a nongivenness – a reduction of nongivenness to the given – that requires us to acknowledge how institutions are 'particularizing.' In providing the grammar for a plurality of historical events, the 'event-matrix' of institution is itself a certain reduction of excessive materiality to a particular historical situation. This reduction is precisely why institution is not a sheer excess; it ensures that opening of an 'event-matrix' (e.g. a new genre in writing) will always be *experienced* as a mere event (e.g. a book or set of books).

What is difficult for phenomenology is to put itself in a position to still make the critical distinction between these two aspects of institution, where each implies the other, and where both risk an entrapment of critique within a limited frame of reference to the point where it becomes unable to recognize these limits as such. Again, the limits of institution, if they are

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[149] IP 9/8

grasped *only* on negative terms, return us to the structure of constitution; historical change on these terms can only amount to a more complete affirmation of the historical structure we already took to be originary, namely our own. In chapter three I will argue that this risk is borne out in a materialism that grasps materiality anthropocentrically; as we will see there, Merleau-Ponty's own materialist humanism as expressed in *Humanism and Terror* will lead him to claim that genuine historical shift requires a reapprorpriation of origins in the form of revolution. A materialism that thinks critique in the hyperdialectical sense, on the other hand, tends away from the totalizing *thought* of revolution; in chapter three, then, I will consider how Merleau-Ponty's later ontology can be rectified with his earlier revolutionary Marxist leanings as expressed in *Humanism and Terror*. For now, we can identify two more specific question that follow from a thinking of history on the model of institution.

First, institution requires that there is no *global* or total analysis of a historical situation – or alternatively, and as per Merleau-Ponty's claims above, every total analysis is by definition partial, achieving the sense of a 'world' only insofar as it remains operative within a specific frame of reference that it does not necessarily put into question. An inverse emphasis on *locality* suggests promise, then, only if locality can be thought to require in advance a plurality that I do not reduce in its sense to the material situation put at stake in and by my own body. Thus my relations with others, which seem automatic on the one hand – the sense of a world that I have as a member of my family, my home city and country, etc. – must be seen as depending in the first place on a divergence or *écart*, hence on an exclusion of other bodies and other institutional structures. The tension at stake in a seemingly differential notion of locality therefore raises the spectre of a 'common world' – but tied to globality we can emphasize that it appears *as* a spectre, as an image or myth in which we could have faith, and which faith itself implicitly

generates, but which critique exposes as nonsense. Is community only possible at the expense of critique, and vice versa?

Second, and by extension, institution implies an ambiguity whereby history appears to have no purely private elaboration, yet we must now add that it seems to have no purely public elaboration either. Thus Merleau-Ponty himself distinguishes between private institutions (e.g. a personal life) and public institutions (e.g. a nation-state) but insists that, even if the public and the private are not identical, there is still "no *separation*" between them.[150] Thus what is 'public' cannot be all-encompassing, just as what is 'private' cannot be radically exclusive, and we should have to recognize the one in the other. How shall we still distinguish between the private and the public, without simply lapsing into a single constituting structure?

In general, the notion of institutional spaces structure and give sense to an articulation of history at the cost of fully articulating a 'universal history' proper to a 'true society.' In developing a 'hyper-dialectical materialism,' the original admission is that expression of history is indirect, and that to attend to a general movement of history – to identify revolution as the event-matrix in the event itself – becomes possible at all only by a kind of irony in the Socratic sense, viz. a radical epistemic humility, and a methodical admission of non-knowledge. At the same time, this sort humility and this method cannot be a strictly private moment, and still less self-sufficient – as if humility consisted here in a confession to what exceeds us, and as if this negative approach were already worthy of being cancelled or itself negated, the admission itself synthetically complete in its incompletion. "If there is institution in the sense of a *field*," Merleau-Ponty says, "we are neither for opacity nor for the system;"[151] thus the ironic moment is

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[150] IP 15
[151] IP 64

necessary, but cannot posit a historical *telos* in the form of either faith or knowledge. The hyperdialectical method is not a possibility that the critical subject is offered from without or offers to itself from within, but must rather be manifest as a public project – as a form of *work* and critical interrogation of given material circumstances, the force of which consists in a refusal to presuppose in the other or in oneself a power to alter or negate those conditions.

As a form of epistemic humility, then, the *work* of irony has both a passive and active moment, so that the impetus of phenomenological and political critique may be found to perhaps to converge at their limits, with a question that each poses to the other in order to catch a glimpse of what they both would have missed on their own terms. Speaking so indirectly to the materiality of a common world, the work would no longer be one of bringing this materiality and this world to light as if there had never been a shadow of doubt as to their being, but rather one of observing and assessing how this or that attempt to give expression to this world diverges from its supposed origin and aim, and of deploying this short circuit as a way to spark another movement in a new direction. If it can be shown that history progresses only by divergence in this sense, and that whatever flashes of light we do see hinge on an equally profound resistance that we do not see, the result that our faith in a common world is never confirmed as a result of our work can perhaps be critically reframed in terms of a different sort of necessity than that of a unificatory grasp of our situation. Indeed, we would have to consider a very different exhortation: neither to know nor produce this common world, and not to abandon our own situation, but to resist both, in order that we may sustain a critical attitude in relation to all those who promise the arrival of the one in the other.

Chapter Two
Khōra **and the Space of Being**

"We look at [*khōra*] as in a dream when we say that everything that exists must of necessity be somewhere, in some place and occupying some space, and that which doesn't exist somewhere […] doesn't exist at all."
   - Plato, *Timaeus* 52b

Beginning with Merleau-Ponty's notion of 'body proper' as a model for passive constitution, I found reason to reframe the importance of renewed attention to materiality and spatiality as suggesting new means of approaching traditional phenomenological insights. Following readings of Merleau-Ponty given by Barbaras, Dastur, and Beith, amongst others, I have attempted to show how critical attention to the role matter and space in embodied experience return us to a 'paradox of the transcendental,' that is, the necessity of allowing the appearance of the conditions of appearance. Rather than affirming the primacy of the experience of one's own body in the world, I have by contrast taken the position that materiality suggests an irreducibility to structures of experiential givenness. In order to explicate an irreducibility of this sort, I distinguished between a negative and excessive materiality; where negative materiality returns us upon phenomenological inquiry to a structure of phenomenological givenness, I tried to show that an excessive materiality can be critically approached as a 'nongivenness' that suggests a divergence or *écart* at the origin of any particular structure of givenness.

The notion of an excessive materiality, specifically once it is grasped as an ontological excess, strains phenomenology as a critical project, as to even name what exceeds the structure of our own experience appears to risk speculation. On the other hand it is the name itself – 'brute space,' 'past that has never been present,' 'excessive materiality' – that can be seen as themselves requiring a return to experience, and try in a certain way to show on terms and dimensions that *are* familiar to us the manner in which there remains something that is not, after

all, exhausted by these terms and dimensions as we know them. If I resist a speculative project in the same moment I appear to call for it, that is because it seems to me that there is no *sense* in carrying on with speculative ontological considerations if we do not somehow refer them to experience, and supply terms for analysis that are available to us by critical analysis there.

But this admission, which we find at the limits of phenomenology as it attempts to give itself an answer to a call issued from beyond its scope, leads us to a question of language that has not been properly addressed so far. In *Signs* Merleau-Ponty makes the claim that "what resists phenomenology within us – natural being, the 'barbarous' source Schelling spoke of – cannot remain outside phenomenology and should have its place within it."[152] The question now is what it means to *speak* of this basic resistance – it is precisely what I have called an 'ontological resistance' – and as I will argue, this question of language suggests its own exhortation to recognize how this resistance may have at once a phenomenological and ontological component that can be held in tension, if not wholly reconciled or identified.

The problem of language in this sense appears to concern the recognition of a materially limited frame of reference, and a tempting analogy to this notion that I have developed in conversation with Merleau-Ponty might be found in Derrida's appeal to "context" – but neither Derrida's term nor my own indicates a simple negation of linguistic content; both attempt to underscore in different ways, and in conversation with different academic traditions, how much it matter which words we use to express a given situation, precisely because no one expression would be exhaustive. If I can at least suggest a point of convergence – even if it must also be a point of divergence – it seems to me that Merleau-Ponty and Derrida each in their own way return us to a kind of hyper-rigour in a question that concerns the conditions for the project of

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[152] S 178

critique. If ontology comes into play at this point it is because of the threat of an excess that

critique in asking after its own conditions appears to evoke. As Derrida puts it, the articulation of

being that we seek may hinge on the ironic admission that there is *plus d'une ontologie* – "more

than one," but also (entailed just as equally) "no more one."

Derrida's insight in this respect – that where a critical philosophy traditionally looks for

an overarching unity or synthesis, what is primarily at stake is rather a difference or

dissemination – has important overlaps with the central insights of Merleau-Ponty's later work,

even if the two do not ultimately arrive at the same conclusions. I do not suppose a simple

convergence of Merleau-Ponty's late thinking with Derrida's, but I also do not propose an

exhaustive account of the points on which they diverge. Rather, I focus specifically on

intersections drawn from work in chapter one concerning space and materiality, and the issues

these notions raise for an exhaustive ontological project.

We can begin by noting one obvious difference given clearly enough in Derrida's text *On

the Name,* in which Derrida takes up the notion of *khōra* as it appears in Plato's *Timaeus*. On

Derrida's reading, Plato's text invokes *khōra* as a 'space' or a 'place' that seems in a certain way

to simultaneously necessitate and to escape ontology: "There is *khōra*," as Derrida points,

because it appears necessary for the distinction between being and becoming, "but what *there is*,

there, is not," because *khōra* cannot be reduced to the terms of the ontological distinction it

makes possible.[153] Evidently such a space would have no exhaustive ontological account; in this

sense at least it echoes implications of a turn to the flesh and the threat of a radical obscurity in

relation to phenomenology. A nongivenness of materiality in space therefore remains the *prima

facie* theme in what follows, but Derrida's challenge to phenomenology will prove in other ways

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[153] ON 96

to be more radical than what I have so far suggested via Merleau-Ponty's thinking of the flesh, which still appears to insist on a certain primacy of being, of the sense of being in terms of a negativity or 'hollow' in being.[154] Derrida agrees that as a radical exteriority or nongivenness, we do not locate the materiality of *khōra* as the exterior *of* being, yet for Derrida this exteriority 'in' being cannot only come in the form of description, but also of an exhortation – to *speak* of being precisely because what is called 'being' is not exhaustive of what there is, or is there. The necessity of *khōra* in the Timaeus is precisely the necessity of becoming, hence a necessity of change that is borne out in this space that in the first place resists being as a structuring *telos*; for the same reason, *khōra* resists becoming (being). Whatever we attempt to conjure with the word "*khōra*," whatever *is there* behind or beyond the inscription, the scene of writing – resists.

We can already anticipate in this sense how there is a certain nongivenness of *khōra* on Derrida's reading of the notion, and that this nongivenness raises question for the relation between phenomenology and ontology first of all by bringing the role of language into play. By appealing to the interpretations of *khōra* forwarded by Judith Butler and Jacques Derrida in particular, but also readings forwarded by Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, John Sallis and others, I intend to show that it is possible to simultaneously acknowledge (i) the *irreducibility* of *khōra* to traditional ontology, and (ii) its *necessity* for any iteration of the ontological project. Where this necessity is itself material, but without a given name in the ontological tradition it makes possible, it becomes necessary to again distinguish between an excessive and negative materiality, or between a broader 'materiality' that cannot be reduced to traditional notions of 'matter.' The phenomenological approach to this excessive materiality will be developed in

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[154] For Merleau-Ponty's notion of the 'hollow' as distinct from the sheer (i.e. Sartrean) negativity of the 'hole,' see VI 196.

terms of a method of double-reading: By appeal to the *prima facie* same or 'given' ontological content, it must be shown that more than one account is possible. Thus where a naïve reading seeks the ontological stakes 'in' the given, a double-reading attempts to expose material conditions for the appearance of the given that exceed the structure of givenness apparently at stake in this 'given.' The critical introduction of nongivenness implies that to speak of being in a certain way is already to frame it from within a particular historical situation that is materially limited; thus the aim of the double-reading, which is carried out from within the same situation, is to expose this doubling and the role of the material limits, but precisely not to give an exhaustive account of the excess it indicates.

The method of double-reading in this sense is not supposed to be exhaustive; indeed, wherever ontology claims to provide this sort of account, the double-reading seems well-suited as a means of critical approach. To borrow Michel de Certeau's language, the double-reading is a tactic rather than a strategy, but with the recognition that the less systematic tactical approach in this case implies and works with a resistance to systematicity: Whereas a systematic approach attempts "to transform the uncertainties of history into readable spaces," in order to establish "a certain type of knowledge,"[155] the tactic of double-reading is intended to reestablish the force of those initial uncertainties by bringing into question the notion that they have been fully given in the production of knowledge. In this sense the double-reading can be seen as a work of resistance rather than a work of production: There is no attempt to propose an alternative or rival ontology to an established one; instead, the work consists in the appeal to a plurality of possible ways of

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[155] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (hereinafter cited as PEL), p. 37

framing the present historical situation.[156] The attention of the double-reading is always in this sense an attention to historical difference – to the diffusion and dissemination of the material conditions of a historical situation as they are worked over into language; the attention to the force of this performative work is therefore intended as a first step in indicating that and how certain terms and considerations have been excluded via the imposition of a systematic explanation of the situation.

There are three broad considerations that I intend to take up via appeal to the materiality of *khōra* in Derrida's analysis, namely institution, discourse, and ontology. However interconnected these themes are, I attempt to focus on one theme in particular with each section.

In the first section, then, I examine how *khōra* figures into a renewed notion of institution, in a way that will prove different from Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserlian *Stiftung*. With the help of Kristeva, Irigaray, and Butler, I demonstrate how *khōra* can be used to emphasize that and how ontology traditionally approaches matter in terms of negative materiality to be categorized and known; ontology in this sense, however, will itself prove to be a kind of institution that affirms and reinscribes, rather than critically questions, a material-historical tradition. Meanwhile a double-reading of the practice of ontology in this sense will reveal how an excessive materiality is already at stake – most explicitly in the form of what a given ontology does not recognize as its proper object, viz. as being. An exclusion of this sort will prove to be necessary for ontology as an institution, in order to ground its claims of giving a comprehensive account of its object; in exposing the necessity of this excess for the institution, a double-reading exposes the materiality of *khōra* as a resistance to institution at the heart of institution as such.

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[156] Cf. PEL 37, where deployment of a tactic is described as "juxtapos[ing] diverse elements in order suddenly to produce a flash shedding a different light on the language" inherent to already-prevalent strategy.

In the second section I examine how *khōra* figures into the notion of discourse, again as a kind of materiality operative as a 'resistance' to being explicitly or exhaustively articulated or made manifest. Where this discursive problem begins the *Timaeus*, in particular with Timaeus' own awkward discourse on *khōra*, I return to Plato's text with the help of Sallis and Derrida, showing (i) how Timaeus seems to implicitly make room for a double-reading of ontological discourse on being, but also (ii) that in the *Timaeus* this double-reading lapses back into traditional ontological discourse. Where the problem I focus on in Plato's text is the saying or representation of *khōra* as something that goes unsaid and resists representation, I appeal to the tension between models of discourse that Derrida argues are both at play in the *Timaeus* – *mythos* and *logos*. As I argue, the question of the primacy of one over the other proves misleading, such that the tension between *mythos* and *logos* is shown in section three to imply a tension between faith and knowledge. Since neither of these poles is sufficient to explain the role of *khōra*, my aim is to show that a critical approach to *khōra* requires a third type of discourse that consists in a play on the tension between the first two; this third type of discourse is what I call *irony*.

In the third section I examine how *khōra* figures into the notion of place in the sense of *topos*. Following Derrida, I show how *khōra* suggests a "receptacle" or space that resists reduction to any place or even to relations between places. I propose the implications of such a space for phenomenological methodology, arguing that an account of this radically receptive space would nevertheless precisely not be totalizing: By contrast with Heidegger's proposal of phenomenology as a "topology of being," I claim that what *khōra* calls for is a "topology of resistance" as a phenomenological method that would take up the manner and extent to which space in the sense of *khōra* resists and ultimately disrupts the systematicity and self-enclosed

structure of traditional ontology. I conclude with some brief considerations of how an ironic

discourse could prove useful not only as a means of critique ontological praxis, but also

anticipates political applications to be discussed at greater length in chapter four.

Section One: The Space of Institution (Genos and its Outside)

"In this turning point of the method, the course of cognition returns at the same time back into itself. [Absolute negativity] is as self-sublating contradiction the *restoration* of the *first immediacy*, of simple universality; for the other of the other, the negative of the negative, is immediately the *positive*, the *identical*, the *universal*. In the whole course, if one at all cares *to count*, this *second* immediate is *third* to the first immediate and the mediated. But it is also *third* to the first or formal negative and to the absolute negativity or second negative; now in so far as that first negative is already the second term, the term counted as *third* can also be counted as *fourth*, and instead of a *triplicity*, the abstract form may also be taken to be a *quadruplicity*; in this way the negative or the *difference* is counted as a *duality*. – The third or the fourth is in general the unity of the first and the second moment, of the immediate and the mediate."
-   Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 746

"One, two, three… Where's number four, Timaeus?"
-   *Tim*. 17a

Merleau-Ponty's notion of a totality that is intrinsically bound to partiality is the simplest

expression of his concept of institution (*Stiftung*),[157] establishing in the same stroke that the

synthetic or constituting account of being is always possible, and always insufficient. This

rejection of a synthetic dialectics offers a means of connecting the Merleau-Pontian *Stiftung* and

what Derrida understands in terms of 'institution.' Derrida uses the term 'institution' in a manner

that reflects the 'modern' institution as conceived for example in terms of the family, legal

institutions, political institutions, etc. What Derrida will always attempt to trouble is the notion

that there could be a single, overarching or comprehensive structure or unity to these institutions,

as is proposed in terms of history in the Hegelian sense, of metaphysics in its traditional

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[157] I mean here Merleau-Ponty's claim that institution is "partial because it is total, and total because it is partial" (IP 7)

philosophical sense, or of ontology in the renewed Heideggerian sense. In its very 'origin,' then, institution on Derrida's account is inevitably plural, and every institution therefore originally and constantly threatened by another; this alterity, however – the extra-institutional – is inseparable from the institution as such, and even suggests a fundamental condition for the emergence of any given institution.

In this section I will examine the role of *khōra* as a materiality that, for a number of thinkers, has required an examination of tensions between institution and the extra-institutional. I will show that *khōra* yields two different ways of understanding extra-institutionality.

First, *khōra* suggests a "strict" extra-institutionality in light of which materiality – especially the materiality of bodies – is wholly excluded by institution, where such exclusion proves necessary for the genesis of that institution. The implication of strict exclusion is one of contradiction – an outside *per se,* so to speak; the implicit exhortation of a strict exclusion will therefore be an overcoming of such contradiction. Strict exclusion in this sense suggests the synthetic dialectics already considered in terms of a 'phenomenological resistance,' where the aim is to render apparent the conditions of appearance, and where this *telos* is grasped in terms of a structure of possibility. Thus Julia Kristeva, for example, considers a semiotic chora that is strictly excluded from symbolic language, but which as a result can be sporadically articulated at the symbolic level by a kind of revolutionary act. A strict exclusion retains the force of dialectical negativity as a personifying force, as the 'exclusion' it produces is not taken as *non-givenness*, but rather in terms of a *non-presence* or absence that can be operative as a moment in a synthetic process of revealing a still more universal – ideally absolutely non-exclusionary – structure of givenness.

Second, however, *khōra* suggests a "broad" extra-institutionality in light of which materiality is not excluded by a given institution – not *per se* – but also cannot properly included within or recognized by the institution on its own terms. Thus Judith Butler, for example, will argue that the materiality of certain bodies will go unrecognized in light of the performative moment in the act of 'recognizing' a body as such, i.e. the application or production of an ontological category to materiality. That materiality proves irreducible to ontological categories is what therefore will require consideration of materiality as an ontological resistance, which we can now add suggests a resistance *to* ontology as an institution.[158] Grasped in terms of a broad exclusion, materiality cannot be approached as a negative moment in a synthetic-dialectical process, but suggests a resistance to this process quite generally: The excessive materiality at stake here is that which, in the institution itself, escapes the scope of institutionality.

The notion of a broad exclusion in particular suggests from the outset how the term "extra-institutional" is in a way duplicitous, and that the 'extra-' or 'outside' that I approach via the notion of *khōra* must never be taken at face value. (As I have already suggested, and as will be approached more directly in section two, the very word '*khōra*' is perhaps suspect.) To leap a bit too quickly to a conclusion that on these terms remains opaque, I will propose for now that the materiality I put at stake by appealing to *khōra* is not strictly extra-institutional, but also that it is not strictly contained within any given institution; instead, this materiality operates as the condition of making any distinction and relation between an institutional inside and outside, and in so doing suggests the notion of "an institution which tends to overflow the institution."[159]

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[158] It is perhaps worth noting that the term 'ontological resistance' here still retains its essential sense as developed in chapter one, which did not consider the extent to which ontology itself functions as an institution. What the term indicates in any case is an ontological excess that cannot be exhaustively accounted for on the terms recognized by a single institution.
[159] AL 36

Section 1a. The Institution of/as Language

"She is a third gender/genus; she does not belong to an oppositional couple. […] *Khōra* marks a place apart, the spacing which keeps a dissymmetrical relation to all that which, "in herself," beside or in addition to herself, seems to make a couple with her."
-    ON 124

In *Revolution in Poetic Language*[160] Kristeva takes up the concept of *khōra* with an eye to its

strange implications for the structures of language, raising "the awkward question of the *extra-*

linguistic."[161] What is simply or strictly 'linguistic' is grasped by Kristeva in terms of a system

of signs as a formal institution, operative at the level of the "symbolic" alone. Kristeva's aim,

however, is to demonstrate that the ideality of symbolic language does not generate its own

significance, arguing that any symbolic system depends on a material basis that Kristeva explains

in terms of the "semiotic *chora*."[162] The semiotic chora is linked to the materiality of bodies,

providing a proto-symbolic 'substance' that, in being worked over into a formal linguistic

system, itself resists exhaustive symbolic expression, and remains operative at the level of the

semiotic. On Kristeva's terms, *khōra* names a necessary contradiction: a materiality that

conditions the institution of language to the extent that it is excluded by the institution it makes

possible.

Kristeva's notion of the semiotic chora bears a primarily psychoanalytic interpretation.

The semiotic chora is a "nonexpressive totality" formed by what Freud calls the drives and

primary processes, which for Kristeva amount to the "pre-symbolic functions" of the body.[163] To

the extent that the semiotic chora retains what is excluded or repressed at the level of the

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[160] Cited hereinafter as RP

[161] RP 21.

[162] This spelling, again a more obviously "English" transliteration of the Greek word, is Kristeva's. For the rest of this section, I will use Kristeva's spelling only when specifically referring to her own conception of it; I will retain the spelling of "*khōra*" when referring to the notion more generally.

[163] RP 25

symbolic, the materiality of *khōra* in this case implies a 'linguistic resistance' that is equally a

psychoanalytic resistance.[164]

There are two things to immediately note about Kristeva's invocation of *khōra*. First,

Kristeva's psychoanalytic reading of *khōra* is specifically intended to remove any ontological

implications of *khōra*.[165] This linguistic and psychoanalytic resistance of materiality in this sense

intentionally rejects the original context of the discussion of *khōra* as it occurs in the *Timaeus*,

turning on a metaphysical question and the relation between being and becoming; indeed

Kristeva's bypass of the metaphysical upshot of the *Timaeus* is what allows her to embrace

Timaeus' figuration of *khōra* in terms of the maternal body as an "ordering principle of the

semiotic *chora*."[166] Second, Kristeva's language of the semiotic chora as a set of 'pre-symbolic'

functions indicates that, although *khōra* resists articulation at the level of the symbolic, it

evidently still has a genuine linguistic *sense*, with the implication that the proto-linguistic nature

of the semiotic chora must be grasped as a process or set of processes that proceed towards the

very order that apparently excludes them.

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[164] In my reading of Kristeva I am already anticipating what I draw from Derrida's reading of Freud in *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, where Derrida suggests that what Freud considers psychoanalytic resistance (viz. on the part of the patient, p. 8) suggests only a "veiled truth" that it is the responsibility of the analyst to unveil (p. 10). Resistance in this sense is always already a "resistance full of meaning" (p. 10), which I take it aligns with Kristeva's grasp of the body as bearing a semiotic sense, hence a kind of *logos* buried in the *potentias* of matter. By contrast with this reading of resistance, Derrida will eventually suggest that a more radical resistance is at stake – a resistance that 'resists' analysis because it is not the subject or object of psychoanalysis at all, but suggests a 'rest' or remainder that cannot analyzed: The resulting aim would be to think "resistance as the remaining of the rest *[La restance du reste],* which is to say, in a way that is not simply ontological […] since the remaining of the rest is not *psychoanalytic*" (p. 26).

[165] In Kristeva's words, her aim is to "remove motility from ontology and amorphousness where Plato confines it" (RP 26).

[166] RP 27. For a critique of Kristeva's reading of the *Timaeus* on this point, see Butler, BM 41. Butler's critique will also be borne out in section 1c below.

So long as we assume no ontological implications, it is not necessarily problematic for Kristeva to stipulate the sense or proto-sense of materiality by invoking the figure of a gendered body: An ambiguity between the figure of the maternal body and the maternal body *per se* is tolerable to the extent that both name or illustrate the same psychoanalytic phenomena, viz. repression, resistance, etc. But the same move also evidently complicates the appeal to materiality in the first place, since the implicit assumption is now that materiality can *itself* be represented (for example in a dream); by not attending to possible ontological distinctions here Kristeva risks invoking an implicit ontology that already constrains the understanding of materiality under the terms of the institution that it ought to resist. Judith Butler's critique of Kristeva's approach to *khōra*, as I will argue in the following subsection, consists precisely in combatting such conflation of body as body-figure, and matter, arguing that the ontological question of materiality is not to be bracketed in the way that Kristeva seems to attempt. The considerations of materiality as psychoanalytic resistance, in other words, should themselves lead to considerations of materiality as ontological resistance.

What we should in this sense take from Kristeva is the basic tension at stake in her position that the materiality of the body *qua* semiotic chora is excluded at the level of the symbolic, but recognizable after all in its tendency towards (its own) expression at the level of the symbolic. There is an implicit dialectics of exclusion here, and a kind of retrospective teleologization of the negative moment of the body's exclusion at the level of the symbolic; the resulting synthetic dialectics at work here becomes more explicit when Kristeva argues that in certain unique cases we nevertheless witness an "irruption" of the semiotic into the symbolic by a kind of *tour de force* – a performative act whereby the materiality of *khōra* is raised "to the

status of a signifier."[167] This transformative or 'revolutionary' act is itself a way of bringing to

symbolic expression the tension already at stake in the semiotic systems of the body, showing

that the tension of the body is itself the original source and producer of the signifier/signified

tension of symbolic language.[168]

Implicitly, the strict exclusion of materiality itself conditions and requires this

revolutionary expression: The semiotic chora is that out of which symbolic language is

constructed; that the product be so radically alienated from the work is itself a contradiction

soluble neither via the semiotic nor symbolic alone, but instead requires the poet's synthetic act

as a means of bringing the contradictory state of affairs to full expression. The poet's revelation

is double: First, they show that the institution of language as it stands is not complete or self-

sufficient, and has always required something outside its own limits; second, they show that this

extra-institutional condition for a given institution can also be the condition, by way of synthetic

reincorporation, for a new system. The poet's act consists in this synthetic movement, that is, in

"the *passage from one sign system to another*."[169] In all of this, the semiotic chora itself remains

strictly excluded: It cannot be reduced to one system or the other; on Kristeva's terms, and in the

unique case of poetic expression, *khōra* is operative as the revolutionary space *between* one

institution and another.

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[167] RP 59.

[168] See e.g. RP 164. "Poetic negativity is third-degree rejection. As the rejection of symbolic and neurotic negation, it recalls […] the dialectical moment of the generating of significance. In so doing, the text *momentarily* sets right the conflict between signifier and signified established by the symbol of negation. […] The text makes rejection work on and in the very place of symbolic and social censorship, which establishes language as a symbolic system with a double articulation: signifier and signified."

[169] RP 59

Of course, the very irreducibility of *khōra* to either system implies that even this 'revolution' in poetic language can never involve a complete reappropriation. Kristeva's insight, then, is that any formal linguistic system's claim to synchronic totality and self-sufficiency depends upon the exclusion of the semiotic chora, hence of the materiality of the body. However, this impropriety of materiality has a double-sense that can be borne out in two different readings.

The "strict" reading of impropriety grasps the alienation or extra-institutionality of materiality as a structure or moment that is *per se* other than institution – an outside 'in itself' – such that there can be no 'inclusion' or reappropriation of materiality that does not destroy a given institution. Strict impropriety is therefore in line with what Kristeva describes more generally in terms of "abjection," positing that any system – whether social, linguistic, etc. – depends for its structure upon the establishment of a border, thus an inside-outside opposition according to which the system can determine itself, that is, its "own" and what is proper to it, by differentiation from what it is not. Evidently the implication – productive because it is contradictory – is that materiality has a *sense* or force that is extra-institutional *per se*. On this reading *khōra* is a motivating force for change, but change is by definition revolutionary to the extent that materiality is in the first place put to work from without, or is not put to work at all.

The 'strict' reading therefore understands resistance on similarly synthetic terms. For Kristeva, the analysis of *khōra* in *Revolution* is inspired by Freud's unique appeal to the body, and Kristeva's intention is therefore to "give […] dialectical logic a materialist foundation."[170] Thus the materiality of the semiotic chora is considered to be operative as psychoanalytic-linguistic resistance to the extent that it is 'other' than the symbolic – but the alterity of

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[170] See e.g. PR 172; see also PR 14-15 for Kristeva's brief introduction to Freud's theory as giving "*dialectical logic* a *materialist foundation.*"

materiality here is taken to be necessary for, indeed constitutive of what excludes it. This constitutive exclusion has analogy to Freud's notion of an unconscious system (Ucs.) as constitutive of a conscious system (Pcpt-Cs.) that cannot 'contain' everything given at that level: For Kristeva, there must be a kind of 'repression' that initially severs the symbolic from its semiotic base; at the same time, the ongoing resistance of what is repressed to conscious expression is ultimately not tenable, and must in certain cases be overcome: the unstable relation of the two interdependent systems demands synthetic resolution by way of a certain 'working through' whereby the semiotic is no longer repressed but is rather committed to, amplified, and finally *given* at the level of the institution in a creative act of symbolic expression. What is therefore crucial to recognize about the 'strict' reading is the extent to which what is extra-institutional in this sense *is itself* what necessitates an affirmation of the institution as a higher order of sense. Simply put, the synthetic nature of the poet's act involves an overcoming of resistance, with the implication that apparent impropriety of materiality in the semiotic chora should in the end be graspable or expressible on proprietary terms.

On the other hand, though, we can also imagine a 'broad' form of impropriety, according to which what is extra-institutional cannot be raised to or reincorporated within the structures of institution at all. As I shall argue in subsection 1c below, a broad impropriety follows from a properly ontological consideration of the nature of *khōra*, yielding the notion of a materiality or 'space' that is not merely the counterpart or 'outside' of institution, but which is rather a space in which the very distinction between a system and its outside can be sensibly made at all. Despite rejecting the notion of a revolution in Kristeva's sense, then, the appeal to a broad impropriety not only embraces but radicalizes Kristeva's central insight that *khōra* is operative as a space of

resistance to clear articulation.[171] Thus where Kristeva identifies in *khōra* a resistance to

symbolic language that follows from proper attention to the 'material basis' of psychoanalytic

resistance, this same materiality, broadly construed, is to be grasped as a form of ontological

resistance – something that *is not*. As a broad impropriety, *khōra* supplies the material conditions

for distinguishing between an institution and its outside, and denies the notion that these

conditions are operative as a contradiction to be overcome, and thus to be expressed at the level

of the institution itself. Rather, the claim is that *khōra* indicates a materiality that is operative as a

form of resistance that is generative of institution only insofar is it cannot be reincorporated into

institution at all. Instead of grasping the ontological resistance of *khōra* in the revolutionary

sense of bringing-to-consciousness, proper attention to a historical materiality must be able to

demonstrate, within any system, the impossibility of any exhaustive claim to systematicity.

Section 1b. The Institution of/as Identity

"This receptacle/nurse is not a metaphor based on likeness to a human form, but a disfiguration
that emerges at the boundaries of the human both as its very condition and as the insistent threat
of its deformation."
-   Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*,[172] p. 41

In Butler's words, *khōra* can only be given within a binary structure "in the mode of

exclusion."[173] The challenge inherited from Kristeva's reading of *khōra* is to think it in terms of

a broad exclusion, which cannot simply be a negative moment on the way to institution. By

generalizing the notion of exclusion at stake in *khōra* from a "strict" to a "broad" sense,

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[171] "We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it
does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it—on the contrary, abjection
acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger." (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 9)
[172] Cited hereinafter as BM
[173] BM 39.

however, it becomes necessary to reconsider the notion of givenness more generally – and as Butler will argue, to do so requires attention to the ontological implications of *khōra* that Kristeva intentionally avoids.

Strict exclusion is thinkable and unproblematic, in other words, so longs as one implicitly grants the ontological admission that the excluded entity *is.* Grasped in terms of a strict exclusion, the 'resistance' that *khōra* implies makes the same implicit ontological claim – that *khōra* (hence e.g. the semiotic functions of the body, or of an unconscious) has an equal ontological standing as that which it resists; this implicit claim is what grounds in advance Kristeva's result that the semiotic chora can be recognized or given at the level of the symbolic, and that what is extra-institutional can in this sense be rendered institutionally.

Broad exclusion, by contrast, requires attention to what is excluded from institution in general, which in turn troubles the implicit ontological claim: *Khōra*, as a broadly excluded materiality, can no longer be associated with a particular body that 'is,' and still less with a model for the body in light of which the materiality at stake can be identified at the level of institution. Since the aim in thinking *khōra* in terms of a broad exclusion is still to think the manner in which it presents a kind of resistance, however, it should be clear that the turn to ontology in order to think this resistance is precisely not an affirmation of a universal scope of ontology; by contrast, the aim is to recognize that and how there are certain material conditions for even this ontological claim to universal scope – and that these conditions cannot be wholly rendered at the level of the institution thus established.

The ontological claim to exhaustiveness is intuitive enough – can we consider the materiality of bodies that are not? – yet, in *Bodies that Matter*, Butler insists the claim is not innocent. Specifically, the simultaneous facts that (i) ontology is necessarily historically situated

as a practice, and (ii) that ontology claims to offer an exhaustive account of what is, for Butler suggest a basic tension at work in the project of ontology, whereby the claim of a universal scope depends for its sense on a situation that cannot be universally shared. The risk therefore is that ontology identifies a 'body' by the imposition of an ontological category in a way that is exclusive of other possible ways of classifying the materiality at stake. This risk is not only a risk for the exclusion of particular bodies (viz. strict exclusion); rather, as the interpretation of matter as a universal 'substance' indicates, the implication seems to be that we can from within a limited historical frame of reference propose an exhaustive account of materiality – in this case, in the reduction of materiality to matter *qua* substance – which in turn risks an exclusion of materiality in any 'excessive' form that would tolerate a plurality of interpretations. Butler emphasizes for us a doubling in the moment of categorical designation, which leads us to thinking materiality as at once within and beyond the scope of ontology: The imposed category allows the classification of materiality in certain ways – viz. as recognizable bodies – but to the extent that the work of classification involves a work that takes place from within a historically limited frame of reference, the resulting categories cannot have taken the entirety of materiality into account. Thus the imposition of a category is always an identification of materiality with what is already known or recognizable – matter, bodies – but the appeal to what is known and familiar in order to explain what was unknown indicates the operation of materiality in a broader sense than any given ontology could admit on its own terms. It is in the face of this *reductive* approach to 'materiality,' which grants it ontological status only in already-recognized bodies via the spectral concept of 'matter,' that we by contrast must make a distinction – on Butler's terms between materiality and matter, or as I have framed the distinction between excessive and negative materiality.

Like Kristeva, then, part of Butler's project involves demonstrating that the recognition of a material body as such must always be coeval with the establishment of "constitutive outsides."[174] By directly considering the ontological engagement with materiality in terms of matter, however, Butler requires a thinking of these outsides as broadly excluded, which is to say as outsides that are necessary to ontology in spite of the fact that according to ontology they are not. As I will show at length in section two, Derrida's concern with *khōra* is precisely with materiality that bears the same apparent contradiction.

For now, it is enough to note that Butler's account of materiality indicates a more radical problematizing of givenness than Kristeva's reading of *khōra*, requiring a thinking of materiality that cannot be reduced to the synthetic structure of identity. As Butler puts it, the invocation of materiality as 'constitutive outside' means that the identifiability of a body hinges on a materiality that is not given therein, with the result that "identity always requires precisely that which it cannot abide."[175] Thus Butler's own investigation of *khōra* requires a transition from thinking matter in terms of a linguistic or psychoanalytic resistance to a grasp of it as ontological resistance – materiality as broadly extra-institutional to the extent that it has no admissible *sense* at the level of ontology as an institution.

Read as 'extra-institutional' in the sense of broad exclusion, Butler's interpretation of *khōra* requires a revision of Kristeva's appeal to the figure of the feminine as we find it in the *Timaeus*. Butler's critique of Kristeva on this point will also lead to Irigaray's reading of the same passage, which as I will argue effects a *double-reading* of the feminine there. First let us list the various figures that Timaeus invokes in his attempt to describe *khōra*, each of which turn

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[174] See e.g. BM 3 for an introduction to the notion of a constitutive outside as Butler interprets it.
[175] BM 188

around strictly oppositional pairs. For example, Timaeus will describe *khōra* as the "wet nurse"

of becoming,[176] as its "womb" or "matrix," or as the "mother" who "receives" and is "entered"

by that of which the "father" is essentially the "source."[177] With each of these figurations we can

identify the implicit operation of numerous opposition pairs: Evidently there is a "mother/father"

pair, while the figure of the womb doubles this opposition by introducing an inside/outside

opposition; overlaid on the mother/father is also a receiver/giver pair suggesting the opposition

between passivity and activity. Kristeva's reading of *khōra* in terms of the maternal body also

emphasizes the additional pairs of material/ideal, as well as body/mind. In general, and as I will

lay out in more detail in section two, all of these oppositional pairs turn more generally around

the becoming/being opposition that constitutes the central ontological theme of the *Timaeus*.

The double-reading begins with these oppositional pairs, and the first reading takes them

at face value. On the first reading, then, we grasp the figure of the feminine in terms of a strict

exclusion from a more ontologically primary origin: The feminine (hence the material, the body,

becoming, etc.) bears sense only in its distinction from the primacy of the masculine (hence the

ideal, mind, being, etc.). The first reading tolerates a synthesis of these pairs (this is why they are

pairs), but this synthesis depends on an affirmation of the primacy of ideal being; only by way of

this affirmation do we arrive at a cognizable sense of materiality, and finally a *figure* of

materiality that allows us to make some sense of it. The implication on this first reading is that in

order for materiality to have or make sense – in order for it to be given in a sensible way –

materiality must be recognized in this synthetic relation to ideal being, hence as a kind of

secondary ontological support for the primacy of ideal being. This first reading is what Kristeva

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[176] *Tim*. 49a

[177] *Tim*. 50c-d

therefore risks allowing, and what Butler critiques when she notes that Kristeva "*accepts* this collapse of the *chora* and the maternal/nurse figure,"[178] since in doing so Kristeva implicitly affirms the hierarchy of Plato's ontology.

A second reading of the same figure, however, can be drawn out with the help of Irigaray, who in *Speculum of the Other Woman* argues that there is another sense of the feminine to be drawn out. In particular, Irigaray distinguishes "specular" feminine on the one hand as a figure that can be reduced to the traditional oppositions, but attempts furthermore to elaborate an "excessive" feminine that refuses any reduction to the categories and oppositional relations that are constitutive of institution.

Still working from a primarily psychoanalytic perspective, for Irigaray the "specular" feminine is the notion of the feminine we find in Freud's early writing, where Freud grasps the feminine body as derivative from an apparently psychologically and ontologically primary masculine body. The female body is on this account "symmetrical" to the male body; this symmetry follows from an initial identity and reducibility to the masculine 'model,'[179] and where a female body develops as such only by differentiation from this model in puberty.[180] Irigaray's aim is to demonstrate how the identification of a female body as such, by thinking it in terms of a symmetry of model and copy, implies that the very difference between two 'types' or categories

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[178] BM 41

[179] Freud's early "symmetry" thesis involves the claim that "the autoerotic activity of the erogenous zones is the same in both sexes, and it is this agreement that removes the possibility of a sex differentiation in childhood as it appears after puberty. In respect to the autoerotic and masturbatic sexual manifestations, it may be asserted that the sexuality of the little girl has entirely a male character." (Freud, *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, p. 41)

[180] SW 27. "'Differentiation' into two sexes derives from the *a priori* assumption of the same, since the little man that the little girl is, must become a man minus certain attributes."

of body in this must be reducible to the self-identity of the model itself.[181] What Irigaray thus

shows is that the apparent necessity of alterity *qua* the *becoming*-feminine of the feminine is a

necessity of becoming that is itself owed from the outset to a masculinity which simply *is*; she

therefore observes how a difference and divergence in the emergence of another ontological

category follows from and effectively returns us to a single ontological origin. Grasped

symmetrically, the materiality of the feminine body was already 'given' in the ideality of a

masculine model; this symmetrical classification of the feminine body therefore ensures that its

difference is precisely not a 'resistance' to classification or to givenness as per the originary

model, and in its emergence as other is even a kind of *a posteriori* affirmation of the primacy of

this model.

      Irigaray's turn to an "excessive" feminine involves an attempt to challenge the

presumption of an exhaustive ideality that is always already fit to think materiality and alterity.

The specular, as we have seen, operates by way of a deficient *mimesis* – as a copy or part that

gives the model partially or incompletely, and which implicitly demands a return to the model in

order to establish a full articulation of the copy's ontological sense. By contrast, then, the

excessive is invoked as a kind of resistance to this process of reductive synthesis: a broadly

excluded materiality and alterity, then, where the very attempt to grasp this alterity on ideal

terms would be self-undermining. By contrast with the symmetrical reading of the feminine, the

excessive reading implies a threat to the self-identity and ontological force of the ideal model. In

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[181] "[…] the feminine will be allowed and even obliged to return in such oppositions as: be/*become*, have/not *have* sex (organ), *phallic*, penis/*clitoris* or else *penis/vagina* plus/*minus*, dearly representable/dark *continent*, *logos/silence* or idle chatter, desire for the mother/desire *to be the mother,* etc." (SW 22)

Irigaray's words, what is at stake in the excessive feminine "is an excess of all identification to/of self," with the radical ontological consequence that "this excess is no-thing."[182]

The notion that the excess of materiality is no-thing suggests more radical problematization of ontological givenness: In trying to speak to the possibility of materiality as a broad ontological resistance, the claim must be something to the effect "There is *x,* yet no category or set of categories suffices to express this *x*." Evidently the claim and invocation even of an 'x' appears to be problematic, but this problem is inevitable only to the extent '*x'* is taken as a direct reference, signifier, or as Irigaray would say a *mimesis* – in short, only so long as we insist that this 'x' stands in for or refers to *something*. We can object to the claim then only by appealing to the ontological status of the referent – but to deny the sense of the claim in this way also confirms it: 'x' is no-thing. A double-reading indicating a broad ontological exclusion turns on precisely this hinge, to the extent that it challenges the basic force of a logical or metaphysical principle of identity, whether grasped analytically or dialectically. The suggestion is that, in order to properly understand the materiality of *khōra* in terms of a broad impropriety, an altogether other approach is required – in particular an approach that does not equate understanding and recognition with an absence of contradiction, preserving a place in language and in ontology for that which generally resists articulation by way of the terms these institutions impose. Evidently an articulation of this sort of resistance cannot be direct; as I will argue in section two, it becomes possible only by way of what I call "discursive irony."

The approach to materiality as a broad ontological resistance still follows from Kristeva's essential insight, namely that what is rejected by appeal to identity and an established ontology is not simply gone or negated as a result: What is abject is no-thing, yet it is still in some sense

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[182] SW p. 230

operative within the boundaries of the institution that rejects it, gaining there what we could call

an "identity by exclusion." What Irigaray therefore anticipates in her discussion of *khōra* and the

feminine body, and what Butler and Derrida will radicalize, is that the paradox of extra-

institutionality will not be properly understood until the scope of exclusion is sufficiently

generalized to the point of aporia, requiring a simultaneous recognition of two irreconcilable

claims: *Khōra* is necessary; *khōra* is not.

Section 1c. The Institution of/as Hylomorphism

Recognizing the irreducibility of matter to ontological categories is Butler's essential aim in

Bodies that Matter, suggesting as a result that a 'body' cannot simply be taken as the synthesis of

materiality and ideality. For Butler it is a historicity at stake in materiality that the traditional

ontological approach would miss, since the reduction of materiality by way of a category (e.g. to

a body or to matter) is already the reduction to something timeless.

By critically attending to this ontologically reductive practice, what Butler reveals is that

the apparently descriptive act of classifying a body involves an implicitly performative element,

namely a decision to narrow the scope of materiality, that is, to proclaim that a body *is* – and to

do so by appeal to an idea first of all. What we draw from Butler's critique is a need to think

materiality as not exhausted by the ideas we deploy in order to grasp it in a certain way, and in

certain historical contexts. By contrast with certain 'new materialisms' such as Jane Bennett's,

however, Butler's aim is not to recuperate or account for an implicit 'agency' of matter that

traditional institutions of ontology would miss.[183] The aim is precisely not to speculate as to the

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[183] In *Vibrant Matter*, for example, Bennett refers to matter as a resistant 'force' (p. 2), to a
'vitality intrinsic to materiality' (p. 3), to a material 'thing-power' (p. 3), and to matter as an

nature of an excessive materiality, which in a way is the mistake that the institution of ontology itself consistently makes, and which culminates in the *concept* of an all-inclusive 'matter' that is – we can only define it negatively, at the cost of a basic contradiction – not an idea. Rather, Butler's aim and method is critical, offering an account not of materiality but rather of the ontologist's decision (viz. to apply this or that idea), and to explicate the implications of this event of decision for the practice of ontology. Specifically, and to the extent that the imposition of an idea 'excludes' other aspects of materiality from the institution of ontology, the turn to materiality as a broad ontological resistance should be a way of bringing into question this very institution, and of producing change in the same place that the institution itself denies is possible.

Thus it is the institution of ontology's hubris in its sweeping claim of materiality in terms of matter which proves pivotal to the disruptive reading of materiality that Butler's and Derrida's accounts of *khōra* allow for. As we will investigate in detail in the third section, the Aristotelian account of materiality as *hylē,* as well as his interpretation of *khōra* as *topos*, leads to the traditional interpretation of matter as a substance. Providing one and the same common ground for all material beings, the undifferentiated self-identity of material substance is an essential condition for the classification of all material beings by way of the same metaphysical grammar – a grammar that proves to be in no way material at its core. Hylomorphism already in this sense incorporates matter by way of an identity-by-exclusion, viz. as that which is selfsame and identical when and insofar as it is without and beyond form – and about which this ontology as a result cannot speak in any more detail except so as to insist on the necessity of such a substance for whatever bodies can be recognized under the heading of some form.

'actant' or 'operator,' where "*actant* and *operator* are substitute words for what in a more subject-centered vocabulary are called agents" (p. 9)

Butler's own double reading of matter turns on the twofold nature of this necessity, recognizing the double-operation of (i) a strictly excluded materiality as essential moment in traditional ontology, but also (ii) of a broadly excluded materiality implied in this initial operation, and which could be disruptive of it.

The interpretation of materiality as strictly excluded is most obvious in the appeal to matter as a formless entity. What is crucial to see is how this exclusion of materiality from the ideality of form suggests a precarious ontological standing for formless matter that is internally coherent for traditional hylomorphism. Nevertheless, on this first reading of materiality the identity-by-exclusion of prime matter – the claim that what it *is* consists in nothing that can be formally identified – is not supposed to present a problem for the hylomorphic model, so long as it is understood that by appealing to a formless matter we are only indicating a generalized *potential* to take on form. Ontology thus claims a right to speak of a formless matter on the basis that matter is in principle what will have been worked over by the introduction of a form, and by extension that the scope of ontology includes matter since it is necessary to any body that is to be known as such. On the first reading of the primacy of the idea, hence of knowledge, is taken for granted as the original condition of whatever sense we can make of materiality.

All of the conclusions in the first reading are arrived at, however, by grasping formless matter negatively and upon reflection, viz. as no-thing insofar as it is a body *minus* form: Just as Irigaray predicts, its sense therefore depends upon the positive element from which it is derived, viz. some already-synthesized and recognized body. A second reading simply notes the strange logic at stake here, according to which a formless matter must by definition draw its sense and necessity from the structure that ought to ontologically exclude it, namely form. On this second reading, the logical priority of prime matter with respect to form is radicalized, so that its

materiality is grasped not as a necessity to form, but as a necessity *per se*. As a result, materiality

is grasped as no-thing in the stronger and more disruptive sense of that which (and here the

description is already testament its incoherence for the hylomorphic model) is *essentially* without

form; materiality on this second reading is not simply lacking a category, but is radically

uncategorizable, and in this sense is irreducible to the idea *or* to 'matter' in the traditional sense,

where both poles of this pair affirm one and the same structure of (ideal) givenness.

Butler recognizes that materiality in this excessive sense is precisely this 'no-thing'

operative in ontological recognition; excessive materiality is operative insofar as it is receptive to

form only as a "site of inscription" on which any form can be laid down,[184] but in this case the

open-endedness of ontological sense comes at the cost of the capacity of form to exhaust the

materiality it requires. Where, to put it figuratively, the negative-synthetic model of matter

suggests the physical ink that sustains an idea after being written, the analogy for Butler's

materiality is the paper on which the ink can in the first place be laid, and which in this sense can

never itself be recognized in the writing it nevertheless conditions.

Butler's claim is that our responsibility is to recognize how both readings of materiality –

negative and excessive – are always at stake in the practice of ontology. In the identification of a

body as a material thing, then, we must not only observe (i) the invocation of matter as

ontologically categorizable *qua* the constative inclusion of matter as *mimesis* of a form/*morphē*,

but also (ii) the performative exclusion of an excess materiality as irreducible to any ontological

category. Butler's reading of *khōra* can therefore be understood as an insistence on materiality as

radical ontological resistance, which is to say a necessary "outside" of any ontology that this

ontology requires, and itself institutes, but cannot explicitly acknowledge on its own terms.

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[184] BM 38

Butler's recognition in the appeal to materiality is in this sense a recognition of a

necessary moment of contradiction or disruption operative *within* and at the heart of the

institution of ontology. In this disruption or radical exclusion from within the framework of a

given institution, we see more explicitly how Butler's thinking of materiality should be

differentiated from the approach to materiality put forward by a number of recent continental

"realist" projects. Such projects clearly also attempt to draw out the limits of a traditional

ontological pursuit, but in so doing the realist proposes some redefinition of the "proper" object

of ontology in order to reestablish the primacy of ontology: Thus we find arguments that a

speculative realist ontology must emphasize and reincorporate, variously and for example,

traditionally excluded notions of the object (Harman), the thing (Shaviro), or a quasi-agential

matter (Bennett).[185] While *khōra* must indeed name a kind of ontological "outside,"[186] it plays a

different role in Butler's thinking than "the great outdoors" does in Meillasoux's or the material

"out-side" in Bennett's: Rather than an appeal to what is not presently – but could, or should be –

recognized on ontological terms, the materiality of *khōra* suggests that which will never have

been recognized within the limits of ontology, precisely for the sake of any given ontology's

claim on being to hold as apparently exhaustive.

If the speculative realist's appeal to an 'outside' is a way of de-emphasizing the role of

the ontologist in defining what is, for Butler the appeal to *khōra* should have the opposite effect

of underscoring the impact of the ontologist's discursive practices. The radical impropriety of

khōra in other words suggests that, insofar as ontology may designate any 'thing' at all, the

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[185] See e.g. Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects.* Peru, IL: Open Court, 2002; Shaviro, "Non-Correlational Thought" in *The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism*. Minnesota University Press, 2014; Bennet, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things.* Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010.
[186] See BM 8

discursive field thereby established can never be comprehensive, inevitably leaving something

unrecognized and unsaid. This radical discursive limit will be drawn out more directly in section

two; for now it has only to be seen that the designation of ontology's *proper* object – the

designation of the limits of being as a claim to comprehensive intelligibility – can never be seen

as an innocent act: For Butler, the performative element of ontological practice consists in the

imposition of historically-bound limits and norms in order to identify and emphasize certain

structures, relations, and histories, always at the expense of others; the discourse of ontology in

this way always produces the structures that it claims to merely describe as already there.[187]

The historical embeddedness of the practice ontology, as Butler notes in the Preface to

Bodies that Matter, also means that considerations of the "materiality of the body only" quickly

open onto a much broader task:[188] The ontological question of what 'is' quickly becomes the

defining critical question in order to approach the materiality of the body as subject to and

constituted by a variety of psychological, social, historical, and political forces; it is precisely the

work of these forces that traditional ontology must deny in order to carry out its proclaimed task

of providing an exhaustive account of what is on its own terms. Butler's aim is therefore to

recognize the radical role of certain "regulatory ideals" that moderate the discourse of ontology

from the outset[189] – ideals according to which a *certain* way of speaking and thinking about

being will present itself as the *only* way of doing so. By acknowledging the radically constitutive

role of this claim to authority, we can observe the dual result that (i) the performative element of

ontological discourse is real, and would make a thing what it is, but only to the extent that (ii) the

performative element is itself backed by a recognized authority or sovereignty. It is in this sense

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[187] See e.g. BM 2
[188] BM ix
[189] BM 1-2

that for Butler we can simultaneously say that the "body […] will be fully material, but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power," indeed, "as power's most productive effect" in the sense that a historically contingent power will have established an apparently self-sufficient and ahistorical substance.[190]

By generalizing Kristeva's insights at the level of the subject, what the analysis of *khōra* makes possible on Butler's terms is not "the simple entry of the excluded into an established ontology," but rather what Butler elsewhere describes as "an insurrection at the level of ontology."[191] By appealing to a broad ontological resistance, ontology can be critiqued without simply calling for another ontology, thus admitting the authority of the institution more generally. The recognition that ontology is historically and normatively driven requires not only a questioning of reality as it is, but indeed requires active intervention in the present constitution and regulation of reality – which includes, but is not exhausted by, the practice of ontology. In short, proper attention to *khōra* requires a critical approach to ontology whereby we do not merely describe a given reality, but consider also how this reality might be "remade" in order to more explicitly recognize what is presently excluded from it.[192]

Section 1d. The Institution of/as Resistance

"It follows that if, and in the extent to which, *matter* in this general economy designates, as you said, radical alterity (I will specify: in relation to philosophical oppositions), then what I write can be considered 'materialist'."
   -   Derrida, *Positions*,[193] p. 64

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[190] BM 2
[191] Butler, *Precarious Life*, p. 33.
[192] Ibid.
[193] Cited hereinafter as P

Even as it unveils a broader materiality, Butler's study in *Bodies that Matter* is still in certain ways dedicated to questions that concern the body. Thus the appeal to *khōra* in that text will end with Butler's recognition that the notion of matter in Plato's *Timaeus* "does not give us bodies;" her conclusions is that *khōra* at best opens up a series of questions that cannot be asked without a basic rejection of the premises of Plato's text.[194] For Derrida, however, the contradictions apparently inherent to the notion of *khōra* as formless or *amorphon* will become reason to very carefully work once again through Plato's text – a reading that I will follow up on at length in section 2. In order to establish the need for these further considerations, I want in the meantime to indicate what I take to be the specifically Derridean interest in considering the implications of *khōra* as an excessive materiality or broad ontological resistance. In particular, where for Butler *khōra* suggests a pressing need to recognize to leave a more abstract discussion of materiality behind in order to recognize the power structures at stake in the institution of ontology, for Derrida it is the very notion of *khōra* itself that, carefully understood in context, suggests an understanding of the material conditions for an "insurrection at the level of ontology" of the sort that Butler describes.

If the ontological impropriety of *khōra* can be said to have this insurrectional role – that is, if what *khōra* names is a space that cannot be appropriated in advance by a single (and especially a prevailing) set of categories or norms – it becomes important to consider where, and under what conditions, *khōra* can and should be deployed or set to work: Where is insurrection best carried out, and what should insurrection look like as a result? Such a question appears to be strictly tactical in nature, that is, a question to be answered locally, in different ways contingent upon different historical, geographical, and socio-political situations. Finally, I do not think it

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[194] BM 54-55

contradictory that this tactical and institutionally-bound question can for Derrida still take the

form of an apparently broad normative concern – the grounds for an insurrection at the level of

ontology – rather, what I draw from Derrida is how an emphasis on the local analysis of

materiality suggests broader connections between insurrection and resistance. To anticipate

conclusions outlined in the final section of this chapter, and further elaborated in chapter four,

khōra for Derrida indicates how ontological resistance is not *revolutionary* in Kristeva's sense –

that is, it does not imply the space 'between' institutions, and for this reason refuses a thinking of

the extra-institutional by way of a strict exclusion. By contrast, for Derrida there is no 'space'

between institutions *per se*: The threat of the ontological project is precisely that it claims to be

exhaustive, and to have no other; thus resistance, however radical, can *only* take place locally,

within the bounds of the institution as such. At the same time, for Derrida the broad ontological

resistance of *khōra* still carries an insurrectional possibility insofar as it speaks to a generality

that no one institution can contain or claim as proper to it.

Thus Derrida will follow an observation of Butler's to its radical conclusions, namely that

what is definitive of *khōra* is the extent to which it "*cannot take on a form, a morphē*," and in

this sense "*cannot be a body*" in any traditional sense.[195] The implication is that there is no

formal structure that can express *khōra per se* – even if, as Kristeva, Irigaray, and Butler each

show in different ways, there is also a kind of necessity of *khōra* to formal structures. Butler

most generalizes this point by refusing all plausible formal expressions of a broad materiality,

arguing that *khōra* indicates an "identity by exclusion" not only, as Irigaray sometimes seems to

suggest, of the feminine, but also of any number of "other Others," all of whom or which can be

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[195] BM 41

understood via a kind of "dematerialization" of their bodies.[196] Above all this means that in the

performative moment of ontological work we should, as Pheng Cheah puts it, recognize a

"movement of desubstantialization" in light of which the negative concept of matter – the

materiality-minus-form that ontology requires for its formal project – begins to dissolve, thus

indicating the tenuousness and vulnerability of every distinction between an institution and its

outside.[197] An appeal to the broad exclusion of materiality, in other words, can itself be critically

deployed from within the institution as means of disrupting every strict exclusion by way of

which the institution is performativity constituted.

Derrida's concern, then, is to fight any invocation of matter that would reify it into

something stable, thus grasping the broad exteriority of matter *comprehensively*, as a new

"transcendental signified" and so "a new fundamental principle"[198]: The apparent exteriority of

the materiality of *khōra* cannot merely, as Peter Gratton reads Derrida on this point, be taken to

function as the "*deus ex machina* of a system" that would be necessary to "make the conceptual

system work;"[199] instead, the exteriority must be grasped as operative within the system, even if

the result is that the system no longer 'works' in the desired way. Gratton's claim thus

emphasizes the complexity of Butler's interpretation of *khōra* as a "constitutive outside," where

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[196] BM 49. "The body that is reason dematerializes the bodies that may not properly stand for reason or its replicas, and yet this is a figure in crisis, for this body of reason is itself the phantasmatic dematerialization of masculinity, one which requires that women and slaves, children and animals be the body, perform the bodily functions, that it will not perform. Irigaray does not always help matters here, for she fails to follow through the metonymic link between women and these other Others, idealizing and appropriating the "elsewhere" as the feminine."

[197] Cheah, "Nondialectical Materialism," p. 147

[198] P 65

[199] Gratton, "Derrida on Materialism," http://philosophyinatimeoferror.com/2010/02/22/derrida-on-materialism/

for Butler this "outside" designates a set of radical exclusions that "are nevertheless *internal to* that system as its own nonthematizable necessity."[200]

Derrida emphasizes the paradox at stake in Butler's reading when he says that *khōra* must have as its "property (as its *physis and dynamis* as Plato will say) that it has nothing as its own, and that it remain unformed, formless (*amorphon*)."[201] In this way Derrida is not only insisting upon the materiality of *khōra* as something that cannot be captured under a form at all (a materiality that in this sense cannot be aligned with the traditional sense of *hylē*);[202] he is arguing that this impropriety is the definitive *property* of *khōra*. Furthermore, by *announcing* this property of a general impropriety – that is, by identifying in matter what traditional ontology cannot say about it on its own terms – Derrida performs the broad exclusion he invokes, demonstrating – not from without but from within – the limits of these same terms. This tactic, which turns on a double-reading of *khōra*, itself yields an "insurrection" that we can still acknowledge as thoroughgoingly institutional, suggesting inexhaustible grounds for the critique of institution that can only emerge as a possibility from within the institution itself.

In this sense, the invocation of *khōra* should indeed be seen as a destabilizing force in relation to the structure of any given institution – not, however, because it posits a substantial "outside" with respect to it (i.e. as the *deus ex machina* that Gratton mentions), but rather because it opens the institution up to that which is essentially without place in the institution, and in this way exceeds the institution with and on its own terms. In this way the materiality of *khōra* suggests a radical alterity that is not the antithesis or negation of institution; as I will argue *khōra*

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[200] BM 8. Cf. BM 188.
[201] Derrida, *ON* 97
[202] "*hylē:* material, wood, raw material, a word that Plato never used to qualify *khōra,* let that be said in passing to announce the problem posed by the Aristotelian interpretation of *khōra* as matter" (ON 127).

is not a *negativity* at all. Instead, I try to show how *khōra* consists in an aporetic moment: the proliferation of institution itself beyond what any *given* institution could on its own terms circumscribe as intelligible, recognizable, or otherwise acceptable. In this sense *khōra* operates much in the manner of what Derrida refers to as "that strange institution called literature" – "the institution," in other words, "that allows one to *say everything*, in *every way*."[203]

No doubt, to "say everything" must be read with a double-sense. For on the one hand, to say everything is nothing but the traditional ontological practice, in Derrida's words "to gather, by translating, all figures into one another, to totalize by formalizing."[204] On the other hand, however, the attempt to "say everything" indicates a moment of incoherence and impropriety, in short the aporia of an announcement that proposes to circumscribe and even appropriate everything *within* the limits of the announcement itself, presenting itself as a descriptive report of those limits rather than their performative circumscription. This moment of impropriety, as that which escapes or is excluded by the totalizing pronouncement, ensures that if it is possible to "say everything in every way" at all, it is possible to do it more than once: The apparently originary and totalizing circumscription made by ontology *is itself* what the practice of ontology cannot ultimately prohibit or regulate.

As Cheah observes, Derrida's aim is to invoke a notion of materiality that, without being straightforwardly absent from or other than the ontological totality with which it is invested, would still consist in "the opening up or overflowing of any form of presence."[205] The impropriety of *khōra* consists in this overflowing, and this excessive materiality in turn suggests

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[203] Derrida, *Acts of Literature* (cited hereinafter as AL), p. 36
[204] AL 36
[205] Cheah, p. 145

an "institution which tends to overflow the institution."[206] Insofar as *khōra* is supposed to

indicate a "receptacle" or space, we can anticipate that for Derrida this must be a kind of public

space, where a plurality of conflicting claims to being can stand in relation to one another,

governed at most by what in "The Future of the Profession" Derrida describes as "a sort of

principle of civil disobedience, even of dissidence."[207] Operating from within this space, the

obligation would neither be to actively oppose the sovereign claim of ontology nor to blindly

abide by it – but rather, by a kind of passive resistance, to welcome it so thoroughly that the

constitutive opposition of a formal "inside" and substantial "outside" upon which the sovereignty

of ontology depends is precisely what becomes untenable.

Let us now turn to Derrida's reading of the *Timaeus* in order to better understand the

normativity of discursive resistance as he finds it there – what I will ultimately describe in terms

of a structure of *irony* that attempts to indicate broadly excluded materiality indirectly,

welcoming into discourse what is ultimately inexpressible on the terms of the institution in which

this materiality is nevertheless operative.

Section Two: The Space of Discourse (Logos and its Outside)

"It is well known: what Plato in the *Timaeus* designates by the name of khōra seems to defy that
"logic of noncontradiction of the philosophers" of which Verdant speaks, that logic "of binarity,
of the yes or no." Hence it might perhaps derive from that 'logic other than the logic of the
logos'."
-    Derrida, *On the Name*, p. 89

As announced at the beginning of the text, the dialogue of the *Timaeus* begins the day after that

of the *Republic*,[208] with a recollection of the prior day's comprehensive account of the ideal

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[206] AL 36
[207] "The Future of the Profession," p. 29.
[208] *Tim*. 17c

polis. It is the very ideality of the republic that Socrates appears to bemoan as he expresses a

desire to consider the concept of city "in motion," alive and ready to "show off its distinctively

physical qualities;" this living city is therefore in active engagement – war is the principal

example – with the foreign territory of the cities that surround it.[209] Especially against the

backdrop of the *Republic*, Socrates' proclaimed desire to speak of the city's outside or other

immediately suggests a crucial relation between the *logos* of the *polis* and a question of place

(*topos*) – of who or what defines the proper place of political discourse, and as a result of who

would have the right to participate in this discourse as a result and who would be excluded.

And if Socrates' concerns suggest that something is indeed missing or excluded from the

account of the *polis* he agreed to carry out in the *Republic*, it becomes all the more notable that in

the *Timaeus* Socrates divests himself of any responsibility or proper place in this discourse on

the other city or city's other: Instead of actively engaging in the dialogue, Socrates plans only on

listening, on letting everyone around him give the account he himself is looking for, on

"receiving" their accounts of the *polis* in motion as "hospitality gifts."[210] For Derrida, this is

already a sign that Socrates will himself operate as a kind of 'receptacle' in the sense to be

attributed to *khōra* later in the text:[211] He will provide, as it were, the material conditions of

discourse, even though these conditions evade the content and form of discourse as such.

Meanwhile Socrates' odd request – to see the ideal city of the *Republic* "in motion" –

already indicates an apparently unreasonable or unspeakable aim, namely the desire for a certain

synthesis of the stable form of the city with the unstable materiality of the city, and to achieve

this synthesis in discourse, in *logos*: Socrates seeks a *story* that would reveal the origins of a

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[209] See *Tim*. 19b-20c
[210] *Tim*. 22b-c
[211] ON 107

historical Athens as a place of becoming – material origins, then, that would nevertheless yield an exhaustive *account* whereby this genesis of Athens could be seen to follow from and coincide with immaterial and ahistorical Being of the *polis* as revealed in the *Republic*. In section 2a I will appeal to John Sallis' work in his *Chorology* to provisionally frame this ontologico-discursive tension as one between the "eidetic city" of the *Republic*, and the "archaic city" of the *Timaeus*. Since, however, a kind of synthesis of the two is the proposed aim, these initial considerations will leave us with further questions – first of the nature and possibility of such a synthesis; second, of whether anything in the *Timaeus* after all resists reduction to such synthetic discourse.

As I have already indicated, I take Derrida's interest in the possibility of a discursive resistance to be normative. It will be my aim to show that a careful reading of *khōra* as it appears in the *Timaeus* will demonstrate how the proposal of totalizing *logos* that could be extended beyond of the ideal city in order to include its material counterpart – the dialogue's attempt, in short, to establish the ontological *necessity* of becoming – opens the text to a double-reading: Whereas the discussion 'strictly' excluded by philosophy concerning the material-historical origins of the city will appear to affirm the necessity and priority of the ideal being, the text's own appeal to the materiality of *khōra* will indirectly indicate a further necessity that escapes the text's attempt to account of this materiality in terms of ideal being. The excessive moment to be recognized is a performative moment: That the text attempts to *speak* to a broadly excluded materiality in a sensible way must be seen as internally disruptive of the text's *prima facie* appeal to ideal being as exhaustive. This is what in particular I draw from Derrida's reading in *On the Name*, and as I argue it consists in a moment of discursive *irony*, as a moment where the limits of a given discourse are announced, and where this announcement itself functions as an indirect indication of an excess that this discourse does not and cannot account for on its own terms.

Discursive irony in this sense will be explicated as a work of discursive resistance that can be

operative within the apparently exhaustive limits of *logos*.

Section 2a. Two (or Three) Cities: Placing Eidos *and* Archē

"[…] I'd love to see our city distinguish itself in the way it goes to war and in the way that it
pursues war: that it deals with the other cities, one after another, in ways that reflect positively on
its own education and training, both in word and deed – that is, both in how behaves towards
them and how it negotiates with them. Now on these matters, Critias and Hermocrates, I
[Socrates] charge myself with being quite unable to sing fitting praises to our city and its men."
   -   Plato, *Timaeus* 19c-d

Let us begin by clarifying the distinction between the two notions of the city to which Socrates

initially refers, since this will help demonstrate the need at stake in the *Timaeus* for the strictly

excluded, 'non-philosophical' type of discourse denied by that of the *Republic*.

In the *Republic*, after all, there are already two figures of the city that are acknowledged,

namely the "healthy city" – that is, the city that is self-sufficient and not at war – and the "city

with a fever."[212] What John Sallis identifies as the "archaic city" in the *Timaeus* seems to have a

great deal in common with the city with a fever: Both find themselves more concerned with

bodily needs and desires, in general, a greater concern with *eros*;[213] both lack the healthy city's

self-sufficiency, and are more explicitly bound by material needs and limitations (food,

resources, etc.); and both, as a result, have a pressing need to expand their borders, and even go

to war with other cities. In general, we find in both cases a city that "can no longer remain a self-

enclosed ordered totality […] but will be related polemically to other cities, engaged with an

other, with an outside."[214]

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[212] See *Rep.* 371e-373a for the initial introduction of this distinction.
[213] See e.g. Sallis, p. 26
[214] Sallis, p. 28. Note that Sallis is not in this passage speaking to the nature of the "city with a
fever" but only to that of the archaic city, for reasons that I am about to take up.

Yet the role of Socrates in each dialogue indicates a crucial discursive difference between these two accounts of an "outside" of the city. In the *Republic* it is Socrates himself who gives the account of the unhealthy city; for Sallis this already indicates that the opposition of the city with a fever and its "healthy" counterpart there is itself eidetic, which is to say that both are philosophically intelligible insofar as both have been "built in *logos*."[215] By contrast, the description of the archaic city involves an essential turn away from the eidetic and in this way concerns itself with an explicitly material "outside," that is, with what Sallis thinks in terms of *archē* in order to name the origin of a living, breathing city. It is therefore the question of a material-historical origin that leads to the necessity for a different manner of speaking – a discourse condemned to fall short of *eidos*, and which philosophically we ought to dismiss as unintelligible. For Sallis, this threat of unintelligibility is the reason why Socrates must exclude himself from the work of discourse, yielding the responsibility of description to practicing politicians in existing cities.[216]

A discursive difference – to be laid out in more detail in the following section – thus begins at the outset of the *Timaeus* with a difference of place or *topos*. When Sallis argues that discussion of the eidetic city is "built in *logos*," the implication is that this city can be found "nowhere on earth"[217] – it has no material conditions because it is strictly formal.[218] By contrast, a city with a genetic origin or *archē* – with and from a physical body, alive and in motion –

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[215] Sallis p. 30

[216] See *Tim.* 19d-e. "Now on these matters, Critias and Hermocrates, I'd charge myself with being quite unable to sing fitting praise to our city andits men. That this should be so in my case isn't at all surprising. […] So that leaves people of your sort, then. By nature as well as by training you take part in both philosophy and politics at once."

[217] *Rep.* 592b
[218] *Rep.* 592b

would be a city that exists "*somewhere*, in some singular place."[219] Sallis' differentiation

between *eidos* and *archē* is therefore topological, a difference between ideal and material place.

No doubt the notion that the eidetic city is a notion 'built in *logos*' does not rule out any

role for matter – matter, that is, grasped negatively in terms of substance, hence as a kind of

'seat' or place for *eidos* or form. But grasped in this way, the appeal to substance immediately

affirms the primacy of the ideal discourse that could attend to it: Precisely *because* matter in the

sense of substance is thought as prior to all differentiation and admixture with form, substance

suggests a universal or *eidetic place* in the sense of a *corpus* ready to house any and all forms –

and by extension the intelligibility of *logos*. In its irreducibility to a given body, matter as

substance suggests a place that is coextensive with *logos*; simply put, substance comprehends

logos in its totality, and as an 'eidetic place' is to be grasped as the place of being.

Evidently the notion of *archē* implies a different notion of place, viz. a place that is

"singular" rather than universal. Nevertheless, the notion of singularity invoked here elicits a

double reading. For on the one hand the archaic city could be 'singular' in the sense of being an

instance of the universal, so that archaic place could be grasped as a deficient mimesis of eidetic

place. This 'strict' or negative reading of singularity implies a singularity due to imperfection or

incompleteness – 'singular' and therefore 'outside' only to the extent that it implies an

incomplete expression, or in other words inevitably coexists with other such instances. This

relative outside ensures that the archaic place cannot be given an exhaustive philosophical

account: Speaking to the archaic city as a strict singularity demands appeal to *mythos* as the kind

of discourse that, without properly or exhaustively expressing *archē* via *logos*, nevertheless has a

certain derivative intelligibility. As *mythos*, discourse on the "singular" place of *archē* is at best a

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[219] Sallis, p. 40

deficient mode of communicating an eidetic truth, so that the proclaimed aim of the *Timaeus*

seems to come with the following proviso: This is just a story; if you want to know the true

origin of the city, go read the *Republic*.

On the other hand, a broad "singularity" of archaic place can be imagined as a place that

is not an 'instance,' but in fact resists any and all reduction of its sense to *eidos*. As a result, the

"outside" at stake in discourse on material origins should be grasped in terms of a broad

exclusion: The attempt should not be to express the outside of some *polis* as the outside of

another – other instances of the same ideal form – but should instead attempt to express the *polis*

as outside. Sallis suggests this more radical reading of the materiality of the city in his brief

appeal to the notion of a "choric city." Neither archaic nor eidetic, the place of such a city would

be excessive – as Derrida puts it (and we will come back to this notion), a "neutral space or a

place without place."[220]

Section 2b. Two (or Three) Discourses: Placing the Philosopheme and the Mytheme

"I [Critias] have said all this, Socrates, to prepare myself to tell Solon's story now. […] We'll
translate the citizens and the city you describe to us in mythical fashion yesterday to the realm of
fact, and place it before us as though it is ancient Athens itself. […] The congruence will be
complete, and our song will be in tune if we say that your imaginary citizens are the ones who
really existed at that time."
- Plato, *Tim.* 26d

Discourse on a "choric" city puts into question any stable relation between the two kinds of

discourse identified by Sallis, suggesting that there may be no straightforward synthesis of the

logoic and the mythic. It is therefore not incidental that a possible failure of discursive synthesis

is often most apparent in the text when the characters themselves proclaim conclusions to the

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[220] ON 109.

contrary. It is this tension or failure that we must locate at the end of Critias' speech in the

Timaeus, in his proposal that his own discourse on the 'living' city in the *Timaeus* and Socrates'

discourse on the ideal city in the *Republic* could be overlaid, the one on the other, with a

"congruence" and even a certain harmony.[221]

If Critias is right, of course, the alterity of mythic discourse – so far the only means of

speaking to the material origins of the city – is so little a challenge to logoic discourse that the

mythic account will in some sense prove essential to its logoic counterpart. Thus Derrida

recognizes how what Critias suggests in this passage allows for a reading of Plato's thinking as

proto-Hegelian – in effect an attempt to include the outside of philosophical discourse back

within its limits; in Derrida's words, such a reading "inscribes mythic thought in a teleological

perspective,"[222] identifying the failure of mythical discourse as an indication of the need for the

systematicity of philosophy. The Hegelian thought is that the initial, partial intelligibility of the

mytheme is only a negative moment, and ultimately owes even this deficient sense to an

overarching philosopheme, allowing the simultaneous affirmation that (i) there a sense to myth

from the outset, but also that (ii) this partial sense put forward by the mytheme is the *same* sense

as the one that will have been fully and exhaustively articulated by philosophy. This reading

therefore affirms the *Timaeus*' discourse on the material origins of the city, but only to the extent

that such a discussion confirms the primacy of the city as an idea – as if Plato wrote the *Timaeus*

only to confirm conclusions already arrived at in the *Republic*.

Yet the text of the *Timaeus* affronts this synthetic reading of material origins insofar as

both Critias and Timaeus imply and even state at various moments how the origin or *archē* to

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[221] *Tim*. 26c-d.
[222] ON 100

which they speak may not be reducible to logoic discourse; in this sense the text itself calls for a

second reading. Critias, for example, admits that his account of the origin of Athens will be a

kind of "story," indeed an "ancient story" (παλαιὸν […] λόγον)[223] – but he insists nevertheless

that his story is nevertheless "true" (ἀληθής).[224] Here the very word *logos*, designating the story

itself rather than its truth, indicates a dual-sense of the manner in which Critias' myth of origin

will mimic *logos*, suggesting how this mimetic discourse has to be seen as operative in at least

two ways.

The first sense of *mimesis* suggests a synthetic structure of Critias' account of material

origins. Here the myth of the origin of Athens is not one story properly speaking, but is rather a

collection of stories rolled into one: Critias after all explains that the tale is not of his own

creation, but is rather a story that has been passed on to him by old Critias, who in turn was told

the story by Solon; Solon for his part only gathers the tale in his travels outside Athens to Saïs,

where he is told the tale by an Egyptian priest. Each *instance* of the story, on this reading, retains

all previous instances for the sake of its intelligibility to the listeners; thus it is *mimesis* itself

which ensures that the story is both complete and true.

The impetus for a second sense of *mimesis*, however, can be located in the content of

Critias' story, specifically at the moment of *its* origin. According to Critias, this origin consists in

the moment when Solon finally receives the true story of the origin of Athens from an Egyptian

priest at Saïs. As if to give authority to his own account, Critias tells us that the priest knows the

true origin of Athens because he had the story in writing. Young Critias therefore tells us how

old Critias was told that Solon was told that the oral tradition of the Greeks has allowed them to

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[223] *Tim.* 21a

[224] See *Tim.* 20d re: the "λόγου […] ἀτόπου" that is nonetheless "ἀληθής" (literally, "unconcealed").

lose track of their own origins,[225] whereas the written tradition of the ancient Egyptians is

encyclopedic in its preservation of "all of the events" of note in Athens.[226] In what Derrida

identifies as a kind of aporia, then, the ideal work of logoic discourse proclaims itself to bottom

out and have its own origins in the materiality of writing:[227] The invocations of a topological

outside (ancient Egypt) and a discursive outside (writing) become conditions of asserting the

comprehensive and exhaustive nature of Critias' story, that is, these outsides are material

conditions of the mythical-philosophical claim that the account has no outside.

As Sallis puts this strange moment, Critias' "true *logos*" of the *polis* is given as a "foreign

logos"[228] – as an idea of Athens that on its own terms is bound to a material text in Egypt – yet

what Critias' story nevertheless claims to do in form and content is to account for this *logos* in a

way that domesticates its alterity. This domestication of alterity consists not only in the fact that

Critias' story is after all given in Athens, but also in the fact that he insists on the "harmony" of

his own discourse and that of Socrates in the *Republic*;[229] this double-domestication of the

foreign origins of Critias' story therefore seems to accomplish the subordination of myth to

comprehensive philosophical or logic discourse.

By insisting on a harmony of the two discourses, however, Critias only exacerbates the

question of where the true discourse belongs: If the mythic discourse mimics the philosophical so

effectively as to be able to proclaim that there is no tension between them, why was an appeal to

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[225] "This is the race from whom you yourself, your whole city, and all that you and your countrymen have today, are spring […]. But this has escaped you, because for many generations the survivors passed on without leaving a written record." (*Tim.* 23b-c)
[226] *Tim. 23a*
[227] Cf. Derrida, ON 114. The city's "living memory must be exiled to the graphic vestiges of *another place*, which is also another city and another political space."
[228] Sallis, p. 40
[229] *Tim*. 26c-d

myth ever necessary? What in the *Republic* went unsaid, such that the work of the *Timaeus*, which Socrates himself initiates, has any impetus or force? If the Hegelian subordination of myth to philosophy also invokes a historical order and teleology – a partial account via myth first, a systematic account via philosophy later – why does Plato write the *Timaeus* in such a way that its written word on the *polis* comes, both according to the written word and to the chronological-historical act of writing, after the Republic?

Section 2c. Two (or three) Categories: Placing Being and Becoming

It is Timaeus who recognizes, and in some sense will himself offer, the double-reading of mythic discourse that Critias unknowingly puts at stake. This opening onto a double-reading occurs in part because Timaeus generalizes the scope of mythic discourse, no longer attempting to account only for the origins of Athens as a *polis,* arguing that this account for the *archē* of the *polis* demands attention to a more originary moment – the *archē* of the *cosmos*, as the origin of a world of becoming in the first place. From Derrida's perspective, however, we should already recognize an analogy between the moment that Critias' story takes us back to – the origin of the oral tale in writing – and Timaeus' appeal to work of the demiurge, and the inscription of ideality that the demiurge effects in initiating a world of becoming: Both moments, in short, attend to a production in writing, and what Derrida will help us to emphasize is the role of materiality as the necessary condition of this production.

For Timaeus himself, however, the difficulty of speaking to such an originary moment seems radicalized: How is an originary production to be intelligibly articulated where this discourse aims at an object other than the intelligibility of being? Timaeus at this point deploys the discursive distinction we have already noted, suggesting the possibility of an account of

being that is "grasped by the understanding," whereas mythic discourse on *archē* simply requires

an account of becoming that is "grasped by opinion" and "unreasoning sense perception."[230]

Nevertheless, the unreasoning discourse on *archē* faces an apparent contradiction as soon as it

claims to offer its account of *archē* in terms of a genuine reason or cause – a necessity that can

be identified as *true*, even as the necessity itself concerns a certain divergence from being at the

origins of becoming. There are two plausible responses to this contradiction inherent to

accounting for the origin of a world of becoming, and Timaeus leads us onto both.

The first response dismisses the contradiction between two types of account as merely

apparent, suggesting once again that the incoherent or only partially coherent discourse on *archē*

is simply a kind of proto-reasoning discourse that attends in advance to what can only be fully

explicated via discourse on *eidos*. The claim that there is a *necessity* for becoming and therefore

a cause manifest in the work of the demiurge,[231] is thus initially seen by Timaeus as reason to

reassert the primacy of being in order to account for the necessity of becoming. In particular,

Timaeus rejects the possibility of giving an explicit account of the work of the demiurge *per

se*,[232] but maintains that we can still recognize a 'necessity' for this work in terms of the model

that any such creator would have to have used as a guide, namely the "eternal model" of the

forms: The unstable world of becoming, in short, can be rationally understood only insofar as it

is "modeled after that which is changeless and is grasped by a rational account."[233] Thus

Timaeus suggests that we can account for the necessity of becoming by only by seeing that

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[230] *Tim.* 27d-28a

[231] See *Tim* 28a. "everything that comes to be must of necessity come to be by the agency of some cause."

[232] *Tim.* 28c. "Now to find the maker and father of this universe [*to pan*] is hard enough, and even if I succeeded, to declare him to everyone is impossible."

[233] *Tim*. 29a

which becomes as an image (*eikon*) of being. As a result, the necessity of becoming, hence of the demiurge's work, is supposed to be already given in the forms, so that an account of the origin of becoming *per se* comes only in the form of a "likely tale" (*eikos logos*) that itself must imitate the stability of being for the sake of its own sense.

Yet the generality of Timaeus' account ensures that the problem implicit in Critias' tale becomes explicit: If we reduce the ontological necessity of becoming to an account of being, on what basis do we explain the simple fact that *there is a world* (*cosmos*) as this "visible and tangible" thing that as Timaeus observes "has a body,"[234] and in this very materiality is ontologically nonidentical with the ideality of the forms? What Timaeus is therefore anticipating is that there must be something, so to speak, upon which the inscription of ideality can take place – but also that this site of inscription, which Timaeus will call "*khōra*," seems to imply a more radical nonidentity with being. We therefore recognize a second reading of the origin of the *cosmos* with Timaeus insistence here, since the implication is that this nonidentity of *khōra* with being would itself be *necessary*, and must be explained in order to grasp a necessity of becoming, even as this necessity appears not to be reducible to the ideality of being, but suggests a radically elusive materiality.

This second account must somehow invoke something beyond the scope of being in order to explain the necessity of becoming, in spite of the fact that such an admission seems to require that the account be incoherent. Timaeus seems to admit this necessary incoherence when he attempts to think the emergence of a world of becoming by appeal to a "Straying Cause" that initiates becoming without any prior guidance via the model of *eidos*; this necessity that does not derive its sense from being could be called be termed a "non-linear" or equally a "non-

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[234] *Tim.* 28b-c

teleological" necessity, implying a cause that does not *follow* from anything in particular, and

which therefore cannot be grasped as on it its way towards something at the moment of its

emergence. [235] In its rejection of a "model," however, there is no sense in grasping the material

necessity of a Straying Cause as a simple 'copy' either, hence something to be accounted for via

myth in the sense of a "likely story" (*eikos logos*);[236] indeed the necessity here is one of

producing change, and producing change in this sense depends on work that does not simply

reproduce what is unchanging. Thus Derrida argues via the *Timaeus* that the event or origin of

becoming, hence the essential opposition proper to ontology, implies a necessity that cannot be

accounted for in terms of being or becoming: it must therefore be recognized how the *necessity*

of this site of inscription for the ideality of being nevertheless *is not*.

Excluded from the ontological categories of being and becoming, then, Timaeus' appeal

to a Straying Cause invokes, in an inevitably contradictory way, a "*necessity* […] that is neither

generative nor engendered, and which carries philosophy."[237] The site of inscription operative as

a non-productive necessity in this sense refuses all reduction to the ontological distinctions it

conditions, which in turn implies its role as an excess that is all the more radically

comprehensive as a result; thus Timaeus explains the necessity of this material site of inscription

in terms of an absolutely inclusive "space [*khōra*]" that initially gives place to the relation of

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[235] See *Tim.* 47e-48a. "Now in all but a brief part of the discourse I have just completed I have presented what has been crafted by Intellect. But I need to match this account by providing a comparable one concerning the things that have come about by Necessity. […] So if I'm to tell the story of how [the world] really came to be in this way, I'd also have to introduce the character of the Straying Cause—how it is its nature to set things adrift."

[236] See ON 113. Here Derrida points out that the necessity of a Straying Cause is "heterogeneous to myth, at least to mytho-logic" and therefore the *eikos logos* as a "philosopho-mytheme which orders myth to its philosophical *telos*."

[237] ON 126

being and becoming.[238] Thus it is as this inclusive site of inscription that, in Atlassian fashion,

khōra carries the living world and that which orders it – the entirety of ontology – on its

shoulders, suggesting a broadly excluded materiality that can only be addressed by an altogether

other kind of discourse.

Section 2d. Giving Place to Discourse: Khōra and The Irony of Metonymy

"[…] an unlimited receptive capacity and a retention of permanent traces seem to be mutually
exclusive […]"
- Freud, "A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad," p. 329

"Such a radicalization of the *thought of the trace* (a *thought* because it escapes binarism and
makes binarism possible on the basis of *nothing*), would be fruitful not only in the deconstruction
of logocentrism, but in a kind of reflection exercised more positively in different fields, at
different levels of writing in general, at the point of articulation of writing in the current sense of
the trace in general."
- Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," WD 231

The space or site of inscription that Timaeus calls *khōra* is a space that has no intrinsic

determinacy nor any extrinsic model, and so in general no logoic limits or *logic*: *Khōra* suggests

a space that is ready to give place to absolutely everything; it cannot but give place and relation

to elements that, on their own terms, could appear absolutely unrelated, or even directly opposed

as sheer incompossibilities, etc. This sense of *giving* place without *governing* it will be crucial,

not only to understanding what Derrida means by *khōra* as a "space" in the ontological sense to

be clarified in detail in section three of this chapter, but also eventually to understand the

political implications of space as a material condition of resistance in chapter four. In the

meantime, I want to clarify more specifically how *khōra* functions as a discursive space that is

broadly inclusive or 'public.' The notion that *khōra* could function as the sort of space that

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[238] *Tim*. 52a-d

"allows one to say *everything*, in *every way*"[239] is something I will now attempt to clarify by appealing to two examples that Derrida invokes as illustrative of *khōra* as an absolutely receptive discursive space, namely, the figures of the palimpsest and the "mystic writing pad."

Both figures appear in the book *Chora L Works*,[240] which documents an interdisciplinary project undertaken by Derrida and the architect Peter Eisenman. Eisenman's rather ambitious project was to build, in *parc La Villette* in Paris, a site based on the notion of *khōra*. In the first meeting between the two, Derrida explicitly states the paradox of Eisenman's aim – an aim after all that is not unlike Timaeus' own attempt to *imitate* or give an explicit figuration of *khōra*: "[*Chora*] is a space that cannot be represented, so it is a challenge to anything solid, to architecture as something built;"[241] in this way *khōra* is "an impossible paradigm for architecture."[242] Derrida's point is that, by contrast with 'place' in either the eidetic or archaic sense, *khōra* itself seems to escape and to ground both: As a space that gives place to ontology in general, *khōra* is itself *atopos*, a "non-place."[243]

Indeed, Derrida's words already indicate that no *example* should suffice in the articulation of *khōra*, if the supposition that an example in this sense would aid in giving the

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[239] AL 36

[240] Cited hereinafter as CW. There are two things to note about this unusual text: First and most pragmatically, it must be noted that the physical text is punched through with aspects of the architectural plan Eisenman eventually develops, which leads to obvious difficulties in both reading and citing certain passages. Wherever the text is so interrupted, I will use square brackets to indicate the "empty space" thus created; wherever I find that a physical look at the page gives an obvious recognition of letters only partially rendered, I will add these within the brackets. Secondly, it should be noted that throughout the text the Greek "χώρα" is transliterated, by contrast with Derrida's usual choice of *"khōra,"* more loosely as "chora," often (as the title of the work demonstrates) to evoke connections with related English words. (Much of the text itself, including all the transcripts from the meetings between Eisenman and Derrda, is originally in English.)

[241] CW 12

[242] CW 71

[243] CW 34

ontological account of what *khōra is*. Rather than this clearly contradictory aim, my appeal to examples here is intended to illustrate precisely how *khōra* eludes articulation on positive discursive terms, but without simply becoming discursively irrelevant. It would be enough, then, to recognize in the following discussion how *khōra* suggests a materiality not reducible to positive or direct linguistic expression, since to do so would already recognize what on traditional discursive terms is unrecognizable.

The example of the palimpsest, pivotal in *Chora L Works*, is given in an attempt to yield a double-reading of the material conditions of logoic discourse. A palimpsest evidently is site of inscription – a space that gives place to discursive content – but for Derrida the material conditions of writing suggested by the case of the palimpsest are unique: One can always write on the palimpsest, but only by erasing, writing over, or crossing out something else. The place given to discourse is therefore given by way of a kind of materially conditioned metonymy; this metonymy, and by extension the palimpsest as material condition of writing, can be grasped in two ways.

First, a "strict" metonymy evidently seems to follow insofar as the palimpsest entails that the inclusion of one thing depends on the strict exclusion of another. The resulting thought of the palimpsest itself is as a kind of 'matter' or materiality that must subsist apart from and prior to the metonymic process, viz. the act of writing (or crossing-out). By the same stroke the palimpsest as such becomes a senseless notion: Stripped of logoic content, the sheer materiality of the palimpsest suggests a kind of blank slate – but a blank slate is not a palimpsest. On this reading a presumed account of materiality as intrinsically stable (viz. matter) is necessary for logoic sense, but materiality cannot play any part in the logoic work of expression: Outside of *logos* there is matter, but matter (and this 'outside') has only the negative definition of being a

discursive void. To Derrida's ongoing frustration in *Chora L Works*, the notion of a void dominates Eisenman's understanding of the palimpsest throughout their collaboration;[244] this allows Eisenman to envision the specific site they designate for *khōra* in *La Villette* as a "non-place" or *atopon* only in the sense of implying and standing in for every place. By contrast, the notion of "a place from which you understand all other places"[245] is explicitly refused by Derrida as a notion of *khōra*, arguing that it cannot entail a "classical" metonymy in which the whole is always given in any one of its parts.[246]

Derrida's solution is to propose a second reading of the palimpsest, and therefore of the metonymy and process of swapping it makes possible. This second reading begins with the insistence that the materiality of the palimpsest cannot be grasped apart from the discursive work it makes possible: A palimpsest is a palimpsest because the material place it offers for discourse is already fully occupied; thus a given discourse cannot be understood apart from this material place in which it is given. Yet it remains the case that the palimpsest is not itself articulable by way of the discourse to which it gives place, for the materiality of the palimpsest also includes the possibility of erasure, that is, the possibility of writing something new, and to that extent it is never exhausted by the logoic content it harbours.

In Derrida's view, the palimpsest is an appropriate illustration of *khōra* because – like the material archive available to the Egyptian priest in the *Timaeus* – it contains a discursive totality without being reducible to it. We can on these terms distinguish between a *strict* and a *broad* metonymy, where the notion of a broad metonymy insists that a discursive whole (e.g. some

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[244] For Eisenman see e.g. CW 7, or CW 48, "I want a void, an absolute erasure." Cf. Derrida "Chora is not exactly a void, though it looks as if it were a void" (CW 10); "It's not a void" (CW 31)

[245] CW 34

[246] CW 34

surface of writing that is exhausted) can only be identified *as* a whole (e.g. the palimpsest identified *as a palimpsest*) only to the extent that we admit therein "the necessity of writing something new."[247] A broad metonymy in the sense of the palimpsest as a site of inscription therefore not only tolerates but requires a plurality of discourses in any given place; thus a broad metonymy allows one to "say everything, in every way" to the extent that it invokes a materiality which resists exhaustive expression – any 'whole' at the level of formal or logoic discourse – even as it conditions such expression. *Khōra* is therefore intended to express such a materiality, viz. one which is operative in the process of discursive articulation as a necessary condition of this process while by the same stroke being inevitably disruptive of it.

A similar understanding for the role of *khōra* can be found in Derrida's reading of Freud's note on the "mystic writing pad." The pad is a children's toy that consists of three layers: Underneath, a resin slab; in the middle, a translucent piece of wax paper; on top, a transparent celluloid sheet. The upper two layers are affixed at the top of the slab, but left free at the bottom. To "write" with it, one presses a stylus on the celluloid, indirectly pressing the paper onto the resin, where a mark is therefore left; by lifting the paper off the slab, the same mark disappears. Between Freud and Derrida, we can identify two very different readings of the device.

For Freud, the toy offers a metaphor for the human psyche: The wax paper, where the mark temporarily appears, is analogous to the system Pcpt.-Cs. (perception-consciousness); the celluloid sheet on top is the layer of protection for Pcpt.-Cs. that Freud posits in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*; while the resin slab underneath – where a permanent mark is left, whether or not it visible on the celluloid (i.e. at the level of Pcpt.-Cs) – is analogous to the unconscious (Ucs.). For Freud the toy is a way of conceiving the synthetic operation of these two systems;

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[247] CW 34

thus Freud's essential observation involves a recognition of the pad as a kind of machine that

seems to mimic the psyche's own twofold structure of retention[248]: Memory depends, on the one

hand, on the strictly temporary retention via consciousness, so that consciousness itself can be

defined by a capacity for repressing, forgetting, or otherwise 'erasing' what presently occupies it,

thus suggesting an "unlimited receptive capacity;" on the other hand, memory itself depends on a

retention of permanent traces via the unconscious, and without which consciousness would have

nothing to remember, and no possibility of forgetting and/or repressing.[249]

   For Derrida Freud's metaphor offers an insight that Freud himself does not quite pursue

to its end, namely the *prima facie* contradictory recognition that "traces thus produce the space of

their inscription only by acceding to the period of their erasure."[250] Without fully taking this

'period of erasure' fully into account, Freud is able to dismiss the contradiction on the basis that

the toy is merely a metaphor: Much like Kristeva as discussed in 1a above, Freud does not

properly credit the materiality at stake in the figure invoked – the materiality of an unconscious –

precisely because for Freud there are no ontological implications to his figuration via the

example of the mystic writing pad. Thus Freud's tendency is still towards a thinking of an

unconscious materiality in terms of a logoic primacy in the structure of memory and conscious

thought;[251] Freud thus grasps the metonymy of the pad in the strict or negative sense whereby the

materiality of the unconscious is again operative as a 'blank slate' that merely supports

consciousness *because* it is wholly separable from it. The materiality of the unconscious is thus

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[248] Freud, "Note," p. 334. "[the pad] solves the problem of combining the two functions *by dividing them between two separate but interrelated component parts or systems*."
[249] Freud, "Note," p. 329, cf. p. 333
[250] WD 284
[251] WD 278. "As has always been done—at least since Plato—Freud first considers writing as a technique subservient to memory, an external, auxiliary technique of psychical memory which is not memory itself."

understood in terms of a strict metonymy, with the act of writing it makes possible reduced to a

kind of likely story or myth that expresses an origin only by taking for granted the primacy and

universal scope of an immaterial *logos*.[252]

By contrast, Derrida will insist on a 'broader' extent to which materiality must be at stake

in Freud's reading of the mystic writing pad, arguing that the materiality of an unconscious

cannot in the end be grasped apart from the conscious systems. Derrida's claim in other words is

that Freud's example ultimately shows how materiality is operative at every level – not only the

unconscious 'slab' (Ucs.) but also the sheet and its protective cover (Pcpt.-Cs). Materiality on

Derrida's reading is therefore as much a condition for forgetting and the erasure or metonymic

swapping of conscious thought as it is for the unconscious retention of these traces: Broadly

construed, it is materiality as such that ensures a psychic or logoic metonymy, even if such a

materiality never presents itself as such on the terms of relation it makes possible. Whereas, in

short, a traditional notion of writing leads to a thinking of ontological permanence whereby "the

concept of a (conscious or unconscious) subject necessarily refers to the concept of substance

[…] out of which it is born," the appeal to *khōra* aims to show by a double-reading of the same

material conditions that "an unerasable trace is not a trace,"[253] and by extension that materiality

itself consists in the *necessity* of the broad ontologico-discursive exclusion of materiality that the

notion of substance claims to recuperate.

The role of erasure in particular helps to emphasize how the examples of the palimpsest

and mystic writing pad lead us towards a structure of discourse that is ironic in its approach

towards an excessive materiality: The palimpsest indicates an excessive materiality as a necessity

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[252] "the *simple* structure of maintenance and manuscription, like every intuition of an origin, is a myth." (WD 284)
[253] WD

for writing that cannot be directly given in writing, while the mystic writing pad indicates a materiality as a necessity of consciousness that cannot be directly given in consciousness. In both cases, the indication of institutional limits suggests a moment of reversal – a moment when the broadly excluded materiality appears *more* fundamental than the structures that excluded it.[254] Indeed, the structure of discourse in the *Timaeus* more generally seems to be indirectly pervaded with and by an ironic moment, structured as an intelligible discourse asking after a necessity that, if articulated, would threaten any stable intelligibility of discourse as such. The insight drawn from Derrida's work in this section is that this *discursive irony* can be recognized as a method of resistance in the face of apparently exhaustive notions of discourse: By indirectly indicating what cannot be said within the limits a given discourse, discursive irony can be operative as a way of indicating how the material conditions of new and other modes of discourse yet to be produced or generated are already at work.

Timaeus, we might suppose, presents a prime example for such a mode of discourse as he attempts, impossibly, to speak explicitly and directly to what cannot be said. This *speculative* discourse, however, is without irony, and Timaeus' originary assumption seems to be that the very excess of the materiality of *khōra* in relation to a tradition of ontology must nevertheless be graspable for us, viz. as the origin of that tradition; this discourse is speculative because it approaches an excessive materiality as if its interrogation would provide an answer, and in this way materiality is once again grasped negatively. Thus Timaeus' extended genetic description of the history of our material world, which we have not discussed and which only *begins* with

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[254] In the reversal materiality 'appears' more fundamental, but ultimately we cannot say that it *is* more fundamental. What is rather at stake in this reversal is that an apparently *transcendent* (or strictly excluded) materiality, can be recognized as operative in a more *transcendental* capacity, viz. as a condition for the possibility of appearance, even if this condition cannot 'appear' in the structures of figuration it conditions.

invocation of *khōra*, claims to be exhaustive. By contrast, Socrates was the one who asked for

the impossible, only to immediately recuse himself of any duty to carry out the work himself.

Socrates therefore is operative throughout the text as the impetus for a discussion that falls apart

on its own terms at each stage; his critical questioning can therefore be seen to be at work

throughout the text even though he does not say a single word after Timaeus' speculation on

material origins begins.

It is this critical questioning of the limits of even the most systematic of institutions,

indirect and ironic in its approach to material conditions that threaten to exceed the institution on

its own terms, that seems to have the most potential for phenomenology at its own limits, and

which must be taken up in greater detail.

Section Three: The Space of Place (*Topos* and its outside)

"Might not *chora* mean: that which separates itself from every particular, that which withdraws,
and in this way admits and "makes room" precisely for something else?"
   -   Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*,[255] p. 51

The problem of discourse with respect to *khōra* is evidently a problem of origins, but what the

double-reading in particular reveals in taking up this origin is that there is more than one, *plus*

d'un. This is why Timaeus is forced to speak incoherently, and to risk radically contradicting

himself: The necessity of this world can and must be tracked back to the ideality of being

(otherwise what becomes has no sense or meaning, no *logos*) – but being does not supply the

necessary materials for becoming; the *sense* of a space or site of inscription upon which the

demiurge is to inscribe the image of being is not the sense of being, even if this space is

necessary for becoming. At the origin of becoming, then, two origins, and a difference before the

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[255] Cited hereinafter as IM, and always in accordance with the original (German) pagination.

first – before being and becoming, there is being and there is space (*khōra*). Timaeus' mistake is

to suppose that he can describe this space as if it fell under the rubric at stake in the facticity of

being. As I have emphasized with Derrida's help, though the claim that "*there is [il y a] khōra*"

requires what I have called an ironic admission – that "what *there is*, there, is not."[256] In this *il y*

a that *is not* we can recognize the meeting of phenomenology and ontology, each at the limits of

the other.

Phenomenology can perhaps locate in the *il y a* of *khōra* the necessity of an originary

event as a necessity that would explain a given situation, namely our experience of and in a

world that is not simply ideal, but is populated with material beings, bodies, etc. But in order to

explain this experience, *logos* is invoked in a way that risks covering over the doubling of the

origin, making sense of *khōra* only with Timaeus, by fitting it back into the rubric of the ideal.

This risk, to return to concerns in section one, concerns the possibility that phenomenological

explanation of *khōra* 'works' only insofar as we grasp the materiality of *khōra* in a *certain* image

or form, namely our own or in any case the form we impose: The performative act of the

demiurge, pluralized yet no more recognizable for it. In order to 'make sense' of *khōra* on its

own terms, by contrast, it seems to me that phenomenology must allow for an ironic moment,

that is, an admission that the origin in this case is something that we *cannot* explain on our terms

and by appeal to our own (human) experience. But will this admission, which consists in an

invitation to the other, have yielded an 'account' of the *il y a*? A *phenomenological* account?

By contrast, ontology can perhaps locate *khōra* in its attempt to begin with this

transcendence, viz. with the facticity of *what* there is. But the appeal to being or to beings in this

second sense would have to be rectified with to the strange facticity of *khōra,* which 'is not,' and

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[256] ON 96

not only in the sense of the absence or negation of being. What is perhaps more obvious from the outset with the ontological approach is the insufficiency of the words we use to carry out the account; thus Heidegger, for example, attempts to show that "the Greeks have no word for 'space,'" or in any case for what "we call space."[257] From this starting-point, however, Heidegger still arrives a positive conclusion, that "[the Greeks] do not experience the spatial according to *extensio* but instead according to *place (topos) as chora*, which means neither space nor place but what is taken up and occupied by what stands there."[258] Heidegger in other words derives the truth of a certain experience by beginning with the notion of *khōra* – but then it is not at all innocent that this truth is found in the Greek experience, and that the Greek experience will have proven to be the origin of our own. Heidegger in this way carries out a unique reversal, which I will track in more detail below: The interpretation of "*topos as chora*" turns on a nonpresence of *khōra* that is taken to indicate an elusiveness at the level of being – but this nopresence of *khōra* is taken for that reason to be useful in elaborating the conditions of experience, specifically our own.

Between the phenomenological and ontological approach, my aim is to more generally draw out what I take a problem of transcendentality in attending to *khōra*. Heidegger's approach, as I will show, demonstrates how genetic conditions grasped as *nonpresence* still implies the aim of securing what is phenomenologically absent within the limits of a certain "ontological *logos*."[259] *Khōra* as nonpresence still defines it as the negative or absence of being, and allows for its appropriation within a structure of phenomenological givenness, even if 'givenness' in this

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[257] IM 50

[258] IM 50. As with Kristeva in section 1, I will use Heidegger's own transliteration of '*chora*' when referring to his interpretation of the notion.

[259] ON 96

sense becomes a thought of presentification by distension or withdrawal. If, on the other hand, we are to properly respect the doubling of origins that *khōra* entails – the ontological excess or resistance of this space of inscription that conditions becoming without causing it or implicitly supporting it – then we require a different account of *khōra*: Rather than a nonpresence, *khōra* must be approached as a *nongivenness* in the sense of a materiality that is 'necessary' for any experience of a world – mine and the other's, and others still – without being exhausted in or by one of the structures of experience it conditions (or for that matter 'all' of them, where this thought of totality and of an exhaustive account is only thinkable from within a given structure, and remains the thought *of* that structure).

The debate that follows in this section turns on, in order to ultimately refuse, a Heideggerian interpretation of *khōra*, developing a response that reflects conclusions in sections one and two concerning the irreducibility of *khōra* to institution and to discourse: Rather than a 'topology of being' in Heidegger's sense, then, I propose a 'topology of resistance' that arrives at the thought of place only as the contingent result of a plurality of institutional and discursive processes – processes that can always be brought into question at an origin that is perhaps not an origin *proper* to these processes. In its attempt to attend to this *plus d'un* of origins, it could be said that my account is not properly ontological, since it begins with the thought of what 'is not' in a manner that is not merely the negative or absence of being (even if not as a result 'positive,' viz. *being*); similarly, it could be said that this account is not phenomenological, since it abandons, at least in part, the attempt to think genetic origins in terms of a structure of experiential givenness. The response is to admit the basic assumptions of both critiques, but to refuse the conclusions: Attention to *khōra* can only be framed within a certain sense of being, and it can only be approached from within a certain structure of givenness; my claim, however,

is that in order for this framing and this structure to be taken up critically, they must be posited

ironically, indirectly admitting from the outset that there is (*il y a*) another frame and another

structure, and that the approach to material conditions from within a given frame and structure

can never be fully accomplished on the terms thus invoked. A topology of resistance is a work

that can only be carried out in and as an invitation to others, with the aim of producing a space of

critique that is not exhausted by any discourse or institution, and of thinking – which assumes the

risk of *imagining* – a critical community whose pivotal relation consists in a work of resistance.

Section 3a. The Space of Identity

"The concept of a (conscious or unconscious) subject necessarily invokes the concept of
substance – and thus of presence – out of which it is born."
-    WD 229

Heidegger's own interpretation of *topos* as *chora*[260] returns us of necessity to a certain history of

the thinking of space and place that is in the first place a history of the thinking of materiality: In

the claim that the Greeks had no word for "we [that is, we moderns] call space," there are two

ends of a historical chain that Heidegger means to grasp – in order to break – as a whole.

The claim evidently begins with the Greeks, specifically with Aristotle, who in the

Physics already begins denying what Heidegger will take to be the essential significance of

khōra. In that text, Aristotle claims that Plato's appeal to *khōra* shows that "matter [*hylē*] and

space [*khōra*] are the same, for the 'participant' and space are identical."[261] Implicitly there is no

difference between the material body and the *place* it occupies, from the *space* in which we find

it – no difference, that is, except for the invocation of an immaterial form. From our perspective

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[260] IM 50
[261] *Phys*. 209b 11-13

we can already see how Aristotle denies the 'doubling' that I have observed, either through

Butler in the distinction of materiality from matter, or through Derrida in the distinction of the

space of inscription from both the matter *and* form of the inscription itself. From Heidegger's

perspective, the problem to anticipate, however, is the too-present *thought* of being that we

tolerate in supposing it to have a clear place in the material world.

Our own, 'modern' end of the same problem is exemplified by Descartes, who in the

Principles of Philosophy similarly reduces space to matter, thinking both in terms of extension.

Descartes' position and its motivations are very different from Aristotle's, but in its approach to

the place of a body the results involve a similar concern: In Descartes' words "the extension in

length, breadth, and depth which constitutes the space occupied by a body, is exactly the same as

that which constitutes the body"[262]; implicitly the space and the body are materially identical,

whereas a distinction of place in relation to bodies is achieved only ideally, and in abstraction

from materiality as such.[263] Thus the invocation of place is again operative as a means of

proclaiming a synthesis of two radically opposed ontological realms, the simple presence of

being in beings.

"What we call space," as Heidegger identifies it more generally, always already

accomplishes this erasure of a more primordial difference in its appeal to place: With Timaeus,

we arrive at a thought of space only by first making the naïve assertion that "everything that

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[262] *Principles*, p. 42

[263] The notion of space *per se* as an undifferentiated material body in this sense suggests how it indicates a primacy of ideality over against the notion of matter as *extensio*: Whereas the defining feature of Cartesian "space" is its indeterminacy, any experience or identification of specific places and bodies must be referred to the imposition of ideas and relations by us. (See e.g. *Principles*, p. 43-44 for the identification of "space" and "internal place;" see p. 45 for the description of "external place" as a relation with respect to other bodies that is not inherently spatial.)

exists, must exist somewhere;" in so doing, we guarantee in advance the ontological presence we

will have claimed to discover – of being in place; of a place that *is* because I am (there). This

assimilation of the conditions of appearance in the presence of what appears is what Heidegger

and – as I will argue, in a very different way – Derrida both combat in their thinking of the

relation between space and place.

Section 3b. The Space of Difference

On Heidegger's account, by the invocation of *khōra*, "Plato means to say: beings and Being are

in different places. […] He is asking for the totally different place of Being, as against the place

of beings."[264] Evidently Heidegger's notion of Being is not to be confused with Plato's, yet in

this case there is perhaps an analogy between the pairs of Being/beings and being/becoming –

minimally to the extent that, still following along with Sallis, we can see how Heidegger is

concerned with a kind of eidetic place as against an archaic place, though first of all with the

difference between these two. It is in terms of this ontological difference that Heidegger

interprets *chora* as *topos*, implying this 'third' *topos* as the difference between the first two:

Khōra is "*the* place" because it is a "separation," that is, χώρα as χωρισμός [*khōra* as

khōrismos].[265]

It is precisely with this allusion to the place of χώρα as χωρισμός that Derrida finds

reason to warn us: By tracking a radical ontological difference back to a single place we risk a

reduction of the sort of difference we mean to preserve, namely a difference of origins. Thus

Heidegger for example claims that the place of *khōra* "must be given, beforehand,"[266] which

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[264] *What is Called Thinking* (cited hereinafter as WT), p. 227
[265] WT 227 (emphasis mine). Cf. IM 80 for the reading of *khōrismos*.
[266] WT 227

alludes to the necessity named by *khōra* – but Heidegger risks approaching this necessity without irony, grasping it strictly in the negativity of a nonpresence. Implicitly the "is not" of *khōra* can be located in the phrase "Being is not reducible to beings," implicitly reinforcing a structure of givenness, namely the *es gibt* of being in its withdrawal from the world it sets forth.

      Derrida's aim is to think the nonpresence of *khōra* without collapsing it back into a notion of givenness; implicitly this reading resists a reduction of anything in the words "*there is khōra*" to a singular "it," "*il*," or "*es*," that is, to the (conscious or unconscious) *subject* of an "*es gibt*/it gives/there is/*il y a*" that gives *khōra* (viz. to the subject, to itself) or for whom *there is khōra* as a kind of preconstituted transcendental that a genetic analysis could reveal on this subject's own terms. Such a subject, however difficult to systematize or thematize, would still seem to invoke, as it were *in* itself, the choric or choral difference between being and beings, whereby the concealment of the one is and has always been bound to the unconcealment of the other, and where a synthesis of these two movements is itself the essential promise of thinking and being in their distension. Such a subject could always be invoked as the guarantor-in-advance of an irrevocable unity and systematicity to the project of ontology, even in light of the attentiveness to history – to what history includes and excludes, remembers and forgets – that Heidegger requires of this project. Evidently it is a subject of this sort that Derrida's reading of *khōra* must more radically bring into question: The ironic approach to *khōra* does not aim to reveal a difference *at* the origin, so much as it seeks to indirectly indicate a difference *of* origins.

      In a certain sense, Heidegger might be subject to a more radical version of the criticism that Butler levels at Kristeva, namely of giving *khōra* a body, and so an identifiable or recognizable place. Thus, and even in its exile from the system it makes possible, it is operative as an absent affirmation of the structure of givenness that excludes it: If the place of *khōra* seems

to be given nowhere 'in' the world, that only confirms for Heidegger that *topos* as *chora* is at

stake everywhere, in every place. As Jeff Maples puts it, *topos* for Heidegger "refers to both *this*

place and to the very place or placedness of which this place *is an instance*."[267] But one cannot

simply turn the tables on the *Republic* and argue that a copy is the model after all, since in so

doing one only affirms the ideal universality of *topos* that the *Republic* establishes for the *polis*.

What we could call Malpasian-Heideggarian "model *topos*" – even if what it names is a site of

material differentiation – still entails that one cannot recognize the singularity of 'this' place

without also attending to placedness as such and as a whole, so that any recognition of

topological differences – or even of what we could more generally call '*the* topological

difference' – depends upon and invokes a structure of givenness of being operative in the manner

of an "ontological *logos*."[268]

For Derrida, then, Heidegger may well maintain that *khōra* 'withdraws' from the scene of

becoming to which it gives place, but the implication is still that the nonpresence of *khōra* is

operative as an "absent support," or "absence as support."[269] Heidegger again echoes Timaeus,

then, when he says that "the various things each have their place" precisely because, from the

very beginning, "the place belongs to the thing itself."[270] This propriety of *topos* follows from

the reading of a certain transcendentality into *khōra*, in particular a *logos* of *topos* or of historical

events in general that can be revealed by a return to historical origins – a *meaning* that has a

complete sense in the moment that a historical origin is recognized as one's own. It is therefore

not only the venturing or making of this promise of a return, whether this promise is considered

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[267] *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place* (cited hereinafter as HP), p. 49
[268] ON 96
[269] ON 99
[270] IM 50

ontologically (viz. revelation of being in history) or phenomenologically (viz. return to the things themselves, the life-world); what matter is the structure of the promise itself, and whether a plurality, and so finally a moment of impropriety can be put at stake in a gesture of irony.

To differentiate himself from this proprietary thinking of *khōra*, Derrida will take the position that the necessity of *khōra* cannot have this role of an ontological or phenomenological guarantor: "*Khōra* is not a subject. It is not the subject. Nor the support [*subjectile*]."[271] What then becomes essential on Derrida's account is to read the *il y a* of *khōra* in a manner that does simply return it to a thinking of givenness: In order to explain this being-there without givenness, a tactic of double-reading is again necessary, according to which *khōra* neither abandons nor grounds *topos* so much as it indirectly indicates, from within a given situation, another mode of approaching place, viz. as unapproachable strictly on one's own terms. With this ironic approach, the 'necessity' of *khōra* can still be grasped as the difference between institution and the extra-institutional, but the extra-institutional cannot be thought in terms of a strict exclusion (viz. from the institution), and requires instead its interpretation as broadly excluded (viz. from the institution and *its* outside); the necessity of *khōra* in this sense is the necessity of a kind of excessive place. Evidently excessive place is a necessarily strange or estranged place – in Derrida's words, a *topos atopon* or a "place without place."[272] Such a place does not and can never "belong" to or participate in the difference it makes possible, and in this sense resists any and all appropriation within a given system of relations.

This double-reading of *topos* requires recognizing Heidegger's reading of *khōra* in terms of a strict negativity or lack, observing in another way that *khōra* is *also* operative as an excess:

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[271] ON 95
[272] ON 109

The notion of a *topos atopon* concerns a place that overflows and resists reduction to place; it follows that *khōra* is not really a "place" or *topos* in the Heideggerian sense, but genuinely a *space* in the most general sense we can afford to the word: Not simply "what we call space," but precisely a 'desubstantialized' space that in its extension *qua* exclusion is without any intrinsic ontological limits. Far from accounting for the *strict* exteriority of place – a place that by autoexclusion becomes a universal given in any closed system – we seek the account of a space so broadly excluded that it "situates […] the place of absolute exteriority."[273]

In order to account for *khōra* via topology, phenomenology must deploy the tactic of double-reading. On the one hand, the account of *khōra* is not possible without the "topology of being" that Heidegger describes, since there is no *sense* in the supposition that phenomenology genetically approach material origins except from a given place, and so on one's own terms; on the other hand, the method of topology must aim to expose a different kind of cleavage than the one Heidegger notes: not a difference between the facticity of what is there and the transcendental condition of being-there, but a condition internal to the very notion of being-there – the difference, in short, between a nonpresence that grounds everything and a nongivenness that brings every ground into question. A necessarily ironic method, the study of a *topos atopon* would perpetually raise what Nadir El-Bizri describes as the "question concerning the situational place of all those who by abjection are *un-placeable*."[274]

Section 3c. The Space of Resistance

"In this theatre of irony, where the scenes interlock in a series of receptacles without end and without bottom, how can one isolate a thesis or a theme mat could be attributed calmly to the "philosophy-of-Plato," indeed to *philosophy* as the Platonic thing? This would be to

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[273] AR 57

[274] "'Qui êtes-vous, χωρα': Receiving Plato's Timaeus," p. 490

misrecognize or violently deny the structure of the textual scene, to regard as resolved all the questions of topology in general."

-   ON 119

As anticipated above, we should note a clear sense in which, even as it delineates a crucial

phenomenological inquiry, the question that El-Bizri poses could just as easily be taken to

indicate that my question of the *method* of phenomenology seems inadequate in properly

accounting for *khōra*. As Michael Naas puts it in *Miracle and Machine*, Timaeus' attempt to

describe *khōra* at all is essentially bound by "the dream of a perfectly autonomous, self-enclosed

system with nothing outside it;"[275] in attempting to read *khōra* as precisely a radical 'outside' or

exteriority in the sense that Timaeus cannot admit, a crucial step becomes identifying at least in

outline the ironic approach whereby phenomenology both does and does not begin with the

immanence of the experiencing subject, recognizing that the account of a structure of givenness

always hinges on other structures that do not coincide, and imply other origins than the one I

seek.[276] Back to beginnings, no doubt, but whose?

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[275] p. 105. Cited hereinafter as MM

[276] Surely the question of *whether* phenomenology is coherent as a project also turns on this same concern – is phenomenology that does not think immanence as givenness still phenomenology? – but this is not a question that I fully can address here. I announce this inability not only with the recognitions of limited space, but also with the recognition that my aim in emphasizing the role of *khōra* has also been to emphasize the limits of discourse and language: To *say* what this phenomenology that I propose is on positive terms – for example, "phenomenology is the work of arriving at ironic expressions of nongivenness as are materially at stake in experience" – seems to be an entirely self-defeating description in the moment that this is taken strictly as a description, that is, unless it can be *read* with a certain irony. Above all this is because my description invokes a performative moment that exceeds what it gives in words (e.g. "nongivenness"); the description itself must therefore be seen as harboring a possibility for the emergence of another word or title with a double-gesture: "Perhaps" (this word that Derrida uses to express the inexpressibility of a future community in *Politics of Friendship* (e.g. p. 28-9)) there is something other than phenomenology, which we begin carrying out when the 'weak force' (R ix) of a nongivenness is recognized as at stake in the work of phenomenology; perhaps, on the other hand, we are not yet doing "phenomenology," which will have only begun with this attention to the nongivenness. This undecidability is itself the *aporia* that requires an ironic approach.

To emphasize both phenomenology and a nongivenness in the same breath in this sense returns us to the difficult question of transcendentality, viz. of whether, in the originary experience of the critical subject – not only that I am, and not only that there is a world that I see, but in Merleau-Ponty's words that "*there is a true vision*"[277] – we should locate a kind of knowledge or a kind of faith. In *Acts of Religion* Derrida takes precisely such a question on: On his terms in that text, the object of faith is "*revelation*," as an experience of *what* is revealed in a way that does not already lend itself to being exhaustively known or accounted for; the object of knowledge, on the other hand, is "*revealability*," as an experience of or access to the conditions under which revelation takes place.[278]

Between faith and knowledge, Derrida also identifies two phenomenological "temptations."[279] The first such temptation is the one Derrida identifies as Hegelian. What constitutes a methodological beginning for Hegel is never more than what is immediately given to us, and the resulting method consists in little more than a faithful attentiveness to the movement of revelation. If a systematicity of knowledge nevertheless remains possible by way of this method, it is because what is initially given will itself prove revelatory of the necessity of something else, with each thing given as a way unto the broader dialectical movement in which all of them partake. A history of revelation thus yields a history of the Idea, concluding with a revelation of the identity of the two, in order that the faithful subject claim this identity as their own. The Hegelian method in this sense consists in a certain "ontotheology" that, in its faithful attentiveness to what is revealed, eventually recognizes what negates or "destroys religion," and

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[277] VI 146

[278] AR 53. For the reading of this Derrida's text that follows, I am heavily indebted to Naas' discussion in *Miracle and Machine* (see esp. ch. 3, which focuses on a tension of revelation and revealability)

[279] AR 53

only in this way "determines absolute knowledge as the truth of religion," thus securing the

concept of a genuinely universal *revealability* after all.[280]

The second temptation is the one that Derrida identifies as "Heideggerian." As suggested,

there is a crucial extent to which Heidegger's appeal to the gift entails *an experience of*

revealability – an experience of the conditions of experience – from the outset. This is the reason

that, as I have argued, even the radical primordiality of the gift-structure still risks invoking a

"subject" as already a synthesis of giving/receiving – a giving-to-oneself of historical-material

origins as a kind of originary autoaffection – that in this way constitutes a universal condition of

revelation. As Derrida puts it, it would for Heidegger "be necessary that a 'revealability' be

allowed to reveal itself, with a light that would manifest (itself) more originality than all

revelation."[281]

Both the Hegelian and Heideggerian approaches are phenomenological to the extent that

they suggest a method according to which we can philosophically approach the nature of what is

already given. Moreover, both approaches seek some passage from revelation to revealability or

vice versa, in short the identity of both, even though they prioritize one aspect over the other. For

Hegel, who prioritizes revelation, the emphasis is inherently on what is present or given; he

therefore explicates a transition from revelation to revealability by showing that contradictions in

what is given must itself imply a broader notion of givenness. For Heidegger, who prioritizes

revealability, the emphasis is on the apparent nonpresence of such a condition in what is given,

but where this nonpresence can itself be revealed in a way that leads to an account of givenness.

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[280] AR 53
[281] AR 53

My aim in what remains, which I will explicate by appeal to a recent debate between Jeff Malpas

and Steven Crowell, is to show that these two phenomenological temptations can be interpreted

as two possible – but problematic – readings of a *topos atopon*, where the central question

concerns the ontological priority of *topos* as against the *atopon*.

Malpas, for his part, attributes a priority to *topos* in what he calls his "transcendental

topology": By beginning with the determinacy of where a thing is – that is, with the topological

limits according to which a thing can be there for us in a meaningful way – we would already

have a way unto the *conditions* for this appearance. Notably, this is almost exactly how

Heidegger at one point describes "*topos* as *chora*," viz. as a "way" or a "passage" "from beings

to being."[282] Insofar as *topos* is ontologically fundamental, then, to recognize the place of a thing

for Malpas does not involve any "philosophical *interpretation*" in light of which a subject asserts

themselves over against the placial context, but involves instead a kind of "responsive

attentiveness"[283] that supposes our immersion in just such a context, that is, in *topos* as a "larger

structure in which we ourselves as well as the things are already given together."[284] On Malpas'

account, then, to appear would be to "*take place*,"[285] yet what takes place thereby would be

nothing other than the structure of place itself. The "passage" from revelation to revealability is

on Malpas' account a passage through *topos*.

In his paper "Is Transcendental Topology Phenomenological?," Steven Crowell offers a

response to Malpas' topological method, suggesting that in order to understand the passage from

revelation to revealability on Malpas' terms, there is a necessary *atopon* or non-place. In part, the

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[282] WT 227-228
[283] HP 353, note 27
[284] Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology*, p. 182.
[285] HP 46

concern Crowell expresses with Malpas' approach is a lack of attention to the role of the one to whom everything is revealed – the issue I have also raised concerning the extent to which Heidegger seems to invoke without attending to an experiencing "subject." Thus, where for Malpas there is a necessary priority of the context of revelation, Crowell's question proposes a kind of counter-condition in light of which Malpas' purportedly "more primordial disclosure" can be described or experienced as such[286] – again, a question of whether the origin must itself be given in a particular or universal, archaic or eidetic place, and by extension of where the origin can be inscribed without invoking other origins, or something anoriginal. Crowell's argument is that Malpas' approach itself depends upon a capacity for differentiating between the revelation of a particular place and the "larger structure" that conditions and regulates this revelation – particularly since what *topos* seems to guarantee is an identity of the two. For Crowell it is not *topos per se* but an attentive "subject"[287] that must make a distinction between the universal and the singular place and as a result be more primordial than place itself – as it were, the *atopos* or non-place that in its ontological priority could take on the role of *khōrismos* as site of differentiating between beings and being, between singular and universal place, in a way that seems to ground the very notion of *topos*.

By setting these two approaches against one another, what I mean to draw out is that the methodological question – the essence of each "temptation" being to secure a systematic relation between revelation and revealability[288] – may not yield a definitive answer. More specifically,

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[286] See Crowell, p. 274. Cf. Malpas *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World,* p. 182. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006)

[287] Crowell, p. 273

[288] Though both Crowell and Malpas are thinking about Heidegger, I believe the same argument could be made for the difference that Naas identifies between Heidegger and Hegel: In short, both are thinkers of revealability after all; the question is only how history should be structured in such a way that revealability can be revealed. Whereas a revelation of revealability is for

the decision or dehiscence that would (let us say it loosely) take place in specifying the

conditions of revelation – whether a subject or a place, or whatever else – is not a decision that

can be rationally made, or in other words is a decision that history will neither prospectively

ground nor retrospectively justify. Thus the aim cannot be to adjudicate between these two

approaches, that is, to decisively settle upon the primordiality of the *topos* or the *atopon*; instead

I mean only to show this conflict concerning the "more primordial disclosure" is precisely what a

discussion of the space of *khōra* renders insoluble. For in truth both Malpas and Crowell make

the same critical assumption, namely that there is *something* that would guarantee the passage

from revelation to revealability or vice versa; this something operates as a promise of identity or

synthesis at the very moment, and in the very same space which could just as well require their

denial.

Whether one begins from the revelation or from a more originary thought of

'revealability,' it seems the temptation in both cases is to insinuate the necessity of a path or way

from the one to the other, without considering how this path – as a necessity or 'condition' for

experience in its own right – suggests an altogether other project, interruptive of the first. This is

not to suggest that phenomenology becomes impossible as it recognizes this moment; rather, the

exhortation is to think this 'other' origin in a way that sustains its difference and does not already

think it as the difference *of* or *between* these moments of revelation and revealability. In the

moment we allow this conflation of the space of inscription with the history that takes place

there, we seem already to guarantee the collapse of revelation and revealability with one and the

same structure of givenness. This collapse is, so to speak, bidirectional: How does the carpenter

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Hegel the end of history, for Heidegger it is only the moment or Event repeated again for the first
time – the end of history and the beginning of a new one, de- and re-temporalization.

know, for example, in departing from the hammer towards an apparently "larger structure" of the

workshop, and then again towards the greater context for this workplace – her working life, the

broader relations of her life as a whole, the world as a whole – that she has arrived at

revealability *per se* and not just another revealed thing? Or alternatively, how can the carpenter

not take each instance – everything that is revealed – as a form of revealability?

Phenomenologically speaking, how could one ever *not* presume to have gotten back to the things

themselves?

What I ultimately take from Derrida in reading the exchange between Crowell and

Malpas is that in neither case do we find what can in good faith be considered the "passage"

between the singular and the universal, revelation and revealability, beings and being. If passage

in this broad sense is without a guarantee/guarantor, it is because, wherever the passage to

revealability *in fact* takes place, it must at that moment and on those terms already consist in a

return to the revealed, that is, to the place where the movement began. So long as we do not think

and sustain the difference between these two moments – so long as the possibility of their

synthesis is not resisted in the broadest sense – passage *as such* will be that which never takes

place. Passage, then, is what neither *topos* nor *atopon* can in fact ground or guarantee, and which

can be indicated only indirectly or ironically, with the quasi-recognition that, demanding a *topos*

atopon, passage is an unthinkable thought.

An "unthinkable thought," we should insist, *as such*. But as I have argued

phenomenology must have a means of approaching this moment of indecision, since it is

precisely indicative of that material *resistance* of *khōra* in light of which it is possible – in light

of which there is a performative moment *of* decision in which a presumed origin is placed under

erasure and another origin is announced. This *aporia* of two origins, which is not a *passage* so

much as it is an event – a doubling of the origin from within the original movement – is what

phenomenology would have to attend to in order to grasp materiality in the sense that I have

presented here, namely as a radical nongivenness or broadly excluded 'third' that cannot be

rectified with present historical, institutional, and discursive structures.

In "Faith and Knowledge," Derrida does not so much attempt to amend or solve this

apparent *aporia*, so much as he radicalizes it. Like Heidegger, Derrida will designate a kind of

"*third place*" as a place (if "place" can be the appropriate name for such thing) "between"

revelation and revealability[289] – precisely, *khōra* as a "borderline place"[290] or a *mi-lieu*[291] insofar

as it cannot be said to *belong* to one side or another. Unlike Heidegger, however, Derrida will

insist that this place is not somehow on the "way" from one originary place to another (from

beings to being or vice-versa; from the revealed to revealability or vice-versa). Instead, and

before the origin or beginning is in any sense "given" or "revealed," what *khōra* makes possible

is a certain "respect for the singular indecision," hence an "oscillation" or "reticence (epoché or

Verhaltenheit)" between revelation and revealability, or between the event and the conditions for

the possibility of the event.[292] It is in this moment of *critical indecision* that a difference *of*

origins can indicated, if not directly accounted for or exhausted. This moment of indecision,

which is not a 'moment' in the dialectical sense even as it remains a form of phenomenological

work – does not reveal anything, or better reveals something in order to indirectly indicate what

cannot be revealed, but which is nevertheless operative in this moment of indecision.

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[289] AR 55
[290] AR 58
[291] ON 116. As David Wood notes, the term "*mi-lieu*" – in addition to the literal translation of the word as "middle" – involves a play that is also suggestive of a "half-way place," or even "something that is only half place."
[292] AR 59

This work of indecision is what I have attempted to develop here as an ironic method for phenomenology in its approach to materiality as nongivenness, that is, as a necessity for the historic event of a 'shift' between structures of givenness, but which can never itself be grasped as a structure of givenness as a result. Evidently phenomenology must deploy a structure of givenness in order to approach materiality in this sense; my claim is that phenomenology must here deploy this ontological frame and historical structure, as it were facetiously and with the intention – this is an ironic choice of words, for example – of indirectly indicating what cannot be exhaustively accounted for on the terms thus brought to bear on a given situation. The attempt to preserve the possibility of decision would therefore be an attempt to admit a certain madness within the bounds of phenomenological method. Phenomenology – like any institution – cannot account for the decision it makes in deciding what is primary: There is no sweeping strategy that can explain the necessity of decision as the necessity of becoming *per se*, so that the question of origin or genesis can never be 'done with' on phenomenological terms. Yet decision – be it a decision like the demiurge's to take being as a model, a decision like Socrates' to let Timaeus speak, or a decision like my own in deploying the words "*khōra*" and "nongivenness" – implies an apparent impossibility even as it retains a certain *sense* that phenomenology in its search of origins is uniquely attuned to. There is no strategy, then, but there remains a set of tactics that can at least indicate the crucial stakes of the phenomenological plan as a concern with origin, alterity, and in general the material conditions of change.

What I present in this sense as the *methodological tactics* of irony was already at stake in the deployment of double-reading throughout this chapter. The double-reading begins with a given classification, category, place, etc. It then follows classical phenomenology in taking as little for granted as possible, as it were 'suspending' the given in order to give an account of its

manner of givenness. In seeking an origin, however, the double-reading also recognizes that a

simple answer to the question of origin will be misleading, which is to say strictly exclusionary

of some other answer or approach. At this point, however, the double-reading does not strictly

speaking 'include' what has been excluded; rather, it goes back over the first explanation in order

to identify what *in that explanation* is strictly exclusive of others – the conditions, so to speak, of

exclusion, or of impossibility. By holding a generative condition in tension with what is

generated, the double-reading resists the apparent necessity to make a choice, demonstrating only

that no rational grounds for this choice is available by appeal to what has so far been given.

Phenomenological attention can thus be paid to what is strictly excluded without simply

prioritizing a given structure or calling for another; moreover, the operations of what is broadly

excluded can at least be indicated as at stake. What we could call a partial or quasi-recognition of

materiality as ontological resistance thus becomes possible, and doing so furthermore supplies

the conditions for phenomenology to more properly discuss "those who by abjection are *un-*

placeable."[293]

     The double-reading in this sense has also helped me to emphasize a performative moment

in the apparently constative (descriptive-explanatory) work of phenomenology. As I have tried to

show, one cannot 'speak to' a *topos atopon* directly, as classical phenomenology often seems

intent on doing; rather, one can at most announce the limits of discourse. Yet the notion of *khōra*

– specifically the historical materiality it entails – indicates why such an announcement is not

merely a Wittgensteinian 'game.' Rather, by *announcing* what cannot be said, a performative

opening of discursive limits is enacted since such an announcement is not 'given' either in the

sense of revelation nor as revealability; the nongivenness of a space of indecision, *khōra*, is

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[293] El-Bizri, Nadir. "'Qui êtes-vous, χωρα': Receiving Plato's *Timaeus*," p. 490.

therefore implicated in the announcement and, read properly, indirectly indicated there, if only in the mode of a "perhaps," a "possibilization of the impossible possible."[294] Attention to this sort of ironic announcement – specifically this performativity as itself decision or dehiscence that comes cloaked in the form of a descriptive claim – is a manner in which phenomenology by extension can attend to limits of discourse as already a function of differences within its own discourse. The ironic announcement thus anticipates other ways of speaking, and only in this way indicates what it might mean to "[say] everything, in every way." That irony is necessary here suggests how a public institution can be generated only by the admission of its inaccessibility as such, such that a certain element of privacy or secret also invades every institution as such.

Yet in spite of the manner in which it is sometimes presented by Derrida, *khōra* is not a secret. As a nongivenness it is always operative as a force of disruption, and even if we cannot exhaustively account for it, we can deploy it. Thus the methodological tactics of an ironic approach follow from the necessity that *khōra* names, specifically a necessity of becoming and change that cannot be grasped in terms of a structure of givenness, but which in the face of a structure 'givenness' is itself broadly excluded from the scope of a 'topology of being,' or alternatively from the scope of a genetic analysis that imagines only a single origin. Since *khōra* at the same time is nothing but the material conditions for philosophy as such, and for phenomenology to speak of *khōra* – that is, of the necessity of change – requires that it drop certain pretenses of systematic closure without also abandoning ideals of rigorous philosophical critique. It is in other words because *khōra* is radically inappropriable within the strict limits of philosophical discourse that it provides the material conditions of critique; the challenge is to see

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[294] PF 29

how these conditions are necessarily immanent to the various institutions of philosophy, and to

show in each case how *khōra is there* precisely as that which, in Michael Naas' words, "resists

philosophy from within."[295]

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[295] MM 49

Chapter Three: Resistance in Communication with the Other

"On close consideration, Marxism is not just any hypothesis that might be replaced tomorrow by some other. It is the simple statement of those conditions without which there would be neither any humanism, in the sense of a mutual relation between men, nor any rationality in history. In this sense Marxism is not a philosophy of history; it is *the* philosophy of history and to renounce it is to dig the grave of Reason in history. After that there remain only dreams or adventures."
-   Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror*, p. 153

"History eliminates the irrational; but the rational remains to be created and imagined […]. A historical solution of the human problem, an end of history, could be conceived only if humanity were a thing to be known – if, in it, knowledge were able to exhaust being and come to a state that really contained all that humanity had been and all that it could ever be. Since, on the contrary, in the density of social reality each decision brings unexpected consequences, and since, moreover, man responds to these surprises by inventions which transform the problem, there is no situation without hope; but there is no choice which terminates these deviations or which can exhaust men's inventive power and put an end to history. There are only advances."
-   Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures of the Dialectic*, p. 22-23

Merleau-Ponty's thinking of materiality has, as I have argued, taken phenomenology to its limits

in its attempt to account for the conditions of our present situation. Between the notion of the

body proper in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, and that of the flesh in *The Visible and the*

Invisible, however, we should not see a break or turn, since the essential concern in both cases is

the same: What Merleau-Ponty seeks is a genetic account of the historical developments in light

of which we are able to make sense of a given material-historical situation. The difference

between the two texts and their conceptions of materiality is not a difference in aims but rather in

the methods used to approach materiality phenomenologically: In the *Phenomenology* a 'direct'

approach is deployed whereby a critical subject may approach a pre-personal historical

constitution – the body proper – and recognize it as their own; in the *The Visible and the*

Invisible, however, the notion of a pre-personal constitution is troubled by the introduction of an

'unconstitutable' materiality – what Merleau-Ponty calls the flesh – which as a result can only be

approached or expressed 'indirectly' by a critical subject's appeal to the limits of their own

material-historical frame of reference, hence as a framework that does not exhaust the broader

materiality and historicity of which it is an expression.

Whether we adopt the direct or indirect approach, however, we can recognize a common

motivation in the appeal to the thinking of materiality as fundamentally shaping history – a

motivation that I will in this chapter argue is shared with Marx and several of his commentators.

In particular, the appeal to materiality seeks a certain *sense* of history as always already a field of

relations that precedes the emergence of any individual beings there – beings who emerge, as a

result, and in their individuality, as always already engaged in relations with others. By

appealing to the historical primacy of materiality as this field of pre-personal relations, then, a

concordant aim is the unveiling of a "primacy of the political"[296] as comprehensive of even the

most basic relations and interactions. By emphasizing prepersonal engagement, a primacy of the

political does not rule out the risk of alienation, particularly given the development of

prepersonal relations into higher and more complex levels of intersubjective engagement; rather,

and in response to alienation, the appeal to a primacy of the political requires a critical return to

origins, hence a reappropriation of the material conditions of a given historical situation on new

terms, viz. of a possibility for intersubjective relations initially given only in latency, and still

requiring a more complete expression. In this way the genetic method of phenomenology,

particularly once grasped via Merleau-Ponty's notion of 'radical reflection,'[297] seems to overlap

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[296] I owe this term to Fóti who in her paper "Nature, Art, and the Primacy of the Political: Reading Taminiaux with Merleau-Ponty**,"** contained in a volume edited by Fóti dedicated more generally to similar concerns, *Phenomenology and the Primacy of the Political*. I return explicitly to Fóti's discussion of the notion in section 3b below.
[297] PhP lxxviii. "[…] philosophy is an ever-renewed experiment of its own beginning, that it consists entirely in describing this beginning, and finally, that radical reflection is conscious of its own dependence on an unreflected life that is its initial, constant, and final situation."

with the notion of a primacy of the political as borne out in more explicitly political materialist approaches.

In making this analogy between the critical effort of genetic phenomenology and the materialist approach to a primacy of the political, however, I should immediately establish two points of clarification.

First, phenomenology is not politics – not necessarily, in any case, and even if phenomenology has something to teach us about intersubjectivity in political relations. The principal difference concerns the approach to critique, which in phenomenology is a principally intellectual and discursive effort, and in politics is principally a matter of action. That being said, as an argument that is anticipated by later work in this chapter, and at stake throughout chapter four, I will suggest that the distinction between critical discourse and critical action is perhaps not as strong as it might seem, and that there is at least a certain meeting or cooperation between the two efforts, since as I will eventually consider they appear to collide in the Habermasian notion of discursive action. As I will argue, Merleau-Ponty's later thinking yields a unique contribution to the Habermasian approach that follows from developments in Merleau-Ponty's own political thinking as we find it in *Adventures of the Dialectic*. In that text, Merleau-Ponty is writing in response to problems that he has located in his early thinking as expressed in *Humanism and Terror* – but in the genealogy of materialism that Merleau-Ponty traces in *Adventures*, we can also recognize how he considers some of his own problems to be at stake in aspects of Marx's and Lukács' political thinking. I do not propose to offer an exhaustive account of the relations between each of these thinkers; rather, in what follows I track a thread of the broader genealogy of Marxian materialism that Merleau-Ponty himself develops in *Adventures of*

the Dialectic, with the aim of drawing out the specific contribution to this broader discussion that I take from Merleau-Ponty's later thinking.

Second, the interpretation of materialism in terms of a critical return to origins returns us to the question of method. The question, in short, is whether the critical approach to material origins can be 'direct,' or whether it must be 'indirect.' As I will show, this issue ultimately aligns with the first, as it turns on the relation between action and discourse in critique. A 'direct' return to pre-personal material conditions can perhaps be grasped as a return to relations that precede and ground language, with the political implication that whereas discourse can be essentially misleading, action – however ambiguous its sense prior to reflection – is the only true means of effecting historical change. Merleau-Ponty in *Humanism and Terror* struggles with the use of violence in revolutionary action on precisely these grounds – that violence is perhaps as necessary in retrieving a more elementary "human bond" as it is ambiguous in its political valence (viz. where the question of whether the action was *truly* revolutionary is still to be settled). The difficulty of an 'indirect' approach, by contrast, is precisely that it does not presuppose the nature of a single, common origin to which it must return, proposing a critical approach only from within present limits, which of course include the limitations of language on a critical genealogy. An indirect approach in this sense is already anticipated, if not fully developed in *Adventures of the Dialectic*, where we can locate a turn away from the violence of revolutionary action, and towards a thinking of political action in terms of discourse.

An "indirect" mode of effecting historical change is therefore what this chapter proposes. As I argued in chapter one, the 'indirect' account requires attention to the limits of the scope of the genetic account that a critical subject can offer from within the confines of their own historical situation as a limited frame of reference: Since a historical origin is not a moment of

synthesis over the course of a dialectical process of historical development of the body proper, but rather an *écart* or divergence within the flesh, the sense of the origin is a sense that is sustained in difference. Two implications follow: First, this origin as *écart* is not simply my 'own,' and we should have to investigate the implications that I share this origin with others; second, I cannot speak to this origin as *écart* strictly on my own terms, and we should similarly have to investigate what it means to be with others.

In order to think this indirect mode of effecting historical change, which does not ultimately align with most traditional interpretations of Marx – including, as we will see, the readings of Lukács, Honneth, and Habermas – I provisionally outline a broader thinking of materialism that reflects the methodological shift I locate in Merleau-Ponty's thinking. Terminologically, then, what I will call a *synthetic dialectical* materialism is one that elaborates a 'direct' approach and reappropriation of material conditions; what I will develop in terms of a *hyperdialectical* materialism is one that elaborates an 'indirect' approach of material conditions, though this will not prove to be a 'reappropriation' strictly speaking.

My focus on thinking an indirect mode of effecting change, hence in developing a hyperdialectical materialism, suggests one final organizational point. In particular, and while the structure of this chapter takes its impetus from *Adventures*, the conclusion and ultimate position takes its impetus from *The Visible and the Invisible*. This late, and unfinished work does not explicitly elaborate a political position, and my contribution here is in part to develop a materialism of which we can catch only a few glimpses in that text. In the working notes, for example, and without elaboration, we find this difficult thought:

"Worked-over-matter—men = *chiasm*"[298]

A crucial point expressed in this otherwise cryptic note concerns the place and role that

humanity has to play in history, as if nothing else this chiasm implies a history of which we are

not the sole origin, and where an account of materiality cannot be accomplished solely on our

own terms. The need for an indirect approach to material origins stems from this essential point:

that we ourselves are a product of the history we mean to critically approach. The

methodological shift between a direct and indirect approach thus requires a shift away from the

thinking of materialism as a humanism, and towards the hyperdialectical thinking the seeks a

primacy of the political in relations that precede ourselves and what we have produced. Let me

briefly establish in greater detail how I intend to establish this insight on my own terms.

In section one I lay out Merleau-Ponty's early "existentialist interpretation" of dialectical

materialism as it is announced in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, showing this materialism

hinges on the notion of an embodied intersubjectivity that assumes humanity at its origin. The

central question concerns the possibility of and response to reification: Appealing both to

Lukács' materialist account and to Honneth's social-theoretical model drawn from

developmental psychology, I consider how Merleau-Ponty's synthetic-dialectical notion of the

human body proper in the *Phenomenology* yields a plausible phenomenological account of the

experience of reification that suggests a compromise between these two thinkers: Whereas

Lukács' model appears 'totalizing,' and whereas Honneth's will strike as 'moralizing,' I show

how Merleau-Ponty's genetic account of an intersubjective body proper allows for a usefully

developmentally-oriented model of intersubjectivity that is nevertheless strongly materialist. The

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[298] VI 275 (from the working notes)

question of political resistance is initially anticipated here by considering possible responses to the experience of reification: As I argue, the phenomenological *epochē,* once grasped in terms of a Merleau-Pontian materialism, can also be seen as having political valence in work of embodied subjects collectively producing a "rupture" with the lived world in order to better understand apparently alienated material-historical forces and institutions as its body proper.

The focus on the body proper as a necessarily humanist model leads, in section two, to considerations of the anthropocentrism of Merleau-Ponty's early approach. Here I focus largely on Merleau-Ponty's own considerations of the question of violence in revolution at it is taken up both in *Humanism and Terror*, as well as *Adventures of the Dialectic*; between these two texts, I identify a shift in Merleau-Ponty's thinking of the work of bringing about political change as a shift from the emphasis on revolutionary violence towards a social-democratic work of critical communication.

In section three, I provisionally develop the notion of a hyper-dialectical materialism as broader materialist framework for the critical role of communication as developed in section two. The language and concept of hyperdialectics allows for a more systematic expression of the 'indirect' method of political action I propose, and which I find at stake in the turn to communication as an elicitation of the thinking and language of others; implicitly, the essential admission of an indirect method of critical action is the insufficiency of one's own terms in recognizing common historical origins, and effecting historical change. The aim in this sense is twofold: to show how a hyperdialectical materialism displaces humanity from the crux of historical change, while nevertheless requiring a careful and critical intersubjective work on our part – communication as a work of resistance, then, if not of revolution.

Section One: The Hierarchy of Humanism and its Origins

In chapter one, I discussed at length an apparent hierarchy of the body proper as a structure of phenomenological givenness. In naïve experience, an embodied subject is confronted with itself as a part of a foreign world, viz. with a more objective, 'actual' body in an apparently transcendent world. Plumbing the material depths of this potentially alienating experience of the transcendence of one's own body, however, we were able to find in every case a "more secret act"[299] that helps to explain this experience: First, the work of a 'lived' body whose habits and motor-intentions are the condition of discovering this 'actual' world, and ultimately the work of a "body proper" (*corps propre*) whose 'primordial habit' suggests the pre-personal constitution of this relation as a whole. Operative as this primordial 'secret act,' however, the materiality of the body proper so little puts into question or problematizes the structure of givenness that it constitutes, that Merleau-Ponty seems in *Phenomenology* rather to affirm the essential insight that he takes from Husserl, and announces in the Preface – that "my existence does not come from my antecedents, nor from my physical and social surroundings," and that, "rather, I am the absolute source."[300]

What must be demonstrated in this section is how Merleau-Ponty's approach the *Phenomenology* already suggests a 'primacy of the political,' and that early his reading of materiality as a negative materiality has demonstrable political consequences that can be used to analyze and re-frame the materialist thinking of Marx and Lukács. The central aim of this section is therefore to demonstrate a basic difficulty at stake in the decision to approach materiality as a

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[299] PhP 294/333
[300] PhP lxxii/9

negativity – a difficulty, I argue, that goes hand in hand with the thinking of materialism as a humanism.

Broadly put, the appeal to a human body proper as a negative materiality returns us on different terms to the question raised in the overall introduction, concerning Husserl's invocation of a "*telos* of […] humanity" towards which we progress "in concealment."[301] This *telos*, we can anticipate, is now to be framed in terms of the materiality of the body rather than an ideality of transcendental consciousness, with at least one crucial reversal: Where a human *telos* is posited in terms of materiality, what appears to be threatened is the critical enterprise as an enterprise of critical *thinking* since, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, it seems now that "to return to the things themselves is to return to this world prior to knowledge."[302] Nevertheless, everything seems to hinge on the possibility of this return to the world, as it is there first of all where a critical human community finds its genetic origin and material conditions.

It is in terms of this basic tension whereby materiality can at once be the source and obfuscation of a historical *telos*, that I will read Merleau-Ponty's early materialism as a humanism. The appeal to a humanism, I will argue, appears on the one hand to rescue the possibility of critical discourse in spite of the limitations of materiality on critique as a project aimed at self-knowledge: Between the origin and *telos* of humanity – between us and ourselves – we find the threat of alienating political and economic institutions that hide rather than reveal their historical-material constitution in originarily human relations. We can already anticipate a *negative* reading of materiality in this thinking of political institutions: In the relevant institutions, materiality is operative as an absence or lack that nevertheless motivates historical

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[301] CE 275. See introduction, p. xx and xx.
[302] PhP lxxii/9

processes; thus a material world 'prior to knowledge' is to be grasped as the genetic impetus for the critical agents who will attempt a 'return to origins' in terms of knowledge as a critical reappropriation of alienated materiality. But this is just to say that the return to human origins *is* the human *telos,* and that the resulting circular or cyclical structure of human history turns on a negative reading of materiality.

This negative reading of materiality, and the resulting humanist thinking of history, neither begins nor ends with Merleau-Ponty's thinking, and before drawing any consequences from Merleau-Ponty's approach, we will have to recognize how this approach opens onto a broader political discourse to be developed via Marx's humanist materialism, and the resulting difficulties of effecting historical change. There are two points to be established in this vein.

First, it has to be shown how a negative materiality yields a synthetic-dialectical structure for inter-human relations from the 'ground up.' Engaging with Honneth in particular, I build on his considerations of the development-psychological model of 'levels' of intersubjectivity, showing how Merleau-Ponty's own thinking of the body as intersubjective yields a similar account, but with a useful corrective as regards a critical approach to the 'origin' of this structure. That is, where Honneth's method is largely empirical and tends towards an account of a human psyche in primary relations, I argue that a phenomenological-critical method allows for a reading of a 'primacy of the political' in human engagements that is more attentive to the radical role of the body.

Second, it has to be shown that a negative materiality is precisely the critical element in the thinking of reification that both Lukács and Honneth deal with. As we will see, Honneth, develops a response to reification by emphasizing the primacy of a recognitive structure of intersubjectivity – a recognition that precedes cognition – which therefore itself acts as a

corrective to reification as a feature unique to cognition. As I argue, however, reification is more deeply bound to the materiality of the body proper, and in this way is intrinsically intertwined with the relation of an embodied subject's productive relation with embodied others in a shared world. A crucial questioning following from this apparent radicality of the possibility of alienation will therefore concern the development of a response to the problem that does not rely on the seemingly normative thinking of a primary intersubjectivity as already corrective for higher and more complex intersubjective institutions.

This 'response' is ultimately the critical point to develop, not only in this section but throughout the chapter. To anticipate, I will identify both a 'direct' and 'indirect' approach to a situation of alienation, and to the prospect of modifying material conditions. This and the following section identify only a direct approach; as we will see this approach appears to risk a prefiguring affirmation of an anthropocentric hierarchy of political institutions. The intersubjectively bound agents of 'direct' approach grasp or pre-grasp themselves at the origin of the historical movement they takes up as apparently alien, and for this reason proceed towards the production of a new historical situation under a shroud of ambiguity; since, however, these agents nevertheless retain a certain sense or intuition, I will argue a presumption of themselves at the origin of this process from the outset, the initial ambiguity is experienced as a kind of promise of genuine self-knowledge. The direct approach will therefore have to confront the contradiction of an intersubjective body that may be deeply at odds with itself, to the point of apparently requiring violence. An 'indirect' method for the modification of material conditions, to be developed in section three, drops the presumption of an anthropocentric hierarchy of historical institutions; in so doing, it makes room for a renewed role for critical discourse as a viable method for effecting genuine historical change. At the same time, discourse on these terms

cannot proceed with an aim of apodictic self-knowledge, but rather must make room for others,

including non-human others, in the work of effecting historical change.

Section 1a. Materialism as Humanism: Three Criteria

"Such is this idea of the individual incarnate and (through incarnation) given to himself but also
to others – incomparable yet stripped of his congenital secret and faced with his *fellows*."
-    Merleau-Ponty, "Man and Adversity," in *Signs*

In Merleau-Ponty's thinking of a pre-personal body proper in terms of a historical materiality,

we can locate a unique thinking of intersubjectivity that Merleau-Ponty shares with Marx. For

Merleau-Ponty, it is the body first of all which carries out an "act of transcendence by which the

subject opens up to the natural world,"[303] so that the materiality of the body is in the first place a

condition for the possibility of being with others in the world. The body, furthermore, is a

condition that the world thus given is not necessarily alienating for the one who approaches it:

As I have emphasized in chapter one, the fact that we develop certain bodily habits – for

example, learning to use a cane to compensate for damage to a knee – is evidence that the act of

opening oneself up to the world is also a way of inhabiting that world, reincorporating the

alterity it presents back into my own being.[304] Two points follow.

First, the body inhabits the world, but has a privileged place there. As Merleau-Ponty's

terminology suggests – *corps propre* as "one's own body" – the relation between the embodied

subject and the material world is possible because there is something of this apparent alterity that

is nevertheless my own. The relation between the subject and the world is thus a dynamic and

cyclical process by which the world imposes material limitations on the embodied subject, to

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[303] PhP 156/191
[304] PhP 179. "Habit expresses the power we have of dilating our being in the world, or of altering
our existence through incorporating new instruments."

which the subject then responds via the body by 'working over' the materiality of the world in new and unforeseen ways, thus 'producing' further material limitations.[305] The body in this sense is a "place of […] appropriation"[306] at which the synthesis of self and world, self and other, is actively and continuously established. The body proper in this sense takes on the role of a constituting transcendental consciousness.

Second, the body proper in this constituting capacity is still operative 'pre-personally,' hence prior to the emergence of the conscious subject that will explicitly recognize this materiality its own. The proprietary structure of the body in this sense helps me to engage with the world and with others before I *know* these others, or indeed before I consciously grasp myself; the "tacit *cogito*" of the body proper in this sense establishes a basic relation between human individuals at the most basic levels of existence. Implicitly, we can locate in the materiality of the body proper a structure of intersubjectivity. Thus a critical thinking of materiality as we find it in the *Phenomenology* literally requires attention to historical processes by which an already-constituted intersubjectivity or community of embodied human individuals can become self-conscious of itself as such.

In this context, and despite the lack of any explicit political commentary to this point in the text, an extended footnote at the end of chapter five on 'the existential interpretation of dialectical materialism' should not seem out of place.[307] Quoting from that note:

> Historical materialism consists just as much in rendering economics historical as it does in rendering history economic. The economics upon which it bases history is not, as in classical science, a closed cycle of objective phenomena, but rather a confrontation between productive forces and forms of production that only reach

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[305] This mode of production is expressed by Merleau-Ponty when he claims "all that we are, we are on the basis of a factual situation that we make our own" (PhP 179)

[306] PhP 179

[307] For the footnote, see PhP 174-178.

completion when the productive forces emerge from their anonymity, become self-conscious, and thereby become capable of articulating the future.[308]

The work of rendering economics 'historical' suggests the essential reversal of critical understanding called for by Merleau-Ponty's reading of materiality: A materialist reading requires that a return to the things themselves is always a return to origins, such that the truth complex institutions in the world can only be properly recognized once they are grasped as intersubjective sites in which more originary relations are being borne out at a higher level.

Insofar as the materiality of the body is the essential condition of such relations, the difficulty of critical analysis can already be anticipated on these materialist terms. This difficulty concerns the opacity of materiality, which must somehow be seen not to conflict with the attempt of grasping intersubjective relations in terms of their material origins: If the body is a 'place of appropriation,' the process of appropriation begins before we are aware of it; nevertheless, this same process is precisely what must be revealed in order to achieve a fully developed self-consciousness, only at which point is the *telos* of an apodictic self-knowledge fulfilled. Thus the capacity to 'articulate a future' is bound to this anonymous and shared past; a materialism built on these premises must therefore attend to history by getting *underneath* its apparent manifestations. In Merleau-Ponty's own words, again from the extended footnote in the

Phenomenology:

> "'Historical materialism,' in the works it inspired, is often nothing other than a concrete understanding of history that takes into account, beyond its manifest content (such as official relations between "citizens" in a democracy), its latent content, that is, the inter-human relations such as they are actually established in concrete life."[309]

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[308] PhP 175
[309] PhP 210

A distinction between the 'official' and 'concrete' relations between humans becomes crucial since there is no obvious identity between the two, with the result that these formal institutions can emerge as alienating forces apparently indifferent to the 'primacy' of a more originarily established human community. As we will see in the following subsection, the distinction is not between two independent political forces, but rather between two 'levels' of the same political structure, with 'higher' levels emerging from the lower levels as a product of these earlier relations. In this sense, we can anticipate that humanist materialism does not require a distinction between 'inter-human' and 'inter-subjective;' rather, it is in part the work of such a materialism to grasp the seemingly abstract notion of intersubjectivity in terms of the human first of all.

Before laying out this hierarchy of human relations, let us briefly take a moment to more explicitly connect Merleau-Ponty's account of materialism as it appears in the *Phenomenology* to Marx's thinking; I suggest three point of connection in the form of three criteria for the interpretation of materialism as a humanism.

The first, and most general criterion can be drawn simply by observing Marx's own appeal to the work of humanity as the driving force of historical development. In *The German Ideology*, for example, Marx offers his own rejection of the tendency of classical economics to understand relations of production as "naturally evolved premises" when for him they are "the creations of hitherto existing men."[310] That there is no objective world without the work and development of humanity is in this sense essential for both thinkers.

Second, and as a result, humans are not to be understood as atomic individuals that could be grasped apart from their worldly projects and relations to one another. Marx emphasizes a

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[310] GI 89

historically primary intersubjectivity when he points out in his "Introduction to the Critique of

Political Economy" that "the further back we go into history, the more the individual and,

therefore, the producing individual seems to depend on and constitute a part of a larger

whole,"[311] which is to say a human society or community in some form.

Third, a political life cannot be grasped as the result of objective forces whose operation

is conceived by way of abstract scientific, economic, and sociological concepts. Rather, such

"objective" concepts are themselves to be seen as abstractions which from the outset imply – but

give only a limited or "one-sided" representation of – "the existence of certain types of family,

clan, or state, etc.," as "an already given concrete and living aggregate."[312]

Section 1b. The Ontogenesis of the Subject; the Hierarchy of Intersubjectivity

"Hitherto men have always formed wrong ideas about themselves, about what they are and what
they ought to be. They have arranged their relations according to their ideas of God, of normal
man, etc. The products of their brains have got out of their hands. They, the creators, have bowed
down before their creations. Let us liberate them from the chimeras, the ideas, dogmas,
imaginary beings under the yoke of which they are pining away. Let us revolt against this rule of
concepts."
   -   Marx, *The German Ideology*, p. 29

Having argued that Merleau-Ponty supplies a materialist model for a historically primary

intersubjectivity, two interrelated tasks follow. First – and given that what I have termed an

"intersubjectivity" implies a set of human relations that precede the emergence of an individual

human subject – I have to further elaborate the nature of the 'subject' that follows, and to show

why this subject is political in the manner of a 'primacy' of the political. Second, I have to show

how my accounts of this intersubjectivity, as well as of this political subject, remain 'materialist.'

In order to accomplish the first task, I will appeal to Axel Honneth's distinction between a

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[311] GI 2
[312] GI 16

primary and a secondary intersubjectivity, showing that Honneth's distinction yields, with some modification, a viable model for elaborating on political terms the 'levels' of inter-human relations that Merleau-Ponty's position has suggested. The need still to modify Honneth's model turn on the fact that in *The Struggle for Recognition* and *Reification*, where Honneth is explicitly combatting an idealist reading both of Hegel and of Marx, Honneth nevertheless does not offer a materialistic account. In order to establish a properly materialist account of a primary and secondary intersubjectivity, then, I refer Honneth's thinking to Merleau-Ponty's account of the body. The essential difference between Honneth's explication of an originary intersubjectivity and Merleau-Ponty's, as I will show, turns on the type of *work* that is taken to be constitutive of a collective human endeavour.

(i)   The Primacy of the Ethical: Honneth and the work of Recognition

In *Reification*, Honneth takes Lukács' concept of reification in order to give a renewed reading Honneth considers more relevant to present lived conditions, which are no longer those of Lukács – the "German-speaking world of the 1920s and 1930s,"[313] in which Lukács produced *History and Class Consciousness* and its essay on reification. In our society and our time, Honneth argues, Lukács' concept has found renewed usage – in fiction, social studies, and ethics, for example.[314] Invoking Nussbaum's application, however, Honneth questions what he sees there as a "decidedly normative sense" for the notion of reification[315] – a question of the right or

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[313] R 17

[314] R pp. 18

[315] R 19, cf. 26. Honneth is referring to Nussbaum's usage of the notion of 'objectification' as found in "Objectification," which on Honneth's reading suggests an ethical attitude of individuals towards others, and so sidesteps Lukács' development of reification as a systematic and structural social phenomenon, rather than a function of the actions of individuals (R 26; for

wrong sort of act that an individual agent could make – that seems to stray from Lukács' concern with a more fundamental "human praxis"[316] or "intersubjective agency."[317]

The notion of reification, as we find it in *History and Class Consciousness*, concerns an 'objectification' or commodification in Marx's sense of this precisely fundamental human praxis or intersubjective agency; it denotes a phenomenon whereby a "relation between people takes on the character of a thing."[318] For Lukács the commodified 'relation' is that of a human society, and the phenomenon of reification is therefore systematic, concerning a historical moment when the commodity is "constitutive of that society," and where for such a moment it would be necessary for "the commodity structure to penetrate society in all its aspects and to remould it in its own image."[319]

How strongly should we take Lukács' claim, which even grammatically places the material structure of the commodity in the place of the constituting subject, and human society in that of the object? Even if Merleau-Ponty was writing some twenty years after the publication of *History and Class Consciousness*, and in France, we can sense something of Lukács' words in Merleau-Ponty's observation that materialism "renders economics historical" as much as the inverse, as Lukács is already prepared to grasp reification in terms of an event and the constitution of a basic human intersubjectivity. Honneth, for his part, is unwilling to go so far as to allow the apparently "totalizing" implications of Lukács' concept, namely the notion that an economic process could on its own "engender[ ] a permanent change, or even a total disruption"

Nussubaum's approach to objectification as implying various objectifying attitudes, not all of which are morally problematic, see "Objectification," p. 257)

[316] R 21
[317] R 22
[318] HCC 83
[319] HCC 85

of human relations.[320] I believe Honneth is right to be wary of a paradox at work in Lukács'

thinking, which does in a way seeming 'totalizing,' and I will return to the point below with

Merleau-Ponty's help. Before directly addressing this problem, however, let us very briefly

summarize Honneth's own attempt to avoid the problem.

Honneth's re-reading of Lukács is carried out on the basis of Honneth's earlier, and as it

were deflationary account of Hegelian recognition. In *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth's

reading of recognition begins with a 'naturalization' of the Hegelian concept via Mead's work in

social psychology as a means to develop a "non-speculative"[321] reading of the Hegelian elements

and stages of ethical life; Honneth's aim in this sense is to translate "Hegel's theory of

intersubjectivity into a post-metaphysical language."[322] As the turn to Mead suggests, and as is

further established in conversation with psychoanalysts such as Freud and Winnicott, Honneth's

method turns on providing an ontogenetic account for the emergence of the critical subject by

appeal to the structure of intersubjective relationships in which any individual has always-

already been caught up; to be 'recognized' on Honneth's terms is to emerge with a clear identity

from out of these early and constituting engagements.

In *Reification*, then, Honneth transplants and builds upon this development of the notion

of recognition as constitutive of the subject, appealing to a primary intersubjectivity that

precedes the conscious subject properly speaking. Engaging not only with Mead and other

accounts in development theory, Honneth also invokes thinkers such as Dewey and Heidegger in

order to establish a basic mode of human engagement that establishes "intersubjective emotional

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[320] R 28, cf. R 76
[321] *Struggle,* p. 71
[322] *Struggle*, p. 70

conditions"[323] for the emergence of a conscious subject; where a recognitive, empathetic stance

towards others is in this sense a principal condition for the emergence of the critical subject as

such, the essential claim is that "in ontogenesis […] recognition must precede cognition."[324] But

'cognition' in this sense is not only the work of a pre-constituted or even atomistically self-

constituting subject; the later work of cognition is therefore itself intersubjectively constituted by

the earlier stage of emotional and empathetic work as an originary 'struggle' for recognition.

While there is a great deal to say about Honneth's wide-ranging discussion in *Reification*,

as well as the original address of Hegel in *Recognition*, the division of intersubjective

engagement into (at least) two "stages" is the pivotal point for my purposes,[325] allowing us not

only to grasp his rejoinder to Lukács, but also leads us back to the discussion of the body and its

constituting role for Merleau-Ponty as discussed in chapter one. In *Recognition*, Honneth very

acutely expresses this division of levels by way of a distinction in developmental psychology

between a primary and secondary intersubjectivity.[326]

A primary intersubjectivity, on Honneth's reading of Winnicott, suggests a phase of

"undifferentiated intersubjectivity" in which a child is engaged with others. For Winnicott, the

mother is the necessarily privileged example:[327] yet able to distinguish between itself and others,

but the mother is supposed to share an analogous dependency, and so to feel a "primary, bodily

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[323] R 46, cf. 42 re: the formative function of emotional bonds.

[324] R 46

[325] Appealing to Mead and developmental theory, Honneth identifies two stages of development specifically (*Struggle*, p. 77); later, back in conversation with Hegel, Honneth suggests that his recognitive framework allows us to recognize variety of stages of social interaction as a broader historical development that exceeds the experience or 'struggles' of particular individuals (see e.g. *Struggle*, p. 170).

[326] *Struggle*, p. 98

[327] See e.g. *Struggle*, p. 99-100.

identification with the child." [328] Honneth's later emphasis on emotion as definitive of the

intersubjectivity at this stage in this sense underscores the role of direct or immediate

relationship, hence an understanding action and the development of habits of engagement that

either precede intention,[329] or which are in any case proto-intentional. A 'struggle' for

recognition is initially borne out at this basic level, but as it were in a kind of splitting of this

initially undifferentiated intersubjective unity.

A secondary intersubjectivity, on Honneth's account, yields a more traditional

understanding of intersubjective engagement, and above all allows for the development of

relationship via mediating institutions: the family, community or civil society, and the state, to

follow the Hegel's development with Honneth.

This distinction allows for Honneth's response to Lukács in two ways. First, by appeal to

a 'primary intersubjectivity' in terms of a (struggle for) recognition, Honneth more empirically

identifies the 'true' or 'authentic' human praxis that Lukács seems to invoke. Second, by appeal

to a secondary intersubjectivity in terms of cognition and more typically rationalistic

engagement, Honneth finds his own account of the possibility for reification, viz. as a no-longer

empathetic or recognitive stance in relation to others. For Honneth, the development of this

cognitive approach is as inevitable as it would have been for Lukács, but Honneth's appeal to the

ontogenesis allows him to propose primary intersubjectivity as an ontological bottom line, and

countermeasure against the possibility of reification: Since what the subject *is* has origins in a

non-alienating or non-reifying intersubjective relation, reification at the level of cognition

involves an *attitude*, or the development of a certain "habit" of approaching others in a cold or

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[328] *Struggle*, p. 98
[329] R 42

calculating manner. Reification in this sense is not 'totalizing,' but suggests only a certain "forgetting" of a more primary relationship that, as the ethical core that originarily constitutes these more complex intersubjective institutions, cannot be radically objectified or commodified.

(ii)   The Primacy of the Political: Merleau-Ponty and the work of Production

By providing an ontogenetic model for the emergence and development of the critical subject in terms of a prior, pre-critical intersubjectivity, namely the work of recognition, Honneth carries out his own 'return to origins,' showing the essentially historical development of more complex intersubjective institutions out of, and as based in, earlier, more basic ones. What is perhaps more difficult to see on Honneth's model is how, which in the end focuses on an empirical method and development psychology, is how materiality and in particular the body figure into the levels of intersubjectivity that he establishes. Building on work in chapter one, however, Merleau-Ponty's early account of the body proper in the *Phenomenology* puts us in a unique position to give a materialist reading of the relations that Honneth seeks on a non-speculative basis; Merleau-Ponty may in this sense help us return to the originally materialist insights of Lukács' thinking, if also some of the radical difficulties that nevertheless follow.

We can begin by taking cues from Shaun Gallagher, who in "The Struggle for Recognition and the Return of Primary Intersubjectivity" identifies a key ambiguity in Honneth's account, concerning both the stage and the place in which the work of recognition is carried out. As Gallagher argues, we can distinguish on Honneth's own terms between "emotional attachment (primary intersubjectivity), emotional recognition (as a transition to secondary intersubjectivity) and knowledge of objective reality (based on secondary intersubjective

relations;"[330] what is difficult is that Honneth in *Reification* appears to use the notion of "recognition" to cover not only the transition and so the unveiling of a common world, but also to cover the earlier emotional attachment. Or rather, what is strange is that Honneth appears to grasp this basic development only in terms of *emotion*, which already has a psychic bent and tends towards the cognitivism Honneth claims to be reproaching out of deference to Lukács;[331] in so doing, Gallagher suggests that Honneth "overlooks, or at least discounts, the embodied dynamics of social interaction that begins in primary intersubjectivity."[332] Honneth attempts a return to origins, in other words, but he does not go back far enough because he does not reach the materiality of the body as an always-already intersubjective ground.

There is another point at stake here that Merleau-Ponty in particular will help navigate. As Gallagher points out, Honneth's appeal to Winnicott suggests a constitutive intersubjectivity only by positing a pre-personal unity in the manner of an "undifferentiated oneness," which suggests a naïve approach to the role of the body in development, including aspects of sensation (e.g. touch, as Husserl shows with his 'hand-touching-hand') that seem originarily differentiating.[333] Honneth therefore interprets primary intersubjectivity as a stage in a historical-chronological progression that can be left behind, that is, as something the child or embodied subject "gets over."[334] Rather than understanding the intersubjectivity that Honneth grasps in terms of *stages*, however, it seems to me that a return to the body equips us just as well to grasp this intersubjectivity in terms of *levels* – in particular, and following the discussion in chapter one, as levels of the body proper.

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[330] Gallagher, p. 8
[331] See e.g. R 67
[332] Gallagher, p. 7
[333] Gallagher, p. 8
[334] Gallagher, p. 8

A 'primary intersubjectivity' in this sense would return us to the notion of the 'lived body' and its "motor-intentional" relation with others in a world via the development of bodily habits in perception. Evidently a primary intersubjectivity on these terms is nothing a person 'gets over'; indeed, grasped in terms of the materiality of the body, we can see how a primary intersubjectivity is not only a function of primary operations and engagements with others, but is perpetually operative even in the 'higher,' more abstract intersubjective engagements it makes possible.

These 'higher engagements' suggest an embodied subject's approach towards the world as a seemingly self-standing objectivity; as argued in chapter one, this perhaps begins with the experience of one's own body as an 'object' in the world, that is, as an 'actual body.' But what Honneth calls 'cognition' in this sense should similarly not be grasped apart from the materiality of the body: a higher 'level' rather than a later 'stage,' the more explicitly mediated interactions of secondary intersubjectivity suggests a hierarchy of intersubjective engagement, in which each participant – apparently atomic and self-constituting at the highest levels – share an origin and primordial identity.

Following Gallagher, however, we can observe how even at the level of a primary subjectivity as an embodied relation, there is already some differentiation at work: Honneth grasps recognition as the "disclosure of a world" in the transition from primary to secondary intersubjectivity,[335] but a focus on the material conditions of this disclosure requires us to insist that the lived body is already *in* a world, and that its experiences are rooted there first of all. There is in this sense a certain 'medium' at work from the outset, but we are now in a position to say that this medium is nothing but the materiality of the body proper.

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[335] Gallagher p. 7, cf. R 45

Only in terms of this pre-personal structure and latent history of the body proper, then, can we make full sense of the 'anonymity' at stake in an originary intersubjectivity in the sense of an 'undifferentiated oneness.' The problem with the appeal to Winnicott in this sense is not simply the turn to this elusive notion, but rather Honneth's supposition that it could be grasped *empirically*, in terms of the psychological relation between two existing individuals. (Thus for example in the 'mother-child dyad,' the 'mother' is grasped by way of a *figure* of someone without an identity and a body of her own; the self-undermining nature of this discursively inscribed non-identity should be clear from discussion with Kristeva, Irigaray, Butler, and Derrida in the first section of chapter two above.) Grasped transcendentally, however, the conditioning 'relation' at work is that of the body with itself, and *that* pre-personal identity – which logically precedes even a 'primary' intersubjectivity on the terms just described – also helps to explain the difference or divergence between the two, viz. as a *historical* divergence in the body proper's constitution of itself in the material world.

But "constitution" in this materialist sense drawn from Merleau-Ponty does not simply accomplish a transition between two stages of intersubjectivity, and it does not merely "disclose" a world; rather, and since one's own body is itself the ground for all levels of intersubjective engagement, the work is not only to disclose the material world, but to produce it – or in any case to reproduce it, to work it over in such a way that it is not simply some impersonal world, but is rather a human world. Such a process, and the conception of materiality as *essentially* human and intersubjective, is what I believe Merleau-Ponty insists upon in Marx: If we find ourselves in the world and can be objectified or commodified there, in and by the very institutions we ourselves have produced and which regulate our 'official' and everyday lives, that

is because "in Marx spirit becomes a thing, while things become saturated with spirit. History's course is a becoming of meanings transformed into forces or institutions."[336]

On these terms, the critical subject is clearly different from the one that Honneth imagines, since above all this subject in Merleau-Ponty's case is radically, which is to say transcendentally, bound to its others in the materiality of its own body, where this body proper by definition precedes the emergence of a consciousness whose knowledge, and first of all its self-knowledge, appears to be radically contingent upon material circumstances. Nevertheless, this materialist reading of the emergence of the critical subject does not simply blind a critical subject to their origins; as Marx and Lukács suggest on different terms, the material restrictions on the critical subject must also be grasped as themselves an opening onto a broader self-understanding and finally a self-consciousness. The appeal to reification is in this sense not only a question of identifying a specific problem proper to a particular historical time and place, or between specific individuals, as Honneth sometimes seems to suggest;[337] properly framed, reification is the problem of history, that is, of a history the begins with the emergence of humanity as a materially self-constituting species, defined by its capacity to refashion the world in its own mold. In Merleau-Ponty's words, 'reification' is for Lukács "a way of saying that the relations among men are not the sum of personal acts or personal decisions, but pass through things, the anonymous roles, the common situations, and the institutions where men have projected so much of themselves that their fate is now played out outside them."[338]

Honneth is perhaps right to see some necessity in the objectifying attitude that we sometimes take towards others, and the impersonal nature of social and legal institutions as

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[336] AD 33
[337] See e.g. R 75
[338] AD 32

institutions that we perhaps require. In any case, the notion of simply abandoning or overturning

our present situation suggests a clearly naïve approach. At the same time, from a materialist

perspective, we must wonder whether the problem of reification as Honneth frames it is

sufficiently respectful of the radicality of its origins, and whether the appeal to recognition in this

sense is sufficiently respectful of the paradox of a human praxis as an always-already

intersubjective endeavour that *nevertheless* denies some even the most basic status as

participants in this collective project.

Section 1c. *Intervention as Interruption:* Epochē *as a Mode of Production*

"Quand un régime est une thèse, parmi d'autres, (parmi tant d'autres), il est par terre. Un régime
qui est debout, qui tient, qui est vivant, n'est pas une thèse."
-    Charles Péguy, *Notre Jeunesse*, p. 52

The body, we have said, is a "place of […] appropriation"[339] that originarily constitutes itself as

an object in the world, and for this reason appears to have a unique place in the in world. The

body proper in this sense does not merely signify a plurality of fragments of historical data that,

aggregated by a critical subject, would have been raised to the level of self-knowledge; rather,

the body proper *is* this aggregation, and the historical 'self' that would know itself is a living

corpus that for the same reason is necessarily incomplete. But on these materialist terms the

historical progression towards self-consciousness is inevitably haphazard; impossible to grasp

except from within the bounds of one's own situation, there is no 'total' expression of the human

project beyond the material limits that therefore always appear to come from without, and which

are not *known* until they are grasped or given again on one's own terms. As I will argue at

greater length in section three below, and throughout chapter four, the inevitably mediate or

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[339] PhP 156/191

mediated possibility of expression suggests how attention to language and discourse play a

crucial role in a materialist understanding of political action, in particular action as the possibility

of directly effecting or indirectly allowing for historical change.

Let us begin to anticipate the broader point concerning the role of discourse here by

following still with the tensions at stake between recognition and production as I have just

presented the notions, in order to see how they suggest a possible recourse against reification. In

both cases, as I will argue, what is required is a certain reflective move, or finally an *epochē* of a

given situation. What Merleau-Ponty allows for is a materialist reading of this critical possibility:

On these terms, what is required is an *epochē* as a form of reflection that helps me to return to a

material world that precedes me as a conscious individual – a reflection that "does not withdraw

from the world toward the unity of consciousness as the foundation of the world [but] steps back

in order to see transcendences spring forth"[340] in the world first of all.

(i)   Epochē *as a Modification of Attitude*

Whether on the basis of a work of recognition or one of production, we have seen, reification is

always possible, and to some extent necessary. On Honneth's account, reification refers to a

basic recognition between and of humans as such that is 'forgotten' as we engage with one

another via more complex intersubjective media, for example social, legal, and political

institutions. The problem of reification is "structural" in the sense of existing beyond the scope

of a single individual's action, but on Honneth's appeal to a more 'moderate' reading of Lukács

the structural problem concerns the development of an intersubjective *attitude*.[341] There are two

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[340] PhP lxxvii/14
[341] R 27

questions to consider: First, we have to ask where a reifying attitude in this sense becomes

'necessary' (as opposed to where it is problematic); second, we have to ask what can be done in

cases where a reifying attitude is prevalent but not necessary.

For Honneth, a reifying attitude is essentially a mode of cognition. As "a habit or form of

behavior,"[342] this habit is nevertheless secondary, and develops only after a more primary

recognition – not as a development or product of it, but as an aberration from it. The essential

characteristic of this aberrational cognitive attitude is therefore that it fails to see its recognitive

roots. Honneth wishes to avoid the 'totalizing' implications of grasping all cognition as

essentially reifying, and so distinguishes on these terms between two modes of cognition as

forms of knowledge: On the one hand, there are "forms of knowledge sensitive to recognition,

and, on the other, forms of knowledge in which every trace of their origin in an antecedent act of

recognition has been lost."[343] Reification in this sense is a cognitive attitude that has 'forgotten'

an originary recognitive moment as its own "condition of possibility."[344]

Though Honneth's method is largely empirical, the passing language of a condition of

possibility does recall the necessity for critique as a certain counter-active 'remembrance.'

Moreover, given Honneth's suggestion that it is possible to see a primary recognition at work in

even a potentially 'objectifying' (if not reifying) cognitive attitude towards others, this critique

bears a decidedly phenomenological quality, viz. in the work of recognizing the conditions of

experience in or by way of the experience itself. From Honneth, then, we can take the notion that

the necessary attitudinal shift in order to return to an authentic rather than aberrant mode of

intersubjective engagement consists in a moment of critical reflection – an *epochē* as a

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[342] R 53
[343] R 56
[344] R 54

modification of the attitude of a constituting consciousness towards the intersubjectivity of the world it constitutes in partnership with others.

Epochē in this sense suggests the critical sort of reflection that Husserl lays out at the beginning of *Ideas II,* where he argues that the essential flaw of a 'natural-scientific attitude' is to approach an objective world as if it were independent and self-constituting.[345] A properly critical and "theoretical" attitude, however, is nevertheless achievable by way of a "special kind of reflection," specifically reflection "in an enlarged sense [that] includes not only the grasping of acts but also every 'turning back'."[346] This 'turning back' can be understood both topologically and chronologically: as a turning back from the world, but also a turning back towards a past in order to critically recuperate it, or to approach it "*in a grasping way*."[347]

While there are various problems that should be apparent in an analogy Honneth's notion of remembrance and Husserl's notion of reflection – for example, but crucially, Honneth's emphasis on an empirical methodology and the resulting implications for his reading of developmental psychology – we can in any case observe several key points of contact. First and foremost is the emphasis on knowledge and a knowing subject as a bottom line against the possibility of an inauthentic or falsifying attitude towards the world: Wherever knowledge, in particular self-knowledge, appears to be threatened, the answer in both cases is to insist on a more critical approach as itself a form of knowledge. Second, the reflective and retrospective mode of knowledge in both cases allows for the understanding of critique as an effort that does not alter or modify, but only clarifies the object it takes up: Whether reflection is in this sense directed towards a "condition of possibility" in the sense of a chronologically precedent moment,

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[345] HUA III 6/4
[346] HUA III 7/5. See ft. 1 for the description of reflection.
[347] HUA III 6/4

or a genuine transcendental condition, what reflection unveils in any case is a constitutive event

that is essentially inalienable.[348]

*(ii)   Epochē *as a Modification of the World**

By again emphasizing the fundamentality of the material for an embodied subject, hence for

even a primary intersubjectivity, we can develop at least two concerns with Honneth's results.

First, following Gallagher we can observe an ambiguity as to the proper moment of an

originary recognition, and by extension trouble the appeal to a remembrance of this moment.

Specifically, Honneth grasps recognition as a condition for secondary intersubjectivity, but by

appealing to the materiality of the body we have good reason to ask after the conditions for the

possibility of recognition. Gallagher emphasizes the chronologically prior motor functionality of

the body in this respect,[349] but with Merleau-Ponty's help we can further establish the body

proper, hence a material intersubjectivity that grasps the development of 'habits' in terms a

history that goes well beyond the development of a single subject. But this deeper materialist

understanding of a human history, even if is also and in part the history of a conscious subject, is

also and more fundamentally a history of the material world as an intersubjective milieu.

Second, and following Butler's critique of Honneth, we can observe how recognition,

whether grasped in terms of a chronological priority or a transcendental condition, seems at that

to be too 'thick' in the sense of inserting normative content at the origin of any critical subject.

Recognition, according to Honneth, is the very element in experience that would allow us to

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[348] See e.g. R 59. "It cannot be true that our consciousness can simply be dispossessed of this fact of recognition and that recognition thereby "vanishes" from view."
[349] Gallagher, p. 7. "Primary intersubjectivity […] includes basic, unmediated sensory-motor and emotional aspects of behavior that are apparent from the very beginning of postnatal life."

distinguish between a 'good' and a 'bad' objectification of the other, hence a 'genuine' and a 'false' human praxis, and in this sense "recognition, regardless of its fundamental status in any and all social ontologies, constitutes a moral value."[350] In arguing that the problem of reification begins and ends at the level of cognition, work at the level of a primary intersubjectivity seems to be ethically and even ontologically immune to alienation – immune on the basis of what recognition *is*, namely an incorporation of the other, and the opening with them onto a common world – hence immune from the outset to any radical conflict or violence in the 'struggle' for recognition that Honneth identifies.[351]

According to Honneth, Reification becomes possible "if 'subjects' begin to forget that their desires and feelings are worthy of articulation and appropriation (*Aneignung*)."[352] What becomes possible in remembrance in this sense is an articulation of these pre-discursive desires and feelings. Recognition yields a kind of *possibility* or *right* to articulate, and remembrance is the remembrance of this possibility. In this sense, everything in Honneth's approach seems to turn on the separation of discourse from its conditions, of the 'desires and feelings' from the structure of their articulation. Finally, then, the possibility or right itself is nothing that needs articulation – and this if nothing else is why a primary intersubjectivity cannot on Honneth's account be misarticulated, or misappropriated.

Even in Husserl we know that the work of reflection ultimately bears more weight. The point of the *epochē* is not only to unveil an origin, but also to establish and to express its essential truth; thus the *epochē* can be taken up anew, rearticulated and reinscribed on different terms. Indeed, given Husserl's notion in *Ideas II* that in the theoretical attitude "lived experiences

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[350] R 99
[351] Butler, R 104-105
[352] R 74

are *performed* or *carried out* in the function of knowledge,"[353] we can imagine Husserl reading

Descartes' *cogito* as a kind of speech act, synthetically constituting by *epochē* the notion of truth

as self-knowledge that it also proclaims. Grasped transcendentally, phenomenologically, the

return to origins must in some sense be a production or reproduction of them: As will be

emphasized at length in chapter four, there is a necessarily performative moment in the work of

reduction, and the discursive moment of 'articulation' cannot be so easily removed from its

conditions.

The difficulties that follow from such a position are only radicalized in Merleau-Ponty,

for whom the conditions for articulation of a primary and constituting intersubjectivity are

essentially material. The appeal to a body proper as intersubjectively constituting in this sense

has two implications for the possibility of an intervention in response to a reifying situation or

relation.

First, the intervention is not only an intervention at the 'cognitive' level, or via

consciousness, that is, a conscious work of 'remembrance' or reflection. Rather, to the extent that

reflection is at stake here, it is a reflection that "does not withdraw from the world toward the

unity of consciousness as the foundation of the world [but] steps back in order to see

transcendences spring forth."[354] This 'radical reflection' is no doubt a return to the unreflected,

but the unreflected is therefore not already conscious; rather, by seeing 'transcendences spring

forth,' what I am witness to upon reflection is a *process of production* in which there can be no

radical intervention – no "articulation and appropriation (*Aneignung*)" – that I can initiate except

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[353] HUA III 5/3
[354] PhP lxxvii/14

by effecting some change at that level first of all. From a materialist perspective, then, everything turns on a return of discourse to its material roots.

Second, however, by affirming that intervention cannot be restricted to the realm of cognition, we trouble Honneth's notion of remembrance as already form of *knowledge*. The appeal to the body, by contrast, should already indicate that critique does not only take place via the work of a fully-formed subject, and that knowledge, specifically self-knowledge, is precisely what has yet to be intersubjectively produced. A coherent discursive articulation of a shared material situation is therefore what is called for in a situation of reification precisely because it is lacking there.

Honneth rightly sees a paradox in Lukács' notion that one and the same process could lead both to the self-subjugation and self-liberation of an intersubjective human community. But this paradox is nothing to be shied away from as a result, as it seems intrinsic to any situation in which such a community rejects or fails to recognize those who seem precisely to be members. This is a paradox for any humanist approach, but becomes particularly acute when – as with Marx, Lukács, Honneth, and Merleau-Ponty – we propose an originarily intersubjective bond that is constituting of human relations from the ground up. The possibility that these primary relations will not be reflected in the same institutions they constitute is not therefore to be brushed off or evaded by an explanation from the top down – the problem is radical. With Merleau-Ponty's help, then, and the materialist interpretation of an originary intersubjectivity in terms of the body proper we have provisionally identified precisely what is at stake in this puzzle, which is nothing other than the paradox of the transcendental as described in chapter one: Where we expect to recognize at the highest level of interaction the operation *right there* of a

historical event that is founding of the entire intersubjective structure, we are precisely seeking

an 'appearance of the conditions of all appearing.'

On these terms, then, we are returned to the basic problem of a constituting

intersubjectivity, and above all its *negative* conception operative in the manner of a *telos* that

requires of us the knowledge that we do not possess, and a self-expression that is therefore

always a future expression – always already.[355] Merleau-Ponty's own account of the body makes

this clear for us, and leads us more directly into the difficulties of reconciling political action and

critical discourse that follow: If the body proper is a shared origin and *telos* in the sense of a

"place […] of appropriation," that seems to be precisely because it is "a zone of non-being *in*

front of which" a transcendent world appears for appropriation. If the materialist project retains a

central aim of self-consciousness, specifically a human self-consciousness, Merleau-Ponty's

existential contribution concerns the insistence on an understanding of this *telos* of human praxis

in terms of a negativity – a communal world that is not, but which must be produced. The

consequences of this negative-materialistic framework of historical change is what must now be

considered in greater detail.

Section Two: Revolution Between Faith and Knowledge

"it is impossible to reduce inter-human life either to economic relations or to juridical and moral
relations conceived by men, just as it is impossible to reduce the individual life either to bodily
functions or to the knowledge that we have of that life. […] To ask whether our current history
has a primarily economic sense and whether our ideologies give nothing but a secondary or
derivative sense of it is a question that no longer comes from philosophy, but rather from
politics. […] Philosophy can only show that resolving the question is *possible* by starting from
the human condition."
-   Merleau-Ponty, PhP 178

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[355] Interestingly, and despite his clear aversion to a more sweeping transcendental approach,
Honneth seems on occasion to use the language of an 'always already' in this sense; see e.g. R
74.

I have so far argued that Marxian historical-dialectical materialism is a humanism, and via

Honneth and Merleau-Ponty have argued that this humanism is conceivable in terms of an

originary intersubjectivity brought to bear in the materiality of one's own body. On these terms,

it has proven necessary to distinguish between at least two 'layers' of intersubjective interaction,

minimally a primary engagement with others that at least appears direct,[356] and a more 'official'

and clearly mediated form of engagement via social and political institutions. By way of this

distinction I have explained the threat of reification on both social-development terms as well as

more distinctly materialist terms: If there is a point on which Marx, Lukács, Honneth, and

Merleau-Ponty can agree, it is that there is an essential problem in the possibility that the more

complex institutions of secondary intersubjectivity, which facilitate, legitimate, and then regulate

interactions between humans can precisely be understood or materially operative as indifferent to

the humanity of the individuals involved.

Where these thinkers have diverged is in their various proposals for the proper critical

countermeasure against the possibility of reification. Although there is a general consensus that

institutions of secondary intersubjectivity must in some way be more explicitly bound to their

origins in more basic human interaction, there is disagreement both as to the method of this

critical 'return,' as well as the understanding of what, precisely, constitutes the humanist origin

that this critical method seeks. One broad complicating factor that I have identified concerns a

seeming tension between action and discourse. For Honneth, and for the Merleau-Ponty of the

Phenomenology, discourse appears to concern an interaction that itself is largely operative at the

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[356] The qualification that primary intersubjectivity 'appears' direct is simply to emphasize the difference between primary intersubjectivity as conceived by Honneth in terms of developmental psychology as a direct or dyadic relationship, whereas for Merleau-Ponty the seemingly 'direct' relationship (viz. of the body proper with itself) seems mediated in experience from the outset.

level of 'secondary' institutions – legal or political recognition of an individual, for example, or

the adoption and usage of symbolic language, etc. Merleau-Ponty in particular leads us to the

point that, if we aim to return discursive practices at a secondary level to their roots in a primary

intersubjectivity, the essential difficulty is that this 'return' to origins implies a necessary

movement in the reverse direction, that is, a need from the 'ground up' to *produce* the framework

of relations at the secondary level required for discourse at that level to give proper expression or

articulation to the relations at a primary level.

Merleau-Ponty's 'negative' thinking of the materiality body is perhaps useful in

explicating this tension phenomenologically, that is, in the experience of something that can or

even must be expressed, but has not yet been. Politically, however, this negative conception of

materiality seems to imply additional problems, or in any case no obvious solution; if anything it

appears to radicalize the divergence between action and discourse, in a way that I find

problematic. In the final section I will propose a means of reconceiving this tension on

materialist terms. For now, and because Merleau-Ponty's own thinking has at once clarified and

radicalized the essential tension at play between Lukács and Honneth, I want to trace a path over

the course of Merleau-Ponty's more explicitly political writings, and in which the tension

between action and discourse is itself borne out as a pivotal theme: Between the early *Humanism*

and Terror in 1947, and the later *Adventures of the Dialectic* in 1955, I show, what is precisely

called into doubt is the primacy of action *as against* discourse as a condition for the possibility of

effecting historical change.

My aim here is to show that the shift in Merleau-Ponty's political thinking turns on the

tension already developed via Taminiaux in section two of chapter one, namely a tension

between a dialectics of ambiguity and dialectics of identity. As I argue, Merleau-Ponty's appeal

to revolution turns on grasping ambiguity in terms of materiality, and grasping materiality

negatively – as a moment, then, on the way to common human identity. I therefore begin in 2a

with *Humanism and Terror*, and the basic ambiguity it turns on in its approach to the explanation

of a need for revolution and violent action. In 2b I consider the historical teleology without a

telos that Merleau-Ponty implicitly invokes in terms of a human identity. In 2c, finally, I turn to

Adventures in order to identify a turn to discourse as an embracement of ambiguity rather than of

identity. Even in *Adventures*, however, the appeal to a stronger role for discourse in political

engagement remains partial and tentative, and is precisely what I will have to explicate and

develop in greater detail in section three.

Section 2a. Good Faith, Bad Dialectics, pt. 1: The Ambiguity of Revolution

"The theory of the repetition of historic cycles […] rests upon an observation of the orbits of old
pre-capitalistic cultures, and in part upon the first experiments of capitalist development. A
certain repetition of cultural stages in ever new settlements was in fact bound up with the
provincial and episodic character of that whole process. Capitalism means, however, an
overcoming of those conditions. It prepares and, in a certain sense, realizes the universality and
permanence of man's development."
  -   Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution,* p. 4

As we have seen, a central concern for Honneth in the engagement with Lukács concerns a

'totalizing' approach that Honneth finds operating in *History and Class Consciousness*.[357] As

Butler suggests, Honneth's turn to a recognition prior to cognition suggests totalizing

implications of its own, specifically an already-normative understanding of constituting human

engagements: recognition is not only necessary for intersubjective engagement, it functions as an

ethical bottom line against the cognitive misappropriation of intersubjective engagement.[358] By

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[357] See e.g. R 28.
[358] Butler, R 99

reading Honneth through Merleau-Ponty, and above all by grasping an originary intersubjectivity negatively, a more radical ambiguity appears to be at stake in the possibility of reification: Whatever common human identity is at stake in the body proper has yet to be articulated as such, viz. as common; thus a transition from primary to secondary intersubjectivity does not overcome this ambiguity so much as it becomes a further expression of it.

Two points appear to follow.

First, since this ambiguity seems to be constitutive of intersubjective relations at any level, the threat of a 'totalizing' account seems to return on other terms. This totalizing implication is perhaps not precisely what Honneth predicts, as from a materialist perspective even an apparently universal account of human relations is bound to a material-historical situation; it follows that we cannot definitively say whether a totalizing account is the true or right account until its predictions have been historically borne out. As Merleau-Ponty puts the point in *Adventures*, a 'totality' for Lukács amounts to "our coherent arrangement of all the known facts," but since we must relativize this totality to our own situation "nothing can change the fact that our knowledge is partial."[359] It is in this sense that an ambiguity at the level a primary intersubjectivity appears manifest at secondary levels.

Second, however, this ambiguity seems to require that we drop the normative element that Honneth introduces in terms of recognition: In retrospect, we can perhaps identify the true or right course of action, but that is simply to say that by acting in the right way we will have raised the truth of our present situation to the level of self-knowledge; in the moment, however, this knowledge is precisely what we lack and which calls for action on essentially ambiguous terms.

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[359] AD 31. Evidently Merleau-Ponty's claim here echoes his reading of institution as "total because it is partial," and "partial because it is total;" see IP 7 for this distinction, and IP xx for a brief application of the point to the notion of revolution.

The point is not only that a negative conception of historical materiality requires a certain kind

action before knowledge, hence a certain kind of faith; the point is that humanity itself is grasped

negatively as a result, and that critical attention to this negativity requires holding any

'recognition' of one's peers as such under a radical doubt. On these terms we are returned to

Butler's observations that violence cannot be ruled out simply by emphasizing a constituting

intersubjectivity, since violence also appears to be similarly basic in relationships between

humans.[360]

What a negative conception of materiality requires us in this sense to approach as a

structural ambiguity appears to be what Merleau-Ponty is struggling with in *Humanism and*

Terror, which begins in its introduction with Péguy's distinction between historical periods and

epochs. On Péguy's account, a 'period' is a time of stability and predictability; an 'epoch,' on the

other, is a time defined by "waves of crisis" that in modern times have a worldwide scope.[361] For

Merleau-Ponty, Péguy's distinction helps to identify a historical movement that is not merely

cyclical, but is propelled by the structure of ambiguity just described:

> "When one is living in what Péguy called an historical *period*, in which political
> man is content to administer a regime or an established law, one can hope for a
> history without violence. When one has the misfortune or the luck to live in an
> *epoch*, or one of those moments where the traditional ground of a nation or
> society crumbles and where, for better or for worse, man himself must reconstruct
> human relations, then the liberty of each man is a mortal threat to the others and
> violence reappears."[362]

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[360] Butler, R 104

[361] "Il y a dans l'histoire moderne, et non pas dans toute histoire, il y a pour les peuples modernes de grandes vagues de crises […] qui font tout trembler d'un bout du monde à l'autre bout. Et il y a des paliers, plus ou moins longs, des calmes, des bonaces qui apaisent tout pour un temps plus ou moins long. Il y a les *époques* et il y a les *périodes*." (Péguy, *Notre Jeunesse*, p. 53)

[362] HT xvii

By emphasizing this inchoate structure of modern history, Merleau-Ponty is effectively identifying a material-historical tension between a primary and a secondary intersubjectivity. In a 'period,' the institutions of a secondary intersubjectivity – the mediating and regulating roles of social, legal, political structures – go largely unquestioned, and appear to have a certain primacy in the possibility of effecting social change. The common refrain that voting is the principal condition for complaining about one's situation is perhaps a modern phenomenon proper to a 'period' in this sense: Everything appears possible via these 'official' institution, because they are taken to be a legitimate expression of relations operative at lower levels such as the family or local communities; under Merleau-Ponty's broad interpretation of the notion, the body politic operative at higher levels can be recognized as one's own body. One can hope for a 'history without violence' because this recognition of one's own body, which is also one's own history, is discursive in nature; it is seen that one we can take a given historical situation and make it our own,[363] and that we can do so via the media of secondary intersubjectivity.

In an epoch, however, it is precisely a discord between the secondary institutions of politics and the more primary political relations that appears. 'Official' political institutions begin to present a discourse that is oppressive or alienating for those whom it is supposed to represent, or the veil of discourse is altogether dropped in favour of oppressive or violent actions. Under these conditions one is reminded of the operation of one's own body in a different way – as incompletely expressed, hence as fractured, and finally as vulnerable. If it is true for Merleau-Ponty that a collapse of secondary-level institutions returns us, in near-Hobbesian

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[363] See PhP 174/209. "All that we are, we are on the basis of a factual situation that we make our own."

fashion, to a situation in which "the liberty of each man is a mortal threat to the others,"[364] this too has to be seen as a reflection of one's own body.

For Merleau-Ponty, of course, the point is that the original ambiguity of the body proper was never overcome; the difference between a period and an epoch is that in a period it *appears* that the institutions of secondary intersubjectivity can be more or less self-regulating at that level, but the epoch demonstrates the falsity of this approach. The etymological link with the Greek *epochē* is therefore not incidental, as in this moment of historical instability one returned to the genetic roots of present political institutions, viz. the 'primacy' of an originarily political body proper.

Thus in *Humanism and Terror*, which adheres in the ways just identified to the implicit ontology of the *Phenomenology*, Merleau-Ponty argues that the only mistake that one can make is to champion the institutions of secondary intersubjectivity in their own right. What Merleau-Ponty generalizes in terms of an American liberalism makes precisely such an error by supposing that its origin consists in the discursive establishment of "formal rules" and abstract ideals;[365] from Merleau-Ponty's "existential" point of view at the time, to suppose that these positive expressions of a political society come *first* is a supposition that is always made in bad faith. By contrast, an Eastern European Marxism is supposed to be more properly attentive the primacy of an underlying "human bond."[366] Still from an existential point of view, of course, this "bond" is sustained in ambiguity, without a knowledge of one's peers as such, and without a clear conception of what a human society in fact is.

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[364] HT xvii
[365] HT 105
[366] HT xiv

From within this humanist framework, Merleau-Ponty can argue that prohibitions against violence are made formally in the manner of 'formal rules'; we can add that even as Honneth attempts to avoid a formal corrective for the possibility of violence, it seems that the resulting position is still *ethical* insofar as it grasps a hierarchy of intersubjective institutions in terms of an originary "moral value."[367] Politically, for Merleau-Ponty, there can be no recourse to such structures, which allow us to forget the intersubjective human basis of relations. In an epoch, then, the only affirmation that can be made in good faith is an affirmation of the ambiguity that is constitutive of humanity as such: "all we know is different kinds of violence and we ought to prefer revolutionary violence because it has a future of humanism."[368]

Section 2b. Good faith, Bad dialectics, pt. 2: The Promise of Identity

From a materialist perspective it makes sense that we should be able to admit a basic ambiguity at work in history; to propose by contrast that history is itself already a function of knowledge, in particular our capacity for knowledge, is a clearly speculative claim. At the same time, there is an awkward tension at work in the call to affirm, as it were, this negative node, and to claim it as our own. Considering the basic ambiguity at work in the Moscow trials of 1938, Bukharin's in particular, Merleau-Ponty observes how the trial itself suggests a negative structure of justice:

> "The revolutionary judges what exists in the name of what does not yet exist, but which he regards as more real. [...] Bourgeois justice adopts the past as its precedent; revolutionary justice adopts the future. It judges in the name of the Truth that the Revolution is about to make true; its proceedings are part of a *praxis* which may well be motivated but transcends any particular motive."[369]

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[367] Butler, R 99
[368] HT 107
[369] HT 28

The revolutionary *praxis* that Merleau-Ponty identifies therefore turns on ambiguity, but is already structured towards a transcendent identity-to-be. The trials become testament to the failures of discourse at such a juncture, since "where in principle all documents are missing, we are left with the things that were said, and at no time do we have any feeling of reaching through the words to the facts themselves;"[370] if the discourse in the trials fails therefore to reach the "brute reality" of the historical situation,[371] that is because the situation is itself one of ambiguity, where the truth is something still to be produced. A tension between discourse and action is in this sense revealed as we must admit that the discursive nature of the trials either (i) fails, *qua* Bourgeois justice, altogether in reaching the truth of the situation and so calls for action apart from discourse, or (ii) is itself, *qua* revolutionary justice, a way of producing the truth, and therefore a form of action.

On these terms we can recognize the disdain that Merleau-Ponty appears to have for the liberalism that grasps discourse as a self-standing institution, since what it appears to do is to deny or to cover over not only a 'human bond' at its core, but also the essential means of expressing and producing this originary identity. Discourse is always at risk of reification; action is first and foremost the possibility of collective liberation.

Implicitly, those who emphasize discourse over action, and who in short refuse in advance the possibility of violence, are at best confused in light of their situation, and at worst a direct threat to the possibility or promise of a truth that we can in produce in common. But then it seems as if this element of ambiguity were itself the decisive factor in ruling out the opinion of those who dissent to a specific course of action. In an awkward way, we can readily admit

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[370] HT 26
[371] HT 26

dissent within the scope of this ambiguity, but we must also be able to recognize whose dissent appears to threaten or deny the ambiguity as such. The negativity or non-knowledge that I have of myself can in a way only be extended to cover others insofar as I grasp them negatively also, but this is precisely to say that they can be a radical threat to me.[372]

In *Humanism and Terror*, the awkward proto-justification of violence appears to turn on this sort of dialectical structure that makes no room for the terms of the other except as the negation of the negation. This other may dissent to the usage of violence, but they can only do so from the alienated perspective of an 'official' intersubjective institution in denial of the originary ambiguities of an intersubjective body proper as a *human* body proper. In Merleau-Ponty's words:

> "He who condemns all violence puts himself outside the domain to which justice and injustice belong. […] Between men considered as the incumbents of situations which together compose a single *common situation* it is inevitable that one has to choose – it is allowable to sacrifice those who according to the logic of their situation are a threat and to promote those who offer a promise of humanity."[373]

To condemn violence, in this sense, which is to claim knowledge that violence would be wrong, is for that reason to alienate oneself from a human situation, which is precisely one of ambiguity. Everything therefore turns on the *decision* that one must make: Whether, 'according to the logic of their situation,' the other will or will not remain in good faith to the essential ambiguity of a '*common situation*' – that is the pivotal distinction to be made; one must be certain as to who tolerates uncertainty, and who does not.

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[372] VI 79. "If the other is really the other, that is, a For Itself in the strong sense that I am for myself, *he must never he so before my eyes.* […] it is necessary that the other be my negation or my destruction." In this passage Merleau-Ponty is describing the Sartrean notion of negativity that by the text of this text he takes to be essentially problematic, and will explicitly refute.
[373] HT 110

We can see how such a decision, particularly in the case of violence and in the context of the Moscow trials, is formative of the common situation to which it also appeals: It is in the name of a human bond that I say that it is just, or will have been just, to do violence to other humans. Here the negativity of the body proper, which I am, runs into its other, which is another negativity – but not another body: The contradiction *is* a contradiction because it is a contradiction in us, in a single human body proper that cannot be anything other. The strange propriety that the other and I have always shared over this negative materiality is itself what demands a violent negation in order to fully articulate the promise of a common human situation. But the other, who has already staked out their unfortunate territory, can have no further say in this production of a collective identity.

Section 2c. Good Faith, Bad Dialectics, pt. 3: The Autocritical Community

"The U.S.S.R. is not the proletarian light of history Marx once described. But it will be, it might be said. Perhaps."
-   Merleau-Ponty, HT 141

To say that justice is bound to an essential ambiguity is not intrinsically problematic, as indeed what this assertion leaves room for is criticism. Evidently in *Humanism and Terror* Merleau-Ponty is not a proponent of what the Marxist movements of his time have already done. His attempt is rather to sever a certain thought of Marxism, or perhaps simply of Marx, from the U.S.S.R. and other communist political bodies at the time in order to think the *possibility* that materialism offers without the factual baggage of its present expression.[374] In a certain way, this future-oriented attitude is precisely in line with what he calls 'revolutionary justice.' I have already suggested a tension in this approach, though, and by the time of *Adventures*, Merleau-

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[374] See e.g. AD 228. "Just after the war […] we said that the U.S.S.R. is not the power of the proletariat, but the Marxist dialectic continues to play its role throughout the world."

Ponty observes that his decision not to decide in *Humanism and Terror* was not innocent.[375] It is the mistake of what in *Adventures* Merleau-Ponty identifies as a 'wait-and-see' Marxism that we must now explicate,[376] as it returns us to Lukács' totalizing thought and Honneth's moralizing solution, requiring something other than both.

The tension essential tension between a dialectics of ambiguity and a dialectics of identity perhaps becomes most obvious in *Humanism and Terror* in the discussion of a communist community. Such a community, we have anticipated, implies a political body proper that must be grasped negatively; at the same time, this turn to non-knowledge leaves us with clear difficulties in the approach to the structure of criticism within this community. Merleau-Ponty already anticipates aspects of this difficulty by observing the strange dialectical relation between the proletariat and the Party in the Bolshevist conception of communism.

On the one hand, in this dialectical structure, we must admit an essential faith in the potential of the proletariat. Whether or not they consciously recognize it, then, the proletariat is the essential condition of revolutionary change: "For a Marxist, the sense of the masses is always true, not that they always have a clear idea of the revolution throughout the world, but because they have the "instinct" for it, as its moving force."[377]

On the other hand, this 'instinct' is not yet knowledge, and that is why the influence of the Party is required as means of accelerating the provenance of proletarian self-consciousness. Quoting Lenin's observation that the proletariat is inevitably "divided into more developed and

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[375] AD 230. As to whether to consider oneself a communist, "one could no longer be satisfied with not choosing: in the perspective of war, to put it clearly, the refusal to choose becomes the choice of a double refusal. Such are, it seems to us, the obligations of commitment."

[376] See AD 228

[377] HT 112-113

less developed strata, […] divided according to territorial origin," Merleau-Ponty argues that "it is because of this that there is need for a Party which clarifies the proletariat to itself."[378]

If we consider the relationship between these two groups, we recognize perhaps with more clarity why the conception of humanity is essentially negative. Between the two – between the 'force' of the proletariat and the critical capacity of the Party – where do we find the 'truth' of the materialist movement? It is impossible to say, because we have only distinguished between two 'levels' of a single political body proper. The proposal is double.

On the one hand the proposal is of a kind of autocriticism that is essentially discursive. Not unlike the phenomenological method, what is required is a return to origins as a process in which an originary intersubjectivity is both the historical genesis and *telos*; thus "the proletariat and the Party machine regulate one another" as in a synthetic cooperation of unconscious matter and a conscious spirit as the one recognizes itself in the other, that is, "through the vital communication of the masses with *their* Party, or the interaction of history in the making with the idea of history."[379]

On the other hand the proposal is of an autocriticism that involves action, as the critical return to origins must be materially transformative, changing the political landscape in which it is initiated. Since it is in the proletariat itself that a critical self-consciousness is realized, "Marxists have often compared revolutionary violence to the doctor's intervention at a birth. This implies that the new society is already in existence and that violence is justified, not by remote goals, but by the vital needs of a new humanity already in view."[380]

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[378] HT 117
[379] HT 113
[380] HT 113

Merleau-Ponty recognizes both these horns of his materialism, but in *Humanism and Terror* he goes back and forth in affirming the primacy of one over the other, which on the other hand is an affirmation he must make, since we have already committed to the notion of a single body politic. In the passage just quoted, Merleau-Ponty appears to affirm the primacy of the proletariat and so of revolutionary action. On the other hand, later in the same chapter we find Merleau-Ponty mournfully reflecting upon the collapse of critical discourse in communist movements:

> "Every word we utter, a Communist told me, is not simply a word but an action as well. […] Marxists have always been concerned with the objective meaning of their discourse, but earlier they were able to believe that the course of events was on their side, which afforded them a degree of freedom. Truth was also a force. Autocriticism was and still is an official practice in the U.S.S.R. In France nowadays many Communists are distrustful of History and the consequences of what they say to the point where at bottom they hardly engage in discussion. In the end, arguing with you, one of them told me (it was over a philosophical problem), is already to have laid down one's arms."[381]

Merleau-Ponty's indecision in *Humanism and Terror* is not precisely what I mean to critique; indeed, discourse and the possibility of exchange in a context where one has not already decided which side to be on or to support – that is precisely what must in some way be recovered. There is in other words a tension between action and discourse that is neither an opposition nor a synthesis, and a tension that in this sense escapes a synthetic-dialectical approach is what must be recovered.

By contrast the move of retaining the negative conception of materiality, on the one hand, and of using this negativity to assert the fundamentality of a basic human identity on the other hand overextends, indeed it *totalizes* the thought of humanity and the human body proper. This totalization, as we have seen, becomes a justification for violence; at the same time Merleau-

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[381] HT 144

Ponty wishes to retain the capacity to condemn the violence of existing communist regimes, which the negative conception of materiality seems also to make possible. It is the negative conception materiality in this sense that I challenge, and which it seems to me Merleau-Ponty himself recognizes as problematic by the time of *Adventures*:

> "[…] we were speaking abstractly when we said that Marxism 'remains true as a negation.' […] This in itself shows well enough that we were not on the terrain of history (and of Marxism) but on that of the *a priori* and of morality. […] This Marxism which remains true whatever it does, which does without proofs and verifications, is not a philosophy of history – it is Kant in disguise, and it is Kant again that we ultimately find in the concept of revolution as absolute action."[382]

The 'abstract' thought of Marxism totalizes the concept of the human by grasping it transcendentally, and the negative conception of materiality makes this possible because as Butler predicts it allows for the de-materialization of the bodies that we choose not to call human, or to exclude from that "common situation" of the human body proper. Merleau-Ponty's early materialism is in this sense totalizing because it thinks the identity of humanity in advance, which returns us to Honneth's concerns for Lukács' theory, whereby one and the same productive activity effectively produces its dialectical opposite and negation.[383] At the same time, Merleau-Ponty attempts to rectify this totalizing implication by thinking the negativity of revolution as it were *without* the world in which it would take place; the appeal to humanity in this sense becomes an ethical rather than a political premise, supplying a moral value that allows us to decide between the right and the wrong sort of violence in retrospect, and in the moment allows us to *not* decide which is which.

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[382] AD 231-232

[383] See e.g. R 31. "Lukács proceeds from the entirely different premise that capitalism's progressive reification eliminates *any* possibility of engaged praxis. Lukács thus *cannot* conceive of his project as unveiling an already present possibility of human existence, but instead as sketching a future possibility."

What we must now turn to is the possibility of thinking materiality in a different way,

which is to say not negatively, so that we do not lapse in the thinking of historical change in

terms of an abstract promise of a concrete future, nor as an ideal to be materialized. In both

cases, as we will see, there is a stronger tension that should require a thought of materiality

whose ambiguity, in action and in discourse, resists the structure of identity, beginning with our

own.

Section Three: Hyperdialectical Materialism – Resistance as Communicative *Praxis*

"If one concentrates all the negativity and all the meaning of history in an existing historical
formation, the working class, then one has to give a free hand to those who represent it in power,
since *all that* is *other* is *an enemy.* […] There is no dialectic without opposition or freedom, and
in a revolution opposition and freedom do not last for long."
   -   Merleau-Ponty, AD 207

In the epilogue to the text, Merleau-Ponty retraces his steps through his interlocutors on the

dialectic in order to announce that these adventures amount to "errors through which it must

pass."[384] The fact that he speaks of errors, and the fact that passage through these errors has not

yielded corrective and comprehensive truths, is precisely what establishes these passages as

dialectical 'adventures' rather than anything more systematic and consolidating. If by the time of

this late text Merleau-Ponty has begun to find the prospect of revolution dubious, then, it is less

because he has lost faith in materialism or in the power of a dialectics, and more that he is no

longer certain that each of these must culminate in a clear expression of their motivating forces at

the level of knowledge, and in particular self-knowledge. In this epilogue without a conclusion,

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[384] AD 204

we find a question without an answer: "[…] what remains of the dialectic if one must give up reading history and deciphering in it the becoming-true of society?"[385]

Seemingly the attempt at a comprehensive response would be undermining here, as what is being implicitly renounced is that synthetic structure of the dialectic whereby the disparate nature of elements that we hold in tension can itself already be grasped as the promise of a truth that transcends each of them while at the same time yielding a common structure within which they each would have their own identity. Materialist dialectics in this sense must at some point diverge from the Hegelian idea, and if we find a *living* spirit in materiality it is materiality itself which we must reconsider at its origins, perhaps in order to reveal a different ordering necessity than the one we initially expected. History is still the text we read, then, and truth remains at stake, but this text may present more than we can decipher on our own terms, and the truths inscribed there may not all be the product of our own work.

Since Merleau-Ponty's *Adventures* ends with this thought of another beginning for materialist politics, and since this renewed thought seems to show promise as a means of approaching the difficulties indicated in section one above – the totalizing possibility of synthesis, the moralizing potential of ideality – what I propose here is to develop in a provisional way a new materialism that, in conversation with the unique hyperdialectical methods of *The Visible and the Invisible*, yields a non-totalizing and non-anthropocentric model of political action. As I will argue, a hyperdialectical materialism presents an opportunity to think discourse in relation to action without invoking structures of synthetic identity. Hyperdialectical materialism in this sense yields a notion of political discourse that is possible without proceeding from a condition of recognition, and productive without resulting in consensus. By emphasizing

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[385] AD 204

a more radical *dissensus*, I show that historical-dialectical change can be effected in a way that sustains this discursive structure rather than negating it – as resistance rather than revolution.

Since the development of a hyperdialectical materialism in this sense must track shifts that I have identified in Merleau-Ponty's thinking of materiality, discourse, and action, it is by focusing on each of these shifts that I aim to provisionally develop my position.

First, the broader shift from a synthetic-dialectical to hyperdialectical materialism evidently hinges on the shift, as developed in chapter one, from the negative materiality of the body proper to the excessive materiality of the flesh. The turn to an excessive materiality will be borne out politically by putting into question what I have argued is an anthropocentric moment in critical reflection, and specifically the revolutionary *epochē*. By contrast with reflection in this more typical, and ultimately autorevelatory sense, I develop the divergent structure of hyperreflection with the help of Rajiv Kaushik's considerations of hyperdialectic in artistic creation.

Second, the shift to an excessive materiality requires recourse to a renewed understanding of expression: Whereas the "implicit ontology" of a negative materiality promises direct expression in one's own body as an intersubjective structure, the "indirect ontology" of excessive materiality requires indirect expression through the experience of the limits of one's own body, and so through embodied others. An indirect expression in this sense will require a structure of discourse that is not exhaustible on the terms of any particular set of participants' terms, and instead allows for a plurality of engagements without identity.

Third, the shift from direct to indirect expression requires a rearticulation of the shift from constitution to institution. Politically the essential point here is the articulation for political institutions that are not simply 'hierarchical' in a way that assumes a necessarily human

community as its intersubjective core. By contrast, the turn to Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of

institution in terms of *Stiftung* requires acknowledging the possibility of engagement between

participants without presupposing a shared identity that can upon reflection be 'recognized,' and

without therefore presupposing a structure of engagement that ideally yields strict consensus. In

conversation with Habermas' notion of communicative action, then, I develop the notion of a

"communicative resistance" as a structure of discursive action that takes a primary *dissensus* as

its operative principle.

Evidently my proposal of a hyperdialectical materialism in this section is intended

provisionally, explicating the notion in outline in order to identify its essential promise, namely a

continuation of dialectical materialism beyond the anthropocentricism of the negative conception

of materiality. The essential promise of materialism in this sense is to allow for discourse on

alterity, and to allow for others in a given structure of discourse; materiality as the *medium* of

discourse must in this sense be rethought as a something that is nevertheless not *for* us, but rather

suggests an indomnibility and impropriety that we ought to be able to recognize as pervasive in

the intersubjectivity of political relations.

Section 3a. Hyperreflection on Humanism: Irreducibility of Men to Matter, Matter to Men

"Worked-over-matter–men = *chiasm*"
- Merleau-Ponty, VI 275 (from the working notes)

As I have emphasized at length, the humanism of the *Phenomenology* and of *Humanism and*

Terror goes hand-in-hand with the negative thinking of materiality in terms of the body proper.

On these terms, humanity grasps itself in the world, but first of all as a negativity or a 'zone of

non-being *in front of which*… precise beings, figures, and point can appear;"[386] in light of this

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[386] PhP 103/130

negative conception of itself, a human body proper is from the outset operative as a "place of

[…] appropriation"[387] that implies a unique claim to the materiality of the world as its own, such

that it may reproduce the materiality of the world on its own terms, and in its own image.

The political implications of this negative conception of materiality, which run

throughout *Humanism and Terror*, are already succinctly expressed by Merleau-Ponty in the

final chapter of the *Phenomenology* on "Freedom" where he says that "the revolutionary

movement, like the work of the artist, is an intention that creates its own instruments and its own

means of expression."[388] What results, as I have argued, is a totalizing conception of humanity in

which a historical (or pre-historical) movement is presupposed to have a single human body

proper as its origin and *telos*. The same totalizing conception of materiality, illustrated by Lukács

in *History and Class Consciousness* as much as Merleau-Ponty in *Humanism*, leads to the result

that a historical movement as a movement of production between humanity and itself is a sort of

externalizing movement of the human potential, that is, an alienation of the productive power of

the human body proper.

If violence becomes justifiable via the negative conception of materiality (and by

extension, humanity), it is precisely due to this double-movement of production-as-appropriation

and production-as-alienation, both of which must be somehow reconciled into a single coherent

process. What Honneth misses in Lukács and Marx, and what Merleau-Ponty helps us

emphasize, is the precarity and contingency of the human situation; the risk of a negative

conception of materiality and synthetic-dialectical reading of historical progress is that this

precarity and contingency are prefigured by a more primordial and necessary thought of

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[387] PhP 156/191
[388] PhP 471/510

humanity as such. But this prefiguration of history and of its dialectical structure as one that is

immanent in us is what Merleau-Ponty in *Adventures* is already giving us reason to doubt:

> "A historical solution of the human problem, an end to history, could be
> conceived only if humanity were a thing to be known – if, in it, knowledge were
> able to exhaust all being and could come to a state that really contained all that
> humanity had been and all that it ever could be."[389]

What is implicitly called for here is a thinking of politics that can give a materialist

interpretation of humanity that does not propose an escape from a historical ambiguity, and least

of all by the invocation of a collective human identity and self-consciousness as somehow

exhaustive of the historical tensions in which we participate. In line with Taminiaux's emphasis

on a dialectics of ambiguity, what I propose here in terms of a hyperdialectical materialism can

be seen as an attempt to describe a politics of ambiguity, as a notion that attempts to retrieve the

essential insights of a dialectical materialism for us, without making ourselves the originary force

in this notion of materiality that should by contrast be grasped as a constant challenge to any

privileged place we might be tempted to suppose for ourselves.

Following Kaushik's lead in *Art, Institution, and Figure in Merleau-Ponty: Excursions in

Hyperdialectic*, I will argue that a hyperdialectical materialism allows us to identify a form of

artistic and political expression that does not require upon reflection a grasp of ourselves as the

necessary and only productive pivot of this process. In Kaushik's text, the nominal focus is on

artistic expression in its relation to language; on this point Kaushik draws out a clear shift

between Merleau-Ponty's thinking of expression in "Indirect Language and the Voices of

Silence," and the later "Eye and Mind."[390]

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[389] AD 22-23
[390] Kaushik, p. 2-3

Both of these Merleau-Pontian texts struggle to rethink a moment of creation in accordance with language, and language in particular as not simply reducible to or exhausted by a formal system of signs; implicitly they both attempt to think a linguistic moment before something is 'said' or 'written' in the formal sense. Already we can sense a movement beyond the 'tacit' *cogito* of the *Phenomenology*, as language and expression are already being grasped with a certain 'primacy' that is not simply a pre- or proto- language, but already meaningful.

The difference between "Indirect Language" and "Eye and Mind," however is that in "indirect Language" the process of expression is still grasped in a synthetic-dialectic manner,[391] so that the transition from the more originary experience of *meaning* to its expression in symbolic *language* is much like the transition from a primary to secondary intersubjectivity.[392] The result in "Indirect Language" is that the process of expression is grasped negatively, with the painter called to work only insofar as "the art of painting still remains to be created."[393] Notably in "Indirect Language," this synthetic-dialectical thinking is not only the painter's problem, but also the politician's; each must speak under the negative force of a recognition whereby "the public he aims at is not given," but is rather "the one which his works will elicit."[394] This negative-providential thought of the creative or productive origin, as I have argued, lends itself

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[391] See Kaushik, p. 3

[392] For example, Merleau-Ponty distinguishes between "creative language" that does not yet amount to a system of signs and "empirical language" that merely repeats aspects of a given system; it is therefore creative language that "frees the meaning captive in the thing" without yet "becoming a common name" (S 44). Analogously, Merleau-Ponty later distinguishes between a 'living' painting in the process creation and a 'dead' painting in a museum; more broadly the distinction is between a history that is "living" and a history that, in being formally recorded, amounts to an "official and pompous history" (S 62).

[393] S 79

[394] S 74

too readily to the thought of ourselves as that origin, leading to the totalizing thought that "every human use of the body is already *primordial expression.*"[395]

If as Kaushik argues "Eye and Mind" yields a different structure of expression, it is because expression can be admitted to contain a material condition that precedes and in a certain way resists the totalizing thought of a synthetic-dialectical expression. To make this admission, however – of something that precedes even the original promise of a world to be created, is to approach the question of our own origin as question that might not be exhaustively answerable on our own terms. Thus in "Eye and Mind" the claim is that the painter can initially paint only insofar as they are first inspired by a world that is not their own; in order to render this world visible to themselves and to other humans, they must in the first place adopt a "prehuman way of seeing things."[396] The painter's body is still at stake, but a 'primordial expression' is not only its own work since expression is not only human: The pre-human world 'speaks' to me because of what is already pre-human in me, that is, in the visibility of my own body (which is not the same my body that sees it); what is first of all productive and what opens me onto another way of seeing is "the fact that my body can assume segments derived from the body of another."[397] These other bodies and the pre-human way of seeing nevertheless allows or call *me* to express something on my own terms, and with my own body, which after all are all I have. "Production" in this moment takes on an entirely new sense, as the materiality that renders it possible cannot be said to be entirely included or given in whatever structures I produce. Let us clarify this crucial point, with Kaushik's help, by distinguishing more carefully between the notions of naïve reflection and hyperreflection.

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[395] S 67

[396] PrP 168

[397] PrP 168

In order to help illustrate the difference, we can imagine a simple example: the initial encounter of a painter with a material thing, a tree, in light of which the painter proves to be inspired to produce a painting.

Naïve reflection takes it for granted the painter sees the tree, and that there is nothing to take up if this minimal content is not taken for granted. To reflect on what is in this sense indubitable amounts to a form of critical doubt or *epochē*, carried out in order to explain the structure of the encounter.[398] Reflection in this sense will notice not only a difference between painter and tree, but take furthermore the *experience* (hence the painter-tree dyad) as its object. Implicitly the initial "difference" or encounter between painter and tree can be seen already as a unity in experience; furthermore it is this unity that the painter will also bring to fruition in the act of painting. What reflection reveals in this sense is a synthetic-dialectical process: The painter's perception of the tree is merely the painter's act of creation in germinal form; what the painter *creates* is only *what they have perceived*, viz. the material world. At no point in this process does a world emerge that cannot be fully given in our own experience; the transition from sensible perception (viz. of a tree) and explicit artistic creation (viz. of a painting of a tree), speaks at every level to a world that "belongs wholly to each of us, without division or loss, because it is *that which* we think we perceive."[399]

Hyperreflection ignores the initial encounter, instead taking up the event and structure of reflection. Before even considering the relation between painter and tree, then, it merely notes that *there is* some initial relation or unity, and that this unity is what naïve reflection takes as its object. It then notes a difference between the unity of experience as it is given before and after

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[398] I skip a step by supposing that only the structure and not the content is at stake; this is specifically true of the phenomenological approach, but not for example of empirical skepticism.
[399] VI 31

reflection: Before reflection, what matters is the painter's experience of a material world that is

other precisely because it has no need for human intervention, and which simply *exists* no matter

what the painter does; upon reflection, the same experience (viz. of a world grasped as other)

consists precisely in the revelation to the painter of their own power, precisely to perceive and

materially change the world, to constitute it. The final observation that hyperreflection offers is

that the act of reflection is dependent upon the unity as given prior to reflection, and that in this

sense "in order to constitute the world, it is necessary to have a notion of the world as

preconstituted."[400] For Merleau-Ponty, then, it is in one sense fair to recognize the role of

humanity as constitutive of the world – but this role is revealed only upon reflection; what

becomes crucial is to see that reflection is in the first place only possible in light of a relationality

that extends beyond the human.

What hyperreflection in this sense aims to demonstrate is a non-identity of what naïve

reflection takes up and what it reveals in so doing. Reflection in this sense is *naïve* insofar as it

claims neutrality with respect to its content when it is in fact creative, consisting a work of re-

structuring the alien nature of a non-human materiality as something *for consciousness*; the

apparent result of a world that was *always already* there 'for us' is what hyperreflection puts us

in a position to doubt. More generally, in Kaushik's words, hyperreflection aims to demonstrate

"the way in which the act of reflection alters the thing that appears to it."[401]

Kaushik in this sense emphasizes what we have already said of the materialist

interpretation of *epochē* in 1b above, namely that there is no 'reflection' in the sense of a

modification of consciousness that does not also entail a modification of the material

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[400] VI 35
[401] Kaushik, p. 3

circumstances of the reflecting subject; we see now that hyperreflection in particular is the critical work that allows us to approach this moment of modification, and which asks us – indirectly – to think the materiality we inhabit and modify as it was or would have been without us. Reflection, we can still say, is essentially productive, that is, it is a modification of the world. Hyperreflection, on the other hand, appears to work back to a kind of pre- or un-productive moment, that is, to an experience of being that consists in the recognition of an inadequacy of one's own capacities as a subject to fully articulate it. This un-productive moment, a certain 'perceptual faith' that opens onto the world without *interrogating* it, suggests an engagement prior to the recognition of negativity, a lack in the world that upon reflection we attribute to ourselves.

Since hyperreflection in this sense allows us to critically return to the limits of our essential critical capacity – limits that we ourselves have not and could not have constituted – it is these limits which must be reconciled with the apparently constituting power that we recognize in the materiality of our own body. In order to approach these limits critically, we must drop pretenses of doing so on our own terms, or as I will put it 'directly.' By contrast, Merleau-Ponty suggests the need for an "indirect method"[402] in light of which the material being of the flesh is not supposed to be reducible to a structure of givenness that I constitute, but instead will find only indirect expression at the limits of the experiential horizons within which I operate. And since hyperreflection as it were begins with reflection, consisting in a critical stance towards the dialectics of reflection, something will always be given; the possibility of producing something *new* depends, however, on the hyperreflective work of not taking what is given (as it were) for granted, that is, as a direct indication or reflection of a work or product that is one's *own*. Rather,

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[402] VI 179

my work with materiality though flesh begins with an acknowledgement of the limits of my own

projects, hence with an indirect admission of the projects of others and not identical to my own.

We can imagine, within certain intersubjectively constituted limits, communities of

embodied subjects, which remains the territory unveiled by reflection; what hyperreflection

unveils is the limits to this process, and so of any given intersubjective community, requiring that

a fully critical approach to one's own community requires the admission of communities that by

contrast one has no part in constituting. Thus hyperreflection requires the thought of a "primacy

of the political" in Fóti's radical sense, taken up in more detail in the following subsection. What

we can in any case observe already is that a hyperdialectical approach rules out the possibility of

thinking the historical primacy of one self-constituting group as against another. Furthermore,

the very capacity for intersubjective constitution of a *specific* community depends on a certain

divergence or *écart* of existing material-historical structures, with the double-implication that the

assertion of one's own community depends on allowing for others, and that there is no longer

any sense in positing a single, overarching (or in other words synthetic-synthesizing) community.

By indicating the differential structure of *écart* as 'originary,' we already in this sense

undermine the notion of an absolute origin. On materialist terms this differential structure, hence

a 'primacy of the political,' is borne out minimally in the hypercritical recognition that my

encounter with the world and with others cannot have been an encounter that was possible

strictly on my own terms, but which already indicates, indirectly, pre- or non-human material

conditions for my own work of production. Just as the painter in this sense "thinks from before

the thought that tends towards absolutization and totalization,"[403] so too must the political actor

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[403] Kaushik, p. 58

in engagement with others. There are two implications of this position that I will try to draw out more fully in the following subsections.

First, the necessary shift away from humanity as the hinge of material-historical development calls for a rethinking of the conditions of engagement between humans, specifically calling attention to the role of language. In particular, a critical approach will show that language as a condition of intersubjective engagement yields an apparently 'direct' engagement with one's peers only insofar as it can also be admitted there, viz. indirectly, that other, different modes of engagement are possible, and in a certain sense that this possibility is already operative in the apparently self-enclosed structure of a given language or institution. The materiality of the flesh in this sense implies a "system with several entries,"[404] and the properly critical approach is no longer to affirm or deny one approach over another, but rather to work to unveil this deeper dissenting or divergent relation in language, that is, to situate oneself "where the multiple *entries* of the world cross."[405]

Second, and by extension, it must be shown how the common ground for political action revealed upon reflection suggests, upon hyperreflection, a far more fractious field in which critical engagement is only possible indirectly. In such a field, the structure of effective political action must be recast, and the aim no longer to produce an overarching consensus; rather, political action begins by situating oneself at the sites of divergence, where in this tension or *dissensus* a partial modification of established intersubjective structures becomes possible – not in the form of a constituting revolution, but rather in the form of a diverging or instituting resistance.

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[404] VI 90
[405] VI 260

Section 3b. Indirect Language and the Primacy of the Political

"[… hyperreflection] must suspend the faith in the world only so as to *see* it […] it must seek in the world itself the secret of our perceptual bond with it. It must use words not according to their pre-established signification, but *in order to state* this prelogical bond."
-    Merleau-Ponty, VI 38

The essential challenge that hyperdialectical materialism raises consists in its proposal of making apparent or explicit, necessarily on our terms, a contact with a material world as something that precisely precedes and conditions our own peculiar attempt to speak to it. Since it includes this element that exceeds us, this contact cannot be spoken to directly in our language; rather, our own language must be taken to its limits, and in speaking to these positive limits as unprefigurable or unconstitutable on our own terms, indirectly indicate an excess at or behind the origin of our language. Here the 'pre-personal' nature of the materiality of the body proper is radicalized by being thought in the flesh, challenging not only the individual identity of a self-conscious human, but challenging the very structure, that is, the logic or grammar of identity as it is operative in our language, yet which is perhaps no longer comprehensive in its scope. Before turning to the notion of communication as political action in the final subsection, let us here develop this crucial different between 'direct' and 'indirect' language, in order that we can recognize the difficulty of communication at its ontological and material-historical core.

A direct language is operative pre-reflectively in everyday experience, for example in the simple act of positing: "There is x," "x is y," etc. The act of positing is uncritical in a double-sense: It takes for granted both the object spoken to and the linguistic structures in light of which the position is made. An immediate one-to-one relation or correspondence can be assumed because both are approached as having a positive existence in relation to which the act of positing, being strictly constative in nature, does nothing.

Direct language is also operative, however, in critical reflection. Unlike simple position, however, language is used precisely to (explicitly or implicitly) suspend the posited object in order to consider the conditions of the initial act (e.g. to make explicit the grammar of the linguistic system in which the position was made, to expose elements of the context of position, to objectively evaluate truth or falsity, etc.). As Merleau-Ponty puts it, reflection by definition 'resists' the initial appearance of the world by adopting a critical 'hypothesis of nonexistence'; this critical attitude is what leads it to take as essential "what *in it* withstands the hypothesis of non-existence."[406] Here the negative relation of reflection (the relation of a body with the world that it constitutes as its own) holds the positive being or truth of the world in suspense, as a promise to be fulfilled. As we can already see, however, reflection holds an element of this relation in suspense precisely in order to speak to an underlying structure that is of the sort which the reflective subject can know, and explicitly formulate on their own terms. Not unlike a certain 'wait-and-see' Marxism in which a group of subjects put or hold history in suspense in order to arrive at a more thoroughgoing self-consciousness, language deployed by a subject in a reflective capacity holds its object in suspense in order to reveal a deeper truth of the naïve linguistic relation with the world, that is, to recognize language and its object as a structure that is originarily proper to the critical subject.

If we consider the role of language in hyper-reflection, however, a different situation emerges. Hyper-reflection, as we have seen, attempts to expose a moment prior to reflection as its condition – but reflection by definition has already intervened and modified this condition. Hyper-reflection does not therefore propose a "hypothesis of non-existence," which would itself

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[406] VI 39, emphasis mine. Originally "[…] what in it *withstands* the hypothesis of *non-existence*."

modify its object and again confirm a structure proper to it, that is, it would not be

*hyper*reflection at all. If on the other hand the aim is to speak to a world prior to the subject's

initial imposition, then, the point would be to demonstrate the limits of the subject's project,

showing that the world modified is nothing the subject could constitute on their own, nor speak

to entirely on their own terms. Thus hyperreflection requires that we speak 'indirectly' to a

prereflective contact with a material world, done not by mastering the original relation as for

ourselves but rather by making room for other approaches, hence for other ways of speaking;

only thus does the notion of a world that does *not* think or speak for itself, and which requires

interpretation and expression by way of the impositions of experience or critique, become

approachable.

On the other hand the work of indirect language must be linked to the project of an

indirect ontology.[407] Language itself, meanwhile – in its various forms, grammars, etc. – is to be

grasped as never exhausting its objects even in its apparently comprehensive framework and

scope; that is, languages, but also language itself must be grasped as institutions of a relationality

and a materiality that conditions relations without being reducible to the structures of givenness

that are revealed upon reflection.

On these terms any language supplies the means for what can be called *naïve*

communication, which takes itself to be 'directly' or in other words immediately an expression

of its object to others. Notably, naïve communication in this sense covers what I have identified

as language even in the critical context of reflection, that is, discussions over the grammar of

language and a clear consensus as to truth of claims is taken to be possible, because this

underlying structure is taken to be held in common – which, in a way, it is. At the same time,

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[407] Kaushik, p. 2

and since the aim here is also to recognize the operations of an excess beyond even that structure

revealed upon reflection, we should distinguish what I will call *indirect communication*, which

recognizes in principle, and ideally in practice that one's institutional frame of reference is

limited by others. Indirect communication in this sense is not intended to rule out communication

between individuals operating in different institutional frames of reference: It is possible for two

individuals who *prima facie* speak the 'same' language to be deploying structures of language, as

well as of culture and tradition, etc. in basically different ways, and yet nevertheless to engage.

What must be recognized in and by way of indirect communication, however, is that the terms of

consensus in such cases have yet to be formulated, as there is not a 'common origin' in the

prefigured sense that naïve communication takes for granted; there is rather a commonality only

in the manner of an excess beyond given institutions as to be expressed. Thus by engaging in

language with others from a different institutional framework, I work much as Kaushik's painter

does: The aim is not merely to appropriate on one's own terms what one encounters, but rather

by divergence or *écart* to create new terms that allow for an expression of previously

unarticulated elements of an excessive material medium for intersubjective engagement.

Indirect communication in this sense allows for a formulation of the primacy of the

political in a more radical way, which we can see operative in Merleau-Ponty's formulation of

institution in "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence:"

> Husserl has used the fine word *Stiftung* – foundation or establishment – to
> designate the unlimited fecundity […] of the products of a culture which continue
> to have value after their appearance and which open a field of investigations in
> which they perpetually come to life again. It is thus that the world as soon as he
> has seen it, his first attempts at painting, and the whole past of painting all deliver
> up a tradition to the painter – *that is,* Husserl remarks, *the power to forget origins*,
> and to give the past not a survival, which is the hypocritical form of forgetfulness,
> but a new life, which is the noble form of memory.[408]

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[408] S 59

The "power to forget origins" in this sense suggests an originarily productive work, not because it brings the established terms of a given institution to fruition, but rather because it takes these terms to their limit in order to indirectly indicate an opening onto others. This power, however, is thoroughgoingly institutional, and is precisely what is carried out by way of indirect communication as a means of making room for other ways of speaking without simply abandoning or affirming one's own terms. In indirect communication, what is produced is a "coherent deformation" of the institution that one calls, ironically rather than naïvely, one's own.

In this way indirect communication allows for a reformulation of a 'primacy of the political' that is not essentially originally one's own, and which furthermore is not originally or necessarily even human. As Fóti puts it, the pivotal exhortation of a primacy of the political is not that we collectively understand ourselves by suspending or negating an alien world, but rather precisely that we do not "forget the strangeness of the world."[409] We cannot avoid language and we cannot simply or directly return to this strangeness; the very attempt to *speak* to this strangeness therefore appears self-undermining since "articulation remains, at every level, diacritical, it is intrinsically non-positive."[410] But on these terms it is language itself that may help us to forget the primacy of our own positions, and so language which in every case preserves room for a certain resistance to the logical, but also the social and political structures it appears to impose.

Section 3c. Communication and the Institution of Resistance

"The world is not something we can dominate."
-   Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, p. 22

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[409] S 22
[410] Foti, "Nature, Art, and the Primacy of the Political: Reading Taminiaux and Merleau-Ponty," p. 224

The notion of indirect communication as I have just presented it, along with its interpretation in the context of Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh, appears to challenge the 'totalizing' interpretation of materialism tracked in section one, but also the 'moralizing' implications of an intersubjective core that prefigures and regulates human relations within a single and exhaustive framework. I have already indicated that indirect communication in this sense allows for a thinking of resistance, but before developing the notion explicitly it will be helpful to distinguish this notion of resistance notion from the specifically humanist and proprietary structure of revolution as developed above.

The ontological appeal to the materiality of the flesh could after all strike us as a radically 'totalizing' move, suggesting a still-more comprehensive unity than the one predicted by way of revolutionary communication – as it were an even broader scope for "universal criticism." On these terms, the 'pre-logical' bond that our work makes manifest seems to function as a kind of ontological guarantee insofar as it inevitably puts us in relation to others, one way or another. Michel Haar suggests as much when he argues from an ontological perspective that "the meaning of being implies for Merleau-Ponty an access to Being-in-itself and to a viewpoint of all viewpoints (no matter what he says), from which one witnesses a total appropriation of the subject by Being."[411]

On the other hand, the appeal to the flesh might be considered 'moralizing' insofar as it widens the scope of intersubjectivity and political interaction beyond a simple moment of interhuman constitution. James Hatley suggests as much when he argues that the positivity of the

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[411] My translation. "[…] le sens de l'Être implique chez Merleau-Ponty un accès à l'Être en soi et à un point de vue de tous les points de vue (quoi qu'il en dise), à partir duquel on assiste à une appropriation totale du sujet par l'Être." Michel Haar, *La philosophie française entre phénoménologie et métaphysique*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, p. 22.

flesh ensures that I am no longer vulnerable to a Sartrean gaze that "dominates me," since the

prima facie alterity that threatens to do so "is already articulated in very depths of my own

visibility."[412] For Hatley the flesh in this sense is normatively loaded, procuring in advance of

any encounters a mutual access and recognition between specific individuals, and to that extent

amounts to an ontological "goodness."[413] Hatley's evaluation of the dialectics at stake appears to

be fair (that is, we no longer recognize a radical negativity), but for the same reason we should

draw no further implications as to the nature of intersubjective engagement: As with Butler's

response to Honneth, we can assert that simply because there is some basic intersubjectivity, this

intersubjectivity does necessarily yield a normative-ontological standard that would regulate or

prefigure relations in a particular way, for example so as to prevent abuse, violence, or war, etc.

Both Haar's and Hatley's reading turn on the notion of the flesh as establishing a

primordial symmetry; as Haar puts it: "the symmetry of the chiasm creates problems: on the one

hand there is a specific sensible-sensing; on the other hand there is a "sensible in general" which

has before it a "sensing in general."[414] What is crucial by way of response in both cases is the

emphasis on indirect language that is gained by enjoining the materiality of the flesh with the

differential iterability of institution. Implicitly, it is in a certain sense true as Haar suggests that to

give expression to the meaning of being (viz. of the flesh) is a manner of tapping into a

'universal' situation; on the other hand, the fact that I express it *through language* implies an

already-differential structure: Even if, from within a limited frame of reference and in naïve

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[412] Hatley, "Recursive Incarnation and Chiasmic Flesh: Two Readings of Paul Celan's 'Chymisch';" in *Chiasms*, p. 238
[413] Hatley, p. 240
[414] My translation. "En d'autres termes, la symétrie du chiasme fait problème : d'un côté, un sensible-sentant spécifique, de l'autre, un « sensible en général » qu'a « devant » lui un « sentant en général »." Haar, p. 16

communication, I can speak to a 'universal,' in indirect communication this universal is precisely what is revealed as a prefiguration of an excess it does not exhaust. What is thus brought to bear is that on the institutional model materiality suggests 'common ground' with our fellows in two very different ways: Grasped negatively, materiality yields a common ground that is wholly constituted by us and on our own terms; approached as an excess, materiality yields a common ground in the thought of difference or divergence (*écart*), and which therefore can only be seen as 'common' indirectly.

Ontologically and politically, then, what the appeal to indirect language rules out from the outset is both (i) a full appropriation of a historical situation (it is irrelevant whether or not one would readily call it one's 'own'), and (ii) an engagement with others on premises of complete recognition. Both conditions – appropriation and recognition – require a dialectical process that is precisely what indirect language, critically deployed, would interrupt. Implicitly, and by contrast with the analysis of Haar and Hatley, Merleau-Ponty's materialism suggests quite a precarious place for at least the critical individual that does not readily take for granted aspects of their historico-political situation.

Political resistance in this sense begins with a recognition of this precarity, borne out materially in the impossibility of 'totalizing' or 'moralizing' appropriations of a world that is nevertheless held in common. This precarity being operative within and at the origins of one's own institutional framework, the possibility of another mode of articulating the excessive materiality held in common comes with the possibility of the radical destabilization of any such framework. Here violence to the other or to the one who threatens a given framework is essentially possible, perhaps necessary as a means of an individual self-preservation, but violence by the same stroke is genuinely impossible to *justify*, as one could only find justification

in relation to the other with whom there is no consensus. Thus Merleau-Ponty's 'wait-and-see' Marxism and the possibility of revolutionary violence must be rejected, since the 'justification' that becomes possible *a posteriori* is precisely a justification on terms that one will have imposed through violence. It remains true: the revolutionary action after the fact would *appear* to be just, but what we add now is that it is 'just' precisely in the manner that for the scientist an observation is upon reflection 'true'; but both claims turn on the modification of medium that was carried out in revolution or upon reflection, and in this sense are self-fulfilling. Within the newly established framework, disagreement is always possible, but there can be no disagreement as to the framework itself, and still less any indication then of something beyond it.

Between revolution and resistance, then, there are two forms of critique, borne out as two different approaches to materiality. Revolution approaches materiality directly in the mode of a negativity, hence as without intrinsic content and therefore itself to be negated in order to reveal a power of constitution underneath appearances to the contrary; revolution effects a 'return to origins' from within a given framework, suggesting the notion of critique itself as an institution. Revolution deploys naïve communication, or deploys no communication at all. Resistance approaches materiality indirectly in the mode of an excess, hence as consisting in the positive limitations to one's own frame of references as what cannot be straightforwardly 'negated,' since it is out of the negativity of divergence (*écart*) that one's own framework emerges, and which negativity is in this sense not exhaustible on one's own terms at all; resistance effects a 'return to origins' as a shared or cooperative effort carried out between institutions, and which in revealing an excess can be *instituting* of new terms for engagement. By calling this instituting critique a 'cooperative' effort I evidently do not mean to normativize the notion, which by contrast turns on a deeper *dissensus*. Within the context or space of this *dissensus*, which is not itself an

institution, naïve communication remains operative and this *dissensus* in a certain way founds the threat of violence as much as it founds the possibility of consensus; neither, however, would be exhaustive of the material conditions out of which they emerge. Let us therefore briefly anticipate the sort of political relation called for by an instituting critique and indirect communication.

Critique as institution can be illustrated for example by Habermas' notion of communicative action, which originally and essentially aims at consensus. Evidently Habermas' notion secures a form of political resistance in the form of a right to say 'no', but it is this very right that *constitutes* the "binding effect of illocutionary forces"[415] in the sense that this rejection – if the rejection is a communicative act *per se* – must itself have been done "for reasons" that can now be presented within the same framework,[416] and which are in other words *reasons* only insofar as they can themselves be understood and recognized by others as such. For this reason Habermas says that "linguistic communication presupposes understanding;"[417] the broader implication is that the institution of critical dissent depends upon a prior mutual assent, and ultimately an implicit aim of consensus in the form, if not of *de facto* agreement, then at least in the form of "a rational trust *motivated* by agreement based on reasons."[418] Habermas' notion of resistance is still synthetically dialectical in this sense, and hinges on the double-role of institution as (i) providing common ground, as it were (ii) in order to give full expression to this common ground. The entire reflective process takes place *within* an institution without putting the institution as such into question.

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[415] *Theory of Communicative Action,* vol. 2 p. 73
[416] *Communicative Action*, vol. 2 p. 74
[417] *Communicative Action*, vol. 2 p. 73
[418] *Communicative Action* vol. 2, p. 74

Since Honneth, interestingly, critiques Habermas for a normativizing approach, I should establish precisely why a Merleau-Pontian response to Habermas would be different. Honneth takes his own notion of primary recognition to explicitly challenge Habermas on the grounds that Habermas' "conceptual strategy" relies too heavily on abstract understanding of the functional role of communication – but this 'function' is essentially the *telos* of agreement or consensus – while at the same time trying to speak about these "functional requirements in an apparently nonnormative way."[419] Habermas' approach on these terms is too dependent upon the notion of reflection as a supposedly content-neutral cognitive structure of secondary intersubjectivity; predictably, Honneth's proposal to indicate the necessary role of a primary recognition as operative 'beneath' the reflective and fully self-conscious level of rational exchange, and as a critical corrective. Honneth in this sense further radicalizes the structure of intersubjective critique required by Habermas' thinking, but does not question the structure of critique itself: Honneth's proposed emphasis on a pre-reflective level is not intended to trouble the reflective structure that Habermas proposes, so much as it is intended to strengthen that structure by clarifying its ontological basis; everything still hangs on a rational reflection that can reappropriate its own pre-reflective roots.

By turning to an instituting critique and indirect method, on the other hand, the point is to recognize a precarity and contingency at these roots, in short, the limits of even a pre-reflective structure that is specifically one's own. An instituting critique therefore attempts to 'recognize' these limits, but this is not a work of appropriation or identification so much as it is a work of indicating divergence, hence a failure of consensus at the origin of institution that is nevertheless not a *lack*. The same 'recognition' already opens onto a certain work of 'production' in the

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[419] Honneth, p. 55

establishment of a new framework for intersubjective engagement, but this again is not a work of appropriation as its object would be a founding *écart*. Between recognition and production in this sense we must locate what can be called an *instituting dissent*, which amounts to the work of putting the origin of a given institution into question, showing (if nothing else) that it is *possible* that another approach exists. Unlike recognition, an instituting dissent does not merely rediscover and reaffirm an already-operative consensus, and unlike revolution an instituting dissent does not directly (viz. in the negative) posit another institutional-historical possibility; instituting dissent proposes neither to ground nor to abolish a given institution, but attempts to transform it on its own terms, hence via 'coherent deformation,' from within. Instituting criticism in this sense is critical, not because it counterposes one institutional situation in relation to another, but rather because it opens any institution onto an excessive materiality as a brute space of politics, an 'ether of events'[420] out of which new institutions of relation may emerge, and even if one is not yet ready to call them one's *own*.

By way of conclusion, I will attempt to further clarify and summarize the notion of instituting critique as a form of political resistance by identifying three criteria or features of the type of work it names.

First, instituting critique follows from a hyperdialectical materialism. Critique in the hyper-reflective sense is linguistic, but language and communication are themselves to be understood in terms of the process of 'working over' matter. The implicit chiasm of "human beings – worked-over-matter" is borne out on the one hand *actively*, that is, in the work of expression and putting-into-question that we explicitly carry out in a political setting, but it is also borne out *passively*, in the sense that instituting criticism cannot amount to a self-sustaining

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[420] N 116

project, but hinges on the work of unrecognized others, and ultimately on the materiality of the flesh, none of which can be directly or actively appealed to.

Second, instituting critique implies a work of resistance that is not 'totalizing' insofar as it does not aim at a self-consciousness or structure of identity, but one of divergence. A hyperreflective attitude is therefore necessary, since a condition of critique here involves the admission of the limits of one's own critical capacities as against an excess in relation to which or within which the critical subject nevertheless remains positioned. To again borrow Fóti's description of the primacy of the political, the aim of instituting critique is to take what appears complete insofar as it is familiar in order to reveal the 'strangeness of the world' as nevertheless at stake there.

Third, instituting critique implies a communal work – not in the sense of a synthetic dialectics, however, but grasped in a hyper-dialectical way that does not propose to universalize the notion of community. Specifically, it becomes necessary to think a kind of 'instituting community,' which entails on the one hand the *active* engagement of a plurality of individuals, more or less recognizable for one another; at the same time, a *passivity* of community is entailed for the same reason, so that the interdependence of community itself calls into doubt the possibility of a full or exhaustive expression of this community by any one of its members, and by extension of it as a 'whole.' That is, what must be communally maintained is precisely a work of dissent that is not prefigured by a single set of terms that is institutionally imposed. Thus there is a plausibly 'autocritical' element to community after all, but the structure of indirect communication because crucial as the structure and premises of the community itself must be put into play in a non-oppositional way.

A community of resistants in this sense takes as its 'originary' motivation the work of locally evincing gaps in an apparently exhaustive synthetic-constitutional narrative. Evidently this implies a situation of precarity for the resistant: Unlike the community that supposes political critique to itself be an institution with a clear origin and historical purpose, a community that founds itself on the work of instituting dissent does not have a future to call its 'own' except as it is carried on in the work of others. A certain 'principle of publicity' in the Habermasian sense remains plausible,[421] but it would hinge on an "epistemic humility" of the sort identified in chapter one, and in light of which the critical work of a public cannot simply render itself transparent, but requires critical attention instead to the various media of public engagement that precisely inhibit the 'direct' and transparent engagement of individuals in public. Implicitly what Habermas sees as a privatization of what he calls the public sphere would not be an accidental historical error, but rather a structural and perhaps 'originary' problem for the very notion of a 'public' that as I have argued would have its origins in *dissensus* in the sense of écart; the ideal of "universal access"[422] is precisely one that a public would have to attend to in indirect communication, and ultimately to resist.

This notion of public space, hence of community in the active or, more precisely *working* sense of *Stiftung*, does not recuse itself of a place in a given institution, and is always potentially assailable in relation to the naïve communication at work in present legal and political structures. Thus the notion of public space can always possibly be reduced to structures in this sense that are pre-reflectively take for granted, or which in the reflective attitude are taken as objects or sites of critique and appropriation. At the same time, what an instituting community of dissidents takes it

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[421] For a brief definition of a 'principle of publicity,' see Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 83

[422] *Structural Transformation*, p. 85

upon itself to reveal is that everything apparently 'new' at the reflective or pre-reflective levels

depends upon the prior, hyper-reflective work of indirect communication; this work, being borne

out in an excessive materiality irreducible to the totalizing structures of naïve communication,

suggests an intersubjective space that is radically public. Further consideration and development

of this position would be productive, I think, insofar as the scope of the space for political

resistance is rapidly increasing in public engagements; the notion of a radically public space,

however difficult and potentially problematic both philosophically and politically, is becoming

increasingly important to recognize as at stake in various new dimensions of the political that can

be observed in a variety of current movements, precisely in order to see why these movements

are new.

      I will attempt to extent the analysis of a public space of this sort in the fourth and final

chapter, culminating in considerations of two such movements.

Chapter Four: Discourse and the Medium of Political Resistance

"If the political is implied by, or implicit in, the thinking of *différance*, it is already operative, whether or not it is explicitly named as such, recognized as part of the political, that is, whether or not the political has been rethought to include this thought."
-    Judith Butler, "Finishing, Starting," p. 293

With Merleau-Ponty's help, and via detours through Marx, Lukács, and Honneth, I have

attempted to elaborate a critical materialist reading of a 'primacy of the political' in terms of an

'excessive materiality,' hence as field of political relations that may precede consciousness of

one's own situation in this field, and which radically rules out a comprehensive concept or

production of this field as a synthetic whole. Maintaining that an excessive materiality

nevertheless retains a crucial political valence, I emphasized the resulting 'indirect' structure of

political discourse – a discursive structure that, approached critically, should be neither totalizing

nor moralizing (these risk coinciding, I said[423]), since the field itself is modified as it is co-opted

and expressed on the terms of a particular intersubjective institution, and since as a result no one

institution can accomplish a comprehensive recuperative expression of this field on its own

terms. In short, an 'excessive materiality' names a condition for political discourse that cannot be

fully appropriated by any given structure of political discourse.

What I have perhaps not sufficiently considered on these terms is the apparent result

arrived at in chapter three, namely the notion of a political resistance as a form of discursive

action. Intended to denote a non-revolutionary political *praxis* that is nevertheless 'radical' in the

sense of carrying out a disruptive return to origins, resistance in this sense would be operative

first of all by putting the designation 'political' into question. In order to explicate how a work of

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[423] Here I am referring to Merleau-Ponty's observation in *Adventures of the Dialectic* that to think Marxism both negatively and comprehensively, that is, which "remains true whatever it does," suggests that this approach is on the terrain "of the *a priori* and of morality." (AD 232)

resistance in this sense is possible, and in particular *where* it is operative – the spaces where it becomes recognizable, of course, but equally the spaces in which it remains at stake without being recognized – I now turn to Derrida's thinking as it explicitly confronts the difficulties of addressing the political without prefiguring it on one's own terms.

Within Derrida's own *corpus* there is perhaps some ambiguity as to which writings can be properly called political. Derridean scholarship has often spoken of a "political turn" that begins, perhaps, with Derrida's keynote address on "The Force of Law" in 1989, or alternatively with the publication of *Specters of Marx* in 1993. This notion of a political turn, initially no more than a practical apparatus for scholarship on Derrida, has since come to generate its own array of debates – when precisely the 'turn' takes place and with which text(s), why it comes about, whether it is even political properly speaking or rather (and for example) ethical, and finally what intentions might have motivated Derrida in taking on a *prima facie* new array of questions in his later work, different enough from his earlier work that they called for a new category, and perhaps a new reading. None of these scholarly debates were ever obviously at stake in what have been classified as Derrida's 'political' texts, such as *Specters*, *Politics of Friendship,* and *Of Hospitality* – and nothing about the question of the 'turn' seems to be settled when Derrida for his part states, with some authority in the series of lectures later published as *Rogues* in 2003, that "there never was in the 1980s or 1990s, as has sometimes been claimed, a political turn or ethical turn in 'deconstruction,' at least not as I experience it. The thinking of the political has always been a thinking of *différance*, and the thinking of *différance* a thinking *of* the political."[424]

In Derrida's own *corpus*, then, but also in these scholarly exchanges, we already anticipate the difficulty of invoking a notion of political discourse that implies an originary

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[424] *Rogues*, p. 39

divergence – as it were an originary doubling, which from the outset risks a certain duplicity in speaking of *the* origin and *the* political. As Butler observes in "Finishing, Starting,"[425] what is at stake in Derrida's thinking is a certain primacy of the political, since it concerns a thinking of the political that has always been operative in a given tradition or institution whether one recognizes it as 'political' or not, and in which a *certain* recognition of its operation would not as a result yield an exhaustive expression. The issue that Butler indicates in other words involves a tension between what is discursively *described* as "political," on the one hand, and the *act* of designation on the other – a tension between the constative and performative moments in the approach to the political as such. If the political is to be rethought in order to include this thought of a performative-constative tension, the fundamentality of both must be suspended and the political taken up again as something uncertain or debatable.

From a materialist perspective, we can already see how as the *corpus* of Derrida's writing extends or is further disseminated throughout institutions such as those of the university, the text begins to engender discourse in ways not explicitly predicted or called for in the 'original' writings. Equally, a core of *dissensus* becomes recognizable in these institutions, and we cannot simply assign its origin to Derrida's writing, as the disagreement itself concerns the proper description of this relation to origins, that is, the proper *critique* of the text. Finally, then, the *decision* to call this or that text political is therefore not Derrida's, and the medium of the text appears to be always already alienated from its author in the very work of reading and interpretation, even as it also remains alienated, in another sense, from these readers. On these terms, we already have a general sense of the essential tension at work in discourse, in which the text functions as a medium that elicits (i) critical discourse (concerning the text) within an

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[425] Judith Butler, "Finishing, Starting," p. 293 in *Derrida and the Time of the Political*

institution, alongside (ii) decisive appropriation (of the text) into the institution. Although the aim of this chapter from beginning to end is to develop the tensions of the discursive structure just developed in outline, we can already risk a provisional formalization as follows:

Discourse – [Medium] – Decision

As I will argue, there are two readings of this structure, which in turn yield two notions of discursive resistance. When, furthermore, 'discursive resistance' is grasped within a framework of discursive action – or when in any case we insist upon the performative element of decision as necessary to the work of critique – the double-reading of discursive resistance usefully opens onto a double-reading of political resistance. These two readings, and by extension two notions of the work or resistance will turn on their approach to the medium of discourse – a medium that I will argue requires a materialist reading.

In sections one and two I will develop the two horns of the first reading, both of which hinge on a negative reading of this medium.

Arendt, as we will see in the first section, offers a negative reading of materiality in order to explicate resistance as a form of *critique* operative within a given institution. This critical resistance will appeal to an institutional origin in the form of a decision, but will not put that decision into question. For Arendt, I will argue, this strict exclusion of material concerns from critical discourse is a necessary condition for a given institution to be considered 'political' properly speaking. On this basis Arendt can admit the important role of materiality in the establishment or collapse of a political sphere – that is, in moments of originary decision – but

she argues that from within the political sphere, the appeal to materiality undermines conditions of equality and freedom that define political discourse as such.

In section two, Schmitt will claim almost the reverse, arguing that what is essentially political is a *decisive* moment made by a sovereign power that constitutes itself as such in the identification of a common enemy. What Schmitt calls political in this sense is originarily 'material' in the sense of a *physis* that one accords to the enemy in the manner of a threat, and to oneself conversely in the manner of shared means to combat this threat. At the same time, the interpretation of materiality here remains 'negative' precisely because it has no expression except in the relation to a strictly excluded enemy, as a relation that can have no definition except as it will have been materially borne out. In this case the work of 'critique,' in its invocation of stable discursive structures and institutions, is essentially a depoliticizing movement in relation to an originally extra-discursive moment of constitution.

In both of the first two sections, I will also attempt to supply a second reading of materiality, viz. as a medium of discourse that 'exceeds' the institutional framework within which we find it operative, and in this sense should be seen as neither strictly included nor excluded. As an excess, however, materiality becomes impossible to identify with either the critical or decisive moment, and as a result troubles their relation as one of opposition: Between critique and decision, a certain *indecision* can be indirectly indicated as operative in the mode of a core of *dissensus* that conditions both critique and decision, and finally their intertwining without synthesis. In the third and final section, I attempt to illustrate the essential upshot of this analysis: Critically approached via double-reading, it is the medium of discourse itself that can itself be deployed in a 'radical' discursive resistance that does not *either* critically describe *or*

decisively establish the origins of given institution, but which remains operative at and as its

limits, in order to resist it from within.

I have already intimated that the university yields a medium of discursive engagement

without presupposing a common institutional identity or history, and it will be one example of an

institution that yields a medium of resistance in the mode of *dissensus*. In the critical spaces of

the university, in other words, it seems possible already to identify approaches that put the

institution and its material conditions into question, without yet claiming an overcoming of the

institution; in this 'radical' questioning that does not think its object negatively, there appears to

be a certain 'institution which tends to overflow the institution'[426] – in resistance, we can say, to

the promise of its own origins. As Derrida puts it, "there is something of the general strike, and

thus of the revolutionary situation, in every reading that founds something new, and that remains

unreadable in regard to established canons and norms of reading."[427] Does this mean that, in

these university spaces deploying discursive resistance, there is already political resistance and a

kind of general strike? "Yes and no," Derrida says, since however potent this effort of

questioning may prove to be, it is evident that the origins being resisted are *merely* those of the

institution itself.[428] Thus discursive resistance, which consists in the resistance of an excessive

materiality *to* discourse, is always tactical, and politically proves most effective in what will

always appear as impossible or as senseless, that is, in the irruption of political discourse into an

apolitical space, hence in a *becoming*-political of discourse that is unrecognizable by appeal to

what *is* political. Nevertheless, we can anticipate that the necessity of this becoming, which is

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[426] AL 36
[427] AR 271
[428] AR 272

precisely the necessity of another origin, *is there* in the very institution it interrupts; the medium

of discourse can always in this sense be deployed as a second origin before the first.

Section One: The Politics of the Address; the Address of Politics

"Force of Law" is an essay of Derrida's developed out of a keynote address at a colloquium –

"Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice" – organized largely for legal scholars concerning

the capacity of deconstruction to properly address the question of justice. Insofar as it is the very

notion of an 'address' that Derrida takes up with his first words, what is initially raised and never

truly abandoned is the structure of the address as itself a means of explicating the notion of

justice in terms of a relation between individuals.[429] The essential problem raised is that, if the

structure of the address can be operative as a structure of relations, this implies a necessarily

differential structure; the notion of justice that Derrida develops is therefore also radically

differential, proving irreducible to any single articulation of the notion. A central claim

developed out of the question of the address is therefore that there must be some slippage

between the law (which does nothing if it does not systematically articulate and institute a

specific interpretation of justice) and justice itself, which must always be more comprehensive

and inclusive than any one attempt to institute and articulate it.

The notion of a tension between law and justice on these terms is already a tension

between the constative and the performative; as I will argue, this tension becomes particularly

apparent in the work of resistance, and specifically of resistance to the law as action that might

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[429] The term "individual," however, will have to be problematized in section three in order to
recognize the kind of relation at stake in resistance. See section 3b below for the distinction
between individual and singularity, and the quasi-communal relation that follows from this
distinction.

nevertheless be justifiable. For the same reason, the work of resistance elicits a tension between critique and decision, as resistance may concern that critical moment where decisive action becomes necessary.

With these tensions in mind I will situate Derrida in relation to Arendt, who in taking up Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* argues for a notion of civil disobedience that arguably has a place and provisional justification in the spirit, if not the letter of the law.

The pivotal claim for Arendt, then, is that civil disobedience can be secured in terms of what Montesquieu calls "relations of possible justice": In civil disobedience the letter of the law is critically 'bracketed' in order to appeal to a more originary spirit of the law as an origin that upon appeal justifies the disobedient act as falling within the institution it appears to deny; thus critique is supposed to 'arrive' at this more originary decision. A certain synthesis of critique and decision is in this sense considered to be achievable in resistance, and achievable in particular by a deployment in bad faith of what I will describe below in terms of the 'teleiopoetic address.'

For Derrida, by contrast, no such synthesis will be possible; instead, the very *tension* between justice and the law will itself be grasped in terms of a work of resistance – but resistance in this sense hinges on a refusal of even the *possibility* of the articulation of justice in the letter. The aim of resistance in this sense will not be to 'do' justice on institutional terms, but rather to subject the terms of the institution to a more radical question, that is, to indicate an undecidability as to the nature of justice inherent the terms of the institution as such. Rather than making a *claim* to the institution's origins, the resistant attempts to indirectly reveal another origin, that is, to *call* for this other origin from within the institution as it is.

Section 1a. Relations of Possible Justice: Civil Disobedience and the Res Publica

In her article on "Civil Disobedience" in 1970, Arendt addresses a question – pivotal at the time

in the U.S., given reactions to the ongoing War in Vietnam, including draft-dodging and other

movements of protest – of the justification that can be found, if any, for a refusal to adhere to the

law. Carl Cohen, writing only a few years earlier, sets up the essential issue when he flatly states

that "the law cannot justify the breaking of the law."[430] Appealing to, and to some extent

rereading Montesquieu's concept of a 'spirit of the law', Arendt offers what seems to be a way

out of the quandary that Cohen's claim announces, in a way that seems to preserve a legal

justification for acts of civil disobedience.[431]

      The tension that Arendt sees in civil disobedience is, she argues, effectively anticipated in

the distinction and relation that Montesquieu exposes between natural and positive laws.

Whereas natural laws are "the necessary relations arising from the nature of things," he says,

positive laws are a specific case of the 'necessary relations', namely the civil-political relations

of intelligent beings in general, and of human beings in particular. Whatever positive laws and

politico-juridical systems in fact emerge from *actual* relations amongst human beings, then,

Montesquieu is able to argue that there is also a more general and more comprehensive

framework for all such systems; this more comprehensive framework is that of the *possible*

relations that in theory have no need to be written or instantiated to bear force. It is these

'relations of possible justice' that, on Montesquieu's account, amount to the "spirit" of the law

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[430] *Rutgers Law Review* (vol. 2 issue 1, Fall, 1966) on "Civil Disobedience and the Law," Carl Cohen, p. 8.

[431] I say that Arendt's position "seems" to preserve a legal justification since her appeal to a 'spirit' of the law, as I will eventually argue, must be seen as problematizing the limits of the law in general, viz. not only the 'letter'; the question of whether or not a 'spirit' of the law can be comprehended as proper to the law or to legally defined individuals is the very question that Derrida raises concerning the "force" of law.

insofar as they provide written laws with their *animus* and force, operative as the origin of the formal institution.[432]

The spirit of the laws in the Montesquieuian sense thus considers relations amongst individuals as an ontological ground: written laws "derive their force entirely from our frame and existence,"[433] which means that positive law is little more than an expression of its natural foundation. Implicitly we already have a synthetic structure: The letter of the law is as we say, since this letter has a nature or *physis* that we are, that is, us humans as discursive beings. At the same time, there is a hierarchy: Natural law, *physis*, comes first. It *so happens* that it is in our nature to write, and this is why there will be positive law, but the medium of writing has no intrinsic force. The written letter of the law does not govern us, we govern it; thus the spirit of the law, which we are, is always a potential corrective: We will know when a politico-juridical system is *just* not by appeal to the letter of the law but by appeal to one another. It is in this sense that discourse must have a clear primacy in legal and political matters, and discourse in this sense has origins that precede any media for its communication.

In "Civil Disobedience," Arendt invokes Montesquieu's framework in order to explicate the apparent contradiction of breaking the law as having plausible politico-juridical justifications. Arendt in this sense complicates Montesquieu's account by observing the possibility of civil disobedience as itself another instance of relations between individuals, hence of 'relations of possible justice.' What becomes thinkable in this sense is the claim, by a group of excluded or opposed individuals, that justice is precisely what is lacking in a given politico-juridical context

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[432] Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, p. 2. "Before laws were made, there were relations of possible justice. […] We must therefore acknowledge relations of justice antecedent to the positive law by which they are established."
[433] Montesquieu, *Laws*, p. 4

or system. (Justice is lacking in this system, we can anticipate, because *we* are lacking in it, because it doesn't represent or recognize us, etc.) Despite Montesquieu's notion that relations amongst individuals are grounding of government, then, what Arendt observes is the possibility of a slippage between the spirit and letter of the law for Arendt implies a "period of turmoil" where the authority of an established government is being challenged, rather than grounded, by the individuals that it governs.[434] Civil disobedience consists therefore in a mobilization of the 'spirit' of the law in light of which the law is itself destabilized; for this reason "civil disobedience arises when a significant number of citizens have become convinced […] that the normal channels of change no longer function."[435]

There is more than one form of disobedience of the law, however, and it is important for Arendt to distinguish *civil* disobedience (e.g. from criminal disobedience) on the basis that there both action *in* and *for* a public.[436] If civil disobedience is a genuine mobilization of the spirit of the law, in other words, it consists already in a relation between individuals who recognize one another as political agents, that is, in "concerted action [that] springs from an agreement with each other."[437] This public, intersubjective, and recognitive nature of the act of civil disobedience confirms for Arendt that the act is itself a movement emerging from the *physis* that precedes and grounds the written letter or *lexis* of the law; on these terms, there is a kind of 'right' to critique

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[434] Arendt, *Crises* p. 55. In this passage, a 'period of turmoil' is defined as a general rather than specific situation where "not local laws, but the national lawmaking power is being challenged."
[435] *Crises*, p. 74
[436] For Arendt, criminal disobedient avoids the public eye altogether (*Crises*, p. 75); meanwhile, a conscientious objector or moral disobedient acts in public, but on Arendt's reading acts out of private or personal concerns (*Crises*, p. 60).
[437] *Crises*, p. 56

the law in its letter, a "right to dissent,"[438] and this right could be grasped as originarily *political*, if not legal in the technical sense.

At the same time, on Arendt's account the political act of disobedience occurs *within* an institution, and in that sense is not radical. Civil disobedience is not a general strike because it is not general: it does not threaten the spirit of the law as a whole, but critiques it only in part on the basis and for the sake of this broader political whole. The work of civil disobedience appears to 'politicize' an issue previously considered to be without place in public discourse, but that is not quite right, as in truth it affirms the origins of the political. Locally and within the institution, there is a 'right to dissent,' but at bottom this "dissent implies consent,"[439] specifically a prior and more general consent (viz. a tacit consent in the traditional sense) as a set of shared beliefs between all individuals in a given *polis*, and which thereby sets the limits of the *polis* in advance.

On Arendt's terms we can see how civil disobedience as a form of resistance is grasped negatively, viz. as a node of *dissensus* that both requires a prior and broader consensus as its justificatory basis, and which in the act of dissenting to the law precisely aims at legal recognition. Discourse is pivotal for Arendt in this process, which is in effect one of giving full expression to latent political relations; since human beings are (i) uniquely political, and (ii) uniquely capable of discourse (*lexis*),[440] what is called for is a development of the political at the level of discourse and only there. On these terms it follows that the notion of political *action* or *praxis* must be similarly discursive, and Dana Villa finds reason on these grounds to link Arendt

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[438] *Crises*, p. 88
[439] *Crises*, p. 88
[440] See e.g. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 27. Here Arendt rebukes the conflation of humans as social and political animals, arguing that Aristotle's notion of a *zoon politikon* should have us oppose the necessarily public realm of the political to the private realm of the social. The human capacity for speech or discourse (*lexis*), as Arendt argues, is similarly definitive of the political, but not necessarily of the social.

to Habermas, arguing that Arendt's position "makes possible a comprehensive theory of communicative action and consensual rationality."[441] Within this framework, it becomes clear why even a *praxis* of resistance, if political, should be realized as *lexis*, hence as a certain address of one's peers through which aspects of a founding decision can be critically appealed to, in light of which this founding decision – which conditions political discourse as such – cannot itself be brought into question.

Between this relation of a political *physis*, *lexis*, and *praxis*, there is no room for materiality, that is, for any *medium* at all. For one thing, the written letter of the law is always extraneous – a product of human nature*,* discourse*,* and action that for its part neither *is* nor *says* nor *does* anything, and which as a result risks straying from its origins. There is a *need* for critique, we might say, because of the letter and its tendency to stray, but this 'because' is too strong as the media of discourse here (the letter of the law and the parchment paper on which it is inscribed; the building of parliament and courthouse; archives of case history and dissenting opinions, etc.) all have no force, are neutral with respect to the specifically human work they make possible.

It is therefore critical for Arendt to sharply distinguish between the public and political nature of discursive *action* (viz. synthesis of human *physis*, *lexis*, *praxis*) as against the activities of *labour* or *work* in which humans also take part. Labour on Arendt's account concerns physical-biological sustenance and consumption, while work concerns the production and use of human artifacts.[442] Political action is unique, and properly human, to the extent that it is an

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[441] Villa, *The Fate of the Political*, p. 8

[442] Unlike labour, what Arendt calls 'work' is a specifically human activity. Guided by "the function of stabilizing human life" (*The Human Condition*, p. 137), work aim at the construction and maintenance of a human world, and to that extent involves various linguistic components at stake (for example) in the proper functioning of personal friendships, private contracts and a

"activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter," and for that reason allow a plurality of human individuals to engage with one another as equals.[443] We can see the problem: the straying tendency of the written letter is a straying from a common origin, and materiality more generally is just as alienating. The difference between a property-owner and the one who works for them does not suggest 'plurality' in Arendt's sense since this material relation emerges without the explicit or free decision of the parties involved; instead a set of material-historical circumstances ensures a structure of power that defines both roles in advance. Discourse as Arendt understands the notion is useless in combatting this situation. The worker can strike, but that is precisely not to engage with the owner; it is a collapse of discourse, and so of the political; the worker on strike cannot be recognized by the employer as human, and that is why they are on strike. Violence is a possibility from now on, and violence is precisely what Arendt means to rule out from the realm of the political as the realm of the human properly *speaking*.[444]

In this sense Arendt's appeal to the difference between the activities of work and action is not only discursive, but also suggests an ontological difference.[445] By extension the realm of politics must strictly exclude the material components of human being, since it is precisely these

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marketplace, social engagements, etc. None of these linguistic components however are political properly speaking for Arendt, since they lack the essential conditions of freedom and plurality as described below. (See *The Human Condition*, p. 7-8)

[443] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 7

[444] See Arendt, *On Violence*, p. 4

[445] I don't here use the term 'ontological difference' in its Heideggerian sense; by evoking something of it, I hope only to emphasize the radical break at stake in the transition from labour/work to what Arendt calls action, where the latter reveals and appropriates what is strictly and properly human, doing so insofar as it transcends and grasps as a whole the material world with which a human in labour or in work is merely confronted as alien and alienating. For Arendt the 'ownmost possibility' of humanity is revealed in political action, and revealed as a communal property in the mutual recognition of equality and plurality between humans.

components that from the outset resist public expression and recognition; this exclusion provides

the necessary condition for Arendt's unconditional affirmation that to engage politically is to

engage publicly.

Meanwhile it is no accident that the form of resistance that Arendt describes as civil

disobedience is never radical: If dissent involves an attempt to "politicize" an issue, the limits of

the *polis* in which one acts provide the conditions for the act, and the conditions of dissent – the

polis as such – cannot be overturned or undone by the work of dissent. Civil disobedience is in

this sense a form of critique that returns a given *polis* to its origin, but necessarily stops short of

the appeal to another origin, which by contrast with the political is always for Arendt

revolutionary appeal. The political mode of critique therefore clarifies, reiterates and refines, but

ultimately reinforces the originary decision in light of which the limits and structure of the

republic are established as such.

Section 1b. Relations of Im/Possible Justice: Resistance and the Spes Publica

If Arendt's notion of a communicative action in this way provides a definitive answer to Butler's

question "what can be called political?", the apparently exhaustive nature of Arendt's answer

depends on her framing of communicative action as an adaptation of Aristotelean teleology.[446]

Since, in other words, the human is *zoon politikon*, and since *zoon politikon* is by nature

discursive, the nature of the political in our case is and can only be discursively borne out: In

short, the political is what we say it is, so long as we add the proviso that to 'say' is not some

decisive event, but is rather an ongoing critical process of public discourse that operates with an

aim of general consensus. Critique in this sense no doubt requires a decisive moment, and in a

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[446] See ft. 440 above for Arendt's appeal to humanity as *zoon politikon*.

way the first and only purpose of critique is to clarify this moment and bring it to full expression, but this *claim* made in discourse to a given origin seems to have force only insofar as it does not bring the origin as such into question.

In *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida is not directly addressing Arendt's account of a political *praxis*,[447] yet his understanding of political relations there, ever concerned with language as a site of difference, leads to a useful way of reopening the question of Arendt's appeal to a consensus-based model for critical discourse. It is the structure of this 'claim' to an origin, in particular to a common origin that does not need to be *produced*, but only *recognized* as such, that we must take up in greater detail.

With the distinction between production and recognition, we are in a way recalling the distinction between Lukács and Honneth in chapter three. It seems to me that Arendt's distinction between Labour and Work, on the hand, and Action on the other hand, allows us to account for both the material and mediated engagements of production, and the immaterial and immediate engagements of action; the transition between the two, however, seems difficult to explain. In raising the issue of the moment of transition, I do not have in mind the revolutionary; it seems clear that the revolutionary is *pre*-political on Arendt's terms, and would have to drastically alter their methods or *praxis* in order to live politically with others. On the other hand, as we have seen, the civil disobedient is clearly within the political, their 'right to dissent' recognized, if nothing else.

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[447] In fact, and in spite of enough overlap in the basic concerns at the heart Arendt's and Derrida's considerations of ontology and politics, Derrida almost never refers to or directly engages with Arendt's work. Even in one of the few notable exceptions to this rule, Derrida's essay "On Cosmopolitanism," the introduction of an overlapping concern with stateless individuals turns very quickly for Derrida into a discussion of hospitality and an 'other politics of the city' (p. 7-8) in a way that Arendt likely would have found uninteresting.

But is it not possible, indeed is it not necessary to think a step (*pas*) between these two moments of strict inclusion and strict exclusion in relation to the political and to the law? I have in mind a non-revolutionary dissenter, let us imagine, whose rights may be recognized *on certain terms*, but whose dissenting position is precisely *to* the terms under which they are recognized as having rights: for example, and to anticipate an example considered section three, the black person whose right to speak in public is formally recognized but whose attempt to politicize and speak of their race would in practice cost them this public platform, or alternatively the transgendered person who has a right to use public restrooms, but where these restrooms are cisgendered. Briefly we can note how, in examples such as these, it is not that the spirit of the law is strictly exclusive of the dissenter, but rather that the letter of the law – how and in what language it is written, how it is interpreted and applied, who enforces it, etc. – appears to undermine dissent. And yet an appeal to the spirit – for example a general 'right to dissent' – does not obviously rectify this dissenter's situation.

If Arendt appears to skip this step between the revolutionary and the disobedient, hence between decision and discourse, it is because of the refusal of any decisive moment *in* discourse, which in turn is possible for Arendt in light of a synthetic incorporation of a human *physis* always already into *lexis*. On these terms, Arendt's civil disobedient makes what Derrida in another context identifies as a 'teleiopoetic address' – an address (*poesis*) that completes or "*brings* to an end" the process of which it is a part, incorporating into the address the object it speaks to:[448] The civil disobedient must affirm a *certain* discursive expression of justice in order that the disobedient actions be recognized by others as 'just'; with their actions, and not only with discourse, the disobedient appears to say "this is justice; I am just." In this way Arendt's

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[448] PF 32

emphasis on discourse as a constative work of collectively describing and agreeing upon a notion

of justice risks an elision of a necessary decisive moment: In order to speam to relations of

possible justice *and* to have them recognized by others on a shared set of terms, one must not

only name the possible relations one speaks to, but in so doing also *actualize* and exhaust the

possibility being named. In order to reinvigorate or mobilize the spirit of the law, in other words,

one cannot only describe it; in the description itself there must be a performative moment.

For Derrida, then, the danger of a teleiopoetic address is not so much that its structure

includes this performative moment, but rather that the same structure is what also allows us to

ignore the necessary operation of this performative force: The decisive moment of "bringing to

an end," hence (e.g.) of articulating justice, effectively negates the distance between the letter

and the spirit of the law, and we may at that point feel entitled to see the spirit in the letter, if not

as the letter.[449] Derrida also emphasizes, however, that there may be a second sense in which a

teleiopoetic address, in its invocation of the letter, introduces a material medium, hence a certain

distance from the object spoken to;[450] this productive moment is lost on us, however, if we

expect a strictly discursive, which is to say a *recognized* notion of justice in the moment of its

articulation, for example by Arendt's civil disobedient. The negative aspect of *teleiopoesis* in this

way can be deployed as the means of covering over a necessarily excessive aspect – the letter

covers o itself – which is reducible neither to the discursive articulation by way of this medium,

nor to the decisive manipulation of it that prefigures discourse on justice in a certain way.

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[449] See the notion of what Derrida calls "justice as law" below.

[450] PF 32. "But permit us to play too with the other *tele,* the one that speaks to distance and the far-removed, for what is indeed in question here is a poetics of distance at one remove, and of an absolute acceleration in the spanning of space by the very structure of the sentence." Lawlor emphasizes the importance of this double-aspect of the teleipoetic address in his book, *From Violence to Speaking Out*, emphasizing the necessary inclusion of a performative moment as a result. See e.g. pp. 253.

In contrast with Arendt's account as an attempt to critically identify the letter with the spirit of the law, the concern that I draw from Derrida is to explicate the material basis in light of which a difference between the two can be sustained. Rather than the always-already synthetic movement that Arendt describes, my aim is to lay out a non-synthetic relation that is operative without being given in the apparent transition, translation, or transposition of the spirit into the letter – a nongivenness, then, that resists reduction to the structure of givenness it makes possible. What I will try to show is that a non-synthetic relation of this sort must be operative as a choric space between or underneath both *physis* and *lexis*, decision and discourse, in or upon which they could be given without being identified. Between the spirit and the letter, in other words, hence between justice and the law, what must be indirectly indicated is the operation of a space of resistance as a space where the nonidentity of the one with the other can be, in a strange way, recognized. (But note immediately how the word 'recognition,' applied to a space of resistance that cannot be given in the letter of the law, precisely cannot consist in recognition or consensus in the Arendtian sense; this is why I will not use the term *recognition*, but instead deploy the language of an 'indirect indication.') In order to indirectly indicate this space of resistance I will emphasize the need for a double-reading of the teleiopoetic address as it applies to the relation between law and justice – a double-relation between these two will fall on the one hand under what I term the *claim*, and on the other under what I term the *call*.

I have already indicated what I call the 'claim' in various ways, but I am now in a position to define it more formally by appeal to the schema developed in the chapter's introduction above. Specifically, under the schema

Discourse – [Medium] – Decision

Arendt's thinking of communicative action proposes a notion of critique (e.g. the civil

disobedient's violation of the letter of the law) that can make evident its own origins in an

originary decision (e.g. tacit consensus of a democratic state as the establishment of a right to

dissent in 'spirit'). The *claim* is a claim *to* this origin – a negation of the distance between the

claimant and the origin effected by teleiopoesis, and borne out as a synthesis of critique and

decision (e.g. the civil disobedient's claim that their violation of the letter of the law is justified

by the spirit of the law); by the same stroke, this teleiopoetic claim is effected in bad faith since it

is also a claim *not to modify* the origin in any way. The claim in this sense turns on the negative

conception of the medium as neutral so that to violate, bracket, and otherwise modify the letter

leaves the originary spirit wholly intact as it originally was.

In "Force of Law," Derrida makes it clear with the first sentence of the presentation that

the notion of a neutral or negative medium is precisely what he will bring into question:

> "*C'est pour moi un devoir, je dois* m'adresser *à vous en anglais.* This is for me a
> duty, I must *address* myself to you in English."[451]

By referring to what is seemingly no more than a pragmatic requirement – the need to address

oneself to others in a shared language – as a "duty," Derrida (whose first and preferred language

is French) is observing a requirement imposed by others that precedes and even conditions any

assent to it. Implicitly, Derrida troubles the original condition of the Arentian-Montesqieuian,

namely a common origin of discourse. Thus we are anticipating an impotence in the 'direct'

critique of the letter of the law: To resist or disobey the requirement or 'duty' of speaking to the

other in their language on the grounds that the imposition of this requirement is unfair or

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[451] AR 231

illegitimate, would by the refusal itself exclude the disobedient from the sphere in which the act

of disobedience could be recognized and affirmed by others as justifiable.[452] Two points follow.

First, we are required to see that even in the claim there is a clear performative moment.

That is, a critical articulation or rearticulation of the spirit of the law, as a modification of the

medium of discourse, *is itself* a modification of an apparently preceding 'spirit.' Derrida

therefore develops the notion of 'justice as law,' in which the spirit is reduced to the letter. On

these terms, the letter of the law brings to bear a kind of illocutionary or perlocutionary force[453]

in the imposition of a discursive framework. Althusser's classic example of the police officer

hailing the citizen is useful to illustrate the performative "force" that Derrida appeals to – a

speech act or demand that seemingly has no force if there is not already a legal system, and

presumably other social and political norms in place. Justice as law therefore hinges, much as

Arendt requires, on a broader institutional framework without which the letter of the law would

be as impotent as the officer's words, and without which justice could not be *done*. What we

must add, beyond Arendt and beyond Althusser, is that the invocation of this framework has

force not because it presents it neutrally but precisely because it is decisive, because it claims to

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[452] A similar discussion emerges in Derrida's essay "If there is Cause to Translate," where he tracks a historical shift in France from Latin to French as the language of the courts; Derrida's observation is that such a shift is an inevitably exclusionary exercise of sovereignty. (See e.g. p. 12: "Try to explain to somebody who holds both force and the force of law that you want to preserve your language. You will have to learn his to convince him." From *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2* (cited hereinafter as RP2))

[453] Elsewhere, Derrida explicitly problematizes Austin's distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts, arguing that the separation of the 'effects' of the act from the act itself depends upon an understanding of the force of the act as extrinsic to language, whereas Derrida takes the position that language has an intrinsic force. See e.g. *Limited Inc.* p. 12-16 on Austin's distinction between perlocution and illocution, and AR 239 on the intrinsic force of language (Cf. performativity in "Force of Law," AR 238-240).

give or be representative of the entire framework even as it clearly modifies this framework and so (re)shapes the structure of discourse on no uncertain terms.

This institution of authority whose force consists in a duplicitous claim to neutrality is crucial, and will come up again in section three; in any case we can see here that the 'possibility' of justice in the claim is less Montesquieu's notion of justice, then, and closer to Pascal's, whereby what is just is by definition what is followed ("*Il est juste que ce qui est juste soit suivi[…]*"), and where what is followed is what has or carries with it the most force ("*[…] il est necessaire que ce qui est le plus fort soit suivi*") – whereby, in short, justice and the law are essentially intertwined, and *appear* to be coextensive.

At the same time, *second*, to argue that the performative force of the letter turns on a decisive modification of a more comprehensive material situation is precisely to admit there is in another sense a materiality and indeed an origin that exceeds what is at stake in the claim. Before the first decision, there must have been a medium of and for decision; this medium is precisely what must be modified by any decision in order a critique may reveal the decision on no uncertain terms. But the medium – here we can say with and against Arendt, a medium of *justice* – is then no longer what the claim itself lays claim to; the origin of the claim that decisively lays down the law, in discourse, is another origin. In Derrida's words:

> Justice is not necessarily law or the law, it cannot become justice legitimately or de jure except by holding force or rather by appealing to force from its first moment, from its first word. At the beginning of justice there will have been *logos*, speech or language, but this is not necessarily in contradiction with another incipit, which would say, "In the beginning there will have been force." What must be thought, therefore, is this exercise of force in language itself.[454]

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[454] AR 238

Justice as law implies a double-sense of its own force. There is a difference between the "following" and the "followability" of the law that reflects the politico-juridical implications of Derrida's distinction between "revelation" and "revealability" discussed in chapter two. When Althusser's officer yells "stop!", for example, the utterance will be followed only insofar as it is seen that the force of an entire legal system is, so to speak, given in the utterance; on the other hand, the utterance is followable only to the extent that this broader context is operative *as apart* from the officer and their words. That is, the decisive moment 'in' discourse on the law does not only or necessarily render justice; the force of the claim, as a claim to justice, depends on an undecidable moment in light of which the claim may or may not – it is impossible to say – be just. It is at this moment we should see that the claim to justice indirectly indicates what cannot be claimed, viz. an address of justice that doesn't quite address it, if to 'address' means already to put into words, on no uncertain terms.

This second notion of the address is what I will generally term the *call*. Its structure has already been anticipated, but I will formalize it as above. Under the schema

Discourse – [Medium] – Decision

the call begins by imposing the terms of discourse. But, we should add, so does the claim; the essential difference, then, is that the call's modification of the medium is not presumed to be neutral, but is rather the elicitation of the material excess that the claim denies: The call for justice is a *call* because it does not propose to make present in discourse the decisive moment it nevertheless invokes – or better, *evokes* in the language of hospitality, invites, welcomes, etc., without supposing that the structure of the response has already been established in the call itself.

This is a modification of the medium, in other words, that is critical of a given structure of

discourse, hence of the decisive origin as such; from within a given discourse, it consists in the

call for another discursive origin. This modification is precisely not synthetic: As an eruption or

interruption of the usual discourse, it makes no claim to legitimacy or recognisability; in its

appeal to justice, it makes no claim to offer a direct articulation. Grasped as an excess rather than

a negativity, the medium of discourse implies, between discourse and decision, a certain

discursive resistance in the form of an undecidability at stake in both but reducible to neither.

      In section three I will attempt to make this notion of discursive resistance more explicit.

What has to be articulated there is how a careful modification of the medium of discourse can be

deployed in the manner of the 'call,' viz. as a means of unveiling the limits of a given structure

of discourse, indirectly indicating the necessity of another origin of discourse, hence another

structure. What can be observed in advance is that this discursive resistance troubles the claim-

structure whereby a claim can be made without certainty as to its own grounds or justification.

The call is not separable from the claim, but it introduces irony there in the mode of uncertainty:

Discursive resistance must be articulable in terms of what Derrida identifies as "the *epochē* of

the rule," in which what is brought to bear is precisely the medium of discourse as undermining

the notion of decision giving law and justice coherently or synthetically. In Derrida's words:

> For a decision to be just and responsible, it must […] be both regulated and
> without regulation, it must preserve the law [*loi*] and also destroy or suspend it
> enough to have to reinvent it in each case […] each decision is different and
> requires an absolutely unique interpretation, which no existing, coded rule can or
> ought to guarantee absolutely. […] It follows from this paradox that at no time
> can one say *presently* that a decision is just, purely just (that is to say, free and
> responsible), or that someone *is* just, and even less, "I *am* just."[455]

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[455] AR 251-252

One cannot simply mobilize an animating spirit of justice by speaking to it, and still less by laying claim to it as one's own, as this is to take for granted the common origin that critical attention to the moment of decision aims to trouble. If there is a 'pure justice,' it is sustainable only on exilic grounds that are not our own; it is in materiality, however, in particular in an excessive materiality that this difference is sustainable as it were for us: From *within* the consensual framework of *res publica*, it remains possible to or at least to *imagine* dissent on other terms, in a kind of *spes publica*. This term, meant to designate another origin of the city, hence a certain 'outside' in the manner of the choric city, nevertheless requires that this other origin has no proper place, no place of its own except in terms of what can be preserved by way of a *critical* faith or hope that we put to work in the city we call our own. Everything of resistance turns on the possibility, however impossible, of putting this radical *dissensus* into play there where it would not be recognized as such, that is, in public.

Section Two. Instabilities at the Origin of the Political

As I have argued, Arendt defines the political by way of a negative conception of materiality: Humanity is considered to be definitive of the political, and humanity is considered to be by nature discursive in its interactions with others. Thus human interaction in labour and work consist primarily in the modification of a material medium (that is, with production), and remains 'indirect' in a way that prevents the recognition of one's peers as equal; labour and action, for the very reason that they concern themselves with materiality, are apolitical. What Arendt calls action, by contrast, consists in discursive rather than productive engagement, which for this reason bypasses a material medium altogether; for the very reason that materiality is strictly excluded from human engagement in action, Arendt considers action specifically political on the

grounds that it suggests *praxis* that can be carried out by way of what all humans by nature (*physis*) have in common, namely a capacity for discourse (*lexis*).

On Arendt's account, materiality appears to be strictly excluded from the realm of the political in the manner of what Butler calls a "constitutive outside," as an unintelligible element that consists in the (negative) limits of intelligibility, and which in being strictly excluded allows for the notion of a pure intelligibility. By extension, a body politic has no body, no body that can be called "political," and political engagement, including political resistance, can be grasped immediately.

In Schmitt's thinking in *The Concept of the Political*, we can locate a very different, almost inverse grasp of the political. In that text, Schmitt is essentially concerned with a definition of the political, but he begins by noting the material-historical limitations in this pursuit: there are various institutions that we happen to call political, and the institution that we call the "state" appears to provide a definition because it appears to be comprehensive of the other various institutions we call political, but the political *as such* cannot merely be a synthetic aggregate in this sense. Thus, and whereas for Arendt the political is precisely to be understood in terms of a specific human institution, Schmitt will be at pains to think the political without institution, before and without a clear expression, still less a collective or intersubjective expression, for example in discourse as *lexis*.

On these terms, as we will see, Schmitt must think his concept of the political in terms of a certain materiality first of all, though once again this materiality will be negatively defined. The body politic is therefore the one that is threatened or vulnerable, open to radical modification, and therefore to destruction: The essential political valence of materiality will not be a question of its invigoration with a certain spirit or life, but rather with the threat of death.

Rather than discourse, then, what matters for Schmitt is decision, specifically a decision to frame or appropriate the medium on one's own terms. For Schmitt, these various institutions, especially those that incorporate discursive elements – "religion, culture, education,"[456] etc. – are all at risk of straying from the political, of 'depoliticization' in relation to a decisively political core. For Schmitt, there will be no 'political resistance' that is *not* radical, since all resistance – assuming it can be called "political" – would be a return to and modification of the medium of politics at the expense of the other.

My aim in setting Schmitt against Arendt on these terms is not to engage with Schmitt on his own terms, but rather to draw out the tensions in Schmitt's thinking that Derrida identifies in *Politics of Friendship* as concerns the emphasis on decision in order to think a pure politics. That Schmitt's concept of the political inverts the framework I have already presented via Arendt is useful in that it illustrates the 'other side' of the notion of materiality as negativity or as neutral with respect to political action. Once again, however, my aim is ultimately to illustrate that this negative conception of materiality leaves us at a loss in giving a fruitful description of political resistance in the case of critical, embodied subjects.

Section 2a. Conjuring the Enemy, pt. 1: Sovereign Claims

There is no reason to defer the point any longer: Beginning with the first sentence, Schmitt's approach in *The Concept of the Political*, which will be to emphasize the essentially political nature of the decision, is itself decisive: "The concept of the state," he declares, "presupposes the concept of the political."[457] Here the point for Schmitt is what I have already indicated, namely

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[456] CP 22
[457] CP 19

that whereas the state is *called* "political," and whereas the institution of the state can be

considered comprehensive of other human institutions, the political as such seems to require

another critical approach. Whether what is being combatted in this sense is the Hegelian

teleology that culminates in the state,[458] then, or whether it is the Aristotelean teleology that

culminates in a well-functioning *polis,* we can sense that what *Schmitt* calls 'the political' will

have us carry out a search in the opposite direction, viz. the origin rather than the *telos*. Having

set forth the parameters of his discourse on no uncertain terms, in other words, Schmitt can begin

to explore the notion of a concept of the political that refuses the terms of any particular

institution and whatever is called political.

Arendt, we said, grasps the political as a discursive process that springs out of a human

engagement with materiality; a human capacity of *lexis* is *due* to a human *physis*; evidently for

Schmitt this cannot be. For Schmitt it is not discourse that is essentially human, but rather

decision. The primacy of decision is reflected in Schmitt's thinking wherever it deploys

polemics,[459] but in the case of the political – the political, which is privileged amongst

polemically defines spheres of human life as "the strongest and most intense of the distinctions

and categorizations"[460] – the originary decision concerns a distinction between friend and

enemy.[461] This distinction cannot be grasped at the level of discourse, in "pure intellectual

controversy" and by way of "symbolic wrestlings;" rather, what is essential here is that "the

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[458] CP 25. "it is said of Hegel's doctrine of the division of powers that it signifies 'the most
vigorous penetration of all societal spheres by the state for the general purpose of winning for the
entirety of the state all vital energies of the people.' […] In actuality it is the total state which no
longer knows anything absolutely nonpolitical."
[459] See e.g. CP 23, 26
[460] CP 27
[461] CP 26

friend, enemy, and combat concepts receive their real meaning precisely because they refer to the

real possibility of physical killing."[462] Two points follow.

First, we can observe how for Schmitt there is a basic primacy of the decision that in

several ways reflects Arendt's understanding of the same. That is, under the schema

Discourse – [medium] – Decision

decision for Schmitt consists in a modification of a material medium in the manner of productive

(or, to anticipate) destructive work, the result of which is an intersubjective institution that can

potentially be called "political" – for example, the modern state as a republic. What is clearly

different in Schmitt's case is the grasp of the primacy of decision *as itself* the definitively

political moment, whereas potentially political institutions, indeed discourse more generally may

or may not reflect the essentially polemical core of the original decision. That is, since all

political discourse and institutions turn on an already-established friend-enemy grouping,

"Words such as state, republic, society, class, as well as sovereignty […] are incomprehensible if

one does not know exactly who is to be affected, combated, refuted, or negated by such a

term."[463]

Second, there appears to be an analogous claim-structure at work in Schmitt's concept of

the political, albeit once again with a reverse emphasis. For Arendt, we said, there was a

discursive claim that appeals to a decisive moment – the critique of a positive law, for example,

which might be legitimized in the appeal to naturally-constituted relations of possible justice. In

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[462] CP 33
[463] CP 30-31

Schmitt's case, we can identify what I will call a *decisive claim* in the manner of an appeal in decision to a discursive moment – the identification of a common enemy, for example, which might be borne out in the institution of a republic. Just as the discursive claim must not itself accomplish decisive work, however, here a decisive claim cannot be embroiled in discursive work. As Schmitt's distinction between the state and the political suggests, the force of the decisive claim turns on its radical distinction from the institutions it grounds; the decisive claim claims *not* to be discursive in nature, since only in so doing does it retain the essential force of decision that is its own in a way that is singular and unshareable. This decisive claim is therefore not a claim *to* a political institution, and still less a claim to *be* a political institution; it is a claim to sovereignty, the claim of a sovereign power to itself.

The sovereign's claim is precisely synthetic in the sense described above for Arendt's civil disobedient, since it negates any distance between the claimant and the force of law, that is, justice. Thus Schmitt's sovereign can assert in a different sense "this is justice; I am just" – a claim that again appears to deploy only the negative aspect of teleiopoesis, hence a negative conception of materiality. The difference is that Schmitt explicitly emphasizes the performative element (i.e. the modification of the material medium), while dismissing the role of discourse as secondary. Thus for Schmitt the sovereign's claim is necessarily pre- or extra-discursive, and so in the designation of a common enemy the enemy is by definition not directly addressed. Rather, the designation of an enemy consists in a modification of a material medium, for example building a wall, drawing a weapon, signing a constitution, deploying troops, etc. But *what* is claimed by modifying the medium in this way, then, is not the enemy *per se*, nor the medium, but instead a (necessarily pre-discursive, extra-legal, etc.) 'right' to designate an enemy. This 'right' is therefore the origin and object of the claim. As a result, we should add, in sovereign

modifications of the world – assuming they are political – the enemy is always at stake, but never present; on Derrida's terms, the enemy is 'conjured' in the medium by teleiopoetic negation, that is, the negation of the medium such that the inevitably distant enemy appears with an absolute presence.

Thus with various claims that invoke materiality and the vulnerability of the human body – "concrete situation;"[464] "concrete antagonism"[465] "[…] The essence of a weapon is that it is a means of physically killing human beings […] real possibility of physical killing […] war is the existential negation of the enemy […]"[466] – the point is precisely not that a friend-enemy grouping, hence a decisive claim, is *reducible* to materiality; rather, everything indicates how materiality is subordinate to the one who decisively modifies it, and to a historical situation as a relation between humans. The same point is only emphasized when we consider modifications that are not or are no longer recognizably a function of an old modification become 'depoliticized' (e.g. the Berlin wall): In spite of being essential to the original political claim, materiality not only does not have any essentially political valence, it has *no* essential valence, and this is why the sovereign claim is so immediately successful in its appropriation of a material world that it is also precisely not reducible to.

The same negative conception of materiality, and the resulting irreducibility of the decisive moment to materiality, gives us a picture of political resistance on Schmitt's terms. For Schmitt there is perhaps a 'civil disobedient' in Arendt's sense, but for Schmitt the action of this person is precisely not 'political' for the same reason that Arendt considers the designation legitimate, viz. that they operate strictly at the level of discourse. On the other hand, the

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[464] CP 20,27, 30, 37, 45, 61
[465] CP 29
[466] CP 32-33

revolutionary is pre-eminently a 'political' resistant insofar as they assert a decisive claim to

designate a common enemy and therefore to found a politicized public.

It is the relation of this sovereign claimant to a public, and the role of materiality and

discursive media in this relation, that we must now turn to.

Section 2b. Conjuring the Enemy, pt. 2 – Calls for Action

"[…] all political concepts, images, and terms have a polemical meaning. They are focused on a
specific conflict and are bound to a concrete situation; the result (which manifests itself in war or
revolution) is a friend-enemy grouping, and they turn into empty and ghostlike abstractions when
this situation disappears."
-    Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, p. 30

I have so far said that the sovereign on Schmitt's account makes a *claim*, and this language

arguably appears misleading for the very reason that we are speaking of sovereignty as a self-

constituting force, whereas a 'claim' is something that one makes on others or on some other

object. A claim, as Honneth and Habermas would argue for example, and as seems at least

implicit in Arendt, must be recognized by others. I have so far sidestepped this point by arguing

that the decisive claim for Arendt appears to deploy *only* the negative aspect of a teleiopoetic

address, giving it an apparently self-fulfilling structure. But then, and just as the point with

Arendt was that a performative moment was at stake in her emphasis on the constative-

discursive, so too with Schmitt we should see how a constative-discursive moment is at stake in

his emphasis on the performative. In short, both thinkers deploy a negative teleiopoetic structure

in order to assert a synthesis – a synthetic identity of the claimant and *what* they claim (justice or

sovereignty) – and both as a result arrive at a thinking of the claim that both does and does not

need to be recognized. In both cases, however, it becomes crucial to see that the synthetic

satisfaction of this this double-necessity is only possible so long as the claim is supposed to have

only a negative potential with respect to a material medium, whereas this medium exceeds any strictly negative claim upon it.

We have already made the point, but let us recall: What Schmitt identifies as the "concrete situation" invokes a material medium that is evidently subordinate to the decision in light of which it is modified. But as also affirmed, the enemy is not reducible to this medium, nor vice versa; the enemy is only 'conjured' there. Thus as we have seen the 'concreteness' of the concrete situation can lose its *political* concreteness – or rather, the concrete situation, which comes and goes with the political sovereign can dematerialize and rematerialize in different ways, and at different times. In fact, it is precisely by so thoroughly removing the sovereign decision from materiality that one can claim a sovereign right over it, for example to claim it as property, but also to cut it up in certain ways, establishing political borders in a concrete way, hence also defending and enforcing those borders with additional means. More generally, we can anticipate: Since the political is a power of decision over materiality – and through the medium of materiality a power over discourse – and since materiality in this role is grasped negatively, the political is as we decide. That is, we can see by appeal to materiality how "for Schmitt even ostensibly nonpolitical categories have the potential of becoming political […] It thus follows that in concrete circumstances it is the prerogative of the state to define the content and course of politics."[467]

On these terms the possibilities for the conjuration of the enemy are far greater than anticipated, as the territory and scope, in short the medium of the decisive claim as its body proper appears comprehensive enough that it includes the same institutions from which it must also be radically distinguished. Schmitt's account of the political in this sense aims to identify

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[467] Schwab, "introduction," CP 7

and then radically isolate the decisive core of what he calls the political, but what he isolates in this way may be inexhaustible in its scope. As Derrida points out, the pivotal point of the decisive claim is that in order for there to be anything that can be called "political," "one must know who the enemy is."[468] In the necessity of this 'must,' however, we can perhaps locate the site of two possible readings.

On the first reading, which we have already anticipated, the necessity of knowing the enemy is originally attributable to the agent or subject of decision, viz. the sovereign. As we have seen, however, the 'enemy' is not reducible to any particular conjuration, or indeed any particular institution that follows from the decisive claim itself. Implicitly everything about this first reading and the resulting claim-structure turns on a negative materiality. That is, the sovereign's modifications of the medium, which includes a 'physical' medium in the traditional sense (*hylē*, etc.), but also discursive media (e.g. state institutions, news and social media, etc.) have no limits in this sense precisely because the medium itself has no intrinsic force. In order to carry out a return to origins, the first reading 'brackets' the medium in order carry out a kind of phenomenology of the various conjurations of the enemy in order to reveal an ontological difference, viz. of the decisive moment and deciding subject as apart from, and prior to, any medium in which it might be borne out.

This irreducibility of the claim-structure – in Schmitt's case, a friend-enemy grouping – to various media is crucial, since it is not only the act of drawing a weapon or physically enforcing borders, for example, that are potential expressions of the political; for Schmitt the appeal to discourse is just as useful in relation to the enemy, that is, "terminological questions become […] highly political" insofar as a word can deployed as a "weapon in a hostile

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[468] PF 88

conflict."[469] Thus in the wake of a failed coup in Turkey in 2016, Prime Minister Erdogan, now President, considered it critical to identify and then purge *en masse* all individuals that could be seen as party to the Gülenist faction from a plurality of institutions, including not only state apparatus but also universities and private news media outlets.[470] If one must 'know who the enemy is,' it might be disconcerting that a word or a gesture could be weaponized in this way, and that the *discourse* thus generated, curtailed, or otherwise refigured and modified could be so thoroughgoingly comprehensive, with the 'enemy' appearing in so many different forms – a "deep state" that both is and is not proper to the sovereign. The same act, however, shows why on Schmitt's account there is no danger in this dissemination of the word ("Gülenist," "deep state," etc.), as it can be traced back in every case to a single perceived threat – and since a *perceived* threat *is* a threat, it can be traced back to a single originary decision on the part of the political sovereign. On the first reading, then, the necessity of 'knowing who the enemy is' is acknowledged and accomplished via the negative aspect of teleiopoesis, hence in a return to one's own sovereignty: One *must* know who the enemy is because one *does* know who the enemy is.

Again, however, I wonder whether there is not a certain step (*pas*) between a diverse material-discursive landscape and a single founding decision, hence between the sovereign and their (self-)expression in the world. I haven't spoken very much of the friend, but as the title of

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[469] CP 31, ft. 12

[470] For Erdogan's arrest and trial of journalists, see e.g. [Editorial] "Erdogan' is transforming Turkey into a totalitarian prison," *The Washington Post*, March 11, 2018 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/06/25/erdogan-may-seem-all-powerful-but-turkey-is-more-unstable-than-ever/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.f6c9a4531516. Accessed July 26, 2018). For broader considerations of the notion of a 'deep state' in Turkey and the U.S., see e.g. Graham, David. "There Is No American 'Deep State'," *The Atlantic*, Feb 20, 2018. (https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/02/why-its-dangerous-to-talk-about-a-deep-state/517221/)

Derrida's text and its first words imply, there is perhaps a certain exhortation or *call* at play in his *Politics of Friendship* for us to do so.[471] I won't develop the structure of this call in any great detail, but it will be worth highlighting what I take to be the essential insight there for our reading of Schmitt, as it returns us to the question of the public.

For Schmitt, and even if the distinction to my knowledge is only raised once in the text, it becomes important to distinguish the enemy as a "public enemy" (*hostis*) rather than a private enemy (*inimicus*).[472] We can anticipate why: The scope of the decisive claim in its political application, we have said, is comprehensive, that is, it cannot be limited by any factors or agents who are not political properly speaking – and if such factors were political properly speaking, that is because they are already given *within* the limits of a specific friend enemy grouping. Implicitly, the structure of a friend-enemy grouping cannot be questioned or further modified from without or from within – not by a questioning or critique, in any case, that could itself be called "political."

From the polemical structure of Schmitt's concept, it is clear that the friend is to be grasped 'within' the structure of a given friend-enemy grouping. The friend therefore stands opposed to the public enemy. Whereas, however, this threat of the enemy is something I am intrinsically able to establish (viz. autoteleiopoetically), the threat of the enemy *for another*, it seems, both is and is not within the scope of my decision: I can designate the enemy as a common or public threat, and my friends may agree (this is why they are my friends), but they can also disagree, and for Schmitt this doesn't necessarily make them an 'enemy.' Indeed, the

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[471] I have in mind here Derrida's initial dealings with the quotation, attributed by Montaigned to Aristotle, that will become thematic over the course of Derrida's text as it deals with the elusiveness of the friend as a political agent or patient: "O my friends, there is no friend." (PF 1)
[472] CP 28

whole point of appealing to a 'public' enemy is to emphasize that this enemy is not simply

anyone I happen to disagree with. Schmitt's response to this friend or would-be friend is to

dismiss their dissent as besides the essential political point, viz. as 'depoliticizing' the original

decisive framework.

Between the two movements of politicization and depoliticization in Schmitt we can

recognize a certain analogy with Butler's notion of materialization and dematerialization. That is,

Schmitt acknowledges the importance of the 'concrete situation' in order to emphasize that

politicization is not arbitrary, and the concrete situation is therefore grasped in terms of material

bodies (the "treat of physical killing," etc.). The concrete situation, however, plays a double-role:

On the one hand the concrete situation supplies a framework for recognition (e.g. of the enemy);

operative as a 'condition of possibility' for the distinction between enemy and friend, it is what

'appears' in the world but which (upon critical reflection) is revealed as properly own. On the

other hand, the concrete situation supplies broader conditions – beyond a framework for

recognition – that are at play: If the would-be friend and I can look at the 'same' situation and

disagree as to its essential meaning – they say it is political and I say it is not – I claim a capacity

to call their approach 'depoliticizing' only by admitting an 'outside' over which my (political)

sovereignty has no recognizable jurisdiction; implicitly the force of my claim is not exhaustive of

the medium to which it lays claim, and even if I want to say that the medium in this case *is not*

political, I must nevertheless admit that it *is there*, and ultimately that the political itself hinges

on and is carried by a medium that cannot be exhausted by a single sovereign decision.

By close attention to the duplicitous or double-role of the friend, it now becomes possible

to formulate a second reading of the necessity that Derrida mentions, of 'knowing who the

enemy is.' I have so far discussed the decisive modification of a material medium as a negative

act – a teleiopoetic negation of the negativity of materiality – which synthetically identifies the discursive and the decisive moments. With the admission of the possibility of a movement of de-politicization and a would-be friend, however, we implicitly admit also that medium which goes unaffected by the decisive claim – an excessive medium, then, that no one appropriative-decisive act, and no one polemical structure could exhaust. Finally, the notion of a *would-be friend* takes on a sense that is not negative but is rather returned to the hypothetical or the imaginary, again a sort of *spes public* where it becomes possible to think a public, however fleetingly or indirectly, that is not reducible to terms given within the limits imposed by a single decisive claim, but which emerges also at the limits of this claim in its opening onto others. This opening or *call* to or for a would-be public, let us be clear, is not yet an articulation of a particular alterity or community: As a modification of a material medium from within a given and decisively imposed framework, it does not produce anything new; indeed, this medium appears to be precisely what is given or opened up, hence deployed in a way that indirectly indicates an excess beyond the decision to modify *and* claim whatever resulting discourse. In its solicitation of the work of others as not yet comprehensible on one's own terms, the novelty and the capacity for the production of the new is precisely what this strange modification of a medium rescinds quite generally as its *own*.

Let us now try to consider more concretely how this sort of excessive medium might have a political valence in the work of resistance – resistance as a work in and against the Arendtian-Schmittian discursive or decisive schema, then, and even if as a result the work is not readily called "political."

Section Three: Community In/Action – *Khōra* as a Medium of Resistance

"[…] if this important frontier [between the public and the private] is being displaced, it is because the medium in which it is instituted, namely the medium of the media themselves (news, the press, telecommunications, techno-tele-discursivity, techno-tele-iconicity, that which in general assures and determines the *spacing* of public space, the very possibility of the *res publica* and the phenomenality of the political), this element itself is neither living nor dead, neither present nor absent: it spectralizes. It does not belong to ontology."
- Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 63

Working through Arendt and Schmitt, I have emphasized two different approaches to the

political, each of which turns on a certain conception of humanity, and in particular human

nature (*physis*). For Arendt humanity is uniquely discursive, and its political nature is to

conceived in terms non-violent discursive engagement at the strict exclusion of everything else,

including in particular the sort of work or labour that concerns itself with the modification of a

material medium. For Schmitt, by contrast, humans are by nature decisive, and the political is

therefore grasped as extra-discursive and necessarily violent, whereas the lapse of the political

into discursive realms appeared to by definition risk depoliticization. The two conceptions of

human nature appear opposed in many ways, but as I have argued they share one element in

common, namely a negative conception of materiality. That is, both thinkers see materiality as a

means or medium for political action (whether discursive or decisive) while specifically denying

it any intrinsic political valence, any human valence, and perhaps simply valence in general. This

negative conception of materiality, however, seemed in both cases to yield a certain synthetic

structure of discourse and decision after all; in becoming possible by the negation of the medium

for a given discursive claim to recognize its necessary origin in decision, and for a decisive claim

to recognize its own necessity in discursive expression.

By emphasizing this synthetic structure, and the negative role for materiality in both

cases, I have tried to show that each approach in its own way passes too easily through

materiality on the way to what as a result it will have prefigured as its proper object, namely the

political as a structure of synthetic identity – the collective consensus of a *res public*, for Arendt,

and the divisive identity of *polemos* for Schmitt, both of which appeared to take on a self-

fulfilling or (negative) autoteleiopoetic structure.[473] Wherever this recognition or production of

synthetic identity appeared too quick or too easy, then, the aim was to show that this synthesis

was only possible in light of a broadly excluded materiality, that is, materiality as an excessive

medium irreducible to the negative relations it makes possible.

In this section, then, my aim is to follow up on these results in order to offer in outline an

account of the political that makes room for the notion of an excessive materiality. If I have spent

so long with Schmitt and Arendt to this point, it is because they each focus on elements I still

take to be critical in this conception of the political, namely discourse and decision; furthermore,

with each thinker forwarding one of these two poles as politically and ontologically fundamental,

I am now in a position to present my own position whereby the priority of discourse or decision

implies an aporetic *undecidability*. This position, as I argue, follows from close attention to the

role of an excessive materiality, which does not allow for the simple dialectical passage between

or identification of discourse and decision even as this medium nevertheless holds them in a

certain relation. The essential claim of the *aporetic materialism* that I develop on these terms is

therefore that, rather than a *praxis* of consensus or *polemos*, political engagement is better

described in terms of a *praxis* of resistance or *dissensus*.

There are two broad points to illustrate.

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[473] What I am calling a specifically 'negative' autoteleiopoesis is in effect analogous to a form of autoaffection, viz. as a synthetic closure of the gap or space between myself and the other. By contrast, we can suppose an 'excessive' autoteleiopoesis that, since it also institutes a distance and an opening, would be analogous to what Derrida in conversation with Merleau-Ponty describes in terms of "auto-hetero-affection" (see e.g. *On Touching,* p. 180).

First, I want to show how an excessive materiality is operative, however awkwardly or opaquely, as a 'medium' in the manner that I have so far been using the term in this chapter, and in particular under the schema

Discourse – [medium] – Decision

To anticipate, the essential aim is to show the irreducibility of an excessive materiality to specific discursive or decisive frameworks (e.g. state apparatus, news media, cultural institutions and tradition, etc.) can itself be deployed as a means of resistance, even as the same irreducibility appears to ensure a lack of public recognition or immediate change in a public or private space. That is, resistance in this sense will appear to be *neither* discursive *nor* decisive, yet as I will argue it is potentially disruptive of the frameworks within which it is operative, precisely because it indirectly indicates an excess as a result.

Second, I want to consider how this medium of *dissensus* nevertheless, in spite of its apparent radicality, nevertheless yields a certain thinking of community, specifically what I call a community of resistance/resistants. Here the essential point is rethink what is inherited via Kant, Hegel, and Habermas as a thinking of the 'public' on synthetic-dialectical terms. Though I also contrast this synthetic thinking with the *private* relation described by Levinas, I ultimately argue that what an aporetic materialism allows for is a position somewhere between the Kant-Hegel-Habermas lineage and Levinas, hence at the limits of the public and the private. I illustrate this position by appeal to Derrida's notion of the university as he re-reads it from Kant,

Section 3a: The Impropriety of Materiality

"[…] that is the common axiom. One must have the ghost's hide and to do that, one must have it. To have it, one must situate it, identify it, see it. One must possess it without being possessed by it, without being possessed of it. […] But does not a specter consist, to the extent that it consists, in forbidding or blurring this distinction? In consisting in this very indiscernibility? Is not to possess a specter to be possessed by it, possessed period?"
  -   Derrida, *Spectres of Marx* 165

Before going any further, and in order to set apart what follows from the Arendtian-Schmittian

thinking of the political from the outset, I should make a terminological observation.

Specifically, and whereas I have so far been nominally circumscribing discussion in this chapter

by imposing the word "resistance," it is not a word that either Arendt or Schmitt use at any

length in developing their own positions in the texts discussed so far: For Arendt, we have said,

there is the civil disobedient or the revolutionary; for Schmitt, there is either the depoliticizing

(would-be) friend or the enemy. Wherever I use the word 'resistance' in what follows, however,

it will be precisely in order to designate a mode of engagement somewhere between these two

extremes that imply either strict inclusion or strict exclusion of the other from the political *praxis*

at stake.

  Resistance as a name for a political *praxis* in this sense occupies an awkward position

that we have perhaps not yet fully recognized, and which for this reason is what must now be

formulated at greater length. Indeed, by positioning the notion of resistance as a political *praxis*

in this way, we arguably trouble very notion of political *praxis* as deployed by Arendt and

Schmitt – a *praxis* operative as a work of defining the political over against other potentially or

apparently 'political' engagements between individuals; this 'direct' account of political *praxis*

deployed by Arendt and Schmitt proposes the necessity of a specific and already-graspable work

of speaking directly to or acting decisively in the name of the political. With the term

"resistance," however, I am suggesting precisely, if duplicitously, that there is a mode of

engagement that both is and is not bound to a *prevailing* political *praxis* and so to what is called "political;" what is challenged by this appeal to political resistance as a political *praxis* is therefore transparency of or 'direct' access to the object which this *praxis* might otherwise have called its own (viz. whether consensus or *polemos* – sovereignty, in any case). If this notion of resistance is tenable at all, two points follow.

First, resistance admits from the outset that there is more than one decision as to what can be in good faith called "political." Derrida's facetious *plus d'un* ("more than one," "no more one") helps indicate that a plurality of claims to the *polis* as such cannot be co-operative as claims within one and the same polis, that is, if to 'co-operate' is already to work towards a unity. By contrast with Arendt and Schmitt, for whom a political claim can be communicated because its origin is from the outset shared or common, Derrida's thought requires a more radical disagreement from the outset: The necessity of my decision, which still motivates all communication and any given *polis*, as well as the idea of the *polis*, is precisely what I cannot communicate to the other – not 'directly,' or immediately.

Second, then, there must from the outset be some medium, that is, a space or materiality upon which this plurality of decisions can be expressed or inscribed. Since, furthermore, this plurality may involve logically or ontologically conflicting claims, the materiality that allows for their expression cannot be supposed as a 'common ground' or common origin, whereby the plurality is already prefigured within a certain framework and therefore on the way to a possible synthesis. In short, this medium is not negative, hence not a secondary and passing moment on the way from an immediate identity to a synthetic identity. Rather, it must be admitted that this materiality suggests a *kind* of 'shared' or 'public' space precisely because it is not reducible in its expression to any one framework, but rather stands in excess of all of them.

By using the word "resistance," then, what I mean to invoke is both this plurality of origins and the excessive space that would accommodate this plurality – but resistance as such cannot be a direct address or invocation of either of these. If resistance is a *praxis*, in other words, that is because it is operative within a given framework for the political – that is, it speaks in a public language, is subject to a set of laws and a sovereign juridico-political system, a culture and a tradition, etc. – but it is a *praxis of resistance* because this framework is what it finds a way to put into question. Operative within and against a given framework, then, the pivotal point is that the resistant refuses to choose. Or better: Whereas to make a new choice is always possible on the one hand, and whereas to justify or critique a given choice is always possible on the other, the resistant indirectly indicates that no synthesis of these two moments is possible except by negative *autoteleiopoesis*, and that a *condition* of negative *autoteleiopoesis*, on the other hand, is a material medium that is not reducible to the negative difference or opposition thus overcome.

To again formalize: Under the schema

Discourse – [medium] – Decision

the resistant deploys the medium in such a way as to indirectly indicate the necessary *non*passage between these two poles, hence to indirectly indicate the medium itself as inappropriable by way of a synthetic cooperation of discourse and decision. On these terms the resistant's *praxis* is neither discursive nor decisive, but can be called *ironic* to the extent that it evokes a material excess that cannot be exhaustively expressed within the limits of the framework in which this *praxis* becomes possible. In being ironically evoked, what this indirect indication allows for is a

manner of bringing into question the terms and limits of a given political framework from within. Insofar as it will be operative in the manner of an excess, however, the resistant – their act, their body, the context or space in which their work is carried out – may not be readily called "political;" at the same time and properly deployed, this very moment or element of exclusion is what can be put to work.

Since all of this remains too abstract and too formal, however, let us take up an example to illustrate the point. The case of Colin Kaepernick offers a fruitful example for my purposes in several ways, in particular for the possibility of indicating a *praxis* with political valence even as it is operative in and for predominantly and traditionally apolitical media. I should immediately note that although the term "media" generally indicates the specific institutions of news and social media, I ultimately intend to show that the notion of "media" must be considered in the most permissive sense we can allow for it, including not only traditional media but also the bodies, spaces, and other intesubjective institutions in light of which political valences can be established, denied, or modified. I should add from the outset that my aim in taking up this case is not to make evaluative claims as to the true impact of Kaepernick's actions, nor to make any normative claims as to the rightness or wrongness of Kaepernick's approach and those surrounding his case; my aim is only to phenomenologically track how Kaepernick's actions appear to simultaneously engage with and defy certain media in a way that troubles a definitive conclusion as to the valence of his act as 'political' properly speaking.

I should begin by offering a brief summary of the case. Kaepernick, a black quarterback in the National Football League in the U.S., expressed a concern with racial injustice and police brutality by refusing to stand for the pre-game playing of the national anthem over the course of the 2016 season. For several preseason games in August the actions went unnoticed, as he simply

sat on the bench; later, as his actions were initially taken up in news media, he began to kneel next to his teammates (See fig. 1-3 below for the progression). Even within its early stages, however, Kaepernick's case was already being taken up well beyond sports media circles, initially showing up in broader news and social media circles, eventually taken up federally by politicians in the U.S. and considered internationally as a spokesperson for the rights of black individuals.

It is important to begin by focusing on the initial act, I think, which in its simplicity nevertheless does not speak for itself, but instead raises several basic questions. The most important question for my purposes can be simply put: By sitting down or kneeling during the national anthem, is Kaepernick 'resisting'? Politically? If so, resisting which parts of what political framework? Some answers appear obvious, even if appearances do not necessarily speak directly to the matter at hand. First, by sitting during the playing of the anthem, Kaepernick seems to be engaging with already-politicized media in the form of state and national symbols – the anthem itself and the flag, of course, but also their strong association in the U.S. with the military, and where all of these engagements would be compounded by the fact this his gesture is carried out at an N.F.L. football game, frequently called "America's Game."

On a first reading, Kaepernick must grasp, recognize at least in part, and therefore be engaging directly with precisely this symbolic-nationalistic framework, offering his own symbolic or strictly discursive gesture within that context. Kaepernick does not explain himself when he initially acts, but after carrying it out for several weeks running he is asked by sports reporters for an explanation of his act; he again appears to be operating with the framework just described when he says "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that

oppresses black people and people of color."[474] Indeed, in almost Montesquieuian fashion,

Kaepernick appears at times to appeal to the 'spirit' of this framework, even as he questions

elements of the letter in it its present instantiations: "this country stands for freedom, liberty, and

justice for all. And it's not happening for all right now."[475]

Kaepernick's deployment of a 'platform' is at issue here. Grasped negatively, the

medium for his discourse leads his message to the precipice of self-contradiction.

First, the state and its apparatus, not incidentally the law and its proper enforcement,

appear to be necessary conditions for Kaepernick's act, minimally via provisions for freedom of

speech. But then his quasi-civil disobedience begins to look awkward in its method, and perhaps

incoherent in its claims. That is, Kaepernick is not apparently *disobeying* anything, beginning

with the law but extending even further into public and private institutions that deny him

nothing: his right to act as he does appears not only legally sanctioned, but also sanctioned at

least formally by his coach, his team, and the N.F.L.; his proclamation against public institutions

and private beliefs comes from a place granted to him by these institutions, which at least

officially do not allow their beliefs to interfere.[476] Finally, the medium he deploys again seems

privileged insofar as it appears to allow for an address without the recognition of the rights of

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[474] From Christine Hauser, "Why Colin Kapernick Didn't Stand for the National Anthem," *New York Times*, August 26. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/28/sports/football/colin-kaepernick-national-anthem-49ers-stand.html (accessed March 26, 2018)
[475] No author, "Transcript: Colin Kaepernick addresses sitting during national anthem."
 https://ninerswire.usatoday.com/2016/08/28/transcript-colin-kaepernick-addresses-sitting-during-national-anthem/ (accessed March 26, 2018)
[476] Coach Chip Kelly states that kneeling is "[Kaepernick's] right as a citizen;" team management acknowledges "American principles as freedom of religion and freedom of expression;" and the NFL issues a statement saying that "players are encouraged but not required to stand during the playing of the national anthem." Steve Wyche, "Colin Kapernick explains why he say during the national anthem," NFL.com.
http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000691077/article/colin-kaepernick-explains-protest-of-national-anthem (accessed March 26, 2018)

others to respond in kind: Kaepernick's critics will have to find their own 'platforms,' and so

cannot possibly address him on the terms he is therefore seen to sovereignly *impose* upon the

material spaces, institutions, and relations at stake, upon the medium as such. In the language so

far deployed in this chapter, Kaepernick's "symbolic" act appears to be a discursive gesture, but

in other ways it appears decisive, hence explicitly disrespectful of traditions of public discourse

in the U.S..

Second, and just as importantly – as we will see, it is almost the same point – the force of

Kaepernick's gesture appears to depend on the materiality of Kaepernick's own body such as it

is *recognized* in and by the framework he claims to challenge. That is, it is assumed that by

kneeling during the anthem with the flag out, Kaepernick's body is given in opposition to these

symbols *at the level of the symbolic*, already in discourse with them and with a public that he will

then decisively claim is strictly exclusive of black people in a radical and violent way. Implicitly

there appears to be no 'fact of blackness' in Fanon's sense at stake in Kaepernick's body,[477] yet

such facticity and objectification appears to be what his own body is intended to indicate.

'Facticity' in general is precisely what is not at stake in the materiality of his body – a body

which *for that reason* becomes the medium for a traditional and well-established discourse on

the inclusion or exclusion of black individuals from American civil society.[478] Within this

framework, there is nothing of his body that resists expression.

This notion that Kaepernick's body becomes identifiable not only within but as it were

with this framework, however – in a universalization or *mondialization* of the symbolic language

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[477] For Fanon's notion of the fact of blackness, see discussion in Ch. 1, 2c above

[478] See e.g. Kyle Smith, "Why Colin Kapernick's Protest Failed," *The National Post,* April 18
2017, where Smith argues that "There is no equivalence between a flag being used in its proper
nonpartisan manner and the Kaepernickian choice to damn it."

decisively imposed by a sovereign – allows us to highlight a different operation of materiality in the act. In order to carry out this second reading, we should trace more carefully how a negative understanding of the medium is pivotal in the reduction of Kaepernick's act to a prefigured sense and discourse.

First of all, there is no address in the traditional sense: He does not speak to anyone or announce the act, and he does not have an audience; he simply sits down, and in spite of sports media coverage and in-person crowds upwards of 80 000, this "act" is not given public attention for three consecutive weeks. Initial representations of Kaepernick in news media are therefore retrospective, taken from tapes of previous T.V. broadcasts.[479]

Kaepernick's initial address of the public in a more 'strict' discourse comes via the mediation of sports media interviewers, in the form of answers to questions he hasn't posed. ("So many people see the flag as a symbol of the military. How do you view it and what do you say to those people? […] Do you personally feel oppressed? […] Any concern about the time of this and the possibility of it being a distraction? […] It is a country that has elected a black president twice… ."[480]) Though more extensive analysis would be useful here, the transcript of Kaepernick's first interview suggests painful failures of communication and misunderstanding, with questions that are beside the point and answers that are sometimes half-formulated and which only very rarely name the concerns of police brutality that are now taken to be Kaepernick's principal concern. Shortly after these initial encounters, and on the advice of Nate Boyer (a U.S. Army veteran with a brief N.F.L. career), Kaepernick considers more carefully

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[479] For an example of this retrospective portrayal, see e.g. Mark Sandritter, "A timeline of Colin Kaepernick's national anthem protest and the athletes who joined him," SBNation, Sept. 25, 2017 (https://www.sbnation.com/2016/9/11/12869726/colin-kaepernick-national-anthem-protest-seahawks-brandon-marshall-nfl; accessed May 1 2018)

[480] No author, "Transcript"

how to present himself, and makes the decision to kneel rather than sit – a traditional military

practice, albeit in an unrelated context.[481] The gesture of kneeling also coincides with a

significant shift of Kaepernick's story from the margins of sports media to the centre of news

media, putting him squarely in view for a national and international public eye. By October,

Kaepernick's story has moved well beyond the football field as we find him, for example, on the

cover of an edition of *Time* magazine, in an article that emphasizes the broader role of

professional athletes, as well as the scope of racial injustice more generally.[482]

No doubt we can follow this *mondialization* of Kaepernick as a *figure* of resistance (a

figure that apparently includes his body), as proliferated not only in traditional news media, but

also social media, academic, and political circles; thus for example he quickly becomes a crucial

figure to rally against or around in the run-up to the 2017 U.S. Presidential election. At the same

time, and whether at this level he is read as a venerable disobedient (Amnesty International

recently recognized him with the Ambassador of Conscience Award[483]) or as anti-patriotic threat

that should have no place in public (Donald Trump in 2017 argues that the N.F.L. should have

suspended Kaepernick and others, if not fired them[484]), we should see that this symbolic public

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[481] For a brief report on Kaepernick's engagement with Boyer, see Will Brinson, "Here's how Nate Boyer got Colin Kaepernick to go from sitting to kneeling" (https://www.cbssports.com/nfl/news/heres-how-nate-boyer-got-colin-kaepernick-to-go-from-sitting-to-kneeling/; accessed May 2 2018)

[482] For the cover, see *Time Magazine*, vol. 188 no. 13 (Oct. 3 2016); for the story, see Sean Gregory, "All Across the Country, Athletes Are Fueling a Debate About How America Defines Patriotism" *Time Magazine*, vol. 188 no. 13 (Oct. 3 2016) (http://time.com/magazine/us/4503993/october-3rd-2016-vol-188-no-13-u-s/; accessed May 16 2018)

[483] See e.g. Sean Gregory, "Colin Kaepernick Wins Amnesty International's Highest Honor," *Time Magazine*, April 21, 2018 (http://time.com/5248606/colin-kaepernick-wins-amnesty-internationals-ambassador-of-conscience-award/; accessed May 16 2018)

[484] See Des Bieler, "Trump says Kaepernick's protests would have ended if NFL had suspended the QB," *The Washington Post*, October 11, 2017, and Adam Sewer, "Trump's War of Words With Black Athletes," *The Atlantic*, September 23, 2017.

discussion is nothing that Kaepernick himself initiates on his own, since it all takes for granted a vast history and framework that is imposed rather than taken up; rather than discussing anything unsaid, discussion appears to swirl around and elicit without asking or addressing, not even indirectly, a vast set of questions that have haunted a collective American consciousness for decades.

What I want to show, then, is that there must be another sense in which Kaepernick's act is not so *mondial*, and that by contrast a certain resistance to proliferation and to recognition in the public eye is what is ultimately forceful about Kaepernick's act. There are two points to establish here.

First, it should be emphasized that the rapid proliferation depends on a negative conception of a medium. We can see how from Kaepernick's original act to sit for the anthem in a football stadium – there is a near-immediate transition to a scope and scale of explicitly political discourse of which, for a time at least, Kaepernick becomes a pivotal node. We ought to be able to see that there is a difference, however, between what Kaepernick does and what he says, and all the more between what Kaepernick says and the discourse that emerges. What he does – this apparently decisive modification at the origin of an international discourse – is sit; what he says – and this comes later (I am in a certain sense speculating simply by trying to isolate a discursive point that seems not to be imposed upon him) – is that there has been regular unfair treatment of blacks by certain elements of law enforcement in the U.S..

If, nevertheless, there is this near-immediate transition that takes place between decisive action and an apparently exhaustive political discourse, then, it is because everything about the material basis for this discourse is covered over. That is, if the act and Kaepernick's body are so easily and so thoroughly politicized, that is because Kaepernick's *body*, that is, the materiality of

his body is not what is spoken about, and because in a way this materiality, this fact of blackness is as unapproachable on public terms and in recognizably "political" discourse as those individuals towards which he gestures – bodies, materiality, individuals, to whom in their more or less radical material exclusion from a phenomenological-political 'world' it proves impossible to speak directly, and so difficult to approach critically precisely because these individuals *appear* or are conjured in spaces where in another sense they have no material place. In raising or conjuring these individuals myself I do not mean to speak to a matter of life and death – not precisely; as Derrida says there is an element of materiality put to work by all media – "news, the press, tele-communications, techno-tele-discursivity, techno-tele-iconicity, that which in general assures and determines the spacing of public space, the very possibility of the res publica and the phenomenality of the political" – but "this element itself is neither living nor dead, present nor absent" because it stands in excess of the terms upon which we approach each of these institutions operate. As an excess, this materiality carries or bears on its shoulders these media along with their various internal and external contradictions, operative in this sense as the "medium of the media themselves."[485]

Second, then, and if we still wish to approach this excess publically, we should articulate a way of challenging this negative structure or concept of materiality. Grasped negatively, materiality is approached 'publically' precisely by laying claim to its excess on one's own terms; on one's own terms, a material medium is approached 'publically' only insofar as excess as such is negated, and so in the final analysis approached 'immediately.' An excess *properly speaking* can therefore be approached 'publically' by way of an ironic gesture that admits an opening in the 'medium of the media themselves,' that is, an opening onto another way of speaking.

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[485] *Spectres of Marx*, p. 63

Whether or not one wishes to take Kaepernick as the proper representative of a clear political movement or institution, then, on a second reading it in any case becomes possible to recognize an opening at stake in what he does. Whereas it appears that his case involves the direct appropriation of material situations and material spaces towards specific ends, arguably none of which are public, there is another sense in which he manages to place himself at a particularly potent crossroads of each of these situations, spaces, and ends, and to do just enough in order that the discourses and decisions which become entangled around this almost-nothing recognize just enough of other discourses and decisions that they begin to feel somewhat estranged from the situation, space or end (e.g. being white or coloured in the U.S., a conservative, an activist, a football fan enjoying a game on Sunday, etc.) they would have called their own.

This alienation is and is not radical: It does not entirely hinder engagement with recognized peers (and one may dismiss it on these grounds), and it does not imply a radical threat to oneself or to one's established community (although one may make sense of it this way); by remaining irreducible to these moments of discourse and decisions, however, it opens onto a mode of engagement in excess of both, that is, a certain indecision or undecidability in light of which it becomes possible to put the framework that one takes for granted into question, without yet formulating the terms of a wholly other framework. In this choric situation, which consists in an opening onto the outside from within – an outside, furthermore, that was never anywhere but here, in the political tradition at its origin – a resistance becomes possible to a prevailing framework in the mode of indecision at or between origins, that is, a form of *resistance as reticence*.

In general, in the case I have chosen the principal point is that the materiality of Kaepernick's body cannot ultimately occupy or be exhausted by the place accorded to him in and by the various and 'strictly' public or private media in which his case is taken up: By contrast with a strict inclusion in these discourses, there is a broad exclusion that is operative as well. Thus, and although what Kaepernick does is recognized as legitimate by his team and by the league, it is also the case that by the end of the 2016-17 team management pressures him to renegotiate his contract, and ultimately to leave the team. To date, Kaepernick has not been offered another contract with a team; in October 2017 he filed suit against the N.F.L. for collusion, and as recently as April 2018 he was in negotiations with another team, which were ended once Kaepernick did not make a decisive commitment not to kneel.[486] A conjuration of 'public' discourse and of legal and social protections for the same covers over the material reality by presenting it at the level of discourse and in the public eye; Kaepernick therefore has a right to speak in public insofar as it is recognized, yet the strict inclusion accomplished by 'recognition' that negates material inequality, and a negation of material inequity will have been the broad exclusion of a material excess that nevertheless remains at work.

Someone will hear all of this and then ask again: Yes, but in kneeling, and in so doing being operative as the material medium that will then have been worked over by various private and public ends, does Kaepernick – I mean Kaepernick himself – resist? Politically? What is crucial is to recognize the implications of this question turn on the negativity of materiality in order to assert the primacy of identity and a logic of strict inclusion or exclusion in the political: As long as materiality is conceived on a proprietary model alone, the answer to such a question

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[486] Jack Moore, "At least the NFL isn't pretending it's not blackballing Colin Kaepernick," The Guardian, April 13 2018 (https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2018/apr/13/kaepernick-reid-blackballed-nfl-kneeling-anthem; accessed May 5 2018)

must be 'yes' or 'no;' on these terms the resistant must stake out their territory in a given region

of a recognized political tradition and do so on no uncertain terms. Grasped strictly, the

discursive or decisive work of resistance – it would be one or the other – depends on the

transparency of the resistant to themselves and to others in an established political context, hence

on already knowing precisely who and what they are resisting. All the terms will have been laid

out by consensus or by fiat. If what I have called 'resistance as reticence' is possible, however, it

turns on an ironic gesture, and so a certain admission of uncertainty as a solicitation or invitation

there where certainty was apparently required: "I'm not sure; what do you think?" This

invitation, like the one Socrates offers to his interlocutors at the beginning of the *Timaeus*

suggests a completely excessive necessity, hence an invitation to once again formulate the

political from the ground up. Meanwhile, the fact that Timaeus in response to Socrates'

invitation attempts to give a reformulation not only of the *polis* and the republic, but of the

genesis of the world from the ground up, requires that we recognize what in this *mondialization*

still resists the account, and so indirectly indicates, in a strange way and by appeal to a strange

place (*topos atopon*), the manner in which the medium of discourse can itself be operative as a

resistance to the direct expression of the political. The question I would now like to briefly

consider is whether this notion of resistance, which concerns a displacement of established

relations and their origins, can nevertheless be considered a public work.

Section 3b: The Impropriety of Community

"[…] a community of the question, therefore, within that fragile moment when the question is
not yet determined enough for the hypocrisy of an answer to have already initiated itself beneath
the mask of the question, and not yet determined enough for its voice to have been already and
fraudulently articulated within the very syntax of the question. A community of decision, of
initiative, of absolute initiality, but also a threatened community, in which the question has not

yet found the language it has decided to seek, is not yet sure of its own possibility within the community."

-   Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, WD 98

Whomever we take as the figure or representative of this strange work of resistance as I have so

far described the notion, the result appears to be the same – broad exclusion from a given public

or community, even there where a strict inclusion remains intact in the formal or 'official'

recognition of rights. What this indicates, however, is that the sort of opening or overflowing that

the resistant makes possible, from within an institution and onto others, already suggests an

element of critical relation that cannot be reduced to existing institutional frameworks. If there is

resistance in the manner of indecision, that is, it is because a certain space can be occupied and

indirectly indicated as a space where in relation to others one is not yet compelled to agree or

disagree, in short to *decide* as to one's own position; rather, in this space of resistance, and

perhaps even in being compelled to decide, it can be shown that it is also possible to do

otherwise, and therefore to be situated both within and in excess of the frameworks of consensus

or decision at stake. More broadly, then, the figure of resistance presents a problem or *aporia* for

the notion of community: In order to grasp what Derrida calls a 'community of decision,' for

which decision is precisely a *possibility* held in common, we must imagine this community in a

space or moment of indecision, where the essential terms of engagement, hence the object of

decision remains ambiguous or even impossible to determine. A "community of decision" in this

sense, which must decide on a common identity precisely because its present situation indirectly

indicates an excess beyond any already-recognized identities, suggests a more radical potential

for engagement than what would have ever been conceivable strictly within a given institutional

framework. As I will argue, a community of decision that retains critical approach in relation to

the excessive medium for engagement suggests what Bill Readings calls a "community of

dissensus."[487]

        This central implication of my appeal to an excessive materiality – that a community of

decision would be a community of *dissensus* – is what I hope to circumscribe and explicate in a

provisional way in this subsection, and then to briefly illustrate in the following subsection. In

both cases I will be building on Readings' notion of the university as an institution that in its

present form implies the possibility for a community of *dissensus*, deploying it as a useful

expression of Derrida's own thinking of the humanities and in particular literature as an

institution that resists the notion of a common origin, that is, as an "institution which tends to

overflow the institution."[488]

        From the outset, then, we should note that this notion of a community of *dissensus* must

in this sense deploy a certain irony, operative only in light of an *aporia* at its origin: Whatever

individuals that are apparently 'of' this community must speak to or 'identify' with – in short

must recognize one another on the commonality of *terms not yet established*, and which in being

established would already be the collapse or sedimentation of this strange community into

already established and so prefiguring institutions. In order to sustain itself as a community of

dissensus, then, this community can only be operative as a project or promise dedicated to no one

in particular, hence to an *aporia* or in any case to the *question* of itself as a community, hence as

a promise or project that doesn't work. Nevertheless, a strange institution of this sort suggests a

potentially fruitful response to more traditional notions of strictly public or private institutions,

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[487] See ch. 12 of *University In Ruins* for the introduction of the concept of a 'community of *dissensus*' on Readings' terms. For the specific distinction that I am adapting, viz. of a community of dissensus from a community of consensus, see pp. 187.
[488] AL 36

both of which take for granted certain peculiarities of the media within which they establish strictly-determined limits as an object of consensus or decision. By appeal to a community of *dissensus*, then, what I intend to indicate is a certain step/not (*pas*) between what I will identify as a Hegelian and synthetic-dialectical grasp of a public on the one hand, and the absolute privacy of a Levinasian relation with others on the other hand. I will try to show that both Hegel and Levinas tend towards a negative thinking of community (viz. whether as the institution or the uninstitutable), whereas Derrida's thinking of the university allows for the notion of a community in excess, where a genuine tension or undecidability between the public and the private remains possible, and as it were definitive.

Since I do not propose in fact to engage with either Hegel or Levinas at length, and since their schematization in a kind of opposition to one another is drawn from Derrida, I should begin with Derrida's treatment of the point in "Violence and Metaphysics." In that text, Derrida suggests that the difference is radical, viz. between philosophy and nonphilosophy. This distinction fits in with the schema that I have deployed throughout this chapter, namely

Discourse – [medium] – Decision

In setting Hegel against Levinas, however, and in radicalizing this different as that between philosophy and nonphilosophy, hence the other whom I do not (but *can*) know, and the Other who can be in no way reduced to or grasped by appeal to our own terms we could add a further iteration of the same tension under the schema, at work at various moments over the course of this dissertation, of

Knowledge – [medium] – Faith

or just as readily

Public – [medium] – Private

For Derrida as we have seen the point is always to somehow think the one in relation to the other, that is, to think the medium, but what we are continually running up against is that this medium appears to say either too much or too little, exceeding or yielding to the terms it holds in *relation*. Derrida anticipates this relation, as we have already done with a discussion of the notion of resistance as reticence, when he declares that between these various oppositions a decision is necessary, but also that "we will not choose."[489] Thus a certain notion of the relation or of the medium indeed suggests a doubling or double operation that culminates in the question of community: we cannot choose between individual and the singularity; rather, resistance is itself the work of indirectly indicating how community as a systematic institution requires its other, and that this other demands the un-working of a system.

But we must choose, of course, and so we have nowhere to turn but the models of the public or non-public that we can draw from these two thinkers. Let us briefly elaborate what appear to be the terms of the choice in this sense.

In the *Philosophy of Right*, what Hegel calls the "individual" is primary,[490] consisting first of all in an abstract self-identity or self-recognition; this capacity to see or recognize oneself

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[489] WD 104

[490] In her dissertation, Seyla Benhabib not only makes a convincing case to this point, but also provides a thorough summary of debates on the question of the primacy of the individual vs. the

for Hegel implies a natural right to the external or material world, viz. "an *absolute right of possession* over all things [Sachen]."[491] We can already anticipate how there is a negative thinking of the materiality of the 'world,' here, and how by extension the individual suggests a negativity of its own – the *power to negate*, that is, as a power to reincorporate the apparently other into a structure of (self-)identity. On this model, the publicity of a public is always already given in the individual, but abstractly; this publicity is more concretely borne out in the establishment of mediated regulations between individuals – first via the institutions of civil society that preside over private relations, and later by the institution of the state that establishes true public relations of which the individual is an actively constitutive member. The individual's right thus gives the publicity of the public by yielding of itself a 'theory of duties,'[492] including the individual's "duty to the rights of civil society,"[493] hence to respect the public authority (*Macht*) of the law and the police, and culminating in Hegel's notion of individuals "whose *highest duty* is to be a citizen."[494] For Hegel the private relation of an individual to or with themselves itself becomes the guiding principle of the most complex institutions of intersubjectivity, that is, of the public as such.

What, then, is there in this structure of a given public to resist? There is a private impetus that motivates everything, but this impetus is itself what achieves expression only in the constitution of and participation in a public. Where in this sense the individual has been

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primacy of the concrete universal (i.e. the State) in the *Philosophy of Right*. See "Natural Right and Hegel: An Essay in Modern Political Philosophy," esp. p. 1-6.

[491] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, p. 73
[492] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, p. 191-192.
[493] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, p. 263. Cf. p. 197 (para 155)
[494] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, p. 275

prefigured towards the institutions of the law and of the state in advance, the notion of the

resistant, and all the more of a community of resistants, appear to be nonsensical notions.[495]

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas attempts to arrive at

another thinking of the public, specifically of a "public sphere" that is not identical to state

institutions, and yet simply a private enterprise. Offering a plausible compromise with this

notion, and perhaps by extension a different thought of resistance, Habermas nevertheless retains

a core Hegelian point by thinking the public sphere as a sphere of *discourse* where "private

individuals" can congregate in order to discuss matters of "public concern." Habermas'

observation, in any case, is that a deeper conflict becomes possible on these terms, and this

conflict would be borne out in public: It is precisely be retaining elements of a private situation,

and not yet grasping one's own identity in terms of the state that individuals can now prepare

themselves to "compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion."[496] The public

sphere in this sense yields a *principle of publicity* that does not follow outright from public

authority; publicity here requires rather than rules out the collective engagement of private

individuals, such that a public sphere allows individuals to fulfil their duty to be a citizen, but as

a critical rather than affirmative practice.

On Habermas' account, the principle of publicity hinges upon a principle of inclusivity,

that is, saying "the public sphere of civil society stood or fell with the principle of universal

access."[497] On his historical analysis, however, he finds that the *de re* universality of a public

sphere becomes a guise for *de facto* control of it by private interests and public authority. Here

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[495] Hegel's dismissal of the rabble comes to mind. As they rebel against public authority on grounds of a situation that is in fact the product of a reasonable state, the claim they make is groundless as "no one can assert a right against nature." (*Philosophy of Right*, p. 266)
[496] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p. 25-6
[497] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 85

the material conditions of access come to the fore: Habermas describes the public sphere as

depending upon, and initially emerging in light of various media, including for example news

media, roads and postal services, common spaces such as a town hall but also a more private

salon, etc. More generally, Habermas identifies the public sphere both with the emerging

bourgeoisie and with "the world of letters";[498] where property ownership and education are in

this sense established as *de facto* conditions of access to the public sphere we find this sphere is

materially limited, and that discourse there makes a claim to universality only by representing it

in a certain light. Habermas thus acknowledges that the public sphere in this sense is vulnerable

– that 'public opinion' is not only something to be convinced, but to be manipulated and

ultimately manufactured in a manner that undermines publicity by first undermining inclusivity.

Recognizing exclusion not as incidental, but as constitutive of Habermas' public sphere,

Nancy Fraser argues that we should abandon what Habermas refers to as "the fiction of *one*

public" in favour of a plurality of public spheres that can be more or less overlapping.[499] Where a

given public is dominant, perhaps outright exclusionary, Fraser advocates for the formation of

counterpublics as a mode of resistance.[500] Fraser thus recognizes not only how the media of a

public sphere are necessary "to construct and express one's […] identity through idiom and

style,"[501] but furthermore that the public construction of different identities entails different

media – different spaces for discourse, different languages, etc. For Fraser this is not an

abandonment of a principle of publicity, but an expansion of it; she predicts a dialectical impact

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[498] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 30.
[499] Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," p. 124, 127; cf. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 56
[500] Fraser, p. 122
[501] Fraser, p. 126

whereby the individual's withdrawal into a "subaltern counterpublic" becomes grounds to better and more critically engage with a wider public.[502]

I think it is right to cast public space as a space of contestation – but "contestation" on whose terms? The difficulty to be drawn from Hegel, Habermas, and Fraser is that even 'universal' principles of inclusivity and publicity can only be given from within a framework imposed by a decision. Fraser in particular recognizes that this imposition must imply strict exclusion – that access to media, hence the possibility of public expression, can be and often is materially limited for certain groups of individuals[503] – but her more general agreement with the principles of publicity and inclusiveness risks avoiding the radical difficulty of her own thought. That is, Fraser's very attention to the role of decision in slicing up a public medium into a plurality of publics still leads back in an awkward to the assertion of a primacy of discourse: One public 'subaltern' and another 'dominant,' there is immediately a division *and* a relation; the appeal to decision is already covered over since a broader dynamic of power is already thinkable, and the decision never therefore so dynamic or radical as to allow for the thought of a radical break or dissent. It is therefore not surprising that after thinking the public sphere as divisible in this plurality of ways, Fraser will still forward the notion of the state as a still-more comprehensive "superpublic;" the more important point that is in this way raised but by no means addressed in its basic potency for the thinking of a public is that we have reason to doubt whether the state is after all "the appropriate unity of sovereignty."[504] But if then we begin to ask after the 'appropriate unit' of sovereignty, and if that strikes us as a legitimate *question*, this

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[502] Fraser, p. 124
[503] Fraser, p. 120
[504] Fraser, p. 135-136

question itself suggests an opening onto a much more radical problem, insoluble in terms of a strictly negative thinking of a public.

Indeed, this question of sovereignty seems to lead these Hegelian questions of a public almost immediately onto the Levinasian appeal to a founding or orginary non-public. *Beginning*, therefore, with the outright denial of the structure of identity as a legitimate model in light of which to cast relations between *individuals*, from a Levinasian perspective it becomes necessary by contrast to approach the other as a *singularity*. Essential to this Levinasian model is a clear "impropriety," but perhaps not quite in the sense that I have been using the term. That is, what we draw from Levinas' model is the radical impossibility of intellectually or physically *possessing* the Other, yet it still seems that this dispossession, nonknowledge, and radical privacy or secrecy in relation to the Other could nevertheless, and because it comes 'first,' be founding and sustaining of the sort of public previously discussed, viz. the one that structures itself around a synthetic identity. We can think a certain relation, according to Levinas, insofar as we have a responsibility to respond to those who cannot make a claim or be subject to a claim in public, and this precisely because they cannot speak on our terms, viz. within frame imposed be a decision not to be questioned, hence in our spaces and our language, etc.; thus the responsibility is a "responsibility without response."[505]

What is important to note is that the alterity of the Other in the Levinasian sense neither constitutes nor grounds *dissent* in the sense of the word that I have been developing, precisely because the Other refuses or transcends whatever *terms* I would try to impose for the sake of communication. That is, Levinas' thinking of the other suggests a negative thinking of the medium since it proposes that *there is* no medium; it is a nonphilosophical proposal, therefore,

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[505] GD 75

since there is no productive notion of expression, and still less of representation that we could put to work without betraying the Other. Thus, and by contrast with the Hegelian notion of community as collective self-knowledge, Levinas' approach appears to yield the nonphilosophical nonthought of a "community of nonpresence."[506]

As I have indicated it seems to me that Derrida's intention is to offer an account that yields a relation between these two apparent extremes, where this thinking of relation turns on a careful rethinking of the medium. This 'medium' has already been expressed in various ways and on various terms, which is an essential temptation of the appeal to materiality: Succumbing to the old fantasy of matter and its history throughout Western philosophy, that it can take on any form. But this negative medium ultimately refuses a thinking of the public since by reducing it to the experience of a *truth* that in relation to others can be grasped as one's own (community of publicity), or to a *responsibility* that can be grasped as one's own (community of secrecy); where this notion of truth appears to be a right to the other, and where this notion of responsibility appears to be a duty to the other, what remains impossible is a genuine *relation of dissent* in which this right and this duty are put to work without being synthetically comprehensive or exhaustive of a medium for interaction. If on the other hand what Derrida proposes is a medium "that allows one to *say everything, in every way*,"[507] and so which will not have been exhausted on one's own terms or by the other's, then what is at stake is a medium for dissent. By extension, a 'right to say everything' can only be claimed ironically – in and by the imposition of certain terms, but precisely in order to *admit* therein the terms of others.

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[506] WD 130-131
[507] AL 36

What is sought in this sense is an institutional medium which leaves undecided the primacy of a Hegelian community of publicity and a Levianasian community of secrecy. In this case Habermas' notion of a 'public sphere' – between and as a conversation between the strictly private and strictly public – is precisely on track until it asserts the primacy of the principle of publicity and by inattention to the material medium allow for the thought of an all-inclusive in-between that becomes autocorrective once again, in short, a synthesis of the public and private achieved in consensus rather than a tension sustained in dissent. In Derrida, however, we find another candidate for this institutional medium, as one that will not have decided in advance on its own terms, choosing neither between publicity nor secrecy in order to put every such limitation into question. Let us briefly see why Derrida takes the university to be operative, at least potentially, in such a capacity, which is articulated in terms of a structural tension, that is, in *Conflict of the Faculties*, as described by Kant.

In that text Kant describes the university as not only topologically between a public and a private sphere, that is, it is not simply a moment on the way from the one to the other, but is *internally torn* between these two moments that shape it from within and without. This internal shearing, the institution at war with itself, comes in the form of a tension between different faculties of the institutions, and which nominally appear as different levels: On the one hand, the higher faculties (theology and law for example) which are directly accountable to the state and public authority as Habermas describes the notion; on the other hand the lower faculties (philosophy is the principal example), these being only indirectly bound to public authority, and so closer in another sense to a more private fidelity to the development of knowledge, to the truth as backed or enforced by no decision-making power. The university in this sense has not one, but two founding principles, and if within each faculty it is clear where allegiances lie, between them

no obvious decision is possible except by the negation of one or other elements of this
institutional medium – a negation that will have rendered it something other than a medium.
Thus we add something to the running schema, a difference within the medium and *as it were*
proper to it:

Discourse – [philosophy – theology] – Decision

or more generally

Discourse – [lower – higher] – Decision

One could no doubt still see a hierarchy if desired, and a Hegelian model in particular if one
takes at face value the distinctions 'lower' and 'higher' while seeing a comprehensive state as the
crown of this structure. But if that is right it becomes all the more notable that 'discourse' as a
result would be hidden in from the public eye, which was not the Hegelian intent. (Nor
meanwhile is it satisfactory to assert the inverse on Hegelian terms, however, as if it were *not* in
the end one's "highest duty" to be a citizen, but rather to pursue a private concern with
knowledge.) In any case, as Kant points out, it appears that the lower faculties cannot be done
away with, as public authority might by virtue of the assertion of its terms on the medium of the
university begin to stray:

It is absolutely essential that the learned community at the university also contain
a faculty that is independent of the government's command with regard to its
teachings. […] For without a faculty of this kind, the truth would not come to

light (and this would be to the government's own detriment); but reason is by its nature free and admits of no command to hold something as true.[508]

As Derrida suggests in "Mochlos: Eyes of the University," Kant here posits, more or less explicitly, a second sovereignty that is necessary for the first, indeed is the guiding necessity *of* the first, and which therefore might be logically prior. This doubling of the institutional medium therefore suggests a doubling of the necessity at stake there, and at a certain point it becomes difficult to say which is truly founding, founding of the truth. Is there a "principle of publicity" for such an institution, which has yet to decide precisely to whom or to what it is in the first place accountable? Is there a principle of publicity when of the public it seems in the institution itself that there is *plus d'un* (more than one/no more one)?

I think there is a useful answer to this question, however tenuous or precarious the implications. Specifically, and prior to the decision of the origin of accountability, hence inherent to this institution's disagreements with itself, we find a principle of undecidability or *dissensus*. In other words, what we find operative in Derrida's notion of the university, and despite the apparently imaginary qualities of this institution, is a "principle of unconditional resistance"[509] that can in existing institutions be put to work as a way of sustaining the institution's capacity to open onto another origin. In this sense what Derrida calls a right to say everything is paired at its core with a duty to preserve an internal incoherence that precedes the decision as to the terms of engagement; the right to say everything goes hand in hand with a duty to resist. Where this right and duty in relation to a pre-originary opening are crucial in sustaining this institution's radical

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[508] Kant, *Conflict of the Faculties*, pp. 27
[509] Derrida, "The Future of the Profession," p. 26

critical potential, it becomes clear that a principle of *dissensus* or resistance is precisely

not *proper* to any existing institution; rather, the principle of *dissensus* and the resulting

the impropriety of the hypercritical institution of the university can be deployed as a

means of bringing into question those frameworks under which a transparency or

publicity is required of all, precisely at the expense of the strict inclusion of some or

others in this public sphere. The university is therefore an institution which 'tends to

overflow the institution' because a 'principle of publicity' for such institution would be

excessive, that is, it would require the admission of a plurality of origins.

Section 3c. The Impropriety of the University

As a brief sketch of the difficult and potentially precarious structure of the university that

follows from the model just laid out, I want to consider the events surrounding Jordan

Peterson's visit at Queen's University in February 2017. I'm not concerned with the

contents of Peterson's talk so much as the various details surrounding it, which I think

help to illustrate the notion of an institution torn between (at least two) sovereignties. As I

will try to show, and whereas it will prove problematic to simply assert one over the

other, the most insidious response will be to deny tensions, which will have been to deny

the role of the medium and the institution altogether.

We can begin by noting some essential ambiguities at work in the case. If we take

for granted the schema

Discourse – [medium] – Decision

it will be difficult to clearly place the parties I have in mind. Peterson, for his part, appears to be there in order to engage in discourse. He is known for some controversial stances and is there to speak one of them, namely – and this is perhaps an interesting coincidence – his position that requiring individuals to address individual in their preferred pronouns constitutes an immoral form of "compelled speech."[510] An invited keynote speaker in any case, speaking to a more or less informed audience in a more or less publicly accessible forum, the idea is not that he should be allowed to unilaterally impose his own terms on the medium and the discussion at hand. Peterson in this sense appears to be motivated by a principle of publicity, and to promote one, that is, Peterson does not appear to modify the scene, but only to engage others on the terms traditionally operative in these university spaces: He has done his research; he is prepared to explain his position, and then to debate. Conversely, however, on Peterson's arrival it appears that others, in particular a group of students, have already made a decision, and precisely modified the space in a notably exclusive way: occupying the forum for his presentation physically – with their bodies, with shouting, horns, and cowbells, they will try to inhibit the talk, and they will effectively succeed.

This is not simply a split between a discursive and decisive approach as borne out between two opposed parties. The students' implicit claim, after all, which they will eventually make explicit, is that they are not the only ones making decisions, and that the invitation to Peterson and the decision to give him a more or less public space in which to speak is already a unilateral imposition. By confronting Peterson with an audience that refuses to listen, the students make their case that their voices should be heard, and that the forum granted to Peterson

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[510] Woolf, "Why we invited Jordan Peterson to discuss compelled speech."

itself undermines this sort of engagement; the claim is that the public spaces of the university

have only been called public on the terms of others.

Meanwhile Peterson's own willingness to engage others in public is perhaps not quite as

genuine as it might appear, if it is supposed to represent a fidelity to the truth rather than to

authority. Peterson has, for example, called critical colleagues out, not waiting for an invitation

but making a decisive challenge to public debate.[511] Thus a principle of publicity is not just

spoken to by Peterson, it is by contrast put to work by Peterson in order to modify or otherwise

assert what is public and what is not, and what can be broadly legitimated in terms of discourse

and what cannot. In this way we can recognize a certain tension in Peterson's decision to speak

of 'compelled speech' on the grounds that no one should be forced to speak on terms to which

they have not consented[512] – for example the gender pronouns of the other, but it seems that a

broader medium is also at stake here. There is, in other words, something useful or advantageous

for Peterson about these spaces of the university, hence the 'public debate' and the traditions that

are formative of them; it is in a certain way the widely-*recognized* equality and objectivity of the

public fora of the university that allow for Peterson's claim to objectivity and a universal

principle of publicity in a way that is not politically-charged or biased.

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[511] From a CBC Radio interview: "*Carol Off***:** You've heard from one of your colleagues, a physics professor, A. W. Peet who is responding to your video. *Jordan Peterson***:** I already mentioned to Peet online that I'd be happy to meet for a debate on this issue." "'I'm not a bigot' Meet the U of T prof who refuses to use genderless pronouns.**"** *CBC Radio,* October 13, 2016. Accessed May 2, 2018. http://www.cbc.ca/radio/asithappens/as-it-happens-friday-edition-1.3786140/i-m-not-a-bigot-meet-the-u-of-t-prof-who-refuses-to-use-genderless-pronouns-1.3786144. Cf. Peterson's Tweet: "UT Prof AW Peet called me a bigot and complained to the university. How about a public debate, Dr. Peet?" "Jordan B. Peterson," *Twitter*, September 29, 2016. Accessed May 2, 2018 https://twitter.com/jordanbpeterson/status/781597674336358400.
[512] ibid. "I don't recognize another person's right to decide what words I'm going to use."

Suffice it to say, then, that the protesting students and Peterson are both aware of the importance of the medium, approaching neither as neutral nor on the same terms. There are several interesting questions to pursue here – whether a neutral forum is possible; whether, in any case, one ever has a right to deny access to others, and if so who has this right and under what conditions, etc. – but they would take a more extended study, and it is not in any case my aim to decide between the parties and their approaches. It is enough to show that the media of the university and its 'public spaces' are not neutral, and that this non-neutrality, hence a tension between public discourse and private decisions or opinions, is always, and at least *implicitly* a theme of university discourse(s) and decision(s); the various and potentially divergent or directly contradictory discourse(s) and decision(s) at stake as a result are overlapping and intertwined *with* and *in* the medium they share in a broad dissent as to even properly common conditions of discourse. It is perhaps by conflicts such as these that, however awkwardly or confusedly, the institution of the university can begin to bring into question its more basic presumptions and traditions.

Meanwhile, and while there are clear dangers to the indecisive attitude just expressed, the same case allows me to illustrate on other terms what I take to be a more radical danger. Specifically, we can locate an attempt to confine the details of the conflict within certain strictures already, hence to know in advance what each party is thinking, where this attempt depends on the imposition of a discursive structure that one takes for granted as coherent, and as it were irresistible. Consider for example Principal and Vice-Chancellor Daniel Woolf's remarks on the incident, not incidentally given in national news media rather than the space of the university:

> Queen's fully supports an inclusive and diverse campus and curriculum, and we
> continue to make important progress in pursuing these ideals. Diversity also

> extends to thought and opinion – it can't simply be "diversity of the sort we happen to agree with today." Universities should be physically safe spaces and diverse and inclusive. But protection from disagreeable ideas isn't safety – it's infantilization, and robs everyone of the opportunity to reflect and grow. Students: We are there to learn with you, to have our assumptions questioned and to question yours. We will not simply reinforce your beliefs and turn them into unexamined convictions.[513]

Who is Woolf speaking to, and who for? The collective voice, which speaks in the same breath of, to, and for the university, in the name of the university, specifically Queen's University, also speaks to those who threaten it, in order to remind them that there is no threat in the spaces at stake. On the one hand Woolf's discourse couldn't be more deferent, apparently offering a claim of sheer hospitality as he adopts and acknowledges the language of safe spaces, diversity, and inclusivity with only minor qualifications, ultimately placing himself entirely with the students who speak on these terms – really he is not speaking to the students; he is speaking to himself. The authority behind or in these words, on the other hand, which includes all students, whether or not they agree to these terms, asserts a truth of the matter in a way that would be possible for no student, and which in a way only speaks to the medium of the university, those spaces, in order to assert the primacy of the decision he has already made as regards what is and is not appropriate there.

What is most troubling about Woolf's claims is the ease with which he completes a passage between a figure of authority and a figure of the vigil of truth; by denying or covering over any tensions at work in the medium, he denies that there is a medium that matters, and so recognizes an identity between two sovereignties – his own.

What I have been provisionally developing over the course of this chapter in terms of an aporetic materialism appears well-suited to carrying out analyses of the sort anticipated in this

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[513] Daniel Woolf, "Why we invited Jordan Peterson to discuss compelled speech."

final subsection via the tension between Peterson and the protesting students, where attention to the role of excessive materiality allows for a recognition of a plurality of apparent 'fundamentals' in play, without requiring that one choose between them in analysis. As a materialism in this sense, it is unique in that it does not require in advance a study of a hierarchical structure of power as regards a material medium (or in any case can attend to more than one such hierarchy), but can attend to internal tensions and ambiguities that are better grasped without collapsing them into a single framework. By the same methods, one is able to recognize the danger of an approach such as Woolf's but it will be hard to do more than identify this danger and the structures being conflated.

That is, in cases of clear oppression and exploitation, traditional dialectical-historical materialisms are perhaps better suited to analyze and in particular combat that sort of problematically disingenuous or uncritical approach to materiality, precisely since it is so unilateral. One does not always have to concern oneself with the 'place of the unplaceable,' and sometimes the simple fact of material inequality and exploitation of those who clearly *have* a place is more urgent.

There is a reason some would be unwilling to call Derrida's thinking 'political,' and although I disagree it would also be precisely wrong to suggest that the scope of the approach I have offered here is somehow universally applicable. Nevertheless, the case of the unrecognizable or un-placeable person should be compelling precisely because of the apparent ease of writing such a case off as a- or pre-political. If nothing else, an aporetic materialism in this sense helps to show that it is precisely in those moments and situations we do not readily call "political" that we must be particularly attentive to the material conditions of such a claim as differential, and therefore less substantial than they might be appear. Such a materialism is

therefore uniquely apt to demonstrating this overflow of the material medium of a public

discourse beyond a recognized public onto a publicity that as a result must be thought first of all

in terms of a work of dissent that is not reducible in scope to any one framework for engagement

that this medium also nevertheless makes possible.

Conclusion: Risks, Temptations, Openings

In speaking of political resistance, I have argued that one must begin with critical attention to the medium in which resistance may first of all take place. By hypothesizing and then attending to the materiality at stake in this medium, however, this project's own broader effort to speak of the public spaces for political resistance was quickly complicated, and led as a result to several detours through diverse, perhaps divergent literatures in phenomenology and deconstruction, as well as critical theory and political theory more generally. In each case a critical engagement was meant to discover certain convergences after all; some of these convergences, it seems to me, can be summarized by identifying three interrelated sets of results: First, there are various common risks to which this project is subject as it ventures into these various theoretical fields; these risks, in turn, will suggest some running temptations in the work of writing, but which perhaps a summary reading of the project must also resist; to resist temptations in this way – the promise of complete sense within an established tradition, or the promise of an altogether other tradition – will help to indicate also a few moments in this project as it opens onto others, but where a conversation remains to be borne out. Let us quickly review the various detours taken in order to isolate and emphasize any broader convergences to be found.

In chapter one, engagement with Husserl and Merleau-Ponty helped to show that space is not only a condition of a self-constituting human subject and the world they inhabit, but as Merleau-Ponty emphasizes space suggests a specifically *material* condition in the form of one's own body. Already on these terms we can anticipate some of the motivating difficulties at stake in chapters three and four concerning the propriety of materiality (viz. of one's *own* body), by extension of space as borne out in the establishment of institutions that collectively operate as an expression of specifically human modes of relation. Meanwhile, however, the concept of

materiality drawn from Merleau-Ponty in terms of the propriety of one's own body struck as problematic on its own terms: The attempt to think a human intersubjectivity in terms of the body turned on a negative moment, allowing an apparent ambiguity to support assertions of common identity after all – beginning with, and not incidentally, the denomination 'human,' such that this material ambiguity grounds recognition in the eyes of others of one's own status as a self-constituting subject. Since, on the other hand, it seemed more important to be able to speak on phenomenological terms of a plurality of embodied subjects who would not be reducible to a structure of identity, I developed the notion of an excessive materiality by appeal to Merleau-Ponty's notion of the flesh. An excessive materiality, as I argued, is not graspable in terms of the self-transparency of constitution; instead, the flesh suggested the need for institution or *Stiftung* as a field for intersubjective relations that could be transformed without being appropriated on a single, common set of terms.

The work with institution in order to approach an excessive materiality, however, led to the difficult question of whether, and then how such materiality might still be critically approached in light of more profound limitations at stake at the origins of the situation of the critical subject. By adapting Derrida's reading of the *Timaeus* alongside more recent considerations of the notion of *khōra*, I developed two senses in which materiality appears to be discursively approachable. First, materiality can be 'directly' approached by the designation of materiality on specific terms (for example "body," "feminine," "city," etc.); via formal designation, materiality can be afforded a recognized place, hence *strictly* included or excluded from identified spaces and discourses. Second, materiality can be approached 'indirectly' with the indication that the designation of materiality in certain ways suggests the necessity of a material medium operative as a condition for even this initial designation (e.g. a palimpsest, or

the mystic writing pad that Freud interprets in order to think memory as a physical 'etching' in the body and a broader unconscious, etc.); this medium, however, must be irreducible to the discourse and the act of designation that it conditions, that is, it cannot be afforded a specific place at all and is as a result *broadly* excluded from any identified spaces and discourses. The pivotal insight of this double-reading was that the indirect approach can be deployed as a tactic within the confines of already-established discourse precisely as a way of putting into question or resisting the basic terms of discourse thus imposed: As exemplified by the figure of Socrates himself in the *Timaeus*, the indirect approach turns on an ironic deployment of recognized terms (including embodied subjects, discursive and city spaces, etc.) in order to indirectly indicate what on these terms is unidentifiable but nevertheless materially at stake.

Given the notion of an excessive materiality as a threateningly inarticulable condition of discourse, it became important in chapter three to develop an initial account of the 'primacy of the political' that an excessive materiality suggests, viz. the political as a mode of engagement that precedes the explicit or 'official' intersubjective engagements of agents within common, formally established institutions. It seemed to me that a 'direct' approach to a primacy of the political was already at work in humanist conceptions of an originary intersubjectivity at stake in Lukács' appeal to class consciousness, Honneth's appeal to primary recognition, and finally Merleau-Ponty's own appeal to a common body proper. Showing, however, that each of these approaches to relations between individuals turned on both (i) a negative grasp of materiality, and so (ii) a synthetic-dialectical notion of intersubjectivity, I argued that the direct approach leads to a thinking of intersubjective relations that is problematically totalizing or moralizing, and in this way inattentive to the problems of broad exclusion from such relations. In order to develop an 'indirect' approach to intersubjective relations, I turned to Merleau-Ponty's notion of

hyperdialectics, which allows us to indirectly indicate the necessity of a materiality that precedes and exceeds our own work of modifying or claiming it, whether this work is understood as a physical, (re)cognitive, or perceptual engagement. An excessive materiality in this sense has two implications: First, it is approachable from within a given institution only insofar as engagements within the institution can attend to their own origins in terms of a divergence or *écart*, hence as already limited by other institutions; second, a communication between institutions consists not in their synthesis but in a coherent deformation of the broader material basis that is never as a result exhaustively expressed. Politically, and by contrast with Habermas' function-theoretical emphasis on communication as founded upon a principle of collective consent, I suggested that a hyperdialectical-materialist approach is necessarily attentive (i) to precisely this broad exclusion of excessive materiality and the resulting limitations on institution, and so (ii) to the possibility of the modification of the institution on its own terms; as a result of this approach, I argued that communication suggests the core principle of an instituting dissent.

This notion of dissent as an unprefigurable core of political engagement led me in chapter four to develop a notion of political resistance as suggesting a central tension in the work of communication. Crucial here was the tension between discourse and decision, that is, between the language of a political institution and the seemingly extra-institutional establishment of this language. Arendt and Schmitt presented the two poles of this dilemma, as they each admitted both of these elements, but emphasized only one as 'political' properly speaking: For Arendt, the model of the political dissenter was the civil disobedient who has already assented at least tacitly to a structure of political discourse, and whose action is in no way violent; for Schmitt, any dissent genuinely deserving to be called "political" was possible only for the enemy that is strictly excluded by an established public, and whose action on these terms was in principle

bound to the act or threat of violence. Here again, however, the emphasis on discourse or decision turned on a negative conception of materiality, allowing both thinkers to dismiss any genuine impact of the medium for political engagement. By contrast, I argued that attentiveness to this medium as a material excess rather than a negativity reveals a tension between discourse and decision that is more fundamental than either of its poles: Since an apparently 'pure' discourse deploys a performative moment that is also a modification of the material medium (e.g. the judge's announcement of a decision in a courtroom, the politician's filibuster in parliamentary debate, the professor's response or nonresponse to a sensitive question in a classroom), and since the force of a decisive modification of the medium depends also on its representation in established discursive contexts (e.g. accepted or controversial figures of authority, well-known national symbols, news and social media, etc.), it becomes unclear what grounds are available in order to assert either decision or discourse as fundamental, and furthermore that the medium which both decision and discourse deploy without exhausting is itself the source of this tension. Between discourse and decision, then, I provisionally developed the notion of political resistance as a form of dissent that indirectly admits an undecidability as to the proper origins of a given discursive framework, but also as to the properly originary act of establishing the grounds for public discourse. Political resistance in this sense deploys an excessive materiality in its irreducibility to the terms of a given public or community, retaining a relation with other possible communities in dissent.

In summarizing these detours on the way to this notion of political resistance, I have in retrospect suggested a logical order apparently motivating the chronological order of topics and literatures taken up – as if each move was not a detour at all, but was in the end necessary. This essentially synthetic-dialectical logic, however, which produces sense out of its lack, out of

nothing, is precisely what this project aims to combat from the outset in its methods and content, and above all in taking up the notion of materiality. That is, by taking up the notion of materiality, and all the more by developing a "materialism," it should be emphasized that there is an essential tension or indecision operative at the core of my project. This tension rears its head in various ways, not incidentally beginning with the structure of the project itself, in and between the chapters and the various fields or subfields of literature thus brought to bear upon one another: What I have said is that there is a medium of engagement that is decipherable only within a given framework, yet what I apparently do is claim this broad medium as the project's proper subject and object. In this basic incoherence we can identify several risks and temptations at work in the project – but if it can be seen that and how the project also resists some of these risks and temptations, it may become possible to recognize some openings and opportunities for further productive engagement along lines already initiated here, if not only here.

The most obvious risks of incoherence, as just indicated, follow simply from the appeal to materiality in order to offer an account of political resistance. These are risks, however, that are precisely not incidental – I do not merely inherit them from the literature with which I engage, as if my own thinking and writing were somehow an indifferent medium for its expression – but risks which I must rather assume as following from the choices that I make in pursuing the notion of materiality. We can identify some of these risks in choices made as to the project's method, language, and scope.

Nominally, the principal concern in method is with the notion of critique, in particular the possibility or conditions of critique. But beginning with chapter one and the engagement with Husserl's genetic method, it becomes clear that to ask after the 'conditions' of critique is precisely to risk an uncritical question, hence already to speculate. By insisting furthermore, and

by appeal to Merleau-Ponty's thinking in particular, that phenomenology on its own terms requires *material* conditions for critique, I further radicalize the difficulty, taking Merleau-Ponty's suggestion in *Signs* almost beyond what it can bear, viz. that "the ultimate task of phenomenology as a philosophy of consciousness is to understand its relationship to non-phenomenology."[514] Properly understood however, it still seems to me that this 'task' is not proper to phenomenology only or fully, and that one insight at work here is that the phenomenologist's efforts can no longer be restricted to an engagement with others in the world on their own terms; if this adaptation or negotiation between divergent terms of engagement can still be called 'phenomenology,' that is because phenomenology in this sense preserves the possibility of another name and another method. Thus the thought of what I called the ontological resistance of materiality in chapter one – a resistance to thematization via ontological or ideal categories – already anticipated the notion of political resistance discussed in chapters three and four as a resistance to thematization via an intersubjective, material-historical framework. At the same time, the notion that an ontological resistance and a political resistance can somehow be built into one and the same account suggests an additional risk that I will return to shortly.

Meanwhile, it has to be said that the attempt to think materiality at these meetings or divergences of ontology, phenomenology, and political theory led to several risks in the deployment of language, most obvious in choices of terminology. Beginning with the distinction between a 'negative' and 'excessive' materiality, a precedent was set for the deployment of numerous other apparently oppositional or dyadic notions – subject/object, self/world, inside/outside, man/woman, recognition/revolution, discourse/decision, … – each of which had

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to be stripped of strictly negative connotations and revealed to require an operative 'third' that itself could not be directly named. Notably, however, I found it necessary at various points precisely to name this unnamable third ('excessive,' 'broad,' '*khōra*,' 'flesh,' 'call' 'resistance,' …) – an ironic requirement or necessity of the medium thus indicated, but only ever indirectly. This linguistic play is not only potentially confusing for the reader, but perhaps radically self-undermining: By doubling dyadic pairs and naming the media that condition the inscription of the name, the language I deploy is constantly at risk of merely lapsing into the style of thinking and of writing I was in every case attempting to challenge and put into question.

A final risk comes with respect to the scope of this project, which in placing itself at a plurality of junctures in and between relevant literatures is at once too broad and too narrow. That is, amongst all the various constellations of thinking that are brought to bear upon one another, some of the most central relations go underdeveloped while some of the most interesting relations require more time and a broader context.

Most centrally, and as already anticipated in the introduction, the relationship between Derrida and Merleau-Ponty receives only passing explicit attention, even as a tension between them runs throughout and even structures the text as a whole. The essential distinction between a negative and excessive materiality is not one I force upon either thinker in light of the other, yet by drawing on both there are clearly some tensions between them that go unexplored. What is the difference, for example, between Merleau-Ponty's characterizing the flesh in terms of a (pre-dialectical?) positivity, and Derrida's appeal to *khōra* as a (non-negative, but also non-positive) condition of dialectics? My intuition is that the difference is ultimately minute: For Derrida the medium stands in excess of being, but this is a *certain* being graspable in terms established over the course of the history of philosophy; for Merleau-Ponty the medium is precisely being in the

sense of the flesh, but the flesh indicates a materiality that "has no name in any philosophy."[515]

Nevertheless, a far more focused effort than the one carried out here is required to demonstrate

what matters, and what doesn't, about the various differences of terminology between these two

thinkers, where the motivations for the later Merleau-Ponty in particular (e.g. with indirect

language, chiasm, hyperdialectics) seem so similar to central Derridean notions (e.g. différance,

aporia, a hypertranscendental, etc.).

Most interestingly, it seems to me in any case, there appears to be a significant overlap

between phenomenology and Marx's thinking, extending also to other threads in political theory;

these connections are unfortunately only given a quite narrow treatment. Though my intention

from the outset was to develop a thinking of public space as a space of resistance – with

Derrida's and Habermas' thinking in particular – I expect that the project risks reading primarily

as a project developed out of phenomenology first of all.

Since each of these risks concerns a tension between elements that the project neither

fully addresses in its own right nor fully explicates in relation to other projects, we can also

identify several temptations in connection with these risks, where a 'temptation' is in principle to

deny risks where they are operative, and so to overlook the potential for the medium at stake

there. To be tempted, then, is either to insist on the primacy of a given position or to attempt,

impossibly, to begin to with the other; either way one engages with a particular context for

critical engagement precisely without reflection, and so without question. Let us note some of the

tensions thus operative here as they again appear in relation to choices concerning method,

language, and scope.

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An obvious methodological temptation solicited by the ambiguity of materiality, for example, is precisely to speculate, and to require in this sense that the critical subject transcend themselves beyond the point of return, or finally the point of identification or recognition. If phenomenology matters politically, it seems to me, it is because phenomenology suggests a response in relation to this temptation of materiality as implying an alterity that can only be accessed by way of an unyielding *faith*; crucially, however, this response that phenomenology provides will not simply have been a counter-assertion or counter-temptation, that is, an assertion of critical *knowledge*. Rather, phenomenology allows for *resistance* in precisely the sense that I have outlined here, as a position between faith and knowledge which is prior to both.

Terminologically, the temptation in the approach of the *apparently* extra-linguistic is to speak of it as *substantially* extra-linguistic. In so doing, the name is put to work without mediation, already in touch with the absolute novelty and singularity of the thing itself; alternatively, one refuses to speak to the thing in its singularity, relying instead on the generality of tradition. But this radical assertion and this radical refusal are two moments in the same faith in the negativity of materiality; implicitly, there appears to be a very fine line, perhaps nothing between the speculative decision to speak of materiality in terms of an absolutely independent exterior (Meillasoux's "great outdoors," Bennett's "vibrant matter," etc.) and the metaphysical decision to speak of *hylē* or *extensio.* By contrast in order to maintain the tension between these extremes one must deploy appearances in a manner that indirectly indicates something beyond them; that is, one must with a certain irony call for an account of that which cannot be directly claimed in words.

The twofold temptation of scope is a temptation in relation to an institutional framework. Between Merleau-Ponty and Derrida in this text, the essential temptation that I encountered was

to treat their thinking identically, hence conflating what appear to be basic institutional differences between deconstruction and phenomenology, or deconstruction and ontology in the 'radical' sense of ontology borne as a continuation of phenomenology. In the face of this temptation, it perhaps remains the case that the solution is not so much to put them in conversation with one another, but rather to attend to the various media that separate them – materiality and language, for example, but also political elements. Only Merleau-Ponty – and this seems important, even if I cannot develop the point here – affirms in good faith the Marxism of his time; Derrida's approach to Marx is essentially skeptical or even sometimes duplicitous, and in this sense is 'political' only indirectly.

Between phenomenology and political theory, then, the temptation has already been suggested – to have begun with Marx, Arendt, Honneth and Habermas, since without them the discussion of public space within the scope of phenomenology as I initially approached it would have been all the more abstract, indeed almost speculative in nature. But then for the same reason it becomes clear why a certain conversation on this front was in its own way productive, even if not in retrospect wholly justifiable. That is, in order to speak of resistance, one must always do so in conversation and negotiation between apparent incompatibles; if everything nevertheless remains to be justified, that is because justification is only possible out of *dissensus* with the other, hence in the questioning of one's own terms as a critical attitude that is impossible to adopt on one's own.

More generally, then, it seems to me that an important point to develop concerns this structure of temptation as a thinking of *change* in the mode of synthesis, that is, strictly as a work of consensus or of production. In "Force of Law," Derrida suggests two "temptations of deconstruction" that he identifies with Benjamin's two types of general strike: (i) A general

political strike that aims "to replace the order of the state with another," and (ii) a general *proletarian* strike that aims "to abolish the state." Both temptations involve an unhindered *passage* through a material medium on the way to the new: In the first case, a public suspends or negates the apparent alterity (negativity) of the medium in order to reaffirm the Same – the end of a regime for the sake of a regime; in the second case, a public suspends or negates the apparent alterity (negativity) of the medium in order to affirm the Different – the end of pre-history, for the sake of history, or the end of history, for the sake of post-history. As I have argued, however, the 'temptation' in either case is neither the Same nor the Different, but specifically the negativity of the medium through which one therefore passes between the one and the other too readily and too completely.

If I have spoken of resistance rather than revolution, then, it is not to promote a third way, but rather to promote a thinking of change that does not hinge on a synthetic moment, but hinges rather on a critical attention to divisions or divergences operative within a given framework as positive rather than negative limitations. Resistance in this sense positions itself at the limits of a given situation in order precisely to expose these limits: Between two temptations, resistance holds these two absolutes in tension without deciding between them, and in this indecision indirectly indicates a space for decision that exceeds each of them. All change and all negation therefore begins in this sense – not with a choice or a decision, but with a recognition of more radical limits of both as the condition of negotiation.

The thesis of this dissertation is contained in this notion of resistance as a resistance of and between temptations, and so in the claim that to be tempted in this sense, that is, to begin with the one or the other, is not to *begin* at all. Does this notion of resistance mean that, on the other hand, the dissertation simply installs itself like Buridan's ass in a perpetual dilemma, on its

own terms condemned to do nothing and go nowhere? But this classic example assumes a logical

equivalence, that is, the negativity of identity in order *not* to think the true problem it raises,

namely the medium for comparison as necessarily and radically differential, a space for

resistance precisely because the appropriate terms of comparison have not been agreed upon, and

because a blind faith in the force of the negative as a result does not already or necessarily

culminate in the thought or production of a common situation. Between temptations there is

genuine *dissensus*, then, and this is no doubt what leads to a plurality of risks; the same *dissensus*

however suggests some potentially fruitful openings to be pursued. Let us, then, and in light of

its limitations and risks, consider possible openings of this project onto others.

It is notable, of course, that in this project there is very little mention of thinkers who

consider their own projects "materialist," and there are potentially fruitful conversations to be

had on this front. I have only alluded to the point at various moments, but it seems that in spite of

my best efforts this project veers dangerously close to the new materialisms of speculative

realism. The work of so-called 'transcendental materialists' such as Adrian Johnston suggests a

point of contact, but also of divergence: Everywhere I have been concerned with materiality in

the manner of a *certain* transcendentality, but it is clear on the other hand that what is developed

here attempts not only to retain a critical method, but also not simply to invert a traditional

material-ideal opposition; there is work to be done in thinking a materialism that is neither

speculative nor "anti-idealist."[516]

As regards the work of political resistance, the thinking of Jacques Rancière suggests a

significant blind spot for this project as it is. Rancière's own materialist approach, as well as his

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[516] See e.g. Johnston, *Prolegommena to any Future Materialism, Volume One: The Outcome of Contemporary French Philosophy*, p. 133

leanings towards Derrida's thinking in this respect, would help to offer a great deal of substance, as it were, to the notion of an 'aporetic materialism' as has been developed only in outline here. At the same time, my own emphasis on the dialectics of materiality, and the distinction between a negative and excessive materiality, might offer useful contributions to Rancière's own thinking of resistance as the work of situating one world in another.[517]

Finally – and here I should admit that I am not certain whether this is in fact an opening or rather a temptation – it could be productive to continue at greater length and in greater depth an aporetic-materialist thinking of the institution of the university, engaging for example with the works of Samir Haddad whose writings intertwine questions of pedagogy and democracy from a largely Derridean perspective.

These lists are by no means exhaustive. What remains fruitful, if also potentially dangerous about discussion of materiality is the broad array of fields and traditions that converge and diverge, or indeed are inscribed atop or underneath one another at a few privileged points. What is perhaps most important and yet most challenging as a result is to both recognize and to sustain the tensions that result, as only then can we begin to imagine that these various academic, social, and political spaces in their work with and against one another might yet be public spaces, and public works.

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[517] Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, p. 38. "Political resistance makes visible that which had no reason to be seen: it places one world in another."

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