A close-up photograph of a person's hands, appearing to be of African descent, gripping dark, vertical metal prison bars. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of the skin and the metallic surface of the bars against a dark background.

# The New Jim Crow

Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness

**MICHELLE ALEXANDER**

WITH A NEW FOREWORD BY CORNEL WEST

## Praise for *The New Jim Crow*

“An instant classic.”

—Cornel West, from the foreword to the paperback edition

“[An] extraordinary book. . . . Michelle Alexander has placed a critical spotlight on a reality our nation can’t afford to deny. We ignore her careful research and stay silent about mass incarceration’s devastating effects at our own and our nation’s peril.”

—Marian Wright Edelman

“Striking. . . . Alexander deserves to be compared to Du Bois in her ability to distill and lay out as mighty human drama a complex argument and history.”

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“A devastating account of a legal system doing its job perfectly well. Alexander looks in detail at what economists usually miss, namely the entire legal structure [and] . . . does a fine job of truth-telling, pointing a finger where it rightly should be pointed: at all of us, liberal and conservative, white and black.”

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“Undoubtedly the most important book published in this century about the U.S.”

—*Birmingham News*

“[A] searing indictment of the War on Drugs. . . . If you care even a little about racial justice, *The New Jim Crow* should be on your bookshelf. It is the most important book you will read this year.”

—*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

“A well-researched book.”

—*Clarence Page, Chicago Tribune*

“Carefully researched, deeply engaging, and thoroughly readable.”

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“An explosive debut.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“[Alexander’s] analysis reflects the passion of an advocate and the intellect of a scholar.”

—**Marc Mauer, executive director of The Sentencing Project and the author of *Race to Incarcerate***

“Michelle Alexander argues convincingly that the huge racial disparity of punishment in America is not the mere result of neutral state action. She sees the rise of mass incarceration as opening up a new front in the historic struggle for racial justice. And she’s right. If you care about justice in America, you need to read this book!”

—**Glenn C. Loury, professor of economics at Brown University and author of *Race, Incarceration, and American Values***



**Michelle Alexander** is a highly acclaimed civil rights lawyer, advocate, and legal scholar. As an associate professor of law at Stanford Law School, she directed the Civil Rights Clinic and pursued a research agenda focused on the intersection of race and criminal justice. In 2005, Alexander won a Soros Justice Fellowship that supported the writing of *The New Jim Crow* and accepted a joint appointment at the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity and the Moritz College of Law at The Ohio State University, where she currently serves as an associate professor of law. Prior to joining academia, Alexander engaged in civil rights litigation in both the private and nonprofit sector, ultimately serving as the director of the Racial Justice Project for the ACLU of Northern California, where she helped to launch a national campaign against racial profiling. Currently she devotes much of her time to freelance writing, public speaking, supporting groups and organizations engaged in movement-building to end mass incarceration, and caring for her three young children.

Alexander is a graduate of Stanford Law School and Vanderbilt University. She has clerked for Justice Harry A. Blackmun on the U.S. Supreme Court and for Chief Judge Abner Mikva on the D.C. Circuit of the U.S. Court of Appeals, and has appeared as a commentator on CNN and MSNBC, among other media outlets. *The New Jim Crow* is her first book. For more information, visit [www.newjimcrow.com](http://www.newjimcrow.com). (Photo courtesy of Zócalo Public Square, [zocalopublicsquare.org](http://zocalopublicsquare.org).)

# The New Jim Crow

Mass Incarceration in the  
Age of Colorblindness

Revised Edition

MICHELLE ALEXANDER



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# Foreword

CORNEL WEST

Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* is the secular bible for a new social movement in early twenty-first-century America. Like C. Vann Woodward's *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*—a book Martin Luther King Jr. called “the historical bible of the Civil Rights Movement”—we are witnessing the unique union of a powerful and poignant text with a democratic awakening focused on the poor and vulnerable in American society. *The New Jim Crow* is an instant classic because it captures the emerging spirit of our age. For too long, there has been no mass fight back against the multileveled assault on poor and vulnerable people, despite the heroic work of intellectual freedom fighters including Marian Wright Edelman, Angela Davis, Loïc Wacquant, Glenn Loury, Marc Mauer, and others. Yet the sleepwalking is slowly but surely coming to a close as more and more fellow citizens realize that the iron cage they inhabit—maybe even a golden cage for the affluent—is still a form of bondage. *The New Jim Crow* is a grand wake-up call in the midst of a long slumber of indifference to the poor and vulnerable. This indifference promotes a superficial ethic of success—money, fame, and pleasure—that leaves too many well-adjusted to injustice. In short, this book is a genuine resurrection of the spirit of Martin Luther King Jr. amid the confusion of the Age of Obama.

While the Age of Obama is a time of historic breakthroughs at the level of racial symbols and political surfaces, Michelle Alexander's magisterial work takes us beyond these breakthroughs to the systemic breakdown of black

and poor communities devastated by mass unemployment, social neglect, economic abandonment, and intense police surveillance. Her subtle analysis shifts our attention from the racial symbol of America's achievement to the actual substance of America's shame: the massive use of state power to incarcerate hundreds of thousands of precious poor, black, male (and, increasingly, female) young people in the name of a bogus "War on Drugs." And her nuanced historical narrative tracing the unconscionable treatment and brutal control of black people—slavery, Jim Crow, mass incarceration—takes us beneath the political surfaces and lays bare the structures of a racial caste system alive and well in the age of colorblindness. In fact, the very discourse of colorblindness—created by neoconservatives and neoliberals in order to trivialize and disguise the depths of black suffering in the 1980s and '90s—has left America blind to the New Jim Crow. How sad it is that this blindness has persisted under both Republican and Democratic administrations and remains to this day hardly acknowledged or examined in our nation's public discourse.

*The New Jim Crow* shatters this silence. Once you read it, you have crossed the Rubicon and there is no return to sleepwalking. You are now awakened to a dark and ugly reality that has been in place for decades and that is continuous with the racist underside of American history from the advent of slavery onward. There is no doubt that if young white people were incarcerated at the same rates as young black people, the issue would be a national emergency. But it is also true that if young black middle- and upper-class people were incarcerated at the same rates as young black poor people, black leaders would focus much more on the prison-industrial complex. Again, Michelle Alexander has exposed the class bias of much of black leadership as well as the racial bias of American leadership, for whom the poor and vulnerable of all colors are a low priority. As Alexander puts it in her fiery and bold last chapter, "The Fire 'This Time" (with echoes from the great James Baldwin!), "It is this failure to care, really care across color lines, that lies at the core of this system of control and every racial caste system that has existed in the United States or anywhere else in the world."

Martin Luther King Jr. called for us to be lovestruck with each other, not colorblind toward each other. To be lovestruck is to care, to have deep compassion, and to be concerned for each and every individual, including the

poor and vulnerable. The social movement fanned and fueled by this historic book is a democratic awakening that says we do care, that the racial caste system must be dismantled, that we need a revolution in our warped priorities, a transfer of power from oligarchs to the people—and that we are willing to live and die to make it so!

## Preface

This book is not for everyone. I have a specific audience in mind—people who care deeply about racial justice but who, for any number of reasons, do not yet appreciate the magnitude of the crisis faced by communities of color as a result of mass incarceration. In other words, I am writing this book for people like me—the person I was ten years ago. I am also writing it for another audience—those who have been struggling to persuade their friends, neighbors, relatives, teachers, co-workers, or political representatives that something is eerily familiar about the way our criminal justice system operates, something that looks and feels a lot like an era we supposedly left behind, but who have lacked the facts and data to back up their claims. It is my hope and prayer that this book empowers you and allows you to speak your truth with greater conviction, credibility, and courage. Last, but definitely not least, I am writing this book for all those trapped within America's latest caste system. You may be locked up or locked out of mainstream society, but you are not forgotten.



# Acknowledgments

It is often said, “It takes a village to raise a child.” In my case, it has taken a village to write this book. I gave birth to three children in four years, and in the middle of this burst of joyous activity in our home, I decided to write this book. It was written while feeding babies and during nap times. It was written at odd hours and often when I (and everyone else in the household) had little sleep. Quitting the endeavor was tempting, as writing the book proved far more challenging than I expected. But just when I felt it was too much or too hard, someone I loved would surprise me with generosity and unconditional support; and just when I started to believe the book was not worth the effort, I would receive—out of the blue—a letter from someone behind bars who would remind me of all the reasons that I could not possibly quit, and how fortunate I was to be sitting in the comfort of my home or my office, rather than in a prison cell. My colleagues and publisher supported this effort, too, in ways that far exceeded the call of duty. I want to begin, then, by acknowledging those people who made sure I did not give up—the people who made sure this important story got told.

First on this list is Nancy Rogers, who was dean of the Moritz College of Law at Ohio State University until 2008. Nancy exemplifies outstanding leadership. I will always remember her steadfast encouragement, support, and flexibility, as I labored to juggle my commitments to work and family. Thank you, Nancy, for your faith in me. In this regard, I also want to thank John Powell, director of the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and

Ethnicity. He immediately understood what I hoped to accomplish with this book and provided critical institutional support.

My husband, Carter Stewart, has been my rock. Without ever once uttering a word of complaint, he has read and reread drafts and rearranged his schedule countless times to care for our children, so that I could make progress with my writing. As a federal prosecutor, he does not share my views about the criminal justice system, but his different worldview has not, even for a moment, compromised his ability to support me, lovingly, at every turn in my efforts to share my truth. I made the best decision of my life when I married him.

My mother and sister, too, have been blessings in my life. Determined to ensure that I actually finished this book, they have exhausted themselves chasing after the little people in my home, who are bundles of joy (and more than a little tiring). Their love and good humor have been food for my soul. Special thanks is also owed Nicole Hanft, whose loving kindness in caring for our children will forever be appreciated.

I deeply regret that I may never be able to thank, in person, Timothy Demetrius Johnson, Tawan Childs, Jacob McNary, Timothy Anderson, and Larry Brown-Austin, who are currently incarcerated. Their kind letters and expressions of gratitude for my work motivated me more than they could possibly know, reminding me that I could not rest until this book was done.

I am also grateful for the support of the Open Society Institute of the Soros Foundation, as well as for the generosity of the many people who have reviewed and commented on portions of the manuscript or contributed to it in some way, including Sharon Davies, Andrew Grant-Thomas, Eavon Mobley, Marc Mauer, Elaine Elinson, Johanna Wu, Steve Menendian, Hiram José Irizarry Osorio, Ruth Peterson, Hasan Jeffries, Shauna Marshall, and Tobias Wolff. My dear friend Maya Harris is owed special thanks for reading multiple drafts of various chapters, never tiring of the revision process. Lucky for me, my sister, Leslie Alexander, is an African American history scholar, so I benefited from her knowledge and critical perspective regarding our nation's racial history. Any errors in fact or judgment are entirely my own, of course. I also want to express my appreciation to my outstanding editor and publisher, Diane Wachtell of The New Press, who believed in this book before I had even written a word (and waited very patiently for the final word to be written).

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I cannot close without acknowledging the invaluable gifts I received from my parents, who ultimately made this book possible by raising me. I inherited determination from my mother, Sandy Alexander, who astounds me with her ability to overcome extraordinary obstacles and meet each day with fresh optimism. I owe my vision for social justice to my father, John Alexander, who was a dreamer and never ceased to challenge me to probe deeper, for greater truth. I wish he were still alive to see this book; though I suspect he knows something of it still. This book is for you, too, Dad. May you rest in peace.



# Introduction

Jarvious Cotton cannot vote. Like his father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and great-great-grandfather, he has been denied the right to participate in our electoral democracy. Cotton's family tree tells the story of several generations of black men who were born in the United States but who were denied the most basic freedom that democracy promises—the freedom to vote for those who will make the rules and laws that govern one's life. Cotton's great-great-grandfather could not vote as a slave. His great-grandfather was beaten to death by the Ku Klux Klan for attempting to vote. His grandfather was prevented from voting by Klan intimidation. His father was barred from voting by poll taxes and literacy tests. Today, Jarvious Cotton cannot vote because he, like many black men in the United States, has been labeled a felon and is currently on parole.<sup>1</sup>

Cotton's story illustrates, in many respects, the old adage "The more things change, the more they remain the same." In each generation, new tactics have been used for achieving the same goals—goals shared by the Founding Fathers. Denying African Americans citizenship was deemed essential to the formation of the original union. Hundreds of years later, America is still not an egalitarian democracy. The arguments and rationalizations that have been trotted out in support of racial exclusion and discrimination in its various forms have changed and evolved, but the outcome has remained largely the same. An extraordinary percentage of black men in the United States are legally barred from voting today, just as they have been throughout most of American history. They are also subject to legalized discrimination in

employment, housing, education, public benefits, and jury service, just as their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents once were.

What has changed since the collapse of Jim Crow has less to do with the basic structure of our society than with the language we use to justify it. In the era of colorblindness, it is no longer socially permissible to use race, explicitly, as a justification for discrimination, exclusion, and social contempt. So we don't. Rather than rely on race, we use our criminal justice system to label people of color "criminals" and then engage in all the practices we supposedly left behind. Today it is perfectly legal to discriminate against criminals in nearly all the ways that it was once legal to discriminate against African Americans. Once you're labeled a felon, the old forms of discrimination—employment discrimination, housing discrimination, denial of the right to vote, denial of educational opportunity, denial of food stamps and other public benefits, and exclusion from jury service—are suddenly legal. As a criminal, you have scarcely more rights, and arguably less respect, than a black man living in Alabama at the height of Jim Crow. We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it.

I reached the conclusions presented in this book reluctantly. Ten years ago, I would have argued strenuously against the central claim made here—namely, that something akin to a racial caste system currently exists in the United States. Indeed, if Barack Obama had been elected president back then, I would have argued that his election marked the nation's triumph over racial caste—the final nail in the coffin of Jim Crow. My elation would have been tempered by the distance yet to be traveled to reach the promised land of racial justice in America, but my conviction that nothing remotely similar to Jim Crow exists in this country would have been steadfast.

Today my elation over Obama's election is tempered by a far more sobering awareness. As an African American woman, with three young children who will never know a world in which a black man could not be president of the United States, I was beyond thrilled on election night. Yet when I walked out of the election night party, full of hope and enthusiasm, I was immediately reminded of the harsh realities of the New Jim Crow. A black man was on his knees in the gutter, hands cuffed behind his back, as several police officers stood around him talking, joking, and ignoring his human existence. People poured out of the building; many stared for a moment at the black

man cowering in the street, and then averted their gaze. What did the election of Barack Obama mean for him?

Like many civil rights lawyers, I was inspired to attend law school by the civil rights victories of the 1950s and 1960s. Even in the face of growing social and political opposition to remedial policies such as affirmative action, I clung to the notion that the evils of Jim Crow are behind us and that, while we have a long way to go to fulfill the dream of an egalitarian, multiracial democracy, we have made real progress and are now struggling to hold on to the gains of the past. I thought my job as a civil rights lawyer was to join with the allies of racial progress to resist attacks on affirmative action and to eliminate the vestiges of Jim Crow segregation, including our still separate and unequal system of education. I understood the problems plaguing poor communities of color, including problems associated with crime and rising incarceration rates, to be a function of poverty and lack of access to quality education—the continuing legacy of slavery and Jim Crow. Never did I seriously consider the possibility that a new racial caste system was operating in this country. The new system had been developed and implemented swiftly, and it was largely invisible, even to people, like me, who spent most of their waking hours fighting for justice.

I first encountered the idea of a new racial caste system more than a decade ago, when a bright orange poster caught my eye. I was rushing to catch the bus, and I noticed a sign stapled to a telephone pole that screamed in large bold print: *THE DRUG WAR IS THE NEW JIM CROW*. I paused for a moment and skimmed the text of the flyer. Some radical group was holding a community meeting about police brutality, the new three-strikes law in California, and the expansion of America's prison system. The meeting was being held at a small community church a few blocks away; it had seating capacity for no more than fifty people. I sighed, and muttered to myself something like, "Yeah, the criminal justice system is racist in many ways, but it really doesn't help to make such an absurd comparison. People will just think you're crazy." I then crossed the street and hopped on the bus. I was headed to my new job, director of the Racial Justice Project of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in Northern California.

When I began my work at the ACLU, I assumed that the criminal justice system had problems of racial bias, much in the same way that all major institutions in our society are plagued with problems associated with conscious

and unconscious bias. As a lawyer who had litigated numerous class-action employment-discrimination cases, I understood well the many ways in which racial stereotyping can permeate subjective decision-making processes at all levels of an organization, with devastating consequences. I was familiar with the challenges associated with reforming institutions in which racial stratification is thought to be normal—the natural consequence of differences in education, culture, motivation, and, some still believe, innate ability. While at the ACLU, I shifted my focus from employment discrimination to criminal justice reform and dedicated myself to the task of working with others to identify and eliminate racial bias whenever and wherever it reared its ugly head.

By the time I left the ACLU, I had come to suspect that I was wrong about the criminal justice system. It was not just another institution infected with racial bias but rather a different beast entirely. The activists who posted the sign on the telephone pole were not crazy; nor were the smattering of lawyers and advocates around the country who were beginning to connect the dots between our current system of mass incarceration and earlier forms of social control. Quite belatedly, I came to see that mass incarceration in the United States had, in fact, emerged as a stunningly comprehensive and well-disguised system of racialized social control that functions in a manner strikingly similar to Jim Crow.

In my experience, people who have been incarcerated rarely have difficulty identifying the parallels between these systems of social control. Once they are released, they are often denied the right to vote, excluded from juries, and relegated to a racially segregated and subordinated existence. Through a web of laws, regulations, and informal rules, all of which are powerfully reinforced by social stigma, they are confined to the margins of mainstream society and denied access to the mainstream economy. They are legally denied the ability to obtain employment, housing, and public benefits—much as African Americans were once forced into a segregated, second-class citizenship in the Jim Crow era.

Those of us who have viewed that world from a comfortable distance—yet sympathize with the plight of the so-called underclass—tend to interpret the experience of those caught up in the criminal justice system primarily through the lens of popularized social science, attributing the staggering increase in incarceration rates in communities of color to the predictable, though unfortunate, consequences of poverty, racial segregation, unequal

educational opportunities, and the presumed realities of the drug market, including the mistaken belief that most drug dealers are black or brown. Occasionally, in the course of my work, someone would make a remark suggesting that perhaps the War on Drugs is a racist conspiracy to put blacks back in their place. This type of remark was invariably accompanied by nervous laughter, intended to convey the impression that although the idea had crossed their minds, it was not an idea a reasonable person would take seriously.

Most people assume the War on Drugs was launched in response to the crisis caused by crack cocaine in inner-city neighborhoods. This view holds that the racial disparities in drug convictions and sentences, as well as the rapid explosion of the prison population, reflect nothing more than the government's zealous—but benign—efforts to address rampant drug crime in poor, minority neighborhoods. This view, while understandable, given the sensational media coverage of crack in the 1980s and 1990s, is simply wrong.

While it is true that the publicity surrounding crack cocaine led to a dramatic increase in funding for the drug war (as well as to sentencing policies that greatly exacerbated racial disparities in incarceration rates), there is no truth to the notion that the War on Drugs was launched in response to crack cocaine. President Ronald Reagan officially announced the current drug war in 1982, before crack became an issue in the media or a crisis in poor black neighborhoods. A few years after the drug war was declared, crack began to spread rapidly in the poor black neighborhoods of Los Angeles and later emerged in cities across the country.<sup>2</sup> The Reagan administration hired staff to publicize the emergence of crack cocaine in 1985 as part of a strategic effort to build public and legislative support for the war.<sup>3</sup> The media campaign was an extraordinary success. Almost overnight, the media was saturated with images of black “crack whores,” “crack dealers,” and “crack babies”—images that seemed to confirm the worst negative racial stereotypes about impoverished inner-city residents. The media bonanza surrounding the “new demon drug” helped to catapult the War on Drugs from an ambitious federal policy to an actual war.

The timing of the crack crisis helped to fuel conspiracy theories and general speculation in poor black communities that the War on Drugs was part of a genocidal plan by the government to destroy black people in the United States. From the outset, stories circulated on the street that crack and other drugs were being brought into black neighborhoods by the CIA. Eventually,

even the Urban League came to take the claims of genocide seriously. In its 1990 report "The State of Black America," it stated: "There is at least one concept that must be recognized if one is to see the pervasive and insidious nature of the drug problem for the African American community. Though difficult to accept, that is the concept of genocide."<sup>4</sup> While the conspiracy theories were initially dismissed as far-fetched, if not downright loony, the word on the street turned out to be right, at least to a point. The CIA admitted in 1998 that guerrilla armies it actively supported in Nicaragua were smuggling illegal drugs into the United States—drugs that were making their way onto the streets of inner-city black neighborhoods in the form of crack cocaine. The CIA also admitted that, in the midst of the War on Drugs, it blocked law enforcement efforts to investigate illegal drug networks that were helping to fund its covert war in Nicaragua.<sup>5</sup>

It bears emphasis that the CIA never admitted (nor has any evidence been revealed to support the claim) that it intentionally sought the destruction of the black community by allowing illegal drugs to be smuggled into the United States. Nonetheless, conspiracy theorists surely must be forgiven for their bold accusation of genocide, in light of the devastation wrought by crack cocaine and the drug war, and the odd coincidence that an illegal drug crisis suddenly appeared in the black community after—not before—a drug war had been declared. In fact, the War on Drugs began at a time when illegal drug use was on the decline.<sup>6</sup> During this same time period, however, a war was declared, causing arrests and convictions for drug offenses to skyrocket, especially among people of color.

The impact of the drug war has been astounding. In less than thirty years, the U.S. penal population exploded from around 300,000 to more than 2 million, with drug convictions accounting for the majority of the increase.<sup>7</sup> The United States now has the highest rate of incarceration in the world, dwarfing the rates of nearly every developed country, even surpassing those in highly repressive regimes like Russia, China, and Iran. In Germany, 93 people are in prison for every 100,000 adults and children. In the United States, the rate is roughly eight times that, or 750 per 100,000.<sup>8</sup>

The racial dimension of mass incarceration is its most striking feature. No other country in the world imprisons so many of its racial or ethnic minorities. The United States imprisons a larger percentage of its black population than South Africa did at the height of apartheid. In Washington, D.C., our nation's capitol, it is estimated that three out of four young black men (and

nearly all those in the poorest neighborhoods) can expect to serve time in prison.<sup>9</sup> Similar rates of incarceration can be found in black communities across America.

These stark racial disparities cannot be explained by rates of drug crime. Studies show that people of all colors *use and sell* illegal drugs at remarkably similar rates.<sup>10</sup> If there are significant differences in the surveys to be found, they frequently suggest that whites, particularly white youth, are more likely to engage in drug crime than people of color.<sup>11</sup> That is not what one would guess, however, when entering our nation's prisons and jails, which are overflowing with black and brown drug offenders. In some states, black men have been admitted to prison on drug charges at rates twenty to fifty times greater than those of white men.<sup>12</sup> And in major cities wracked by the drug war, as many as 80 percent of young African American men now have criminal records and are thus subject to legalized discrimination for the rest of their lives.<sup>13</sup> These young men are part of a growing undercaste, permanently locked up and locked out of mainstream society.

It may be surprising to some that drug crime was declining, not rising, when a drug war was declared. From a historical perspective, however, the lack of correlation between crime and punishment is nothing new. Sociologists have frequently observed that governments use punishment primarily as a tool of social control, and thus the extent or severity of punishment is often unrelated to actual crime patterns. Michael Tonry explains in *Thinking About Crime*: "Governments decide how much punishment they want, and these decisions are in no simple way related to crime rates."<sup>14</sup> This fact, he points out, can be seen most clearly by putting crime and punishment in comparative perspective. Although crime rates in the United States have not been markedly higher than those of other Western countries, the rate of incarceration has soared in the United States while it has remained stable or declined in other countries. Between 1960 and 1990, for example, official crime rates in Finland, Germany, and the United States were close to identical. Yet the U.S. incarceration rate quadrupled, the Finnish rate fell by 60 percent, and the German rate was stable in that period.<sup>15</sup> Despite similar crime rates, each government chose to impose different levels of punishment.

Today, due to recent declines, U.S. crime rates have dipped below the international norm. Nevertheless, the United States now boasts an incarceration

rate that is six to ten times greater than that of other industrialized nations<sup>16</sup>—a development directly traceable to the drug war. The only country in the world that even comes close to the American rate of incarceration is Russia, and no other country in the world incarcerates such an astonishing percentage of its racial or ethnic minorities.

The stark and sobering reality is that, for reasons largely unrelated to actual crime trends, the American penal system has emerged as a system of social control unparalleled in world history. And while the size of the system alone might suggest that it would touch the lives of most Americans, the primary targets of its control can be defined largely by race. This is an astonishing development, especially given that as recently as the mid-1970s, the most well-respected criminologists were predicting that the prison system would soon fade away. Prison did not deter crime significantly, many experts concluded. Those who had meaningful economic and social opportunities were unlikely to commit crimes regardless of the penalty, while those who went to prison were far more likely to commit crimes again in the future. The growing consensus among experts was perhaps best reflected by the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, which issued a recommendation in 1973 that “no new institutions for adults should be built and existing institutions for juveniles should be closed.”<sup>17</sup> This recommendation was based on their finding that “the prison, the reformatory and the jail have achieved only a shocking record of failure. There is overwhelming evidence that these institutions create crime rather than prevent it.”<sup>18</sup>

These days, activists who advocate “a world without prisons” are often dismissed as quacks, but only a few decades ago, the notion that our society would be much better off without prisons—and that the end of prisons was more or less inevitable—not only dominated mainstream academic discourse in the field of criminology but also inspired a national campaign by reformers demanding a moratorium on prison construction. Marc Mauer, the executive director of the Sentencing Project, notes that what is most remarkable about the moratorium campaign in retrospect is the context of imprisonment at the time. In 1972, fewer than 350,000 people were being held in prisons and jails nationwide, compared with more than 2 million people today. The rate of incarceration in 1972 was at a level so low that it no longer seems in the realm of possibility, but for moratorium supporters,

that magnitude of imprisonment was egregiously high. “Supporters of the moratorium effort can be forgiven for being so naïve,” Mauer suggests, “since the prison expansion that was about to take place was unprecedented in human history.”<sup>19</sup> No one imagined that the prison population would more than quintuple in their lifetime. It seemed far more likely that prisons would fade away.

Far from fading away, it appears that prisons are here to stay. And despite the unprecedented levels of incarceration in the African American community, the civil rights community is oddly quiet. One in three young African American men will serve time in prison if current trends continue, and in some cities more than half of all young adult black men are currently under correctional control—in prison or jail, on probation or parole.<sup>20</sup> Yet mass incarceration tends to be categorized as a criminal justice issue as opposed to a racial justice or civil rights issue (or crisis).

The attention of civil rights advocates has been largely devoted to other issues, such as affirmative action. During the past twenty years, virtually every progressive, national civil rights organization in the country has mobilized and rallied in defense of affirmative action. The struggle to preserve affirmative action in higher education, and thus maintain diversity in the nation’s most elite colleges and universities, has consumed much of the attention and resources of the civil rights community and dominated racial justice discourse in the mainstream media, leading the general public to believe that affirmative action is the main battlefield in U.S. race relations—even as our prisons fill with black and brown men.

My own experience reflects this dynamic. When I first joined the ACLU, no one imagined that the Racial Justice Project would focus its attention on criminal justice reform. The ACLU was engaged in important criminal justice reform work, but no one suspected that work would eventually become central to the agenda of the Racial Justice Project. The assumption was that the project would concentrate its efforts on defending affirmative action. Shortly after leaving the ACLU, I joined the board of directors of the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area. Although the organization included racial justice among its core priorities, reform of the criminal justice system was not a major part of its racial justice work. It was not alone.

In January 2008, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights—an organiza-

tion composed of the leadership of more than 180 civil rights organizations—sent a letter to its allies and supporters informing them of a major initiative to document the voting record of members of Congress. The letter explained that its forthcoming report would show “how each representative and senator cast his or her vote on some of the most important civil rights issues of 2007, including voting rights, affirmative action, immigration, nominations, education, hate crimes, employment, health, housing, and poverty.” Criminal justice issues did not make the list. That same broad-based coalition organized a major conference in October 2007, entitled *Why We Can't Wait: Reversing the Retreat on Civil Rights*, which included panels discussing school integration, employment discrimination, housing and lending discrimination, economic justice, environmental justice, disability rights, age discrimination, and immigrants' rights. Not a single panel was devoted to criminal justice reform.

The elected leaders of the African American community have a much broader mandate than civil rights groups, but they, too, frequently overlook criminal justice. In January 2009, for example, the Congressional Black Caucus sent a letter to hundreds of community and organization leaders who have worked with the caucus over the years, soliciting general information about them and requesting that they identify their priorities. More than thirty-five topics were listed as areas of potential special interest, including taxes, defense, immigration, agriculture, housing, banking, higher education, multimedia, transportation and infrastructure, women, seniors, nutrition, faith initiatives, civil rights, census, economic security, and emerging leaders. No mention was made of criminal justice. “Re-entry” was listed, but a community leader who was interested in criminal justice reform had to check the box labeled “other.”

This is not to say that important criminal justice reform work has not been done. Civil rights advocates have organized vigorous challenges to specific aspects of the new caste system. One notable example is the successful challenge led by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund to a racist drug sting operation in Tulia, Texas. The 1999 drug bust incarcerated almost 15 percent of the black population of the town, based on the uncorroborated false testimony of a single informant hired by the sheriff of Tulia. More recently, civil rights groups around the country have helped to launch legal attacks and vibrant grassroots campaigns against felon disenfranchisement laws and

have strenuously opposed discriminatory crack sentencing laws and guidelines, as well as “zero tolerance” policies that effectively funnel youth of color from schools to jails. The national ACLU recently developed a racial justice program that includes criminal justice issues among its core priorities and has created a promising Drug Law Reform Project. And thanks to the aggressive advocacy of the ACLU, NAACP, and other civil rights organizations around the country, racial profiling is widely condemned, even by members of law enforcement who once openly embraced the practice.

Still, despite these significant developments, there seems to be a lack of appreciation for the enormity of the crisis at hand. There is no broad-based movement brewing to end mass incarceration and no advocacy effort that approaches in scale the fight to preserve affirmative action. There also remains a persistent tendency in the civil rights community to treat the criminal justice system as just another institution infected with lingering racial bias. The NAACP’s website offers one example. As recently as May 2008, one could find a brief introduction to the organization’s criminal justice work in the section entitled Legal Department. The introduction explained that “despite the civil rights victories of our past, racial prejudice still pervades the criminal justice system.” Visitors to the website were urged to join the NAACP in order to “protect the hard-earned civil rights gains of the past three decades.” No one visiting the website would learn that the mass incarceration of African Americans had already eviscerated many of the hard-earned gains it urged its members to protect.

Imagine if civil rights organizations and African American leaders in the 1940s had not placed Jim Crow segregation at the forefront of their racial justice agenda. It would have seemed absurd, given that racial segregation was the primary vehicle of racialized social control in the United States during that period. This book argues that mass incarceration is, metaphorically, the New Jim Crow and that all those who care about social justice should fully commit themselves to dismantling this new racial caste system. Mass incarceration—not attacks on affirmative action or lax civil rights enforcement—is the most damaging manifestation of the backlash against the Civil Rights Movement. The popular narrative that emphasizes the death of slavery and Jim Crow and celebrates the nation’s “triumph over race” with the election of Barack Obama, is dangerously misguided. The colorblind public consensus that prevails in America today—i.e., the widespread belief that

race no longer matters—has blinded us to the realities of race in our society and facilitated the emergence of a new caste system.

Clearly, much has changed in my thinking about the criminal justice system since I passed that bright orange poster stapled to a telephone pole ten years ago. For me, the new caste system is now as obvious as my own face in the mirror. Like an optical illusion—one in which the embedded image is impossible to see until its outline is identified—the new caste system lurks invisibly within the maze of rationalizations we have developed for persistent racial inequality. It is possible—quite easy, in fact—never to see the embedded reality. Only after years of working on criminal justice reform did my own focus finally shift, and then the rigid caste system slowly came into view. Eventually it became obvious. Now it seems odd that I could not see it before.

Knowing as I do the difficulty of seeing what most everyone insists does not exist, I anticipate that this book will be met with skepticism or something worse. For some, the characterization of mass incarceration as a “racial caste system” may seem like a gross exaggeration, if not hyperbole. Yes, we may have “classes” in the United States—vaguely defined upper, middle, and lower classes—and we may even have an “underclass” (a group so estranged from mainstream society that it is no longer in reach of the mythical ladder of opportunity), but we do not, many will insist, have anything in this country that resembles a “caste.”

The aim of this book is not to venture into the long-running, vigorous debate in the scholarly literature regarding what does and does not constitute a caste system. I use the term *racial caste* in this book the way it is used in common parlance to denote a stigmatized racial group locked into an inferior position by law and custom. Jim Crow and slavery were caste systems. So is our current system of mass incarceration.

It may be helpful, in attempting to understand the basic nature of the new caste system, to think of the criminal justice system—the entire collection of institutions and practices that comprise it—not as an independent system but rather as a *gateway* into a much larger system of racial stigmatization and permanent marginalization. This larger system, referred to here as mass incarceration, is a system that locks people not only behind actual bars in actual prisons, but also behind virtual bars and virtual walls—walls that are invisible to the naked eye but function nearly as effectively as Jim Crow laws

once did at locking people of color into a permanent second-class citizenship. The term *mass incarceration* refers not only to the criminal justice system but also to the larger web of laws, rules, policies, and customs that control those labeled criminals both in and out of prison. Once released, former prisoners enter a hidden underworld of legalized discrimination and permanent social exclusion. They are members of America's new undercaste.

The language of caste may well seem foreign or unfamiliar to some. Public discussions about racial caste in America are relatively rare. We avoid talking about caste in our society because we are ashamed of our racial history. We also avoid talking about race. We even avoid talking about class. Conversations about class are resisted in part because there is a tendency to imagine that one's class reflects upon one's character. What is key to America's understanding of class is the persistent belief—despite all evidence to the contrary—that anyone, with the proper discipline and drive, can move from a lower class to a higher class. We recognize that mobility may be difficult, but the key to our collective self-image is the assumption that mobility is always possible, so failure to move up reflects on one's character. By extension, the failure of a race or ethnic group to move up reflects very poorly on the group as a whole.

What is completely missed in the rare public debates today about the plight of African Americans is that a huge percentage of them are not free to move up at all. It is not just that they lack opportunity, attend poor schools, or are plagued by poverty. They are barred by law from doing so. And the major institutions with which they come into contact are designed to prevent their mobility. To put the matter starkly: The current system of control permanently locks a huge percentage of the African American community out of the mainstream society and economy. The system operates through our criminal justice institutions, but it functions more like a caste system than a system of crime control. Viewed from this perspective, the so-called underclass is better understood as an *undercaste*—a lower caste of individuals who are permanently barred by law and custom from mainstream society. Although this new system of racialized social control purports to be colorblind, it creates and maintains racial hierarchy much as earlier systems of control did. Like Jim Crow (and slavery), mass incarceration operates as a tightly networked system of laws, policies, customs, and institutions that operate collectively to ensure the subordinate status of a group defined largely by race.

This argument may be particularly hard to swallow given the election of Barack Obama. Many will wonder how a nation that just elected its first black president could possibly have a racial caste system. It's a fair question. But as discussed in chapter 6, there is no inconsistency whatsoever between the election of Barack Obama to the highest office in the land and the existence of a racial caste system in the era of colorblindness. The current system of control depends on black exceptionalism; it is not disproved or undermined by it. Others may wonder how a racial caste system could exist when most Americans—of all colors—oppose race discrimination and endorse colorblindness. Yet as we shall see in the pages that follow, racial caste systems do not require racial hostility or overt bigotry to thrive. They need only racial indifference, as Martin Luther King Jr. warned more than forty-five years ago.

The recent decisions by some state legislatures, most notably New York's, to repeal or reduce mandatory drug sentencing laws have led some to believe that the system of racial control described in this book is already fading away. Such a conclusion, I believe, is a serious mistake. Many of the states that have reconsidered their harsh sentencing schemes have done so not out of concern for the lives and families that have been destroyed by these laws or the racial dimensions of the drug war, but out of concern for bursting state budgets in a time of economic recession. In other words, the racial ideology that gave rise to these laws remains largely undisturbed. Changing economic conditions or rising crime rates could easily result in a reversal of fortunes for those who commit drug crimes, particularly if the drug criminals are perceived to be black and brown. Equally important to understand is this: Merely reducing sentence length, by itself, does not disturb the basic architecture of the New Jim Crow. So long as large numbers of African Americans continue to be arrested and labeled drug criminals, they will continue to be relegated to a permanent second-class status upon their release, no matter how much (or how little) time they spend behind bars. The system of mass incarceration is based on the prison label, not prison time.

Skepticism about the claims made here is warranted. There are important differences, to be sure, among mass incarceration, Jim Crow, and slavery—the three major racialized systems of control adopted in the United States to date. Failure to acknowledge the relevant differences, as well as their implications, would be a disservice to racial justice discourse. Many of the differences are not as dramatic as they initially appear, however; others serve

to illustrate the ways in which systems of racialized social control have managed to morph, evolve, and adapt to changes in the political, social, and legal context over time. Ultimately, I believe that the similarities between these systems of control overwhelm the differences and that mass incarceration, like its predecessors, has been largely immunized from legal challenge. If this claim is substantially correct, the implications for racial justice advocacy are profound.

With the benefit of hindsight, surely we can see that piecemeal policy reform or litigation alone would have been a futile approach to dismantling Jim Crow segregation. While those strategies certainly had their place, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the concomitant cultural shift would never have occurred without the cultivation of a critical political consciousness in the African American community and the widespread, strategic activism that flowed from it. Likewise, the notion that the *New Jim Crow* can ever be dismantled through traditional litigation and policy-reform strategies that are wholly disconnected from a major social movement seems fundamentally misguided.

Such a movement is impossible, though, if those most committed to abolishing racial hierarchy continue to talk and behave as if a state-sponsored racial caste system no longer exists. If we continue to tell ourselves the popular myths about racial progress or, worse yet, if we say to ourselves that the problem of mass incarceration is just too big, too daunting for us to do anything about and that we should instead direct our energies to battles that might be more easily won, history will judge us harshly. A human rights nightmare is occurring on our watch.

A new social consensus must be forged about race and the role of race in defining the basic structure of our society, if we hope ever to abolish the New Jim Crow. This new consensus must begin with dialogue, a conversation that fosters a critical consciousness, a key prerequisite to effective social action. This book is an attempt to ensure that the conversation does not end with nervous laughter.

It is not possible to write a relatively short book that explores all aspects of the phenomenon of mass incarceration and its implications for racial justice. No attempt has been made to do so here. This book paints with a broad brush, and as a result, many important issues have not received the attention they deserve. For example, relatively little is said here about the unique

experience of women, Latinos, and immigrants in the criminal justice system, though these groups are particularly vulnerable to the worst abuses and suffer in ways that are important and distinct. This book focuses on the experience of African American men in the new caste system. I hope other scholars and advocates will pick up where the book leaves off and develop the critique more fully or apply the themes sketched here to other groups and other contexts.

What this book is intended to do—the only thing it is intended to do—is to stimulate a much-needed conversation about the role of the criminal justice system in creating and perpetuating racial hierarchy in the United States. The fate of millions of people—indeed the future of the black community itself—may depend on the willingness of those who care about racial justice to re-examine their basic assumptions about the role of the criminal justice system in our society. The fact that more than half of the young black men in many large American cities are currently under the control of the criminal justice system (or saddled with criminal records) is not—as many argue—just a symptom of poverty or poor choices, but rather evidence of a new racial caste system at work.

Chapter 1 begins our journey. It briefly reviews the history of racialized social control in the United States, answering the basic question: How did we get here? The chapter describes the control of African Americans through racial caste systems, such as slavery and Jim Crow, which appear to die but then are reborn in new form, tailored to the needs and constraints of the time. As we shall see, there is a certain pattern to the births and deaths of racial caste in America. Time and again, the most ardent proponents of racial hierarchy have succeeded in creating new caste systems by triggering a collapse of resistance across the political spectrum. This feat has been achieved largely by appealing to the racism and vulnerability of lower-class whites, a group of people who are understandably eager to ensure that they never find themselves trapped at the bottom of the American totem pole. This pattern, dating back to slavery, has birthed yet another racial caste system in the United States: mass incarceration.

The structure of mass incarceration is described in some detail in chapter 2, with a focus on the War on Drugs. Few legal rules meaningfully constrain the police in the drug war, and enormous financial incentives have been granted to law enforcement to engage in mass drug arrests through military-style tactics. Once swept into the system, one's chances of ever being truly

free are slim, often to the vanishing point. Defendants are typically denied meaningful legal representation, pressured by the threat of lengthy sentences into a plea bargain, and then placed under formal control—in prison or jail, on probation or parole. Upon release, ex-offenders are discriminated against, legally, for the rest of their lives, and most will eventually return to prison. They are members of America's new undercaste.

Chapter 3 turns our attention to the role of race in the U.S. criminal justice system. It describes the method to the madness—how a formally race-neutral criminal justice system can manage to round up, arrest, and imprison an extraordinary number of black and brown men, when people of color are actually no more likely to be guilty of drug crimes and many other offenses than whites. This chapter debunks the notion that rates of black imprisonment can be explained by crime rates and identifies the huge racial disparities at every stage of the criminal justice process—from the initial stop, search, and arrest to the plea bargaining and sentencing phases. In short, the chapter explains how the legal rules that structure the system guarantee discriminatory results. These legal rules ensure that the undercaste is overwhelmingly black and brown.

Chapter 4 considers how the caste system operates once people are released from prison. In many respects, release from prison does not represent the beginning of freedom but instead a cruel new phase of stigmatization and control. Myriad laws, rules, and regulations discriminate against ex-offenders and effectively prevent their meaningful re-integration into the mainstream economy and society. I argue that the shame and stigma of the “prison label” is, in many respects, more damaging to the African American community than the shame and stigma associated with Jim Crow. The criminalization and demonization of black men has turned the black community against itself, unraveling community and family relationships, decimating networks of mutual support, and intensifying the shame and self-hate experienced by the current pariah caste.

The many parallels between mass incarceration and Jim Crow are explored in chapter 5. The most obvious parallel is legalized discrimination. Like Jim Crow, mass incarceration marginalizes large segments of the African American community, segregates them physically (in prisons, jails, and ghettos), and then authorizes discrimination against them in voting, employment, housing, education, public benefits, and jury service. The federal court system has effectively immunized the current system from challenges on the

grounds of racial bias, much as earlier systems of control were protected and endorsed by the U.S. Supreme Court. The parallels do not end there, however. Mass incarceration, like Jim Crow, helps to define the meaning and significance of race in America. Indeed, the stigma of criminality functions in much the same way that the stigma of race once did. It justifies a legal, social, and economic boundary between “us” and “them.” Chapter 5 also explores some of the differences among slavery, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration, most significantly the fact that mass incarceration is designed to warehouse a population deemed disposable—unnecessary to the functioning of the new global economy—while earlier systems of control were designed to exploit and control black labor. In addition, the chapter discusses the experience of white people in this new caste system; although they have not been the primary targets of the drug war, they have been harmed by it—a powerful illustration of how a racial state can harm people of all colors. Finally, this chapter responds to skeptics who claim that mass incarceration cannot be understood as a racial caste system because many “get tough on crime” policies are supported by African Americans. Many of these claims, I note, are no more persuasive today than arguments made a hundred years ago by blacks and whites who claimed that racial segregation simply reflected “reality,” not racial animus, and that African Americans would be better off not challenging the Jim Crow system but should focus instead on improving themselves within it. Throughout our history, there have been African Americans who, for a variety of reasons, have defended or been complicit with the prevailing system of control.

Chapter 6 reflects on what acknowledging the presence of the New Jim Crow means for the future of civil rights advocacy. I argue that nothing short of a major social movement can successfully dismantle the new caste system. Meaningful reforms can be achieved without such a movement, but unless the public consensus supporting the current system is completely overturned, the basic structure of the new caste system will remain intact. Building a broad-based social movement, however, is not enough. It is not nearly enough to persuade mainstream voters that we have relied too heavily on incarceration or that drug abuse is a public health problem, not a crime. If the movement that emerges to challenge mass incarceration fails to confront squarely the critical role of race in the basic structure of our society, and if it fails to cultivate an ethic of genuine care, compassion, and concern for every human being—of every class, race, and nationality—within our

nation's borders (including poor whites, who are often pitted against poor people of color), the collapse of mass incarceration will not mean the death of racial caste in America. Inevitably a new system of racialized social control will emerge—one that we cannot foresee, just as the current system of mass incarceration was not predicted by anyone thirty years ago. No task is more urgent for racial justice advocates today than ensuring that America's current racial caste system is its last.

## The Rebirth of Caste

[T]he slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery.

—W.E.B Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*

For more than one hundred years, scholars have written about the illusory nature of the Emancipation Proclamation. President Abraham Lincoln issued a declaration purporting to free slaves held in Southern Confederate states, but not a single black slave was actually free to walk away from a master in those states as a result. A civil war had to be won first, hundreds of thousands of lives lost, and then—only then—were slaves across the South set free. Even that freedom proved illusory, though. As W.E.B. Du Bois eloquently reminds us, former slaves had “a brief moment in the sun” before they were returned to a status akin to slavery. Constitutional amendments guaranteeing African Americans “equal protection of the laws” and the right to vote proved as impotent as the Emancipation Proclamation once a white backlash against Reconstruction gained steam. Black people found themselves yet again powerless and relegated to convict leasing camps that were, in many ways, worse than slavery. Sunshine gave way to darkness, and the Jim Crow system of segregation emerged—a system that put black people nearly back where they began, in a subordinate racial caste.

Few find it surprising that Jim Crow arose following the collapse of slavery. The development is described in history books as regrettable but predictable, given the virulent racism that gripped the South and the political dynamics

of the time. What is remarkable is that hardly anyone seems to imagine that similar political dynamics may have produced another caste system in the years following the collapse of Jim Crow—one that exists today. The story that is told during Black History Month is one of triumph; the system of racial caste is officially dead and buried. Suggestions to the contrary are frequently met with shocked disbelief. The standard reply is: “How can you say that a racial caste system exists today? Just look at Barack Obama! Just look at Oprah Winfrey!”

The fact that some African Americans have experienced great success in recent years does not mean that something akin to a racial caste system no longer exists. No caste system in the United States has ever governed all black people; there have always been “free blacks” and black success stories, even during slavery and Jim Crow. The superlative nature of individual black achievement today in formerly white domains is a good indicator that the old Jim Crow is dead, but it does not necessarily mean the end of racial caste. If history is any guide, it may have simply taken a different form.

Any candid observer of American racial history must acknowledge that racism is highly adaptable. The rules and reasons the political system employs to enforce status relations of any kind, including racial hierarchy, evolve and change as they are challenged. The valiant efforts to abolish slavery and Jim Crow and to achieve greater racial equality have brought about significant changes in the legal framework of American society—new “rules of the game,” so to speak. These new rules have been justified by new rhetoric, new language, and a new social consensus, while producing many of the same results. This dynamic, which legal scholar Reva Siegel has dubbed “preservation through transformation,” is the process through which white privilege is maintained, though the rules and rhetoric change.<sup>1</sup>

This process, though difficult to recognize at any given moment, is easier to see in retrospect. Since the nation’s founding, African Americans repeatedly have been controlled through institutions such as slavery and Jim Crow, which appear to die, but then are reborn in new form, tailored to the needs and constraints of the time. As described in the pages that follow, there is a certain pattern to this cycle. Following the collapse of each system of control, there has been a period of confusion—transition—in which those who are most committed to racial hierarchy search for new means to achieve their goals within the rules of the game as currently defined. It is during this period of uncertainty that the backlash intensifies and a new form of racialized

social control begins to take hold. The adoption of the new system of control is never inevitable, but to date it has never been avoided. The most ardent proponents of racial hierarchy have consistently succeeded in implementing new racial caste systems by triggering a collapse of resistance across the political spectrum. This feat has been achieved largely by appealing to the racism and vulnerability of lower-class whites, a group of people who are understandably eager to ensure that they never find themselves trapped at the bottom of the American hierarchy.

The emergence of each new system of control may seem sudden, but history shows that the seeds are planted long before each new institution begins to grow. For example, although it is common to think of the Jim Crow regime following immediately on the heels of Reconstruction, the truth is more complicated. And while it is generally believed that the backlash against the Civil Rights Movement is defined primarily by the rollback of affirmative action and the undermining of federal civil rights legislation by a hostile judiciary, the seeds of the new system of control—mass incarceration—were planted during the Civil Rights Movement itself, when it became clear that the old caste system was crumbling and a new one would have to take its place.

With each reincarnation of racial caste, the new system, as sociologist Loïc Wacquant puts it, “is less total, less capable of encompassing and controlling the entire race.”<sup>2</sup> However, any notion that this evolution reflects some kind of linear progress would be misguided, for it is not at all obvious that it would be better to be incarcerated for life for a minor drug offense than to live with one’s family, earning an honest wage under the Jim Crow regime—notwithstanding the ever-present threat of the Klan. Moreover, as the systems of control have evolved, they have become perfected, arguably more resilient to challenge, and thus capable of enduring for generations to come. The story of the political and economic underpinnings of the nation’s founding sheds some light on these recurring themes in our history and the reasons new racial caste systems continue to be born.

## The Birth of Slavery

Back there, before Jim Crow, before the invention of the Negro or the white man or the words and concepts to describe them, the Colonial population con-

sisted largely of a great mass of white and black bondsmen, who occupied roughly the same economic category and were treated with equal contempt by the lords of the plantations and legislatures. Curiously unconcerned about their color, these people worked together and relaxed together.<sup>3</sup>

—Lerone Bennett Jr.

The concept of race is a relatively recent development. Only in the past few centuries, owing largely to European imperialism, have the world's people been classified along racial lines.<sup>4</sup> Here, in America, the idea of race emerged as a means of reconciling chattel slavery—as well as the extermination of American Indians—with the ideals of freedom preached by whites in the new colonies.

In the early colonial period, when settlements remained relatively small, indentured servitude was the dominant means of securing cheap labor. Under this system, whites and blacks struggled to survive against a common enemy, what historian Lerone Bennett Jr. describes as “the big planter apparatus and a social system that legalized terror against black and white bondsmen.”<sup>5</sup> Initially, blacks brought to this country were not all enslaved; many were treated as indentured servants. As plantation farming expanded, particularly tobacco and cotton farming, demand increased greatly for both labor and land.

The demand for land was met by invading and conquering larger and larger swaths of territory. American Indians became a growing impediment to white European “progress,” and during this period, the images of American Indians promoted in books, newspapers, and magazines became increasingly negative. As sociologists Keith Kilty and Eric Swank have observed, eliminating “savages” is less of a moral problem than eliminating human beings, and therefore American Indians came to be understood as a lesser race—uncivilized savages—thus providing a justification for the extermination of the native peoples.<sup>6</sup>

The growing demand for labor on plantations was met through slavery. American Indians were considered unsuitable as slaves, largely because native tribes were clearly in a position to fight back. The fear of raids by Indian tribes led plantation owners to grasp for an alternative source of free labor. European immigrants were also deemed poor candidates for slavery, not because of their race, but rather because they were in short supply and enslavement would, quite naturally, interfere with voluntary immigration to the

new colonies. Plantation owners thus viewed Africans, who were relatively powerless, as the ideal slaves. The systematic enslavement of Africans, and the rearing of their children under bondage, emerged with all deliberate speed—quickened by events such as Bacon's Rebellion.

Nathaniel Bacon was a white property owner in Jamestown, Virginia, who managed to unite slaves, indentured servants, and poor whites in a revolutionary effort to overthrow the planter elite. Although slaves clearly occupied the lowest position in the social hierarchy and suffered the most under the plantation system, the condition of indentured whites was barely better, and the majority of free whites lived in extreme poverty. As explained by historian Edmund Morgan, in colonies like Virginia, the planter elite, with huge land grants, occupied a vastly superior position to workers of all colors.<sup>7</sup> Southern colonies did not hesitate to invent ways to extend the terms of servitude, and the planter class accumulated uncultivated lands to restrict the options of free workers. The simmering resentment against the planter class created conditions that were ripe for revolt.

Varying accounts of Bacon's rebellion abound, but the basic facts are these: Bacon developed plans in 1675 to seize Native American lands in order to acquire more property for himself and others and nullify the threat of Indian raids. When the planter elite in Virginia refused to provide militia support for his scheme, Bacon retaliated, leading an attack on the elite, their homes, and their property. He openly condemned the rich for their oppression of the poor and inspired an alliance of white and black bond laborers, as well as slaves, who demanded an end to their servitude. The attempted revolution was ended by force and false promises of amnesty. A number of the people who participated in the revolt were hanged. The events in Jamestown were alarming to the planter elite, who were deeply fearful of the multiracial alliance of bond workers and slaves. Word of Bacon's Rebellion spread far and wide, and several more uprisings of a similar type followed.

In an effort to protect their superior status and economic position, the planters shifted their strategy for maintaining dominance. They abandoned their heavy reliance on indentured servants in favor of the importation of more black slaves. Instead of importing English-speaking slaves from the West Indies, who were more likely to be familiar with European language and culture, many more slaves were shipped directly from Africa. These slaves would be far easier to control and far less likely to form alliances with poor whites.

Fearful that such measures might not be sufficient to protect their interests, the planter class took an additional precautionary step, a step that would later come to be known as a “racial bribe.” Deliberately and strategically, the planter class extended special privileges to poor whites in an effort to drive a wedge between them and black slaves. White settlers were allowed greater access to Native American lands, white servants were allowed to police slaves through slave patrols and militias, and barriers were created so that free labor would not be placed in competition with slave labor. These measures effectively eliminated the risk of future alliances between black slaves and poor whites. Poor whites suddenly had a direct, personal stake in the existence of a race-based system of slavery. Their own plight had not improved by much, but at least they were not slaves. Once the planter elite split the labor force, poor whites responded to the logic of their situation and sought ways to expand their racially privileged position.<sup>8</sup>

By the mid-1770s, the system of bond labor had been thoroughly transformed into a racial caste system predicated on slavery. The degraded status of Africans was justified on the ground that Negroes, like the Indians, were an uncivilized lesser race, perhaps even more lacking in intelligence and laudable human qualities than the red-skinned natives. The notion of white supremacy rationalized the enslavement of Africans, even as whites endeavored to form a new nation based on the ideals of equality, liberty, and justice for all. Before democracy, chattel slavery in America was born.

It may be impossible to overstate the significance of race in defining the basic structure of American society. The structure and content of the original Constitution was based largely on the effort to preserve a racial caste system—slavery—while at the same time affording political and economic rights to whites, especially propertied whites. The Southern slaveholding colonies would agree to form a union only on the condition that the federal government would not be able to interfere with the right to own slaves. Northern white elites were sympathetic to the demand for their “property rights” to be respected, as they, too, wanted the Constitution to protect their property interests. As James Madison put it, the nation ought to be constituted “to protect the minority of the opulent against the majority.”<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the Constitution was designed so the federal government would be weak, not only in its relationship to private property, but also in relationship to the rights of states to conduct their own affairs. The language of the Constitution itself was deliberately colorblind (the words *slave* or *Negro* were

never used), but the document was built upon a compromise regarding the prevailing racial caste system. Federalism—the division of power between the states and the federal government—was the device employed to protect the institution of slavery and the political power of slaveholding states. Even the method for determining proportional representation in Congress and identifying the winner of a presidential election (the electoral college) were specifically developed with the interest of slaveholders in mind. Under the terms of our country's founding document, slaves were defined as three-fifths of a man, not a real, whole human being. Upon this racist fiction rests the entire structure of American democracy.

### The Death of Slavery

The history of racial caste in the United States would end with the Civil War if the idea of race and racial difference had died when the institution of slavery was put to rest. But during the four centuries in which slavery flourished, the idea of race flourished as well. Indeed, the notion of racial difference—specifically the notion of white supremacy—proved far more durable than the institution that gave birth to it.

White supremacy, over time, became a religion of sorts. Faith in the idea that people of the African race were bestial, that whites were inherently superior, and that slavery was, in fact, for blacks' own good, served to alleviate the white conscience and reconcile the tension between slavery and the democratic ideals espoused by whites in the so-called New World. There was no contradiction in the bold claim made by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal" if Africans were not really people. Racism operated as a deeply held belief system based on "truths" beyond question or doubt. This deep faith in white supremacy not only justified an economic and political system in which plantation owners acquired land and great wealth through the brutality, torture, and coercion of other human beings; it also endured, like most articles of faith, long after the historical circumstances that gave rise to the religion passed away. In Wacquant's words: "Racial division was a consequence, not a precondition of slavery, but once it was instituted it became detached from its initial function and acquired a social potency all its own."<sup>10</sup> After the death of slavery, the idea of race lived on.

One of the most compelling accounts of the postemancipation period is *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, written by C. Vann Woodward in 1955.<sup>11</sup> The book continues to be the focal point of study and debate by scholars and was once described by Martin Luther King Jr. as the “historical bible of the Civil Rights Movement.” As Woodward tells the story, the end of slavery created an extraordinary dilemma for Southern white society. Without the labor of former slaves, the region’s economy would surely collapse, and without the institution of slavery, there was no longer a formal mechanism for maintaining racial hierarchy and preventing “amalgamation” with a group of people considered intrinsically inferior and vile. This state of affairs produced a temporary anarchy and a state of mind bordering on hysteria, particularly among the planter elite. But even among poor whites, the collapse of slavery was a bitter pill. In the antebellum South, the lowliest white person at least possessed his or her white skin—a badge of superiority over even the most skilled slave or prosperous free African American.

While Southern whites—poor and rich alike—were utterly outraged by emancipation, there was no obvious solution to the dilemma they faced. Following the Civil War, the economic and political infrastructure of the South was in shambles. Plantation owners were suddenly destitute, and state governments, shackled by war debt, were penniless. Large amounts of real estate and other property had been destroyed in the war, industry was disorganized, and hundreds of thousands of men had been killed or maimed. With all of this went the demoralizing effect of an unsuccessful war and the extraordinary challenges associated with rebuilding new state and local governments. Add to all this the sudden presence of 4 million newly freed slaves, and the picture becomes even more complicated. Southern whites, Woodward explains, strongly believed that a new system of racial control was clearly required, but it was not immediately obvious what form it should take.

Under slavery, the racial order was most effectively maintained by a large degree of contact between slave owners and slaves, thus maximizing opportunities for supervision and discipline, and minimizing the potential for active resistance or rebellion. Strict separation of the races would have threatened slaveholders’ immediate interests and was, in any event, wholly unnecessary as a means of creating social distance or establishing the inferior status of slaves.

Following the Civil War, it was unclear what institutions, laws, or customs would be necessary to maintain white control now that slavery was gone.

Nonetheless, as numerous historians have shown, the development of a new racial order became the consuming passion for most white Southerners. Rumors of a great insurrection terrified whites, and blacks increasingly came to be viewed as menacing and dangerous. In fact, the current stereotypes of black men as aggressive, unruly predators can be traced to this period, when whites feared that an angry mass of black men might rise up and attack them or rape their women.

Equally worrisome was the state of the economy. Former slaves literally walked away from their plantations, causing panic and outrage among plantation owners. Large numbers of former slaves roamed the highways in the early years after the war. Some converged on towns and cities; others joined the federal militia. Most white people believed African Americans lacked the proper motivation to work, prompting the provisional Southern legislatures to adopt the notorious black codes. As expressed by one Alabama planter: "We have the power to pass stringent police laws to govern the Negroes—this is a blessing—for they must be controlled in some way or white people cannot live among them."<sup>12</sup> While some of these codes were intended to establish systems of peonage resembling slavery, others foreshadowed Jim Crow laws by prohibiting, among other things, interracial seating in the first-class sections of railroad cars and by segregating schools.

Although the convict laws enacted during this period are rarely seen as part of the black codes, that is a mistake. As explained by historian William Cohen, "the main purpose of the codes was to control the freedmen, and the question of how to handle convicted black law breakers was very much at the center of the control issue."<sup>13</sup> Nine Southern states adopted vagrancy laws—which essentially made it a criminal offense not to work and were applied selectively to blacks—and eight of those states enacted convict laws allowing for the hiring-out of county prisoners to plantation owners and private companies. Prisoners were forced to work for little or no pay. One vagrancy act specifically provided that "all free negroes and mulattoes over the age of eighteen" must have written proof of a job at the beginning of every year. Those found with no lawful employment were deemed vagrants and convicted. Clearly, the purpose of the black codes in general and the vagrancy laws in particular was to establish another system of forced labor. In W.E.B. Du Bois's words: "The Codes spoke for themselves. . . . No open-minded student can read them without being convinced they meant nothing more nor less than slavery in daily toil."<sup>14</sup>

Ultimately, the black codes were overturned, and a slew of federal civil rights legislation protecting the newly freed slaves was passed during the relatively brief but extraordinary period of black advancement known as the Reconstruction Era. The impressive legislative achievements of this period include the Thirteenth Amendment, abolishing slavery; the Civil Rights Act of 1866, bestowing full citizenship upon African Americans; the Fourteenth Amendment, prohibiting states from denying citizens due process and “equal protection of the laws”; the Fifteenth Amendment, providing that the right to vote should not be denied on account of race; and the Ku Klux Klan Acts, which, among other things, declared interference with voting a federal offense and the violent infringement of civil rights a crime. The new legislation also provided for federal supervision of voting and authorized the president to send the army and suspend the writ of habeas corpus in districts declared to be in a state of insurrection against the federal government.

In addition to federal civil rights legislation, the Reconstruction Era brought the expansion of the Freedmen’s Bureau, the agency charged with the responsibility of providing food, clothing, fuel, and other forms of assistance to destitute former slaves. A public education system emerged in the South, which afforded many blacks (and poor whites) their first opportunity to learn to read and write.

While the Reconstruction Era was fraught with corruption and arguably doomed by the lack of land reform, the sweeping economic and political developments in that period did appear, at least for a time, to have the potential to seriously undermine, if not completely eradicate, the racial caste system in the South. With the protection of federal troops, African Americans began to vote in large numbers and seize control, in some areas, of the local political apparatus. Literacy rates climbed, and educated blacks began to populate legislatures, open schools, and initiate successful businesses. In 1867, at the dawn of the Reconstruction Era, no black man held political office in the South, yet three years later, at least 15 percent of all Southern elected officials were black. This is particularly extraordinary in light of the fact that fifteen years after the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965—the high water mark of the Civil Rights Movement—fewer than 8 percent of all Southern elected officials were black.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, however, many of the new civil rights laws were proving largely symbolic.<sup>16</sup> Notably absent from the Fifteenth Amendment, for example, was language prohibiting the states from imposing educational,

residential, or other qualifications for voting, thus leaving the door open to the states to impose poll taxes, literacy tests, and other devices to prevent blacks from voting. Other laws revealed themselves as more an assertion of principle than direct federal intervention into Southern affairs, because enforcement required African Americans to take their cases to federal courts, a costly and time-consuming procedure that was a practical impossibility for the vast majority of those who had claims. Most blacks were too poor to sue to enforce their civil rights, and no organization like the NAACP yet existed to spread the risks and costs of litigation. Moreover, the threat of violence often deterred blacks from pressing legitimate claims, making the “civil rights” of former slaves largely illusory—existing on paper but rarely to be found in real life.

Meanwhile, the separation of the races had begun to emerge as a comprehensive pattern throughout the South, driven in large part by the rhetoric of the planter elite, who hoped to reestablish a system of control that would ensure a low-paid, submissive labor force. Racial segregation had actually begun years earlier in the North, as an effort to prevent race-mixing and preserve racial hierarchy following the abolition of Northern slavery. It had never developed, however, into a comprehensive system—operating instead largely as a matter of custom, enforced with varying degrees of consistency. Even among those most hostile to Reconstruction, few would have predicted that racial segregation would soon evolve into a new racial caste system as stunningly comprehensive and repressive as the one that came to be known simply as Jim Crow.

### The Birth of Jim Crow

The backlash against the gains of African Americans in the Reconstruction Era was swift and severe. As African Americans obtained political power and began the long march toward greater social and economic equality, whites reacted with panic and outrage. Southern conservatives vowed to reverse Reconstruction and sought the “abolition of the Freedmen’s Bureau and all political instrumentalities designed to secure Negro supremacy.”<sup>17</sup> Their campaign to “redeem” the South was reinforced by a resurgent Ku Klux Klan, which fought a terrorist campaign against Reconstruction governments and local leaders, complete with bombings, lynchings, and mob violence.

The terrorist campaign proved highly successful. “Redemption” resulted in the withdrawal of federal troops from the South and the effective abandonment of African Americans and all those who had fought for or supported an egalitarian racial order. The federal government no longer made any effort to enforce federal civil rights legislation, and funding for the Freedmen’s Bureau was slashed to such a degree that the agency became virtually defunct.

Once again, vagrancy laws and other laws defining activities such as “mischief” and “insulting gestures” as crimes were enforced vigorously against blacks. The aggressive enforcement of these criminal offenses opened up an enormous market for convict leasing, in which prisoners were contracted out as laborers to the highest private bidder. Douglas Blackmon, in *Slavery by Another Name*, describes how tens of thousands of African Americans were arbitrarily arrested during this period, many of them hit with court costs and fines, which had to be worked off in order to secure their release.<sup>18</sup> With no means to pay off their “debts,” prisoners were sold as forced laborers to lumber camps, brickyards, railroads, farms, plantations, and dozens of corporations throughout the South. Death rates were shockingly high, for the private contractors had no interest in the health and well-being of their laborers, unlike the earlier slave-owners who needed their slaves, at a minimum, to be healthy enough to survive hard labor. Laborers were subject to almost continual lashing by long horse whips, and those who collapsed due to injuries or exhaustion were often left to die.

Convicts had no meaningful legal rights at this time and no effective redress. They were understood, quite literally, to be slaves of the state. The Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution had abolished slavery but allowed one major exception: slavery remained appropriate as punishment for a crime. In a landmark decision by the Virginia Supreme Court, *Ruffin v. Commonwealth*, issued at the height of Southern Redemption, the court put to rest any notion that convicts were legally distinguishable from slaves:

For a time, during his service in the penitentiary, he is in a state of penal servitude to the State. He has, as a consequence of his crime, not only forfeited his liberty, but all his personal rights except those which the law in its humanity accords to him. He is for the time being a slave of the State. He is *civilitur mortuus*; and his estate, if he has any, is administered like that of a dead man.<sup>19</sup>

The state of Mississippi eventually moved from hiring convict labor to organizing its own convict labor camp, known as Parchman Farm. It was not alone. During the decade following Redemption, the convict population grew ten times faster than the general population: "Prisoners became younger and blacker, and the length of their sentences soared."<sup>20</sup> It was the nation's first prison boom and, as they are today, the prisoners were disproportionately black. After a brief period of progress during Reconstruction, African Americans found themselves, once again, virtually defenseless. The criminal justice system was strategically employed to force African Americans back into a system of extreme repression and control, a tactic that would continue to prove successful for generations to come. Even as convict leasing faded away, strategic forms of exploitation and repression emerged anew. As Blackmon notes: "The apparent demise . . . of leasing prisoners seemed a harbinger of a new day. But the harsher reality of the South was that the new post-Civil War neoslavery was evolving—not disappearing."<sup>21</sup>

Redemption marked a turning point in the quest by dominant whites for a new racial equilibrium, a racial order that would protect their economic, political, and social interests in a world without slavery. Yet a clear consensus among whites about what the new racial order should be was still lacking. The Redeemers who overthrew Reconstruction were inclined to retain such segregation practices as had already emerged, but they displayed no apparent disposition to expand or universalize the system.

Three alternative philosophies of race relations were put forward to compete for the region's support, all of which rejected the doctrines of extreme racism espoused by some Redeemers: liberalism, conservatism, and radicalism.<sup>22</sup> The liberal philosophy of race relations emphasized the stigma of segregation and the hypocrisy of a government that celebrates freedom and equality yet denies both on account of race. This philosophy, born in the North, never gained much traction among Southern whites or blacks.

The conservative philosophy, by contrast, attracted wide support and was implemented in various contexts over a considerable period of time. Conservatives blamed liberals for pushing blacks ahead of their proper station in life and placing blacks in positions they were unprepared to fill, a circumstance that had allegedly contributed to their downfall. They warned blacks that some Redeemers were not satisfied with having decimated Reconstruction, and were prepared to wage an aggressive war against blacks throughout

the South. With some success, the conservatives reached out to African American voters, reminding them that they had something to lose as well as gain and that the liberals' preoccupation with political and economic equality presented the danger of losing all that blacks had so far gained.

The radical philosophy offered, for many African Americans, the most promise. It was predicated on a searing critique of large corporations, particularly railroads, and the wealthy elite in the North and South. The radicals of the late nineteenth century, who later formed the Populist Party, viewed the privileged classes as conspiring to keep poor whites and blacks locked into a subordinate political and economic position. For many African American voters, the Populist approach was preferable to the paternalism of liberals. Populists preached an "equalitarianism of want and poverty, the kinship of a common grievance, and a common oppressor."<sup>23</sup> As described by Tom Watson, a prominent Populist leader, in a speech advocating a union between black and white farmers: "You are kept apart that you may be separately fleeced of your earnings. You are made to hate each other because upon that hatred is rested the keystone of the arch of financial despotism that enslaves you both. You are deceived and blinded that you may not see how this race antagonism perpetuates a monetary system which beggars both."<sup>24</sup>

In an effort to demonstrate their commitment to a genuinely multiracial, working-class movement against white elites, the Populists made strides toward racial integration, a symbol of their commitment to class-based unity. African Americans throughout the South responded with great hope and enthusiasm, eager to be true partners in a struggle for social justice. According to Woodward, "It is altogether probable that during the brief Populist upheaval in the nineties Negroes and native whites achieved a greater comity of mind and harmony of political purpose than ever before or since in the South."<sup>25</sup>

The challenges inherent in creating the alliance sought by the Populists were formidable, as race prejudice ran the highest among the very white populations to which the Populist appeal was specifically addressed—the depressed lower economic classes. Nevertheless, the Populist movement initially enjoyed remarkable success in the South, fueled by a wave of discontent aroused by the severe agrarian depression of the 1880s and 1890s. The Populists took direct aim at the conservatives, who were known as comprising a party of privilege, and they achieved a stunning series of political

victories throughout the region. Alarmed by the success of the Populists and the apparent potency of the alliance between poor and working-class whites and African Americans, the conservatives raised the cry of white supremacy and resorted to the tactics they had employed in their quest for Redemption, including fraud, intimidation, bribery, and terror.

Segregation laws were proposed as part of a deliberate effort to drive a wedge between poor whites and African Americans. These discriminatory barriers were designed to encourage lower-class whites to retain a sense of superiority over blacks, making it far less likely that they would sustain interracial political alliances aimed at toppling the white elite. The laws were, in effect, another racial bribe. As William Julius Wilson has noted, "As long as poor whites directed their hatred and frustration against the black competitor, the planters were relieved of class hostility directed against them."<sup>26</sup> Indeed, in order to overcome the well-founded suspicions of poor and illiterate whites that they, as well as blacks, were in danger of losing the right to vote, the leaders of the movement pursued an aggressive campaign of white supremacy in every state prior to black disenfranchisement.

Ultimately, the Populists caved to the pressure and abandoned their former allies. "While the [Populist] movement was at the peak of zeal," Woodward observed, "the two races had surprised each other and astonished their opponents by the harmony they achieved and the good will with which they co-operated."<sup>27</sup> But when it became clear that the conservatives would stop at nothing to decimate their alliance, the biracial partnership dissolved, and Populist leaders re-aligned themselves with conservatives. Even Tom Watson, who had been among the most forceful advocates for an interracial alliance of farmers, concluded that Populist principles could never be fully embraced by the South until blacks were eliminated from politics.

The agricultural depression, taken together with a series of failed reforms and broken political promises, had pyramided to a climax of social tensions. Dominant whites concluded that it was in their political and economic interest to scapegoat blacks, and "permission to hate" came from sources that had formerly denied it, including Northern liberals eager to reconcile with the South, Southern conservatives who had once promised blacks protection from racial extremism, and Populists, who cast aside their dark-skinned allies when the partnership fell under siege.<sup>28</sup>

History seemed to repeat itself. Just as the white elite had successfully driven a wedge between poor whites and blacks following Bacon's Rebellion

by creating the institution of black slavery, another racial caste system was emerging nearly two centuries later, in part due to efforts by white elites to decimate a multiracial alliance of poor people. By the turn of the twentieth century, every state in the South had laws on the books that disenfranchised blacks and discriminated against them in virtually every sphere of life, lending sanction to a racial ostracism that extended to schools, churches, housing, jobs, restrooms, hotels, restaurants, hospitals, orphanages, prisons, funeral homes, morgues, and cemeteries. Politicians competed with each other by proposing and passing ever more stringent, oppressive, and downright ridiculous legislation (such as laws specifically prohibiting blacks and whites from playing chess together). The public symbols and constant reminders of black subjugation were supported by whites across the political spectrum, though the plight of poor whites remained largely unchanged. For them, the racial bribe was primarily psychological.

The new racial order, known as Jim Crow—a term apparently derived from a minstrel show character—was regarded as the “final settlement,” the “return to sanity,” and “the permanent system.”<sup>29</sup> Of course, the earlier system of racialized social control—slavery—had also been regarded as final, sane, and permanent by its supporters. Like the earlier system, Jim Crow seemed “natural,” and it became difficult to remember that alternative paths were not only available at one time, but nearly embraced.

### The Death of Jim Crow

Scholars have long debated the beginning and end of Reconstruction, as well as exactly when Jim Crow ended and the Civil Rights Movement or “Second Reconstruction” began. Reconstruction is most typically described as stretching from 1863 when the North freed the slaves to 1877, when it abandoned them and withdrew federal troops from the South. There is much less certainty regarding the beginning of the end of Jim Crow.

The general public typically traces the death of Jim Crow to *Brown v. Board of Education*, although the institution was showing signs of weakness years before. By 1945, a growing number of whites in the North had concluded that the Jim Crow system would have to be modified, if not entirely overthrown. This consensus was due to a number of factors, including the increased political power of blacks due to migration to the North and the

growing membership and influence of the NAACP, particularly its highly successful legal campaign challenging Jim Crow laws in federal courts. Far more important in the view of many scholars, however, is the influence of World War II. The blatant contradiction between the country's opposition to the crimes of the Third Reich against European Jews and the continued existence of a racial caste system in the United States was proving embarrassing, severely damaging the nation's credibility as leader of the "free world." There was also increased concern that, without greater equality for African Americans, blacks would become susceptible to communist influence, given Russia's commitment to both racial and economic equality. In Gunnar Myrdal's highly influential book *The American Dilemma*, published in 1944, Myrdal made a passionate plea for integration based on the theory that the inherent contradiction between the "American Creed" of freedom and equality and the treatment of African Americans was not only immoral and profoundly unjust, but was also against the economic and foreign-policy interests of the United States.<sup>30</sup>

The Supreme Court seemed to agree. In 1944, in *Smith v. Allwright*, the Supreme Court ended the use of the all-white primary election; and in 1946, the Court ruled that state laws requiring segregation on interstate buses were unconstitutional. Two years later, the Court voided any real estate agreements that racially discriminated against purchasers, and in 1949 the Court ruled that Texas's segregated law school for blacks was inherently unequal and inferior in every respect to its law school for whites. In 1950, in *McLaurin v. Oklahoma*, it declared that Oklahoma had to desegregate its law school. Thus, even before *Brown*, the Supreme Court had already begun to set in motion a striking pattern of desegregation.

*Brown v. Board of Education* was unique, however. It signaled the end of "home rule" in the South with respect to racial affairs. Earlier decisions had chipped away at the "separate but equal" doctrine, yet Jim Crow had managed to adapt to the changing legal environment, and most Southerners had remained confident that the institution would survive. *Brown* threatened not only to abolish segregation in public schools, but also, by implication, the entire system of legalized discrimination in the South. After more than fifty years of nearly complete deference to Southern states and noninterference in their racial affairs, *Brown* suggested a reversal in course.

A mood of outrage and defiance swept the South, not unlike the reaction to emancipation and Reconstruction following the Civil War. Again, racial

equality was being forced upon the South by the federal government, and by 1956 Southern white opposition to desegregation mushroomed into a vicious backlash. In Congress, North Carolina senator Sam Ervin Jr. drafted a racist polemic, "the Southern Manifesto," which vowed to fight to maintain Jim Crow by all legal means. Ervin succeeded in obtaining the support of 101 out of 128 members of Congress from the eleven original Confederate states.

A fresh wave of white terror was hurled at those who supported the dismantling of Jim Crow. White Citizens' Councils were formed in almost every Southern city and backwater town, comprised primarily of middle- to upper-middle-class whites in business and the clergy. Just as Southern legislatures had passed the black codes in response to the early steps of Reconstruction, in the years immediately following *Brown v. Board*, five Southern legislatures passed nearly fifty new Jim Crow laws. In the streets, resistance turned violent. The Ku Klux Klan reasserted itself as a powerful terrorist organization, committing castrations, killings, and the bombing of black homes and churches. NAACP leaders were beaten, pistol-whipped, and shot. As quickly as it began, desegregation across the South ground to a halt. In 1958, thirteen school systems were desegregated; in 1960, only seventeen.<sup>31</sup>

In the absence of a massive, grassroots movement directly challenging the racial caste system, Jim Crow might be alive and well today. Yet in the 1950s, a civil rights movement was brewing, emboldened by the Supreme Court's decisions and a shifting domestic and international political environment. With extraordinary bravery, civil rights leaders, activists, and progressive clergy launched boycotts, marches, and sit-ins protesting the Jim Crow system. They endured fire hoses, police dogs, bombings, and beatings by white mobs, as well as by the police. Once again, federal troops were sent to the South to provide protection for blacks attempting to exercise their civil rights, and the violent reaction of white racists was met with horror in the North.

The dramatic high point of the Civil Rights Movement occurred in 1963. The Southern struggle had grown from a modest group of black students demonstrating peacefully at one lunch counter to the largest mass movement for racial reform and civil rights in the twentieth century. Between autumn 1961 and the spring of 1963, twenty thousand men, women, and children had been arrested. In 1963 alone, another fifteen thousand were imprisoned, and one thousand desegregation protests occurred across the region, in more than one hundred cities.<sup>32</sup>

On June 12, 1963, President Kennedy announced that he would deliver

to Congress a strong civil rights bill, a declaration that transformed him into a widely recognized ally of the Civil Rights Movement. Following Kennedy's assassination, President Johnson professed his commitment to the goal of "the full assimilation of more than twenty million Negroes into American life," and ensured the passage of comprehensive civil rights legislation. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 formally dismantled the Jim Crow system of discrimination in public accommodations, employment, voting, education, and federally financed activities. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 arguably had even greater scope, as it rendered illegal numerous discriminatory barriers to effective political participation by African Americans and mandated federal review of all new voting regulations so that it would be possible to determine whether their use would perpetuate voting discrimination.

Within five years, the effects of the civil rights revolution were undeniable. Between 1964 and 1969, the percentage of African American adults registered to vote in the South soared. In Alabama the rate leaped from 19.3 percent to 61.3 percent; in Georgia, 27.4 percent to 60.4 percent; in Louisiana, 31.6 percent to 60.8 percent; and in Mississippi, 6.7 percent to 66.5 percent.<sup>33</sup> Suddenly black children could shop in department stores, eat at restaurants, drink from water fountains, and go to amusement parks that were once off-limits. Miscegenation laws were declared unconstitutional, and the rate of interracial marriage climbed.

While dramatic progress was apparent in the political and social realms, civil rights activists became increasingly concerned that, without major economic reforms, the vast majority of blacks would remain locked in poverty. Thus at the peak of the Civil Rights Movement, activists and others began to turn their attention to economic problems, arguing that socioeconomic inequality interacted with racism to produce crippling poverty and related social problems. Economic issues emerged as a major focus of discontent. As political scientists Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward have described, "blacks became more indignant over their condition—not only as an oppressed racial minority in a white society but as poor people in an affluent one."<sup>34</sup> Activists organized boycotts, picket lines, and demonstrations to attack discrimination in access to jobs and the denial of economic opportunity.

Perhaps the most famous demonstration in support of economic justice is the March on Washington for Jobs and Economic Freedom in August 1963. The wave of activism associated with economic justice helped to focus President Kennedy's attention on poverty and black unemployment. In the

summer of 1963, he initiated a series of staff studies on those subjects. By the end of the summer, he declared his intention to make the eradication of poverty a key legislative objective in 1964.<sup>35</sup> Following Kennedy's assassination, President Lyndon Johnson embraced the antipoverty rhetoric with great passion, calling for an "unconditional war on poverty," in his State of the Union Address in January 1964. Weeks later he proposed to Congress the Economic Opportunities Bill of 1964.

The shift in focus served to align the goals of the Civil Rights Movement with key political goals of poor and working-class whites, who were also demanding economic reforms. As the Civil Rights Movement began to evolve into a "Poor People's Movement," it promised to address not only black poverty, but white poverty as well—thus raising the specter of a poor and working-class movement that cut across racial lines. Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders made it clear that they viewed the eradication of economic inequality as the next front in the "human rights movement" and made great efforts to build multiracial coalitions that sought economic justice for all. Genuine equality for black people, King reasoned, demanded a radical restructuring of society, one that would address the needs of the black and white poor throughout the country. Shortly before his assassination, he envisioned bringing to Washington, D.C., thousands of the nation's disadvantaged in an interracial alliance that embraced rural and ghetto blacks, Appalachian whites, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Native Americans to demand jobs and income—the right to live. In a speech delivered in 1968, King acknowledged there had been some progress for blacks since the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but insisted that the current challenges required even greater resolve and that the entire nation must be transformed for economic justice to be more than a dream for poor people of all colors. As historian Gerald McKnight observes, "King was proposing nothing less than a radical transformation of the Civil Rights Movement into a populist crusade calling for redistribution of economic and political power. America's only civil rights leader was now focusing on class issues and was planning to descend on Washington with an army of poor to shake the foundations of the power structure and force the government to respond to the needs of the ignored underclass."<sup>36</sup>

With the success of the Civil Rights Movement and the launching of the Poor People's Movement, it was apparent to all that a major disruption in the nation's racial equilibrium had occurred. Yet as we shall see below, Negroes

stood only a “brief moment in the sun.” Conservative whites began, once again, to search for a new racial order that would conform to the needs and constraints of the time. This process took place with the understanding that whatever the new order would be, it would have to be formally race-neutral—it could not involve explicit or clearly intentional race discrimination. A similar phenomenon had followed slavery and Reconstruction, as white elites struggled to define a new racial order with the understanding that whatever the new order would be, it could not include slavery. Jim Crow eventually replaced slavery, but now it too had died, and it was unclear what might take its place. Barred by law from invoking race explicitly, those committed to racial hierarchy were forced to search for new means of achieving their goals according to the new rules of American democracy.

History reveals that the seeds of the new system of control were planted well before the end of the Civil Rights Movement. A new race-neutral language was developed for appealing to old racist sentiments, a language accompanied by a political movement that succeeded in putting the vast majority of blacks back in their place. Proponents of racial hierarchy found they could install a new racial caste system without violating the law or the new limits of acceptable political discourse, by demanding “law and order” rather than “segregation forever.”

### The Birth of Mass Incarceration

The rhetoric of “law and order” was first mobilized in the late 1950s as Southern governors and law enforcement officials attempted to generate and mobilize white opposition to the Civil Rights Movement. In the years following *Brown v. Board of Education*, civil rights activists used direct-action tactics in an effort to force reluctant Southern states to desegregate public facilities. Southern governors and law enforcement officials often characterized these tactics as criminal and argued that the rise of the Civil Rights Movement was indicative of a breakdown of law and order. Support of civil rights legislation was derided by Southern conservatives as merely “rewarding lawbreakers.”

For more than a decade—from the mid-1950s until the late 1960s—conservatives systematically and strategically linked opposition to civil

rights legislation to calls for law and order, arguing that Martin Luther King Jr.'s philosophy of civil disobedience was a leading cause of crime. Civil rights protests were frequently depicted as criminal rather than political in nature, and federal courts were accused of excessive "lenience" toward lawlessness, thereby contributing to the spread of crime. In the words of then-vice president Richard Nixon, the increasing crime rate "can be traced directly to the spread of the corrosive doctrine that every citizen possesses an inherent right to decide for himself which laws to obey and when to disobey them."<sup>37</sup> Some segregationists went further, insisting that integration causes crime, citing lower crime rates in Southern states as evidence that segregation was necessary. In the words of Representative John Bell Williams, "This exodus of Negroes from the South, and their influx into the great metropolitan centers of other areas of the Nation, has been accompanied by a wave of crime. . . . What has civil rights accomplished for these areas? . . . Segregation is the only answer as most Americans—not the politicians—have realized for hundreds of years."<sup>38</sup>

Unfortunately, at the same time that civil rights were being identified as a threat to law and order, the FBI was reporting fairly dramatic increases in the national crime rate. Beginning in the 1960s, crime rates rose in the United States for a period of about ten years. Reported street crime quadrupled, and homicide rates nearly doubled. Despite significant controversy over the accuracy of crime statistics during this period (the FBI's method of tracking crime was changing), sociologists and criminologists agree that crime did rise, in some categories quite sharply. The reasons for the crime wave are complex but can be explained in large part by the rise of the "baby boom" generation—the spike in the number of young men in the fifteen-to-twenty-four age group, which historically has been responsible for most crimes. The surge of young men in the population was occurring at precisely the same time that unemployment rates for black men were rising sharply, but the economic and demographic factors contributing to rising crime were not explored in the media. Instead, crime reports were sensationalized and offered as further evidence of the breakdown in lawfulness, morality, and social stability in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>39</sup>

To make matters worse, riots erupted in the summer of 1964 in Harlem and Rochester, followed by a series of uprisings that swept the nation following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. The racial imagery

associated with the riots gave fuel to the argument that civil rights for blacks led to rampant crime. Cities like Philadelphia and Rochester were described as being victims of their own generosity. Conservatives argued that, having welcomed blacks migrating from the South, these cities “were repaid with crime-ridden slums and black discontent.”<sup>40</sup>

Barry Goldwater, in his 1964 presidential campaign, aggressively exploited the riots and fears of black crime, laying the foundation for the “get tough on crime” movement that would emerge years later. In a widely quoted speech, Goldwater warned voters, “Choose the way of [the Johnson] Administration and you have the way of mobs in the street.”<sup>41</sup> Civil rights activists who argued that the uprisings were directly related to widespread police harassment and abuse were dismissed by conservatives out of hand. “If [blacks] conduct themselves in an orderly way, they will not have to worry about police brutality,” argued West Virginia senator Robert Byrd.<sup>42</sup>

While many civil rights advocates in this period actively resisted the attempt by conservatives to use rising crime as an excuse to crack down on impoverished black communities, some black activists began to join the calls for “law and order” and expressed support for harsh responses to lawbreakers. As Vanessa Barker describes in *The Politics of Imprisonment*, black activists in Harlem, alarmed by rising crime rates, actively campaigned for what would become the notorious Rockefeller drug laws as well as other harsh sentencing measures.<sup>43</sup> Wittingly or unwittingly, they found themselves complicit in the emergence of a penal system unprecedented in world history. Black support for harsh responses to urban crime—support born of desperation and legitimate concern over the unraveling of basic security in inner-city communities—helped provide political cover for conservative politicians who saw an opening to turn back the clock on racial progress in the United States. Conservatives could point to black support for highly punitive approaches to dealing with the problems of the urban poor as “proof” that race had nothing to do with their “law and order” agenda.

Early on, little effort was made to disguise the racial motivations behind the law and order rhetoric and the harsh criminal justice legislation proposed in Congress. The most ardent opponents of civil rights legislation and desegregation were the most active on the emerging crime issue. Well-known segregationist George Wallace, for example, argued that “the same Supreme Court that ordered integration and encouraged civil rights legislation” was now “bending over backwards to help criminals.”<sup>44</sup> Three other prominent

segregationists—Senators McClellan, Erwin, and Thurmond—led the legislative battle to curb the rights of criminal defendants.<sup>45</sup>

As the rules of acceptable discourse changed, however, segregationists distanced themselves from an explicitly racist agenda. They developed instead the racially sanitized rhetoric of “cracking down on crime”—rhetoric that is now used freely by politicians of every stripe. Conservative politicians who embraced this rhetoric purposefully failed to distinguish between the direct action tactics of civil rights activists, violent rebellions in inner cities, and traditional crimes of an economic or violent nature. Instead, as Marc Maurer of the Sentencing Project has noted, “all of these phenomenon were subsumed under the heading of ‘crime in the streets.’”<sup>46</sup>

After the passage of the Civil Rights Act, the public debate shifted focus from segregation to crime. The battle lines, however, remained largely the same. Positions taken on crime policies typically cohered along lines of racial ideology. Political scientist Vesla Weaver explains: “Votes cast in opposition to open housing, busing, the Civil Rights Act, and other measures time and again showed the same divisions as votes for amendments to crime bills. . . . Members of Congress who voted against civil rights measures proactively designed crime legislation and actively fought for their proposals.”<sup>47</sup>

Although law and order rhetoric ultimately failed to prevent the formal dismantling of the Jim Crow system, it proved highly effective in appealing to poor and working-class whites, particularly in the South, who were opposed to integration and frustrated by the Democratic Party’s apparent support for the Civil Rights Movement. As Weaver notes, “rather than fading, the segregationists’ crime-race argument was reframed, with a slightly different veneer,” and eventually became the foundation of the conservative agenda on crime.<sup>48</sup> In fact, law and order rhetoric—first employed by segregationists—would eventually contribute to a major realignment of political parties in the United States.

Following the Civil War, party alignment was almost entirely regional. The South was solidly Democratic, embittered by the war, firmly committed to the maintenance of a racial caste system, and extremely hostile to federal intervention on behalf of African Americans. The North was overwhelming Republican and, while Republicans were ambivalent about equality for African Americans, they were far more inclined to adopt and implement racial justice reforms than their Democratic counterparts below the Mason-Dixon line.

The Great Depression effectuated a sea change in American race relations and party alignment. The New Deal—spearheaded by the Democratic Party of President Franklin D. Roosevelt—was designed to alleviate the suffering of poor people in the midst of the Depression, and blacks, the poorest of the poor, benefited disproportionately. While New Deal programs were rife with discrimination in their administration, they at least included blacks within the pool of beneficiaries—a development, historian Michael Klarman has noted, that was “sufficient to raise black hopes and expectations after decades of malign neglect from Washington.”<sup>49</sup> Poor and working-class whites in both the North and South, no less than African Americans, responded positively to the New Deal, anxious for meaningful economic relief. As a result, the Democratic New Deal coalition evolved into an alliance of urban ethnic groups and the white South that dominated electoral politics from 1932 to the early 1960s.

That dominance came to an abrupt end with the creation and implementation of what has come to be known as the Southern Strategy. The success of law and order rhetoric among working-class whites and the intense resentment of racial reforms, particularly in the South, led conservative Republican analysts to believe that a “new majority” could be created by the Republican Party, one that included the traditional Republican base, the white South, and half the Catholic, blue-collar vote of the big cities.<sup>50</sup> Some conservative political strategists admitted that appealing to racial fears and antagonisms was central to this strategy, though it had to be done surreptitiously. H.R. Haldeman, one of Nixon’s key advisers, recalls that Nixon himself deliberately pursued a Southern, racial strategy: “He [President Nixon] emphasized that you have to face the fact that the whole problem is really the blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to.”<sup>51</sup> Similarly, John Ehrlichman, special counsel to the president, explained the Nixon administration’s campaign strategy of 1968 in this way: “We’ll go after the racists.”<sup>52</sup> In Ehrlichman’s view, “that subliminal appeal to the anti-black voter was always present in Nixon’s statements and speeches.”<sup>53</sup>

Republican strategist Kevin Phillips is often credited for offering the most influential argument in favor of a race-based strategy for Republican political dominance in the South. He argued in *The Emerging Republican Majority*, published in 1969, that Nixon’s successful presidential election campaign could point the way toward long-term political realignment and the building of a new Republican majority, if Republicans continued to campaign primar-

ily on the basis of racial issues, using coded antiblack rhetoric.<sup>54</sup> He argued that Southern white Democrats had become so angered and alienated by the Democratic Party's support for civil rights reforms, such as desegregation and busing, that those voters could be easily persuaded to switch parties if those racial resentments could be maintained. Warren Weaver, a *New York Times* journalist who reviewed the book upon its release, observed that Phillips's strategy largely depended upon creating and maintaining a racially polarized political environment. "Full racial polarization is an essential ingredient of Phillips's political pragmatism. He wants to see a black Democratic party, particularly in the South, because this will drive into the Republican party precisely the kind of anti-Negro whites who will help constitute the emerging majority. This even leads him to support some civil rights efforts."<sup>55</sup> Appealing to the racism and vulnerability of working-class whites had worked to defeat the Populists at the turn of the century, and a growing number of conservatives believed the tactic should be employed again, albeit in a more subtle fashion.

Thus in the late 1960s and early 1970s, two schools of thought were offered to the general public regarding race, poverty, and the social order. Conservatives argued that poverty was caused not by structural factors related to race and class but rather by culture—particularly black culture. This view received support from Daniel Patrick Moynihan's now infamous report on the black family, which attributed black poverty to a black "subculture" and the "tangle of pathology" that characterized it. As described by sociologist Katherine Beckett, "The (alleged) misbehaviors of the poor were transformed from adaptations to poverty that had the unfortunate effect of reproducing it into character failings that accounted for poverty in the first place."<sup>56</sup> The "social pathologies" of the poor, particularly street crime, illegal drug use, and delinquency, were redefined by conservatives as having their cause in overly generous relief arrangements. Black "welfare cheats" and their dangerous offspring emerged, for the first time, in the political discourse and media imagery.

Liberals, by contrast, insisted that social reforms such as the War on Poverty and civil rights legislation would get at the "root causes" of criminal behavior and stressed the social conditions that predictably generate crime. Lyndon Johnson, for example, argued during his 1964 presidential campaign against Barry Goldwater that antipoverty programs were, in effect, anticrime programs: "There is something mighty wrong when a candidate for the highest office bemoans violence in the streets but votes against the War on Poverty,

votes against the Civil Rights Act and votes against major educational bills that come before him as a legislator.”<sup>57</sup>

Competing images of the poor as “deserving” and “undeserving” became central components of the debate. Ultimately, the racialized nature of this imagery became a crucial resource for conservatives, who succeeded in using law and order rhetoric in their effort to mobilize the resentment of white working-class voters, many of whom felt threatened by the sudden progress of African Americans. As explained by Thomas and Mary Edsall in their insightful book *Chain Reaction*, a disproportionate share of the costs of integration and racial equality had been borne by lower- and lower-middle-class whites, who were suddenly forced to compete on equal terms with blacks for jobs and status and who lived in neighborhoods adjoining black ghettos. Their children—not the children of wealthy whites—attended schools most likely to fall under busing orders. The affluent white liberals who were pressing the legal claims of blacks and other minorities “were often sheltered, in their private lives, and largely immune to the costs of implementing minority claims.”<sup>58</sup> This reality made it possible for conservatives to characterize the “liberal Democratic establishment” as being out of touch with ordinary working people—thus resolving one of the central problems facing conservatives: how to persuade poor and working-class voters to join in alliance with corporate interests and the conservative elite. By 1968, 81 percent of those responding to the Gallup Poll agreed with the statement that “law and order has broken down in this country,” and the majority blamed “Negroes who start riots” and “Communists.”<sup>59</sup>

During the presidential election that year, both the Republican candidate, Richard Nixon, and the independent segregationist candidate, George Wallace, made “law and order” a central theme of their campaigns, and together they collected 57 percent of the vote.<sup>60</sup> Nixon dedicated seventeen speeches solely to the topic of law and order, and one of his television ads explicitly called on voters to reject the lawlessness of civil rights activists and embrace “order” in the United States.<sup>61</sup> The advertisement began with frightening music accompanied by flashing images of protestors, bloodied victims, and violence. A deep voice then said:

It is time for an honest look at the problem of order in the United States. Dissent is a necessary ingredient of change, but in a system of government that provides for peaceful change, there is no cause that

justifies resort to violence. Let us recognize that the first right of every American is to be free from domestic violence. So I pledge to you, we shall have order in the United States.

At the end of the ad, a caption declared: “This time . . . vote like your whole world depended on it . . . NIXON.” Viewing his own campaign ad, Nixon reportedly remarked with glee that the ad “hits it right on the nose. It’s all about those damn Negro–Puerto Rican groups out there.”<sup>62</sup>

Race had become, yet again, a powerful wedge, breaking up what had been a solid liberal coalition based on economic interests of the poor and the working and lower-middle classes. In the 1968 election, race eclipsed class as the organizing principle of American politics, and by 1972, attitudes on racial issues rather than socioeconomic status were the primary determinant of voters’ political self-identification. The late 1960s and early 1970s marked the dramatic erosion in the belief among working-class whites that the condition of the poor, or those who fail to prosper, was the result of a faulty economic system that needed to be challenged. As the Edsalls explain, “the pitting of whites and blacks at the low end of the income distribution against each other intensified the view among many whites that the condition of life for the disadvantaged—particularly for disadvantaged blacks—is the responsibility of those afflicted, and not the responsibility of the larger society.”<sup>63</sup> Just as race had been used at the turn of the century by Southern elites to rupture class solidarity at the bottom of the income ladder, race as a national issue had broken up the Democratic New Deal “bottom-up” coalition—a coalition dependent on substantial support from all voters, white and black, at or below the median income.

The conservative revolution that took root within the Republican Party in the 1960s did not reach its full development until the election of 1980. The decade preceding Ronald Reagan’s ascent to the presidency was characterized by political and social crises, as the Civil Rights Movement was promptly followed by intense controversy over the implementation of the equality principle—especially busing and affirmative action—as well as dramatic political clashes over the Vietnam War and Watergate. During this period, conservatives gave lip service to the goal of racial equality but actively resisted desegregation, busing, and civil rights enforcement. They repeatedly raised the issue of welfare, subtly framing it as a contest between hardworking, blue-collar whites and poor blacks who refused to work. The not-so-subtle

message to working-class whites was that their tax dollars were going to support special programs for blacks who most certainly did not deserve them. During this period, Nixon called for a “war on drugs”—an announcement that proved largely rhetorical as he declared illegal drugs “public enemy number one” without proposing dramatic shifts in drug policy. A backlash against blacks was clearly in force, but no consensus had yet been reached regarding what racial and social order would ultimately emerge from these turbulent times.

In his campaign for the presidency, Reagan mastered the “excision of the language of race from conservative public discourse” and thus built on the success of earlier conservatives who developed a strategy of exploiting racial hostility or resentment for political gain without making explicit reference to race.<sup>64</sup> Condemning “welfare queens” and criminal “predators,” he rode into office with the strong support of disaffected whites—poor and working-class whites who felt betrayed by the Democratic Party’s embrace of the civil rights agenda. As one political insider explained, Reagan’s appeal derived primarily from the ideological fervor of the right wing of the Republican Party and “the emotional distress of those who fear or resent the Negro, and who expect Reagan somehow to keep him ‘in his place’ or at least echo their own anger and frustration.”<sup>65</sup> To great effect, Reagan echoed white frustration in race-neutral terms through implicit racial appeals. His “color-blind” rhetoric on crime, welfare, taxes, and states’ rights was clearly understood by white (and black) voters as having a racial dimension, though claims to that effect were impossible to prove. The absence of explicitly racist rhetoric afforded the racial nature of his coded appeals a certain plausible deniability. For example, when Reagan kicked off his presidential campaign at the annual Neshoba County Fair near Philadelphia, Mississippi—the town where three civil rights activists were murdered in 1964—he assured the crowd “I believe in states’ rights,” and promised to restore to states and local governments the power that properly belonged to them.<sup>66</sup> His critics promptly alleged that he was signaling a racial message to his audience, suggesting allegiance with those who resisted desegregation, but Reagan firmly denied it, forcing liberals into a position that would soon become familiar—arguing that something is racist but finding it impossible to prove in the absence of explicitly racist language.

Crime and welfare were the major themes of Reagan’s campaign rhetoric. According to the Edsalls, one of Reagan’s favorite and most-often-repeated

anecdotes was the story of a Chicago “welfare queen” with “80 names, 30 addresses, 12 Social Security cards,” whose “tax-free income alone is over \$150,000.”<sup>67</sup> The term “welfare queen” became a not-so-subtle code for “lazy, greedy, black ghetto mother.” The food stamp program, in turn, was a vehicle to let “some fellow ahead of you buy a T-bone steak,” while “you were standing in a checkout line with your package of hamburger.”<sup>68</sup> These highly racialized appeals, targeted to poor and working-class whites, were nearly always accompanied by vehement promises to be tougher on crime and to enhance the federal government’s role in combating it. Reagan portrayed the criminal as “a staring face—a face that belongs to a frightening reality of our time: the face of the human predator.”<sup>69</sup> Reagan’s racially coded rhetoric and strategy proved extraordinarily effective, as 22 percent of all Democrats defected from the party to vote for Reagan. The defection rate shot up to 34 percent among those Democrats who believed civil rights leaders were pushing “too fast.”<sup>70</sup>

Once elected, Reagan’s promise to enhance the federal government’s role in fighting crime was complicated by the fact that fighting street crime has traditionally been the responsibility of state and local law enforcement. After a period of initial confusion and controversy regarding whether the FBI and the federal government should be involved in street crime, the Justice Department announced its intention to cut in half the number of specialists assigned to identify and prosecute white-collar criminals and to shift its attention to street crime, especially drug-law enforcement.<sup>71</sup> In October 1982, President Reagan officially announced his administration’s War on Drugs. At the time he declared this new war, less than 2 percent of the American public viewed drugs as the most important issue facing the nation.<sup>72</sup> This fact was no deterrent to Reagan, for the drug war from the outset had little to do with public concern about drugs and much to do with public concern about race. By waging a war on drug users and dealers, Reagan made good on his promise to crack down on the racially defined “others”—the undeserving.

Practically overnight the budgets of federal law enforcement agencies soared. Between 1980 and 1984, FBI antidrug funding increased from \$8 million to \$95 million.<sup>73</sup> Department of Defense antidrug allocations increased from \$33 million in 1981 to \$1,042 million in 1991. During that same period, DEA antidrug spending grew from \$86 to \$1,026 million, and FBI antidrug allocations grew from \$38 to \$181 million.<sup>74</sup> By contrast, funding

for agencies responsible for drug treatment, prevention, and education was dramatically reduced. The budget of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, for example, was reduced from \$274 million to \$57 million from 1981 to 1984, and antidrug funds allocated to the Department of Education were cut from \$14 million to \$3 million.<sup>75</sup>

Determined to ensure that the “new Republican majority” would continue to support the extraordinary expansion of the federal government’s law enforcement activities and that Congress would continue to fund it, the Reagan administration launched a media offensive to justify the War on Drugs.<sup>76</sup> Central to the media campaign was an effort to sensationalize the emergence of crack cocaine in inner-city neighborhoods—communities devastated by deindustrialization and skyrocketing unemployment. The media frenzy the campaign inspired simply could not have come at a worse time for African Americans.

In the early 1980s, just as the drug war was kicking off, inner-city communities were suffering from economic collapse. The blue-collar factory jobs that had been plentiful in urban areas in the 1950s and 1960s had suddenly disappeared.<sup>77</sup> Prior to 1970, inner-city workers with relatively little formal education could find industrial employment close to home. Globalization, however, helped to change that. Manufacturing jobs were transferred by multinational corporations away from American cities to countries that lacked unions, where workers earn a small fraction of what is considered a fair wage in the United States. To make matters worse, dramatic technological changes revolutionized the workplace—changes that eliminated many of the jobs that less skilled workers once relied upon for their survival. Highly educated workers benefited from the pace of technological change and the increased use of computer-based technologies, but blue-collar workers often found themselves displaced in the sudden transition from an industrial to a service economy.

The impact of globalization and deindustrialization was felt most strongly in black inner-city communities. As described by William Julius Wilson, in his book *When Work Disappears*, the overwhelming majority of African Americans in the 1970s lacked college educations and had attended racially segregated, underfunded schools lacking basic resources. Those residing in ghetto communities were particularly ill equipped to adapt to the seismic changes taking place in the U.S. economy; they were left isolated and jobless. One study indicates that as late as 1970, more than 70 percent of all blacks work-

ing in metropolitan areas held blue-collar jobs.<sup>78</sup> Yet by 1987, when the drug war hit high gear, the industrial employment of black men had plummeted to 28 percent.<sup>79</sup>

The new manufacturing jobs that opened during this time period were generally located in the suburbs. The growing spatial mismatch of jobs had a profound impact on African Americans trapped in ghettos. A study of urban black fathers found that only 28 percent had access to an automobile. The rate fell to 18 percent for those living in ghetto areas.<sup>80</sup>

Women fared somewhat better during this period because the social-service sector in urban areas—which employs primarily women—was expanding at the same time manufacturing jobs were evaporating. The fraction of black men who moved into so called pink-collar jobs like nursing or clerical work was negligible.<sup>81</sup>

The decline in legitimate employment opportunities among inner-city residents increased incentives to sell drugs—most notably crack cocaine. Crack is pharmacologically almost identical to powder cocaine, but it has been converted into a form that can be vaporized and inhaled for a faster, more intense (though shorter) high using less of the drug—making it possible to sell small doses at more affordable prices. Crack hit the streets in 1985, a few years after Reagan’s drug war was announced, leading to a spike in violence as drug markets struggled to stabilize, and the anger and frustration associated with joblessness boiled. Joblessness and crack swept inner cities precisely at the moment that a fierce backlash against the Civil Rights Movement was manifesting itself through the War on Drugs.

No one should ever attempt to minimize the harm caused by crack cocaine and the related violence. As David Kennedy correctly observes, “[c]rack blew through America’s poor black neighborhoods like the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse,” leaving behind unspeakable devastation and suffering.<sup>82</sup> As a nation, though, we had a choice about how to respond. Some countries faced with rising drug crime or seemingly intractable rates of drug abuse and drug addiction chose the path of drug treatment, prevention, and education or economic investment in crime-ridden communities. Portugal, for example, responded to persistent problems of drug addiction and abuse by decriminalizing the possession of all drugs and redirecting the money that would have been spent putting drug users in cages into drug treatment and prevention. Ten years later, Portugal reported that rates of drug abuse and addiction had plummeted, and drug-related crime was on the decline as well.<sup>83</sup>

Numerous paths were available to us, as a nation, in the wake of the crack crisis, yet for reasons traceable largely to racial politics and fear mongering we chose war. Conservatives found they could finally justify an all-out war on an “enemy” that had been racially defined years before.

Almost immediately after crack appeared, the Reagan administration leaped at the opportunity to publicize crack cocaine in an effort to build support for its drug war. In October 1985, the DEA sent Robert Stutman to serve as director of its New York City office and charged him with the responsibility of shoring up public support for the administration’s new war. Stutman developed a strategy for improving relations with the news media and sought to draw journalists’ attention to the spread of crack cocaine in inner-city communities. As Stutman recounted years later:

The agents would hear me give hundreds of presentations to the media as I attempted to call attention to the drug scourge. I wasted no time in pointing out its [the DEA’s] new accomplishments against the drug traffickers. . . . In order to convince Washington, I needed to make it [drugs] a national issue and quickly. I began a lobbying effort and I used the media. The media were only too willing to cooperate, because as far the New York media was concerned, crack was the hottest combat reporting story to come along since the end of the Vietnam War.<sup>84</sup>

The strategy bore fruit. In June 1986, *Newsweek* declared crack to be the biggest story since Vietnam/Watergate, and in August of that year, *Time* magazine termed crack “the issue of the year.” Thousands of stories about the crack crisis flooded the airwaves and newsstands, and the stories had a clear racial subtext. The articles typically featured black “crack whores,” “crack babies,” and “gangbangers,” reinforcing already prevalent racial stereotypes of black women as irresponsible, selfish “welfare queens,” and black men as “predators”—part of an inferior and criminal subculture.<sup>85</sup> When two popular sports figures, Len Bias and Don Rogers, died of cocaine overdoses in June 1986, the media erroneously reported their deaths as caused by crack, contributing to the media firestorm and groundswell of political activity and public concern relating to the new “demon drug,” crack cocaine. The bonanza continued into 1989, as the media continued to disseminate claims that crack was an “epidemic,” a “plague,” “instantly addictive,” and extraordinarily dangerous—claims that have now been proven

false or highly misleading. Between October 1988 and October 1989, the *Washington Post* alone ran 1,565 stories about the “drug scourge.” Richard Harwood, the *Post*’s ombudsman, eventually admitted the paper had lost “a proper sense of perspective” due to such a “hyperbole epidemic.” He said that “politicians are doing a number on people’s heads.”<sup>86</sup> Sociologists Craig Reinerman and Harry Levine later made a similar point: “Crack was a god-send to the Right. . . . It could not have appeared at a more politically opportune moment.”<sup>87</sup>

In September 1986, with the media frenzy at full throttle, the House passed legislation that allocated \$2 billion to the antidrug crusade, required the participation of the military in narcotics control efforts, allowed the death penalty for some drug-related crimes, and authorized the admission of some illegally obtained evidence in drug trials. Later that month, the Senate proposed even tougher antidrug legislation, and shortly thereafter, the president signed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 into law. Among other harsh penalties, the legislation included mandatory minimum sentences for the distribution of cocaine, including far more severe punishment for distribution of crack—associated with blacks—than powder cocaine, associated with whites.

Few criticisms of the legislation could be heard en route to enactment. One senator insisted that crack had become a scapegoat distracting the public’s attention from the true causes of our social ills, arguing: “If we blame crime on crack, our politicians are off the hook. Forgotten are the failed schools, the malign welfare programs, the desolate neighborhoods, the wasted years. Only crack is to blame. One is tempted to think that if crack did not exist, someone somewhere would have received a Federal grant to develop it.”<sup>88</sup> Critical voices, however, were lonely ones.

Congress revisited drug policy in 1988. The resulting legislation was once again extraordinarily punitive, this time extending far beyond traditional criminal punishments and including new “civil penalties” for drug offenders. The new Anti-Drug Abuse Act authorized public housing authorities to evict any tenant who allows any form of drug-related criminal activity to occur on or near public housing premises and eliminated many federal benefits, including student loans, for anyone convicted of a drug offense. The act also expanded use of the death penalty for serious drug-related offenses and imposed new mandatory minimums for drug offenses, including a five-year mandatory minimum for simple possession of cocaine base—with no evidence

of intent to sell. Remarkably, the penalty would apply to first-time offenders. **The severity of this punishment was unprecedented in the federal system.** Until 1988, one year of imprisonment had been the maximum for possession of any amount of any drug. Members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) were mixed in their assessment of the new legislation—some believed the harsh penalties were necessary, others convinced that the laws were biased and harmful to African Americans. Ultimately the legislation passed by an overwhelming margin—346 to 11. Six of the negative votes came from the CBC.<sup>89</sup>

The War on Drugs proved popular among key white voters, particularly whites who remained resentful of black progress, civil rights enforcement, and affirmative action. Beginning in the 1970s, researchers found that racial attitudes—not crime rates or likelihood of victimization—are an important determinant of white support for “get tough on crime” and antiwelfare measures.<sup>90</sup> Among whites, those expressing the highest degree of concern about crime also tend to oppose racial reform, and their punitive attitudes toward crime are largely unrelated to their likelihood of victimization.<sup>91</sup> Whites, on average, are more punitive than blacks, despite the fact that blacks are far more likely to be victims of crime. Rural whites are often the most punitive, even though they are least likely to be crime victims.<sup>92</sup> The War on Drugs, cloaked in race-neutral language, offered whites opposed to racial reform a unique opportunity to express their hostility toward blacks and black progress, without being exposed to the charge of racism.

Reagan’s successor, President George Bush Sr., did not hesitate to employ implicit racial appeals, having learned from the success of other conservative politicians that subtle negative references to race could mobilize poor and working-class whites who once were loyal to the Democratic Party. Bush’s most famous racial appeal, the Willie Horton ad, featured a dark-skinned black man, a convicted murderer who escaped while on a work furlough and then raped and murdered a white woman in her home. The ad blamed Bush’s opponent, Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis, for the death of the white woman, because he approved the furlough program. For months, the ad played repeatedly on network news stations and was the subject of incessant political commentary. Though controversial, the ad was stunningly effective; it destroyed Dukakis’s chances of ever becoming president.

Once in the Oval Office, Bush stayed on message, opposing affirmative action and aggressive civil rights enforcement, and embracing the drug war

with great enthusiasm. In August 1989, President Bush characterized drug use as “the most pressing problem facing the nation.”<sup>93</sup> Shortly thereafter, a New York Times/CBS News Poll reported that 64 percent of those polled—the highest percentage ever recorded—now thought that drugs were the most significant problem in the United States.<sup>94</sup> This surge of public concern did not correspond to a dramatic shift in illegal drug activity, but instead was the product of a carefully orchestrated political campaign. The level of public concern about crime and drugs was only weakly correlated with actual crime rates, but highly correlated with political initiatives, campaigns, and partisan appeals.<sup>95</sup>

The shift to a general attitude of “toughness” toward problems associated with communities of color began in the 1960s, when the gains and goals of the Civil Rights Movement began to require real sacrifices on the part of white Americans, and conservative politicians found they could mobilize white racial resentment by vowing to crack down on crime. By the late 1980s, however, not only conservatives played leading roles in the get-tough movement, spouting the rhetoric once associated only with segregationists. Democratic politicians and policy makers were now attempting to wrest control of the crime and drug issues from Republicans by advocating stricter anticrime and antidrug laws—all in an effort to win back the so-called “swing voters” who were defecting to the Republican Party. Somewhat ironically, these “new Democrats” were joined by virulent racists, most notably the Ku Klux Klan, which announced in 1990 that it intended to “join the battle against illegal drugs” by becoming the “eyes and ears of the police.”<sup>96</sup> Progressives concerned about racial justice in this period were mostly silent about the War on Drugs, preferring to channel their energy toward defense of affirmative action and other perceived gains of the Civil Rights Movement.

In the early 1990s, resistance to the emergence of a new system of racialized social control collapsed across the political spectrum. A century earlier, a similar political dynamic had resulted in the birth of Jim Crow. In the 1890s, Populists buckled under the political pressure created by the Redeemers, who had successfully appealed to poor and working-class whites by proposing overtly racist and increasingly absurd Jim Crow laws. Now, a new racial caste system—mass incarceration—was taking hold, as politicians of every stripe competed with each other to win the votes of poor and working-class whites, whose economic status was precarious, at best, and who felt threatened by racial reforms. As had happened before, former allies

of African Americans—as much as conservatives—adopted a political strategy that required them to prove how “tough” they could be on “them,” the dark-skinned pariahs.

The results were immediate. As law enforcement budgets exploded, so did prison and jail populations. In 1991, the Sentencing Project reported that the number of people behind bars in the United States was unprecedented in world history, and that one fourth of young African American men were now under the control of the criminal justice system. Despite the jaw-dropping impact of the “get tough” movement on the African American community, neither the Democrats nor the Republicans revealed any inclination to slow the pace of incarceration.

To the contrary, in 1992, presidential candidate Bill Clinton vowed that he would never permit any Republican to be perceived as tougher on crime than he. True to his word, just weeks before the critical New Hampshire primary, Clinton chose to fly home to Arkansas to oversee the execution of Ricky Ray Rector, a mentally impaired black man who had so little conception of what was about to happen to him that he asked for the dessert from his last meal to be saved for him until the morning. After the execution, Clinton remarked, “I can be nicked a lot, but no one can say I’m soft on crime.”<sup>97</sup>

Once elected, Clinton endorsed the idea of a federal “three strikes and you’re out” law, which he advocated in his 1994 State of the Union address to enthusiastic applause on both sides of the aisle. The \$30 billion crime bill sent to President Clinton in August 1994 was hailed as a victory for the Democrats, who “were able to wrest the crime issue from the Republicans and make it their own.”<sup>98</sup> The bill created dozens of new federal capital crimes, mandated life sentences for some three-time offenders, and authorized more than \$16 billion for state prison grants and expansion of state and local police forces. Far from resisting the emergence of the new caste system, Clinton escalated the drug war beyond what conservatives had imagined possible a decade earlier. As the Justice Policy Institute has observed, “the Clinton Administration’s ‘tough on crime’ policies resulted in the largest increases in federal and state prison inmates of any president in American history.”<sup>99</sup>

Clinton eventually moved beyond crime and capitulated to the conservative racial agenda on welfare. This move, like his “get tough” rhetoric and policies, was part of a grand strategy articulated by the “new Democrats” to appeal to the elusive white swing voters. In so doing, Clinton—more than

any other president—created the current racial undercaste. He signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which “ended welfare as we know it,” replacing Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with a block grant to states called Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). TANF imposed a five-year lifetime limit on welfare assistance, as well as a permanent, lifetime ban on eligibility for welfare and food stamps for anyone convicted of a felony drug offense—including simple possession of marijuana.

Despite claims that these radical policy changes were driven by fiscal conservatism—i.e., the desire to end big government and slash budget deficits—the reality is that government was *not* reducing the amount of money devoted to the management of the urban poor. It was radically altering what the funds would be used for. The dramatic shift toward punitiveness resulted in a massive reallocation of public resources. By 1996, the penal budget doubled the amount that had been allocated to AFDC or food stamps.<sup>100</sup> Similarly, funding that had once been used for public housing was being redirected to prison construction. During Clinton’s tenure, Washington slashed funding for public housing by \$17 billion (a reduction of 61 percent) and boosted corrections by \$19 billion (an increase of 171 percent), “effectively making the construction of prisons the nation’s main housing program for the urban poor.”<sup>101</sup>

Clinton did not stop there. Determined to prove how “tough” he could be on “them,” Clinton also made it easier for federally assisted public housing projects to exclude anyone with a criminal history—an extraordinarily harsh step in the midst of a drug war aimed at racial and ethnic minorities. In his announcement of the “One Strike and You’re Out” Initiative, Clinton explained: “From now on, the rule for residents who commit crime and peddle drugs should be one strike and you’re out.”<sup>102</sup> The new rule promised to be “the toughest admission and eviction policy that HUD has implemented.”<sup>103</sup> Thus, for countless poor people, particularly racial minorities targeted by the drug war, public housing was no longer available, leaving many of them homeless—locked out not only of mainstream society, but their own homes.

The law and order perspective, first introduced during the peak of the Civil Rights Movement by rabid segregationists, had become nearly hegemonic two decades later. By the mid-1990s, no serious alternatives to the War on Drugs and “get tough” movement were being entertained in mainstream

political discourse. Once again, in response to a major disruption in the prevailing racial order—this time the civil rights gains of the 1960s—a new system of racialized social control was created by exploiting the vulnerabilities and racial resentments of poor and working-class whites. More than 2 million people found themselves behind bars at the turn of the twenty-first century, and millions more were relegated to the margins of mainstream society, banished to a political and social space not unlike Jim Crow, where discrimination in employment, housing, and access to education was perfectly legal, and where they could be denied the right to vote. The system functioned relatively automatically, and the prevailing system of racial meanings, identities, and ideologies already seemed natural. Ninety percent of those admitted to prison for drug offenses in many states were black or Latino, yet the mass incarceration of communities of color was explained in race-neutral terms, an adaptation to the needs and demands of the current political climate. The New Jim Crow was born.

## The Lockdown

We may think we know how the criminal justice system works. Television is overloaded with fictional dramas about police, crime, and prosecutors—shows such as *Law & Order*. These fictional dramas, like the evening news, tend to focus on individual stories of crime, victimization, and punishment, and the stories are typically told from the point of view of law enforcement. A charismatic police officer, investigator, or prosecutor struggles with his own demons while heroically trying to solve a horrible crime. He ultimately achieves a personal and moral victory by finding the bad guy and throwing him in jail. That is the made-for-TV version of the criminal justice system. It perpetuates the myth that the primary function of the system is to keep our streets safe and our homes secure by rooting out dangerous criminals and punishing them. These television shows, especially those that romanticize drug-law enforcement, are the modern-day equivalent of the old movies portraying happy slaves, the fictional gloss placed on a brutal system of racialized oppression and control.

Those who have been swept within the criminal justice system know that the way the system actually works bears little resemblance to what happens on television or in movies. Full-blown trials of guilt or innocence rarely occur; many people never even meet with an attorney; witnesses are routinely paid and coerced by the government; police regularly stop and search people for no reason whatsoever; penalties for many crimes are so severe that innocent people plead guilty, accepting plea bargains to avoid harsh mandatory sentences; and children, even as young as fourteen, are sent to adult prisons.

Rules of law and procedure, such as “guilt beyond a reasonable doubt” or “probable cause” or “reasonable suspicion,” can easily be found in court cases and law-school textbooks but are much harder to find in real life.

In this chapter, we shall see how the system of mass incarceration actually works. Our focus is the War on Drugs. The reason is simple: Convictions for drug offenses are the single most important cause of the explosion in incarceration rates in the United States. Drug offenses alone account for two-thirds of the rise in the federal inmate population and more than half of the rise in state prisoners between 1985 and 2000.<sup>1</sup> Approximately a half-million people are in prison or jail for a drug offense today, compared to an estimated 41,100 in 1980—an increase of 1,100 percent.<sup>2</sup> Drug arrests have tripled since 1980. As a result, more than 31 million people have been arrested for drug offenses since the drug war began.<sup>3</sup> To put the matter in perspective, consider this: there are more people in prisons and jails today just for drug offenses than were incarcerated for *all* reasons in 1980.<sup>4</sup> Nothing has contributed more to the systematic mass incarceration of people of color in the United States than the War on Drugs.

Before we begin our tour of the drug war, it is worthwhile to get a couple of myths out of the way. The first is that the war is aimed at ridding the nation of drug “kingpins” or big-time dealers. Nothing could be further from the truth. The vast majority of those arrested are *not* charged with serious offenses. In 2005, for example, four out of five drug arrests were for possession, and only one out of five was for sales. Moreover, most people in state prison for drug offenses have *no* history of violence or significant selling activity.<sup>5</sup>

The second myth is that the drug war is principally concerned with dangerous drugs. Quite to the contrary, arrests for marijuana possession—a drug less harmful than tobacco or alcohol—accounted for nearly 80 percent of the growth in drug arrests in the 1990s.<sup>6</sup> Despite the fact that most drug arrests are for nonviolent minor offenses, the War on Drugs has ushered in an era of unprecedented punitiveness.

The percentage of drug arrests that result in prison sentences (rather than dismissal, community service, or probation) has quadrupled, resulting in a prison-building boom the likes of which the world has never seen. In two short decades, between 1980 and 2000, the number of people incarcerated in our nation’s prisons and jails soared from roughly 300,000 to more than 2 million. By the end of 2007, more than 7 million Americans—or one in every 31 adults—were behind bars, on probation, or on parole.<sup>7</sup>

We begin our exploration of the drug war at the point of entry—arrest by the police—and then consider how the system of mass incarceration is structured to reward mass drug arrests and facilitate the conviction and imprisonment of an unprecedented number of Americans, whether guilty or innocent. In subsequent chapters, we will consider how the system specifically targets people of color and then relegates them to a second-class status analogous to Jim Crow. At this point, we simply take stock of the means by which the War on Drugs facilitates the roundup and lockdown of an extraordinary percentage of the U.S. population.

### Rules of the Game

Few legal rules meaningfully constrain the police in the War on Drugs. This may sound like an overstatement, but upon examination it proves accurate. The absence of significant constraints on the exercise of police discretion is a key feature of the drug war's design. It has made the roundup of millions of Americans for nonviolent drug offenses relatively easy.

With only a few exceptions, the Supreme Court has seized every opportunity to facilitate the drug war, primarily by eviscerating Fourth Amendment protections against unreasonable searches and seizures by the police. The rollback has been so pronounced that some commentators charge that a virtual “drug exception” now exists to the Bill of Rights. Shortly before his death, Justice Thurgood Marshall felt compelled to remind his colleagues that there is, in fact, “no drug exception” written into the text of the Constitution.<sup>8</sup>

Most Americans do not know what the Fourth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution actually says or what it requires of the police. It states, in its entirety:

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the person or things to be seized.

Courts and scholars agree that the Fourth Amendment governs all searches and seizures by the police and that the amendment was adopted in response

to the English practice of conducting arbitrary searches under general warrants to uncover seditious libels. The routine police harassment, arbitrary searches, and widespread police intimidation of those subject to English rule helped to inspire the American Revolution. Not surprisingly, then, preventing arbitrary searches and seizures by the police was deemed by the Founding Fathers an essential element of the U.S. Constitution. Until the War on Drugs, courts had been fairly stringent about enforcing the Fourth Amendment's requirements.

Within a few years after the drug war was declared, however, many legal scholars noted a sharp turn in the Supreme Court's Fourth Amendment jurisprudence. By the close of the Supreme Court's 1990–91 term, it had become clear that a major shift in the relationship between the citizens of this country and the police was under way. Justice Stevens noted the trend in a powerful dissent issued in *California v. Acevedo*, a case upholding the warrantless search of a bag locked in a motorist's trunk:

In the years [from 1982 to 1991], the Court has heard argument in 30 Fourth Amendment cases involving narcotics. In all but one, the government was the petitioner. All save two involved a search or seizure without a warrant or with a defective warrant. And, in all except three, the Court upheld the constitutionality of the search or seizure. In the meantime, the flow of narcotics cases through the courts has steadily and dramatically increased. No impartial observer could criticize this Court for hindering the progress of the war on drugs. On the contrary, decisions like the one the Court makes today will support the conclusion that this Court has become a loyal foot soldier in the Executive's fight against crime.<sup>9</sup>

The Fourth Amendment is but one example. Virtually all constitutionally protected civil liberties have been undermined by the drug war. The Court has been busy in recent years approving mandatory drug testing of employees and students, upholding random searches and sweeps of public schools and students, permitting police to obtain search warrants based on an anonymous informant's tip, expanding the government's wiretapping authority, legitimating the use of paid, unidentified informants by police and prosecutors, approving the use of helicopter surveillance of homes without a warrant, and allowing the forfeiture of cash, homes, and other property based on unproven allegations of illegal drug activity.

For our purposes here, we limit our focus to the legal rules crafted by the Supreme Court that grant law enforcement a pecuniary interest in the drug war and make it relatively easy for the police to seize people virtually anywhere—on public streets and sidewalks, on buses, airplanes and trains, or any other public place—and usher them behind bars. These new legal rules have ensured that anyone, virtually anywhere, for any reason, can become a target of drug-law enforcement activity.

### Unreasonable Suspicion

Once upon a time, it was generally understood that the police could not stop and search someone without a warrant unless there was probable cause to believe that the individual was engaged in criminal activity. That was a basic Fourth Amendment principle. In *Terry v. Ohio*, decided in 1968, the Supreme Court modified that understanding, but only modestly, by ruling that if and when a police officer observes unusual conduct by someone the officer reasonably believes to be dangerous and engaged in criminal activity, the officer “is entitled for the protection of himself and others in the area” to conduct a limited search “to discover weapons that might be used against the officer.”<sup>10</sup> Known as the stop-and-frisk rule, the *Terry* decision stands for the proposition that, so long as a police officer has “reasonable articulable suspicion” that someone is engaged in criminal activity *and* dangerous, it is constitutionally permissible to stop, question, and frisk him or her—even in the absence of probable cause.

Justice Douglas dissented in *Terry* on the grounds that “grant[ing] police greater power than a magistrate [judge] is to take a long step down the totalitarian path.”<sup>11</sup> He objected to the notion that police should be free to conduct warrantless searches whenever they suspect someone is a criminal, believing that dispensing with the Fourth Amendment’s warrant requirement risked opening the door to the same abuses that gave rise to the American Revolution. His voice was a lonely one. Most commentators at the time agreed that affording police the power and discretion to protect themselves during an encounter with someone they believed to be a dangerous criminal is not “unreasonable” under the Fourth Amendment.

History suggests Justice Douglas had the better of the argument. In the years since *Terry*, stops, interrogations, and searches of ordinary people

driving down the street, walking home from the bus stop, or riding the train, have become commonplace—at least for people of color. As Douglas suspected, the Court in *Terry* had begun its slide down a very slippery slope. Today it is no longer necessary for the police to have any reason to believe that people are engaged in criminal activity or actually dangerous to stop and search them. As long as you give “consent,” the police can stop, interrogate, and search you for any reason or no reason at all.

### Just Say No

The first major sign that the Supreme Court would not allow the Fourth Amendment to interfere with the prosecution of the War on Drugs came in *Florida v. Bostick*. In that case, Terrance Bostick, a twenty-eight-year-old African American, had been sleeping in the back seat of a Greyhound bus on his way from Miami to Atlanta. Two police officers, wearing bright green “raid” jackets and displaying their badges and a gun, woke him with a start. The bus was stopped for a brief layover in Fort Lauderdale, and the officers were “working the bus,” looking for persons who might be carrying drugs. Bostick provided them with his identification and ticket, as requested. The officers then asked to search his bag. Bostick complied, even though he knew his bag contained a pound of cocaine. The officers had no basis for suspecting Bostick of any criminal activity, but they got lucky. They arrested Bostick, and he was charged and convicted of trafficking cocaine.

Bostick’s search and seizure reflected what had become an increasingly common tactic in the War on Drugs: suspicionless police sweeps of buses in interstate or intrastate travel. The resulting “interviews” of passengers in these dragnet operations usually culminate in a request for “consent” to search the passenger’s luggage.<sup>12</sup> Never do the officers inform passengers that they are free to remain silent or to refuse to answer questions. By proceeding systematically in this manner, the police are able to engage in an extremely high volume of searches. One officer was able to search over three thousand bags in a nine-month period employing these techniques.<sup>13</sup> By and large, however, the hit rates are low. For example, in one case, a sweep of one hundred buses resulted in only seven arrests.<sup>14</sup>

On appeal, the Florida Supreme Court ruled in Bostick’s case that the police officer’s conduct violated the Fourth Amendment’s prohibition of unreasonable

searches and seizures. The Fourth Amendment, the court reasoned, forbids the police from seizing people and searching them without some individualized suspicion that they have committed or are committing a crime. The court thus overturned *Bostick's* conviction, ruling that the cocaine, having been obtained illegally, was inadmissible. It also broadly condemned “bus sweeps” in the drug war, comparing them to methods employed by totalitarian regimes:

The evidence in this case has evoked images of other days, under other flags, when no man traveled his nation’s roads or railways without fear of unwarranted interruption, by individuals who had temporary power in Government. . . . This is not Hitler’s Berlin, nor Stalin’s Moscow, nor is it white supremacist South Africa. Yet in Broward County, Florida, these police officers approach every person on board buses and trains (“that time permits”) and check identification, tickets, ask to search luggage—all in the name of “voluntary cooperation” with law enforcement.<sup>15</sup>

The U.S. Supreme Court reversed. The Court ruled that *Bostick's* encounter with the police was purely voluntary, and therefore he was not “seized” within the meaning of the Fourth Amendment. Even if *Bostick* did not feel free to leave when confronted by police at the back of the bus, the proper question, according to the Court, was whether “a reasonable person” in *Bostick's* shoes would have felt free to terminate the encounter. A reasonable person, the Court concluded, would have felt free to sit there and refuse to answer the police officer’s questions, and would have felt free to tell the officer “No, you can’t search my bag.” Accordingly, *Bostick* was not really “seized” within the meaning of the Fourth Amendment, and the subsequent search was purely consensual. The Court made clear that its decision was to govern all future drug sweeps, no matter what the circumstances of the targeted individual. Given the blanket nature of the ruling, courts have found police encounters to be consensual in truly preposterous situations. For example, a few years after *Bostick*, the District of Columbia Court of Appeals applied the ruling to a case involving a fourteen-year-old girl interrogated by the police, concluding that she must be held to the same reasonable-person standard.<sup>16</sup>

Prior to the *Bostick* decision, a number of lower courts had found absurd the notion that “reasonable people” would feel empowered to refuse to answer

questions when confronted by the police. As federal judge Prentiss Marshall explained, “The average person encountered will feel obliged to stop and respond. Few will feel that they can walk away or refuse to answer.”<sup>17</sup> Professor Tracey Maclin put it this way: “Common sense teaches that most of us do not have the chutzpah or stupidity to tell a police officer to ‘get lost’ after he has stopped us and asked us for identification or questioned us about possible criminal conduct.”<sup>18</sup> Other courts emphasized that granting police the freedom to stop, interrogate, and search anyone who consented would likely lead to racial and ethnic discrimination. Young black men would be the likely targets, rather than older white women. Justice Thurgood Marshall acknowledged as much in his dissent in *Bostick*, noting “the basis of the decision to single out particular passengers during a suspicionless sweep is less likely to be inarticulable than unspeakable.”<sup>19</sup>

Studies have shown that Maclin’s common sense is correct: the overwhelming majority of people who are confronted by police and asked questions respond, and when asked to be searched, they comply.<sup>20</sup> This is the case even among those, like *Bostick*, who have every reason to resist these tactics because they actually have something to hide. This is no secret to the Supreme Court. The Court long ago acknowledged that effective use of consent searches by the police depends on the ignorance (and powerlessness) of those who are targeted. In *Schneckloth v. Bustamonte*, decided in 1973, the Court admitted that if waiver of one’s right to refuse consent were truly “knowing, intelligent, and voluntary,” it would “in practice create serious doubt whether consent searches would continue to be conducted.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, consent searches are valuable tools for the police only because hardly anyone dares to say no.

### Poor Excuse

So-called consent searches have made it possible for the police to stop and search just about anybody walking down the street for drugs. All a police officer has to do in order to conduct a baseless drug investigation is ask to speak with someone and then get their “consent” to be searched. So long as orders are phrased as a question, compliance is interpreted as consent. “May I speak to you?” thunders an officer. “Will you put your arms up and stand

against the wall for a search?” Because almost no one refuses, drug sweeps on the sidewalk (and on buses and trains) are easy. People are easily intimidated when the police confront them, hands on their revolvers, and most have no idea the question can be answered, “No.” But what about all the people driving down the street? How do police extract consent from them? The answer: pretext stops.

Like consent searches, pretext stops are favorite tools of law enforcement in the War on Drugs. A classic pretext stop is a traffic stop motivated not by any desire to enforce traffic laws, but instead motivated by a desire to hunt for drugs in the absence of any evidence of illegal drug activity. In other words, police officers use minor traffic violations as an excuse—a pretext—to search for drugs, even though there is not a shred of evidence suggesting the motorist is violating drug laws. Pretext stops, like consent searches, have received the Supreme Court’s unequivocal blessing. Just ask Michael Whren and James Brown.

Whren and Brown, both of whom are African American, were stopped by plainclothes officers in an unmarked vehicle in June 1993. The police admitted to stopping Whren and Brown because they wanted to investigate them for imagined drug crimes, even though they did not have probable cause or reasonable suspicion such crimes had actually been committed. Lacking actual evidence of criminal activity, the officers decided to stop them based on a pretext—a traffic violation. The officers testified that the driver failed to use his turn signal and accelerated abruptly from a stop sign. Although the officers weren’t really interested in the traffic violation, they stopped the pair anyway because they had a “hunch” they might be drug criminals. It turned out they were right. According to the officers, the driver had a bag of cocaine in his lap—allegedly in plain view.

On appeal, Whren and Brown challenged their convictions on the ground that pretextual stops violate the Fourth Amendment. They argued that, because of the multitude of applicable traffic and equipment regulations, and the difficulty of obeying all traffic rules perfectly at all times, the police will nearly always have an excuse to stop someone and go fishing for drugs. Anyone driving more than a few blocks is likely to commit a traffic violation of some kind, such as failing to track properly between lanes, failing to stop at precisely the correct distance behind a crosswalk, failing to pause for precisely the right amount of time at a stop sign, or failing to use a turn signal

at the appropriate distance from an intersection. Allowing the police to use minor traffic violations as a pretext for baseless drug investigations would permit them to single out anyone for a drug investigation without any evidence of illegal drug activity whatsoever. That kind of arbitrary police conduct is precisely what the Fourth Amendment was intended to prohibit.

The Supreme Court rejected their argument, ruling that an officer's motivations are irrelevant when evaluating the reasonableness of police activity under the Fourth Amendment. It does not matter, the Court declared, *why* the police are stopping motorists under the Fourth Amendment, so long as some kind of traffic violation gives them an excuse. The fact that the Fourth Amendment was specifically adopted by the Founding Fathers to prevent arbitrary stops and searches was deemed unpersuasive. The Court ruled that the police are free to use minor traffic violations as a pretext to conduct drug investigations, even when there is no evidence of illegal drug activity.

A few months later, in *Ohio v. Robinette*, the Court took its twisted logic one step further. In that case, a police officer pulled over Robert Robinette, allegedly for speeding. After checking Robinette's license and issuing a warning (but no ticket), the officer then ordered Robinette out of his vehicle, turned on a video camera in the officer's car, and then asked Robinette whether he was carrying any drugs and would "consent" to a search. He did. The officer found a small amount of marijuana in Robinette's car, and a single pill, which turned out to be methamphetamine.

The Ohio Supreme Court, reviewing the case on appeal, was obviously uncomfortable with the blatant fishing expedition for drugs. The court noted that traffic stops were increasingly being used in the War on Drugs to extract "consent" for searches, and that motorists may not believe they are free to refuse consent and simply drive away. In an effort to provide some minimal protection for motorists, the Ohio court adopted a bright-line rule, that is, an unambiguous requirement that officers tell motorists they are free to leave before asking for consent to search their vehicles. At the very least, the justices reasoned, motorists should know they have the right to refuse consent and to leave, if they so choose.

The U.S. Supreme Court struck down this basic requirement as "unrealistic." In so doing, the Court made clear to all lower courts that, from now on, the Fourth Amendment should place no meaningful constraints on the police in the War on Drugs. No one needs to be informed of their rights dur-

ing a stop or search, and police may use minor traffic stops as well as the myth of “consent” to stop and search anyone they choose for imaginary drug crimes, whether or not any evidence of illegal drug activity actually exists.

One might imagine that the legal rules described thus far would provide more than enough latitude for the police to engage in an all-out, no-holds-barred war on drugs. But there’s more. Even if motorists, after being detained and interrogated, have the nerve to refuse consent to a search, the police can arrest them anyway. In *Atwater v. City of Lago Vista*, the Supreme Court held that the police may arrest motorists for minor traffic violations and throw them in jail (even if the statutory penalty for the traffic violation is a mere fine, not jail time).

Another legal option for officers frustrated by a motorist’s refusal to grant “consent” is to bring a drug-sniffing dog to the scene. This option is available to police in traffic stops, as well as to law enforcement officials confronted with resistant travelers in airports and in bus or train stations who refuse to give the police consent to search their luggage. The Supreme Court has ruled that walking a drug-sniffing dog around someone’s vehicle (or someone’s luggage) does not constitute a “search,” and therefore does not trigger Fourth Amendment scrutiny.<sup>22</sup> If the dog alerts to drugs, then the officer has probable cause to search without the person’s consent. Naturally, in most cases, when someone is told that a drug-sniffing dog will be called, the seized individual backs down and “consents” to the search, as it has become apparent that the police are determined to conduct the search one way or another.

### Kissing Frogs

Court cases involving drug-law enforcement almost always involve guilty people. Police usually release the innocent on the street—often without a ticket, citation, or even an apology—so their stories are rarely heard in court. Hardly anyone files a complaint, because the last thing most people want to do after experiencing a frightening and intrusive encounter with the police is show up at the police station where the officer works and attract more attention to themselves. For good reason, many people—especially poor people of color—fear police harassment, retaliation, and abuse. After having your car torn apart by the police in a futile search for drugs, or being

forced to lie spread-eagled on the pavement while the police search you and interrogate you for no reason at all, how much confidence do you have in law enforcement? Do you expect to get a fair hearing? Those who try to find an attorney to represent them in a lawsuit often learn that unless they have broken bones (and no criminal record), private attorneys are unlikely to be interested in their case. Many people are shocked to discover that what happened to them on the side of the road was not, in fact, against the law.

The inevitable result is that the people who wind up in front of a judge are usually guilty of some crime. The parade of guilty people through America's courtrooms gives the false impression to the public—as well as to judges—that when the police have a “hunch,” it makes sense to let them act on it. Judges tend to imagine the police have a sixth sense—or some kind of special police training—that qualifies them to identify drug criminals in the absence of any evidence. After all, they seem to be right so much of the time, don't they?

The truth, however, is that most people stopped and searched in the War on Drugs are perfectly innocent of any crime. The police have received no training that enhances the likelihood they will spot the drug criminals as they drive by and leave everyone else alone. To the contrary, tens of thousands of law enforcement officers have received training that guarantees precisely the opposite. The Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) trains police to conduct utterly unreasonable and discriminatory stops and searches throughout the United States.

Perhaps the best known of these training programs is Operation Pipeline. The DEA launched Operation Pipeline in 1984 as part of the Reagan administration's rollout of the War on Drugs. The federal program, administered by over three hundred state and local law enforcement agencies, trains state and local law enforcement officers to use pretextual traffic stops and consent searches on a large scale for drug interdiction. Officers learn, among other things, how to use a minor traffic violation as a pretext to stop someone, how to lengthen a routine traffic stop and leverage it into a search for drugs, how to obtain consent from a reluctant motorist, and how to use drug-sniffing dogs to obtain probable cause.<sup>23</sup> By 2000, the DEA had directly trained more than 25,000 officers in forty-eight states in Pipeline tactics and helped to develop training programs for countless municipal and state law enforcement agencies. In legal scholar Ricardo Bascuas's words, “Operation Pipeline is exactly what the Framers meant to prohibit: a

federally-run general search program that targets people without cause for suspicion, particularly those who belong to disfavored groups.”<sup>24</sup>

The program’s success requires police to stop “staggering” numbers of people in shotgun fashion.<sup>25</sup> This “volume” approach to drug enforcement sweeps up extraordinary numbers of innocent people. As one California Highway Patrol Officer said, “It’s sheer numbers. . . . You’ve got to kiss a lot of frogs before you find a prince.”<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, every year, tens of thousands of motorists find themselves stopped on the side of the road, fielding questions about imaginary drug activity, and then succumbing to a request for their vehicle to be searched—sometimes torn apart—in the search for drugs. Most of these stops and searches are futile. It has been estimated that 95 percent of Pipeline stops yield no illegal drugs.<sup>27</sup> One study found that up to 99 percent of traffic stops made by federally funded narcotics task forces result in no citation and that 98 percent of task-force searches during traffic stops are discretionary searches in which the officer searches the car with the driver’s verbal “consent” but has no other legal authority to do so.<sup>28</sup>

The “drug-courier profiles” utilized by the DEA and other law enforcement agencies for drug sweeps on highways, as well as in airports and train stations, are notoriously unreliable. In theory, a drug-courier profile reflects the collective wisdom and judgment of a law enforcement agency’s officials. Instead of allowing each officer to rely on his or her own limited experience and biases in detecting suspicious behavior, a drug-courier profile affords every officer the advantage of the agency’s collective experience and expertise. However, as legal scholar David Cole has observed, “in practice, the drug-courier profile is a scattershot hodgepodge of traits and characteristics so expansive that it potentially justifies stopping anybody and everybody.”<sup>29</sup> The profile can include traveling with luggage, traveling without luggage, driving an expensive car, driving a car that needs repairs, driving with out-of-state license plates, driving a rental car, driving with “mismatched occupants,” acting too calm, acting too nervous, dressing casually, wearing expensive clothing or jewelry, being one of the first to deplane, being one of the last to deplane, deplaning in the middle, paying for a ticket in cash, using large-denomination currency, using small-denomination currency, traveling alone, traveling with a companion, and so on. Even striving to obey the law fits the profile! The Florida Highway Patrol Drug Courier Profile cautioned troopers to be suspicious of “scrupulous obedience to traffic laws.”<sup>30</sup> As Cole points out, “such profiles do not so much focus an investigation as

provide law enforcement officials a ready-made excuse for stopping whomever they please.”<sup>31</sup>

The Supreme Court has allowed use of drug-courier profiles as guides for the exercise of police discretion. Although it has indicated that the mere fact that someone fits a profile does not automatically constitute reasonable suspicion justifying a stop, courts routinely defer to these profiles, and the Court has yet to object. As one judge said after conducting a review of drug-courier profile decisions: “Many courts have accepted the profile, as well as the Drug Enforcement Agency’s scattershot enforcement efforts, unquestioningly, mechanistically, and dispositively.”<sup>32</sup>

### It Pays to Play

Clearly, the rules of the game are designed to allow for the roundup of an unprecedented number of Americans for minor, nonviolent drug offenses. The number of annual drug arrests more than tripled between 1980 and 2005, as drug sweeps and suspicionless stops and searches proceeded in record numbers.<sup>33</sup>

Still, it is fair to wonder why the police would choose to arrest such an astonishing percentage of the American public for minor drug crimes. The fact that police are legally *allowed* to engage in a wholesale roundup of nonviolent drug offenders does not answer the question *why* they would choose to do so, particularly when most police departments have far more serious crimes to prevent and solve. Why would police prioritize drug-law enforcement? Drug use and abuse is nothing new; in fact, it was on the decline, not on the rise, when the War on Drugs began. So why make drug-law enforcement a priority now?

Once again, the answer lies in the system’s design. Every system of control depends for its survival on the tangible and intangible benefits that are provided to those who are responsible for the system’s maintenance and administration. This system is no exception.

At the time the drug war was declared, illegal drug use and abuse was not a pressing concern in most communities. The announcement of a War on Drugs was therefore met with some confusion and resistance within law enforcement, as well as among some conservative commentators.<sup>34</sup> The feder-

alization of drug crime violated the conservative tenet of states' rights and local control, as street crime was typically the responsibility of local law enforcement. Many state and local law enforcement officials were less than pleased with the attempt by the federal government to assert itself in local crime fighting, viewing the new drug war as an unwelcome distraction. Participation in the drug war required a diversion of resources away from more serious crimes, such as murder, rape, grand theft, and violent assault—all of which were of far greater concern to most communities than illegal drug use.

The resistance within law enforcement to the drug war created something of a dilemma for the Reagan administration. In order for the war to actually work—that is, in order for it to succeed in achieving its political goals—it was necessary to build a consensus among state and local law enforcement agencies that the drug war should be a top priority in their hometowns. The solution: cash. Huge cash grants were made to those law enforcement agencies that were willing to make drug-law enforcement a top priority. The new system of control is traceable, to a significant degree, to a massive bribe offered to state and local law enforcement by the federal government.

In 1988, at the behest of the Reagan administration, Congress revised the program that provides federal aid to law enforcement, renaming it the Edward Byrne Memorial State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance Program after a New York City police officer who was shot to death while guarding the home of a drug-case witness. The Byrne program was designed to encourage every federal grant recipient to help fight the War on Drugs. Millions of dollars in federal aid have been offered to state and local law enforcement agencies willing to wage the war. This federal grant money has resulted in the proliferation of narcotics task forces, including those responsible for highway drug interdiction. Nationally, narcotics task forces make up about 40 percent of all Byrne grant funding, but in some states as much as 90 percent of all Byrne grant funds go toward specialized narcotics task forces.<sup>35</sup> In fact, it is questionable whether any specialized drug enforcement activity would exist in some states without the Byrne program.

Other forms of valuable aid have been offered as well. The DEA has offered free training, intelligence, and technical support to state highway patrol agencies that are willing to commit their officers to highway drug interdiction. The Pentagon, for its part, has given away military intelligence and

millions of dollars in firepower to state and local agencies willing to make the rhetorical war a literal one.

Almost immediately after the federal dollars began to flow, law enforcement agencies across the country began to compete for funding, equipment, and training. By the late 1990s, the overwhelming majority of state and local police forces in the country had availed themselves of the newly available resources and added a significant military component to buttress their drug-war operations. According to the Cato Institute, in 1997 alone, the Pentagon handed over more than 1.2 million pieces of military equipment to local police departments.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, the *National Journal* reported that between January 1997 and October 1999, the agency handled 3.4 million orders of Pentagon equipment from over eleven thousand domestic police agencies in all fifty states. Included in the bounty were “253 aircraft (including six- and seven-passenger airplanes, UH-60 Blackhawk and UH-1 Huey helicopters, 7,856 M-16 rifles, 181 grenade launchers, 8,131 bulletproof helmets, and 1,161 pairs of night-vision goggles.”<sup>37</sup> A retired police chief in New Haven, Connecticut, told the *New York Times*, “I was offered tanks, bazookas, anything I wanted.”<sup>38</sup>

### Waging War

In barely a decade, the War on Drugs went from being a political slogan to an actual war. Now that police departments were suddenly flush with cash and military equipment earmarked for the drug war, they needed to make use of their new resources. As described in a Cato Institute report, paramilitary units (most commonly called Special Weapons and Tactics, or SWAT, teams) were quickly formed in virtually every major city to fight the drug war.<sup>39</sup>

SWAT teams originated in the 1960s and gradually became more common in the 1970s, but until the drug war, they were used rarely, primarily for extraordinary emergency situations such as hostage takings, hijackings, or prison escapes. That changed in the 1980s, when local law enforcement agencies suddenly had access to cash and military equipment specifically for the purpose of conducting drug raids.

Today, the most common use of SWAT teams is to serve narcotics warrants, usually with forced, unannounced entry into the home. In fact, in some

jurisdictions drug warrants are served *only* by SWAT teams—regardless of the nature of the alleged drug crime. As the *Miami Herald* reported in 2002, “Police say they want [SWAT teams] in case of a hostage situation or a Columbine-type incident, but in practice the teams are used mainly to serve search warrants on suspected drug dealers. Some of these searches yield as little as a few grams of cocaine or marijuana.”<sup>40</sup>

The rate of increase in the use of SWAT teams has been astonishing. In 1972, there were just a few hundred paramilitary drug raids per year in the United States. By the early 1980s, there were three thousand annual SWAT deployments, by 1996 there were thirty thousand, and by 2001 there were forty thousand.<sup>41</sup> The escalation of military force was quite dramatic in cities throughout the United States. In the city of Minneapolis, Minnesota, for example, its SWAT team was deployed on no-knock warrants thirty-five times in 1986, but in 1996 that same team was deployed for drug raids more than seven hundred times.<sup>42</sup>

Drug raids conducted by SWAT teams are not polite encounters. In countless situations in which police could easily have arrested someone or conducted a search without a military-style raid, police blast into people’s homes, typically in the middle of the night, throwing grenades, shouting, and pointing guns and rifles at anyone inside, often including young children. In recent years, dozens of people have been killed by police in the course of these raids, including elderly grandparents and those who are completely innocent of any crime. Criminologist Peter Kraska reports that between 1989 and 2001 at least 780 cases of flawed paramilitary raids reached the appellate level, a dramatic increase over the 1980s, when such cases were rare, or earlier, when they were nonexistent.<sup>43</sup> Many of these cases involve people killed in botched raids.

Alberta Spruill, a fifty-seven-year-old city worker from Harlem, is among the fallen. On May 16, 2003, a dozen New York City police officers stormed her apartment building on a no-knock warrant, acting on a tip from a confidential informant who told them a convicted felon was selling drugs on the sixth floor. The informant had actually been in jail at the time he said he’d bought drugs in the apartment, and the target of the raid had been arrested four days before, but the officers didn’t check and didn’t even interview the building superintendent. The only resident in the building was Alberta, described by friends as a “devout churchgoer.” Before entering, police deployed a flash-bang grenade, resulting in a blinding, deafening explosion. Alberta

went into cardiac arrest and died two hours later. The death was ruled a homicide but no one was indicted.

Those who survive SWAT raids are generally traumatized by the event. Not long after Spruill's death, Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields held hearings on SWAT practices in New York City. According to the *Village Voice*, "Dozens of black and Latino victims—nurses, secretaries, and former officers—packed her chambers airing tales, one more horrifying than the next. Most were unable to hold back tears as they described police ransacking their homes, handcuffing children and grandparents, putting guns to their heads, and being verbally (and often physically) abusive. In many cases, victims had received no follow-up from the NYPD, even to fix busted doors or other physical damage."<sup>44</sup>

Even in small towns, such as those in Dodge County, Wisconsin, SWAT teams treat routine searches for narcotics as a major battlefield in the drug war. In Dodge County, police raided the mobile home of Scott Bryant in April 1995, after finding traces of marijuana in his garbage. Moments after busting into the mobile home, police shot Bryant—who was unarmed—killing him. Bryant's eight-year-old son was asleep in the next room and watched his father die while waiting for an ambulance. The district attorney theorized that the shooter's hand had clenched in "sympathetic physical reaction" as his other hand reached for handcuffs. A spokesman for the Beretta company called this unlikely because the gun's double-action trigger was designed to prevent unintentional firing. The Dodge County sheriff compared the shooting to a hunting accident.<sup>45</sup>

SWAT raids have not been limited to homes, apartment buildings, or public housing projects. Public high schools have been invaded by SWAT teams in search of drugs. In November 2003, for example, police raided Stratford High School in Goose Creek, South Carolina. The raid was recorded by the school's surveillance cameras as well as a police camera. The tapes show students as young as fourteen forced to the ground in handcuffs as officers in SWAT team uniforms and bulletproof vests aim guns at their heads and lead a drug-sniffing dog to tear through their book bags. The raid was initiated by the school's principal, who was suspicious that a single student might be dealing marijuana. No drugs or weapons were found during the raid and no charges were filed. Nearly all of the students searched and seized were students of color.

The transformation from "community policing" to "military policing," began

in 1981, when President Reagan persuaded Congress to pass the Military Cooperation with Law Enforcement Act, which encouraged the military to give local, state, and federal police access to military bases, intelligence, research, weaponry, and other equipment for drug interdiction. That legislation carved a huge exception to the Posse Comitatus Act, the Civil War-era law prohibiting the use of the military for civilian policing. It was followed by Reagan's National Security Decision Directive, which declared drugs a threat to U.S. national security, and provided for yet more cooperation between local, state, and federal law enforcement. In the years that followed, Presidents George Bush and Bill Clinton enthusiastically embraced the drug war and increased the transfer of military equipment, technology, and training to local law enforcement, contingent, of course, on the willingness of agencies to prioritize drug-law enforcement and concentrate resources on arrests for illegal drugs.

The incentives program worked. Drug arrests skyrocketed, as SWAT teams swept through urban housing projects, highway patrol agencies organized drug interdiction units on the freeways, and stop-and-frisk programs were set loose on the streets. Generally, the financial incentives offered to local law enforcement to pump up their drug arrests have not been well publicized, leading the average person to conclude reasonably (but mistakenly) that when their local police departments report that drug arrests have doubled or tripled in a short period of time, the arrests reflect a surge in illegal drug activity, rather than an infusion of money and an intensified enforcement effort.

One exception is a 2001 report by the *Capital Times* in Madison, Wisconsin. The *Times* reported that as of 2001, sixty-five of the state's eighty-three local SWAT teams had come into being since 1980, and that the explosion of SWAT teams was traceable to the Pentagon's weaponry giveaway program, as well as to federal programs that provide money to local police departments for drug control. The paper explained that, in the 1990s, Wisconsin police departments were given nearly a hundred thousand pieces of military equipment. And although the paramilitary units were often justified to city councils and skeptical citizens as essential to fight terrorism or deal with hostage situations, they were rarely deployed for those reasons but instead were sent to serve routine search warrants for drugs and make drug arrests. In fact, the *Times* reported that police departments had an extraordinary incentive to use their new equipment for drug enforcement: the extra federal

funding the local police departments received was tied to antidrug policing. The size of the disbursements was linked to the number of city or county drug arrests. Each arrest, in theory, would net a given city or county about \$153 in state and federal funding. Non-drug-related policing brought no federal dollars, even for violent crime. As a result, when Jackson County, Wisconsin, quadrupled its drug arrests between 1999 and 2000, the county's federal subsidy quadrupled too.<sup>46</sup>

### Finders Keepers

As if the free military equipment, training, and cash grants were not enough, the Reagan administration provided law enforcement with yet another financial incentive to devote extraordinary resources to drug law enforcement, rather than more serious crimes: state and local law enforcement agencies were granted the authority to keep, for their own use, the vast majority of cash and assets they seize when waging the drug war. This dramatic change in policy gave state and local police an enormous stake in the War on Drugs—not in its success, but in its perpetual existence. Law enforcement gained a pecuniary interest not only in the forfeited property, but in the profitability of the drug market itself.

Modern drug forfeiture laws date back to 1970, when Congress passed the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act. The Act included a civil forfeiture provision authorizing the government to seize and forfeit drugs, drug manufacturing and storage equipment, and conveyances used to transport drugs. As legal scholars Eric Blumenson and Eva Nilsen have explained, the provision was justified as an effort “to forestall the spread of drugs in a way criminal penalties could not—by striking at its economic roots.”<sup>47</sup> When a drug dealer is sent to jail, there are many others ready and willing to take his place, but seizing the means of production, some legislators reasoned, may shut down the trafficking business for good. Over the years, the list of properties subject to forfeiture expanded greatly, and the required connection to illegal drug activity became increasingly remote, leading to many instances of abuse. But it was not until 1984, when Congress amended the federal law to allow federal law enforcement agencies to retain and use any and all proceeds from asset forfeitures, and to allow state and

local police agencies to retain up to 80 percent of the assets' value, that a true revolution occurred.

Suddenly, police departments were capable of increasing the size of their budgets, quite substantially, simply by taking the cash, cars, and homes of people suspected of drug use or sales. At the time the new rules were adopted, the law governing civil forfeiture was so heavily weighted in favor of the government that fully 80 percent of forfeitures went uncontested. Property or cash could be seized based on mere suspicion of illegal drug activity, and the seizure could occur without notice or hearing, upon an *ex parte* showing of mere probable cause to believe that the property had somehow been "involved" in a crime. The probable cause showing could be based on nothing more than hearsay, innuendo, or even the paid, self-serving testimony of someone with interests clearly adverse to the property owner. Neither the owner of the property nor anyone else need be charged with a crime, much less found guilty of one. Indeed, a person could be found innocent of any criminal conduct and the property could still be subject to forfeiture. Once the property was seized, the owner had no right of counsel, and the burden was placed on him to prove the property's "innocence." Because those who were targeted were typically poor or of moderate means, they often lacked the resources to hire an attorney or pay the considerable court costs. As a result, most people who had their cash or property seized did not challenge the government's action, especially because the government could retaliate by filing criminal charges—baseless or not.

Not surprisingly, this drug forfeiture regime proved highly lucrative for law enforcement, offering more than enough incentive to wage the War on Drugs. According to a report commissioned by the Department of Justice, between 1988 and 1992 alone, Byrne-funded drug task forces seized over \$1 billion in assets.<sup>48</sup> Remarkably, this figure does not include drug task forces funded by the DEA or other federal agencies.

The actual operation of drug forfeiture laws seriously undermines the usual rhetoric offered in support of the War on Drugs, namely that it is the big "kingpins" that are the target of the war. Drug-war forfeiture laws are frequently used to allow those with assets to buy their freedom, while drug users and small-time dealers with few assets to trade are subjected to lengthy prison terms. In Massachusetts, for example, an investigation by journalists found that on average a "payment of \$50,000 in drug profits won a 6.3 year

reduction in a sentence for dealers,” while agreements of \$10,000 or more bought elimination or reduction of trafficking charges in almost three-fourths of such cases.<sup>49</sup> Federal drug forfeiture laws are one reason, Blumenson and Nilsen note, “why state and federal prisons now confine large numbers of men and women who had relatively minor roles in drug distribution networks, but few of their bosses.”<sup>50</sup>

## The Shakedown

Quite predictably, the enormous economic rewards created by both the drug-war forfeiture and Byrne-grant laws has created an environment in which a very fine line exists between the lawful and the unlawful taking of other people’s money and property—a line so thin that some officers disregard the formalities of search warrants, probable cause, and reasonable suspicion altogether. In *United States v. Reese*, for example, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals described a drug task force completely corrupted by its dependence on federal drug money. Operating as a separate unit within the Oakland Housing Authority, the task force behaved, in the words of one officer, “more or less like a wolfpack,” driving up in police vehicles and taking “anything and everything we saw on the street corner.”<sup>51</sup> The officers were under tremendous pressure from their commander to keep their arrest numbers up, and all of the officers were aware that their jobs depended on the renewal of a federal grant. The task force commander emphasized that they would need statistics to show that the grant money was well spent and sent the task force out to begin a shift with comments like, “Let’s go out and kick ass,” and “Everybody goes to jail tonight for everything, right?”<sup>52</sup>

Journalists and investigators have documented numerous other instances in which police departments have engaged in illegal shakedowns, searches, and threats in search of forfeitable property and cash. In Florida, reporters reviewed nearly one thousand videotapes of highway traffic stops and found that police had used traffic violations as an excuse—or pretext—to confiscate “tens of thousands of dollars from motorists against whom there [was] no evidence of wrongdoing,” frequently taking the money without filing any criminal charges.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, in Louisiana, journalists reported that Louisi-

ana police engaged in massive pretextual stops in an effort to seize cash, with the money diverted to police department ski trips and other unauthorized uses.<sup>54</sup> And in Southern California, a Los Angeles Sheriff's Department employee reported that deputies routinely planted drugs and falsified police reports to establish probable cause for cash seizures.<sup>55</sup>

Lots of small seizures can be nearly as profitable, and require the expenditure of fewer investigative resources, than a few large busts. The Western Area Narcotics Task Force (WANT) became the focus of a major investigation in 1996 when almost \$66,000 was discovered hidden in its headquarters. The investigation revealed that the task force seized large amounts of money, but also small amounts, and then dispensed it freely, unconstrained by reporting requirements or the task force's mission. Some seizures were as small as eight cents. Another seizure of ninety-three cents prompted the local newspaper to observe that "once again the officers were taking whatever the suspects were carrying, even though by no stretch could pocket change be construed to be drug money."<sup>56</sup>

In 2000, Congress passed the Civil Asset Forfeiture Reform Act which was meant to address many of the egregious examples of abuse of civil forfeiture. Some of the most widely cited examples involved wealthy whites whose property was seized. One highly publicized case involved a reclusive millionaire, Donald Scott, who was shot and killed when a multiagency task force raided his two-hundred-acre Malibu ranch purportedly in search of marijuana plants. They never found a single marijuana plant in the course of the search. A subsequent investigation revealed that the primary motivation for the raid was the possibility of forfeiting Scott's property. If the forfeiture had been successful, it would have netted the law enforcement agencies about \$5 million in assets.<sup>57</sup> In another case, William Munnerlynn had his Learjet seized by the DEA after he inadvertently used it to transport a drug dealer. Though charges were dropped against him within seventy-two hours, the DEA refused to return his Learjet. Only after five years of litigation and tens of thousands of dollars in legal fees was he able to secure return of his jet. When the jet was returned, it had sustained \$100,000 worth of damage.<sup>58</sup> Such cases were atypical but got the attention of Congress.

The Reform Act resulted in a number of significant due-process changes, such as shifting the burden of proof onto the government, eliminating the requirement that an owner post a cost bond, and providing some minimal

hardship protections for innocent parties who stand to lose their homes. These reforms, however, do not go nearly far enough.

Arguably the most significant reform is the creation of an “innocent owner” defense. Prior to the Reform Act, the Supreme Court had ruled that the guilt or innocence of the property’s owner was irrelevant to the *property’s* guilt—a ruling based on the archaic legal fiction that a piece of property could be “guilty” of a crime. The act remedied this insanity to some extent; it provides an “innocent owner” defense to those whose property has been seized. However, the defense is seriously undermined by the fact that the government’s burden of proof is so low—the government need only establish by a “preponderance of the evidence” that the property was involved in the commission of a drug crime. This standard of proof is significantly lower than the “clear and convincing evidence” standard contained in an earlier version of the legislation, and it is far lower than the “proof beyond a reasonable doubt” standard for criminal convictions.

Once the government meets this minimal burden, the burden then shifts to the owner to prove that she “did not know of the conduct giving rise to the forfeiture” or that she did “all that reasonably could be expected under the circumstances to terminate such use of the property.” This means, for example, that a woman who knew that her husband occasionally smoked pot could have her car forfeited to the government because she allowed him to use her car. Because the “car” was guilty of transporting someone who had broken a drug law at some time, she could legally lose her only form of transportation, even though she herself committed no crime. Indeed, women who are involved in some relationship with men accused of drug crimes, typically husbands or boyfriends, are among the most frequent claimants in forfeiture proceedings.<sup>59</sup> Courts have not been forgiving of women in these circumstances, frequently concluding that “the nature and circumstances of the marital relationship may give rise to an inference of knowledge by the spouse claiming innocent ownership.”<sup>60</sup>

There are other problems with this framework, not the least of which being that the owner of the property is not entitled to the appointment of counsel in the forfeiture proceeding, unless he or she has been charged with a crime. The overwhelming majority of forfeiture cases do not involve any criminal charges, so the vast majority of people who have their cash, cars, or homes seized must represent themselves in court, against the federal government. Oddly, someone who has actually been charged with a crime is en-

titled to the appointment of counsel in civil forfeiture proceedings, but those whose property has been forfeited but whose conduct did not merit criminal charges are on their own. This helps to explain why up to 90 percent of forfeiture cases in some jurisdictions are not challenged. Most people simply cannot afford the considerable cost of hiring an attorney. Even if the cost is not an issue, the incentives are all wrong. If the police seized your car worth \$5,000, or took \$500 cash from your home, would you be willing to pay an attorney more than your assets are worth to get them back? If you haven't been charged with a crime, are you willing to risk the possibility that fighting the forfeiture might prompt the government to file criminal charges against you?

The greatest failure of the Reform Act, however, has nothing to do with one's due process rights once property has been seized in a drug investigation. Despite all of the new procedural rules and formal protections, the law does not address the single most serious problem associated with drug-war forfeiture laws: the profit motive in drug-law enforcement. Under the new law, drug busts motivated by the desire to seize cash, cars, homes, and other property are still perfectly legal. Law enforcement agencies are still allowed, through revenue-sharing agreements with the federal government, to keep seized assets for their own use. Clearly, so long as law enforcement is free to seize assets allegedly associated with illegal drug activity—without ever charging anyone with a crime—local police departments, as well as state and federal law enforcement agencies, will continue to have a direct pecuniary interest in the profitability and longevity of the drug war. The basic structure of the system remains intact.

None of this is to suggest that the financial rewards offered for police participation in the drug war are the only reason that law enforcement decided to embrace the war with zeal. Undoubtedly, the political and cultural context of the drug war—particularly in the early years—encouraged the roundup. When politicians declare a drug war, the police (our domestic warriors) undoubtedly feel some pressure to wage it. But it is doubtful that the drug war would have been launched with such intensity on the ground but for the bribes offered for law enforcement's cooperation.

Today the bribes may no longer be necessary. Now that the SWAT teams, the multiagency drug task forces, and the drug enforcement agenda have become a regular part of federal, state, and local law enforcement, it appears the drug war is here to stay. Funding for the Byrne-sponsored drug task

forces had begun to dwindle during President Bush's tenure, but Barack Obama, as a presidential candidate, promised to revive the Byrne grant program, claiming that it is "critical to creating the anti-drug task forces our communities need."<sup>61</sup> Obama honored his word following the election, drastically increasing funding for the Byrne grant program despite its abysmal track record. The Economic Recovery Act of 2009 included more than \$2 billion in new Byrne funding and an additional \$600 million to increase state and local law enforcement across the country.<sup>62</sup> Relatively little organized opposition to the drug war currently exists, and any dramatic effort to scale back the war may be publicly condemned as "soft" on crime. The war has become institutionalized. It is no longer a special program or politicized project; it is simply the way things are done.

### Legal Misrepresentation

So far, we have seen that the legal rules governing the drug war ensure that extraordinary numbers of people will be swept into the criminal justice system—arrested on drug charges, often for very minor offenses. But what happens after arrest? How does the design of the system help to ensure the creation of a massive undercaste?

Once arrested, one's chances of ever being truly free of the system of control are slim, often to the vanishing point. Defendants are typically denied meaningful legal representation, pressured by the threat of a lengthy sentence into a plea bargain, and then placed under formal control—in prison or jail, on probation or parole. Most Americans probably have no idea how common it is for people to be convicted without ever having the benefit of legal representation, or how many people plead guilty to crimes they did not commit because of fear of mandatory sentences.

Tens of thousands of poor people go to jail every year without ever talking to a lawyer, and those who do meet with a lawyer for a drug offense often spend only a few minutes discussing their case and options before making a decision that will profoundly affect the rest of their lives. As one public defender explained to the *Los Angeles Times*, "They are herded like cattle [into the courtroom lockup], up at 3 or 4 in the morning. Then they have to make decisions that affect the rest of their lives. You can imagine how stressful it is."<sup>63</sup>

More than forty years ago, in *Gideon v. Wainwright*, the Supreme Court ruled that poor people accused of serious crimes were entitled to counsel. Yet thousands of people are processed through America's courts annually either with no lawyer at all or with a lawyer who does not have the time, resources or, in some cases, the inclination to provide effective representation. In *Gideon*, the Supreme Court left it to state and local governments to decide how legal services should be funded. However, in the midst of a drug war, when politicians compete with each other to prove how "tough" they can be on crime and criminals, funding public defender offices and paying private attorneys to represent those accused of crimes has been a low priority.

Approximately 80 percent of criminal defendants are indigent and thus unable to hire a lawyer.<sup>64</sup> Yet our nation's public defender system is woefully inadequate. The most visible sign of the failed system is the astonishingly large caseloads public defenders routinely carry, making it impossible for them to provide meaningful representation to their clients. Sometimes defenders have well over one hundred clients at a time; many of these clients are facing decades behind bars or life imprisonment. Too often the quality of court-appointed counsel is poor because the miserable working conditions and low pay discourage good attorneys from participating in the system. And some states deny representation to impoverished defendants on the theory that somehow they should be able to pay for a lawyer, even though they are scarcely able to pay for food or rent. In Virginia, for example, fees paid to court-appointed attorneys for representing someone charged with a felony that carries a sentence of less than twenty years are capped at \$428. And in Wisconsin, more than 11,000 poor people go to court without representation every year because anyone who earns more than \$3,000 per year is considered able to afford a lawyer.<sup>65</sup> In Lake Charles, Louisiana, the public defender office has only two investigators for the 2,500 new felony cases and 4,000 new misdemeanor cases assigned to the office each year.<sup>66</sup> The NAACP Legal Defense Fund and the Southern Center for Human Rights in Atlanta sued the city of Gulfport, Mississippi, alleging that the city operated a "modern day debtor's prison" by jailing poor people who are unable to pay their fines and denying them the right to lawyers.

In 2004, the American Bar Association released a report on the status of indigent defense, concluding that, "All too often, defendants plead guilty, even if they are innocent, without really understanding their legal rights or

what is occurring. Sometimes the proceedings reflect little or no recognition that the accused is mentally ill or does not adequately understand English. The fundamental right to a lawyer that Americans assume applies to everyone accused of criminal conduct effectively does not exist in practice for countless people across the United States.”<sup>67</sup>

Even when people are charged with extremely serious crimes, such as murder, they may find themselves languishing in jail for years without meeting with an attorney, much less getting a trial. One extreme example is the experience of James Thomas, an impoverished day laborer in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, who was charged with murder in 1996, and waited eight and a half years for his case to go to trial. It never did. His mother finally succeeded in getting his case dismissed, after scraping together \$500 to hire an attorney, who demonstrated to the court that, in the time Thomas spent waiting for his case to go to trial, his alibi witness had died of kidney disease. Another Louisiana man, Johnny Lee Ball, was convicted of second-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole after meeting with a public defender for just eleven minutes before trial. If indicted murderers have a hard time getting meaningful representation, what are the odds that small-time drug dealers find themselves represented by a zealous advocate? As David Carroll, the research director for the National Legal Aid & Defender Association explained to *USA Today*, “There’s a real disconnect in this country between what people perceive is the state of indigent defense and what it is. I attribute that to shows like *Law & Order*, where the defendant says, ‘I want a lawyer,’ and all of a sudden Legal Aid appears in the cell. That’s what people think.”<sup>68</sup>

Children caught up in this system are the most vulnerable and yet are the least likely to be represented by counsel. In 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *In re Gault* that children under the age of eighteen have the right to legal assistance with any criminal charges filed against them. In practice, however, children routinely “waive” their right to counsel in juvenile proceedings. In some states, such as Ohio, as many as 90 percent of children charged with criminal wrongdoing are not represented by a lawyer. As one public defender explained, “The kids come in with their parents, who want to get this dealt with as quickly as possible, and they say, ‘You did it, admit it.’ If people were informed about what could be done, they might actually ask for help.”<sup>69</sup>

## Bad Deal

Almost no one ever goes to trial. Nearly all criminal cases are resolved through plea bargaining—a guilty plea by the defendant in exchange for some form of leniency by the prosecutor. Though it is not widely known, the prosecutor is the most powerful law enforcement official in the criminal justice system. One might think that judges are the most powerful, or even the police, but in reality the prosecutor holds the cards. It is the prosecutor, far more than any other criminal justice official, who holds the keys to the jailhouse door.

After the police arrest someone, the prosecutor is in charge. Few rules constrain the exercise of his or her discretion. The prosecutor is free to dismiss a case for any reason or no reason at all. The prosecutor is also free to file more charges against a defendant than can realistically be proven in court, so long as probable cause arguably exists—a practice known as overcharging.

The practice of encouraging defendants to plead guilty to crimes, rather than affording them the benefit of a full trial, has always carried its risks and downsides. Never before in our history, though, have such an extraordinary number of people felt compelled to plead guilty, even if they are innocent, simply because the punishment for the minor, nonviolent offense with which they have been charged is so unbelievably severe. When prosecutors offer “only” three years in prison when the penalties defendants could receive if they took their case to trial would be five, ten, or twenty years—or life imprisonment—only extremely courageous (or foolish) defendants turn the offer down.

The pressure to plead guilty to crimes has increased exponentially since the advent of the War on Drugs. In 1986, Congress passed The Anti-Drug Abuse Act, which established extremely long mandatory minimum prison terms for low-level drug dealing and possession of crack cocaine. The typical mandatory sentence for a first-time drug offense in federal court is five or ten years. By contrast, in other developed countries around the world, a first-time drug offense would merit no more than six months in jail, if jail time is imposed at all.<sup>70</sup> State legislatures were eager to jump on the “get tough” bandwagon, passing harsh drug laws, as well as “three strikes” laws mandating a life sentence for those convicted of any third offense. These mandatory

minimum statutory schemes have transferred an enormous amount of power from judges to prosecutors. Now, simply by charging someone with an offense carrying a mandatory sentence of ten to fifteen years or life, prosecutors are able to force people to plead guilty rather than risk a decade or more in prison. Prosecutors admit that they routinely charge people with crimes for which they technically have probable cause but which they seriously doubt they could ever win in court.<sup>71</sup> They “load up” defendants with charges that carry extremely harsh sentences in order to force them to plead guilty to lesser offenses and—here’s the kicker—to obtain testimony for a related case. Harsh sentencing laws encourage people to snitch.

The number of snitches in drug cases has soared in recent years, partly because the government has tempted people to “cooperate” with law enforcement by offering cash, putting them “on payroll,” and promising cuts of seized drug assets, but also because ratting out co-defendants, friends, family, or acquaintances is often the only way to avoid a lengthy mandatory minimum sentence.<sup>72</sup> In fact, under the federal sentencing guidelines, providing “substantial assistance” is often the only way defendants can hope to obtain a sentence below the mandatory minimum. The “assistance” provided by snitches is notoriously unreliable, as studies have documented countless informants who have fabricated stories about drug-related and other criminal activity in exchange for money or leniency in their pending criminal cases.<sup>73</sup> While such conduct is deplorable, it is not difficult to understand. Who among us would not be tempted to lie if it was the only way to avoid a forty-year sentence for a minor drug crime?

The pressure to plea-bargain and thereby “convict yourself” in exchange for some kind of leniency is not an accidental by-product of the mandatory-sentencing regime. The U.S. Sentencing Commission itself has noted that “the value of a mandatory minimum sentence lies not in its imposition, but in its value as a bargaining chip to be given away in return for the resource-saving plea from the defendant to a more leniently sanctioned charge.” Describing severe mandatory sentences as a bargaining chip is a major understatement, given its potential for extracting guilty pleas from people who are innocent of any crime.

It is impossible to know for certain how many innocent drug defendants convict themselves every year by accepting a plea bargain out of fear of mandatory sentences, or how many are convicted due to lying informants and paid witnesses, but reliable estimates of the number of innocent people cur-

rently in prison tend to range from 2 percent to 5 percent.<sup>74</sup> While those numbers may sound small (and probably are underestimates), they translate into thousands of innocent people who are locked up, some of whom will die in prison. In fact, if only 1 percent of America's prisoners are actually innocent of the crimes for which they have been convicted, that would mean tens of thousands of innocent people are currently languishing behind bars in the United States.

The real point here, however, is not that innocent people are locked up. That has been true since penitentiaries first opened in America. The critical point is that thousands of people are swept into the criminal justice system every year pursuant to the drug war without much regard for their guilt or innocence. The police are allowed by the courts to conduct fishing expeditions for drugs on streets and freeways based on nothing more than a hunch. Homes may be searched for drugs based on a tip from an unreliable, confidential informant who is trading the information for money or to escape prison time. And once swept inside the system, people are often denied attorneys or meaningful representation and pressured into plea bargains by the threat of unbelievably harsh sentences—sentences for minor drug crimes that are higher than many countries impose on convicted murderers. This is the way the roundup works, and it works this way in virtually every major city in the United States.

### Time Served

Once convicted of felony drug charges, one's chances of being released from the system in short order are slim, at best. The elimination of judicial discretion through mandatory sentencing laws has forced judges to impose sentences for drug crimes that are often longer than those violent criminals receive. When judges have discretion, they may consider a defendant's background and impose a lighter penalty if the defendant's personal circumstances—extreme poverty or experience of abuse, for example—warrant it. This flexibility—which is important in all criminal cases—is especially important in drug cases, as studies have indicated that many drug defendants are using or selling to support an addiction.<sup>75</sup> Referring a defendant to treatment, rather than sending him or her to prison, may well be the most prudent choice—saving government resources and potentially saving the defendant

from a lifetime of addiction. Likewise, imposing a short prison sentence (or none at all) may increase the chances that the defendant will experience successful re-entry. A lengthy prison term may increase the odds that re-entry will be extremely difficult, leading to relapse, and re-imprisonment. Mandatory drug sentencing laws strip judges of their traditional role of considering all relevant circumstances in an effort to do justice in the individual case.

Nevertheless, harsh mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenders have been consistently upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1982, the Supreme Court upheld forty years of imprisonment for possession and an attempt to sell 9 ounces of marijuana.<sup>76</sup> Several years later, in *Harmelin v. Michigan*, the Court upheld a sentence of *life imprisonment* for a defendant with no prior convictions who attempted to sell 672 grams (approximately 23 ounces) of crack cocaine.<sup>77</sup> The Court found the sentences imposed in those cases “reasonably proportionate” to the offenses committed—and not “cruel and unusual” in violation of the Eighth Amendment. This ruling was remarkable given that, prior to the Drug Reform Act of 1986, the longest sentence Congress had ever imposed for possession of any drug in any amount was one year. A life sentence for a first-time drug offense is unheard of in the rest of the developed world. Even for high-end drug crimes, most countries impose sentences that are measured in months, rather than years. For example, a conviction for selling a kilogram of heroin yields a mandatory ten-year sentence in U.S. federal court, compared with six months in prison in England.<sup>78</sup> Remarkably, in the United States, a life sentence is deemed perfectly appropriate for a first-time drug offender.

The most famous Supreme Court decision upholding mandatory minimum sentences is *Lockyer v. Andrade*.<sup>79</sup> In that case, the Court rejected constitutional challenges to sentences of twenty-five years without parole for a man who stole three golf clubs from a pro shop, and fifty years without parole for another man for stealing children’s videotapes from a Kmart store. These sentences were imposed pursuant to California’s controversial three strikes law, which mandates a sentence of twenty-five years to life for recidivists convicted of a third felony, no matter how minor. Writing for the Court’s majority, Justice Sandra Day O’Connor acknowledged that the sentences were severe but concluded that they are not grossly disproportionate to the offense, and therefore do not violate the Eighth Amendment’s ban on “cruel

and unusual” punishments. In dissent, Justice David H. Souter retorted, “If Andrade’s sentence [for stealing videotapes] is not grossly disproportionate, the principle has no meaning.” Similarly, counsel for one of the defendants, University of Southern California law professor Erwin Chemerinsky, noted that the Court’s reasoning makes it extremely difficult if not impossible to challenge any recidivist sentencing law: “If these sentences aren’t cruel and unusual punishment, what would be?”<sup>80</sup>

Mandatory sentencing laws are frequently justified as necessary to keep “violent criminals” off the streets, yet these penalties are imposed most often against drug offenders and those who are guilty of nonviolent crimes. In fact, under three-strikes regimes, such as the one in California, a “repeat offender” could be someone who had a single prior case decades ago. First and second strikes are counted by individual charges, rather than individual cases, so a single case can result in first, second, and even third strikes. The prosecutor has the discretion to charge related but individual charges as separate strikes. For example, imagine a young man arrested at age seventeen for a school yard fight tried and convicted as an adult. A few years later, he is struggling to survive, having been branded a felon and unable to find work. He passes two bad checks, desperate for cash. That’s three strikes: one for the prior assault and one for each bad check. His children will be raised without a father.

Or imagine a woman struggling with drug addiction, unable to obtain treatment, and desperate for money so she can feed her habit. She burglarizes a home and steals a television that she hopes to sell, but she is caught and arrested a few blocks away. She gets no jail time but also gets no drug treatment and now has a felony record. When she is caught with cocaine and heroin in her pocket a few months later, she has three strikes. One strike for each drug, and one for her prior felony. She will die in prison.

These examples may sound extreme, but real life can be worse. Sentences for each charge can run consecutively, so a defendant can easily face a sentence of fifty, seventy-five, or one hundred years to life arising from a single case. It is not uncommon for people to receive prison sentences of more than fifty years for minor crimes. In fact, fifty years to life was the actual sentence given to Leandro Andrade for stealing videotapes, a sentence upheld by the Supreme Court.

The clear majority of those subject to harsh mandatory minimum sentences in the federal system are drug offenders. Most are low-level, minor drug dealers—not “drug kingpins.” The stories are legion. Marcus Boyd was arrested after selling 3.9 grams of crack cocaine to a confidential informant working with a regional drug task force. At the time of his arrest, Marcus was twenty-four years old and had been addicted to drugs for six years, beginning shortly after his mother’s death and escalating throughout his early twenties. He met the informant through a close family friend, someone he trusted. At sentencing, the judge based the drug quantity calculation on testimony from the informant and another witness, who both claimed they bought crack from Marcus on other occasions. As a result, Marcus was held accountable for 37.4 grams (the equivalent of 1.3 ounces) based on the statements made by the informant and the other witness. He was sentenced to more than fourteen years in prison. His two children were six and seven years old at the time of his sentencing. They will be adults when he is released.<sup>81</sup>

Weldon Angelos is another casualty of the drug war. He will spend the rest of his life in prison for three marijuana sales. Angelos, a twenty-four-year-old record producer, possessed a weapon—which he did not use or threaten to use—at the time of the sales. Under federal sentencing guidelines, however, the sentencing judge was obligated to impose a fifty-five-year mandatory minimum sentence. Upon doing so, the judge noted his reluctance to send the young man away for life for three marijuana sales. He said from the bench, “The Court believes that to sentence Mr. Angelos to prison for the rest of his life is unjust, cruel, and even irrational.”<sup>82</sup>

Some federal judges, including conservative judges, have quit in protest of federal drug laws and sentencing guidelines. Face-to-face with those whose lives hang in the balance, they are far closer to the human tragedy occasioned by the drug war than the legislators who write the laws from afar. Judge Lawrence Irving, a Reagan appointee, noted upon his retirement: “If I remain on the bench, I have no choice but to follow the law. I just can’t, in good conscience, continue to do this.”<sup>83</sup> Other judges, such as Judge Jack Weinstein, publicly refused to take any more drug cases, describing “a sense of depression about much of the cruelty I have been a party to in connection with the ‘war on drugs.’”<sup>84</sup> Another Reagan appointee, Judge Stanley Marshall, told a reporter, “I’ve always been considered a fairly harsh sentencer, but it’s killing me that I’m sending so many low-level offenders away for all

this time.”<sup>85</sup> He made the statement after imposing a five-year sentence on a mother in Washington, D.C., who was convicted of “possession” of crack found by police in a locked box that her son had hidden in her attic. In California, reporters described a similar event:

U.S. District Judge William W. Schwarzer, a Republican appointee, is not known as a light sentencer. Thus it was that everyone in his San Francisco courtroom watched in stunned silence as Schwarzer, known for his stoic demeanor, choked with tears as he anguished over sentencing Richard Anderson, a first offender Oakland longshoreman, to ten years in prison without parole for what appeared to be a minor mistake in judgment in having given a ride to a drug dealer for a meeting with an undercover agent.<sup>86</sup>

Even Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy has condemned the harsh mandatory minimum sentences imposed on drug offenders. He told attorneys gathered for the American Bar Association’s 2003 annual conference: “Our [prison] resources are misspent, our punishments too severe, our sentences too loaded.” He then added, “I can accept neither the necessity nor the wisdom of federal mandatory minimum sentences. In all too many cases, mandatory minimum sentences are unjust.”<sup>87</sup>

### The Prison Label

Most people imagine that the explosion in the U.S. prison population during the past twenty-five years reflects changes in crime rates. Few would guess that our prison population leaped from approximately 350,000 to 2.3 million in such a short period of time due to changes in laws and policies, not changes in crime rates. Yet it has been changes in our laws—particularly the dramatic increases in the length of prison sentences—that have been responsible for the growth of our prison system, not increases in crime. One study suggests that the *entire* increase in the prison population from 1980 to 2001 can be explained by sentencing policy changes.<sup>88</sup>

Because harsh sentencing is a major cause of the prison explosion, one might reasonably assume that substantially reducing the length of prison

sentences would effectively dismantle this new system of control. That view, however, is mistaken. This system depends on the prison label, not prison time.

Once a person is labeled a felon, he or she is ushered into a parallel universe in which discrimination, stigma, and exclusion are perfectly legal, and privileges of citizenship such as voting and jury service are off-limits. It does not matter whether you have actually spent time in prison; your second-class citizenship begins the moment you are branded a felon. Most people branded felons, in fact, are not sentenced to prison. As of 2008, there were approximately 2.3 million people in prisons and jails, and a staggering 5.1 million people under “community correctional supervision”—i.e., on probation or parole.<sup>89</sup> Merely reducing prison terms does not have a major impact on the majority of people in the system. It is the badge of inferiority—the felony record—that relegates people for their entire lives, to second-class status. As described in chapter 4, for drug felons, there is little hope of escape. Barred from public housing by law, discriminated against by private landlords, ineligible for food stamps, forced to “check the box” indicating a felony conviction on employment applications for nearly every job, and denied licenses for a wide range of professions, people whose only crime is drug addiction or possession of a small amount of drugs for recreational use find themselves locked out of the mainstream society and economy—permanently.

No wonder, then, that most people labeled felons find their way back into prison. According to a Bureau of Justice Statistics study, about 30 percent of released prisoners in its sample were rearrested within six months of release.<sup>90</sup> Within three years, nearly 68 percent were rearrested at least once for a new offense.<sup>91</sup> Only a small minority are rearrested for violent crimes; the vast majority are rearrested for property offenses, drug offenses, and offenses against the public order.<sup>92</sup>

For those released on probation or parole, the risks are especially high. They are subject to regular surveillance and monitoring by the police and may be stopped and searched (with or without their consent) for any reason or no reason at all. As a result, they are far more likely to be arrested (again) than those whose behavior is not subject to constant scrutiny by law enforcement. Probationers and parolees are at increased risk of arrest because their lives are governed by additional rules that do not apply to everyone

else. Myriad restrictions on their travel and behavior (such as a prohibition on associating with other felons), as well as various requirements of probation and parole (such as paying fines and meeting with probation officers), create opportunities for arrest. Violation of these special rules can land someone right back in prison. In fact, that is what happens a good deal of the time.

The extraordinary increase in prison admissions due to parole and probation violations is due almost entirely to the War on Drugs. With respect to parole, in 1980, only 1 percent of all prison admissions were parole violators. Twenty years later, more than one third (35 percent) of prison admissions resulted from parole violations.<sup>93</sup> To put the matter more starkly: *About as many people were returned to prison for parole violations in 2000 as were admitted to prison in 1980 for all reasons.*<sup>94</sup> Of all parole violators returned to prison in 2000, only one-third were returned for a new conviction; two-thirds were returned for a technical violation such as missing appointments with a parole officer, failing to maintain employment, or failing a drug test.<sup>95</sup> In this system of control, failing to cope well with one's exile status is treated like a crime. If you fail, after being released from prison with a criminal record—your personal badge of inferiority—to remain drug free, or if you fail to get a job against all the odds, or if you get depressed and miss an appointment with your parole officer (or if you cannot afford the bus fare to take you there), you can be sent right back to prison—where society apparently thinks millions of Americans belong.

This disturbing phenomenon of people cycling in and out of prison, trapped by their second-class status, has been described by Loïc Wacquant as a “closed circuit of perpetual marginality.”<sup>96</sup> Hundreds of thousands of people are released from prison every year, only to find themselves locked out of the mainstream society and economy. Most ultimately return to prison, sometimes for the rest of their lives. Others are released again, only to find themselves in precisely the circumstances they occupied before, unable to cope with the stigma of the prison label and their permanent pariah status.

Reducing the amount of time people spend behind bars—by eliminating harsh mandatory minimums—will alleviate some of the unnecessary suffering caused by this system, but it will not disturb the closed circuit. Those labeled felons will continue to cycle in and out of prison, subject to perpetual

surveillance by the police, and unable to integrate into the mainstream society and economy. Unless the number of people who are labeled felons is dramatically reduced, and unless the laws and policies that keep ex-offenders marginalized from the mainstream society and economy are eliminated, the system will continue to create and maintain an enormous undercaste.

## The Color of Justice

Imagine you are Emma Faye Stewart, a thirty-year-old, single African American mother of two who was arrested as part of a drug sweep in Hearne, Texas.<sup>1</sup> All but one of the people arrested were African American. You are innocent. After a week in jail, you have no one to care for your two small children and are eager to get home. Your court-appointed attorney urges you to plead guilty to a drug distribution charge, saying the prosecutor has offered probation. You refuse, steadfastly proclaiming your innocence. Finally, after almost a month in jail, you decide to plead guilty so you can return home to your children. Unwilling to risk a trial and years of imprisonment, you are sentenced to ten years probation and ordered to pay \$1,000 in fines, as well as court and probation costs. You are also now branded a drug felon. You are no longer eligible for food stamps; you may be discriminated against in employment; you cannot vote for at least twelve years; and you are about to be evicted from public housing. Once homeless, your children will be taken from you and put in foster care.

A judge eventually dismisses all cases against the defendants who did not plead guilty. At trial, the judge finds that the entire sweep was based on the testimony of a single informant who lied to the prosecution. You, however, are still a drug felon, homeless, and desperate to regain custody of your children.

Now place yourself in the shoes of Clifford Runoalds, another African American victim of the Hearne drug bust.<sup>2</sup> You returned home to Bryan, Texas, to attend the funeral of your eighteen-month-old daughter. Before the funeral services begin, the police show up and handcuff you. You beg the

officers to let you take one last look at your daughter before she is buried. The police refuse. You are told by prosecutors that you are needed to testify against one of the defendants in a recent drug bust. You deny witnessing any drug transaction; you don't know what they are talking about. Because of your refusal to cooperate, you are indicted on felony charges. After a month of being held in jail, the charges against you are dropped. You are technically free, but as a result of your arrest and period of incarceration, you lose your job, your apartment, your furniture, and your car. Not to mention the chance to say good-bye to your baby girl.

This is the War on Drugs. The brutal stories described above are not isolated incidents, nor are the racial identities of Emma Faye Stewart and Clifford Runoalds random or accidental. In every state across our nation, African Americans—particularly in the poorest neighborhoods—are subjected to tactics and practices that would result in public outrage and scandal if committed in middle-class white neighborhoods. In the drug war, the enemy is racially defined. The law enforcement methods described in chapter 2 have been employed almost exclusively in poor communities of color, resulting in jaw-dropping numbers of African Americans and Latinos filling our nation's prisons and jails every year. We are told by drug warriors that the enemy in this war is a thing—drugs—not a group of people, but the facts prove otherwise.

Human Rights Watch reported in 2000 that, in seven states, African Americans constitute 80 to 90 percent of all drug offenders sent to prison.<sup>3</sup> In at least fifteen states, blacks are admitted to prison on drug charges at a rate from twenty to fifty-seven times greater than that of white men.<sup>4</sup> In fact, nationwide, the rate of incarceration for African American drug offenders dwarfs the rate of whites. When the War on Drugs gained full steam in the mid-1980s, prison admissions for African Americans skyrocketed, nearly quadrupling in three years, and then increasing steadily until it reached in 2000 a level *more than twenty-six times* the level in 1983.<sup>5</sup> The number of 2000 drug admissions for Latinos was twenty-two times the number of 1983 admissions.<sup>6</sup> Whites have been admitted to prison for drug offenses at increased rates as well—the number of whites admitted for drug offenses in 2000 was eight times the number admitted in 1983—but their relative numbers are small compared to blacks' and Latinos'.<sup>7</sup> Although the majority of illegal drug users and dealers nationwide are white, three-fourths of all people imprisoned for drug offenses have been black or Latino.<sup>8</sup> In recent

years, rates of black imprisonment for drug offenses have dipped somewhat—declining approximately 25 percent from their zenith in the mid-1990s—but it remains the case that African Americans are incarcerated at grossly disproportionate rates throughout the United States.<sup>9</sup>

There is, of course, an official explanation for all of this: crime rates. This explanation has tremendous appeal—before you know the facts—for it is consistent with, and reinforces, dominant racial narratives about crime and criminality dating back to slavery. The truth, however, is that rates and patterns of drug crime do not explain the glaring racial disparities in our criminal justice system. People of all races use and sell illegal drugs at remarkably similar rates.<sup>10</sup> If there are significant differences in the surveys to be found, they frequently suggest that whites, particularly white youth, are more likely to engage in illegal drug dealing than people of color.<sup>11</sup> One study, for example, published in 2000 by the National Institute on Drug Abuse reported that white students use cocaine at seven times the rate of black students, use crack cocaine at eight times the rate of black students, and use heroin at seven times the rate of black students.<sup>12</sup> That same survey revealed that nearly identical percentages of white and black high school seniors use marijuana. The National Household Survey on Drug Abuse reported in 2000 that white youth aged 12–17 are more than a third more likely to have sold illegal drugs than African American youth.<sup>13</sup> Thus the very same year Human Rights Watch was reporting that African Americans were being arrested and imprisoned at unprecedented rates, government data revealed that blacks were no more likely to be guilty of drug crimes than whites and that white youth were actually the *most likely* of any racial or ethnic group to be guilty of illegal drug possession and sales. Any notion that drug use among blacks is more severe or dangerous is belied by the data; white youth have about three times the number of drug-related emergency room visits as their African American counterparts.<sup>14</sup>

The notion that whites comprise the vast majority of drug users and dealers—and may well be more likely than other racial groups to commit drug crimes—may seem implausible to some, given the media imagery we are fed on a daily basis and the racial composition of our prisons and jails. Upon reflection, however, the prevalence of white drug crime—including drug dealing—should not be surprising. After all, where do whites get their illegal drugs? Do they all drive to the ghetto to purchase them from somebody standing on a street corner? No. Studies consistently indicate that drug markets,

like American society generally, reflect our nation's racial and socioeconomic boundaries. Whites tend to sell to whites; blacks to blacks.<sup>15</sup> University students tend to sell to each other.<sup>16</sup> Rural whites, for their part, don't make a special trip to the 'hood to purchase marijuana. They buy it from somebody down the road.<sup>17</sup> White high school students typically buy drugs from white classmates, friends, or older relatives. Even Barry McCaffrey, former director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, once remarked, if your child bought drugs, "it was from a student of their own race generally."<sup>18</sup> The notion that most illegal drug use and sales happens in the ghetto is pure fiction. Drug trafficking occurs there, but it occurs everywhere else in America as well. Nevertheless, black men have been admitted to state prison on drug charges at a rate that is more than thirteen times higher than white men.<sup>19</sup> The racial bias inherent in the drug war is a major reason that 1 in every 14 black men was behind bars in 2006, compared with 1 in 106 white men.<sup>20</sup> For young black men, the statistics are even worse. One in 9 black men between the ages of twenty and thirty-five was behind bars in 2006, and far more were under some form of penal control—such as probation or parole.<sup>21</sup> These gross racial disparities simply cannot be explained by rates of illegal drug activity among African Americans.

What, then, does explain the extraordinary racial disparities in our criminal justice system? Old-fashioned racism seems out of the question. Politicians and law enforcement officials today rarely endorse racially biased practices, and most of them fiercely condemn racial discrimination of any kind. When accused of racial bias, police and prosecutors—like most Americans—express horror and outrage. Forms of race discrimination that were open and notorious for centuries were transformed in the 1960s and 1970s into something un-American—an affront to our newly conceived ethic of colorblindness. By the early 1980s, survey data indicated that 90 percent of whites thought black and white children should attend the same schools, 71 percent disagreed with the idea that whites have a right to keep blacks out of their neighborhoods, 80 percent indicated they would support a black candidate for president, and 66 percent opposed laws prohibiting intermarriage.<sup>22</sup> Although far fewer supported specific policies designed to achieve racial equality or integration (such as busing), the mere fact that large majorities of whites were, by the early 1980s, supporting the antidiscrimination principle reflected a profound shift in racial attitudes. The margin of support for colorblind norms has only increased since then.

This dramatically changed racial climate has led defenders of mass incarceration to insist that our criminal justice system, whatever its past sins, is now largely fair and nondiscriminatory. They point to violent crime rates in the African American community as a justification for the staggering number of black men who find themselves behind bars. Black men, they say, have much higher rates of violent crime; that's why so many of them are locked up.

Typically, this is where the discussion ends.

The problem with this abbreviated analysis is that violent crime is *not* responsible for mass incarceration. As numerous researchers have shown, violent crime rates have fluctuated over the years and bear little relationship to incarceration rates—which have soared during the past three decades regardless of whether violent crime was going up or down.<sup>23</sup> Today violent crime rates are at historically low levels, yet incarceration rates continue to climb.

Murder convictions tend to receive a tremendous amount of media attention, which feeds the public's sense that violent crime is rampant and forever on the rise. But like violent crime in general, the murder rate cannot explain the growth of the penal apparatus. Homicide convictions account for a tiny fraction of the growth in the prison population. In the federal system, for example, homicide offenders account for 0.4 percent of the past decade's growth in the federal prison population, while drug offenders account for nearly 61 percent of that expansion.<sup>24</sup> In the state system, less than 3 percent of new court commitments to state prison typically involve people convicted of homicide.<sup>25</sup> As much as half of state prisoners are violent offenders, but that statistic can easily be misinterpreted. Violent offenders tend to get longer prison sentences than nonviolent offenders, and therefore comprise a much larger share of the prison population than they would if they had earlier release dates. In addition, state prison data excludes federal prisoners, who are overwhelmingly incarcerated for nonviolent offenses. As of September 2009, only 7.9 percent of federal prisoners were convicted of violent crimes.<sup>26</sup>

The most important fact to keep in mind, however, is this: debates about prison statistics ignore the fact that most people who are under correctional control today are not in prison. As noted earlier, of the nearly 7.3 million people currently under correctional control, only 1.6 million are in prison.<sup>27</sup> This caste system extends far beyond prison walls and governs millions of

people who are on probation and parole, primarily for nonviolent offenses. They have been swept into the system, branded criminals or felons, and ushered into a permanent second-class status—acquiring records that will follow them for life. Probationers are the clear majority of those who are under community supervision (84 percent), and only 19 percent of them were convicted of a violent offense.<sup>28</sup> The most common offense for which probationers are under supervision is a drug offense.<sup>29</sup> Even if the analysis is limited to people convicted of felonies—thus excluding extremely minor crimes and misdemeanors—nonviolent offenders still predominate. Only about a quarter of felony defendants in large urban counties were charged with a violent offense in 2006.<sup>30</sup> In cities such as Chicago, criminal courts are clogged with low-level drug cases. In one study, 72 percent of criminal cases in Cook County (Chicago) had a drug charge, and 70 percent of them were charged as class 4 felony possession (the lowest-level felony charge).<sup>31</sup>

None of this is to suggest that we ought not be concerned about violent crime in impoverished urban communities. We should care deeply, and as discussed in the final chapter, we must come to understand the ways in which mass imprisonment increases—not decreases—the likelihood of violence in urban communities. But at the same time, we ought not be misled by those who insist that violent crime has driven the rise of this unprecedented system of racial and social control. The uncomfortable reality is that arrests and convictions for drug offenses—not violent crime—have propelled mass incarceration. In many states, including Colorado and Maryland, drug offenders now constitute the single largest category of people admitted to prison.<sup>32</sup> People of color are convicted of drug offenses at rates out of all proportion to their drug crimes, a fact that has greatly contributed to the emergence of a vast new racial undercaste.

These facts may still leave some readers unsatisfied. The idea that the criminal justice system discriminates in such a terrific fashion when few people openly express or endorse racial discrimination may seem far-fetched, if not absurd. How could the War on Drugs operate in a discriminatory manner, on such a large scale, when hardly anyone advocates or engages in explicit race discrimination? That question is the subject of this chapter. As we shall see, despite the colorblind rhetoric and fanfare of recent years, the design of the drug war effectively guarantees that those who are swept into the nation's new undercaste are largely black and brown.

This sort of claim invites skepticism. Nonracial explanations and excuses for the systematic mass incarceration of people of color are plentiful. It is the genius of the new system of control that it can always be defended on nonracial grounds, given the rarity of a noose or a racial slur in connection with any particular criminal case. Moreover, because blacks and whites are almost never similarly situated (given extreme racial segregation in housing and disparate life experiences), trying to “control for race” in an effort to evaluate whether the mass incarceration of people of color is really about race or something else—anything else—is difficult. But it is not impossible.

A bit of common sense is overdue in public discussions about racial bias in the criminal justice system. The great debate over whether black men have been targeted by the criminal justice system or unfairly treated in the War on Drugs often overlooks the obvious. What is painfully obvious when one steps back from individual cases and specific policies is that the system of mass incarceration operates with stunning efficiency to sweep people of color off the streets, lock them in cages, and then release them into an inferior second-class status. Nowhere is this more true than in the War on Drugs.

The central question, then, is *how* exactly does a formally colorblind criminal justice system achieve such racially discriminatory results? Rather easily, it turns out. The process occurs in two stages. The first step is to grant law enforcement officials extraordinary discretion regarding whom to stop, search, arrest, and charge for drug offenses, thus ensuring that conscious and unconscious racial beliefs and stereotypes will be given free rein. Unbridled discretion inevitably creates huge racial disparities. Then, the damning step: Close the courthouse doors to all claims by defendants and private litigants that the criminal justice system operates in racially discriminatory fashion. Demand that anyone who wants to challenge racial bias in the system offer, in advance, clear proof that the racial disparities are the product of intentional racial discrimination—i.e., the work of a bigot. This evidence will almost never be available in the era of colorblindness, because everyone knows—but does not say—that the enemy in the War on Drugs can be identified by race. This simple design has helped to produce one of the most extraordinary systems of racialized social control the world has ever seen.

## Picking and Choosing—The Role of Discretion

Chapter 2 described the first step in some detail, including the legal rules that grant police the discretion and authority to stop, interrogate, and search anyone, anywhere, provided they get “consent” from the targeted individual. It also examined the legal framework that affords prosecutors extraordinary discretion to charge or not charge, plea bargain or not, and load up defendants with charges carrying the threat of harsh mandatory sentences, in order to force guilty pleas, even in cases in which the defendants may well be innocent. These rules have made it possible for law enforcement agencies to boost dramatically their rates of drug arrests and convictions, even in communities where drug crime is stable or declining.<sup>33</sup> But that is not all. These rules have also guaranteed racially discriminatory results.

The reason is this: Drug-law enforcement is *unlike* most other types of law enforcement. When a violent crime or a robbery or a trespass occurs, someone usually calls the police. There is a clear victim and perpetrator. Someone is hurt or harmed in some way and wants the offender punished. But with drug crime, neither the purchaser of the drugs nor the seller has any incentive to contact law enforcement. It is consensual activity. Equally important, it is popular. The clear majority of Americans of all races have violated drug laws in their lifetime. In fact, in any given year, more than one in ten Americans violate drug laws. But due to resource constraints (and the politics of the drug war), only a small fraction are arrested, convicted, and incarcerated. In 2002, for example, there were 19.5 million illicit drug users, compared to 1.5 million drug arrests and 175,000 people admitted to prison for a drug offense.<sup>34</sup>

The ubiquity of illegal drug activity, combined with its consensual nature, requires a far more proactive approach by law enforcement than what is required to address ordinary street crime. It is impossible for law enforcement to identify and arrest every drug criminal. Strategic choices must be made about whom to target and what tactics to employ. Police and prosecutors did not declare the War on Drugs—and some initially opposed it—but once the financial incentives for waging the war became too attractive to ignore, law enforcement agencies had to ask themselves, if we’re going to wage this war, where should it be fought and who should be taken prisoner?

That question was not difficult to answer, given the political and social context. As discussed in chapter 1, the Reagan administration launched a

media campaign a few years after the drug war was announced in an effort to publicize horror stories involving black crack users and crack dealers in ghetto communities. Although crack cocaine had not yet hit the streets when the War on Drugs was declared in 1982, its appearance a few years later created the perfect opportunity for the Reagan administration to build support for its new war. Drug use, once considered a private, public-health matter, was reframed through political rhetoric and media imagery as a grave threat to the national order.

Jimmie Reeves and Richard Campbell show in their research how the media imagery surrounding cocaine changed as the practice of smoking cocaine came to be associated with poor blacks.<sup>35</sup> Early in the 1980s, the typical cocaine-related story focused on white recreational users who snorted the drug in its powder form. These stories generally relied on news sources associated with the drug treatment industry, such as rehabilitation clinics, and emphasized the possibility of recovery. By 1985, however, as the War on Drugs moved into high gear, this frame was supplanted by a new “siege paradigm,” in which transgressors were poor, nonwhite users and dealers of crack cocaine. Law enforcement officials assumed the role of drug “experts,” emphasizing the need for law and order responses—a crackdown on those associated with the drug. These findings are consistent with numerous other studies, including a study of network television news from 1990 and 1991, which found that a predictable “us against them” frame was used in the news stories, with “us” being white, suburban America, and “them” being black Americans and a few corrupted whites.<sup>36</sup>

The media bonanza inspired by the administration’s campaign solidified in the public imagination the image of the black drug criminal. Although explicitly racial political appeals remained rare, the calls for “war” at a time when the media was saturated with images of black drug crime left little doubt about who the enemy was in the War on Drugs and exactly what he looked like. Jerome Miller, the former executive director of the National Center for Institutions and Alternatives, described the dynamic this way: “There are certain code words that allow you never to have to say ‘race,’ but everybody knows that’s what you mean and ‘crime’ is one of those. . . . So when we talk about locking up more and more people, what we’re really talking about is locking up more and more black men.”<sup>37</sup> Another commentator noted, “It is unnecessary to speak directly of race [today] because speaking about crime is talking about race.”<sup>38</sup> Indeed, not long after the drug war was

ramped up in the media and political discourse, almost no one imagined that drug criminals could be anything other than black.

A survey was conducted in 1995 asking the following question: “Would you close your eyes for a second, envision a drug user, and describe that person to me?” The startling results were published in the *Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education*. Ninety-five percent of respondents pictured a black drug user, while only 5 percent imagined other racial groups.<sup>39</sup> These results contrast sharply with the reality of drug crime in America. African Americans constituted only 15 percent of current drug users in 1995, and they constitute roughly the same percentage today. Whites constituted the vast majority of drug users then (and now), but almost no one pictured a white person when asked to imagine what a drug user looks like. The same group of respondents also perceived the typical drug trafficker as black.

There is no reason to believe that the survey results would have been any different if police officers or prosecutors—rather than the general public—had been the respondents. Law enforcement officials, no less than the rest of us, have been exposed to the racially charged political rhetoric and media imagery associated with the drug war. In fact, for nearly three decades, news stories regarding virtually *all* street crime have disproportionately featured African American offenders. One study suggests that the standard crime news “script” is so prevalent and so thoroughly racialized that viewers imagine a black perpetrator even when none exists. In that study, 60 percent of viewers who saw a story with no image falsely recalled seeing one, and 70 percent of those viewers believed the perpetrator to be African American.<sup>40</sup>

Decades of cognitive bias research demonstrates that both unconscious and conscious biases lead to discriminatory actions, even when an individual does not want to discriminate.<sup>41</sup> The quotation commonly attributed to Nietzsche, that “there is no immaculate perception,” perfectly captures how cognitive schemas—thought structures—influence what we notice and how the things we notice get interpreted.<sup>42</sup> Studies have shown that racial schemas operate not only as part of conscious, rational deliberations, but also automatically—without conscious awareness or intent.<sup>43</sup> One study, for example, involved a video game that placed photographs of white and black individuals holding either a gun or other object (such as a wallet, soda can, or cell phone) into various photographic backgrounds. Participants were told to decide as quickly as possible whether to shoot the target. Consistent with earlier studies, participants were more likely to mistake a black target as

armed when he was not, and mistake a white target as unarmed, when in fact he was armed.<sup>44</sup> This pattern of discrimination reflected automatic, unconscious thought processes, not careful deliberations.

Most striking, perhaps, is the overwhelming evidence that implicit bias measures are disassociated from explicit bias measures.<sup>45</sup> In other words, the fact that you may honestly believe that you are not biased against African Americans, and that you may even have black friends or relatives, does not mean that you are free from unconscious bias. Implicit bias tests may still show that you hold negative attitudes and stereotypes about blacks, even though you do not believe you do and do not want to.<sup>46</sup> In the study described above, for example, black participants showed an amount of “shooter bias” similar to that shown by whites.<sup>47</sup> Not surprisingly, people who have the greatest explicit bias (as measured by self-reported answers to survey questions) against a racial group tend also to have the greatest implicit bias against them, and vice versa.<sup>48</sup> Yet there is often a weak correlation between degrees of explicit and implicit bias; many people who think they are not biased prove when tested to have relatively high levels of bias.<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately, a fairly consistent finding is that punitiveness and hostility almost always increase when people are primed—even subliminally—with images or verbal cues associated with African Americans. In fact, studies indicate that people become increasingly harsh when an alleged criminal is darker and more “stereotypically black”; they are more lenient when the accused is lighter and appears more stereotypically white. This is true of jurors as well as law enforcement officers.<sup>50</sup>

Viewed as a whole, the relevant research by cognitive and social psychologists to date suggests that racial bias in the drug war was *inevitable*, once a public consensus was constructed by political and media elites that drug crime is black and brown. Once blackness and crime, especially drug crime, became conflated in the public consciousness, the “criminalblackman,” as termed by legal scholar Kathryn Russell, would inevitably become the primary target of law enforcement.<sup>51</sup> Some discrimination would be conscious and deliberate, as many honestly and consciously would believe that black men deserve extra scrutiny and harsher treatment. Much racial bias, though, would operate unconsciously and automatically—even among law enforcement officials genuinely committed to equal treatment under the law.

Whether or not one believes racial discrimination in the drug war was inevitable, it should have been glaringly obvious in the 1980s and 1990s that

an extraordinarily high *risk* of racial bias in the administration of criminal justice was present, given the way in which all crime had been framed in the media and in political discourse. Awareness of this risk did not require intimate familiarity with cognitive bias research. Anyone possessing a television set during this period would likely have had some awareness of the extent to which black men had been demonized in the War on Drugs.

The risk that African Americans would be unfairly targeted should have been of special concern to the U.S. Supreme Court—the one branch of government charged with the responsibility of protecting “discrete and insular minorities” from the excesses of majoritarian democracy, and guaranteeing constitutional rights for groups deemed unpopular or subject to prejudice.<sup>52</sup> Yet when the time came for the Supreme Court to devise the legal rules that would govern the War on Drugs, the Court adopted rules that would *maximize*—not minimize—the amount of racial discrimination that would likely occur. It then closed the courthouse doors to claims of racial bias.

*Whren v. United States* is a case in point. As noted in chapter 2, the Court held in *Whren* that police officers are free to use minor traffic violations as an excuse to stop motorists for drug investigations—even when there is no evidence whatsoever that the motorist has engaged in drug crime. So long as a minor traffic violation—such as failing to use a turn signal, exceeding the speed limit by a mile or two, tracking improperly between the lines, or stopping on a pedestrian walkway—can be identified, police are free to stop motorists for the purpose of engaging in a fishing expedition for drugs. Such police conduct, the Court concluded, does not violate the Fourth Amendment’s ban on “unreasonable searches and seizures.”<sup>53</sup>

For good reason, the petitioners in *Whren* argued that granting police officers such broad discretion to investigate virtually anyone for drug crimes created a high risk that police would exercise their discretion in a racially discriminatory manner. With no requirement that any evidence of drug activity actually be present before launching a drug investigation, police officers’ snap judgments regarding who seems like a drug criminal would likely be influenced by prevailing racial stereotypes and bias. They urged the Court to prohibit the police from stopping motorists for the purpose of drug investigations unless the officers actually had reason to believe a motorist was committing, or had committed, a drug crime. Failing to do so, they argued, was unreasonable under the Fourth Amendment and would expose African Americans to a high risk of discriminatory stops and searches.

Not only did the Court reject the petitioners' central claim—that using traffic stops as a pretext for drug investigations is unconstitutional—it ruled that claims of racial bias could not be brought under the Fourth Amendment. In other words, the Court barred any victim of race discrimination by the police *from even alleging a claim of racial bias* under the Fourth Amendment. According to the Court, whether or not police discriminate on the basis of race when making traffic stops is irrelevant to a consideration of whether their conduct is “reasonable” under the Fourth Amendment.

The Court did offer one caveat, however. It indicated that victims of race discrimination could still state a claim under the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which guarantees “equal treatment under the laws.” This suggestion may have been reassuring to those unfamiliar with the Court's equal protection jurisprudence. But for those who have actually tried to prove race discrimination under the Fourteenth Amendment, the Court's remark amounted to cruel irony. As we shall see below, the Supreme Court has made it virtually impossible to challenge racial bias in the criminal justice system under the Fourteenth Amendment, and it has barred litigation of such claims under federal civil rights laws as well.

### Closing the Courthouse Doors—*McCleskey v. Kemp*

First, consider sentencing. In 1987, when media hysteria regarding black drug crime was at fever pitch and the evening news was saturated with images of black criminals shackled in courtrooms, the Supreme Court ruled in *McCleskey v. Kemp* that racial bias in sentencing, even if shown through credible statistical evidence, could not be challenged under the Fourteenth Amendment in the absence of clear evidence of conscious, discriminatory intent. On its face, the case appeared to be a straightforward challenge to Georgia's death penalty scheme. Once the Court's opinion was released, however, it became clear the case was about much more than the death penalty. The real issue at hand was whether—and to what extent—the Supreme Court would tolerate racial bias in the criminal justice system as a whole. The Court's answer was that racial bias would be tolerated—virtually to any degree—so long as no one admitted it.

Warren McCleskey was a black man facing the death penalty for killing a white police officer during an armed robbery in Georgia. Represented by the

NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, McCleskey challenged his death sentence on the grounds that Georgia's death penalty scheme was infected with racial bias and thus violated the Fourteenth and Eighth Amendments. In support of his claim, he offered an exhaustive study of more than two thousand murder cases in Georgia. The study was known as the Baldus study—named after Professor David Baldus, who was its lead author. The study found that defendants charged with killing white victims received the death penalty eleven times more often than defendants charged with killing black victims. Georgia prosecutors seemed largely to blame for the disparity; they sought the death penalty in 70 percent of cases involving black defendants and white victims, but only 19 percent of cases involving white defendants and black victims.<sup>54</sup>

Sensitive to the fact that numerous factors besides race can influence the decision making of prosecutors, judges, and juries, Baldus and his colleagues subjected the raw data to highly sophisticated statistical analysis to see if nonracial factors might explain the disparities. Yet even after accounting for thirty-five nonracial variables, the researchers found that defendants charged with killing white victims were 4.3 times more likely to receive a death sentence than defendants charged with killing blacks. Black defendants, like McCleskey, who killed white victims had the highest chance of being sentenced to death in Georgia.<sup>55</sup>

The case was closely watched by criminal lawyers and civil rights lawyers nationwide. The statistical evidence of discrimination that Baldus had developed was the strongest ever presented to a court regarding race and criminal sentencing. If McCleskey's evidence was not enough to prove discrimination in the absence of some kind of racist utterance, what would be?

By a one-vote margin, the Court rejected McCleskey's claims under the Fourteenth Amendment, insisting that unless McCleskey could prove that the prosecutor in his particular case had sought the death penalty because of race or that the jury had imposed it for racial reasons, the statistical evidence of race discrimination in Georgia's death penalty system did not prove unequal treatment under the law. The Court accepted the statistical evidence as valid but insisted that evidence of conscious, racial bias in McCleskey's individual case was necessary to prove unlawful discrimination. In the absence of such evidence, patterns of discrimination—even patterns as shocking as demonstrated by the Baldus study—did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment.

In erecting this high standard, the Court knew full well that the standard could not be met absent an admission that a prosecutor or judge acted because of racial bias. The majority opinion openly acknowledged that long-standing rules generally bar litigants from obtaining discovery from the prosecution regarding charging patterns and motives, and that similar rules forbid introduction of evidence of jury deliberations even when a juror has chosen to make deliberations public.<sup>56</sup> The very evidence that the Court demanded in *McCleskey*—evidence of deliberate bias in his individual case—would almost always be unavailable and/or inadmissible due to procedural rules that shield jurors and prosecutors from scrutiny. This dilemma was of little concern to the Court. It closed the courthouse doors to claims of racial bias in sentencing.

There is good reason to believe that, despite appearances, the *McCleskey* decision was not really about the death penalty at all; rather, the Court's opinion was driven by a desire to immunize the entire criminal justice system from claims of racial bias. The best evidence in support of this view can be found at the end of the majority opinion where the Court states that discretion plays a necessary role in the implementation of the criminal justice system, and that discrimination is an inevitable by-product of discretion. Racial discrimination, the Court seemed to suggest, was something that simply must be tolerated in the criminal justice system, provided no one admits to racial bias.

The majority observed that significant racial disparities had been found in other criminal settings beyond the death penalty, and that *McCleskey*'s case implicitly calls into question the integrity of the entire system. In the Court's words: "Taken to its logical conclusion, [Warren McCleskey's claim] throws into serious question the principles that underlie our criminal justice system. . . . [I]f we accepted *McCleskey*'s claim that racial bias has impermissibly tainted the capital sentencing decision, we could soon be faced with similar claims as to other types of penalty."<sup>57</sup> The Court openly worried that other actors in the criminal justice system might also face scrutiny for allegedly biased decision-making if similar claims of racial bias in the system were allowed to proceed. Driven by these concerns, the Court rejected *McCleskey*'s claim that Georgia's death penalty system violates the Eighth Amendment's ban on arbitrary punishment, framing the critical question as whether the *Baldus* study demonstrated a "constitutionally unacceptable risk" of discrimination. Its answer was no. The Court deemed the risk of

racial bias in Georgia's capital sentencing scheme "constitutionally acceptable." Justice Brennan pointedly noted in his dissent that the Court's opinion "seems to suggest a fear of too much justice."<sup>58</sup>

### Cracked Up—Discriminatory Sentencing in the War on Drugs

Anyone who doubts the devastating impact of *McCleskey v. Kemp* on African American defendants throughout the criminal justice system, including those ensnared by the War on Drugs, need only ask Edward Clary. Two months after his eighteenth birthday, Clary was stopped and searched in the St. Louis airport because he "looked like" a drug courier. At the time, he was returning home from visiting some friends in California. One of them persuaded him to take some drugs back home to St. Louis. Clary had never attempted to deal drugs before, and he had no criminal record.

During the search, the police found crack cocaine and promptly arrested him. He was convicted in federal court and sentenced under federal laws that punish crack offenses one hundred times more severely than offenses involving powder cocaine. A conviction for the sale of five hundred grams of powder cocaine triggers a five-year mandatory sentence, while only five grams of crack triggers the same sentence. Because Clary had been caught with more than fifty grams of crack (less than two ounces), the sentencing judge believed he had no choice but to sentence him—an eighteen-year-old, first-time offender—to a minimum of ten years in federal prison.

Clary, like defendants in other crack cases, challenged the constitutionality of the hundred-to-one ratio. His lawyers argued that the law is arbitrary and irrational, because it imposes such vastly different penalties on two forms of the same substance. They also argued that the law discriminates against African Americans, because the majority of those charged with crimes involving crack at that time were black (approximately 93 percent of convicted crack offenders were black, 5 percent were white), whereas powder cocaine offenders were predominantly white.

Every federal appellate court to have considered these claims had rejected them on the ground that Congress—rightly or wrongly—believed that crack was more dangerous to society, a view supported by the testimony of some drug-abuse "experts" and police officers. The fact that most of the evidence in support of *any* disparity had since been discredited was deemed irrele-

vant; what mattered was whether the law had seemed rational at the time it was adopted. Congress, the courts concluded, is free to amend the law if circumstances have changed.

Courts also had rejected claims that crack sentencing laws were racially discriminatory, largely on the grounds that the Supreme Court's decision in *McCleskey v. Kemp* precluded such a result. In the years following *McCleskey*, lower courts consistently rejected claims of race discrimination in the criminal justice system, finding that gross racial disparities do not merit strict scrutiny in the absence of evidence of explicit race discrimination—the very evidence unavailable in the era of colorblindness.

Judge Clyde Cahill of the Federal District of Missouri, an African American judge assigned Clary's case, boldly challenged the prevailing view that courts are powerless to address forms of race discrimination that are not overtly hostile. Cahill declared the hundred-to-one ratio racially discriminatory in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment, notwithstanding *McCleskey*.<sup>59</sup> Although no admissions of racial bias or racist intent could be found in the record, Judge Cahill believed race was undeniably a factor in the crack sentencing laws and policies. He traced the history of the get-tough movement and concluded that fear coupled with unconscious racism had led to a lynch-mob mentality and a desire to control crime—and those deemed responsible for it—at any cost. Cahill acknowledged that many people may not believe they are motivated by discriminatory attitudes but argued that we all have internalized fear of young black men, a fear reinforced by media imagery that has helped to create a national image of the young black male as a criminal. “The presumption of innocence is now a legal myth,” he declared. “The 100-to-1 ratio, coupled with mandatory minimum sentencing provided by federal statute, has created a situation that reeks with inhumanity and injustice. . . . If young white males were being incarcerated at the same rate as young black males, the statute would have been amended long ago.” Judge Cahill sentenced Clary as if the drug he had carried home had been powder cocaine. The sentence imposed was four years in prison. Clary served his term and was released.

The prosecution appealed Clary's case to the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals, which reversed Judge Cahill in a unanimous opinion, finding that the case was not even close. In the court's view, there was no credible evidence that the crack penalties were motivated by any conscious racial bigotry, as required by *McCleskey v. Kemp*. The court remanded the case back to the

district court for resentencing. Clary—now married and a father—was ordered back to prison to complete his ten-year term.<sup>60</sup>

Few challenges to sentencing schemes, patterns, or results have been brought since *McCleskey*, for the exercise is plainly futile. Yet in 1995, a few brave souls challenged the implementation of Georgia's "two strikes and you're out" sentencing scheme, which imposes life imprisonment for a second drug offense. Georgia's district attorneys, who have unbridled discretion to decide whether to seek this harsh penalty, had invoked it against only 1 percent of white defendants facing a second drug conviction but against 16 percent of black defendants. The result was that 98.4 percent of those serving life sentences under the provision were black. The Georgia Supreme Court ruled, by a 4–3 vote, that the stark racial disparity presented a threshold case of discrimination and required the prosecutors to offer a race-neutral explanation for the results. Rather than offer a justification, however, the Georgia attorney general filed a petition for rehearing signed by every one of the state's forty-six district attorneys, all of whom were white. The petition argued that the Court's decision was a dire mistake; if the decision were allowed to stand and prosecutors were compelled to explain gross racial disparities such as the ones at issue, it would be a "substantial step toward invalidating" the death penalty and would "paralyze the criminal justice system"—apparently because severe and inexplicable racial disparities pervaded the system as a whole. Thirteen days later, the Georgia Supreme Court reversed itself, holding that the fact that 98.4 percent of the defendants selected to receive life sentences for repeat drug offenses were black required no justification. The court's new decision relied almost exclusively on *McCleskey v. Kemp*. To date, not a single successful challenge has ever been made to racial bias in sentencing under *McCleskey v. Kemp* anywhere in the United States.

### Charging Ahead—*Armstrong v. United States*

If sentencing were the only stage of the criminal justice process in which racial biases were allowed to flourish, it would be a tragedy of gargantuan proportions. Thousands of people have had years of their lives wasted in prison—years they would have been free if they had been white. Some, like *McCleskey*, have been killed because of the influence of race in the death

penalty. Sentencing, however, is not the end, but just the beginning. As we shall see, the legal rules governing prosecutions, like those that govern sentencing decisions, maximize rather than minimize racial bias in the drug war. The Supreme Court has gone to great lengths to ensure that prosecutors are free to exercise their discretion in any manner they choose, and it has closed the courthouse doors to claims of racial bias.

As discussed in chapter 2, no one has more power in the criminal justice system than prosecutors. Few rules constrain the exercise of prosecutorial discretion. The prosecutor is free to dismiss a case for any reason or no reason at all, regardless of the strength of the evidence. The prosecutor is also free to file more charges against a defendant than can realistically be proven in court, so long as probable cause arguably exists. Whether a good plea deal is offered to a defendant is entirely up to the prosecutor. And if the mood strikes, the prosecutor can transfer drug defendants to the federal system, where the penalties are far more severe. Juveniles, for their part, can be transferred to adult court, where they can be sent to adult prison. Angela J. Davis, in her authoritative study *Arbitrary Justice: The Power of the American Prosecutor*, observes that “the most remarkable feature of these important, sometimes life-and-death decisions is that they are totally discretionary and virtually unreviewable.”<sup>61</sup> Most prosecutors’ offices lack any manual or guidebook advising prosecutors how to make discretionary decisions. Even the American Bar Association’s standards of practice for prosecutors are purely aspirational; no prosecutor is required to follow the standards or even consider them.

Christopher Lee Armstrong learned the hard way that the Supreme Court has little interest in ensuring that prosecutors exercise their extraordinary discretion in a manner that is fair and nondiscriminatory. He, along with four of his companions, was staying at a Los Angeles motel in April 1992 when federal and state agents on a joint drug crime task force raided their room and arrested them on federal drug charges—conspiracy to distribute more than fifty grams of crack cocaine. The federal public defenders assigned to Armstrong’s case were disturbed by the fact that Armstrong and his friends had something in common with every other crack defendant their office had represented during the past year: they were all black. In fact, of the fifty-three crack cases their office had handled over the prior three years, forty-eight defendants were black, five were Hispanic, and not a single one was white. Armstrong’s lawyers found it puzzling that no white crack offenders

had been charged, given that most crack offenders are white. They suspected that whites were being diverted by federal prosecutors to the state system, where the penalties for crack offenses were far less severe. The only way to prove this, though, would be to gain access to the prosecutors' records and find out just how many white defendants were transferred to the state system and why. Armstrong's lawyers thus filed a motion asking the district court for discovery of the prosecutors' files to support their claim of selective prosecution under the Fourteenth Amendment.

Nearly one hundred years earlier, in a case called *Yick Wo v. Hopkins*, the Supreme Court had recognized that racially selective enforcement violates equal protection of the laws. In that case, decided in 1886, the Court unanimously overturned convictions of two Chinese men who were operating laundries without a license. San Francisco had denied licenses to all Chinese applicants, but granted licenses to all but one of the non-Chinese laundry operators who applied. Law enforcement arrested more than a hundred people for operating laundries without licenses, and every one of the arrestees was Chinese. Overturning Yick Wo's conviction, the Supreme Court declared in a widely quoted passage, "Though the law itself be fair on its face, and impartial in appearance, yet, if it is applied and administered by public authority with an evil eye and an unequal hand, so as practically to make unjust and illegal discriminations, between persons in similar circumstances . . . the denial of equal justice is still within the prohibition of the Constitution."<sup>62</sup> Armstrong's lawyers sought to prove that, like the law at issue in *Yick Wo*, federal crack laws were fair on their face and impartial in their appearance, but were selectively enforced in a racially discriminatory manner.

In support of their claim that Armstrong should, at the very least, be entitled to discovery, Armstrong's lawyers offered two sworn affidavits. One was from a halfway house intake coordinator who testified that, in his experience treating crack addicts, whites and blacks dealt and used the drugs in similar proportions. The other affidavit was from a defense attorney who had extensive experience in state prosecutions. He testified that nonblack defendants were routinely prosecuted in state, rather than federal, court. Arguably the best evidence in support of Armstrong's claims came from the government, which submitted a list of more than two thousand people charged with federal crack cocaine violations over a three-year period, all but eleven of whom were black. None were white.

The district court ruled that the evidence presented was sufficient to justify discovery for the purposes of determining whether the allegations of selective enforcement were valid. The prosecutors, however, refused to release any records and appealed the issue all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. In May 1996, the Supreme Court reversed. As in *McCleskey*, the Court did not question the accuracy of the evidence submitted, but ruled that because Armstrong failed to identify any similarly situated white defendants who should have been charged in federal court but were not, he was not entitled even to discovery on his selective-prosecution claim. With no trace of irony, the Court demanded that Armstrong produce in advance the very thing he sought in discovery: information regarding white defendants who should have been charged in federal court. That information, of course, was in the prosecution's possession and control, which is why Armstrong filed a discovery motion in the first place.

As a result of the *Armstrong* decision, defendants who suspect racial bias on the part of prosecutors are trapped in a classic catch-22. In order to state a claim of selective prosecution, they are required to offer *in advance* the very evidence that generally can be obtained only through discovery of the prosecutor's files. The Court justified this insurmountable hurdle on the grounds that considerable deference is owed the exercise of prosecutorial discretion. Unless evidence of conscious, intentional bias on the part of the prosecutor could be produced, the Court would not allow any inquiry into the reasons for or causes of apparent racial disparities in prosecutorial decision making. Again the courthouse doors were closed, for all practical purposes, to claims of racial bias in the administration of the criminal justice system.

Immunizing prosecutors from claims of racial bias and failing to impose any meaningful check on the exercise of their discretion in charging, plea bargaining, transferring cases, and sentencing has created an environment in which conscious and unconscious biases are allowed to flourish. Numerous studies have shown that prosecutors interpret and respond to identical criminal activity differently based on the race of the offender.<sup>63</sup> One widely cited study was conducted by the *San Jose Mercury News*. The study reviewed 700,000 criminal cases that were matched by crime and criminal history of the defendant. The analysis revealed that similarly situated whites were far more successful than African Americans and Latinos in the plea bargaining process; in fact, "at virtually every stage of pretrial negotiation, whites are more successful than nonwhites."<sup>64</sup>

The most comprehensive studies of racial bias in the exercise of prosecutorial and judicial discretion involve the treatment of juveniles. These studies have shown that youth of color are more likely to be arrested, detained, formally charged, transferred to adult court, and confined to secure residential facilities than their white counterparts.<sup>65</sup> A report in 2000 observed that among youth who have never been sent to a juvenile prison before, African Americans were more than six times as likely as whites to be sentenced to prison for *identical* crimes.<sup>66</sup> A study sponsored by the U.S. Justice Department and several of the nation's leading foundations, published in 2007, found that the impact of the biased treatment is magnified with each additional step into the criminal justice system. African American youth account for 16 percent of all youth, 28 percent of all juvenile arrests, 35 percent of the youth waived to adult criminal court, and 58 percent of youth admitted to state adult prison.<sup>67</sup> A major reason for these disparities is unconscious and conscious racial biases infecting decision making. In the state of Washington, for example, a review of juvenile sentencing reports found that prosecutors routinely described black and white offenders differently.<sup>68</sup> Blacks committed crimes because of internal personality flaws such as disrespect. Whites did so because of external conditions such as family conflict.

The risk that prosecutorial discretion will be racially biased is especially acute in the drug enforcement context, where virtually identical behavior is susceptible to a wide variety of interpretations and responses and the media imagery and political discourse has been so thoroughly racialized. Whether a kid is perceived as a dangerous drug-dealing thug or instead is viewed as a good kid who was merely experimenting with drugs and selling to a few of his friends has to do with the ways in which information about illegal drug activity is processed and interpreted, in a social climate in which drug dealing is racially defined. As a former U.S. Attorney explained:

I had an [assistant U.S. attorney who] wanted to drop the gun charge against the defendant [in a case in which] there were no extenuating circumstances. I asked, "Why do you want to drop the gun offense?" And he said, "'He's a rural guy and grew up on a farm. The gun he had with him was a rifle. He's a good ol' boy, and all good ol' boys have rifles, and it's not like he was a gun-toting drug dealer.'" But he was a gun-toting drug dealer, exactly.

The decision in *Armstrong* effectively shields this type of biased decision making from judicial scrutiny for racial bias. Prosecutors are well aware that the exercise of their discretion is unchecked, provided no explicitly racist remarks are made, as it is next to impossible for defendants to prove racial bias. It is difficult to imagine a system better designed to ensure that racial biases and stereotypes are given free rein—while at the same time appearing on the surface to be colorblind—than the one devised by the U.S. Supreme Court.

### In Defense of the All-White Jury—*Purkett v. Elm*

The rules governing jury selection provide yet another illustration of the Court's complete abdication of its responsibility to guarantee racial minorities equal treatment under the law. In 1985, in *Batson v. Kentucky*, the Court held that the Fourteenth Amendment prohibits prosecutors from discriminating on the basis of race when selecting juries, a ruling hailed as an important safeguard against all-white juries locking up African Americans based on racial biases and stereotypes. Prior to *Batson*, prosecutors had been allowed to strike blacks from juries, provided they did not *always* strike black jurors. The Supreme Court had ruled in 1965, in *Swain v. Alabama*, that an equal-protection claim would arise only if a defendant could prove that a prosecutor struck African American jurors in every case, regardless of the crime involved or regardless of the races of the defendant or the victim.<sup>69</sup> Two decades later, in *Batson*, the Supreme Court reversed course, a nod to the newly minted public consensus that explicit race discrimination is an affront to American values. Almost immediately after *Batson* was decided, however, it became readily apparent that prosecutors had no difficulty circumventing the formal requirement of colorblindness in jury selection by means of a form of subterfuge the Court would come to accept, if not endorse.

The history of race discrimination in jury selection dates back to slavery. Until 1860, no black person had ever sat on a jury in the United States. During the Reconstruction era, African Americans began to serve on juries in the South for the first time. The all-white jury promptly returned, however, when Democratic conservatives sought to “redeem” the South by stripping blacks of their right to vote and their right to serve on juries. In 1880, the

Supreme Court intervened, striking down a West Virginia statute that expressly reserved jury service to white men. Citing the recently enacted Fourteenth Amendment, the Court declared that the exclusion of blacks from jury service was “practically a brand upon them, affixed by law, an assertion of their inferiority, and a stimulant to that race prejudice which is an impediment to . . . equal justice.”<sup>70</sup> The Court asked, “How can it be maintained that compelling a colored man to submit to a trial for his life by a jury drawn from a panel from which the State has expressly excluded every man of his race, because of his color alone, however well qualified in other respects, is not a denial to him of equal protection?”<sup>71</sup>

For all its bluster, the Court offered no meaningful protection against jury discrimination in the years that followed. As legal scholar Benno Schmidt has observed, from the end of Reconstruction through the New Deal, “the systematic exclusion of black men from Southern juries was about as plain as any legal discrimination could be short of proclamation in state statutes or confession by state officials.”<sup>72</sup> The Supreme Court repeatedly upheld convictions of black defendants by all-white juries in situations where exclusion of black jurors was obvious.<sup>73</sup> The only case in which the Court overturned a conviction on the grounds of discrimination in jury selection was *Neal v. Delaware*, a case decided in 1935. State law in Delaware once had explicitly restricted jury service to white men, and “no colored citizen had ever been summoned as a juror.”<sup>74</sup> The Delaware Supreme Court had rejected Neal’s equal protection claim on the grounds that “the great body of black men residing in this State are utterly unqualified [for jury service] by want of intelligence, experience, or moral integrity.”<sup>75</sup> The Supreme Court reversed. Clearly, what offended the U.S. Supreme Court was not the exclusion of blacks from jury service per se, but rather doing so openly and explicitly. That orientation continues to hold today.

Notwithstanding *Batson*’s formal prohibition on race discrimination in jury selection, the Supreme Court and lower federal courts have tolerated all but the most egregious examples of racial bias in jury selection. *Miller El v. Cockrell* was such a case.<sup>76</sup> That case involved a jury-selection manual that sanctioned race-based selection. The Court noted that it was unclear whether the official policy of race-based exclusion was still in effect, but the prosecution did in fact exclude ten of eleven black jurors, in part by employing an unusual practice of “jury shuffling” that reduced the number of black jurors.<sup>77</sup> The prosecution also engaged in disparate questioning of jurors

based on race—practices that seemed linked to the jury-selection manual. This was a highly unusual case. In typical cases, there are no official policies authorizing race discrimination in jury selection still lurking around, arguably in effect. Normally, the discrimination is obvious yet unstated, and the systematic exclusion of black jurors continues largely unabated through use of the peremptory strike.

Peremptory strikes have long been controversial. Both prosecutors and defense attorneys are permitted to strike “peremptorily” jurors they don’t like—that is, people they believe will not respond favorably to the evidence or witnesses they intend to present at trial. In theory, peremptory strikes may increase the fairness of the proceeding by eliminating jurors who may be biased but whose biases cannot be demonstrated convincingly to a judge. In practice, however, peremptory challenges are notoriously discriminatory. Lawyers typically have little information about potential jurors, so their decisions to strike individual jurors tend to be based on nothing more than stereotypes, prejudices, and hunches. Achieving an all-white jury, or nearly all-white jury, is easy in most jurisdictions, because relatively few racial minorities are included in the jury pool. Potential jurors are typically called for service based on the list of registered voters or Department of Motor Vehicle lists—sources that contain disproportionately fewer people of color, because people of color are significantly less likely to own cars or register to vote. Making matters worse, thirty-one states and the federal government subscribe to the practice of lifetime felon exclusion from juries. *As a result, about 30 percent of black men are automatically banned from jury service for life.*<sup>78</sup> Accordingly, no more than a handful of strikes are necessary in many cases to eliminate all or nearly all black jurors. The practice of systematically excluding black jurors has not been halted by *Batson*; the only thing that has changed is that prosecutors must come up with a race-neutral excuse for the strikes—an exceedingly easy task.

In fact, one comprehensive study reviewed all published decisions involving *Batson* challenges from 1986 to 1992 and concluded that prosecutors almost never fail to successfully craft acceptable race-neutral explanations to justify striking black jurors.<sup>79</sup> Courts accept explanations that jurors are too young, too old, too conservative, too liberal, too comfortable, or too uncomfortable. Clothing is also a favorite reason; jurors have been stricken for wearing hats or sunglasses. Even explanations that might correlate with race, such as lack of education, unemployment, poverty, being single, living in the

same neighborhood as the defendant, or prior involvement with the criminal justice system—have all been accepted as perfectly good, non-pretexual excuses for striking African Americans from juries. As professor Sheri Lynn Johnson once remarked, “If prosecutors exist who . . . cannot create a ‘racially neutral’ reason for discriminating on the basis of race, bar exams are too easy.”<sup>80</sup>

Given how flagrantly prosecutors were violating *Batson*’s ban on race discrimination in jury selection, it was reasonable to hope that, if presented with a particularly repugnant case, the Supreme Court might be willing to draw the line at practices that make a mockery of the antidiscrimination principle. Granted, the Court had been unwilling to accept statistical proof of race discrimination in sentencing in *McCleskey*, and it had brushed off concerns of racial bias in discretionary police stops in *Whren*, and it had granted virtual immunity to prosecutors in their charging decisions in *Armstrong*, but would it go so far as to allow prosecutors to offer blatantly absurd, downright laughable excuses for striking blacks from juries? It turns out the answer was yes.

In *Purkett v. Elm*, in 1995, the Supreme Court ruled that any race-neutral reason, no matter how silly, ridiculous, or superstitious, is enough to satisfy the prosecutor’s burden of showing that a pattern of striking a particular racial group is not, in fact, based on race. In that case, the prosecutor offered the following explanation to justify his strikes of black jurors:

I struck [juror] number twenty-two because of his long hair. He had long curly hair. He had the longest hair of anybody on the panel by far. He appeared not to be a good juror for that fact. . . . Also, he had a mustache and a goatee type beard. And juror number twenty-four also had a mustache and goatee type beard. . . . And I don’t like the way they looked, with the way the hair is cut, both of them. And the mustaches and the beards look suspicious to me.<sup>81</sup>

The Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit ruled that the foregoing explanation for the prosecutor’s strikes of black jurors was insufficient and should have been rejected by the trial court because long hair and facial hair are not plausibly related to a person’s ability to perform as a juror. The appellate court explained: “Where the prosecution strikes a prospective juror who is a member of the defendant’s racial group, solely on the basis of factors

which are facially irrelevant to the question of whether that person is qualified to serve as a juror in the particular case, the prosecution must at least articulate some plausible race neutral reason for believing that those factors will somehow affect the person's ability to perform his or her duties as a juror."<sup>82</sup>

The U.S. Supreme Court reversed, holding that when a pattern of race-based strikes has been identified by the defense, the prosecutor need not provide "an explanation that is persuasive, or even plausible."<sup>83</sup> Once the reason is offered, a trial judge may choose to believe (or disbelieve) any "silly or superstitious" reason offered by prosecutors to explain a pattern of strikes that appear to be based on race.<sup>84</sup> The Court sent a clear message that appellate courts are largely free to accept the reasons offered by a prosecutor for excluding prospective black jurors—no matter how irrational or absurd the reasons may seem.

### The Occupation—Policing the Enemy

The Court's blind eye to race discrimination in the criminal justice system has been especially problematic in policing. Racial bias is most acute at the point of entry into the system for two reasons: discretion and authorization. Although prosecutors, as a group, have the greatest power in the criminal justice system, police have the greatest discretion—discretion that is amplified in drug-law enforcement. And unbeknownst to the general public, the Supreme Court has actually authorized race discrimination in policing, rather than adopting legal rules banning it.

Racially biased police discretion is key to understanding how the overwhelming majority of people who get swept into the criminal justice system in the War on Drugs turn out to be black or brown, even though the police adamantly deny that they engage in racial profiling. In the drug war, police have discretion regarding whom to target (which individuals), as well as where to target (which neighborhoods or communities). As noted earlier, at least 10 percent of Americans violate drug laws every year, and people of all races engage in illegal drug activity at similar rates. With such an extraordinarily large population of offenders to choose from, decisions must be made regarding who should be targeted and where the drug war should be waged.

From the outset, the drug war could have been waged primarily in overwhelmingly white suburbs or on college campuses. SWAT teams could have rappelled from helicopters in gated suburban communities and raided the homes of high school lacrosse players known for hosting coke and ecstasy parties after their games. The police could have seized televisions, furniture, and cash from fraternity houses based on an anonymous tip that a few joints or a stash of cocaine could be found hidden in someone's dresser drawer. Suburban homemakers could have been placed under surveillance and subjected to undercover operations designed to catch them violating laws regulating the use and sale of prescription "uppers." All of this could have happened as a matter of routine in white communities, but it did not.

Instead, when police go looking for drugs, they look in the 'hood. Tactics that would be political suicide in an upscale white suburb are not even newsworthy in poor black and brown communities. So long as mass drug arrests are concentrated in impoverished urban areas, police chiefs have little reason to fear a political backlash, no matter how aggressive and warlike the efforts may be. And so long as the number of drug arrests increases or at least remains high, federal dollars continue to flow in and fill the department's coffers. As one former prosecutor put it, "It's a lot easier to go out to the 'hood, so to speak, and pick somebody than to put your resources in an undercover [operation in a] community where there are potentially politically powerful people."<sup>85</sup>

The hypersegregation of the black poor in ghetto communities has made the roundup easy. Confined to ghetto areas and lacking political power, the black poor are convenient targets. Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton's book, *American Apartheid*, documents how racially segregated ghettos were deliberately created by federal policy, not impersonal market forces or private housing choices.<sup>86</sup> The enduring racial isolation of the ghetto poor has made them uniquely vulnerable in the War on Drugs. What happens to them does not directly affect—and is scarcely noticed by—the privileged beyond the ghetto's invisible walls. Thus it is here, in the poverty-stricken, racially segregated ghettos, where the War on Poverty has been abandoned and factories have disappeared, that the drug war has been waged with the greatest ferocity. SWAT teams are deployed here; buy-and-bust operations are concentrated here; drug raids of apartment buildings occur here; stop-and-frisk operations occur on the streets here. Black and brown youth are the primary targets. It is not uncommon for a young black teenager living in a ghetto community to be stopped, interrogated, and frisked numerous times

in the course of a month, or even a single week, often by paramilitary units. Studies of racial profiling typically report the total number of people stopped and searched, disaggregated by race. These studies have led some policing experts to conclude that racial profiling is actually “worse” in white communities, because the racial disparities in stop and search rates are much greater there. What these studies do not reveal, however, is the frequency with which any given individual is likely to be stopped in specific, racially defined neighborhoods.

The militarized nature of law enforcement in ghetto communities has inspired rap artists and black youth to refer to the police presence in black communities as “The Occupation.” In these occupied territories, many black youth automatically “assume the position” when a patrol car pulls up, knowing full well that they will be detained and frisked no matter what. This dynamic often comes as a surprise to those who have spent little time in ghettos. Craig Futterman, a law professor at the University of Chicago, reports that his students frequently express shock and dismay when they venture into those communities for the first time and witness the distance between abstract legal principles and actual practice. One student reported, following her ride-along with Chicago police: “Each time we drove into a public housing project and stopped the car, every young black man in the area would almost reflexively place his hands up against the car and spread his legs to be searched. And the officers would search them. The officers would then get back in the car and stop in another project, and this would happen again. This repeated itself throughout the entire day. I couldn’t believe it. This was nothing like we learned in law school. But it just seemed so normal—for the police and the young men.”

Numerous scholars (and many law enforcement officials) attempt to justify the concentration of drug law enforcement resources in ghetto communities on the grounds that it is easier for the police to combat illegal drug activity there. The theory is that black and Latino drug users are more likely than white users to obtain illegal drugs in public spaces that are visible to the police, and therefore it is more efficient and convenient for the police to concentrate their efforts on open-air drug markets in ghetto communities. Sociologists have been major proponents of this line of reasoning, pointing out that differential access to private space influences the likelihood that criminal behavior will be detected. Because poor people lack access to private space (often sharing small apartments with numerous family members

or relatives), their criminal activity is more likely to be conducted outdoors. Concentrating law enforcement efforts in locations where drug activity will be more easily detected is viewed as a race-neutral organizational necessity. This argument is often buttressed by claims that most citizen complaints about illegal drug activity come from ghetto areas, and that the violence associated with the drug trade occurs in inner cities. These facts, drug war defenders claim, make the decision to wage the drug war almost exclusively in poor communities of color an easy and logical choice.

This line of reasoning is weaker than it initially appears. Many law enforcement officials acknowledge that the demand for illegal drugs is so great—and the lack of alternative sources of income so few in ghetto communities—that “if you take one dealer off the street, he’ll be replaced within an hour.” Many also admit that a predictable consequence of breaking up one drug ring is a slew of violence as others fight for control of the previously stabilized market.<sup>87</sup> These realities suggest—if the past two decades of endless war somehow did not—that the drug war is doomed to fail. They also call into question the legitimacy of “convenience” as an excuse for the mass imprisonment of black and brown men in ghetto communities.

Even putting aside such concerns, though, recent research indicates that the basic assumptions upon which drug war defenses typically rest are simply wrong. The conventional wisdom—that “get tough” tactics are a regrettable necessity in poor communities of color and that efficiency requires the drug war to be waged in the most vulnerable neighborhoods—turns out to be, as many have long suspected, nothing more than wartime propaganda, not sound policy.

### Unconventional Wisdom

In 2002, a team of researchers at the University of Washington decided to take the defenses of the drug war seriously, by subjecting the arguments to empirical testing in a major study of drug-law enforcement in a racially mixed city—Seattle.<sup>88</sup> The study found that, contrary to the prevailing “common sense,” the high arrest rates of African Americans in drug-law enforcement could not be explained by rates of offending; nor could they be explained by other standard excuses, such as the ease and efficiency of policing open-air drug markets, citizen complaints, crime rates, or drug-related

violence. The study also debunked the assumption that white drug dealers deal indoors, making their criminal activity more difficult to detect.

The authors found that it was untrue stereotypes about crack markets, crack dealers, and crack babies—not facts—that were driving discretionary decision making by the Seattle Police Department. The facts were as follows: Seattle residents were far more likely to report suspected narcotics activities in residences—not outdoors—but police devoted their resources to open-air drug markets and to the one precinct that was *least* likely to be identified as the site of suspected drug activity in citizen complaints. In fact, although hundreds of outdoor drug transactions were recorded in predominantly white areas of Seattle, police concentrated their drug enforcement efforts in one downtown drug market where the frequency of drug transactions was much lower. In racially mixed open-air drug markets, black dealers were far more likely to be arrested than whites, even though white dealers were present and visible. And the department focused overwhelmingly on crack—the one drug in Seattle more likely to be sold by African Americans—despite the fact that local hospital records indicated that overdose deaths involving heroin were more numerous than all overdose deaths for crack and powder cocaine combined. Local police acknowledged that no significant level of violence was associated with crack in Seattle and that other drugs were causing more hospitalizations, but steadfastly maintained that their deployment decisions were nondiscriminatory.

The study's authors concluded, based on their review and analysis of the empirical evidence, that the Seattle Police Department's decisions to focus so heavily on crack, to the near exclusion of other drugs, and to concentrate its efforts on outdoor drug markets in downtown areas rather than drug markets located indoors or in predominantly white communities, reflect "a racialized conception of the drug problem."<sup>89</sup> As the authors put it: "[The Seattle Police Department's] focus on black and Latino individuals and on the drug most strongly associated with 'blackness' suggest that law enforcement policies and practices are predicated on the assumption that the drug problem is, in fact, a black and Latino one, and that crack, the drug most strongly associated with urban blacks, is 'the worst.'"<sup>90</sup> This racialized cultural script about who and what constitutes the drug problem renders illegal drug activity by whites invisible. "White people," the study's authors observed, "are simply not perceived as drug offenders by Seattle police officers."<sup>91</sup>

## Hollow Hope

One might imagine that the facts described above would provide grounds for a lawsuit challenging the Seattle Police Department's drug war tactics as a violation of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and demanding reform. After all, obtaining reform through the city council or state legislature may seem unlikely, for black "criminals" are perhaps the most despised minority in the U.S. population. Few politicians will leap at the opportunity to support black people labeled criminals. Accordingly, a lawsuit may seem like the best option. The purpose of our Constitution—especially the Fourteenth Amendment's equal-protection guarantee—is to protect minority rights even when, or especially when, they are unpopular. So shouldn't African American defendants be able to file a successful lawsuit demanding an end to these discriminatory practices or challenge their drug arrests on the grounds that these law enforcement practices are unlawfully tainted by race? The answer is yes, they should, but no, they probably can't.

As legal scholar David Cole has observed, "The Court has imposed nearly insurmountable barriers to persons challenging race discrimination at all stages of the criminal justice system."<sup>92</sup> The barriers are so high that few lawsuits are even filed, notwithstanding shocking and indefensible racial disparities. Procedural hurdles, such as the "standing requirement," have made it virtually impossible to seek reform of law enforcement agencies through the judicial process, even when the policies or practices at issue are illegal or plainly discriminatory.

Adolph Lyons's attempt to ban the use of lethal chokeholds by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) is a good example. Lyons, a twenty-four-year-old black man, was driving his car in Los Angeles one morning when he was pulled over by four police officers for a burned-out taillight. With guns drawn, police ordered Lyons out of his car. He obeyed. The officers told him to face the car, spread his legs, and put his hands on his head. Again, Lyons did as he was told. After the officers completed a pat-down, Lyons dropped his hands, prompting an officer to slam Lyons's hands back on his head. When Lyons complained that the car keys he was holding were causing him pain, the officer forced Lyons into a chokehold. He lost consciousness and collapsed. When he awoke, "he was spitting up blood and dirt, had urinated

and defecated, and had suffered permanent damage to his larynx.”<sup>93</sup> The officers issued a traffic ticket for the burned-out taillight and released him.

Lyons sued the City of Los Angeles for violation of his constitutional rights and sought, as a remedy, a ban against future use of the chokeholds. By the time his case reached the Supreme Court, sixteen people had been killed by police use of the chokehold, twelve of them black men. The Supreme Court dismissed the case, however, ruling that Lyons lacked “standing” to seek an injunction against the deadly practice. In order to have standing, the Court reasoned, Lyons would have to show that he was highly likely to be subject to a chokehold again.

Lyons argued that, as a black man, he had good reason to fear he would be stopped by the police for a minor traffic violation and subjected to a chokehold again. He had done nothing to provoke the chokehold; to the contrary, he had obeyed instructions and cooperated fully. Why wouldn’t he believe he was at risk of being stopped and choked again? The Court, however, ruled that in order to have standing

Lyons would have had not only to allege that he would have another encounter with the police but also to make the incredible assertion either (1) that all police officers in Los Angeles always choke any citizen with whom they have an encounter, whether for the purpose of arrest, issuing a citation or for questioning, or (2) that the City ordered or authorized the police to act in such a manner.<sup>94</sup>

Lyons did not allege race discrimination, but if he had, that claim would almost certainly have been a loser too. The Court’s ruling in *Lyons* makes it extremely difficult to challenge systemic race discrimination in law enforcement and obtain meaningful policy reform. For example, African Americans in Seattle who hope to end the Seattle police department’s discriminatory tactics through litigation would be required to prove that they plan to violate drug laws and that they will almost certainly face race discrimination by Seattle police officers engaged in drug-law enforcement, in order to have standing to seek reform—i.e., just to get in the courthouse door.

It is worthy of note that the *Lyons* standard does not apply to suits for damages. But any suggestion that litigants need not worry about policy reform because they can always sue for damages would be disingenuous—particularly as applied to race discrimination cases. Why? Neither the state

nor the state police can be sued for damages. In a series of cases, the Supreme Court has ruled that the state and its offices are immune from federal suits for damages under the Eleventh Amendment to the Constitution (unless they consent), and the state can't be sued for damages for constitutional violations in state court either.<sup>95</sup> City police departments, like the LAPD, are also typically off limits. The Court has ruled that a city police department cannot be sued for damages unless a specific city policy or custom can be identified authorizing the illegal practice.<sup>96</sup> Most cities, of course, do not have policies specifically authorizing illegal conduct (particularly race discrimination), and "custom" is notoriously difficult to prove. Accordingly, suing a city police department for damages is generally not an option. Yet even if all of those hurdles can somehow be overcome, there is still the matter of proving a claim of race discrimination. As we have seen, to establish an equal-protection violation, one must prove *intentional* discrimination—conscious racial bias. Law enforcement officials rarely admit to having acted for racial reasons, leaving most victims of discriminatory law enforcement without anyone to sue and without a claim that can be proven in a court of law. But even if a plaintiff managed to overcome all of the procedural hurdles and prove that a police officer deliberately exercised his or her discretion on the basis of race, that still might not be enough.

### Race as a Factor

The dirty little secret of policing is that the Supreme Court has actually granted the police license to discriminate. This fact is not advertised by police departments, because law enforcement officials know that the public would not respond well to this fact in the era of colorblindness. It is the sort of thing that is better left unsaid. Civil rights lawyers—including those litigating racial profiling cases—have been complicit in this silence, fearing that any acknowledgment that race-based policing is authorized by law would legitimate in the public mind the very practice they are hoping to eradicate.

The truth, however, is this: At other stages of the criminal justice process, the Court has indicated that overt racial bias necessarily triggers strict scrutiny—a concession that has not been costly, as very few law enforcement officials today are foolish enough to admit bias openly. But the Supreme Court has indicated that in policing, race *can* be used as a factor in

discretionary decision making. In *United States v. Brignoni-Ponce*, the Court concluded it was permissible under the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment for the police to use race as a factor in making decisions about which motorists to stop and search. In that case, the Court concluded that the police could take a person's Mexican appearance into account when developing reasonable suspicion that a vehicle may contain undocumented immigrants. The Court said that "the likelihood that any person of Mexican ancestry is an alien is high enough to make Mexican appearance a relevant factor."<sup>97</sup> Some commentators have argued that *Brignoni-Ponce* may be limited to the immigration context; the Court might not apply the same principle to drug-law enforcement. It is not obvious what the rational basis would be for limiting overt race discrimination by police to immigration. The likelihood that a person of Mexican ancestry is an "alien" could not be significantly higher than the likelihood that any random black person is a drug criminal.

The Court's quiet blessing of race-based traffic stops has led to something of an Orwellian public discourse regarding racial profiling. Police departments and highway patrol agencies frequently declare, "We do not engage in racial profiling," even though their officers routinely use race as a factor when making decisions regarding whom to stop and search. The justification for the implicit doublespeak—"we do not racial-profile; we just stop people based on race"—can be explained in part by the Supreme Court's jurisprudence. Because the Supreme Court has authorized the police to use race as a factor when making decisions regarding whom to stop and search, police departments believe that racial profiling exists only when race is the *sole* factor. Thus, if race is one factor but not the only factor, then it doesn't really count as a factor at all.

The absurdity of this logic is evidenced by the fact that police almost never stop anyone solely because of race. A young black male wearing baggy pants, standing in front of his high school surrounded by a group of similarly dressed black friends, may be stopped and searched because police believe he "looks like" a drug dealer. Clearly, race is not the only reason for that conclusion. Gender, age, attire, and location play a role. The police would likely ignore an eighty-five-year-old black man standing in the same spot surrounded by a group of elderly black women.

The problem is that although race is rarely the sole reason for a stop or search, it is frequently a *determinative* reason. A young white male wearing

baggy pants, standing in front of his high school and surrounded by his friends, might well be ignored by police officers. It might never occur to them that a group of young white kids might be dealing dope in front of their high school. Similarly situated people inevitably are treated differently when police are granted permission to rely on racial stereotypes when making discretionary decisions.

Equally important, though, the sole-factor test ignores the ways in which seemingly race-neutral factors—such as location—operate in a highly discriminatory fashion. Some law enforcement officials claim that they would stop and search white kids wearing baggy jeans in the ghetto (that would be suspicious)—it just so happens they're rarely there. Subjecting people to stops and searches because they live in "high crime" ghettos cannot be said to be truly race-neutral, given that the ghetto itself was constructed to contain and control groups of people defined by race.<sup>98</sup> Even seemingly race-neutral factors such as "prior criminal history" are not truly race-neutral. A black kid arrested twice for possession of marijuana may be no more of a repeat offender than a white frat boy who regularly smokes pot in his dorm room. But because of his race and his confinement to a racially segregated ghetto, the black kid has a criminal record, while the white frat boy, because of his race and relative privilege, does not. Thus, when prosecutors throw the book at black repeat offenders or when police stalk ex-offenders and subject them to regular frisks and searches on the grounds that it makes sense to "watch criminals closely," they are often exacerbating racial disparities created by the discretionary decision to wage the War on Drugs almost exclusively in poor communities of color.

Defending against claims of racial bias in policing is easy. Because race is never the only reason for a stop or search, any police officer with a fifth-grade education will be able to cite multiple nonracial reasons for initiating an encounter, including any number of the so-called "indicators" of drug trafficking discussed in chapter 2, such as appearing too nervous or too calm. Police officers (like prosecutors) are highly adept at offering race-neutral reasons for actions that consistently disadvantage African Americans. Whereas prosecutors claim they strike black jurors not because of their race but because of their hairstyle, police officers have their own stock excuses—e.g., "Your honor, we didn't stop him because he's black; we stopped him because he failed to use his turn signal at the right time," or "It wasn't just because he was black; it was also because he seemed nervous when he saw

the police car.” Judges are just as reluctant to second-guess an officer’s motives as they are to second-guess prosecutors’. So long as officers refrain from uttering racial epithets and so long as they show the good sense not to say “the only reason I stopped him was ’cause he’s black,” courts generally turn a blind eye to patterns of discrimination by the police.

Studies of racial profiling have shown that police do, in fact, exercise their discretion regarding whom to stop and search in the drug war in a highly discriminatory manner.<sup>99</sup> Not only do police discriminate in their determinations regarding where to wage the war, but they also discriminate in their judgments regarding whom to target outside of the ghetto’s invisible walls.

The most famous of these studies were conducted in New Jersey and Maryland in the 1990s. Allegations of racial profiling in federally funded drug interdiction operations resulted in numerous investigations and comprehensive data demonstrating a dramatic pattern of racial bias in highway patrol stops and searches. These drug interdiction programs were the brainchild of the DEA, part of the federally funded program known as Operation Pipeline.

In New Jersey, the data showed that only 15 percent of all drivers on the New Jersey Turnpike were racial minorities, yet 42 percent of all stops and 73 percent of all arrests were of black motorists—despite the fact that blacks and whites violated traffic laws at almost exactly the same rate. While radar stops were relatively consistent with the percentage of minority violators, discretionary stops made by officers involved in drug interdiction resulted in double the number of stops of minorities.<sup>100</sup> A subsequent study conducted by the attorney general of New Jersey found that searches on the turnpike were even more discriminatory than the initial stops—77 percent of all consent searches were of minorities. The Maryland studies produced similar results: African Americans comprised only 17 percent of drivers along a stretch of I-95 outside of Baltimore, yet they were 70 percent of those who were stopped and searched. Only 21 percent of all drivers along that stretch of highway were racial minorities (Latinos, Asians, and African Americans), yet those groups comprised nearly 80 percent of those pulled over and searched.<sup>101</sup>

What most surprised many analysts was that, in both studies, whites were actually *more likely* than people of color to be carrying illegal drugs or contraband in their vehicles. In fact, in New Jersey, whites were almost twice as likely to be found with illegal drugs or contraband as African Americans, and five times as likely to be found with contraband as Latinos.<sup>102</sup> Although

whites were more likely to be guilty of carrying drugs, they were far less likely to be viewed as suspicious, resulting in relatively few stops, searches, and arrests of whites. The former New Jersey attorney general dubbed this phenomenon the “circular illogic of racial profiling.” Law enforcement officials, he explained, often point to the racial composition of our prisons and jails as a justification for targeting racial minorities, but the empirical evidence actually suggested the opposite conclusion was warranted. The disproportionate imprisonment of people of color was, in part, a product of racial profiling—not a justification for it.

In the years following the release of the New Jersey and Maryland data, dozens of other studies of racial profiling have been conducted. A brief sampling:

- In Volusia County, Florida, a reporter obtained 148 hours of video footage documenting more than 1,000 highway stops conducted by state troopers. Only 5 percent of the drivers on the road were African American or Latino, but more than 80 percent of the people stopped and searched were minorities.<sup>103</sup>
- In Illinois, the state police initiated a drug interdiction program known as Operation Valkyrie that targeted Latino motorists. While Latinos comprised less than 8 percent of the Illinois population and took fewer than 3 percent of the personal vehicle trips in Illinois, they comprised approximately 30 percent of the motorists stopped by drug interdiction officers for discretionary offenses, such as failure to signal a lane change.<sup>104</sup> Latinos, however, were significantly less likely than whites to have illegal contraband in their vehicles.
- A racial profiling study in Oakland, California, in 2001 showed that African Americans were approximately twice as likely as whites to be stopped, and three times as likely to be searched.<sup>105</sup>

Pedestrian stops, too, have been the subject of study and controversy. The New York Police Department released statistics in February 2007 showing that during the prior year its officers stopped an astounding 508,540 people—an average of 1,393 per day—who were walking down the street, perhaps on their way to the subway, grocery store, or bus stop. Often the stops included searches for illegal drugs or guns—searches that frequently required people to lie face down on the pavement or stand spread-eagled against a wall while

police officers aggressively groped all over their bodies while bystanders watched or walked by. The vast majority of those stopped and searched were racial minorities, and more than half were African American.<sup>106</sup>

The NYPD began collecting data on pedestrian stops following the shooting of Amadou Diallo, an African immigrant who died in a hail of police bullets on the front steps of his own home in February 1999. Diallo was followed to his apartment building by four white police officers—members of the elite Street Crime Unit—who viewed him as suspicious and wanted to interrogate him. They ordered him to stop, but, according to the officers, Diallo did not respond immediately. He walked a bit farther to his apartment building, opened the door, and retrieved his wallet—probably to produce identification. The officers said they thought the wallet was a gun, and fired forty-one times. Amadou Diallo died at the age of twenty-two. He was unarmed and had no criminal record.

Diallo's murder sparked huge protests, resulting in a series of studies commissioned by the attorney general of New York. The first study found that African Americans were stopped six times more frequently than whites, and that stops of African Americans were less likely to result in arrests than stops of whites—presumably because blacks were less likely to be found with drugs or other contraband.<sup>107</sup> Although the NYPD attempted to justify the stops on the grounds that they were designed to get guns off the street, stops by the Street Crime Unit—the group of officers who supposedly are specially trained to identify gun-toting thugs—yielded a weapon in only 2.5 percent of all stops.<sup>108</sup>

Rather than reducing reliance on stop-and-frisk tactics following the Diallo shooting and the release of this disturbing data, the NYPD dramatically *increased* its number of pedestrian stops and continued to stop and frisk African Americans at grossly disproportionate rates. The NYPD stopped five times more people in 2005 than in 2002—the overwhelming majority of whom were African American or Latino.<sup>109</sup> By 2008, the NYPD was stopping 545,000 in a single year, and 80 percent of the people stopped were African Americans and Latinos. Whites comprised a mere 8 percent of people frisked by the NYPD, while African Americans accounted for 85 percent of all frisks.<sup>110</sup> A report by the *New York Times* found that the highest concentration of stops in the city was a roughly eight-block area of Brownsville, Brooklyn, that was predominately black. Residents there were stopped at a rate thirteen times the city average.<sup>111</sup>

Although the NYPD frequently attempts to justify stop-and-frisk operations in poor communities of color on the grounds that such tactics are necessary to get guns off the streets, less than 1 percent of stops (0.15 percent) resulted in guns being found, and guns and other contraband were seized less often in stops of African Americans and Latinos than of whites.<sup>112</sup> As Darius Charney, a lawyer for the Center for Constitutional Rights, observed, these studies “confirm what we have been saying for the last 10 or 11 years, which is that with stop-and-frisk patterns—it is really race, not crime, that is driving this.”<sup>113</sup>

Ultimately, these stop-and-frisk operations amount to much more than humiliating, demeaning rituals for young men of color, who must raise their arms and spread their legs, always careful not to make a sudden move or gesture that could provide an excuse for brutal—even lethal—force. Like the days when black men were expected to step off the sidewalk and cast their eyes downward when a white woman passed, young black men know the drill when they see the police crossing the street toward them; it is a ritual of dominance and submission played out hundreds of thousands of times each year. But it is more than that. These routine encounters often serve as the gateway into the criminal justice system. The NYPD made 50,300 marijuana arrests in 2010 alone, mostly of young men of color. As one report noted, these marijuana arrests offer “training opportunities” for rookie police who can practice on ghetto kids while earning overtime.<sup>114</sup> These arrests serve another purpose as well: they “are the most effective way for the NYPD to collect fingerprints, photographs and other information on young people not yet entered into the criminal databases.”<sup>115</sup> A simple arrest for marijuana possession can show up on criminal databases as “a drug arrest” without specifying the substance or the charge, and without clarifying even whether the person was convicted. These databases are then used by police and prosecutors, as well as by employers and housing officials—an electronic record that will haunt many for life. More than 353,000 people were arrested and jailed by the NYPD between 1997 and 2006 for simple possession of small amounts of marijuana, with blacks five times more likely to be arrested than whites.<sup>116</sup>

In Los Angeles, mass stops of young African American men and boys resulted in the creation of a database containing the names, addresses, and other biographical information of the overwhelming majority of young black men in the entire city. The LAPD justified its database as a tool for tracking gang or

“gang-related” activity. However, the criterion for inclusion in the database is notoriously vague and discriminatory. Having a relative or friend in a gang and wearing baggy jeans is enough to put youth on what the ACLU calls a Black List. In Denver, displaying any two of a list of attributes—including slang, “clothing of a particular color,” pagers, hairstyles, or jewelry—earns youth a spot in the Denver Police’s gang database. In 1992, citizen activism led to an investigation, which revealed that eight out of every ten people of color in the entire city were on the list of suspected criminals.<sup>117</sup>

### The End of an Era

The litigation that swept the nation in the 1990s challenging racial profiling practices has nearly vanished. The news stories about people being stopped and searched on their way to church or work or school have faded from the evening news. This is not because the problem has been solved or because the experience of being stopped, interrogated, and searched on the basis of race has become less humiliating, alienating, or demoralizing as time has gone by. The lawsuits have disappeared because, in a little noticed case called *Alexander v. Sandoval*, decided in 2001, the Supreme Court eliminated the last remaining avenue available for challenging racial bias in the criminal justice system.<sup>118</sup>

*Sandoval* was not, on its face, even about criminal justice. It was a case challenging the Alabama Department of Public Safety’s decision to administer state driver’s license examinations only in English. The plaintiffs argued that the department’s policy violated Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its implementing regulations, because the policy had the effect of subjecting non-English speakers to discrimination based on their national origin. The Supreme Court did not reach the merits of the case, ruling instead that the plaintiffs lacked the legal right even to file the lawsuit. It concluded that Title VI does not provide a “private right of action” to ordinary citizens and civil rights groups; meaning that victims of discrimination can no longer sue under the law.

The *Sandoval* decision virtually wiped out racial profiling litigation nationwide. Nearly all of the cases alleging racial profiling in drug-law enforcement were brought pursuant to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its implementing regulations. Title VI prohibits federally funded programs

or activities from discriminating on the basis of race, and the regulations employ a “disparate impact test” for discrimination—meaning that plaintiffs could prevail in claims of race discrimination without proving discriminatory intent. Under the regulations, a federally funded law enforcement program or activity is unlawful if it has a racially discriminatory impact and if that impact cannot be justified by law enforcement necessity. Because nearly all law enforcement agencies receive federal funding in the drug war, and because drug war tactics—such as pretext stops and consent searches—have a grossly discriminatory impact and are largely ineffective, plaintiffs were able to argue persuasively that the tactics could not be justified by law enforcement necessity.

In 1999, for example, the ACLU of Northern California filed a class action lawsuit against the California Highway Patrol (CHP), alleging that its highway drug interdiction program violated Title VI of the Civil Rights Act because it relied heavily on discretionary pretext stops and consent searches that are employed overwhelmingly against African American and Latino motorists. During the course of the litigation, the CHP produced data that showed African Americans were twice as likely, and Latinos three times as likely, to be stopped and searched by its officers as were whites. The data further showed that consent searches were ineffective; only a tiny percentage of the discriminatory searches resulted in the discovery of drugs or other contraband, yet thousands of black and brown motorists were subjected to baseless interrogations, searches, and seizures as a result of having committed a minor traffic violation. The CHP entered into a consent decree that provided for a three-year moratorium on consent searches and pretext stops statewide and the collection of comprehensive data on the race and ethnicity of motorists stopped and searched by the police, so that it would be possible to determine whether discriminatory practices were continuing. Similar results were obtained in New Jersey, as a result of landmark litigation filed against the New Jersey State Police. After *Sandoval*, these cases can no longer be brought under Title VI by private litigants. Only the federal government can sue to enforce Title VI’s antidiscrimination provisions—something it has neither the inclination nor the capacity to do in most racial profiling cases due to its limited resources and institutional reluctance to antagonize local law enforcement. Since the War on Drugs, private litigants represented by organizations such as the ACLU have been at the forefront of racial profiling litigation. Those days, however, have come to an end. The racial profil-

ing cases that swept the nation in the 1990s may well be the last wave of litigation challenging racial bias in the criminal justice system that we see for a very long time.

The Supreme Court has now closed the courthouse doors to claims of racial bias at every stage of the criminal justice process, from stops and searches to plea bargaining and sentencing. The system of mass incarceration is now, for all practical purposes, thoroughly immunized from claims of racial bias. Staggering racial disparities in the drug war continue but rarely make the news. One recent development that did make news was President Obama's decision to sign legislation reducing the hundred-to-one disparity in sentencing for crack versus powder cocaine to eighteen to one, a small step in the right direction.<sup>119</sup> Under the new law, it takes 28 grams of crack cocaine to net a five-year mandatory minimum sentence, while it still takes selling 500 grams of powdered cocaine to net the same sentence. There should be no disparity—the ratio should be one-to-one. But that disparity is just the tip of the iceberg. As noted in chapter 2, this system depends primarily on the prison label, not prison time. What matters most is who gets swept into this system of control and then ushered into an undercaste. The legal rules adopted by the Supreme Court guarantee that those who find themselves locked up and permanently locked out due to the drug war are overwhelmingly black and brown.



# Notes

## Introduction

1. Jarvis Cotton was a plaintiff in *Cotton v. Fordice*, 157 F.3d 388 (5th Cir. 1998), which held that Mississippi's felon disenfranchisement provision had lost its racially discriminatory taint. The information regarding Cotton's family tree was obtained by Emily Bolton on March 29, 1999, when she interviewed Cotton at Mississippi State Prison. Jarvis Cotton was released on parole in Mississippi, a state that denies voting rights to parolees.

2. The *New York Times* made the national media's first specific reference to crack in a story published in late 1985. Crack became known in a few impoverished neighborhoods in Los Angeles, New York, and Miami in early 1986. See Craig Reinerman and Harry Levine, "The Crack Attack: America's Latest Drug Scare, 1986–1992," in *Images of Issues: Typifying Contemporary Social Problems* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1995), 152.

3. The Reagan administration's decision to publicize crack "horror stories" is discussed in more depth in chapter 1.

4. Clarence Page, "'The Plan': A Paranoid View of Black Problems," *Dover* (Delaware) *Herald*, Feb. 23, 1990. See also Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945–1990* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), 212–13.

5. See Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair, *Whiteout: The CIA, Drugs, and the Press* (New York: Verso, 1999). See also Nick Shou, "The Truth in 'Dark Alliance,'" *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 18, 2006; Peter Kornbluh, "CIA's Challenge in South Central," *Los Angeles Times* (Washington edition), Nov. 15, 1996; and Alexander Cockburn, "Why They Hated Gary Webb," *The Nation*, Dec. 16, 2004.

6. Katherine Beckett and Theodore Sasson, *The Politics of Injustice: Crime and Punishment in America*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2004), 163.

7. Marc Mauer, *Race to Incarcerate*, rev. ed. (New York: The New Press, 2006), 33.

8. PEW Center on the States, *One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008* (Washington, DC: PEW Charitable Trusts, 2008), 5.

9. Donald Braman, *Doing Time on the Outside: Incarceration and Family Life in Urban America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 3, citing D.C. Department of Corrections data for 2000.

10. See, e.g., U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *Summary of Findings from the 2000 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse*, NHSDA series H-13, DHHS pub. no. SMA 01-3549 (Rockville, MD: 2001), reporting that 6.4 percent of whites, 6.4 percent of blacks, and 5.3 percent of Hispanics were current users of illegal drugs in 2000; *Results from the 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings*, NHSDA series H-22, DHHS pub. no. SMA 03-3836 (2003), revealing nearly identical rates of illegal drug use among whites and blacks, only a single percentage point between them; and *Results from the 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings*, NSDUH series H-34, DHHS pub. no. SMA 08-4343 (2007), showing essentially the same finding. See also Marc Mauer and Ryan S. King, *A 25-Year Quagmire: The "War on Drugs" and Its Impact on American Society* (Washington, DC: Sentencing Project, 2007), 19, citing a study suggesting that African Americans have slightly higher rates of illegal drug use than whites.

11. See, e.g., Howard N. Snyder and Melissa Sickman, *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report*, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2006), reporting that white youth are more likely than black youth to engage in illegal drug sales. See also Lloyd D. Johnson, Patrick M. O'Malley, Jerald G. Bachman, and John E. Schulenberg, *Monitoring the Future, National Survey Results on Drug Use, 1975–2006*, vol. 1, *Secondary School Students*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute on Drug Abuse, NIH pub. no. 07-6205 (Bethesda, MD: 2007), 32, "African American 12th graders have consistently shown lower usage rates than White 12th graders for most drugs, both licit and illicit"; and Lloyd D. Johnston, Patrick M. O'Malley, and Jerald G. Bachman, *Monitoring the Future: National Results on Adolescent Drug Use: Overview of Key Findings 2002*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute on Drug Abuse, NIH pub. no. 03-5374 (Bethesda, MD: 2003), presenting data showing that African American adolescents have slightly lower rates of illicit drug use than their white counterparts.

12. Human Rights Watch, *Punishment and Prejudice: Racial Disparities in the War on Drugs*, HRW Reports, vol. 12, no. 2 (New York, 2000).

13. See, e.g., Paul Street, *The Vicious Circle: Race, Prison, Jobs, and Community in Chicago, Illinois, and the Nation* (Chicago: Chicago Urban League, Department of Research and Planning, 2002).

14. Michael Tonry, *Thinking About Crime: Sense and Sensibility in American Penal Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 14.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, 20.
17. National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, *Task Force Report on Corrections* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1973), 358.
18. *Ibid.*, 597.
19. Mauer, *Race to Incarcerate*, 17–18.
20. The estimate that one in three black men will go to prison during their lifetime is drawn from Thomas P. Bonczar, “Prevalence of Imprisonment in the U.S. Population, 1974–2001,” U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, August 2003. In Baltimore, like many large urban areas, the majority of young African American men are currently under correctional supervision. See Eric Lotke and Jason Ziedenberg, “Tipping Point: Maryland’s Overuse of Incarceration and the Impact on Community Safety,” Justice Policy Institute, March 2005, 3.

## 1. The Rebirth of Caste

1. Reva Siegel, “Why Equal Protection No Longer Protects: The Evolving Forms of Status-Enforcing Action,” *Stanford Law Review* 49 (1997): 1111; see also Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 84–91.
2. Loïc Wacquant, “America’s New ‘Peculiar Institution’: On the Prison as Surrogate Ghetto,” *Theoretical Criminology* 4, no. 3 (2000): 380.
3. Lerone Bennett Jr., *The Shaping of Black America* (Chicago: Johnson, 1975), 62.
4. For an excellent analysis of the development of race as a social construct in the United States and around the globe, see Howard Winant, *The World Is a Ghetto: Race and Democracy Since World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).
5. Bennett, *Shaping of Black America*, 62.
6. Keith Kilty and Eric Swank, “Institutional Racism and Media Representations: Depictions of Violent Criminals and Welfare Recipients,” *Sociological Imagination* 34, no. 2–3 (1997): 106.
7. Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: Norton, 1975).
8. *Ibid.*; see also Leslie Carr, *Color-blind Racism* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), 14–16.
9. Gerald Fresia, *Toward an American Revolution: Exposing the Constitution and Other Illusions* (Boston: South End Press, 1998), 55.
10. Wacquant, “America’s New ‘Peculiar Institution,’” 380.
11. C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (1955; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

12. William Cohen, *At Freedom's Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Racial Control* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 28.

13. *Ibid.*, 33.

14. W.E.B. Du Bois, "Reconstruction and Its Benefits," *American Historical Review* 15, no. 4 (1910): 784.

15. James McPherson, "Comparing the Two Reconstructions," *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, Feb. 26, 1979, 17.

16. See Michael Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 49, 52–53.

17. John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, 8th ed. (New York: Knopf, 2000), 82; and Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 425.

18. Douglas Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-enslavement of Black People in America from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

19. *Ruffin v. Commonwealth*, 62 Va. 790, 796 (1871).

20. David M. Oshinsky, *Worse Than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1996), 63.

21. See Douglas Blackmon, "A Different Kind of Slavery," *Wall Street Journal Online*, Mar. 29, 2008.

22. Woodward, *Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 45–64.

23. *Ibid.*, 61.

24. Tom Watson, "The Negro Question in the South," cited in Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967).

25. Woodward, *Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 64.

26. William Julius Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 54.

27. Woodward, *Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 80.

28. *Ibid.*, 81.

29. *Ibid.*, 7.

30. Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944).

31. Manning Marable, *Race, Reform and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945–1990* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), 44; see also Michael Klarman, "Brown, Racial Change, and the Civil Rights Movement," *Virginia Law Review* 80 (1994): 7, 9.

32. Marable, *Race, Reform and Rebellion*, 69.

33. Stephen F. Lawson, *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944–1969* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 300, 321, 329, 331.

34. Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Pantheon, 1977), 269.
35. John Donovan, *The Politics of Poverty* (Indianapolis: Pegasus, 1973), 23.
36. Gerald McKnight, *The Last Crusade: Martin Luther King, Jr., the FBI, and the Poor People's Campaign* (New York: Westview Press, 1998), 21–22.
37. Richard Nixon, "If Mob Rule Takes Hold in U.S.," *U.S. News and World Report*, Aug. 15, 1966, 64.
38. U.S. House, "Northern Congressmen Want Civil Rights but Their Constituents Do Not Want Negroes," *Congressional Record*, 86th Cong., 2d sess. (1960) 106, pt. 4: 5062–63.
39. Katherine Beckett, *Making Crime Pay: Law and Order in Contemporary American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 32; Marc Mauer, "Two-Tiered Justice: Race, Class and Crime Policy," in *The Integration Debate: Competing Futures for American Cities*, ed. Chester Hartman and Gregory Squires (New York: Routledge, 2005), 171.
40. Vesla M. Weaver, "Frontlash: Race and the Development of Punitive Crime Policy," *Studies in American Political Development* 21 (Fall 2007): 242.
41. Barry Goldwater, "Peace Through Strength," in *Vital Speeches of the Day*, vol. 30 (New York: City News, 1964), 744.
42. "Poverty: Phony Excuse for Riots? Yes, Says a Key Senator," *U.S. News and World Report*, July 31, 1967, 14.
43. See Vanessa Barker, *The Politics of Imprisonment: How the Democratic Process Shapes the Way America Punishes Offenders* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 151.
44. Joel Rosch, "Crime as an Issue in American Politics," in *The Politics of Crime and Criminal Justice* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1985).
45. Beckett, *Making Crime Pay*, 32.
46. Marc Mauer, *Race to Incarcerate* (New York: The New Press, 1999), 52.
47. Weaver, "Frontlash," 262.
48. *Ibid.*
49. Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights*, 110.
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51. See Kathryn Russell, *The Color of Crime* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), coining the term *criminalblackman*.

52. The notion that the Supreme Court must apply a higher standard of review and show special concern for the treatment of “discrete and insular minorities”—who may not fare well through the majoritarian political process—was first recognized by the Court in the famous footnote 4 of *United States v. Caroline Products Co.*, 301 U.S. 144, n. 4 (1938).

53. *Whren v. United States*, 517 U.S. 806 (1996).

54. *McCleskey v. Kemp*, 481 U.S. 279, 327 (1989), Brennan, J., dissenting.

55. Ibid., 321.

56. Ibid., 296. Ironically, the Court expressed concern that these rules would make it difficult for *prosecutors* to disprove racial bias. Apparently, the Court was unconcerned that defendants, due to its ruling in the case, would not be able to prove racial bias because of the same rules.

57. *Ibid.*, 314–16.
58. *Ibid.*, 339.
59. *United States v. Clary*, 846 F.Supp. 768, 796–97 (E.D.Mo. 1994).
60. Doris Marie Provine, *Unequal Under Law: Race in the War on Drugs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 26.
61. Davis, *Arbitrary Justice*, 5.
62. *Yick Wo v. Hopkins*, 118 U.S. 356, 373–74 (1886).
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64. Christopher Schmitt, “Plea Bargaining Favors Whites, as Blacks, Hispanics Pay Price,” *San Jose Mercury News*, Dec. 8, 1991.
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77. *Ibid.*, 334–35.

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#### 4. The Cruel Hand

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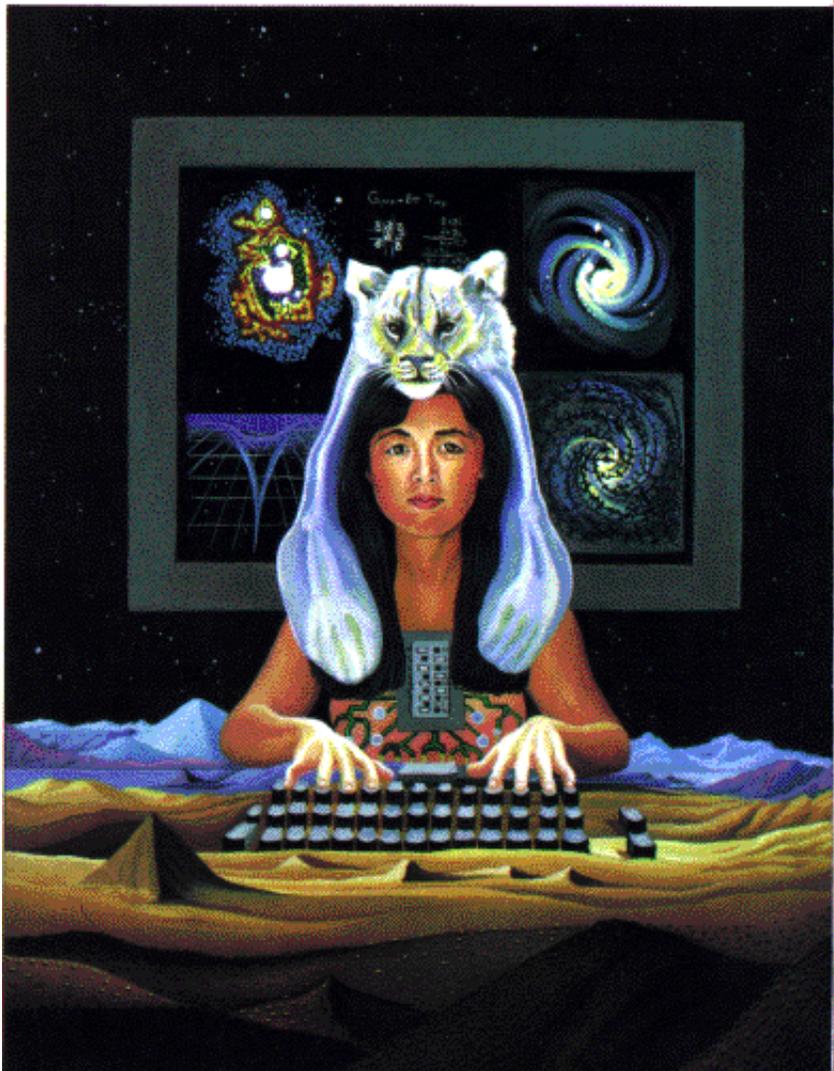
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Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York; Routledge, 1991), pp.149-181.

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## AN IRONIC DREAM OF A COMMON LANGUAGE FOR WOMEN IN THE INTEGRATED CIRCUIT

This chapter is an effort to build an ironic political myth faithful to feminism, socialism, and materialism. Perhaps more faithful as blasphemy is faithful, than as reverent worship and identification. Blasphemy has always seemed to require taking things very seriously. I know no better stance to adopt from within the secular-religious, evangelical traditions of United States politics, including the politics of socialist feminism. Blasphemy protects one from the moral majority within, while still insisting on the need for community. Blasphemy is not apostasy. Irony is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true. Irony is about humour and serious play. It is also a rhetorical strategy and a political method, one I would like to see more honoured within socialist-feminism. At the centre of my ironic faith, my blasphemy, is the image of the cyborg.

A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction. The international women's movements have constructed 'women's experience', as well as uncovered or discovered this crucial collective object. This experience is a fiction and fact of the most crucial, political kind. Liberation rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility. The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century. This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion.

Contemporary science fiction is full of cyborgs - creatures simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted.

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Modern medicine is also full of cyborgs, of couplings between organism and machine, each conceived as coded devices, in an intimacy and with a power that was not generated in the history of sexuality. Cyborg 'sex' restores some of the lovely replicative baroque of ferns and invertebrates (such nice organic prophylactics against heterosexism). Cyborg replication is uncoupled from organic reproduction. Modern production seems like a dream of cyborg colonization work, a dream that makes the nightmare of Taylorism seem idyllic. And modern war is a cyborg orgy, coded by C3I, command-control-communication-intelligence, an \$84 billion item in 1984's US defence budget. I am making an argument for the cyborg as a fiction mapping our social and bodily reality and as an imaginative resource suggesting some very fruitful couplings. Michael Foucault's biopolitics is a flaccid premonition of cyborg politics, a very open field.

By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation. In the traditions of 'Western' science and politics--the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other - the relation between organism and machine has been a border war. The stakes in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination. This chapter is an argument for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction. It is also an effort to contribute to socialist-feminist culture and theory in a postmodernist, non-naturalist mode and in the utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender, which is perhaps a world without genesis, but maybe also a world without end. The cyborg incarnation is outside salvation history. Nor does it mark time on an oedipal calendar, attempting to heal the terrible cleavages of gender in an oral symbiotic utopia or post-oedipal apocalypse. As Zoe Sofoulis argues in her unpublished manuscript on Jacques Lacan, Melanie Klein, and nuclear culture, Lacklein, the most terrible and

perhaps the most promising monsters in cyborg worlds are embodied in non-oedipal narratives with a different logic of repression, which we need to understand for our survival.

The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity. In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense - a 'final' irony since the cyborg is also the awful apocalyptic telos of the

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'West's' escalating dominations of abstract individuation, an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency, a man in space. An origin story in the 'Western', humanist sense depends on the myth of original unity, fullness, bliss and terror, represented by the phallic mother from whom all humans must separate, the task of individual development and of history, the twin potent myths inscribed most powerfully for us in psychoanalysis and Marxism. Hilary Klein has argued that both Marxism and psychoanalysis, in their concepts of labour and of individuation and gender formation, depend on the plot of original unity out of which difference must be produced and enlisted in a drama of escalating domination of woman/nature. The cyborg skips the step of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense. This is its illegitimate promise that might lead to subversion of its teleology as star wars.

The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polls based partly on a revolution of social relations in the oikos, the household. Nature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other. The relationships for forming wholes from parts, including those of polarity and hierarchical domination, are at issue in the cyborg world. Unlike the hopes of Frankenstein's monster, the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden; that is, through the fabrication of a heterosexual mate, through its completion in a finished whole, a city and cosmos. The cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family, this time without the oedipal project. The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust. Perhaps that is why I want to see if cyborgs can subvert the apocalypse of returning to nuclear dust in the manic compulsion to name the Enemy. Cyborgs are not reverent; they do not re-member the cosmos. They are wary of holism, but needy for connection- they seem to have a natural feel for united front politics, but without the vanguard party. The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential.

I will return to the science fiction of cyborgs at the end of this chapter, but now I want to signal three crucial boundary breakdowns that make the following political-fictional (political-scientific) analysis possible. By the late twentieth century in United States scientific culture, the boundary between human and animal is thoroughly

breached. The last beachheads of uniqueness have been polluted if not turned into amusement parks--language tool

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use, social behaviour, mental events, nothing really convincingly settles the separation of human and animal. And many people no longer feel the need for such a separation; indeed, many branches of feminist culture affirm the pleasure of connection of human and other living creatures. Movements for animal rights are not irrational denials of human uniqueness; they are a clear-sighted recognition of connection across the discredited breach of nature and culture. Biology and evolutionary theory over the last two centuries have simultaneously produced modern organisms as objects of knowledge and reduced the line between humans and animals to a faint trace re-etched in ideological struggle or professional disputes between life and social science. Within this framework, teaching modern Christian creationism should be fought as a form of child abuse.

Biological-determinist ideology is only one position opened up in scientific culture for arguing the meanings of human animality. There is much room for radical political people to contest the meanings of the breached boundary.<sup>2</sup> The cyborg appears in myth precisely where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed. Far from signalling a walling off of people from other living beings, cyborgs signal disturbingly and pleasurably tight coupling. Bestiality has a new status in this cycle of marriage exchange.

The second leaky distinction is between animal-human (organism) and machine. Pre-cybernetic machines could be haunted; there was always the spectre of the ghost in the machine. This dualism structured the dialogue between materialism and idealism that was settled by a dialectical progeny, called spirit or history, according to taste. But basically machines were not self-moving, self-designing, autonomous. They could not achieve man's dream, only mock it. They were not man, an author to himself, but only a caricature of that masculinist reproductive dream. To think they were otherwise was paranoid. Now we are not so sure. Late twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and art)ificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines. Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert.

Technological determination is only one ideological space opened up by the reconceptions of machine and organism as coded texts through which we engage in the play of writing and reading the world.<sup>3</sup> 'Textualization' of everything in poststructuralist, postmodernist theory has been damned by Marxists and socialist feminists for its utopian disregard for the lived relations of domination that ground the 'play' of arbitrary reading.<sup>4</sup> It is certainly true that postmodernist strategies, like my cyborg myth, subvert myriad organic wholes (for example, the poem, the primitive culture, the biological organism). In short, the certainty of what counts as nature -- a

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source of insight and promise of innocence -- is undermined, probably fatally. The transcendent authorization of interpretation is lost, and with it the ontology grounding 'Western' epistemology. But the alternative is not cynicism or faithlessness, that is, some version of abstract existence, like the accounts of technological determinism destroying 'man' by the 'machine' or 'meaningful political action' by the 'text'. Who cyborgs will be is a radical question; the answers are a matter of survival. Both chimpanzees and artefacts have politics, so why shouldn't we (de Waal, 1982; Winner, 1980)?

The third distinction is a subset of the second: the boundary between physical and non-physical is very imprecise for us. Pop physics books on the consequences of quantum theory and the indeterminacy principle are a kind of popular scientific equivalent to Harlequin romances\* as a marker of radical change in American white heterosexuality: they get it wrong, but they are on the right subject. Modern machines are quintessentially microelectronic devices: they are everywhere and they are invisible. Modern machinery is an irreverent upstart god, mocking the Father's ubiquity and spirituality. The silicon chip is a surface for writing; it is etched in molecular scales disturbed only by atomic noise, the ultimate interference for nuclear scores. Writing, power, and technology are old partners in Western stories of the origin of civilization, but miniaturization has changed our experience of mechanism. Miniaturization has turned out to be about power; small is not so much beautiful as pre-eminently dangerous, as in cruise missiles. Contrast the TV sets of the 1950s or the news cameras of the 1970s with the TV wrist bands or hand-sized video cameras now advertised. Our best machines are made of sunshine; they are all light and clean because they are nothing but signals, electromagnetic waves, a section of a spectrum, and these machines are eminently portable, mobile -- a matter of immense human pain in Detroit and Singapore. People are nowhere near so fluid, being both material and opaque. Cyborgs are ether, quintessence.

The ubiquity and invisibility of cyborgs is precisely why these sunshine-belt machines are so deadly. They are as hard to see politically as materially. They are about consciousness - or its simulation.<sup>5</sup> They are floating signifiers moving in pickup trucks across Europe, blocked more effectively by the witch-weavings of the displaced and so unnatural Greenham women, who read the cyborg webs of power so very well, than by the militant labour of older masculinist politics, whose natural constituency needs defence jobs. Ultimately the 'hardest' science is about the realm of greatest boundary confusion, the realm of pure number, pure spirit, C3I, cryptography, and the preservation of potent secrets. The new machines are so clean and light. Their engineers are sun-worshippers mediating a new scientific revolution

\*The US equivalent of Mills & Boon.

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associated with the night dream of post-industrial society. The diseases evoked by these clean machines are 'no more' than the minuscule coding changes of an antigen in the immune system, 'no more' than the experience of stress. The nimble fingers of 'Oriental' women, the old fascination of little Anglo-Saxon Victorian girls with

doll's houses, women's enforced attention to the small take on quite new dimensions in this world. There might be a cyborg Alice taking account of these new dimensions. Ironically, it might be the unnatural cyborg women making chips in Asia and spiral dancing in Santa Rita jail\* whose constructed unities will guide effective oppositional strategies.

So my cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work. One of my premises is that most American socialists and feminists see deepened dualisms of mind and body, animal and machine, idealism and materialism in the social practices, symbolic formula-tions, and physical artefacts associated with 'high technology' and scientific culture. From *One-Dimensional Man* (Marcuse, 1964) to *The Death of Nature* (Merchant, 1980), the analytic resources developed by progressives have insisted on the necessary domination of technics and recalled us to an imagined organic body to integrate our resistance. Another of my premises is that the need for unity of people trying to resist world-wide intensification of domination has never been more acute. But a slightly perverse shift of perspective might better enable us to contest for meanings, as well as for other forms of power and pleasure in technologically mediated societies.

From one perspective, a cyborg world is about the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet, about the final abstraction embodied in a Star Wars apocalypse waged in the name of defence, about the final appropriation of women's bodies in a masculinist orgy of war (Sofia, 1984). From another perspective, a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints. The political struggle is to see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point. Single vision produces worse illusions than double vision or many-headed monsters. Cyborg unities are monstrous and illegitimate; in our present political circumstances, we could hardly hope for more potent myths for resistance and recoupling. I like to imagine LAG, the Livermore Action Group, as a kind of cyborg society, dedicated to realistically converting the laboratories that most fiercely embody and spew out the tools

\* A practice at once both spiritual and political that linked guards and arrested anti-nuclear demonstrators in the Alameda County jail in California in the early 1985.

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Of technological apocalypse, and committed to building a political form that acutally manages to hold together witches, engineers, elders, perverts, Christians, mothers, and Leninists long enough to disarm the state. Fission Impossible is the name of the affinity group in my town.(Affinity: related not by blood but by choice, the appeal of one chemical nuclear group for another, avidiy.)6

## FRACTURED IDENTITIES

It has become difficult to name one's feminism by a single adjective -- or even to insist in every circumstance upon the noun. Consciousness of exclusion through naming is acute. Identities seem contradictory, partial, and strategic. With the hard-won recognition of their social and historical constitution, gender, race, and class cannot provide the basis for belief in 'essential' unity. There is nothing about teeing 'female' that naturally binds women. There is not even such a state as 'being' female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practices. Gender, race, or class consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism. And who counts as 'us' in my own rhetoric? Which identities are available to ground such a potent political myth called 'us', and what could motivate enlistment in this collectivity? Painful fragmentation among feminists (not to mention among women) along every possible fault line has made the concept of woman elusive, an excuse for the matrix of women's dominations of each other. For me - and for many who share a similar historical location in white, professional middle-class, female, radical, North American, mid-adult bodies - the sources of a crisis in political identity are legion. The recent history for much of the US left and US feminism has been a response to this kind of crisis by endless splitting and searches for a new essential unity. But there has also been a growing recognition of another response through coalition - affinity, not identity.<sup>7</sup>

Chela Sandoval (n.d., 1984), from a consideration of specific historical moments in the formation of the new political voice called women of colour, has theorized a hopeful model of political identity called 'oppositional consciousness', born of the skills for reading webs of power by those refused stable membership in the social categories of race, sex, or class. 'Women of color', a name contested at its origins by those whom it would incorporate, as well as a historical consciousness marking systematic breakdown of all the signs of Man in 'Western' traditions, constructs a kind of postmodernist identity out of otherness, difference, and specificity. This postmodernist identity is fully political, whatever might be said about other possible postmodernisms. Sandoval's oppositional consciousness is about contradic-

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tory locations and heterochronic calendars, not about relativisms and pluralisms.

Sandoval emphasizes the lack of any essential criterion for identifying who is a woman of colour. She notes that the definition of the group has been by conscious appropriation of negation. For example, a Chicana or US black woman has not been able to speak as a woman or as a black person or as a Chicano. Thus, she was at the bottom of a cascade of negative identities, left out of even the privileged oppressed authorial categories called 'women and blacks', who claimed to make the important revolutions. The category 'woman' negated all non-white women; 'black' negated all non-black people, as well as all black women. But there was also no 'she', no singularity, but a sea of differences among US women who have affirmed their historical identity as US women of colour. This identity marks out a self-consciously constructed space that cannot affirm the capacity to act on the basis of natural identification, but only on the basis of conscious coalition, of affinity, of political kinship.<sup>8</sup> Unlike the 'woman' of some streams of the white women's movement in the United States, there is no

naturalization of the matrix, or at least this is what Sandoval argues is uniquely available through the power of oppositional consciousness.

Sandoval's argument has to be seen as one potent formulation for feminists out of the world-wide development of anti-colonialist discourse; that is to say, discourse dissolving the 'West' and its highest product - the one who is not animal, barbarian, or woman; man, that is, the author of a cosmos called history. As orientalism is deconstructed politically and semiotically, the identities of the occident destabilize, including those of feminists.<sup>9</sup> Sandoval argues that 'women of colour' have a chance to build an effective unity that does not replicate the imperializing, totalizing revolutionary subjects of previous Marxisms and feminisms which had not faced the consequences of the disorderly polyphony emerging from decolonization.

Katie King has emphasized the limits of identification and the political/ poetic mechanics of identification built into reading 'the poem', that generative core of cultural feminism. King criticizes the persistent tendency among contemporary feminists from different 'moments' or 'conversations' in feminist practice to taxonomize the women's movement to make one's own political tendencies appear to be the telos of the whole. These taxonomies tend to remake feminist history so that it appears to be an ideological struggle among coherent types persisting over time, especially those typical units called radical, liberal, and socialist-feminism. Literally, all other feminisms are either incorporated or marginalized, usually by building an explicit ontology and epistemology.<sup>10</sup> Taxonomies of feminism produce epistemologies to police deviation from official women's experience. And of course, 'women's culture', like women of colour, is consciously created by

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mechanisms inducing affinity. The rituals of poetry, music, and certain forms of academic practice have been pre-eminent. The politics of race and culture in the US women's movements are intimately interwoven. The common achievement of King and Sandoval is learning how to craft a poetic/political unity without relying on a logic of appropriation, incorporation, and taxonomic identification.

The theoretical and practical struggle against unity-through-domination or unity-through-incorporation ironically not only undermines the justifications for patriarchy, colonialism, humanism, positivism, essentialism, scientism, and other unlamented -isms, but all claims for an organic or natural standpoint. I think that radical and socialist/ Marxist-feminisms have also undermined their/our own epistemological strategies and that this is a crucially valuable step in imagining possible unities. It remains to be seen whether all 'epistemologies' as Western political people have known them fail us in the task to build effective affinities.

It is important to note that the effort to construct revolutionary stand-points, epistemologies as achievements of people committed to changing the world, has been part of the process showing the limits of identification. The acid tools of postmodernist theory and the constructive tools of ontological discourse about revolutionary

subjects might be seen as ironic allies in dissolving Western selves in the interests of survival. We are excruciatingly conscious of what it means to have a historically constituted body. But with the loss of innocence in our origin, there is no expulsion from the Garden either. Our politics lose the indulgence of guilt with the naivete of innocence. But what would another political myth for socialist-feminism look like? What kind of politics could embrace partial, contradictory, permanently unclosed constructions of personal and collective selves and still be faithful, effective - and, ironically, socialist-feminist?

I do not know of any other time in history when there was greater need for political unity to confront effectively the dominations of 'race', 'gender', 'sexuality', and 'class'. I also do not know of any other time when the kind of unity we might help build could have been possible. None of 'us' have any longer the symbolic or material capability of dictating the shape of reality to any of 'them'. Or at least 'we' cannot claim innocence from practicing such dominations. White women, including socialist feminists, discovered (that is, were forced kicking and screaming to notice) the non-innocence of the category 'woman'. That consciousness changes the geography of all previous categories; it denatures them as heat denatures a fragile protein. Cyborg feminists have to argue that 'we' do not want any more natural matrix of unity and that no construction is whole. Innocence, and the corollary insistence on victimhood as the only ground for insight, has done enough damage. But the constructed revolutionary subject must give late-twentieth-

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century people pause as well. In the fraying of identities and in the reflexive strategies for constructing them, the possibility opens up for weaving something other than a shroud for the day after the apocalypse that so prophetically ends salvation history.

Both Marxist/socialist-feminisms and radical feminisms have simul-taneously naturalized and denatured the category 'woman' and conscious-ness of the social lives of 'women'. Perhaps a schematic caricature can highlight both kinds of moves. Marxian socialism is rooted in an analysis of wage labour which reveals class structure. The consequence of the wage relationship is systematic alienation, as the worker is dissociated from his (sic) product. Abstraction and illusion rule in knowledge, domination rules in practice. Labour is the pre-eminently privileged category enabling the Marxist to overcome illusion and find that point of view which is necessary for changing the world. Labour is the humanizing activity that makes man; labour is an ontological category permitting the knowledge of a subject, and so the knowledge of subjugation and alienation.

In faithful filiation, socialist-feminism advanced by allying itself with the basic analytic strategies of Marxism. The main achievement of both Marxist feminists and socialist feminists was to expand the category of labour to accommodate what (some) women did, even when the wage relation was subordinated to a more comprehensive view of labour under capitalist patriarchy. In particular, women's labour in the household and women's activity as mothers generally (that is, reproduction in the socialist-feminist sense), entered theory on the authority of analogy to the Marxian concept of labour. The unity of women here rests on an epistemology based on the ontological structure of 'labour'. Marxist/socialist-feminism does not 'natur-alize' unity; it is a

possible achievement based on a possible standpoint rooted in social relations. The essentializing move is in the ontological structure of labour or of its analogue, women's activity.<sup>11</sup> The inheritance of Marxian humanism, with its pre-eminently Western self, is the difficulty for me. The contribution from these formulations has been the emphasis on the daily responsibility of real women to build unities, rather than to naturalize them.

Catherine MacKinnon's (198Z, 1987) version of radical feminism is itself a caricature of the appropriating, incorporating, totalizing tendencies of Western theories of identity grounding action.<sup>12</sup> It is factually and politically wrong to assimilate all of the diverse 'moments' or 'conversations' in recent women's politics named radical feminism to MacKinnon's version. But the teleological logic of her theory shows how an epistemology and ontology - including their negations - erase or police difference. Only one of the effects of MacKinnon's theory is the rewriting of the history of the polymorphous field called radical feminism. The major effect is the production of a theory

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of experience, of women's identity, that is a kind of apocalypse for all revolutionary standpoints. That is, the totalization built into this tale of radical feminism achieves its end - the unity of women - by enforcing the experience of and testimony to radical non-being. As for the Marxist/ socialist feminist, consciousness is an achievement, not a natural fact. And MacKinnon's theory eliminates some of the difficulties built into humanist revolutionary subjects, but at the cost of radical reductionism.

MacKinnon argues that feminism necessarily adopted a different analytical strategy from Marxism, looking first not at the structure of class, but at the structure of sex/gender and its generative relationship, men's constitution and appropriation of women sexually. Ironically, MacKinnon's 'ontology' constructs a non-subject, a non-being. Another's desire, not the self's labour, is the origin of 'woman'. She therefore develops a theory of consciousness that enforces what can count as 'women's' experience - anything that names sexual violation, indeed, sex itself as far as 'women' can be concerned. Feminist practice is the construction of this form of consciousness; that is, the self-knowledge of a self-who-is-not.

Perversely, sexual appropriation in this feminism still has the epistemological status of labour; that is to say, the point from which an analysis able to contribute to changing the world must flow. But sexual objectification, not alienation, is the consequence of the structure of sex/gender. In the realm of knowledge, the result of sexual objectification is illusion and abstraction. However, a woman is not simply alienated from her product, but in a deep sense does not exist as a subject, or even potential subject, since she owes her existence as a woman to sexual appropriation. To be constituted by another's desire is not the same thing as to be alienated in the violent separation of the labourer from his product.

MacKinnon's radical theory of experience is totalizing in the extreme; it does not so much marginalize as

obliterate the authority of any other women's political speech and action. It is a totalization producing what Western patriarchy itself never succeeded in doing - feminists' consciousness of the non-existence of women, except as products of men's desire. I think MacKinnon correctly argues that no Marxian version of identity can firmly ground women's unity. But in solving the problem of the contradictions of any Western revolutionary subject for feminist purposes, she develops an even more authoritarian doctrine of experience. If my complaint about socialist/Marxian standpoints is their unintended erasure of polyvocal, unassimilable, radical difference made visible in anti-colonial discourse and practice, MacKinnon's intentional erasure of all difference through the device of the 'essential' non-existence of women is not reassuring.

In my taxonomy, which like any other taxonomy is a re-inscription of history, radical feminism can accommodate all the activities of women named by socialist feminists as forms of labour only if the activity can somehow be sexualized. Reproduction had different tones of meanings for the two tendencies, one rooted in labour, one in sex, both calling the consequences of domination and ignorance of social and personal reality 'false consciousness'.

Beyond either the difficulties or the contributions in the argument of any one author, neither Marxist nor radical feminist points of view have tended to embrace the status of a partial explanation; both were regularly constituted as totalities. Western explanation has demanded as much; how else could the 'Western' author incorporate its others? Each tried to annex other forms of domination by expanding its basic categories through analogy, simple listing, or addition. Embarrassed silence about race among white radical and socialist feminists was one major, devastating political consequence. History and polyvocality disappear into political taxonomies that try to establish genealogies. There was no structural room for race (or for much else) in theory claiming to reveal the construction of the category woman and social group women as a unified or totalizable whole. The structure of my caricature looks like this:

socialist feminism--structure of class // wage labour // alienation labour, by analogy reproduction,  
by extension sex, by addition race radical feminism - structure of gender // sexual appropriation //  
objectification

sex, by analogy labour, by extension reproduction, by addition race

In another context, the French theorist, Julia Kristeva, claimed women appeared as a historical group after the Second World War, along with groups like youth. Her dates are doubtful; but we are now accustomed to remembering that as objects of knowledge and as historical actors, 'race' did not always exist, 'class' has a historical genesis, and 'homosexuals' are quite junior. It is no accident that the symbolic system of the family of man - and so the essence of woman - breaks up at the same moment that networks of connection among people on the planet are unprecedentedly multiple, pregnant, and complex. 'Advanced capitalism' is inadequate to convey the structure of this historical moment. In the 'Western' sense, the end of man is at stake. It is no accident that woman disintegrates into women in our time. Perhaps socialist feminists were not substantially guilty of producing essentialist theory that suppressed women's particularity and contradictory interests. I think

we have been, at least through unreflective participation in the logics, languages, and practices of white humanism and through searching for a single ground of domination to secure our revolutionary voice. Now we have less excuse. But in the consciousness of our failures, we

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risk lapsing into boundless difference and giving up on the confusing task of making partial, real connection. Some differences are playful; some are poles of world historical systems of domination. 'Epistemology' is about knowing the difference.

## THE INFORMATICS OF DOMINATION

In this attempt at an epistemological and political position, I would like to sketch a picture of possible unity, a picture indebted to socialist and feminist principles of design. The frame for my sketch is set by the extent and importance of rearrangements in world-wide social relations tied to science and technology. I argue for a politics rooted in claims about fundamental changes in the nature of class, race, and gender in an emerging system of world order analogous in its novelty and scope to that created by industrial capitalism; we are living through a movement from an organic, industrial society to a polymorphous, information system--from all work to all play, a deadly game. Simultaneously material and ideological, the dichotomies may be expressed in the following chart of transitions from the comfortable old hierarchical dominations to the scary new networks I have called the informatics of domination:

Representation	Simulation
Bourgeois novel, realism	Science fiction, postmodernism
Organism	Biotic Component
Depth, integrity	Surface, boundary
Heat	Noise
Biology as clinical practice	Biology as inscription
Physiology	Communications engineering
Small group	Subsystem
Perfection	Optimization
Eugenics	Population Control
Decadence, <i>Magic Mountain</i>	Obsolescence, <i>Future Shock</i>
Hygiene	Stress Management
Microbiology, tuberculosis	Immunology, AIDS
Organic division of labour	Ergonomics/cybernetics of labour
Functional specialization	Modular construction
Reproduction	Replication
Organic sex role specialization	Optimal genetic strategies
Biological determinism	Evolutionary inertia, constraints
Community ecology	Ecosystem
Racial chain of being	Neo-imperialism, United Nations humanism
Scientific management in home/ factory	Global factory/Electronic cottage
Family/Market/Factory	Women in the Integrated Circuit
Family wage	Comparable worth
Public/Private	Cyborg citizenship
Nature/Culture	fields of difference
Co-operation	Communications enhancement
Freud	Lacan
Sex	Genetic engineering
labour	Robotics
Mind	Artificial Intelligence
Second World War	Star Wars
White Capitalist Patriarchy	Informatics of Domination

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This list suggests several interesting things.<sup>13</sup> First, the objects on the right-hand side cannot be coded as 'natural', a realization that subverts naturalistic coding for the left-hand side as well. We cannot go back ideologically or materially. It's not just that 'god' is dead; so is the 'goddess'. Or both are revived in the worlds charged with microelectronic and biotechnological politics. In relation to objects like biotic components, one must not think in terms of essential properties, but in terms of design, boundary constraints, rates of flows, systems logics, costs of lowering constraints. Sexual reproduction is one kind of reproductive strategy among many, with costs and benefits as a function of the system environment. Ideologies of sexual reproduction can no longer reasonably call on notions of sex and sex role as organic aspects in natural objects like organisms and

families. Such reasoning will be unmasked as irrational, and ironically corporate executives reading Playboy and anti-porn radical feminists will make strange bedfellows in jointly unmasking the irrationalism.

Likewise for race, ideologies about human diversity have to be formulated in terms of frequencies of parameters, like blood groups or intelligence scores. It is 'irrational' to invoke concepts like primitive and civilized. For liberals and radicals, the search for integrated social systems gives way to a new practice called 'experimental ethnography' in which an organic object dissipates in attention to the play of writing. At the level of ideology, we see translations of racism and colonialism into languages of development and under-development, rates and constraints of modernization. Any objects or persons can be reasonably thought of in terms of disassembly and reassembly; no 'natural' architectures constrain system design. The financial districts in all the world's cities, as well as the export-processing and free-trade zones, proclaim this elementary fact of 'late capitalism'. The entire universe of objects that can be known scientifically must be formulated as problems in

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communications engineering (for the managers) or theories of the text (for those who would resist). Both are cyborg semiologies.

One should expect control strategies to concentrate on boundary conditions and interfaces, on rates of flow across boundaries-- and not on the integrity of natural objects. 'Integrity' or 'sincerity' of the Western self gives way to decision procedures and expert systems. For example, control strategies applied to women's capacities to give birth to new human beings will be developed in the languages of population control and maximization of goal achievement for individual decision-makers. Control strategies will be formulated in terms of rates, costs of constraints, degrees of freedom. Human beings, like any other component or subsystem, must be localized in a system architecture whose basic modes of operation are probabilistic, statistical. No objects, spaces, or bodies are sacred in themselves; any component can be interfaced with any other if the proper standard, the proper code, can be constructed for processing signals in a common language. Exchange in this world transcends the universal translation effected by capitalist markets that Marx analysed so well. The privileged pathology affecting all kinds of components in this universe is stress - communications breakdown (Hogness, 1983). The cyborg is not subject to Foucault's biopolitics; the cyborg simulates politics, a much more potent field of operations.

This kind of analysis of scientific and cultural objects of knowledge which have appeared historically since the Second World War prepares us to notice some important inadequacies in feminist analysis which has proceeded as if the organic, hierarchical dualisms ordering discourse in 'the West' since Aristotle still ruled. They have been cannibalized, or as Zoe Sofia (Sofoulis) might put it, they have been 'techno-digested'. The dichotomies between mind and body, animal and human, organism and machine, public and private, nature and culture, men and women, primitive and civilized are all in question ideologically. The actual situation of women is their integration/ exploitation into a world system of production/reproduction and communication called the informatics of domination. The home, workplace, market, public arena, the body itself- all can be dispersed

and interfaced in nearly infinite, polymorphous ways, with large consequences for women and others - consequences that themselves are very different for different people and which make potent oppositional international movements difficult to imagine and essential for survival. One important route for reconstructing socialist-feminist politics is through theory and practice addressed to the social relations of science and technology, including crucially the systems of myth and meanings structuring our imaginations. The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code.

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Communications technologies and biotechnologies are the crucial tools recrafting our bodies. These tools embody and enforce new social relations for women world-wide. Technologies and scientific discourses can be partially understood as formalizations, i.e., as frozen moments, of the fluid social interactions constituting them, but they should also be viewed as instruments for enforcing meanings. The boundary is permeable between tool and myth, instrument and concept, historical systems of social relations and historical anatomies of possible bodies, including objects of knowledge. Indeed, myth and tool mutually constitute each other.

Furthermore, communications sciences and modern biologies are constructed by a common move - the translation of the world into a problem of coding, a search for a common language in which all resistance to instrumental control disappears and all heterogeneity can be submitted to disassembly, reassembly, investment, and exchange.

In communications sciences, the translation of the world into a problem in coding can be illustrated by looking at cybernetic (feedback-controlled) systems theories applied to telephone technology, computer design, weapons deployment, or data base construction and maintenance. In each case, solution to the key questions rests on a theory of language and control; the key operation is determining the rates, directions, and probabilities of flow of a quantity called information. The world is subdivided by boundaries differentially permeable to information. Information is just that kind of quantifiable element (unit, basis of unity) which allows universal translation, and so unhindered instrumental power (called effective communication). The biggest threat to such power is interruption of communication. Any system breakdown is a function of stress. The fundamentals of this technology can be condensed into the metaphor C31, command-controlcommunication-intelligence, the military's symbol for its operations theory.

In modern biologies, the translation of the world into a problem in coding can be illustrated by molecular genetics, ecology, sociobiological evolutionary theory, and immunobiology. The organism has been translated into problems of genetic coding and read-out. Biotechnology, a writing technology, informs research broadly.<sup>14</sup> In a sense, organisms have ceased to exist as objects of knowledge, giving way to biotic components, i.e., special kinds of information-processing devices. The analogous moves in ecology could be examined by probing the history and utility of the concept of the ecosystem. Immunobiology and associated medical practices are rich exemplars of the privilege of coding and recognition systems as objects of

knowledge, as constructions of bodily reality for us. Biology here is a kind of cryptography. Research is necessarily a kind of intelligence activity. Ironies abound. A stressed system goes awry; its communication processes break down; it fails to recognize the difference between self and other. Human babies with

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baboon hearts evoke national ethical perplexity-- for animal rights activists at least as much as for the guardians of human purity. In the US gay men and intravenous drug users are the 'privileged' victims of an awful immune system disease that marks (inscribes on the body) confusion of boundaries and moral pollution (Treichler, 1987).

But these excursions into communications sciences and biology have been at a rarefied level; there is a mundane, largely economic reality to support my claim that these sciences and technologies indicate fundamental transformations in the structure of the world for us. Communications technologies depend on electronics. Modern states, multinational corporations, military power, welfare state apparatuses, satellite systems, political processes, fabrication of our imaginations, labour-control systems, medical constructions of our bodies, commercial pornography, the international division of labour, and religious evangelism depend intimately upon electronics. Micro-electronics is the technical basis of simulacra; that is, of copies without originals.

Microelectronics mediates the translations of labour into robotics and word processing, sex into genetic engineering and reproductive technologies, and mind into artificial intelligence and decision procedures. The new biotechnologies concern more than human reproduction. Biology as a powerful engineering science for redesigning materials and processes has revolutionary implications for industry, perhaps most obvious today in areas of fermentation, agriculture, and energy. Communications sciences and biology are constructions of natural-technical objects of knowledge in which the difference between machine and organism is thoroughly blurred; mind, body, and tool are on very intimate terms. The 'multinational' material organization of the production and reproduction of daily life and the symbolic organization of the production and reproduction of culture and imagination seem equally implicated. The boundary-maintaining images of base and superstructure, public and private, or material and ideal never seemed more feeble.

I have used Rachel Grossman's (1980) image of women in the integrated circuit to name the situation of women in a world so intimately restructured through the social relations of science and technology.<sup>15</sup> I used the odd circumlocution, 'the social relations of science and technology', to indicate that we are not dealing with a technological determinism, but with a historical system depending upon structured relations among people. But the phrase should also indicate that science and technology provide fresh sources of power, that we need fresh sources of analysis and political action (Latour, 1984). Some of the rearrangements of race, sex, and class rooted in high-tech-facilitated social relations can make socialist-feminism more relevant to effective progressive politics.

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## THE 'HOMWORK ECONOMY' OUTSIDE 'THE HOME'

The 'New Industrial Revolution' is producing a new world-wide working class, as well as new sexualities and ethnicities. The extreme mobility of capital and the emerging international division of labour are intertwined with the emergence of new collectivities, and the weakening of familiar groupings. These developments are neither gender- nor race-neutral. White men in advanced industrial societies have become newly vulnerable to permanent job loss, and women are not disappearing from the job rolls at the same rates as men. It is not simply that women in Third World countries are the preferred labour force for the science-based multinationals in the export-processing sectors, particularly in electronics. The picture is more systematic and involves reproduction, sexuality, culture, consumption, and production. In the prototypical Silicon Valley, many women's lives have been structured around employment in electronics-dependent jobs, and their intimate realities include serial heterosexual monogamy, negotiating childcare, distance from extended kin or most other forms of traditional community, a high likelihood of loneliness and extreme economic vulnerability as they age. The ethnic and racial diversity of women in Silicon Valley structures a microcosm of conflicting differences in culture, family, religion, education, and language.

Richard Gordon has called this new situation the 'homework economy'.<sup>16</sup> Although he includes the phenomenon of literal homework emerging in connection with electronics assembly, Gordon intends 'homework economy' to name a restructuring of work that broadly has the characteristics formerly ascribed to female jobs, jobs literally done only by women. Work is being redefined as both literally female and feminized, whether performed by men or women. To be feminized means to be made extremely vulnerable; able to be disassembled, reassembled, exploited as a reserve labour force; seen less as workers than as servers; subjected to time arrangements on and off the paid job that make a mockery of a limited work day; leading an existence that always borders on being obscene, out of place, and reducible to sex. Deskilling is an old strategy newly applicable to formerly privileged workers. However, the homework economy does not refer only to large-scale deskilling, nor does it deny that new areas of high skill are emerging, even for women and men previously excluded from skilled employment. Rather, the concept indicates that factory, home, and market are integrated on a new scale and that the places of women are crucial - and need to be analysed for differences among women and for meanings for relations between men and women in various situations.

The homework economy as a world capitalist organizational structure is made possible by (not caused by) the new technologies. The success of the attack on relatively privileged, mostly white, men's unionized jobs is deaf to

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the power of the new communications technologies to integrate and control labour despite extensive dispersion and decentralization. The consequences of the new technologies are felt by women both in the loss of the family (male) wage (if they ever had access to this white privilege) and in the character of their own jobs, which are becoming capital-intensive; for example, office work and nursing.

The new economic and technological arrangements are also related to the collapsing welfare state and the ensuing intensification of demands on women to sustain daily life for themselves as well as for men, children, and old people. The feminization of poverty-- generated by dismantling the welfare state, by the homework economy where stable jobs become the exception, and sustained by the expectation that women's wages will not be matched by a male income for the support of children-- has become an urgent focus. The causes of various women-headed households are a function of race, class, or sexuality; but their increasing generality is a ground for coalitions of women on many issues. That women regularly sustain daily life partly as a function of their enforced status as mothers is hardly new; the kind of integration with the overall capitalist and progressively war-based economy is new. The particular pressure, for example, on US black women, who have achieved an escape from (barely) paid domestic service and who now hold clerical and similar jobs in large numbers, has large implications for continued enforced black poverty with employment. Teenage women in industrializing areas of the Third World increasingly find themselves the sole or major source of a cash wage for their families, while access to land is ever more problematic. These developments must have major consequences in the psychodynamics and politics of gender and race.

Within the framework of three major stages of capitalism (commercial/ early industrial, monopoly, multinational) --tied to nationalism, imperialism, and multinationalism, and related to Jameson's three dominant aesthetic periods of realism, modernism, and postmodernism --I would argue that specific forms of families dialectically relate to forms of capital and to its political and cultural concomitants. Although lived problematically and unequally, ideal forms of these families might be schematized as (1) the patriarchal nuclear family, structured by the dichotomy between public and private and accompanied by the white bourgeois ideology of separate spheres and nineteenth-century Anglo-American bourgeois feminism; (2) the modern family mediated (or enforced) by the welfare state and institutions like the family wage, with a flowering of a-feminist heterosexual ideologies, including their radical versions represented in Greenwich Village around the First World War; and (3) the 'family' of the homework economy with its oxymoronic structure of women-headed households and its explosion of feminisms and the paradoxical intensification and erosion of gender itself.

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This is the context in which the projections for world-wide structural unemployment stemming from the new technologies are part of the picture of the homework economy. As robotics and related technologies put men out of work in 'developed' countries and exacerbate failure to generate male jobs in Third World 'development', and as the automated office becomes the rule even in labour-surplus countries, the feminization of work intensifies. Black women in the United States have long known what it looks like to face the structural underemployment ('feminization') of black men, as well as their own highly vulnerable position in the wage economy. It is no longer a secret that sexuality, reproduction, family, and community life are interwoven with this economic structure in myriad ways which have also differentiated the situations of white and black women. Many more women and men will contend with similar situations, which will make cross-gender and race

alliances on issues of basic life support (with or without jobs) necessary, not just mice.

The new technologies also have a profound effect on hunger and on food production for subsistence world-wide. Rae Lesser Blumberg (1983) estimates that women produce about 50 per cent of the world's subsistence food.<sup>17</sup> Women are excluded generally from benefiting from the increased high-tech commodification of food and energy crops, their days are made more arduous because their responsibilities to provide food do not diminish, and their reproductive situations are made more complex. Green Revolution technologies interact with other high-tech industrial production to alter gender divisions of labour and differential gender migration patterns.

The new technologies seem deeply involved in the forms of 'privatization' that Ros Petchesky (1981) has analysed, in which militarization, right-wing family ideologies and policies, and intensified definitions of corporate (and state) property as private synergistically interact.<sup>18</sup> The new communications technologies are fundamental to the eradication of 'public life' for everyone. This facilitates the mushrooming of a permanent high-tech military establishment at the cultural and economic expense of most people, but especially of women. Technologies like video games and highly miniaturized television seem crucial to production of modern forms of 'private life'. The culture of video games is heavily orientated to individual competition and extraterrestrial warfare. High-tech, gendered imaginations are produced here, imaginations that can contemplate destruction of the planet and a sci-fi escape from its consequences. More than our imaginations is militarized; and the other realities of electronic and nuclear warfare are inescapable. These are the technologies that promise ultimate mobility and perfect exchange-- and incidentally enable tourism, that perfect practice of mobility and exchange, to emerge as one of the world's largest single industries.

The new technologies affect the social relations of both sexuality and of

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reproduction, and not always in the same ways. The close ties of sexuality and instrumentality, of views of the body as a kind of private satisfaction- and utility-maximizing machine, are described nicely in sociobiological origin stories that stress a genetic calculus and explain the inevitable dialectic of domination of male and female gender roles.<sup>19</sup> These sociobiological stories depend on a high-tech view of the body as a biotic component or cybernetic communications system. Among the many transformations of reproductive situations is the medical one, where women's bodies have boundaries newly permeable to both 'visualization' and 'intervention'. Of course, who controls the interpretation of bodily boundaries in medical hermeneutics is a major feminist issue. The speculum served as an icon of women's claiming their bodies in the 1970s; that handcraft tool is inadequate to express our needed body politics in the negotiation of reality in the practices of cyborg reproduction. Self-help is not enough. The technologies of visualization recall the important cultural practice of hanging with the camera and the deeply predatory nature of a photographic consciousness.<sup>20</sup> Sex, sexuality, and reproduction are central actors in high-tech myth systems structuring our imaginations of personal and social possibility.

Another critical aspect of the social relations of the new technologies is the reformulation of expectations, culture, work, and reproduction for the large scientific and technical work-force. A major social and political danger is the formation of a strongly bimodal social structure, with the masses of women and men of all ethnic groups, but especially people of colour, confined to a homework economy, illiteracy of several varieties, and general redundancy and impotence, controlled by high-tech repressive apparatuses ranging from entertainment to surveillance and disappearance. An adequate socialist-feminist politics should address women in the privileged occupational categories, and particularly in the production of science and technology that constructs scientific-technical discourses, processes, and objects.<sup>21</sup>

This issue is only one aspect of enquiry into the possibility of a feminist science, but it is important. What kind of constitutive role in the production of knowledge, imagination, and practice can new groups doing science have? How can these groups be allied with progressive social and political movements? What kind of political accountability can be constructed to the women together across the scientific-technical hierarchies separating us? Might there be ways of developing feminist science/technology politics in alliance with and-military science facility conversion action groups? Many scientific and technical workers in Silicon Valley, the high-tech cowboys included, do not want to work on military science.<sup>22</sup> Can these personal preferences and cultural tendencies be welded into progressive politics among this professional middle class in which women, including women of colour, are coming to be fairly numerous?

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## WOMEN IN THE INTEGRATED CIRCUIT

Let me summarize the picture of women's historical locations in advanced industrial societies, as these positions have been restructured partly through the social relations of science and technology. If it was ever possible ideologically to characterize women's lives by the disjunction of public and private domains-- suggested by images of the division of working-class life into factory and home, of bourgeois life into market and home, and of gender existence into personal and political realms --it is now a totally misleading ideology, even to show how both terms of these dichotomies construct each other in practice and in theory. I prefer a network ideological image, suggesting the profusion of spaces and identities and the permeability of boundaries in the personal body and in the body politic. 'Networking' is both a feminist practice and a multinational corporate strategy -- weaving is for oppositional cyborgs.

So let me return to the earlier image of the informatics of domination and trace one vision of women's 'place' in the integrated circuit, touching only a few idealized social locations seen primarily from the point of view of advanced capitalist societies: Home, Market, Paid Work Place, State, School, Clinic-Hospital, and Church. Each of these idealized spaces is logically and practically implied in every other locus, perhaps analogous to a holographic photograph. I want to suggest the impact of the social relations mediated and enforced by the new technologies in order to help formulate needed analysis and practical work. However, there is no 'place' for women in these networks, only geometries of difference and contradiction crucial to women's cyborg identities.

If we learn how to read these webs of power and social life, we might learn new couplings, new coalitions. There is no way to read the following list from a standpoint of 'identification', of a unitary self. The issue is dispersion. The task is to survive in the diaspora.

Home: Women-headed households, serial monogamy, flight of men, old women alone, technology of domestic work, paid homework, re-emergence of home sweat-shops, home-based businesses and telecom-muting, electronic cottage, urban homelessness, migration, module architecture, reinforced (simulated) nuclear family, intense domestic violence.

Market: Women's continuing consumption work, newly targeted to buy the profusion of new production from the new technologies (especially as the competitive race among industrialized and industrializing nations to avoid dangerous mass unemployment necessitates finding ever bigger new markets for ever less clearly needed commodities); bimodal buying power, coupled with advertising targeting of the numerous affluent groups and neglect of the previous mass markets; growing importance of

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informal markets in labour and commodities parallel to high-tech, affluent market structures; surveillance systems through electronic funds transfer; intensified market abstraction (commodification) of experience, resulting in ineffective utopian or equivalent cynical theories of community; extreme mobility (abstraction) of marketing/financing systems; inter-penetration of sexual and labour markets; intensified sexualization of abstracted and alienated consumption.

Paid Work Place: Continued intense sexual and racial division of labour, but considerable growth of membership in privileged occupational categories for many white women and people of colour; impact of new technologies on women's work in clerical, service, manufacturing (especially textiles), agriculture, electronics; international restructuring of the working classes; development of new time arrangements to facilitate the homework economy (flex time, part time, over time, no time); homework and out work; increased pressures for two-tiered wage structures; significant numbers of people in cash-dependent populations world-wide with no experience or no further hope of stable employment; most labour 'marginal' or 'feminized'.

State: Continued erosion of the welfare state; decentralizations with increased surveillance and control; citizenship by telematics; imperialism and political power broadly in the form of information rich/information poor differentiation; increased high-tech militarization increasingly opposed by many social groups; reduction of civil service jobs as a result of the growing capital intensification of office work, with implications for occupational mobility for women of colour; growing privatization of material and ideological life and culture; close integration of privatization and militarization, the high-tech forms of bourgeois capitalist personal and public life; invisibility of different social groups to each other, linked to psychological mechanisms of belief in abstract enemies.

School: Deepening coupling of high-tech capital needs and public education at all levels, differentiated by race, class, and gender; managerial classes involved in educational reform and refunding at the cost of

remaining progressive educational democratic structures for children and teachers; education for mass ignorance and repression in technocratic and militarized culture; growing and-science mystery cults in dissenting and radical political movements; continued relative scientific illiteracy among white women and people of colour; growing industrial direction of education (especially higher education) by science-based multinationals (particularly in electronics- and biotechnology-dependent companies); highly educated, numerous elites in a progressively bimodal society.

Clinic-hospital: Intensified machine-body relations; renegotiations of

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public metaphors which channel personal experience of the body, particularly in relation to reproduction, immune system functions, and 'stress' phenomena; intensification of reproductive politics in response to world historical implications of women's unrealized, potential control of their relation to reproduction; emergence of new, historically specific diseases; struggles over meanings and means of health in environments pervaded by high technology products and processes; continuing feminization of health work; intensified struggle over state responsibility for health; continued ideological role of popular health movements as a major form of American politics.

Church: Electronic fundamentalist 'super-saver' preachers solemnizing the union of electronic capital and automated fetish gods; intensified importance of churches in resisting the militarized state; central struggle over women's meanings and authority in religion; continued relevance of spirituality, intertwined with sex and health, in political struggle.

The only way to characterize the informatics of domination is as a massive intensification of insecurity and cultural impoverishment, with common failure of subsistence networks for the most vulnerable. Since much of this picture interweaves with the social relations of science and technology, the urgency of a socialist-feminist politics addressed to science and technology is plain. There is much now being done, and the grounds for political work are rich. For example, the efforts to develop forms of collective struggle for women in paid work, like SEIU's District 925,\* should be a high priority for all of us. These efforts are profoundly deaf to technical restructuring of labour processes and reformations of working classes. These efforts also are providing understanding of a more comprehensive kind of labour organization, involving community, sexuality, and family issues never privileged in the largely white male industrial unions.

The structural rearrangements related to the social relations of science and technology evoke strong ambivalence. But it is not necessary to be ultimately depressed by the implications of late twentieth-century women's relation to all aspects of work, culture, production of knowledge, sexuality, and reproduction. For excellent reasons, most Marxisms see domination best and have trouble understanding what can only look like false consciousness and people's complicity in their own domination in late capitalism. It is crucial to remember that what is lost, perhaps especially from women's points of view, is often virulent forms of oppression, nostalgically naturalized in the face of current violation. Ambivalence towards the disrupted unities mediated by high-tech culture requires not sorting consciousness into categories of clear-sighted critique grounding a solid political epistemology'

\*Service Employees International Union's office workers' organization in the US.

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versus 'manipulated false consciousness', but subtle understanding of emerging pleasures, experiences, and powers with serious potential for changing the rules of the game.

There are grounds for hope in the emerging bases for new kinds of unity across race, gender, and class, as these elementary units of socialist-feminist analysis themselves suffer protean transformations. Intensifications of hardship experienced world-wide in connection with the social relations of science and technology are severe. But what people are experiencing is not transparently clear, and we lack sufficiently subtle connections for collectively building effective theories of experience. Present efforts - Marxist, psychoanalytic, feminist, anthropological-- to clarify even 'our' experience are rudimentary.

I am conscious of the odd perspective provided by my historical position - a PhD in biology for an Irish Catholic girl was made possible by Sputnik's impact on US national science-education policy. I have a body and mind as much constructed by the post-Second World War arms race and cold war as by the women's movements. There are more grounds for hope in focusing on the contradictory effects of politics designed to produce loyal American technocrats, which also produced large numbers of dissidents, than in focusing on the present defeats.

The permanent partiality of feminist points of view has consequences for our expectations of forms of political organization and participation. We do not need a totality in order to work well. The feminist dream of a common language, like all dreams for a perfectly true language, of perfectly faithful naming of experience, is a totalizing and imperialist one. In that sense, dialectics too is a dream language, longing to resolve contradiction. Perhaps, ironically, we can learn from our fusions with animals and machines how not to be Man, the

embodiment of Western logoi. From the point of view of pleasure in these potent and taboo fusions, made inevitable by the social relations of science and technology, there might indeed be a feminist science.

## CYBORGS: A MYTH OF POLITICAL IDENTITY

I want to conclude with a myth about identity and boundaries which might inform late twentieth-century political imaginations (Plate 1). I am indebted in this story to writers like Joanna Russ, Samuel R. Delany, John Varley, James Tiptree, Jr, Octavia Butler, Monique Wittig, and Vonda McIntyre.<sup>23</sup> These are our story-tellers exploring what it means to be embodied in high-tech worlds. They are theorists for cyborgs. Exploring conceptions of bodily boundaries and social order, the anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966, 1970) should be credited with helping us to consciousness about how fundamental body imagery is to world view, and so to political language.

French feminists like Luce Irigaray and Monique Wittig, for all their differences, know how to write the body; how to weave eroticism, cosmology, and politics from imagery of embodiment, and especially for Wittig, from imagery of fragmentation and reconstitution of bodies.<sup>24</sup>

American radical feminists like Susan Griffin, Audre Lorde, and Adrienne Rich have profoundly affected our political imaginations - and perhaps restricted too much what we allow as a friendly body and political language.<sup>25</sup> They insist on the organic, opposing it to the technological. But their symbolic systems and the related positions of ecofeminism and feminist paganism, replete with organicisms, can only be understood in Sandoval's terms as oppositional ideologies fitting the late twentieth century. They would simply bewilder anyone not preoccupied with the machines and consciousness of late capitalism. In that sense they are part of the cyborg world. But there are also great riches for feminists in explicitly embracing the possibilities inherent in the breakdown of clean distinctions between organism and machine and similar distinctions structuring the Western self. It is the simultaneity of breakdowns that cracks the matrices of domination and opens geometric possibilities. What might be learned from personal and political 'technological' pollution? I look briefly at two overlapping groups of texts for their insight into the construction of a potentially helpful cyborg myth: constructions of women of colour and monstrous selves in feminist science fiction.

Earlier I suggested that 'women of colour' might be understood as a cyborg identity, a potent subjectivity synthesized from fusions of outsider identities and in the complex political-historical layerings of her 'biomythography', *Zami* (Lorde, 1982; King, 1987a, 1987b). There are material and cultural grids mapping this potential, Audre Lorde (1984) captures the tone in the title of her *Sister Outsider*. In my political myth, *Sister Outsider* is the offshore woman, whom US workers, female and feminized, are supposed to regard as the enemy preventing their solidarity, threatening their security. Onshore, inside the boundary of the United States, *Sister Outsider* is a potential amidst the races and ethnic identities of women manipulated for division, competition, and exploitation in the same industries. 'Women of colour' are the preferred labour force for the

science-based industries, the real women for whom the world-wide sexual market, labour market, and politics of reproduction kaleidoscope into daily life. Young Korean women hired in the sex industry and in electronics assembly are recruited from high schools, educated for the integrated circuit. Literacy, especially in English, distinguishes the 'cheap' female labour so attractive to the multinationals.

Contrary to orientalist stereotypes of the 'oral primitive', literacy is a special mark of women of colour, acquired by US black women as well as

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men through a history of risking death to learn and to teach reading and writing. Writing has a special significance for all colonized groups. Writing has been crucial to the Western myth of the distinction between oral and written cultures, primitive and civilized mentalities, and more recently to the erosion of that distinction in 'postmodernist' theories attacking the phallogocentrism of the West, with its worship of the monotheistic, phallic, authoritative, and singular work, the unique and perfect name.<sup>26</sup> Contests for the meanings of writing are a major form of contemporary political struggle. Releasing the play of writing is deadly serious. The poetry and stories of US women of colour are repeatedly about writing, about access to the power to signify; but this time that power must be neither phallic nor innocent. Cyborg writing must not be about the Fall, the imagination of a once-upon-a-time wholeness before language, before writing, before Man. Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other.

The tools are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities. In retelling origin stories, cyborg authors subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture. We have all been colonized by those origin myths, with their longing for fulfilment in apocalypse. The phallogocentric origin stories most crucial for feminist cyborgs are built into the literal technologies - technologies that write the world, biotechnology and microelectronics - that have recently textualized our bodies as code problems on the grid of C3I. Feminist cyborg stories have the task of recoding communication and intelligence to subvert command and control.

Figuratively and literally, language politics pervade the struggles of women of colour; and stories about language have a special power in the rich contemporary writing by US women of colour. For example, retellings of the story of the indigenous woman Malinche, mother of the mestizo 'bastard' race of the new world, master of languages, and mistress of Cortes, carry special meaning for Chicana constructions of identity. Cherrie Moraga (1983) in *Loving in the War Years* explores the themes of identity when one never possessed the original language, never told the original story, never resided in the harmony of legitimate heterosexuality in the garden of culture, and so cannot base identity on a myth or a fall from innocence and right to natural names, mother's or father's.<sup>27</sup> Moraga's writing, her superb literacy, is presented in her poetry as the same kind of violation as Malinche's mastery of the conqueror's language -- a violation, an illegitimate production, that allows survival. Moraga's language is not 'whole'; it is self-consciously spliced, a chimera of English and Spanish, both conqueror's languages. But it is this chimeric monster, without claim to an original language before

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violation, that crafts the erode, competent, potent identities of women of colour. Sister Outsider hints at the possibility of world survival not because of her innocence, but because of her ability to live on the boundaries, to write without the founding myth of original wholeness, with its inescapable apocalypse of final return to a deathly oneness that Man has imagined to be the innocent and all-powerful Mother, freed at the End from another spiral of appropriation by her son. Writing marks Moraga's body, affirms it as the body of a woman of colour, against the possibility of passing into the unmarked category of the Anglo father or into the orientalist myth of 'original illiteracy' of a mother that never was. Malinche was mother here, not Eve before eating the forbidden fruit. Writing affirms Sister Outsider, not the Woman-before-the-Fall-into-Writing needed by the phallogocentric Family of Man.

Writing is pre-eminently the technology of cyborgs, etched surfaces of the late twentieth century. Cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism. That is why cyborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine. These are the couplings which make Man and Woman so problematic, subverting the structure of desire, the force imagined to generate language and gender, and so subverting the structure and modes of reproduction of 'Western' identity, of nature and culture, of mirror and eye, slave and master, body and mind. 'We' did not originally choose to be cyborgs, but choice grounds a liberal politics and epistemology that imagines the reproduction of individuals before the wider replications of 'texts'.

From the perspective of cyborgs, freed of the need to ground politics in 'our' privileged position of the oppression that incorporates all other dominations, the innocence of the merely violated, the ground of those closer to nature, we can see powerful possibilities. Feminisms and Marxisms have run aground on Western epistemological imperatives to construct a revolutionary subject from the perspective of a hierarchy of oppressions and/or a latent position of moral superiority, innocence, and greater closeness to nature. With no available original dream of a common language or original symbiosis promising protection from hostile 'masculine' separation, but written into the play of a text that has no finally privileged reading or salvation history, to recognize 'oneself' as fully implicated in the world, frees us of the need to root politics in identification, vanguard parties, purity, and mothering. Stripped of identity, the bastard race teaches about the power of the margins and the importance of a mother like Malinche. Women of colour have transformed her from the evil mother of

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masculinist fear into the originally literate mother who teaches survival.

This is not just literary deconstruction, but liminal transformation. Every story that begins with original innocence and privileges the return to wholeness imagines the drama of life to be individuation, separation, the birth of the self, the tragedy of autonomy, the fall into writing, alienation; that is, war, tempered by imaginary respite in the bosom of the Other. These plots are ruled by a reproductive politics --rebirth without flaw, perfection, abstraction. In this plot women are imagined either better or worse off, but all agree they have less selfhood, weaker individuation, more fusion to the oral, to Mother, less at stake in masculine autonomy. But there is another route to having less at stake in masculine autonomy, a route that does not pass through Woman, Primitive, Zero, the Mirror Stage and its imaginaw. It passes through women and other present-tense, illegitimate cyborgs, not of Woman born, who refuse the ideological resources of victimization so as to have a real life. These cyborgs are the people who refuse to disappear on cue, no matter how many times a 'western' commentator remarks on the sad passing of another primitive, another organic group done in by 'Western' technology, by writing.<sup>28</sup> These real-life cyborgs (for example, the Southeast Asian village women workers in Japanese and US electronics firms described by Aihwa Ong) are actively rewriting the texts of their bodies and societies. Survival is the stakes in this play of readings.

To recapitulate, certain dualisms have been persistent in Western traditions; they have all been systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of colour, nature, workers, animals - in short, domination of all constituted as others, whose task is to mirror the self. Chief among these troubling dualisms are self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive, reality/appearance, whole/part, agent/resource, maker/ made, active/passive, right/wrong, truth/illusion, total/partial, God/man. The self is the One who is not dominated, who knows that by the semic of the other, the other is the one who holds the future, who knows that by the experience of domination, which gives the lie to the autonomy of the self. To be One is to be autonomous, to be powerful, to be God; but to be One is to be an illusion, and so to be involved in a dialectic of apocalypse with the other. Yet to be other is to be multiple, without clear boundary, frayed, insubstantial. One is too few, but two are too many.

High-tech culture challenges these dualisms in intriguing ways. It is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine. It is not clear what is mind and what body in machines that resolve into coding practices. In so far as we know ourselves in both formal discourse (for example, biology) and in daily practice (for example, the homework economy in the integrated circuit), we find ourselves to be cyborgs, hybrids, mosaics, chimeras. Biological organisms have become biotic systems, com-

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munications devices like others. There is no fundamental, ontological separation in our formal knowledge of machine and organism, of technical and organic. The replicant Rachel in the Ridley Scott film *Blade Runner* stands as the image of a cyborg culture's fear, love, and confusion.

One consequence is that our sense of connection to our tools is heightened. The trance state experienced by many computer users has become a staple of science-fiction film and cultural jokes. Perhaps paraplegics and other severely handicapped people can (and sometimes do) have the most intense experiences of complex hybridization with other communication devices.<sup>29</sup> Anne McCaffrey's pre-feminist *The Ship Who Sang* (1969)

explored the consciousness of a cyborg, hybrid of girl's brain and complex machinery, formed after the birth of a severely handicapped child. Gender, sexuality, embodiment, skill: all were reconstituted in the story. Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin? From the seventeenth century till now, machines could be animated - given ghostly souls to make them speak or move or to account for their orderly development and mental capacities. Or organisms could be mechanized - reduced to body understood as resource of mind. These machine/ organism relationships are obsolete, unnecessary. For us, in imagination and in other practice, machines can be prosthetic devices, intimate components, friendly selves. We don't need organic holism to give impermeable whole-ness, the total woman and her feminist variants (mutants?). Let me conclude this point by a very partial reading of the logic of the cyborg monsters of my second group of texts, feminist science fiction.

The cyborgs populating feminist science fiction make very problematic the statuses of man or woman, human, artefact, member of a race, individual entity, or body. Katie King clarifies how pleasure in reading these fictions is not largely based on identification. Students facing Joanna Russ for the first time, students who have learned to take modernist writers like James Joyce or Virginia Woolf without flinching, do not know what to make of *The Adventures of Alyx* or *The Female Man*, where characters refuse the reader's search for innocent wholeness while granting the wish for heroic quests, exuberant eroticism, and serious politics. *The Female Man* is the story of four versions of one genotype, all of whom meet, but even taken together do not make a whole, resolve the dilemmas of violent moral action, or remove the growing scandal of gender. The feminist science fiction of Samuel R. Delany, especially *Tales of Neveyon*, mocks stories of origin by redoing the neolithic revolution, replaying the founding moves of Western civilization to subvert their plausibility. James Tiptree, Jr, an author whose fiction was regarded as particularly manly until her 'true' gender was revealed, tells tales of reproduction based on non-mammalian technologies like alternation of generations of male brood pouches and male nurturing. John Varley

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constructs a supreme cyborg in his arch-feminist exploration of Gaea, a mad goddess-planet-trickster-old woman-technological device on whose surface an extraordinary array of post-cyborg symbioses are spawned. Octavia Butler writes of an African sorceress pithug her powers of transformation against the genetic manipulations of her rival (*Wild Seed*), of time warps that bring a modern US black woman into slavery where her actions in relation to her white master-ancestor determine the possibility of her own birth (*Kindred*), and of the illegitimate insights into identity and community of an adopted cross-species child who came to know the enemy as self (*Survivor*). In *Dawn* (1987), the first instalment of a series called *Xenogenesis*, Butler tells the story of Lilith Iyapo, whose personal name recalls Adam's first and repudiated wife and whose family name marks her status as the widow of the son of Nigerian immigrants to the US. A black woman and a mother whose child is dead, Lilith mediates the transformation of humanity through genetic exchange with extra-terrestrial lovers/rescuers/destroyers/genetic engineers, who reform earth's habitats after the nuclear holocaust and coerce surviving humans into intimate fusion with them. It is a novel that interrogates reproductive, linguistic, and nuclear politics in a mythic field structured by late twentieth-century race and gender.

Because it is particularly rich in boundary transgressions, Vonda McIntyre's *Superluminal* can close this truncated catalogue of promising and dangerous monsters who help redefine the pleasures and politics of

embodiment and feminist writing. In a fiction where no character is 'simply' human, human status is highly problematic. Orca, a genetically altered diver, can speak with killer whales and survive deep ocean conditions, but she longs to explore space as a pilot, necessitating bionic implants jeopardizing her kinship with the divers and cetaceans. Transformations are effected by virus vectors carrying a new developmental code, by transplant surgery, by implants of microelectronic devices, by analogue doubles, and other means. Lacnea becomes a pilot by accepting a heart implant and a host of other alterations allowing survival in transit at speeds exceeding that of light. Radu Dracul survives a virus-caused plague in his outerworld planet to find himself with a time sense that changes the boundaries of spatial perception for the whole species. All the characters explore the limits of language; the dream of communicating experience; and the necessity of limitation, partiality, and indmacy even in this world of protean transformation and connection. Superluminal stands also for the defining contradictions of a cyborg world in another sense; it embodies textually the intersection of feminist theory and colonial discourse in the science fiction I have alluded to in this chapter. This is a conjunction with a long history that many 'First World' feminists have tried to repress, including myself in my readings of Superluminal before being called to account by Zoe Sofoulis,

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whose different location in the world system's informatics of domin-ation made her acutely alert to the imperialist moment of all science fiction cultures, including women's science fiction. From an Australian feminist sensitivity, Sofoulis remembered more readily McIntyre's role as writer of the adventures of Captain Kirk and Spock in TV's Star Trek series than her rewriting the romance in Superluminal.

Monsters have always defined the limits of community in Western imaginations. The Centaurs and Amazons of ancient Greece established the limits of the centred polls of the Greek male human by their disruption of marriage and boundary pollutions of the warrior with animality and woman. Unseparated twins and hermaphrodites were the confused human material in early modern France who grounded discourse on the natural and supernatural, medical and legal, portents and diseases -- all crucial to establishing modern identity.<sup>30</sup> The evolutionary and behavioural sciences of monkeys and apes have marked the multiple boundaries of late twentieth-century industrial identities. Cyborg monsters in feminist science fiction define quite different political possibilities and limits from those proposed by the mundane fiction of Man and Woman.

There are several consequences to taking seriously the imagery of cyborgs as other than our enemies. Our bodies, ourselves; bodies are maps of power and identity. Cyborgs are no exception. A cyborg body is not innocent; it was not born in a garden; it does not seek unitary identity and so generate antagonistic dualisms without end (or until the world ends); it takes irony for granted. One is too few, and two is only one possibility. Intense pleasure in skill, machine skill, ceases to be a sin, but an aspect of embodiment. The machine is not an it to be animated, worshipped, and dominated. The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment. We can be responsible for machines; they do not dominate or threaten us. We are responsible for boundaries; we are they. Up till now (once upon a time), female embodiment seemed to be given, organic, necessary; and female embodiment seemed to mean skill in mothering and its metaphoric exten-sions. Only by being out of place could we take intense pleasure in machines, and then with excuses that this was organic activity after all, appropriate to females. Cyborgs might consider more seriously the partial, fluid, sometimes aspect of sex and sexual embodiment. Gender might not be global identity after all, even if it has profound historical breadth and

depth.

The ideologically charged question of what counts as daily activity, as experience, can be approached by exploiting the cyborg image. Feminists have recently claimed that women are given to dailiness, that women more than men somehow sustain daily life, and so have a privileged epistemo-logical position potentially. There is a compelling aspect to this claim, one that makes visible unvalued female activity and names it as the ground of life.

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But the ground of life? What about all the ignorance of women, all the exclusions and failures of knowledge and skill? What about men's access to daily competence, to knowing how to build things, to take them apart, to play? What about other embodiments? Cyborg gender is a local possibility taking a global vengeance. Race, gender, and capital require a cyborg theory of wholes and parts. There is no drive in cyborgs to produce total theory, but there is an intimate experience of boundaries, their construction and deconstruction. There is a myth system waiting to become a political language to ground one way of looking at science and technology and challenging the informatics of domination-- in order to act potently.

One last image organisms and organismic, holistic politics depend on metaphors of rebirth and invariably call on the resources of reproductive sex. I would suggest that cyborgs have more to do with regeneration and are suspicious of the reproductive matrix and of most birthing. For salamanders, regeneration after injury, such as the loss of a limb, involves regrowth of structure and restoration of function with the constant possibility of twinning or other odd topographical productions at the site of former injury. The regrown limb can be monstrous, duplicated, potent. We have all been injured, profoundly. We require regeneration, not rebirth, and the possibilities for our reconstitution include the utopian dream of the hope for a monstrous world without gender.

Cyborg imagery can help express two crucial arguments in this essay: first, the production of universal, totalizing theory is a major mistake that misses most of reality, probably always, but certainly now; and second, taking responsibility for the social relations of science and technology means refusing an anti-science metaphysics, a demonology of technology, and so means embracing the skilful task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily life, in partial connection with others, in communication with all of our parts. It is not just that science and technology are possible means of great human satisfaction, as well as a matrix of complex dominations. Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves. This is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia. It is an imagination of a feminist speaking in tongues to strike fear into the circuits of the supersavers of the new right. It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories. Though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess.



# TESTO JUNKIE

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**BEATRIZ PRECIADO**

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**SEX, DRUGS, AND BIOPOLITICS IN  
THE PHARMACOPORNOGRAPHIC ERA**

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TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY BRUCE BENDERSON



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*For our dead ones: A., T., E., J., K., S., T.*

*For William*

*For Virginie, Pepa, and Swann*

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## INTRODUCTION

This book is not a memoir. This book is a testosterone-based, voluntary intoxication protocol, which concerns the body and affects of BP. A body-essay. Fiction, actually. If things must be pushed to the extreme, this is a somatopolitical fiction, a theory of the self, or self-theory. During the time period covered by this essay, two external transformations follow on each other in the context of the experimental body, the impact of which couldn't be calculated beforehand and cannot be taken into account as a function of the study; but it created the limits around which writing was incorporated. First of all, there is the death of GD, the human distillation of a vanishing epoch, an icon, and the ultimate French representative of a form of written sexual insurrection; almost simultaneously, there is the tropism of BP's body in the direction of VD's body, an opportunity for perfection—and for ruin. This is a record of physiological and political micromutations provoked in BP's body by testosterone, as well as the theoretical and physical changes incited in that body by loss, desire, elation, failure, or renouncement. I'm not interested in my emotions insofar as their being mine, belonging only, uniquely, to me. I'm not interested in their individual aspects, only in how they are traversed by what isn't mine. In what emanates

from our planet's history, the evolution of living species, the flux of economics, remnants of technological innovations, preparation for wars, the trafficking of organic slaves and commodities, the creation of hierarchies, institutions of punishment and repression, networks of communication and surveillance, the random overlapping of market research groups, techniques and blocs of opinion, the biochemical transformation of feeling, the production and distribution of pornographic images. Some will read this text as a manual for a kind of gender bioterrorism on a molecular scale. Others will see in it a single point in a cartography of extinction. In this text, the reader won't come to any definitive conclusion about the truth of my sex, or predictions about the world to come. I present these pages as an account of theoretical junctions, molecules, affects, in order to leave a trace of a political experiment that lasted 236 days and nights and that continues today under other forms. If the reader sees this text as an uninterrupted series of philosophical reflections, accounts of hormone administration, and detailed records of sexual practices without the solutions provided by continuity, it is simply because this is the mode on which subjectivity is constructed and deconstructed.

*Question: If you could see  
a documentary on a philosopher,  
on Heidegger, Kant, or Hegel,  
what would you like to see in it?*

*Jacques Derrida's answer:  
For them to talk about their sex life.  
. . . You want a quick answer?  
Their sex life.†*

† Jacques Derrida. *Derrida*, directed by Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Koffman. (New York: Zeitgeist Video, 2003), DVD.

## 2. THE PHARMACOPORNOGRAPHIC ERA

I was born in 1970. The automobile industry, which had reached its peak, was beginning to decline. My father had the first and most prominent garage in Burgos, a Gothic city full of parish priests and members of the military, where Franco had set up the new symbolic capital of fascist Spain. If Hitler had won the war, the new Europe would have been established around two obviously unequal poles, Burgos and Berlin. At least, that was the little Galician general's dream.

Garage Central was located on rue du General Mola, named after the soldier who in 1936 led the uprising against the Republican regime. The most expensive cars in the city, belonging to the rich and to dignitaries of the Franco regime, were kept there. In my house there were no books, just cars. Some Chrysler Motor Slant Sixes; several Renault Gordinis, Dauphines, and Ondines (nicknamed "widows' cars," because they had the reputation of skidding on curves and killing husbands at the wheel); some Citroën DSs (which the Spanish called "sharks"); and several Standards brought back from England and reserved for doctors. I should add the collection of antique cars that my father had put together little by little: a black "Lola Flores" Mer-

cedes, a gray, pre-1930s Citroën with a traction engine, a seventeen-horsepower Ford, a Dodge Dart Swinger, a 1928 Citroën with its “frog’s ass,” and a Cadillac with eight cylinders. At the time, my father was investing in brickyard industries, which (like the dictatorship, coincidentally) would begin to decline in 1975 with the gas crisis. In the end, he had to sell his car collection to make up for the collapse of the factory. I cried about it. Meanwhile, I was growing up like a tomboy. My father cried about it.

During that bygone yet not-so-long-ago era that we today call Fordism, the automobile and mass-produced suburban housing industries synthesized and perfected a specific mode of production and consumption, a Taylorist temporal organization of life characterized by a sleek polychrome aesthetic of the inanimate object, a way of conceiving of inner space and urban living, a conflictual arrangement of the body and the machine, a discontinuous flow of desire and resistance. In the years following the energy crisis and the decline of the assembly line, people sought to identify new growth sectors in a transformed global economy. That is when “experts” began talking about biochemical, electronic, computing, or communications industries as new industrial props of capitalism . . . But these discourses won’t be enough to explain the production of added value and the metamorphosis of life in contemporary society.

It is, however, possible to sketch out a new cartography of the transformations in industrial production during the previous century, using as an axis the political and technical management of the body, sex, and identity. In other words,

it is philosophically relevant today to undertake a *somato-political*<sup>1</sup> analysis of “world-economy.”<sup>2</sup>

From an economic perspective, the transition toward a third form of capitalism, after the slave-dependent and industrial systems, is generally situated somewhere in the 1970s; but the establishment of a new type of “government of the living”<sup>3</sup> had already emerged from the urban, physical, psychological, and ecological ruins of World War II—or, in the case of Spain, from the Civil War.

How did sex and sexuality become the main objects of political and economic activity?

Follow me: The changes in capitalism that we are witnessing are characterized not only by the transformation of “gender,” “sex,” “sexuality,” “sexual identity,” and “pleasure” into objects of the political management of living (just as Foucault had suspected in his biopolitical description of new systems of social control), but also by the fact that this management itself is carried out through the new dynamics of advanced technocapitalism, global media, and biotechnologies. During the Cold War, the United States put more money into scientific research about sex and sexuality than any other country in history. The application of surveillance and biotechnologies for governing civil society

1. I refer here to Foucault’s notion “*somato-pouvoir*” and “*technologie politique du corps*.” See Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 33–36; see also Michel Foucault, “*Les rapports de pouvoir passent à l’intérieur du corps*,” in *La Quinzaine Littéraire*, 247 (1er–15 janvier 1977): 4–6.

2. Here I draw on the well-known expression used by Immanuel Wallerstein in *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

3. Michel Foucault, “*Du gouvernement des vivants (1979–1980)*,” *Leçons du Collège de France, 1979–1980*, in *Dits et Ecrits*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 4: 641–42.

started during the late 1930s: the war was the best laboratory for molding the body, sex, and sexuality. The necropolitical techniques of the war will progressively become biopolitical industries for producing and controlling sexual subjectivities. Let us remember that the period between the beginning of World War II and the first years of the Cold War constitutes a moment without precedent for women's visibility in public space as well as the emergence of visible and politicized forms of homosexuality in such unexpected places as, for example, the American army.<sup>4</sup> Alongside this social development, American McCarthyism—rampant throughout the 1950s—added to the patriotic fight against communism the persecution of homosexuality as a form of antinationalism while at the same time exalting the family values of masculine labor and domestic maternity.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, architects Ray and Charles Eames collaborated with the American army to manufacture small boards of molded plywood to use as splints for mutilated appendages. A few years later, the same material was used to build furniture that came to exemplify the light design of modern American disposable architecture.<sup>6</sup> During the twentieth century, the “invention” of the biochemical notion of the hormone and the pharmaceutical development of synthetic molecules for commercial uses radically modified traditional definitions of normal and pathological sexual identities. In 1941, the first natural molecules of progesterone and estrogens were

4. Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: The Free Press, 1990).

5. John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

6. See Beatriz Colomina, *Domesticity at War* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 29.

obtained from the urine of pregnant mares (Premarin) and soon after synthetic hormones (Norethindrone) were commercialized. The same year, George Henry carried out the first demographic study of “sexual deviation,” a quantitative study of masses known as *Sex Variants*.<sup>7</sup> The Kinsey Reports on human sexual behavior (1948 and 1953) and Robert Stoller’s protocols for “femininity” and “masculinity” (1968) followed in sexological suit. In 1957, the North American pedo-psychiatrist John Money coined the term “gender,” differentiating it from the traditional term “sex,” to define an individual’s inclusion in a culturally recognized group of “masculine” or “feminine” behavior and physical expression. Money famously affirms that it is possible (using surgical, endocrinological, and cultural techniques) to “change the gender of any baby up to 18 months.”<sup>8</sup> Between 1946 and 1949 Harold Gillies was performing the first phalloplastic surgeries in the UK, including work on Michael Dillon, the first female-to-male transsexual to have taken testosterone as part of the masculinization protocol.<sup>9</sup> In 1952, US soldier George W. Jorgensen was transformed into Christine, the first transsexual person discussed widely in the popular press. During the early 50s and into the 60s, physician Harry Benjamin systematized the clinical use of hormonal molecules in the treatment of “sex change” and

7. Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 178–218.

8. John Money, Joan Hampson, and John Hampson, “Imprinting and the Establishment of Gender Role,” *Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry* 77 (1957): 333–36.

9. Harold Gillies and Raph Millard J., *The Principles and Art of Plastic Surgery* (Boston: Little Brown, 1957), 385–88; Michael Dillon, *Self. A Study in Ethics and Endocrinology* (London: Heinemann, 1946); for a larger historical survey see also: Berenice L. Hausman, *Changing Sex, Transsexualism, Technology, and the Idea of Gender* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1995), 67.

defined “transsexualism,” a term first introduced in 1954, as a curable condition.<sup>10</sup>

The invention of the contraceptive pill, the first biochemical technique enabling the separation between heterosexual practice and reproduction, was a direct result of the expansion of endocrinological experimentation, and triggered a process of development of what could be called, twisting the Eisenhower term, “the sex-gender industrial complex.”<sup>11</sup> In 1957, Searle & Co. commercialized Enovid, the first contraceptive pill (“the Pill”) made of a combination of mestranol and norethynodrei. First promoted for the treatment of menstrual disorders, the Pill was approved for contraceptive use four years later. The chemical components of the Pill would soon become the most used pharmaceutical molecules in the whole of human history.<sup>12</sup>

The Cold War was also a period of transformation of the governmental and economic regulations concerning pornography and prostitution. In 1946, elderly sex worker and spy Martha Richard convinced the French government to declare the “*maison closes*” illegal, which ended the nineteenth-century governmental system of brothels in France. In 1953, Hugh Hefner founded *Playboy*, the first North American “porn” magazine to be sold at newspaper stands, with a photograph of Marilyn Monroe naked as the

10. Whereas homosexuality was withdrawn from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) in 1973, in 1983, gender identity disorder (clinical form of transsexuality) was included in the DSM with diagnostic criteria for this new pathology.

11. President Eisenhower used the term “military-industrial complex” in his Farewell to the Nation speech of 1961.

12. Andrea Tone, *Devices and Desires. A History of Contraceptives in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 203–31; Lara V. Marks, *Sexual Chemistry: A History of the Contraceptive Pill* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

centerfold of the first publication. In 1959, Hefner transformed an old Chicago house into the Playboy Mansion, which was promoted within the magazine and on television as a “love palace” with thirty-two rooms, becoming soon the most popular American erotic utopia. In 1972, Gerard Damiano produced *Deep Throat*. The film, starring Linda Lovelace, was widely commercialized in the US and became one of the most watched movies of all times, grossing more than \$600 million. From this time on, porn film production boomed, from thirty clandestine film producers in 1950 to over 2,500 films in 1970.

If for years pornography was the dominant visual technology addressed to the male body for controlling his sexual reaction, during the 1950s the pharmaceutical industry looked for ways of triggering erection and sexual response using surgical and chemical prostheses. In 1974, Soviet Victor Konstantinovich Kalnberz patented the first penis implant using polyethylene plastic rods as a treatment for impotency, resulting in a permanently erect penis. These implants were abandoned for chemical variants because they were found to be “physically uncomfortable and emotionally disconcerting.” In 1984 Tom F. Lue, Emil A. Tanaghoy, and Richard A. Schmidt implanted a “sexual pacemaker” in the penis of a patient. The contraption was a system of electrodes inserted close to the prostate that permitted an erection by remote control. The molecule of sildenafil (commercialized as Viagra<sup>®</sup> by Pfizer laboratories in 1988) will later become the chemical treatment for “erectile dysfunction.”

During the Cold War years psychotropic techniques first developed within the military were extended to medical and recreational uses for the civil population. In the 1950s, the United States Central Intelligence Agency performed a series of experiments involving electroshock techniques as well as psychedelic and hallucinogen drugs as part of a program of “brainwashing,” military interrogation, and psychological torture. The aim of the experimental program of the CIA was to identify the chemical techniques able to directly modify the prisoner’s subjectivity, inflecting levels of anxiety, dizziness, agitation, irritability, sexual excitement, or fear.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the laboratories Eli Lilly (Indiana) commercialized the molecule called Methadone (the most simple opiate) as an analgesic and Secobarbital, a barbiturate with anaesthetic, sedative, and hypnotic properties conceived for the treatment of epilepsy, insomnia, and as an anaesthetic for short surgery. Secobarbital, better known as “the red pill” or “doll,” became one of the drugs of the rock underground culture of the 1960s.<sup>14</sup> In 1977, the state of Oklahoma introduced the first lethal injection composed of barbiturates similar to “the red pill” to be used for the death penalty.<sup>15</sup>

The Cold War military space race was also the site of production of a new form of technological embodiment.

13. On the use of chemicals for military purposes during the Cold War years see: Naomi Klein, “The Torture Lab,” in *The Shock Doctrine* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 25–48.

14. Methadone became in the 70s the basic substitution treatment for heroine addiction. See: Tom Carnwath and Ian Smith, *Heroin Century* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 40–42.

15. The same method had already been applied in a Nazi German program called “Action T4” for “racial hygiene” that euthanatized between 75,000 and 100,000 people with physical or psychic disabilities. It was abandoned because of the high pharmacological cost; instead it was substituted by gas chambers or simply death caused by inanition.

At the start of the 60s, Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline used the term “cyborg” for the first time to refer to an organism technologically supplemented to live in an extraterrestrial environment where it could operate as an “integrated homeostatic system.”<sup>16</sup> They experimented with a laboratory rat, which received an osmotic prosthesis implant that it dragged along—a cyber tail. Beyond the rat, the cyborg named a new techno-organic condition, a sort of “soft machine”<sup>17</sup> (to use a Burroughs term) or a body with “electric skin” (to put it in Haus-Rucker & Co. terms) subjected to new forms of political control but also able to develop new forms of resistance. During the 1960s, as part of a military investigation program, *Arpanet* was created; it was the predecessor of the global Internet, the first “net of nets” of interconnected computers capable of transmitting information.

On the other hand, the surgical techniques developed for the treatment of “*les geules cassées*” of the First World War and the skin reconstruction techniques specially invented for the handling of the victims of the nuclear bomb will be transformed during the 1950s and 1960s into cosmetic and sexual surgeries.<sup>18</sup> In response to the threat inferred by Nazism and racist rhetoric, which claims that racial or religious differences can be detected in anatomical signs, “de-circumcision,” the artificial reconstruction of foreskin, was one of the most practiced cosmetic surgery operations

16. M. E. Clynes and N. S. Kline, “Cyborgs and Space,” in *Astronautics* (September, 1960).

17. William S. Burroughs, *The Soft Machine* (New York: Olympia Press, 1961).

18. Martin Monestier, *Les geules cassées, Les médecins de l'impossible 1914-18* (Paris: Cherche Midi, 2009).

in the United States.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, facelifts, as well as various other cosmetic surgery operations, became mass-market techniques for a new middle-class body consumer. Andy Warhol had himself photographed during a facelift, transforming his own body into a bio-pop object.

Meanwhile, the use of a viscous, semi-rigid material that is waterproof, thermally and electrically resistant, produced by artificial propagation of carbon atoms in long chains of molecules of organic compounds derived from petroleum, and whose burning is highly polluting, became generalized in manufacturing the objects of daily life. DuPont, who pioneered the development of plastics from the 1930s on, was also implicated in nuclear research for the Manhattan project.<sup>20</sup> Together with plastics, we saw the exponential multiplication of the production of transuranic elements (the chemical elements with atomic numbers greater than 92—the atomic number of Uranium), which became the material to be used in the civil sector, including plutonium, that had, before, been used as nuclear fuel in military operations.<sup>21</sup> The level of toxicity of transuranic elements exceeds that of any other element on earth, creating a new form of vulnerability for life. Cellulosic, poly-nosic, polyamide, polyester, acrylic, polypylene, spandex, etc., became materials used equally for body consumption and architecture. The mass consumption of plastic defined

19. Sander L. Gilman, "Decircumcision: The First Aesthetic Surgery," *Modern Judaism* 17, 3 (1997): 201–10. Maxell Matz, *Evolution of Plastic Surgery* (New York: Froben Press, 1946), 287–89.

20. Pap A. Ndiaye, *Nylon and Bombs: DuPont and the March of Modern America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2006).

21. See: Donna J. Haraway, *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium. FemaleMan@Meets\_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 54.

the material conditions of a large-scale ecological transformation that resulted in destruction of other (mostly lower) energy resources, rapid consumption, and high pollution. The *Trash Vortex*, a floating mass the size of Texas in the North Pacific made of plastic garbage, was to become the largest water architecture of the twenty-first century.<sup>22</sup>

We are being confronted with a new kind of hot, psychotropic, punk capitalism. Such recent transformations are imposing an ensemble of new microprosthetic mechanisms of control of subjectivity by means of biomolecular and multimedia technical protocols. Our world economy is dependent on the production and circulation of hundreds of tons of synthetic steroids and technically transformed organs, fluids, cells (techno-blood, techno-sperm, techno-ovum, etc.), on the global diffusion of a flood of pornographic images, on the elaboration and distribution of new varieties of legal and illegal synthetic psychotropic drugs (e.g., bromazepam, Special K, Viagra, speed, crystal, Prozac, ecstasy, poppers, heroin), on the flood of signs and circuits of the digital transmission of information, on the extension of a form of diffuse urban architecture to the entire planet in which megacities of misery are knotted into high concentrations of sex-capital.<sup>23</sup>

These are just some snapshots of a postindustrial, global, and mediatic regime that, from here on, I will call *pharmacopornographic*. The term refers to the processes of a biomolecular (pharmaco) and semiotic-technical (porno-

22. Susan Freinkel, *Plastic: A Toxic Love Story* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011).

23. See Mike Davis, "Planet of Slums," *New Left Review* 26 (April–March 2004).

graphic) government of sexual subjectivity—of which “the Pill” and *Playboy* are two paradigmatic offspring. Although their lines of force may be rooted in the scientific and colonial society of the nineteenth century, their economic vectors become visible only at the end of World War II. Hidden at first under the guise of a Fordist economy, they reveal themselves in the 1970s with the gradual collapse of this phenomenon.

During the second half of the twentieth century, the mechanisms of the pharmacopornographic regime are materialized in the fields of psychology, sexology, and endocrinology. If science has reached the hegemonic place that it occupies as a discourse and as a practice in our culture, it is because, as Ian Hacking, Steve Woolgar, and Bruno Latour have noticed, it works as a material-discursive apparatus of bodily production.<sup>24</sup> Technoscience has established its material authority by transforming the concepts of the psyche, libido, consciousness, femininity and masculinity, heterosexuality and homosexuality, intersexuality and transsexuality into tangible realities. They are manifest in commercial chemical substances and molecules, biotype bodies, and fungible technological goods managed by multinationals. The success of contemporary technoscientific industry consists in transforming our depression into Prozac, our masculinity into testosterone, our erection into Viagra, our fertility/sterility into the Pill, our AIDS into tritherapy, without knowing which comes first: our

24. Ian Hacking, *Representing and Intervening: Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Natural Science* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983); and Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *La vie de laboratoire: La production des faits scientifiques* (Paris: La Découverte, 1979).

depression or Prozac, Viagra or an erection, testosterone or masculinity, the Pill or maternity, tritherapy or AIDS. This performative feedback is one of the mechanisms of the pharmacopornographic regime.

Contemporary society is inhabited by toxic-pornographic subjectivities: subjectivities defined by the substance (or substances) that supply their metabolism, by the cybernetic prostheses and various types of pharmacopornographic desires that feed the subject's actions and through which they turn into agents. So we will speak of Prozac subjects, cannabis subjects, cocaine subjects, alcohol subjects, Ritalin subjects, cortisone subjects, silicone subjects, heterovaginal subjects, double-penetration subjects, Viagra subjects, \$ subjects . . .

There is nothing to discover in nature; there is no hidden secret. We live in a punk hypermodernity: it is no longer about discovering the hidden truth in nature; it is about the necessity to specify the cultural, political, and technological processes through which the body as artifact acquires natural status. The oncomouse,<sup>25</sup> the laboratory mouse biotechnologically designed to carry a carcinogenic gene, eats Heidegger. Buffy kills the vampire of Simone de Beauvoir. The dildo, a synthetic extension of sex to produce pleasure and identity, eats Rocco Siffredi's cock. There is nothing to discover in sex or in sexual identity; there is no *inside*. The truth about sex is not a disclosure; it is *sexdesign*. Pharmacopornographic biocapitalism does not produce *things*.

25. See Donna J. Haraway, "When Man™ is on the Menu," in *Incorporations*(Zone 6), eds. Jonathan Crary and Sanford K. Winter (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 38–43.

It produces mobile ideas, living organs, symbols, desires, chemical reactions, and conditions of the soul. In biotechnology and in pornocommunication there is no object to be produced. The pharmacopornographic business is the *invention of a subject* and then its global reproduction.

## MASTURBATORY COOPERATION

The theoreticians of post-Fordism (Virno, Hardt, Negri, Corsani, Marazzi, Moulier-Boutang, etc.) have made it clear that the productive process of contemporary capitalism takes its raw material from knowledge, information, communication, and social relationships.<sup>26</sup> According to the most recent economic theory, the mainspring of production is no longer situated in companies but is “in society as a whole, the quality of the population, cooperation, conventions, training, forms of organization that hybridize the market, the firm and society.”<sup>27</sup> Negri and Hardt refer to “biopolitical production,” using Foucault’s cult notion, or to “cognitive capitalism” to enumerate today’s complex forms of capitalist production that mask the “production of symbols, language, information,” as well as the “production of

26. Some of the most influential analyses of the current transformations of industrial society and capitalism relevant to my own work are the following: Maurizio Lazzarato, “*Le concept de travail immatériel: la grande entreprise*,” *Futur Antérieur* 10 (1992); Antonella Corsani, “*Vers un renouveau de l’économie politique: anciens concepts et innovation théorique*,” *Multitudes* 2 (printemps 2000); Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Multitude: guerre et démocratie à l’âge de l’empire* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006); Yann Moulier-Boutang, *Le capitalisme cognitive: La nouvelle grande transformation* (Paris: Editions Amsterdam, 2007).

27. Yann Moulier-Boutang, “*Eclats d’économie et bruits de lutte*,” *Multitudes* 2 (Mai 200): 7. See also Antonella Corsani, “*Vers un renouveau de l’économie politique*.”

affects.”<sup>28</sup> They call “biopolitical work” the forms of production that are linked to aids provided to the body, to care, to the protection of the other and to the creation of human relations, to the “feminine” work of reproduction,<sup>29</sup> to relationships of communication and exchange of knowledge and affects. But most often, analysis and description of this new form of production stops biopolitically at the belt.<sup>30</sup>

What if, in reality, the insatiable bodies of the multitude—their cocks, clitorises, anuses, hormones, and neurosexual synapses—what if desire, excitement, sexuality, seduction, and the pleasure of the multitude were all the mainsprings of the creation of value added to the contemporary economy? And what if cooperation were a *masturbatory cooperation* and not the simple cooperation of brains?

The pornographic industry is currently the great mainspring of our cybereconomy; there are more than a million and a half sites available to adults at any point on the planet. Sixteen billion dollars is generated annually by the sex industry, a large part of it belonging to the porn portals of the Internet. Each day, 350 new portals allow virtual access to an exponentially increasing number of users. If

28. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Multitude: guerre et démocratie à l'âge de l'empire* (Paris: Editions 10–18, DL, 2006), 135.

29. Ibid., 137. Cristian Marazzi, *The Violence of Financial Capitalism*, trans. Kristina Lebedeva and Jason Francis McGimsey (New York: Semiotext(e), 2011), op. cit.

30. Several trajectories in this direction come from the reflections in *Precarias a la Deriva*, by Anne Querrien and Antonella Corsani. See *Precarias a la Deriva, A la deriva por los circuitos de la precariedad femenina* (Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños, 2004); Antonella Corsani, “Quelles sont les conditions nécessaires pour l'émergence de multiples récits du monde? Penser le revenu garanti à travers l'histoire des luttes des femmes et de la théorie féministe,” *Multitudes* 27 (hiver 2007); Antonella Corsani, “Beyond the Myth of Woman: The Becoming-Transfeminist of (Post-)Marxism,” trans. Timothy S. Murphy, *SubStance* #112: *Italian Post-Workerist Thought* 36, no. 1, (2007): 106–38; and Linda McDowell, “Life without Father and Ford: The New Gender Order of Post-Fordism,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 16, no. 4 (1991): 400–19.

it's true that the majority of these sites belong to the multinationals (Playboy, Hotvideo, Dorcel, Hustler . . . ), the amateur portals are what constitute the truly emerging market for Internet porn. When Jennifer Kaye Ringley had the initiative in 1996 to install several webcams throughout her home that broadcast real-time videos of her daily life through her Internet portal, the model of the single transmitter was supplanted. In documentary style, JenniCams produce an audiovisual chronicle of sex lives and are paid for by subscription, similar to the way some TV stations operate. Today, any user of the Internet who has a body, a computer, a video camera, or a webcam, as well as an Internet connection and a bank account, can create a porn site and have access to the cybermarket of the sex industry. The autpornographic body has suddenly emerged as a new force in the world economy. The recent access of relatively impoverished populations all over the planet to the technical means of producing cyberpornography has, for the first time, sabotaged a monopoly that was until now controlled by the big multinationals of porn. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the first people able to make use of this market were sex workers from the former Soviet bloc, then those in China, Africa, and India. Confronted with such autonomous strategies on the part of sex workers, the multinationals of porn have gradually united with advertising companies, hoping to attract cybervisitors by offering free access to their pages.

The sex industry is not only the most profitable market on the Internet; it's also the model of maximum profitability for the global cybernetic market (comparable only

to financial speculation): minimum investment, direct sales of the product in real time in a unique fashion, the production of instant satisfaction for the consumer. Every Internet portal is modeled on and organized according to this masturbatory logic of pornographic consumption. If the financial analysts who direct Google, eBay, or Facebook are attentively following the fluctuations of the cyberporn market, it's because the sex industry furnishes an economic model of the cybernetic market as a whole.

If we consider that the pharmaceutical industry (which includes the legal extension of the scientific, medical, and cosmetic industries, as well as the trafficking of drugs declared illegal), the pornography industry, and the industry of war are the load-bearing sectors of post-Fordist capitalism, we ought to be able to give a cruder name to *immaterial labor*. Let us dare, then, to make the following hypothesis: the raw materials of today's production process are excitation, erection, ejaculation, and pleasure and feelings of self-satisfaction, omnipotent control, and total destruction. The real stake of capitalism today is the pharmacopornographic control of subjectivity, whose products are serotonin, techno-blood and blood products, testosterone, antacids, cortisone, techno-sperm, antibiotics, estradiol, techno-milk, alcohol and tobacco, morphine, insulin, cocaine, living human eggs, citrate of sildenafil (Viagra), and the entire material and virtual complex participating in the production of mental and psychosomatic states of excitation, relaxation, and discharge, as well as those of omnipotence and total control. In these conditions, money itself becomes an abstract, signifying psychotropic substance.

Sex is the corollary of capitalism and war, the mirror of production. The dependent and sexual body and sex and all its semiototechnical derivations are henceforth the principal resource of post-Fordist capitalism.

Although the era dominated by the economy of the automobile has been named “Fordism,” let us call this new economy *pharmacopornism*, dominated as it is by the industry of the pill, the masturbatory logic of pornography, and the chain of excitation-frustration on which it is based. The pharmacopornographic industry is white and viscous gold, the crystalline powder of biopolitical capitalism.

Negri and Hardt, in rereading Marx, have shown that “in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the global economy is characterized by the hegemony of industrial labor, even if, in quantitative terms, the latter remains minor in comparison to other forms of production such as agriculture.”<sup>31</sup> Industrial labor was hegemonic by virtue of the powers of transformation it exerted over any other form of production.

Pharmacopornographic production is characteristic today of a new age of political world economy, not by its quantitative supremacy, but because the control, production, and intensification of narcosexual affects have become the model of all other forms of production. In this way, pharmacopornographic control infiltrates and dominates the entire flow of capital, from agrarian biotechnology to high-tech industries of communication.

In this period of the body’s technomanagement, the

31. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Multitude* (Paris: Editions 10-18, DL, 2006), 133–34.

pharmacopornographic industry synthesizes and defines a specific mode of production and consumption, a masturbatory temporization of life, a virtual and hallucinogenic aesthetic of the living object, an architecture that transforms inner space into exteriority and the city into interiority and “junkspace”<sup>32</sup> by means of mechanisms of immediate auto-surveillance and ultrarapid diffusion of information, a continuous mode of desiring and resisting, of consuming and destroying, of evolution and self-destruction.

### **POTENTIA GAUDENDI**

To understand how and why sexuality and the body, the excitable body, at the end of the nineteenth century raided the heart of political action and became the objects of a minute governmental and industrial management, we must first elaborate a new philosophical concept in the pharmacopornographic domain that is equivalent to the force of work in the domain of classical economics. I call *potentia gaudendi*, or “orgasmic force,” the (real or virtual) strength of a body’s (total) excitation.<sup>33</sup> This strength is of indeterminate capacity; it has no gender; it is neither male nor female, neither human nor animal, neither animated nor inanimate. Its orientation emphasizes neither the fem-

32. For an elaboration of this idea, see Rem Koolhaas, “Junkspace,” *October* 100 (Spring, 2002): 175–90.

33. My work here begins with the notion of “power of action or force of existing” elaborated by Spinoza and derived from the Greek idea of *dynamis* and its correlations in scholastic metaphysics; cf. Baruch Spinoza, *Éthique*, trans. Bernard Pautrat (Paris: Le Seuil, 1988); Gilles Deleuze, “Spinoza” (lecture, Université de Vincennes à Saint Denis, Université Paris 8, Paris, February 2, 1980).

inine nor the masculine and creates no boundary between heterosexuality and homosexuality or between object and subject; neither does it know the difference between being excited, being exciting, or being-excited-with. It favors no organ over any other, so that the penis possesses no more orgasmic force than the vagina, the eye, or the toe. Orgasmic force is the sum of the potential for excitation inherent in every material molecule. Orgasmic force is not seeking any immediate resolution, and it aspires only to its own extension in space and time, toward everything and everyone, in every place and at every moment. It is a force of transformation for the world in pleasure—"in pleasure with." *Potentia gaudendi* unites all material, somatic, and psychic forces and seeks all biochemical resources and all the structures of the mind.

In pharmacopornographic capitalism, the force of work reveals its actual substratum: orgasmic force, or *potentia gaudendi*. Current capitalism tries to put to work the *potentia gaudendi* in whatever form in which it exists, whether this be in its pharmacological form (a consumable molecule and material agency that will operate within the body of the person who is digesting it), as a pornographic representation (a semiotekhnical sign that can be converted into numeric data or transferred into digital, televisual, or telephonic media), or as a sexual service (a live pharmacopornographic entity whose orgasmic force and emotional volume are put in service to a consumer during a specified time, according to a more or less formal contract of sale of sexual services).

*Potentia gaudendi* is characterized not only by its impermanence and great malleability, but also and above all by the impossibility of possessing and retaining it. *Potentia gaudendi*, as the fundamental energetics of pharmacopornism, does not allow itself to be reified or transformed into private property. I can neither possess nor retain another's *potentia gaudendi*, but neither can one possess or retain what seems to be one's own. *Potentia gaudendi* exists exclusively as an event, a relation, a practice, or an evolutionary process.

Orgasmic force is both the most abstract and the most material of all workforces. It is inextricably carnal and digital, viscous yet representational by numerical values, a phantasmatic or molecular wonder that can be transformed into capital.

The living pansexual body is the *bioport* of the orgasmic force. Thus, it cannot be reduced to a prediscursive organism; its limits do not coincide with the skin capsule that surrounds it. This life cannot be understood as a biological given; it does not exist outside the interlacing of production and culture that belongs to technoscience. This body is a technoliving, multiconnected entity incorporating technology.<sup>34</sup> Neither an organism nor a machine, but “the fluid, dispersed, networking techno-organic-textual-mythic system.”<sup>35</sup> This new condition of the body blurs the traditional modern distinction between art, performance,

34. Haraway, *Modest\_Witness*.

35. Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 219.

media, design, and architecture. The new pharmacological and surgical techniques set in motion tectonic construction processes that combine figurative representations derived from cinema and from architecture (editing, 3-D modeling, 3-D printing, etc.), according to which the organs, the vessels, the fluids (techno-blood, techno-sperm, etc.), and the molecules are converted into the prime material from which our pharmacopornographic corporality is manufactured. Technobodies are either not-yet-alive or already-dead: we are half fetuses, half zombies. Thus, every politics of resistance is a monster politics. Marshall McLuhan, Buckminster Fuller, and Norbert Wiener had an intuition about it in the 1950s: the technologies of communication function like an extension of the body. Today, the situation seems a lot more complex—the individual body functions like an extension of global technologies of communication. “Embodiment is significant prosthesis.”<sup>36</sup> To borrow the terms of the American feminist Donna J. Haraway, the twenty-first-century body is a technoliving system, the result of an irreversible implosion of modern binaries (female/male, animal/human, nature/culture). Even the term *life* has become archaic for identifying the actors in this new technology. For Foucault’s notion of “biopower,” Donna J. Haraway has substituted “techno-biopower.” It’s no longer a question of power over life, of the power to manage and maximize life, as Foucault wanted, but of power and control exerted over a technoliving and connected whole.<sup>37</sup>

36. *Ibid.*, 195.37. *Ibid.*, 204–30.

In the circuit in which excitation is technoproduced, there are neither living bodies nor dead bodies, but present or missing, actual or virtual connectors. Images, viruses, computer programs, techno-organic fluids, Net surfers, electronic voices that answer phone sex lines, drugs and living dead animals in the laboratory on which they are tested, frozen embryos, mother cells, active alkaloid molecules . . . display no value in the current global economy as being “alive” or “dead,” but only to the extent that they can or can’t be integrated into a bioelectronics of global excitation. Haraway reminds us that “cyborg figures—such as the end-of-the-millennium seed, chip gene, database, bomb, fetus, race, brain, and ecosystem—are the offspring of implosions of subjects and objects and of the natural and artificial.”<sup>38</sup> Every technobody, including a dead technobody, can unleash orgasmic force, thus becoming a carrier of the power of production of sexual capital. The force that lets itself be converted into capital lies neither in *bios* nor in *soma*, in the way that they have been conceived from Aristotle to Darwin, but in *techno-eros*, the technoliving enchanted body and its *potentia gaudendi*. And from this it follows that biopolitics (the politics of the control and production of life) as well as necropolitics (the politics of the control and production of death) function as pharmacoporno politics, as planetary managements of *potentia gaudendi*.

Sex, the so-called sexual organs, pleasure and impotence, joy and horror are moved to the center of technopolitical management as soon as the possibility of drawing

38. Haraway, *Modest\_Witness*, 12.

profit from orgasmic force comes into play. If the theorists of post-Fordism were interested in immaterial work, in cognitive work, in “non-objectifiable work,”<sup>39</sup> in “affective work,”<sup>40</sup> we theorists of pharmacopornographic capitalism are interested in sexual work as a process of subjectivization, in the possibility of making the subject an inexhaustible supply of planetary ejaculation that can be transformed into abstraction and digital data—into capital.

This theory of “orgasmic force” should not be read through a Hegelian paranoid or Rousseauist utopian/dystopian prism; the market isn’t an outside power coming to expropriate, repress, or control the sexual instincts of the individual. On the other hand, we are being confronted by the most deprived of political situations: the body isn’t aware of its *potentia gaudendi* as long as it does not put it to work.

Orgasmic force in its role as the workforce finds itself progressively regulated by a strict technobiopolitical control. The sexual body is the product of a sexual division of flesh according to which each organ is defined by its function. A sexuality always implies a precise governing of the mouth, hand, anus, vagina. Until recently, the relationship between buying/selling and dependence that united the capitalist to the worker also governed the relationship between the genders, which was conceived as a relationship between the ejaculator and the facilitator of ejaculation. Femininity, far from being nature, is the quality of the

39. Paolo Virno, “La multitude comme subjectivité,” in *Grammaire de la multitude: pour une analyse des formes de vie contemporaines* (Paris: Éditions de l’éclat, 2002), 78–121.

40. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitudes*, 134.

orgasmic force when it can be converted into merchandise, into an object of economic exchange, into work. Obviously, a male body can occupy (and in fact already does occupy) a position of female gender in the market of sex work and, as a result, see its orgasmic power reduced to a capacity for work.

The control of orgasmic power (*puissance*) not only defines the difference between genders, the female/male dichotomy, it also governs, in a more general way, the technobiopolitical difference between heterosexuality and homosexuality. The technical restriction of masturbation and the invention of homosexuality as a pathology are of a pair with the composition of a disciplinary regime at the heart of which the collective orgasmic force is put to work as a function of the heterosexual reproduction of the species. Heterosexuality must be understood as a politically assisted procreation technology. But after the 1940s, the molecu­lized sexual body was introduced into the machinery of capital and forced to mutate its forms of production. Biopolitical conditions change drastically when it becomes possible to derive benefits from masturbation through the mechanism of pornography and the employment of techniques for the control of sexual reproduction by means of contraceptives and artificial insemination.

If we agree with Marx that “workforce is not actual work carried out but the simple potential or ability for work,” then it must be said that every human or animal, real or virtual, female or male body possesses this masturbatory potentiality, a *potentia gaudendi*, the power to produce molecular joy, and therefore also possesses productive

power without being consumed and depleted in the process. Until now, we've been aware of the direct relationship between the pornification of the body and the level of oppression. Throughout history, the most pornified bodies have been those of non-human animals, women and children, the racialized bodies of the slave, the bodies of young workers and the homosexual body. But there is no ontological relationship between anatomy and *potentia gaudendi*. The credit goes to the French writer Michel Houellebecq for having understood how to build a dystopian fable about this new capacity of global capitalism, which has manufactured the megaslut and the megaletch. The new hegemonic subject is a body (often codified as male, white, and heterosexual) supplemented pharmacopornographically (by Viagra, coke, pornography) and a consumer of pauperized sexual services (often in bodies codified as female, childlike, or racialized):

“When he can, a westerner *works*; he often finds his work frustrating or boring, but he pretends to find it interesting; this much is obvious. At the age of fifty, weary of teaching, of math, of everything, I decided to see the world. I had just been divorced for the third time; as far as sex was concerned, I wasn't expecting much. My first trip was to Thailand, and immediately after that I left for Madagascar. I haven't fucked a white woman since. I've never even felt the desire to do so. Believe me,” he added, placing a firm hand on Lionel's forearm, “you won't find a white woman with a soft, submissive, supple, muscular pussy anymore. That's all gone now.”<sup>41</sup>

41. Michel Houellebecq, *Platform*, trans. Frank Wynne (New York: Random House, 2002), 80.

Power is located not only in the (“female,” “childlike,” or “nonwhite”) body as a space traditionally imagined as pre-discursive and natural, but also in the collection of representations that render it sexual and desirable. In every case it remains a body that is always pharmacopornographic, a technoliving system that is the effect of a widespread cultural mechanism of representation and production.

The goal of contemporary critical theory would be to unravel our condition as pharmacopornographic workers/consumers. If the current theory of the *feminization of labor* omits the *cum shot*, conceals videographic ejaculation behind the screen of cooperative communication, it’s because, unlike Houellebecq, the philosophers of biopolitics prefer not to reveal their position as customers of the global pharmacopornomarket.

In the first volume of *Homo Sacer*, Giorgio Agamben reclaims Walter Benjamin’s concept of the “naked life” in order to define the biopolitical status of the subject after Auschwitz, a subject whose paradigm would be the concentration camp prisoner or the illegal immigrant held in a temporary detention center, reduced to existing only physically and stripped of all legal status or citizenship. To such a notion of the “naked life,” we could add that of the pharmacopornographic life, or *naked technolife*; the distinctive feature of a body stripped of all legal or political status is that its use is intended as a source of production of *potentia gaudendi*. The distinctive feature of a body reduced to naked technolife, in both democratic societies and fascist regimes, is precisely the power to be the object of maximum pharmacopornographic exploitation. Identical codes

of pornographic representation function in the images of the prisoners of Abu Ghraib,<sup>42</sup> the eroticized images of Thai adolescents, advertisements for L'Oréal and McDonald's, and the pages of *Hot magazine*. All these bodies are already functioning, in an inexhaustible manner, as carnal and digital sources of ejaculatory capital. For the Aristotelian distinction between *zōē* and *bios*, between animal life deprived of any intentionality and "exalted" life, that is, life gifted with meaning and self-determination that is a substrate of biopolitical government, we must today substitute the distinction between *raw* and *biotech* (biotechnoculturally produced); and the latter term refers to the condition of life in the pharmacopornographic era. Biotechnological reality deprived of all civic context (the body of the migrant, the deported, the colonized, the porn actress/actor, the sex worker, the laboratory animal, etc.) becomes that of the *corpus* (and no longer that of *homo*) *pornographicus* whose life (a technical condition rather than a purely biological one), lacking any right to citizenship, authorship, and right to work, is composed by and subject to self-surveillance and global mediatization. No need to resort to the dystopian model of the concentration or extermination camp—which are easy to denounce as mechanisms of control—in order to discover naked technolife, because it's at the center of postindustrial democracies, forming part of a global, integrated multimedia laboratory-brothel, where the control of the flow of affect begins under the pop form of excitation-frustration.

42. See Judith Butler, "Torture and Ethics of Photography," in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*. 25, no. 6 (April 19, 2007): 951–66.

## **EXCITE AND CONTROL**

The gradual transformation of sexual cooperation into a principal productive force cannot be accomplished without the technical control of reproduction. There's no porn without the Pill or without Viagra. Inversely, there is no Viagra or Pill without porn. The new kind of sexual production implies a detailed and strict control of the forces of reproduction of the species. There is no pornography without a parallel surveillance and control of the body's affects and fluids. Acting on this pharmacoporno body are the forces of the reproduction industry, entailing control of the production of eggs, techniques of programming relationships, straw collections of sperm, in vitro fertilization, artificial insemination, the monitoring of pregnancy, the technical planning of childbirth, and so on. Consequently, the sexual division of traditional work gradually disintegrates. Pharmacopornographic capitalism is ushering in a new era in which the most interesting kind of commerce is the production of the species as species, the production of its mind and its body, its desires and its affects. Contemporary biocapitalism at the same time produces and destroys the species. Although we're accustomed to speaking of a society of consumption, the objects of consumption are only the scintilla of a psychotoxic virtual production. We are consumers of air, dreams, identity, relation, things of the mind. This pharmacopornographic capitalism functions in reality thanks to the biomediatric management of subjectivity, through molecular control and the production of virtual audiovisual connections.

The pharmaceutical and audiovisual digital industry are the two pillars on which contemporary biocapitalism relies; they are the two tentacles of a gigantic, viscous built-in circuit. The pharmacoporno program of the second half of the twentieth century is this: control the sexuality of those bodies codified as woman and cause the ejaculation of those bodies codified as men. The Pill, Prozac, and Viagra are to the pharmaceutical industry what pornography, with its grammar of blowjobs, penetrations, and cum shots, is to the industry of culture: the jackpot of postindustrial biocapitalism.

Within the context of biocapitalism, an illness is the conclusion of a medical and pharmaceutical model, the result of a technical and institutional medium that is capable of explaining it discursively, of realizing it and of treating it in a manner that is more or less operational. From a pharmacopornopolitical point of view, a third of the African population infected with HIV *isn't really sick*. The thousands of seropositive people who die each day on the continent of Africa are precarious bodies whose survival has *not yet* been capitalized as bioconsumers/producers by the Western pharmaceutical industry. For the pharmacopornographic system, these bodies are *neither dead nor living*. They are in a prepharmacopornographic state or their life isn't likely to produce an ejaculatory benefit, which amounts to the same thing. They are bodies excluded from the technobiopolitical regime. The emerging pharmaceutical industries of India, Brazil, or Thailand are fiercely fighting for the right to distribute their antiretrovirus therapies. Similarly, if we are still waiting for the commercialization of a vaccine for

malaria (a disease that was causing five million deaths a year on the continent of Africa), it is partly because the countries that need it can't pay for it. The same Western multinational companies that are launching costly programs for the production of Viagra or new treatments for prostate cancer would never invest in malaria. If we do not take into account calculations about pharmacopornographic profitability, it becomes obvious that erectile dysfunction and prostate cancer are not at all priorities in countries where life expectancies for human bodies stricken by tuberculosis, malaria, and AIDS don't exceed the age of fifty-five.<sup>43</sup>

In the context of pharmacopornographic capitalism, sexual desire and illness are produced and cultivated on the same basis: without the technical, pharmaceutical, and mediatic supports capable of materializing them, they don't exist.

We are living in a toxopornographic era. The postmodern body is becoming collectively desirable through its pharmacological management and audiovisual advancement: two sectors in which the United States holds—for the moment but, perhaps not for long—worldwide hegemony. These two forces for the creation of capital are dependent not on an economy of production, but on an *economy of invention*. As Philippe Pignare has pointed out, “The pharmaceutical industry is one of the economic sectors where the cost of research and development is very high, whereas the manufacturing costs are extremely low. Unlike in the automobile industry, nothing is easier than reproducing a drug and

43. Michael Kremer and Christopher M. Snyder, “Why Is There No AIDS Vaccine?” (Research Paper, Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, June 2006).

guaranteeing its chemical synthesis on a massive scale, but nothing is more difficult or more costly than inventing it.”<sup>44</sup> In the same way, nothing costs less, materially speaking, than filming a blowjob or vaginal or anal penetration with a video camera. Drugs, like orgasms and books, are relatively easy and inexpensive to fabricate. The difficulty resides in their conception and political dissemination.<sup>45</sup> Pharmacopornographic biocapitalism does not produce things. It produces movable ideas, living organs, symbols, desires, chemical reactions, and affects. In the fields of biotechnology and pornocommunication, there are no objects to produce; it’s a matter of *inventing* a subject and producing it on a global scale.

44. Philippe Pignarre, *Le grand secret de l'industrie pharmaceutique* (Paris: La Découverte, 2004), 18.

45. Maurizio Lazzarato, *Puissance de l'invention: La Psychologie économique de Gabriel Tarde contre l'économie politique* (Paris: Les Empêcheurs de Penser en Rond, 2002).

## 4. HISTORY OF TECHNOSEXUALITY

The discontinuity of history, body, power: Foucault describes the transformation of European society in the late eighteenth century from what he calls a “sovereign society” into a “disciplinary society,” which he sees as a shift away from a form of power that determines and ritualizes death toward a new form of power that technically plans life based on population, health, and the national interest. *Bio-pouvoir* (biopower) is his way of referring to this new form of productive, diffuse, sprawling power. Spilling beyond the boundaries of the legal realm and punitive sphere, it becomes a force of “somato-power” that penetrates and composes the body of the modern individual. This power no longer plays the role of a coercive law through a negative mandate but is more versatile and welcoming, taking on the form of “an art of governing life,” an overall political technology that is transformed into disciplinary architectures (prisons, barracks, schools, hospitals, etc.), scientific texts, statistical tables, demographic calculations, how-to manuals, usage guidelines, schedules for the regulation of reproduction, and public health projects. Foucault underlined the centrality of sex and of sexuality in this modern art of government. The biopower processes of the feminine body’s hysterization, children’s sexual pedagogy, the regu-

lation of procreative conduct, and the psychiatrization of the pervert's pleasures will be to Foucault the axes of this project that he characterized with some degree of irony as a process of sexual modernization.<sup>1</sup>

In keeping with the intuitions of Michel Foucault, Monique Wittig, and Judith Butler, I refer to one of the dominant forms of this biopolitical action, which emerged with disciplinary capitalism, as *sexopolitics*.<sup>2</sup> *Sex*, its truth, its visibility, and its forms of externalization; *sexuality* and the normal and pathological forms of pleasure; and *race*, in its purity or degeneracy, are three powerful somatic fictions that have obsessed the Western world since the eighteenth century, eventually defining the scope of all contemporary theoretical, scientific, and political activity. These are somatic fictions, not because they lack material reality but because their existence depends on what Judith Butler calls the performative repetition of processes of political construction.<sup>3</sup>

Sex has become such a part of plans for power that the discourse on masculinity and femininity, as well as techniques of normalizing sexual identity, have turned into governmental agents of the control and standardization of life. Hetero- and homosexual identities were invented in 1868, inside a sphere of empiricism, taxonomic classification, and psychopathology. Likewise, Krafft-Ebing created an encyclopedia of normal and perverse sexualities where

1. Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité: La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 136–39; see also Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique: Cours au collège de France, 1978–1979* (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

2. Beatriz Preciado, "Multitudes Queer," *Multitudes* 12 (printemps 2003): 17–25.

3. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

sexual identities became objects of knowledge, surveillance, and judicial repression.<sup>4</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, laws criminalizing sodomy spread throughout Europe. “Sexual difference” was codified visually as an anatomical truth. The fallopian tubes, Bartholin’s gland, and the clitoris were defined as anatomical entities. One of the elemental political differences of the West (being a man or a woman) could be summed up by a banal equation: whether one had or did not have at birth a penis that was a centimeter and a half long. The first experiments in artificial insemination were accomplished on animals. With the help of mechanical instruments, interventions were made in the domain of the production of female pleasure; whereas, on the one hand, masturbation was controlled and prohibited, on the other, the female orgasm was medicalized and perceived as a crisis of hysteria.<sup>5</sup> Male orgasm was mechanized and domesticated through the lens of a budding pornographic codification . . . Machinery was on the way. The body, whether docile or rabid, was ready.

We could call the “sexual empire” (if we can be allowed to sexualize Hardt and Negri’s rather chaste catchword)<sup>6</sup> that biopolitical regime that uses sex, sexuality, and sexual identity as the somato-political centers for producing and governing subjectivity. Western disciplinary sexopolitics at

4. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis: The Classic Study of Deviant Sex* (New York: Arcade, 1998).

5. For a visual history of hysteria see Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpetriere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004); for a history of the technologies of the hysteric body see Rachel P. Maines, *The Technology of Orgasm: “Hysteria,” Vibrators and Women’s Sexual Satisfaction* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001).

6. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Empire* (Paris: Exils, 2000).

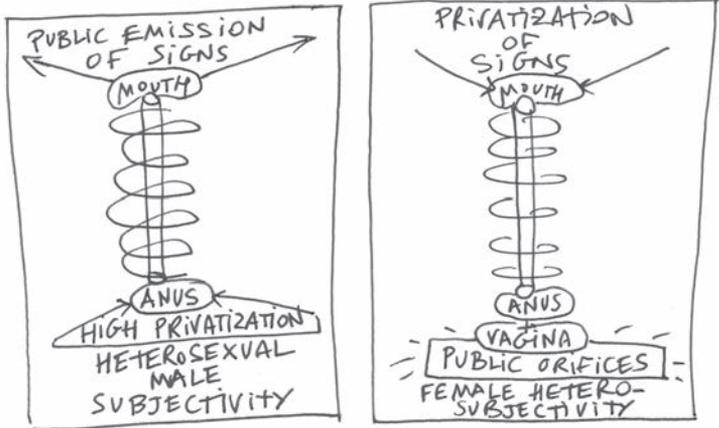
the end of the nineteenth and during a good part of the twentieth century boils down to a regulation of the conditions of reproduction or to those biological processes that “concern the population.” For the sexopolitics of the nineteenth century, the heterosexual is the artifact that will rake in the most success for government. The *straight mind*, to borrow an expression developed by Monique Wittig in the 1980s to designate heterosexuality— taken not as a sexual practice but as a political regime<sup>7</sup>—guarantees the structural relationship between the production of sexual identity and the production of certain body parts (to the detriment of others) as reproductive organs. One important task of this disciplinary work will consist of excluding the anus from circuits of production and pleasure. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari, “The first organ to suffer privatization, removal from the social field, was the anus. It was the anus that offered itself as a model for privatization, at the same time that money came to express the flows’ new state of abstraction.”<sup>8</sup> The anus as a center of production of pleasure (and, in this sense, closely related to the mouth or hand, which are also organs strongly controlled by the sexopolitical campaign against masturbation and homosexuality in the nineteenth century) has no gender. Neither male nor female, it creates a short circuit in the division of the sexes. As a center of primordial passivity and a perfect locale for the abject, positioned close to waste and shit, it serves as the universal black hole into which rush genders, sexes, identities, and capital. The West has

7. Monique Wittig, *La Pensée straight* (Paris: Balland, 2001), 65–76.

8. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (London: Continuum, 2004), 157.

designed a tube with two orifices: a mouth that emits public signs and an impenetrable anus around which it winds a male, heterosexual subjectivity, which acquires the status of a socially privileged body.

## 2 STRAIGHT SOMATIC FICTIONS



Until the seventeenth century, the sexual epistemology of the sovereign regime was dominated by what the historian Thomas Laqueur calls “a system of similarities”; female sexual anatomy was set up as a weak, internalized, degenerate variation of the only sex that possessed an ontological existence, the male.<sup>9</sup> The ovaries were considered to be internal testicles and the vagina to be an inverted penis that served as a receptacle for male sex organs. Abortion and infanticide, practices of the time, weren’t regu-

9. Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 63–108.

lated by the legal apparatus of the state but by different economic-political micropowers to which pregnant bodies found themselves affixed (the tribe, the feudal house, the paterfamilias . . . ). Two hierarchically differentiated social and political expressions divide the surface of a “mono-sexual” model: “man,” the perfect model of the human, and “woman,” a reproductive receptacle. In the sovereign regime, masculinity is the only somatic fiction with political power. Masculinity (embodied within the figures of the king and the father) is defined by necropolitical techniques: the king and the father are those who have the right of giving death. Sex assignment depended not only on the external morphology of the organs but, above all, on reproductive capacity and social role. A bearded woman who was capable of pregnancy, of putting a child into the world and nursing it, was considered a woman, regardless of the shape and size of her vulva. Within such a somato-political configuration, sex and sexuality (note that the term *sexuality* itself wouldn’t be invented until 1880) do not yet amount to categories of knowledge or techniques of subjectivization that are likely to outdo the political segmentation that separates the slave from the free man, the citizen from the metic, or the lord from the serf. Differences between masculinity and femininity remain, as well as between several modes of the production of sexual pleasure, but these do not yet determine the crystallizations of sexopolitical subjectivity.

Beginning in the eighteenth century, a new, visual sexopolitical regime that depends on a “system of oppositions” rather than on “similarities” takes form. It maps out a new sexual anatomy, in which the female sex ceases to be an

inversion or interiorization of the male sex and becomes an entirely different sex whose forms and functions proceed from their own anatomical logic. According to Thomas Laqueur, the invention of what could be called the aesthetic of sexual (and racial) difference is needed to establish an anatomical-political hierarchy between the sexes (male, female) and the races (white, nonwhite) in the face of upheavals resulting from movements of revolution and liberation that are clamoring for the enlargement of the boundaries of the public spheres for women and foreigners. It is here that anatomical truth functions like a legitimization of a new political organization of the social field.<sup>10</sup>

The change that will give birth to the disciplinary regime begins with the political management of syphilis, the advent of sexual difference, the technical repression of masturbation, and the invention of sexual identities.<sup>11</sup> The culmination of these rigid and cumbersome technologies of the production of sexual identity will come in 1868 with the pathologizing of homosexuality and the bourgeois normalization of heterosexuality. From then on, abortion and postpartum infanticide will be subject to surveillance and punished by law. The body and its products will become the property of the male/husband/father and, by extension, the state and God.

Inside this system of recognition, any corporal divergence from the norm (such as the size and form of the sex organs, facial pilosity, and the shape and size of the breasts)

10. *Ibid.*, 149–92.

11. See Thomas Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (New York: Zone Books, 2003).

will be considered a monstrosity, a violation of the laws of nature or a perversion, a violation of moral law. As sexual difference is elevated to a category that is not only natural but even transcendental (going beyond historical and cultural contexts), differences between homosexuality and heterosexuality appear as both anatomical and psychological, and so do the differences between sadism, masochism, and pedophilia; between normalcy and perversion. Considered simple sexual practices until this moment, they become identities and conditions that must be studied, recorded, hounded, hunted, punished, cured. Each body, as Foucault tells us, becomes an “individual to correct.”<sup>12</sup> Invented as well are the child masturbator and the sexual monster. Under this new epistemological gaze, the bearded woman becomes either an object of scientific observation or a fairground attraction in the new urban agglomerate. This double shift toward medico-legal surveillance and mediatic spectacularization, intensified as it is by digital and data-processing techniques and communication networks, will become one of the characteristics of the pharmacopornographic regime, whose expansion begins in the middle of the twentieth century.

The sexopolitical devices that develop with the nineteenth-century aesthetics of sexual difference and sexual identities are mechanical, semiotic, and architectonic techniques to naturalize sex. And here we can list a loose collection of the resulting phenomena: the atlas of sexual anatomy, treatises on optimizing natural resources com-

12. Michel Foucault, *Les anormaux: cours au Collège de France (1974–1975)* (Paris: Seuil, 1999), 53.

mensurate with the growth of population, legal texts on the criminalization of transvestism or sodomy, the tying of little girls' masturbating hands to their beds, irons for forcing apart the legs of young hysterics, silver nitrate photographic prints that engrave images of the dilated anus of passive homosexuals, straitjackets immobilizing the uncontrollable bodies of masculine women . . . These devices for the production of sexual subjectivity take the form of a political architecture *external* to the body. Their systems have a firm command of orthopedic politics and disciplinary exoskeletons. The model for these techniques of subjectivization, according to Foucault, could be Jeremy Bentham's architecture for the prison-factory (panopticism, in particular), the asylum, or the military barracks. If we think about devices of sexo-political subjectivization, then we must also speak about the expansion of a network of "domestic architecture." These extensive, intensive, and, moreover, intimate architectural forms include a redefinition of private and public spaces, the management of sexual commerce, but also gynecological devices and sexual orthopedic inventions (the corset, the speculum, the medical vibrator), as well as new media techniques of control and representation (photography, film, incipient pornography) and the massive development of psychological techniques for introspection and confession.

If it is true that Foucault's analysis up to this point, although not always chronologically exact, seems to have great critical acuity, it is no less true that his analysis loses intensity the closer it gets to contemporary society. Foucault neglected the emergence of a group of profound trans-

formations of technologies of production of the body and subjectivity that progressively appeared beginning with World War II. They force us to conceptualize a third regime of subjectivization, a third system of knowledge-power that is neither sovereign nor disciplinary, neither premodern nor modern. In the postscript to *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari, inspired by William S. Burroughs, use the term “control society”<sup>13</sup> to name this “new monster” of social organization that is a by-product of biopolitical control. Adding notions inspired by both Burroughs and Bukowski, I shall call this the “pharmacopornographic society.” A politically programmed ejaculation is the currency of this new molecular-informatic control.

After World War II, the somato-political context of the body’s technopolitical production seems dominated by a series of new technologies of the body (biotechnology, surgery, endocrinology, genetic engineering, etc.) and representation (photography, cinema, television, internet, video games, etc.) that infiltrate and penetrate daily life like never before. These are biomolecular, digital, and broadband data-transmission technologies. This is the age of soft, featherweight, viscous, gelatinous technologies that can be injected, inhaled—“incorporated.” The testosterone that I use is a part of these new gelatinous technologies.

These three regimes of production of sexual bodies and subjectivities should not be understood as mere historical periods. The disciplinary regime didn’t erase the sovereign necropolitical techniques. Likewise, the pharmacoporno-

13. Gilles Deleuze, “Post-scriptum sur les sociétés de contrôle,” in *Pourparlers* (Paris: Minuit, 1990), 241.

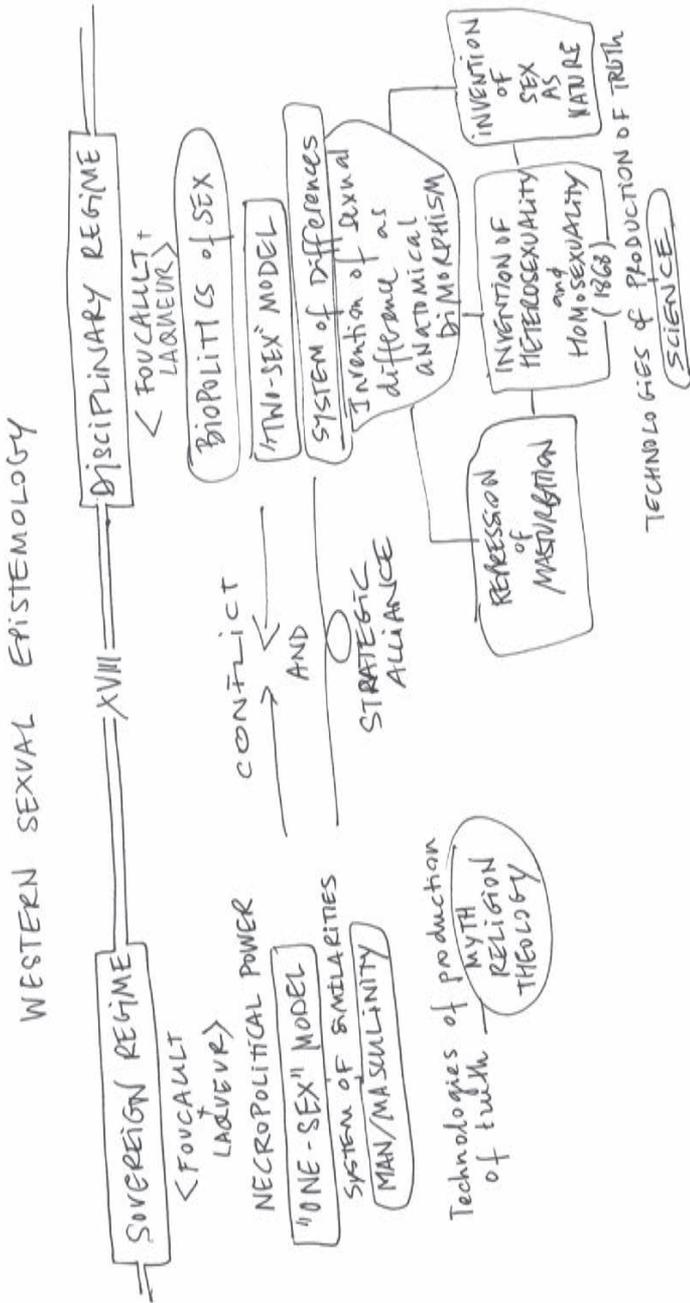
graphic regime has not totally obliterated biopolitical disciplinary techniques. Three different and conflicting power regime techniques juxtapose and act upon the body producing our contemporary subject and somatic fiction.

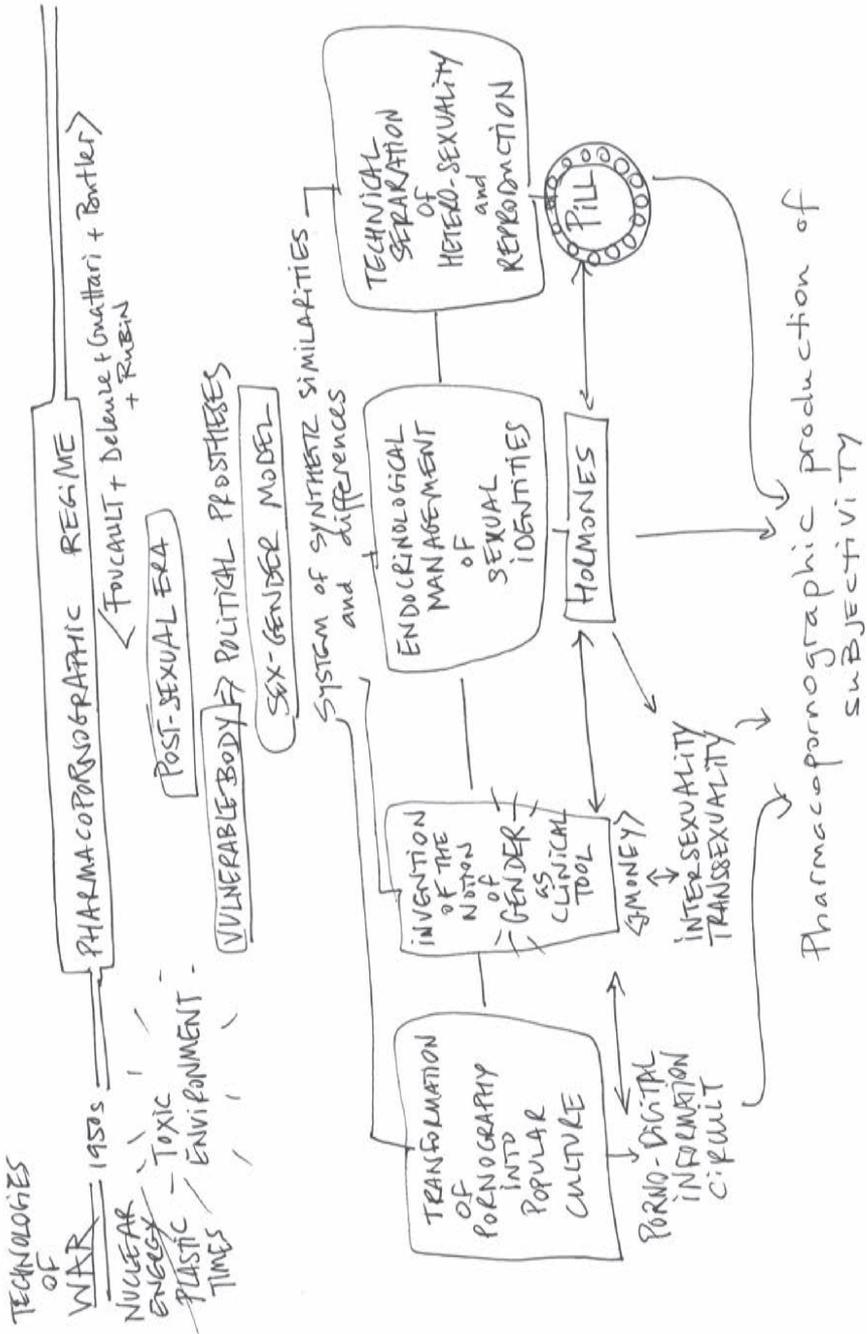
In disciplinary society, technologies of subjectivization controlled the body externally like orthoarchitectural apparatuses, but in the pharmacopornographic society, the technologies become part of the body: they dissolve into it, becoming *somatechnics*.<sup>14</sup> As a result, the body-power relationship becomes tautological: technopolitics takes on the form of the body and is incorporated. One of the first signs of the transformation of the somato-power regime in the mid-twentieth century was the electrification, digitalization, and molecularization of these devices for the control and production of sexual difference and sexual identities. Little by little, orthopedic-sexual and architectural disciplinary mechanisms were absorbed by lightweight, rapid-transmission microcomputing, as well as by pharmacological and audiovisual techniques. If architecture and orthopedics in the disciplinary society served as models for understanding the relation of body to power, in the pharmacopornographic society, the models for body control are microprosthetic: now, power acts through molecules that incorporate themselves into our immune system; silicone takes the shape of our breasts; neurotransmitters alter our perceptions and behavior; hormones produce their systemic

14. In the early 2000s, a group of academics at Macquarie University, including Susan Stryker, coined the term "somatechnics" to highlight the complex relationship between body and technology. Technology does not add upon a given body, but rather it is the very means by which corporeality is crafted.

effects on hunger, sleep, sexual arousal, aggressiveness, and the social decoding of our femininity and masculinity.

We are gradually witnessing the miniaturization, internalization, and reflexive introversion (an inward coiling toward what is considered intimate, private space) of the surveillance and control mechanisms of the disciplinary sexopolitical regime. These new soft technologies of micro-control adopt the form of the body they control and become part of it until they are inseparable and indistinguishable from it, ending up as techno-soma-subjectivities. The body no longer inhabits disciplinary spaces but is inhabited by them. The biomolecular and organic structure of the body is the last hiding place of these biopolitical systems of control. This moment contains all the horror and exaltation of the body's political potential.





## 6. TECHNOGENDER

The invention of the category *gender* signaled a splitting off and became the source point for the emergence of the pharmacopornographic regime for producing and governing sexuality. Far from its being the creation of a feminist agenda, the notion of gender belongs to the biotechnological discourse that appeared in the US medical and therapeutic industries at the end of the 1940s. Gender and pharmacopornographic masculinity and femininity are artifacts that originated with industrial capitalism and would reach commercial peaks during the Cold War, just like canned food, computers, plastic chairs, nuclear energy, television, credit cards, disposable ballpoint pens, bar codes, inflatable mattresses, or telecommunications satellites.

In 1955, the child psychologist John Money, who treated “hermaphrodites” and “intersex babies,” became the first to make use of the grammatical category of *gender* as a clinical and diagnosis tool. He would develop it with Anke Ehrhardt and Joan and John Hampson as part of a set of potential hormonal or surgical techniques to modify the bodies of babies born with genitals or chromosomes that medicine—relying on its visual and discursive criteria—

couldn't classify as strictly female or male.<sup>1</sup> To the rigid nineteenth-century categorizations of sex, John Money opposed the malleability of *gender*, using social and biochemical techniques. When he used *gender* as a name for "social role" or "psychological identity," he was essentially thinking of the possibility of using technologies (from hormones to social techniques, such as those employed in pedagogic and administrative institutions) to modify the body or to produce subjectivity intentionally in order to conform to a preexisting visual and biopolitical order, which was prescriptive for what was supposed to be a female or male human body.<sup>2</sup> In order to ensure that their external "sexual" development could be identified as feminine, newborns declared to be "intersex" because they possessed a "micropenis" (according to somato-political visual criteria) had it amputated, and their genitals were reconstructed in the form of a vagina, after which they received hormone-substitution therapy.<sup>3</sup> Intersex activists have pointed out the similarity between traditional non-Western cliterodectomy techniques and industrialized practices of genital mutilation on intersex bodies in the West.<sup>4</sup> Far as they were from the rigidity and exteriority of techniques of normalization

1. John Money, Joan G. Hampson, and John L. Hampson, "Imprinting and the Establishment of Gender Role," *Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry* 77, no. 3 (1957): 333–36, doi:10.1001/archneurpsyc.1957.02330330119019.

2. Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 98–129.

3. Suzanne Kessler, "The Medical Construction of Gender: Case Management of Intersex Infants," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 16, no. 1 (1990); Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna, *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach* (New York: John Wiley, 1978).

4. Cheryl Chase, "Hermaphrodites with Attitude: Mapping the Emergence of Intersex Political Activism," in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 300–14.

of the body of the architectonic and disciplinary systems at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, the new biocapitalism's pharmacopornographic techniques of gender production were simultaneously invasive and minimal, penetrating and invisible, intimate and toxic, high tech and mutilating.

Like the Pill or the oncomouse, gender is a biotech industrial artifact. The technologies of gender, sex, sexuality, and race are the true economicopolitical sectors of pharmacopornism. They are technologies of production of somatic fictions. *Male* and *female* are terms without empirical content beyond the technologies that produce them. That being the case, the recent history of sexuality appears as a gigantic pharmacopornographic Disneyland in which the tropes of sexual naturalism are fabricated on a global scale as products of the endocrinological, surgical, agrifood and media industries.

Whereas Money tampered with the bodies of infants to force them into the categories of "male gender" or "female gender," Dr. Henry Benjamin administered estrogens and progesterone to a new kind of patient of state-managed medicine: an adult who claims not to identify with the gender that was assigned at birth. Curiously, the criteria for the assignment of gender, as well as those for its reassignment in cases of transsexuality, function according to two metaphysical models of the body that are nearly irreconcilable. On the one hand, the criteria for sex assignment that permit a decision regarding whether or not a body is "female" or "male" at the moment of birth (or in utero, using a

sonogram) depend on a model of visual recognition that is supposedly empirical and in which the signifiers (chromosomes, size of the genitals, etc.) are cast as scientific truths. In this case, making a body visible implies that it is being assigned a male *or* female gender in a univocal and definitive way. This unveiling of gender depends on an optical ontology: the real is what you can see. On the other hand, the idea that posits a true “psychological sex” distinct from the one that has been assigned at birth—in other words, a subjective conviction of being a “man” or a “woman”—belongs to the model of radical invisibility, of the nonrepresentable, and this paradigm is close to that of the Freudian unconscious: an immaterial ontology. In this case, the real isn’t accessible to the senses and is by definition what cannot be apprehended by empirical means. These two models can function together thanks to a single metaphysical axis that attaches them as it opposes them. It’s necessary to imagine the biopolitical ideals of masculinity and femininity as transcendental essences from which are suspended aesthetics of gender, normative codes of visual recognition, and immaterial psychological convictions prompting the subject to proclaim itself male or female, heterosexual or homosexual, cis- or trans. However, the visual criteria that govern sex assignment at birth are not a biological event any more than are the psychological criteria that lead to the “inner” conviction of being a man or a woman: “Physical genitals are a construction of biological and scientific forms of life.”<sup>5</sup> Penises and vaginas are biocodes of power-

5. Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna, “Toward a Theory of Gender,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 173.

knowledge regimes. They are ideal regulators, biopolitical fictions that find their somatic support in individual subjectivity.<sup>6</sup> The pharmacopornographic sex-gender regime is the result of the unexpected alliance between the nineteenth-century naturalist metaphysics of sexual dimorphism, focused on heterosexual reproduction, and the rise of a hyperconstructivist medical and biotech industry in which gender roles and identities can be artificially designed.<sup>7</sup> Plato meets Money in the high-tech gender garage.

The hyperbolic production of the postwar medical discourse on gender is the sign of an epistemic crisis: the endless “nature versus nurture” debates of the 1950s–70s that involved John Money, David O. Caudwell, Robert Stoller, Henry Benjamin, Richard Green, or Milton Diamond remind us of sixteenth-century tricks on spheres and epicycles whose aim was to maintain the hegemony of the geocentric astronomical model. The proliferation of the clinical discourse on “true hermaphroditism,” “pseudo-hermaphroditism,” “intersexuality,” “sexual incongruities,” and “psychopathia transexualis,”<sup>8</sup> as well as the medical normalization of techniques of sex reassignment, genital mutilation of intersex babies, and surgical reconstruction of gender, are nothing other than desperate (and violent) measures to reinforce a shattered epistemology. In the 1950s, which were confronted with the political rise of feminism and with homosexuality, as well as with the desire

6. Judith Butler, “Doing Justice to Someone: Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality,” in *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 57–74.

7. See Butler, “Doing Justice.”

8. See David O. Caudwell, “Psychopathia Transexualis,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 40–44.

of “transvestites,” “deviants,” and “transsexuals” to escape or transform birth sex assignment, the dimorphism epistemology of sexual difference was simply crumbling. Nineteenth-century disciplinary epistemology was grounded on the biopolitical imperative of the heterosexual reproduction of the nation’s population. As Suzanne J. Kessler and Wendy McKenna put it, human bodies were “diagnosed” male or female at birth as potential “sperm and egg cell carriers.”<sup>9</sup> But “sperm and egg cell carriers” were gaining new political agency over their reproductive power. Moreover, new techniques in the 1950s for reading genetic and chromosomal differences and measuring endocrinological levels introduced variables that could not be reduced to the epistemological framework of sexual dimorphism. Medical, biological, and political discourses were confronted with an infinite variability of bodies and desires (multiple chromosomal, gonadal, hormonal, external genital, psychological, and political variables) that could not be subsumed within the disciplinary imperative of heterosexual reproduction. John Money puts it this way:

In human beings, the irreducible sex differences are that males impregnate, and females menstruate, gestate, and lactate. Otherwise, sexual dimorphism that is programmed into the brain under the influence of prenatal hormones appears to be not sex-irreducible, but sex-shared and threshold-dimorphic. A complete theory of the differentiation of all the constituents of masculinity or femininity of the gender identity role needs to be both

9. Kessler and McKenna, “Toward a Theory of Gender,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, 180.

multivariable and sequential in type. It must be applicable to all the syndromes of hermaphroditism, and to the genesis of the gender identity role phenomena, including transvestism and transsexualism, as well as to the genesis of a heterosexual gender identity role.<sup>10</sup>

But in the late 1950s, males are no longer guaranteed to impregnate, females stop menstruating and gestating under the effects of the contraceptive pill, and lactation is provided by food industries instead of by female breasts. The heterosexual dimorphic regime of “sperm and egg cell carriers” is going awry.

Instead of collectively producing an alternative (multimorphic) epistemology for understanding bodies and desires, the 1950s medical, biological, and political discourses decided to directly intervene within the structures of living beings to artificially construct sexual dimorphism using surgical, prosthetic, and hormonal techniques supported by the pharmacological, medical, and food industries.<sup>11</sup> When the possibility of the technical construction of sexual difference is recognized as a point of departure, nature and identity are brought to the level of a somatic parody. Whereas the disciplinary system of the nineteenth century considered sex to be natural, definitive, unchangeable, and transcendental, pharmacopornographic gender seems to be synthetic, malleable, variable, open to transfor-

10. John Money, “Pediatric Sexology and Hermaphroditism,” *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*, 11, no. 3 (1985): 139, doi: 10.1080/00926238508405440.

11. See Anne Fausto-Sterling, “The Five Sexes, Revisited,” *Sciences* 40, no. 4 (July/August 2000): 18–23. Several biologists have recently called for a change to a non-dimorphic epistemology of sex-gender assignment.

mation, and imitable, as well as produced and reproduced technically.

Strangely, the medical and biotechnological dimensions of gender production were ignored within the “cultural” version of white feminism’s constructivism, which reappropriated the notion of “gender” in order to recast it as an instrument of critical analysis of the oppression of women. Gender appears gradually in the anthropological or sociological texts of Margaret Mead or Ann Oakley as the social and cultural construction of sexual difference.<sup>12</sup> The feminist culturalist definitions of gender have been the source of two stumbling blocks whose disastrous effects are still at work in the current “politics of gender” that maintain that sex, an anatomical truth, is a biological given and therefore isn’t subject to cultural construction, whereas gender specifically expresses the social, cultural, and political difference of *women* in a society and at a particular historical moment. In this context, there’s nothing surprising about feminism’s finding itself on a dead-end street of the essentialism/constructivism debates or regarding the politics of the state’s facility in co-opting feminist rhetoric into an extensive program of sexual normalization and social control. Why didn’t 1970s culturalist and constructivist feminists fight against clinical diagnosis, reassignment protocols for intersex bodies, normalizing biochemical and surgical technologies, and the binary regime within administrative systems? Intersex activist Cheryl Chase answers: “Intersexuals have had such difficulty generating

12. One of the first texts where this difference is clearly thematicized is Ann Oakley, *Sex, Gender and Society* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, Ltd., 1972). See also Christine Delphy, *L’Enemi principal*, vol. 2, *Penser le genre*, (Paris: Syllepse, 2001).

mainstream feminist support not only because of the racist and colonialist frameworks that situate cliterodectomy as a practice foreign to proper subjects within the first world, but also because intersexuality undermines the stability of the category of ‘woman.’”<sup>13</sup>

Apart from claims coming from the intersex and transsexual movements, late 1980s queer theory represented the first critique of the use of the notion of gender within feminism itself. In the 1980s, Teresa de Lauretis and Judith Butler started to point out that second-wave feminism uncritically shared the very epistemological sex-gender framework it aimed to question. Lauretis claimed that feminist “theory” could not be evinced unless it examined its own critical foundations, political terms, linguistic practices, and practices of the production of visibility. Lauretis asked what the political subject produced by feminism as a discourse and practice of representation was. Stripped of all self-indulgence, her conclusion takes the form of an extremely lucid warning: feminism functions, or can function, as an instrument of normalization and political control when it reduces its subject to “women.” Under the apparent neutrality and universality of the term *woman*, a host of vectors of production and subjectivity are hiding: sex, race, class, sexuality, age, ability, geopolitical or corporal difference, and so on. In Lauretian terms, the subject of feminism is inevitably *eccentric*; rather than coinciding with “women,” it arises as a force of displacement, as a practice for the transformation of subjectivity.<sup>14</sup>

13. Chase, “Hermaphrodites,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, 312.

14. Teresa de Lauretis, “Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness,” *Feminist Studies* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 115–50.

In order to question the conflation of gender and woman, Teresa de Lauretis developed the notion of “technologies of gender.”<sup>15</sup> For Lauretis, filmmaking devices—specific modes of recording, projection, montage, signification, and decoding—serve as a paradigm for conceiving of the production of gender and sexual subjectivity. This amounts to saying that the pharmacopornographic regime functions like a machine of somatic representation in which text, image, and the corporal spread through the interior of an expansive cybernetic circuit. According to Lauretis’s semiotic-political interpretation, gender is the effect of a system of signification that includes modes of production and decoding of politically regulated visual and textual signs. The subject, who is simultaneously the producer and interpreter of these signs, is constantly involved in a corporal process of signification, representation, and self-representation. Transposing Foucault’s critique of disciplinary power and Metz’s cinematographic semiotics to feminism, Lauretis writes:

It seemed to me that gender was not the simple derivation of anatomical/biological sex but a sociocultural construction, a representation, or better, the compounded effect of discursive and visual representations which I saw emanating from various institutions—the family, religion, the educational system, the media, medicine, or law—but also from less obvious sources: language, art, literature, film, and so on. However, the constructed-ness or discursive nature of gender does not prevent it from

15. See Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987).

having real implications, or concrete effects, both social and subjective, for the material life of individuals. On the contrary, the reality of gender is precisely in the effects of its representation; gender is realized, becomes “real” when that representation becomes a self-representation, is individually assumed as a form of one’s social and subjective identity.<sup>16</sup>

Lauretis displaces the naturalized notion of “woman” with “gender” while translating the question of the “dialectics of oppression” into a multiplicity of “technologies.” The issue of this conceptual difference between gender and woman, between “technologies of power” and “dialectics of oppression” isn’t limited to nominal questions of translation or semantics. The issue directly concerns body technologies and devices of subjectification. This distinction has the potential to disrupt the entire grammar of feminism, and even the entire political history of the production of difference between the sexes. Whereas the feminism of the 1970s studied the sources of the oppression of women, Lauretis invites us to identify the functioning of a collection of technologies of gender, operating across bodies that produce not only differences of gender but also sexual, racial, somatic, class, age, disability, and other differences.

As a result, a new field of study has been established for feminism: the analysis of different *technologies of gender* that produce (always in a precarious, unstable way) bodies,

16. Teresa de Lauretis, “Gender Identities and Bad Habits,” in *Actas del IV Congreso Estatal Insomnía sobre Identidad de Género vs. Identidad Sexual* (Castelló de la Plana, España: Publicacions de la Universitat Jaume I, 2008): 13–23.

subjects of enunciation and action. It goes without saying that research about these technologies of gender cannot, in any case, be reduced to a statistical or sociological study of women's situation in the different domains of production of bodies, discourses, and representations.<sup>17</sup> The issue no longer comes down to considering gender as a cultural force that comes to modify a biologically determined foundation (sex). Instead, it is subjectivity as a whole, produced within the techno-organic circuits that are codified in terms of gender, sex, race, and sexuality through which pharmacopornographic capital circulates.

With Lauretis, Judith Butler introduced the largest and most acute critique of both gender-sex epistemology and the grammar of feminism. For Butler, gender is a system of rules, conventions, social norms, and institutional practices that *performatively* produce the subject they claim to describe. Through a cross-referenced reading of Austin, Derrida, and Foucault, Butler reaches a consideration of gender in which it is no longer an essence or psychological truth, but a discursive, corporal, and performative practice by means of which the subject acquires social intelligibility and political recognition.<sup>18</sup> Today, this Butlerian analysis comes together with Donna J. Haraway's lessons for examining the semiototechnical dimension of this performative production: pushing the performative hypothesis further into the body, as far as its organs and fluids; drawing it into the cells, chromosomes, and genes.

17. Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*.

18. See Butler's *Gender Trouble*, *Bodies That Matter*, and *Undoing Gender*.

The clinical notion of gender invented by Money sees it above all as an instrument of rationalization for a living being whose visible body is only one of the parameters. The invention of gender as an organizing principle was necessary for the appearance and development of a series of pharmacopornographic techniques for the normalization and transformation of living beings—a process that includes photographing “deviants,” cellular diagnosis, hormonal analysis and therapy, chromosomal readings, and transsexual and intersexual surgery.

Photography, invented at the end of the nineteenth century, before the appearance and perfection of hormonal and surgical techniques, signaled a crucial stage in the production of the new sexual subject and its visual truth. Of course, this process of representation of the body had already begun in the seventeenth century with anatomical and pornographic drawings,<sup>19</sup> but it is photography that would endow this technical production of the materiality of the body with the merit of visual realism. Let us take the example of one of the classical images by Félix Nadar<sup>20</sup> representing “hermaphrodites” and “inverts”: a body, named “X” in medical histories, appears in a supine position with legs spread, covered with a white slip that has been raised to the level of the chest, exposing the upper part of the pelvis. The genitals have been unveiled to the eyes of the camera by a hand coming from outside the frame. The image reveals its own process of discursive production. It shares its codes

19. Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 154–63.

20. Nadar photographed a “hermaphrodite” patient around 1860 at the behest of the French physician Armand Trousseau.

of representation with the pornography that appears at the same period; the doctor's hand hides and exhibits the genitals, thus establishing a power relationship between the subject and the object of representation. The face and, especially, the eyes of the patient have been effaced; the deviant cannot be the agent of his/her own representation. The truth of sex takes on the nature of a visual disclosure, a process in which photography participates like an ontological catalyst, making explicit a reality that wouldn't be able to emerge any other way.

A century later, in 1980, the anthropologist Susan Kessler will denounce the aesthetic codes (relying on the shape and form of the penis and the clitoris) that dominate medical protocol for the assignment of sex to newborns. Although the visual criteria for sex assignment may not seem to have changed very much since the end of the nineteenth century, the current technical possibilities of body modification are introducing substantial differences in the process of the assignment and production of femininity and masculinity in the pharmacopornographic era. The process of normalization (assignment, reassignment) that could be accomplished only by discursive or photographic representation in the past is now inscribed within the very structure of the living being by surgical, endocrinological, and even genetic techniques.

After World War II, human mapping in the West, characterized by sexual dimorphism and its classification of sexualities as normal or deviant, healthy or disabled, becomes dependent on the legal and commercial management of molecules essential to the production of phenotypes

(external signs) that are culturally recognized as female or male (facial hair, size and shape of the genitals, voice register . . . ), as well as on the technopolitical management of the reproduction of the species and on the pharmacological control of our immune systems and their resistance to aggression, illness, and death.

There have been several regimes of body production—political regimes for producing and reproducing human life on the planet, depending on the historical moment and the political, economic, and cultural context. Some lost their potential for subjectification (for example, patriarchy or Greek pedophilia) when the *political technoecologies* inside of which they functioned disappeared. Others are undergoing full mutation. This is the case with ours.

If the concept of gender has introduced a rift, the precise reason is that it represents the first self-conscious moment within the epistemology of sexual difference. From this point on, there is no going back; Money is to the history of sexuality what Hegel is to the history of philosophy and Einstein to the conception of space-time. It is the beginning of the end, the explosion of sex-nature, nature-history, time and space as linearity and extension. With the notion of gender, the medical discourse is unveiling its arbitrary foundations and its constructivist character, and at the same time opening the way for new forms of resistance and political action. When I bring up the idea of a rift introduced by the notion of gender, I'm not claiming to be referring to the passage from one political paradigm to a radically distinct other, or to an epistemological rupture that will give rise to a form of radical discontinuity. Rather,

I'm referring to a superimposition of strata in which different techniques of producing and managing life are interlacing and overlapping. The pharmacopornographic body is not passive living matter but a techno-organic interface, a technoliving system segmented and territorialized by different (textual, data-processing, biochemical) political technologies.

Let us examine, for example, the displacement of production of body hair from the disciplinary sex regime to the gender pharmacopornographic regime. In the sexodisciplinary system of the nineteenth century, the "bearded lady" was considered to be a monstrous abnormality, and her body was becoming visible within the spectacularized framework of circuses and freak shows. In the pharmacopornographic regime, "hirsutism" has become a clinical condition, making women potential clients of the medical system and consumers of manufactured molecules (specifically, Androcur, which is administered to neutralize testosterone production, but also insulin regulators), the purpose of which is not hormonal, but political, normalization. After 1961, hirsutism was measured by the Ferriman-Gallwey scale, which examines nineteen body areas (from sideburns to toes) to assess normal hair growth.<sup>21</sup> The Ferriman-Gallwey score establishes a correlation between

21. David Ferriman and J.D. Gallwey, "Clinical Assessment of Body Hair Growth in Women," *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology* 21, no. 11 (November 1961): 1440-7.

gender, ethnicity, and hair; for example, in a Caucasian woman a score of eight is regarded as indicative of androgen excess whereas in East Asian and Native American women a much lower score reveals hirsutism. According to the same clinical method, Ashkenazi Jews and Hispanic women are “high-risk ethnic groups.”<sup>22</sup> Hirsutism becomes here a method to clinically assess race as much as gender. Biopolitical loop: femininity-body-hair-visibility, circus-hirsutism-Androcur-race-cosmetic-treatment-invisibility-femininity. Different “techniques of the body”<sup>23</sup> and visual frameworks produce different somato-political living fictions: formerly exhibited in the circus, the racialized pharmacopornographic hirsute body becomes the object of the plastic surgery clinic and the beauty salon and their techniques of hormonal regulation and electrolysis.

In the changing definitions of gender, there is no succession of models (sovereign, disciplinary, and pharmacopornographic) about to be supplanted historically by others, or any ruptures or radical discontinuities, but rather an interconnected simultaneity, a transversal effect of multiple somato-political models that compose and implement subjectivity according to various intensities, different indexes of penetration, and different degrees of efficiency.

22. Daniel A. Dumesic and Lauri A. Pasch, “Hirsutism: Bother or Burden? Developing a patient-centered management approach,” *Sexuality, Reproduction & Menopause* 9, no. 3 (August 2011): 14.

23. Marcel Mauss, “Techniques du corps,” in *Sociologie et anthropologie* (Paris: PUF, 2001). This article was originally published in *Journal de Psychologie*, 32, no. 3–4 (15 mars–15 avril, 1936). Paper presented at the Société de Psychologie on May 17, 1934.

If this is not the case, then how to explain the fact that, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, rhinoplasty is considered plastic surgery whereas vaginoplasty (the surgical construction of a vagina) and phalloplasty (the surgical construction of a penis) are considered sex change operations?<sup>24</sup> One could say that two clearly distinct regimes of power-knowledge traverse the body and that they construct the nose and the genitals according to different somato-political technologies. Whereas the nose is regulated by a pharmacopornographic power in which an organ is considered to be private property and merchandise, the genitals are still imprisoned in a premodern, sovereign, and nearly theocratic power regime that considers them to be the property of the state and dependent on unchanging transcendental law. But in the pharmacopornographic society, a conflicting multiplicity of power-knowledge regimes is operating simultaneously on different organs, tearing the body apart. We are not bodies without organs, but rather an array of heterogeneous organs unable to be gathered under the same skin. Those who survive the mutation that is happening will see their bodies moving into a new semio-technical system and will witness the proliferation of new organs; in other words, they'll cease to be the bodies that they were before.

When it comes to such transformations of the living body, the outlines of the problem become clearer. Pharma-

24. See Dean Spade, "Mutilating Gender," in *The Transgender Studies Reader* eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 315–52.

copornographic gender is neither metaphor nor ideology; it can't be reduced to a performance: it is a form of political technoeology. The certainty of being a man or a woman is a somato-political biofiction produced by a collection of body technologies, pharmacologic and audiovisual techniques that determine and define the scope of our somatic potentialities and function like prostheses of subjectification. Gender is an operational program capable of triggering a proliferation of sensory perceptions under the form of affects, desires, actions, beliefs, and identities. One of the characteristic results of such a technology of gender is the production of inner knowledge about oneself, with a sense of a sexual self that appears to be an emotional reality that is evident to consciousness. "I am a man," "I am a woman," "I am heterosexual," "I am homosexual," "I am transsexual": these are units of specific knowledge about oneself, hard biopolitical nuclei around which it's possible to assemble an entire collection of discourses and performative practices.

We could call the "programming of gender" a psychopolitical neoliberal modeling of subjectivity that potentiates the production of subjects that think of themselves and behave like individual bodies, aware of themselves as private organic spaces and biological properties with fixed identities of gender and sexuality. The prevailing programming of gender operates with the following premise: an individual = a healthy body = a sex = a gender = a sexuality = a private property. But constructing gender, as Butler has argued, always amounts to taking the risk of dismantling it. Producing gender implies a collection of

strategies of naturalization/denaturalization and identification/disidentification. Drag king devices and hormonal self-experimentation are only two of these derailment strategies.

Within the pharmacopornographic regime, gender is constructed in industrial networks of biopolitical materialization; it is reproduced and reinforced socially by its transformation into entertainment, moving images, digital data, pharmacological molecules, cybercodes. Pharmacopornographic female or male gender exists before a public audience, as a somato-discursive construction of a collective nature, facing a scientific community or a network. Technogender is a public, scientific, community network biocode.

Oxytocin, serotonin, codeine, cortisone, the estrogens, omeprazole, testosterone, and so on, correspond to the group of molecules currently available for the manufacturing of subjectivity and its affects. We are technobiopolitically equipped to screw, reproduce the National Body, and consume. We live under the control of molecular technologies, hormonal straitjackets intended to maintain biopower: hyperestrogened bodies—rape—testosterone—love—pregnancy—sex drives—abjection—ejaculation. And the state draws its pleasure from the production and control of our pornogore subjectivity.

The objective of these pharmacopornographic technologies is the production of a living political prosthesis: a body

that is compliant enough to put its *potentia gaudendi*, its total and abstract capacity for creating pleasure, at the service of the production of capital and the reproduction of the species. Outside such somato-political ecology of “sperm and egg carriers,” there are neither men nor women, just as there is neither heterosexuality nor homosexuality, neither ableness nor disability.

Our contemporary societies are gigantic sexopolitical laboratories where the genders are produced. The body—each and every one of our bodies—is the invaluable enclave where transactions of power are ceaselessly carried out. My body = the multitude’s body. Postwar white men and women are biotechnological beings belonging to the sexopolitical regime, whose goal is the production, reproduction, and colonial expansion of heterosexual human life on the planet.

Beginning in the 1940s, the new biopolitical ideals of masculinity and femininity were created under laboratory conditions. These artifacts (us) can’t exist in a pure state, but only within our enclosed sexual *technoecosystems*. In our role as sexual subjects, we’re inhabiting biocapitalist amusement parks. We are men and women of the laboratory, effects of a kind of politicoscientific bio-Platonism. We are strange biopolitical fictions because we are alive: we are simultaneously the effect of the pharmacopornographic power (*biopower*) regime and the potential for its defeat (*bioempowerment*).

**Some semiotechanical codes of white heterosexual femininity belonging to the postwar pharmacopornographic political ecology:**

*Little Women*, a mother's courage, the Pill, the hyperloaded cocktail of estrogens and progesterone, the honor of virgins, *Sleeping Beauty*, bulimia, the desire for a child, the shame of deflowering, *The Little Mermaid*, silence in the face of rape, *Cinderella*, the ultimate immorality of abortion, cakes and cookies, knowing how to give a good blowjob, bromazepam, the shame about not having done it yet, *Gone with the Wind*, saying no when you want to say yes, not leaving home, having small hands, Audrey Hepburn's ballet shoes, codeine, taking care of your hair, fashion, saying yes when you want to say no, anorexia, knowing in secret that the one you're really attracted to is your best friend, fear of growing old, the need to be on a diet constantly, the beauty imperative, kleptomania, compassion, cooking, the desperate sensuality of Marilyn Monroe, the manicure, not making any noise when you walk, not making any noise when you eat, not making any noise, the immaculate and carcinogenic cotton of Tampax, the certainty that maternity is a natural bond, not knowing how to cry, not knowing how to fight, not knowing how to kill, not knowing much or knowing a lot but not being able to say it, knowing how to wait, the subdued elegance of Lady Di, Prozac, fear of being a bitch in heat, Valium, the necessity of the G-string, knowing how to restrain yourself, letting yourself be fucked in the ass when it's necessary, being resigned, accurate waxing of the pubes, depression, thirst, little lavender balls that smell good, the smile, the living mummification of the smooth face of

youth, love before sex, breast cancer, being a kept woman, being left by your husband for a younger woman . . .

**Some semiottechnical codes of white heterosexual masculinity belonging to the postwar pharmacopornographic political ecology:**

James Bond, soccer, wearing pants, knowing how to raise your voice, *Platoon*, knowing how to kill, knowing how to smash somebody's face, mass media, stomach ulcers, the precariousness of paternity as a natural bond, overalls, sweat, war (including the television version), Bruce Willis, Operation Desert Storm, speed, terrorism, sex for sex's sake, getting hard like Ron Jeremy, knowing how to drink, earning money, *Rocky*, Prilosec, the city, bars, hookers, boxing, the garage, the shame of not getting hard like Ron Jeremy, Viagra, prostate cancer, broken noses, philosophy, gastronomy, *Scarface*, having dirty hands, Bruce Lee, paying alimony to your ex-wife, conjugal violence, horror films, porn, gambling, bets, the government, the state, the corporation, cold cuts, hunting and fishing, boots, the tie, the three-day growth of beard, alcohol, coronaries, balding, the Grand Prix, journey to the Moon, getting plastered, hanging yourself, big watches, callused hands, keeping your anus squeezed shut, camaraderie, bursts of laughter, intelligence, encyclopedic knowledge, sexual obsessions, Don Juanism, misogyny, being a skinhead, serial killers, heavy metal, leaving your wife for a younger woman, fear of getting fucked in the ass, not seeing your children after the divorce, the desire to get fucked in the ass . . .

For a long time I believed that only people like me were really in deep shit. Because we aren't and will never be Little Women or James Bond heroes. Now I know that shit concerns all of us, especially Little Women and James Bond heroes.

## THE TWILIGHT OF HETEROSEXUALITY

Monique Wittig with Michel Foucault. Judith Butler with Antony Negri. Angela Davis with Félix Guattari. Kate Bornstein with Franz Fanon. White heterosexual femininity is, above all, an economic function referring to a specific position within biopolitical relationships of production and exchange, and based on the transformation of sex work, the work of pregnancy, body care, and other unpaid activity within industrial capitalism.<sup>25</sup> This sexualized economy functions through what Judith Butler has called performative coercion:<sup>26</sup> by means of semiothechnical, linguistic, and corporal processes of regulated repetitions imposed by cultural conventions. It's impossible to imagine the rapid expansion of industrial capitalism without the slave trade, colonial expropriation, and the institutionalization of the heterosexual *dispositif* as a mode of transformation in surplus value of unpaid sexual services historically performed by women. It is reasonable to posit an unpaid debt for sex work that heterosexual men historically contracted with regard to women, in the same way that Western countries

25. Wittig, 58–59.

26. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

should be, according to Franz Fanon, forced to reimburse a colonial debt to colonized peoples.<sup>27</sup> If interest were applied to the debt for sexual services and colonial plundering, all women and colonized peoples on the planet would receive an annuity that would allow them to spend the rest of their lives without working.

Heterosexuality hasn't always existed. The contemporary transformation of capitalism entails a mutation of the sex-gender order. If we look attentively at the signs of technification and informatization of gender that emerge starting with World War II, we can even affirm that heterosexuality has been summoned to disappear one day. In fact, it is in the act of disappearing now. The postsexual era will then begin as a secondary effect of the pharmacoporno industry. This means that there will no longer be sexual relations between cis-males and cis-females and that the conditions of sexual production (production of bodies and pleasures) are drastically changing, that they will begin to resemble more and more closely the production of bodies and deviant pleasures, under the control of the same pharmacopornographic regulations. In other words, all forms of sexuality and production of pleasure, all libidinal and biopolitical economies are now subject to the same molecular and digital technologies of the production of sex, gender, and sexuality.

The normative premises of the nineteenth-century

27. Frantz Fanon, "De la violence," in *Les Damnés de la terre*, in *Oeuvres* (Paris: La Découverte, 2011), 503.

disciplinary sexual regime (continuity between sexuality and reproduction and pathologization of nonreproductive practices, including masturbation and homosexuality) were radically displaced with the invention of the Pill and the making of pornography into a branch of popular media industries that transformed masturbation into a source of production of capital. But the technoliving park of which we are part isn't completely coherent and integrated. The two poles of the pharmacopornographic industry (pharmaco and porno) function more in opposition than they do in tandem. Although the pornography industry as a whole works as cultural propaganda for the gender dimorphic regime (producing normative and idealized representations of heterosexual and homosexual practice, where sexuality equals penetration with a biopenis) and the political asymmetry between cis-males and cis-females is legitimized as based on anatomical differences (cis-male = biopenis; cis-female = biovagina), the pharmaceutical and biotechnical industries and the new techniques of assisted reproduction—even if they do continue to function in a heteronormative legal framework—are ceaselessly redesigning the frontiers between the genders and, as a whole, turning the economic, heterosexual, and political system into an obsolete means of management of subjectivity.

The dialectic between pharmaco and porno is already arising in the contradictions between various (low-tech or high-tech) biocodes of subjectivity coming from different regimes of production of the body. For example, families (whether heterosexual, homosexual, or monoparental) in which reproduction has been accomplished by *in vitro* fer-

tilization with anonymous donor sperm continue to function in a politicolegal system in which the performative ideals of masculinity and kinship have not been challenged. Moreover, the biocodes of the production of subjectivity (both those that are semiotic and those that are pharmaceutical, from Viagra to testosterone, by way of the aesthetics of the gay body or sexual practices using synthetic organs) are circulating within the pharmacopornographic market without any possibility of controlling the processes of production of subjectivity that they are inducing. Thus, biocodes (language, ways of dressing, hormones, prostheses) that once belonged to feminine, masculine, heterosexual, homosexual, transsexual, or even genderqueer configurations can achieve means of expression that are denaturalized and offbeat and free of a sexual identity or a precise biopolitical subjectivity. A way of life or an identity agenda. The visual codes governing the transformed face of Courtney Love, a rock icon, are not at all different from those used to rejuvenate the face of the queen of Spain, the actress Pamela Anderson, Chen Lili (the transsexual woman who attempted to compete in the Miss Universe contest in 2004), or the lesbian star Ellen DeGeneres, or from those used in remodeling the face of an anonymous working-class cis-female who wins the right to participate in the American TV show *Extreme Makeover*. As a result, we are witnessing a horizontalization of the consumption of the techniques of production of the body that redistributes the differences between class, race, or sexual identities, between the culture of rock music, high society, and the porn industry. This pharmacopornographic shifting is a

sign that normative white heterosexuality will soon be one body aesthetic among many others, a retro reproductive style that various future generations will be able to denigrate or exalt, a low-tech reproduction machine possibly exportable to other parts of the world (even an excuse for waging war against Muslim countries), but completely out of date and decadent in Western democratic post-Judeo-Christian societies.

Fifty years after the invention of the Pill, all sexual bodies are produced and become intelligible according to a common pharmacopornographic epistemology. There are not body biotechnologies that differ but the administrative systems that, as Dean Spade argues, sort and manage the access and use of those technologies, distributing life chances according to class, race, ability, gender, or sexuality.<sup>28</sup> Today, a cis-male can self-administer a testosterone-based hormonal complex to increase his athletic efficiency, and a teenager can have an implant placed under her skin that releases a composite of estrogens and progesterone for three years, acting as a contraceptive; a cis-female who claims to be a man can sign an agreement for a sex change and receive endocrinal therapy with a base of testosterone that makes it possible to grow a beard and mustache and increases muscularity; a cis-female of sixty may discover that more than twenty years of swallowing her high-strength contraceptive pill has caused kidney failure or breast cancer that she is supposed to treat with chemotherapy resembling what the victims of Chernobyl were

28. See Dean Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics and the Limits of the Law* (New York: South End Press, 2011).

exposed to; a heterosexual couple can resort to in vitro fertilization after discovering that the male can't produce sperm mobile enough to fertilize the ovum of his partner because he has consumed too much tobacco and alcohol. The same testosterone that helps turn the wheels of the Tour de France serves to transform the bodies of F2M transsexuals . . . The question is, who has access to hormone treatments? According to which clinical diagnosis? How do class and race modify the distribution of and the access to technologies of production of gender?

All this suggests that a normative regime for segregated distribution of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability coexists with the process of "becoming common"<sup>29</sup> of technologies of the production of body, gender, sex, race, and sexuality. From now on, the mutation will be impossible to stop.

In the middle of the Cold War, a new ontological-political distinction between "cis-" (a body that keeps the gender it was assigned at birth) and "trans" (a body availing itself of hormonal, surgical, prosthetic, or legal technologies to change that assignment) made its appearance. Henceforth, I will use the nomenclature *cis-* and *trans*, with the understanding that these two biopolitical gender statuses are technically produced. Both of them fall within the province of common methods of visual recognition, performative production, and morphological control. The difference between "cis-" and "trans" is enumerated as a function of resistance to the norm of the consciousness of those tech-

29. See the notion of "becoming common" in Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Multitudes*, 142.

nical (pharmacopornographic) processes that produce somatic fictions of masculinity and femininity and as a function of scientific techniques and social recognition in public space. This implies no judgment about value: “trans” gender is neither better nor more political than “cis-” gender. It comes down to saying that, in ontopolitical terms, there are only technogenders. Photographic, biotechnological, surgical, pharmacological, cinematographic, or cybernetic techniques come to construct the materiality of the sexes *performatively*. Some transsexuals claim to have been born “imprisoned in the body of the opposite sex” and say that the technical mechanisms placed at their disposal by contemporary medicine are only a way of revealing their *true, authentic sex*. Others, like Kate Bornstein, Del LaGrace Volcano, or Susan Stryker,<sup>30</sup> affirm their status as *gender queers*, or gender deviants, and refuse any summons as man or woman, declaring them to be impositions of the norm. Del LaGrace Volcano puts it this way:

As a gender variant visual artist I access “technologies of gender” in order to amplify rather than erase the hermaphroditic traces of my body. *I name myself*. A gender abolitionist. A part time gender terrorist. An intentional mutation and intersex by design, (as opposed to diagnosis), in order to distinguish my journey from the thousands of intersex individuals who have had their “ambiguous” bodies mutilated and disfigured in a misguided attempt at “normalization.”<sup>31</sup>

30. Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Susan Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1, no. 3 (1994): 227–54.

31. Del LaGrace Volcano, “Artist Statement,” last modified September 2005, <http://www.dellagracevolcano.com/statement.html>.

One cannot insist enough on the fact that the pharmacopornographic regime of sexuality cannot function without the circulation of an enormous quantity of semitechnical flow: the flow of hormones, the flow of silicone, and the flow of digital, textual, and representational content . . . In other words, it cannot function without the constant trafficking of gender biocodes. Gender in the twenty-first century functions as an abstract mechanism for technical subjectification; it is spliced, cut, moved, cited, imitated, swallowed, injected, transplanted, digitized, copied, conceived of as design, bought, sold, modified, mortgaged, transferred, downloaded, enforced, translated, falsified, fabricated, swapped, dosed, administered, extracted, contracted, concealed, negated, renounced, betrayed . . . It transmutes.

In terms of political agency, subjection, or empowerment do not depend on the rejection of technologies in the name of nature, but rather on the differential use and reappropriation of the very techniques of the production of subjectivity. No political power exists without control over production and distribution of gender biocodes. Pharmacopornographic emancipation of subaltern bodies can be measured only according to these essential criteria: involvement in and access to the production, circulation, and interpretation of somato-politic biocodes.

# The Posthuman

Rosi Braidotti

polity

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# Introduction

Not all of us can say, with any degree of certainty, that we have always been human, or that we are only that. Some of us are not even considered fully human now, let alone at previous moments of Western social, political and scientific history. Not if by ‘human’ we mean that creature familiar to us from the Enlightenment and its legacy: ‘The Cartesian subject of the cogito, the Kantian “community of reasonable beings”, or, in more sociological terms, the subject as citizen, rights-holder, property-owner, and so on’ (Wolfe, 2010a). And yet the term enjoys widespread consensus and it maintains the re-assuring familiarity of common sense. We assert our attachment to the species as if it were a matter of fact, a given. So much so that we construct a fundamental notion of Rights around the Human. But is it so?

While conservative, religious social forces today often labour to re-inscribe the human within a paradigm of natural law, the concept of the human has exploded under the double pressure of contemporary scientific advances and global economic concerns. After the postmodern, the post-colonial, the post-industrial, the post-communist and even the much contested post-feminist conditions, we seem to have entered the post-human predicament. Far from being the  $n^{\text{th}}$  variation in a sequence of prefixes that may appear both endless and somehow arbitrary, the posthuman condition introduces a

qualitative shift in our thinking about what exactly is the basic unit of common reference for our species, our polity and our relationship to the other inhabitants of this planet. This issue raises serious questions as to the very structures of our shared identity – as humans – amidst the complexity of contemporary science, politics and international relations. Discourses and representations of the non-human, the inhuman, the anti-human, the inhumane and the posthuman proliferate and overlap in our globalized, technologically mediated societies.

The debates in mainstream culture range from hard-nosed business discussions of robotics, prosthetic technologies, neuroscience and bio-genetic capital to fuzzier new age visions of trans-humanism and techno-transcendence. Human enhancement is at the core of these debates. In academic culture, on the other hand, the posthuman is alternatively celebrated as the next frontier in critical and cultural theory or shunned as the latest in a series of annoying ‘post’ fads. The posthuman provokes elation but also anxiety (Habermas, 2003) about the possibility of a serious de-centring of ‘Man’, the former measure of all things. There is widespread concern about the loss of relevance and mastery suffered by the dominant vision of the human subject and by the field of scholarship centred on it, namely the Humanities.

In my view, the common denominator for the posthuman condition is an assumption about the vital, self-organizing and yet non-naturalistic structure of living matter itself. This nature–culture continuum is the shared starting point for my take on posthuman theory. Whether this post-naturalistic assumption subsequently results in playful experimentations with the boundaries of perfectibility of the body, in moral panic about the disruption of centuries-old beliefs about human ‘nature’ or in exploitative and profit-minded pursuit of genetic and neural capital, remains however to be seen. In this book I will try to examine these approaches and engage critically with them, while arguing my case for posthuman subjectivity.

What does this nature–culture continuum amount to? It marks a scientific paradigm that takes its distance from the social constructivist approach, which has enjoyed widespread consensus. This approach posits a categorical distinction between the given (nature) and the constructed (culture). The distinction allows for a sharper focus in social analysis and it

provides robust foundations to study and critique the social mechanisms that support the construction of key identities, institutions and practices. In progressive politics, social constructivist methods sustain the efforts to de-naturalize social differences and thus show their man-made and historically contingent structure. Just think of the world-changing effect of Simone de Beauvoir's statement that 'one is not born, one becomes a woman'. This insight into the socially bound and therefore historically variable nature of social inequalities paves the road to their resolution by human intervention through social policy and activism.

My point is that this approach, which rests on the binary opposition between the given and the constructed, is currently being replaced by a non-dualistic understanding of nature–culture interaction. In my view the latter is associated to and supported by a monistic philosophy, which rejects dualism, especially the opposition nature–culture and stresses instead the self-organizing (or auto-poietic) force of living matter. The boundaries between the categories of the natural and the cultural have been displaced and to a large extent blurred by the effects of scientific and technological advances. This book starts from the assumption that social theory needs to take stock of the transformation of concepts, methods and political practices brought about by this change of paradigm. Conversely, the question of what kind of political analysis and which progressive politics is supported by the approach based on the nature–culture continuum is central to the agenda of the posthuman predicament.

The main questions I want to address in this book are: firstly what is the posthuman? More specifically, what are the intellectual and historical itineraries that may lead us to the posthuman? Secondly: where does the posthuman condition leave humanity? More specifically, what new forms of subjectivity are supported by the posthuman? Thirdly: how does the posthuman engender its own forms of inhumanity? More specifically, how might we resist the inhuman(e) aspects of our era? And last, how does the posthuman affect the practice of the Humanities today? More specifically, what is the function of theory in posthuman times?

This book rides the wave of simultaneous fascination for the posthuman condition as a crucial aspect of our historicity, but

also of concern for its aberrations, its abuses of power and the sustainability of some of its basic premises. Part of the fascination is due to my sense of what the task of critical theorists should be in the world today, namely, to provide adequate representations of our situated historical location. This in itself humble cartographic aim, that is connected to the ideal of producing socially relevant knowledge, flips over into a more ambitious and abstract question, namely the status and value of theory itself.

Several cultural critics have commented on the ambivalent nature of the 'post-theoretical malaise' that has struck the contemporary Human and Social Sciences. For instance, Tom Cohen, Claire Colebrook and J. Hillis Miller (2012) emphasize the positive aspect of this 'post-theory' phase, namely the fact that it actually registers the new opportunities as well as the threats that emerge from contemporary science. The negative aspects, however, are just as striking, notably the lack of suitable critical schemes to scrutinize the present.

I think that the anti-theory shift is linked to the vicissitudes of the ideological context. After the official end of the Cold War, the political movements of the second half of the twentieth century have been discarded and their theoretical efforts dismissed as failed historical experiments. The 'new' ideology of the free market economy has steamrolled all oppositions, in spite of massive protest from many sectors of society, imposing anti-intellectualism as a salient feature of our times. This is especially hard on the Humanities because it penalizes subtlety of analysis by paying undue allegiance to 'common sense' – the tyranny of doxa – and to economic profit – the banality of self-interest. In this context, 'theory' has lost status and is often dismissed as a form of fantasy or narcissistic self-indulgence. Consequently, a shallow version of neo-empiricism – which is often nothing more than data-mining – has become the methodological norm in Humanities research.

The question of method deserves serious consideration: after the official end of ideologies and in view of the advances in neural, evolutionary and bio-genetic sciences, can we still hold the powers of theoretical interpretation in the same esteem they have enjoyed since the end of the Second World War? Is the posthuman predicament not also linked to a post-theory mood? For instance, Bruno Latour (2004) – not exactly a classical

humanist in his epistemological work on how knowledge is produced by networks of human and non-human actors, things and objects – recently commented on the tradition of critical theory and its connection to European humanism. Critical thought rests on a social constructivist paradigm which intrinsically proclaims faith in theory as a tool to apprehend and represent reality, but is such faith still legitimate today? Latour raised serious self-questioning doubts about the function of theory today.

There is an undeniably gloomy connotation to the posthuman condition, especially in relation to genealogies of critical thought. It is as if, after the great explosion of theoretical creativity of the 1970s and 1980s, we had entered a zombified landscape of repetition without difference and lingering melancholia. A spectral dimension has seeped into our patterns of thinking, boosted, on the right of the political spectrum, by ideas about the end of ideological time (Fukuyama, 1989) and the inevitability of civilizational crusades (Huntington, 1996). On the political left, on the other hand, the rejection of theory has resulted in a wave of resentment and negative thought against the previous intellectual generations. In this context of theory-fatigue, neo-communist intellectuals (Badiou and Žižek, 2009) have argued for the need to return to concrete political action, even violent antagonism if necessary, rather than indulge in more theoretical speculations. They have contributed to push the philosophical theories of post-structuralism way out of fashion.

In response to this generally negative social climate, I want to approach posthuman theory as both a genealogical and a navigational tool. I find it useful as a term to explore ways of engaging affirmatively with the present, accounting for some of its features in a manner that is empirically grounded without being reductive and remains critical while avoiding negativity. I want to map out some of the ways in which the posthuman is circulating as a dominant term in our globally linked and technologically mediated societies. More specifically, posthuman theory is a generative tool to help us re-think the basic unit of reference for the human in the bio-genetic age known as ‘anthropocene’, the historical moment when the Human has become a geological force capable of affecting all life on this planet. By extension, it can also help us re-think the basic tenets

of our interaction with both human and non-human agents on a planetary scale.

Let me give some examples of the contradictions offered by our posthuman historical condition.

### **Vignette 1**

*In November 2007 Pekka-Eric Auvinen, an eighteen-year-old Finnish boy, opened fire on his classmates in a high school near Helsinki, killing eight people before shooting himself. Prior to the carnage, the young killer posted a video on YouTube, in which he showed himself, wearing a t-shirt with the caption 'Humanity is overrated'.*

That humanity be in a critical condition – some may even say approaching extinction – has been a *leitmotif* in European philosophy ever since Friedrich Nietzsche proclaimed the 'death of God' and of the idea of Man that was built upon it. This bombastic assertion was meant to drive home a more modest point. What Nietzsche asserted was the end of the self-evident status attributed to human nature as the common sense belief in the metaphysically stable and universal validity of the European humanistic subject. Nietzschean genealogy stresses the importance of interpretation over dogmatic implementation of natural laws and values. Ever since then, the main items on the philosophical agenda have been: firstly, how to develop critical thought, after the shock of recognition of a state of ontological uncertainty, and, secondly, how to reconstitute a sense of community held together by affinity and ethical accountability, without falling into the negative passions of doubt and suspicion.

As the Finnish episode points out, however, philosophical anti-humanism must not be confused with cynical and nihilistic misanthropy. Humanity may well be over-rated, but as the human population on earth reaches its eighth billion mark, any talk of extinction seems downright silly. And yet, the issue of both ecological and social sustainability is at the top of most governmental programmes across the world, in view of the environmental crisis and climate change. Thus, the question Bertrand Russell formulated in 1963, at the height of the Cold War and of nuclear confrontation, sounds more relevant than ever: has Man a future indeed? Does

the choice between sustainability and extinction frame the horizon of our shared future, or are there other options? The issue of the limits of both humanism and of its anti-humanist critics is therefore central to the debate on the posthuman predicament and I will accordingly devote the first chapter to it.

### Vignette 2

*The Guardian reported that people in war-torn lands like Afghanistan were reduced to eating grass in order to survive.<sup>1</sup> At the same point in history, cows in the United Kingdom and parts of the European Union were fed meat-based fodder. The agricultural bio-technological sector of the over-developed world had taken an unexpected cannibalistic turn by fattening cows, sheep and chickens on animal feed. This action was later diagnosed as the source for the lethal disease Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), vulgarly called 'mad cow disease', which caused the brain structure of the animals to corrode and turn to pulp. The madness here, however, is decidedly on the side of the humans and their bio-technological industries.*

Advanced capitalism and its bio-genetic technologies engender a perverse form of the posthuman. At its core there is a radical disruption of the human–animal interaction, but all living species are caught in the spinning machine of the global economy. The genetic code of living matter – 'Life itself' (Rose, 2007) – is the main capital. Globalization means the commercialization of planet Earth in all its forms, through a series of inter-related modes of appropriation. According to Haraway, these are the techno-military proliferation of micro-conflicts on a global scale; the hyper-capitalist accumulation of wealth; the turning of the ecosystem into a planetary apparatus of production, and the global infotainment apparatus of the new multimedia environment.

The phenomenon of Dolly the sheep is emblematic of the complications engendered by the bio-genetic structure of contemporary technologies and their stock-market backers. Animals provide living material for scientific experiments.

<sup>1</sup> *The Guardian Weekly*, 3–5 January 2002, p. 2.

They are manipulated, mistreated, tortured and genetically recombined in ways that are productive for our bio-technological agriculture, the cosmetics industry, drugs and pharmaceutical industries and other sectors of the economy. Animals are also sold as exotic commodities and constitute the third largest illegal trade in the world today, after drugs and arms, but ahead of women.

Mice, sheep, goats, cattle, pigs, rabbits, birds, poultry and cats are bred in industrial farming, locked up in battery-cage production units. As George Orwell prophetically put it, however, all animals may be equal, but some are definitely more equal than others. Thus, because they are an integral part of the bio-technological industrial complex, livestock in the European Union receives subsidy to the tune of US\$803 per cow. This is considerably less than the US\$1,057 that is granted to each American cow and US\$2,555 given to each cow in Japan. These figures look all the more ominous when compared to the gross national income *per capita* in countries like Ethiopia (US\$120), Bangladesh (US\$360), Angola (US\$660) or Honduras (US\$920).<sup>2</sup>

The counterpart of this global commodification of living organisms is that animals have become partly humanized themselves. In the field of bio-ethics, for instance, the issue of the 'human' rights of animals has been raised as a way of countering these excesses. The defence of animals' rights is a hot political issue in most liberal democracies. This combination of investments and abuse is the paradoxical posthuman condition engendered by advanced capitalism itself, which triggers multiple forms of resistance. I will discuss the new post-anthropocentric views of animals at length in chapter 2.

### Vignette 3

*On 10 October 2011, Muammar Gaddafi, deposed leader of Libya, was captured in his hometown of Sirte, beaten and killed by members of the National Transitional Council of Libya (NTC). Before he was shot by the rebel forces, however, Colonel Gaddafi's convoy was bombed by French jets and by an American Predator Drone which was flown out of the*

<sup>2</sup> *The Guardian Weekly*, 11–17 September 2003, p. 5.

*American Air Force base in Sicily and controlled via satellite from a base outside Las Vegas.*<sup>3</sup>

Although world media focused on the brutality of the actual shooting and on the indignity of the global visual exposure of Gaddafi's wounded and bleeding body, less attention was paid to what can only be described as the posthuman aspect of contemporary warfare: the tele-thanatological machines created by our own advanced technology. The atrocity of Gaddafi's end – his own tyrannical despotism notwithstanding – was enough to make one feel slightly ashamed of being human. The denial of the role played by the advanced world's sophisticated death-technology of drones in his demise, however, added an extra layer of moral and political discomfort.

The posthuman predicament has more than its fair share of inhuman(e) moments. The brutality of the new wars, in a globalized world run by the governance of fear, refers not only to the government of the living, but also to multiple practices of dying, especially in countries in transition. Bio-power and necro-politics are two sides of the same coin, as Mbembe (2003) brilliantly argues. The post-Cold War world has seen not only a dramatic increase in warfare, but also a profound transformation of the practice of war as such in the direction of a more complex management of survival and of extinction. Contemporary death-technologies are posthuman because of the intense technological mediation within which they operate. Can the digital operator that flew the American Predator Drone from a computer room in Las Vegas be considered a 'pilot'? How does he differ from the Air Force boys who flew the Enola Gay plane over Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Contemporary wars have heightened our necro-political power to a new level of administration of 'the material destruction of human bodies and population' (Mbembe, 2003: 19). And *not* only human.

The new necro-technologies operate in a social climate dominated by a political economy of nostalgia and paranoia on the one hand, and euphoria or exaltation on the other.

<sup>3</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 October 2011.

This manic-depressive condition enacts a number of variations: from the fear of the imminent disaster, the catastrophe just waiting to happen, to hurricane Katrina or the next environmental accident. From a plane flying too low, to genetic mutations and immunity breakdowns: the accident is there, just about to unfold and virtually certain; it is just a question of time (Massumi, 1992). As a result of this state of insecurity, the socially enforced aim is not change, but conservation or survival. I shall return to these necro-political aspects in chapter 3.

#### **Vignette 4**

*At a scientific meeting organized by the Dutch Royal Academy of Sciences about the future of the academic field of the Humanities a few years ago, a professor in Cognitive Sciences attacked the Humanities head-on. His attacks rested on what he perceived as the two major shortcomings of the Humanities: their intrinsic anthropocentrism and their methodological nationalism. The distinguished researcher found these two flaws to be fatal for the field, which was deemed unsuitable for contemporary science and hence not eligible for financial support by the relevant Ministry and the government.*

The crisis of the human and its posthuman fallout has dire consequences for the academic field most closely associated with it – the Humanities. In the neo-liberal social climate of most advanced democracies today, Humanistic studies have been downgraded beyond the ‘soft’ sciences level, to something like a finishing school for the leisurely classes. Considered more of a personal hobby than a professional research field, I believe that the Humanities are in serious danger of disappearing from the twenty-first-century European university curriculum.

Another motivation behind my engagement with the topic of the posthuman therefore can be related to a profound sense of civic responsibility for the role of the academic today. A thinker from the Humanities, a figure who used to be known as an ‘intellectual’, may be at a loss to know what role to play in contemporary social public scenarios. One could say that my interest in the posthuman emerges from an all too human concern about the kind of knowledge and intellectual values

we are producing as a society today. More specifically, I worry about the status of university research in what we are still calling, for lack of a better word, the human sciences or the Humanities. I will develop my ideas about the university today in chapter 4.

This sense of responsibility also expresses a habit of thought which is dear to my heart and mind, as I belong to a generation that had a dream. It was and still is the dream of actually constituting communities of learning: schools, universities, books and curricula, debating societies, theatre, radio, television and media programmes – and later, websites and computer environments – that look like the society they both reflect, serve and help to construct. It is the dream of producing socially relevant knowledge that is attuned to basic principles of social justice, the respect for human decency and diversity, the rejection of false universalisms; the affirmation of the positivity of difference; the principles of academic freedom, anti-racism, openness to others and conviviality. Although I am inclined towards anti-humanism, I have no difficulty in recognizing that these ideals are perfectly compatible with the best humanist values. This book is not about taking sides in academic disputes, but rather aims to make sense of the complexities we find ourselves in. I will propose new ways of combining critique with creativity, putting the ‘active’ back into ‘activism’, thus moving towards a vision of posthuman humanity for the global era.

Posthuman knowledge – and the knowing subjects that sustain it – enacts a fundamental aspiration to principles of community bonding, while avoiding the twin pitfalls of conservative nostalgia and neo-liberal euphoria. This book is motivated by my belief in new generations of ‘knowing subjects’ who affirm a constructive type of pan-humanity by working hard to free us from the provincialism of the mind, the sectarianism of ideologies, the dishonesty of grandiose posturing and the grip of fear. This aspiration also shapes my vision of what a university should look like – a *universum* that serves the world of today, not only as the epistemological site of scientific production, but also as the epistemophilic yearning for the empowerment that comes with knowledge and sustains our subjectivity. I would define this yearning as a radical aspiration to freedom through the understanding of

the specific conditions and relations of power that are imminent to our historical locations. These conditions include the power that each and every one of us exercises in the everyday network of social relations, at both the micro- and macro-political levels.

In some ways, my interest in the posthuman is directly proportional to the sense of frustration I feel about the human, all too human, resources and limitations that frame our collective and personal levels of intensity and creativity. This is why the issue of subjectivity is so central to this book: we need to devise new social, ethical and discursive schemes of subject formation to match the profound transformations we are undergoing. That means that we need to learn to think differently about ourselves. I take the posthuman predicament as an opportunity to empower the pursuit of alternative schemes of thought, knowledge and self-representation. The posthuman condition urges us to think critically and creatively about who and what we are actually in the process of becoming.

# Chapter 1

## Post-Humanism: Life beyond the Self

At the start of it all there is He: the classical ideal of ‘Man’, formulated first by Protagoras as ‘the measure of all things’, later renewed in the Italian Renaissance as a universal model and represented in Leonardo da Vinci’s Vitruvian Man (see figure 1.1). An ideal of bodily perfection which, in keeping with the classical dictum *mens sana in corpore sano*, doubles up as a set of mental, discursive and spiritual values. Together they uphold a specific view of what is ‘human’ about humanity. Moreover, they assert with unshakable certainty the almost boundless capacity of humans to pursue their individual and collective perfectibility. That iconic image is the emblem of Humanism as a doctrine that combines the biological, discursive and moral expansion of human capabilities into an idea of teleologically ordained, rational progress. Faith in the unique, self-regulating and intrinsically moral powers of human reason forms an integral part of this high-humanistic creed, which was essentially predicated on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century renditions of classical Antiquity and Italian Renaissance ideals.

This model sets standards not only for individuals, but also for their cultures. Humanism historically developed into a civilizational model, which shaped a certain idea of Europe as coinciding with the universalizing powers of self-reflexive reason. The mutation of the Humanistic ideal into

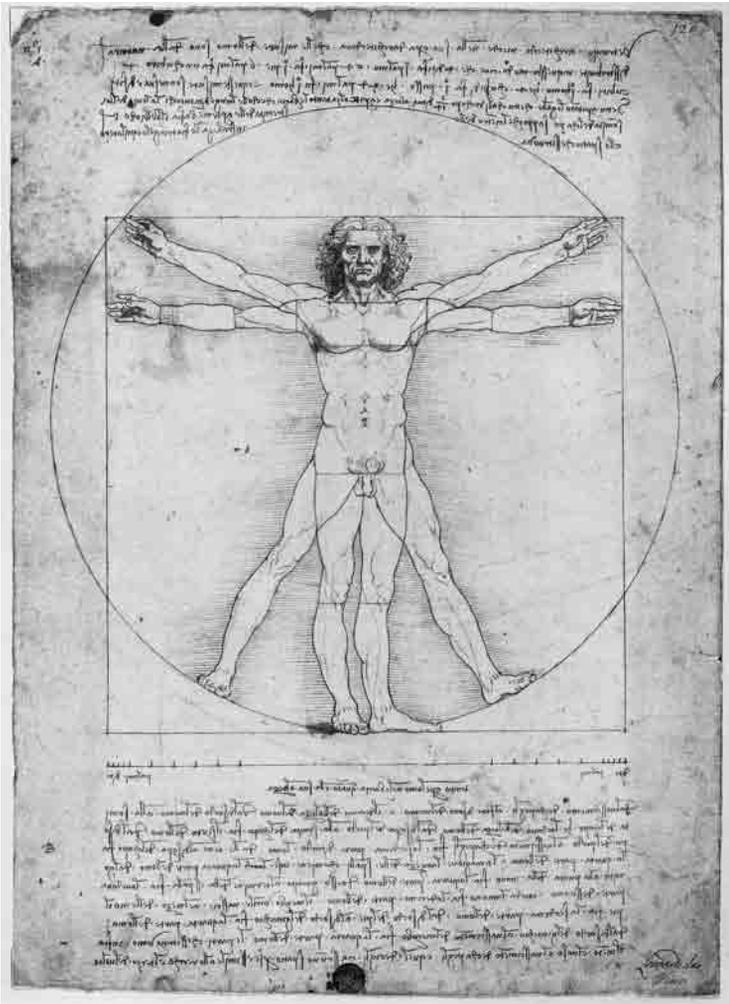


Figure 1.1 Vitruvian Man, 1492, Leonardo da Vinci  
Source: Wikimedia Commons

a hegemonic cultural model was canonized by Hegel's philosophy of history. This self-aggrandizing vision assumes that Europe is not just a geo-political location, but rather a universal attribute of the human mind that can lend its quality to any suitable object. This is the view espoused by Edmund Husserl (1970) in his celebrated essay 'The crisis of European

sciences', which is a passionate defence of the universal powers of reason against the intellectual and moral decline symbolized by the rising threat of European fascism in the 1930s. In Husserl's view, Europe announces itself as the site of origin of critical reason and self-reflexivity, both qualities resting on the Humanistic norm. Equal only to itself, Europe as universal consciousness transcends its specificity, or, rather, posits the power of transcendence as its distinctive characteristic and humanistic universalism as its particularity. This makes Eurocentrism into more than just a contingent matter of attitude: it is a structural element of our cultural practice, which is also embedded in both theory and institutional and pedagogical practices. As a civilizational ideal, Humanism fuelled 'the imperial destinies of nineteenth-century Germany, France and, supremely, Great Britain' (Davies, 1997: 23).

This Eurocentric paradigm implies the dialectics of self and other, and the binary logic of identity and otherness as respectively the motor for and the cultural logic of universal Humanism. Central to this universalistic posture and its binary logic is the notion of 'difference' as pejoration. Subjectivity is equated with consciousness, universal rationality, and self-regulating ethical behaviour, whereas Otherness is defined as its negative and specular counterpart. In so far as difference spells inferiority, it acquires both essentialist and lethal connotations for people who get branded as 'others'. These are the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others, who are reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies. We are all humans, but some of us are just more mortal than others. Because their history in Europe and elsewhere has been one of lethal exclusions and fatal disqualifications, these 'others' raise issues of power and exclusion. We need more ethical accountability in dealing with the legacy of Humanism. Tony Davies puts it lucidly: 'All Humanisms, until now, have been imperial. They speak of the human in the accents and the interests of a class, a sex, a race, a genome. Their embrace suffocates those whom it does not ignore. [. . .] It is almost impossible to think of a crime that has not been committed in the name of humanity' (Davies, 1997: 141). Indeed, but it is also the case unfortunately that many atrocities have been committed in the name of the hatred for humanity, as shown by the case of Pekka-Eric Auvinen in the first vignette in the introduction.

Humanism's restricted notion of what counts as the human is one of the keys to understand how we got to a post-human turn at all. The itinerary is far from simple or predictable. Edward Said, for instance, complicates the picture by introducing a post-colonial angle: 'Humanism as protective or even defensive nationalism is [. . .] a mixed blessing for its [. . .] ideological ferocity and triumphalism, although it is sometimes inevitable. In a colonial setting for example, a revival of the suppressed languages and cultures, the attempts at national assertion through cultural tradition and glorious ancestors [. . .] are explainable and understandable' (Said, 2004: 37). This qualification is crucial in pointing out the importance of where one is actually speaking from. Differences of location between centres and margins matter greatly, especially in relation to the legacy of something as complex and multi-faceted as Humanism. Complicitous with genocides and crimes on the one hand, supportive of enormous hopes and aspirations to freedom on the other, Humanism somehow defeats linear criticism. This protean quality is partly responsible for its longevity.

## Anti-Humanism

Let me put my cards on the table at this early stage of the argument: I am none too fond of Humanism or of the idea of the human which it implicitly upholds. Anti-humanism is so much part of my intellectual and personal genealogy, as well as family background, that for me the crisis of Humanism is almost a banality. Why?

Politics and philosophy are the main reasons for the glee with which I have always greeted the notion of the historical decline of Humanism, with its Eurocentric core and imperial tendencies. Of course, the historical context has a lot to do with it. I came of age intellectually and politically in the turbulent years after the Second World War, when the Humanist ideal came to be questioned quite radically. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s an activist brand of anti-Humanism was developed by the new social movements and the youth cultures of the day: feminism, de-colonization and anti-racism, anti-nuclear and pacifist movements. Chronologically linked

to the social and cultural politics of the generation known as the baby-boomers, these social movements produced radical political, social theories and new epistemologies. They challenged the platitudes of Cold War rhetoric, with its emphasis on Western democracy, liberal individualism and the freedom they allegedly ensured for all.

Nothing smacks more like a theoretical mid-life crisis than to acknowledge one's affiliation to the baby-boomers. The public image of this generation is not exactly edifying at this point in time. Nonetheless, truth be said, that generation was marked by the traumatic legacy of the many failed political experiments of the twentieth century. Fascism and the Holocaust on the one hand, Communism and the Gulag on the other, strike a blood-drenched balance on the comparative scale of horrors. There is a clear generational link between these historical phenomena and the rejection of Humanism in the 1960s and 1970s. Let me explain.

At the levels of their own ideological content, these two historical phenomena, Fascism and Communism, rejected openly or implicitly the basic tenets of European Humanism and betrayed them violently. They remain, however, quite different as movements in their structures and aims. Whereas fascism preached a ruthless departure from the very roots of Enlightenment-based respect for the autonomy of reason and the moral good, socialism pursued a communitarian notion of humanist solidarity. Socialist Humanism had been a feature of the European Left since the utopian socialist movements of the eighteenth century. Admittedly, Marxist-Leninism rejected these 'soft-headed' aspects of socialist humanism, notably the emphasis on the fulfilment of the human beings' potential for authenticity (as opposed to alienation). It offered as an alternative 'proletarian Humanism', also known as the 'revolutionary Humanism' of the USSR and its ruthless pursuit of universal, rational human 'freedom' through and under Communism.

Two factors contributed to the relative popularity of communist Humanism in the post-war era. The first is the disastrous effects of Fascism upon European social but also intellectual history. The period of Fascism and Nazism enacted a major disruption in the history of critical theory in Continental Europe in that it destroyed and banned from Europe the

very schools of thought – notably Marxism, psychoanalysis, the Frankfurt School and the disruptive charge of Nietzschean genealogy (though the case of Nietzsche is admittedly quite complex) – which had been central to philosophy in the earlier part of the twentieth century. Moreover, the Cold War and the opposition of the two geo-political blocks, which followed the end of the Second World War kept Europe split asunder and dichotomized until 1989, and did not facilitate the re-implantation of those radical theories back into the Continent which had cast them away with such violence and self-destruction. It is significant, for instance, that most of the authors which Michel Foucault singled out as heralding the philosophical era of critical post-modernity (Marx, Freud, Darwin) are the same authors whom the Nazis condemned and burned at the stake in the 1930s.

The second reason for the popularity of Marxist Humanism is that Communism, under the aegis of the USSR, played a pivotal role in defeating Fascism and hence, to all ends and purposes came out of the Second World War as the winner. It follows therefore that the generation that came of age politically in 1968 inherited a positive view of Marxist praxis and ideology as a result of socialists' and communists' opposition to fascism and to the Soviet Union's war effort against Nazism. This clashes with the almost epidemic anti-communism of American culture and remains to date a point of great intellectual tension between Europe and the USA. It is sometimes difficult at the dawn of the third millennium to remember that Communist parties were the single largest emblem of anti-fascist resistance throughout Europe. They also played a significant role in national liberation movements throughout the world, notably in Africa and Asia. André Malraux's seminal text: *Man's Fate* (*La condition humaine*, 1934) bears testimony to both the moral stature and the tragic dimension of Communism, as does, in a different era and geo-political context, Nelson Mandela's (1994) life and work.

Speaking from his position within the United States of America, Edward Said adds another significant insight:

Antihumanism took hold on the United States intellectual scene partly because of widespread revulsion with the Vietnam War. Part of that revulsion was the emergence of a resistance movement to racism, imperialism generally and the dry-as-dust aca-

demic Humanities that had for years represented an apolitical, unworldly and oblivious (sometimes even manipulative) attitude to the present, all the while adamantly extolling the virtues of the past. (2004: 13)

The 'new' Left in the USA throughout the 1960s and 1970s embodied a militant brand of radical anti-humanism, which was posited in opposition not only to the Liberal majority, but also to the Marxist Humanism of the traditional Left.

I am fully aware of the fact that the notion that Marxism, by now socially coded as an inhumane and violent ideology, may actually be a Humanism will shock the younger generations and all who are unschooled in Continental philosophy. Suffice it, however, to think of the emphasis that philosophers of the calibre of Sartre and de Beauvoir placed on Humanism as a secular tool of critical analysis, to see how the argument may have shaped up. Existentialism stressed Humanist conscience as the source of both moral responsibility and political freedom.

France occupies a very special position in the genealogy of anti-humanist critical theory. The prestige of French intellectuals was linked not only to the formidable educational structure of that country, but also to contextual considerations. Foremost among them is the high moral stature of France at the end of the Second World War, thanks to the anti-Nazi resistance of Charles de Gaulle. French intellectuals continued accordingly to enjoy a very high status, especially in comparison with the wasteland that was post-war Germany. Hence the huge international reputation of Sartre and de Beauvoir, but also Aron, Mauriac, Camus and Malraux. Tony Judt sums it up succinctly (2005: 210):

Despite France's shattering defeat in 1940, its humiliating subjugation under four years of German occupation, the moral ambiguity (and worse) of Marshall Petain's Vichy regime, and the country's embarrassing subordination to the US and Britain in the international diplomacy of the post-war years, French culture became once again the centre of international attention: French intellectuals acquired a special international significance as spokesmen for the age, and the tenor of French political arguments epitomised the ideological rent in the world at large. Once more – and for the last time – Paris was the capital of Europe.

Throughout the post-war years, Paris continued to function as a magnet that attracted and engendered all sorts of critical thinkers. For example, Alexandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* was first published in France in the 1970s, after being smuggled out of the USSR in samizdat form. It was out of his Parisian retreat that the Ayatollah Khomeini led the Iranian revolution of 1979, which installed the world's first Islamist government. In some ways, the French context of those days was open to all sorts of radical political movements. As a matter of fact, so many critical schools of thought flourished on the Left and Right Bank in that period, that French philosophy became almost synonymous with theory itself, with mixed long-term consequences, as we shall see in chapter 4.

Up until the 1960s, philosophical reason had escaped relatively unscathed from the question of its responsibilities in perpetuating historical models of domination and exclusion. Both Sartre and de Beauvoir, influenced by Marxist theories of alienation and ideology, did connect the triumph of reason with the might of dominant powers, thus disclosing the complicity between philosophical ratio and real-life social practices of injustice. They continued, however, to defend a universalist idea of reason and to rely on a dialectical model for the resolution of these contradictions. This methodological approach, while being critical of hegemonic models of violent appropriation and consumption of the 'others', also defined the task of philosophy as a privileged and culturally hegemonic tool of political analysis. With Sartre and de Beauvoir, the image of the philosopher-king is built into the general picture, albeit in a critical mode. As a critic of ideology and the conscience of the oppressed, the philosopher is a thinking human being who continues to pursue grand theoretical systems and overarching truths. Sartre and de Beauvoir consider humanistic universalism as the distinctive trait of Western culture, i.e. its specific form of particularism. They use the conceptual tools provided by Humanism to precipitate a confrontation of philosophy with its own historical responsibilities and conceptual power-brokering.

This humanistic universalism, coupled with the social constructivist emphasis on the man-made and historically variable nature of social inequalities, lays the grounds for a robust political ontology. For instance, de Beauvoir's emancipatory



**Figure 1.2** New Vitruvian Woman

Source: Friedrich Saurer/Science Photo Library

feminism builds on the Humanist principle that ‘Woman is the measure of all things female’ (see figure 1.2) and that to account for herself, the feminist philosopher needs to take into account the situation of all women. This creates on the theoretical level a productive synthesis of self and others. Politically, the Vitruvian female forged a bond of solidarity between one and the many, which in the hands of the second feminist wave in the 1960s was to grow into the principle of political sisterhood. This posits a common grounding among women, taking being-women-in-the-world as the starting

point for all critical reflection and jointly articulated political praxis.

Humanist feminism introduced a new brand of materialism, of the embodied and embedded kind (Braidotti, 1991). The cornerstone of this theoretical innovation is a specific brand of situated epistemology (Haraway, 1988), which evolved from the practice of 'the politics of locations' (Rich, 1987) and infused standpoint feminist theory and the subsequent debates with postmodernist feminism throughout the 1990s (Harding, 1991). The theoretical premise of humanist feminism is a materialist notion of embodiment that spells the premises of new and more accurate analyses of power. These are based on the radical critique of masculinist universalism, but are still dependent on a form of activist and equality-minded Humanism.

Feminist theory and practice worked faster and more efficiently than most social movements of the 1970s. It developed original tools and methods of analysis that allowed for more incisive accounts of how power works. Feminists also explicitly targeted the masculinism and the sexist habits of the allegedly 'revolutionary' Left and denounced them as contradictory with their ideology, as well as intrinsically offensive.

Within the mainstream Left, however, a new generation of post-war thinkers had other priorities. They rebelled against the high moral status of post-war European Communist parties in Western Europe, as well as in the Soviet empire. This had resulted in an authoritarian hold over the interpretation of Marxist texts and their key philosophical concepts. The new forms of philosophical radicalism developed in France and throughout Europe in the late 1960s expressed a vocal critique of the dogmatic structure of Communist thought and practice. They included a critique of the political alliance between philosophers like Sartre and de Beauvoir and the Communist Left,<sup>1</sup> which lasted at least until the Hungarian insurrection of 1956. In response to the dogma and the violence of Communism, the generation of 1968 appealed directly to the subversive potential of the texts of Marx, so as to recover their anti-institutional roots. Their radicalism was expressed in terms of a critique of

<sup>1</sup> Although Sartre and de Beauvoir were not members of the French Communist Party.

the humanistic implications and the political conservatism of the institutions that embodied Marxist dogma.

Anti-humanism emerged as the rallying cry of this generation of radical thinkers who later were to become world-famous as the 'post-structuralist generation'. In fact, they were post-communists *avant la lettre*. They stepped out of the dialectical oppositional thinking and developed a third way to deal with changing understandings of human subjectivity. By the time Michel Foucault published his ground-breaking critique of Humanism in *The Order of Things* (1970), the question of what, if anything, was the idea of 'the human' was circulating in the radical discourses of the time and had set the anti-humanist agenda for an array of political groups. The 'death of Man', announced by Foucault formalizes an epistemological and moral crisis that goes beyond binary oppositions and cuts across the different poles of the political spectrum. What is targeted is the implicit Humanism of Marxism, more specifically the humanistic arrogance of continuing to place Man at the centre of world history. Even Marxism, under the cover of a master theory of historical materialism, continued to define the subject of European thought as unitary and hegemonic and to assign him (the gender is no coincidence) a royal place as the motor of human history. Anti-humanism consists in de-linking the human agent from this universalistic posture, calling him to task, so to speak, on the concrete actions he is enacting. Different and sharper power relations emerge, once this formerly dominant subject is freed from his delusions of grandeur and is no longer allegedly in charge of historical progress.

The radical thinkers of the post-1968 generation rejected Humanism both in its classical and its socialist versions. The Vitruvian ideal of Man as the standard of both perfection and perfectibility (as shown in figure 1.1) was literally pulled down from his pedestal and deconstructed. This humanistic ideal constituted, in fact, the core of a liberal individualistic view of the subject, which defined perfectibility in terms of autonomy and self-determination. These are precisely the qualifications the post-structuralists objected to.

It turned out that this Man, far from being the canon of perfect proportions, spelling out a universalistic ideal that by

now had reached the status of a natural law, was in fact a historical construct and as such contingent as to values and locations. Individualism is not an intrinsic part of 'human nature', as liberal thinkers are prone to believe, but rather a historically and culturally specific discursive formation, one which, moreover, is becoming increasingly problematic. The deconstructive brand of social constructivism introduced by post-structuralist thinkers like Jacques Derrida (2001a) also contributed to a radical revision of the Humanist tenets. An entire philosophical generation called for insubordination from received Humanist ideas of 'human nature'.

Feminists like Luce Irigaray (1985a, 1985b) pointed out that the allegedly abstract ideal of Man as a symbol of classical Humanity is very much a male of the species: it is a he. Moreover, he is white, European, handsome and able-bodied; of his sexuality nothing much can be guessed, though plenty of speculation surrounds that of its painter, Leonardo da Vinci. What this ideal model may have in common with the statistical average of most members of the species and the civilization he is supposed to represent is a very good question indeed. Feminist critiques of patriarchal posturing through abstract masculinity (Hartsock, 1987) and triumphant whiteness (hooks, 1981; Ware, 1992) argued that this Humanist universalism is objectionable not only on epistemological, but also on ethical and political grounds.

Anti-colonial thinkers adopted a similar critical stance by questioning the primacy of whiteness in the Vitruvian ideal as the aesthetic canon of beauty (see figure 1.2). Re-grounding such lofty claims onto the history of colonialism, anti-racist and post-colonial thinkers explicitly questioned the relevance of the Humanistic ideal, in view of the obvious contradictions imposed by its Eurocentric assumptions, but at the same time they did not entirely cast it aside. They held the Europeans accountable for the uses and abuses of this ideal by looking at colonial history and the violent domination of other cultures, but still upheld its basic premises. Frantz Fanon, for instance, wanted to rescue Humanism from its European perpetuators arguing that we have betrayed and misused the humanist ideal. As Sartre put it in his preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963: 7): 'the yellow and black voices still spoke of our Humanism, but only to

reproach us with our inhumanity'. Post-colonial thought asserts that if Humanism has a future at all, it has to come from outside the Western world and by-pass the limitations of Eurocentrism. By extension, the claim to universality by scientific rationality is challenged on both epistemological and political grounds (Spivak, 1999; Said, 2004), all knowledge claims being expressions of Western culture and of its drive to mastery.

French post-structuralist philosophers pursued the same post-colonial aim through different routes and means.<sup>2</sup> They argued that in the aftermath of colonialism, Auschwitz, Hiroshima and the Gulag – to mention but a few of the horrors of modern history – we Europeans need to develop a critique of Europe's delusion of grandeur in positing ourselves as the moral guardian of the world and as the motor of human evolution. Thus, the philosophical generation of the 1970s, that proclaimed the 'death of Man' was anti-fascist, post-communist, post-colonial and post-humanist, in a variety of different combinations of the terms. They led to the rejection of the classical definition of European identity in terms of Humanism, rationality and the universal. The feminist philosophies of sexual difference,<sup>3</sup> through the spectrum of the critique of dominant masculinity, also stressed the ethnocentric nature of European claims to universalism. They advocated the need to open it up to the 'others within' (Kristeva, 1991) in such a way as to re-locate diversity and multiple belongings to a central position as a structural component of European subjectivity.

Anti-humanism is consequently an important source for posthuman thought. It is by no means the only one, nor is the connection between anti-humanism and the posthuman logically necessary or historically inevitable. And yet it turned out to be so for my own work, although this story is still unfinished and in some ways, as I will argue in the next section, my relation to Humanism remains unresolved.

<sup>2</sup> This line is pursued in philosophy by Deleuze's rejection of the transcendental vision of the subject (1994); Irigaray's de-centring of phallogocentrism (1985a, 1985b); Foucault's critique of Humanism (1977) and Derrida's deconstruction of Eurocentrism (1992).

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Irigaray (1993), Cixous (1997) and Braidotti (1991).

## The Death of Man, the Deconstruction of Woman

As indicated in the genealogical itinerary I have just sketched, anti-humanism is one of the historical and theoretical paths that can lead to the posthuman. I owe my anti-humanism to my beloved post-1968 teachers, some of whom were amazing philosophers whose legacy I continue to respect and admire: Foucault, Irigaray and Deleuze especially. The human of Humanism is neither an ideal nor an objective statistical average or middle ground. It rather spells out a systematized standard of recognizability – of Sameness – by which all others can be assessed, regulated and allotted to a designated social location. The human is a normative convention, which does not make it inherently negative, just highly regulatory and hence instrumental to practices of exclusion and discrimination. The human norm stands for normality, normalcy and normativity. It functions by transposing a specific mode of being human into a generalized standard, which acquires transcendent values as *the* human: from male to masculine and onto human as the universalized format of humanity. This standard is posited as categorically and qualitatively distinct from the sexualized, racialized, naturalized others and also in opposition to the technological artefact. The human is a historical construct that became a social convention about ‘human nature’.

My anti-humanism leads me to object to the unitary subject of Humanism, including its socialist variables, and to replace it with a more complex and relational subject framed by embodiment, sexuality, affectivity, empathy and desire as core qualities. Equally central to this approach is the insight I learned from Foucault on power as both a restrictive (*potestas*) and productive (*potentia*) force. This means that power formations not only function at the material level but are also expressed in systems of theoretical and cultural representation, political and normative narratives and social modes of identification. These are neither coherent, nor rational and their makeshift nature is instrumental to their hegemonic force. The awareness of the instability and the lack of coherence of the narratives that compose the social structures and relations, far from resulting in a suspension of political and

moral action, become the starting point to elaborate new forms of resistance suited to the polycentric and dynamic structure of contemporary power (Patton, 2000). This engenders a pragmatic form of micro-politics that reflects the complex and nomadic nature of contemporary social systems and of the subjects that inhabit them. If power is complex, scattered and productive, so must be our resistance to it. Once this deconstructive move is activated, both the standard notion of Man and his second sex, Woman, are challenged in terms of their internal complexities.

This clearly affects the task and the methods status of theory. Discourse, as Michel Foucault argues in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), is about the political currency that is attributed to certain meanings, or systems of meaning, in such a way as to invest them with scientific legitimacy; there is nothing neutral or given about it. Thus, a critical, materialist link is established between scientific truth, discursive currency and power relations. This approach of discourse analysis primarily aims at dislodging the belief in the 'natural' foundations of socially coded and enforced 'differences' and of the systems of scientific validity, ethical values and representation which they support (Coward and Ellis, 1977).<sup>4</sup>

Feminist anti-Humanism, also known as postmodernist feminism, rejected the unitary identities indexed on that Eurocentric and normative humanist ideal of 'Man' (Braidotti, 2002). It went further, however, and argued that it is impossible to speak in one unified voice about women, natives and other marginal subjects. The emphasis falls instead on issues of diversity and differences among them and on the internal fractures of each category. In this respect, anti-humanism rejects the dialectical scheme of thought, where difference or otherness played a constitutive role, marking off the sexualized other (woman), the racialized other (the native) and the naturalized other (animals, the environment or earth). These others were constitutive in that they fulfilled a mirror

<sup>4</sup> This approach has also been adopted by intersectional analysis, which argues for the methodological parallelism of gender, race, class and sexual factors, without flattening out any differences between them but rather investing politically the question of their complex interaction (Crenshaw, 1995).

function that confirmed the Same in His superior position (Braidotti, 2006). This political economy of difference resulted in passing off entire categories of human beings as devalued and therefore disposable others: to be 'different from' came to mean to be 'less than'. The dominant norm of the subject was positioned at the pinnacle of a hierarchical scale that rewarded the ideal of zero-degree of difference.<sup>5</sup> This is the former 'Man' of classical Humanism.

The negative dialectical processes of sexualization, racialization and naturalization of those who are marginalized or excluded have another important implication: they result in the active production of half-truths, or forms of partial knowledge about these others. Dialectical and pejorative otherness induces structural ignorance about those who, by being others, are posited as the outside of major categorical divides in the attribution of Humanity. Paul Gilroy (2010) refers to this phenomenon as 'agnatology' or enforced and structural ignorance. This is one of the paradoxical effects of the alleged universalist reach of humanist knowledge. The 'bellicose dismissiveness' of other cultures and civilizations is what Edward Said criticizes as: 'self-puffery, not humanism and certainly not enlightened criticism' (2004: 27). The reduction to sub-human status of non-Western others is a constitutive source of ignorance, falsity and bad consciousness for the dominant subject who is responsible for their epistemic as well as social de-humanization.

These radical critiques of humanistic arrogance from feminist and post-colonial theory are not merely negative, because they propose new alternative ways to look at the 'human' from a more inclusive and diverse angle. They also offer significant and innovative insights into the image of thought that is implicitly conveyed by the humanistic vision of Man as the measure of all things, standard-bearer of the 'human'. Thus, they further the analysis of power by developing the

<sup>5</sup> Deleuze calls it 'the Majority subject' or the Molar centre of being (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Irigaray calls it 'the Same', or the hyper-inflated, falsely universal 'He' (Irigaray, 1985b, 1993), whereas Hill Collins calls to account the white and Eurocentric bias of this particular subject of humanistic knowledge (1991).

tools and the terminology by which we can come to terms with masculinism, racism, white superiority, the dogma of scientific reason and other socially supported systems of dominant values.

Having practically grown up with theories about the death of God (Nietzsche), the end of Man (Foucault) and the decline of ideologies (Fukuyama), it took me a while to realize that, actually, one touches humanism at one's own risk and peril. The anti-humanist position is certainly not free of contradictions. As Badmington wisely reminds us: 'Apocalyptic accounts of the end of "man" [. . .] ignore Humanism's capacity for regeneration and, quite literally, recapitulation' (2003: 11). The Vitruvian Man rises over and over again from his ashes, continues to uphold universal standards and to exercise a fatal attraction.

The thought did occur to me, as I was listening to Diamanda Galas' 'Plague Mass' (1991) for the victims of AIDS: it is one thing to loudly announce an anti-humanist stance, quite another to act accordingly, with a modicum of consistency. Anti-humanism is a position fraught with such contradictions that the more one tries to overcome them, the more slippery it gets. Not only do anti-humanists often end up espousing humanist ideals – freedom being my favourite one – but also, in some ways, the work of critical thought is supported by intrinsic humanist discursive values (Soper, 1986). Somehow, neither humanism nor anti-humanism is adequate to the task.

The best example of the intrinsic contradictions generated by the anti-humanist stance is emancipation and progressive politics in general, which I consider one of the most valuable aspects of the humanistic tradition and its most enduring legacy. Across the political spectrum, Humanism has supported on the liberal side individualism, autonomy, responsibility and self-determination (Todorov, 2002). On the more radical front, it has promoted solidarity, community-bonding, social justice and principles of equality. Profoundly secular in orientation, Humanism promotes respect for science and culture, against the authority of holy texts and religious dogma. It also contains an adventurous element, a curiosity-driven yearning for discovery and a project-oriented approach that is extremely valuable in its pragmatism. These principles are so deeply

entrenched in our habits of thought that it is difficult to leave them behind altogether.

And why should we? Anti-humanism criticizes the implicit assumptions about the human subject that are upheld by the humanist image of Man, but this does not amount to a complete rejection.

For me it is impossible, both intellectually and ethically, to disengage the positive elements of Humanism from their problematic counterparts: individualism breeds egotism and self-centredness; self-determination can turn to arrogance and domination; and science is not free from its own dogmatic tendencies. The difficulties inherent in trying to overcome Humanism as an intellectual tradition, a normative frame and an institutionalized practice, lie at the core of the deconstructive approach to the posthuman. Derrida (2001a) opened this discussion by pointing out the violence implicit in the assignation of meaning. His followers pressed the case further: 'the assertion that Humanism can be decisively left behind ironically subscribes to a basic humanist assumption with regard to volition and agency, as if the "end" of Humanism might be subjected to human control, as if we bear the capacity to erase the traces of Humanism from either the present or an imagined future' (Peterson, 2011: 128). The emphasis falls therefore on the difficulty of erasing the trace of the epistemic violence by which a non-humanist position might be carved out of the institutions of Humanism. The acknowledgment of epistemic violence goes hand in hand with the recognition of the real-life violence which was and still is practised against non-human animals and the dehumanized social and political 'others' of the humanist norm. In this deconstructive tradition, Cary Wolfe (2010b) is especially interesting, as he attempts to strike a new position that combines sensitivity to epistemic and word-historical violence with a distinctly trans-humanist faith (Bostrom, 2005) in the potential of the post-human condition as conducive to human enhancement.

I have great respect for deconstruction, but also some impatience with the limitations of its linguistic frame of reference. I prefer to take a more materialist route to deal with the complexities of the posthuman as a key feature of our historicity. That road, too, is fraught with perils, as we shall see in the next section.

## The Postsecular Turn

As a progressive political creed, Humanism bears a privileged relation to two other interlocked ideas: human emancipation in the pursuit of equality, and secularism through rational governance. These two premises emerge from the concept of Humanism just like the classical goddess Athena is raised from Zeus' head, fully clad and armed for battle. As John Gray (2002: xiii) argued: 'Humanism is the transformation of the Christian doctrine of salvation into a project of universal human emancipation. The idea of progress is a secular version of the Christian belief in providence. That is why among the ancient pagans it was unknown'. It is not surprising, therefore, that one of the side-effects of the decline of Humanism is the rise of the post-secular condition (Braidotti, 2008; Habermas, 2008).

If the death of Man proved to be a bit of a hasty statement, that of God turned out to be positively delusional. The first cracks in the edifice of self-assured secularity appeared at the end of the 1970s. As the revolutionary zeal cooled off and social movements started to dissipate, conform or mutate, former militant agnostics joined a wave of conversions to a variety of conventional monotheistic or imported Eastern religions. This turn of events raised serious doubts as to the future of secularity. The doubt crept into the collective and individual mind: how secular are 'we' – feminists, anti-racists, post-colonialists, environmentalists, etc. – really?

The doubt was even sharper for intellectual activists. Science is intrinsically secular, secularity being a key tenet of Humanism, alongside universalism, the unitary subject and the primacy of rationality. Science itself, however, in spite of its secular foundations, is far from immune from its own forms of dogmatism. Freud was one of the first critical thinkers to warn us against the fanatical atheism of the supporters of scientific reason. In *The Future of an Illusion* (1928), Freud compares different forms of rigid dogmatism, classifying rationalist scientism alongside religion as a source of superstitious belief, a position best illustrated today by the extremism with which Richard Dawkins defends his atheist faith (Dawkins, 1976). Moreover, the much-celebrated objectivity

of science has also been shown to be quite flawed. The uses and abuses of scientific experimentation under Fascism and in the colonial era prove that science is not immunized against nationalist, racist and hegemonic discourses and practices. Any claim to scientific purity, objectivity and autonomy needs therefore to be firmly resisted. Where does that leave Humanism and its anti-humanist critics?

Secularity is one of the pillars of Western Humanism, thus an instinctive form of aversion to religion and to the church is historically an integral aspect of emancipatory politics. The socialist humanist tradition, which was so central to the European Left and the women's movements in Europe since the eighteenth century, is justified in claiming to be secular in the narrow sense of the term: to be agnostic if not atheist and to descend from the Enlightenment critique of religious dogma and clerical authority. Like other emancipatory philosophies and political practices, the feminist struggle for women's rights in Europe has historically built on secular foundations. The lasting influence exercised by existentialist feminism (de Beauvoir, 1973), and Marxist or socialist feminisms<sup>6</sup> on the second feminist wave, may also account for the perpetuation of this position. As the secular and rebellious daughters of the Enlightenment, European feminists were raised in rational argumentation and detached self-irony. The feminist belief-system is accordingly civic, not theistic and viscerally opposed to authoritarianism and orthodoxy. Feminist politics is also and at the same time a double-edged vision (Kelly, 1979) that combines rational arguments with political passions and creates alternative social blueprints and value systems.

However proud twentieth-century feminism may be of its secular roots, it is nonetheless the case that it has historically produced various alternative spiritual practices alongside and often in antagonism to the mainstream political secularist line. Major writers in the radical feminist tradition of the second American wave, notably Audre Lorde (1984), Alice

<sup>6</sup> Central figures in this tradition are: Firestone (1970), Rowbotham (1973), Mitchell (1974), Barrett (1980), Davis (1981), Coward (1983) and Delphy (1984).

Walker (1984) and Adrienne Rich (1987), acknowledged the importance of the spiritual dimension of women's struggle for equality and symbolic recognition. The work of Mary Daly (1973), Schussler Fiorenza (1983) and Luce Irigaray (1993), to name but a few, highlights a specific feminist tradition of non-male-centred spiritual and religious practices. Feminist theology in the Christian (Keller, 1998; Wadud, 1999), Muslim (Tayyab, 1998) and Judaic (Adler, 1998) traditions produced well-established communities of both critical resistance and affirmation of creative alternatives. The call for new rituals and ceremonies makes the fortune of the witches' movement, currently best exemplified by Starhawk (1999) and reclaimed among others by the epistemologist Stengers (1997). Neo-pagan elements have also emerged in technologically mediated cyber-culture, producing various brands of posthuman techno-asceticism (Halberstam and Livingston, 1995; Braidotti, 2002).

Black and post-colonial theories have never been loudly secular. In the very religious context of the USA, African-American women's literature is filled with references to Christianity, as bell hooks (1990) and Cornell West (1994) demonstrate. Furthermore, as we shall see later on in this chapter, post-colonial and critical race theories today have developed non-theistic brands of situated neo-humanism, often based on non-Western sources and traditions.

Contemporary popular culture has intensified the post-secular trend. Madonna, known in her Judaic (con)version as Esther, has a standing dialogue and stage act as/with Jesus Christ and has revived the tradition of female crucifixions. Evelyn Fox Keller (1983), in her seminal work on feminist epistemology, recognizes the importance of Buddhism in the making of contemporary microbiologist McClintock's Nobel-prize winning discoveries. Henrietta Moore's recent anthropological research on sexuality in Kenya (2007) argues that, considering the impact of grass-roots religious organizations, being white is less of a problem in the field today than being a failed Christian. Recently Donna Haraway came out as a failed secularist (Haraway, 2006); while Helen Cixous (2004) saw it fit to write a book entitled *Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint*. Now, let me ask once again: how secular is all this?

The notion that flatly and hastily equates secularity and secularism with women's emancipation emerges therefore as problematic. As Joan Scott cogently argues (2007), this notion can be easily challenged by contradictory historical evidence. If we take, for instance, the French Revolution as the historical point of origin of European secularism, there is no evidence that a concern for the equal status of women was a priority for those who acted to separate church from state. High secularism is essentially a political doctrine of the separation of powers, which was even historically consolidated in Europe and is still prominent in political theory today (British Humanist Association, 2007). This tradition of secularism, however, introduces a polarization between religion and citizenship, which is socially enacted in a new partition between a private belief system and the public political sphere. This public-private distinction is thoroughly gendered. Historically, women in Europe have been assigned to both the private domain and to the realm of faith and religion, Humanism being 'white Man's burden'. This traditional attribution of religious faith to women stands in the way of granting them full political citizenship. European women were encouraged to engage in religious activity, rather than to participate in public affairs. This is not only a source of social marginalization, but also a dubious privilege, in view of the entrenched sexism of monotheistic religions and their shared conviction of the necessity to exclude women from the ministry and the administration of sacred functions. Secularity therefore reinforced the distinction between emotions or un-reason, including faith and rational judgement. In this polarized scheme, women were assigned to the pole of un-reason, passions and emotions, including religion, and these factors combined to keep them in the private sphere. Thus secularism actually re-enforces the oppression of women and their exclusion from the public sphere of rational citizenship and politics. The fact that idealized secularism in European political history does not guarantee that women were considered the political equals of men opens a series of critical questions, according to Joan Scott. What are European feminists to make of the fact that, both logically and historically, equality within the secular state does not guarantee the respect for difference, let alone diversity?

These sobering and important questions can be raised in the aftermath of decades of anti-humanist critical theory, which generated innovative feminist, post-colonial and environmental insights. Complexity becomes the key word, as it is clear that one single narrative does not suffice to account for secularity as an unfinished project and its relationship to Humanism and emancipatory politics. A post-secular approach, posited on firm anti-humanist grounds makes manifest the previously unacceptable notion that rational agency and political subjectivity, can actually be conveyed through and supported by religious piety and may even involve significant amounts of spirituality. Belief systems and their rituals are perhaps not incompatible with critical thought and practices of citizenship. Simone de Beauvoir would be distressed at the very suggestion of such a possibility.

Let me approach the limits of the feminist secular position from another angle. My monistic philosophy of becomings rests on the idea that matter, including the specific slice of matter that is human embodiment, is intelligent and self-organizing. This means that matter is not dialectically opposed to culture, nor to technological mediation, but continuous with them. This produces a different scheme of emancipation and a non-dialectical politics of human liberation. This position has another important corollary, namely that political agency need not be critical in the negative sense of oppositional and thus may not be aimed solely or primarily at the production of counter-subjectivities. Subjectivity is rather a process of auto-poiesis or self-styling, which involves complex and continuous negotiations with dominant norms and values and hence also multiple forms of accountability (Braidotti, 2006). This process-oriented political ontology can accommodate a post-secular turn, a position that is also defended within feminism by a variety of thinkers, such as Harding (2000) and Mahmood (2005). The double challenge of linking political subjectivity to religious agency and of disengaging both from oppositional consciousness, and from critique defined as negativity, is one of the main issues raised by the posthumanist condition.

Things around Humanism, however, are always more complex than one expects them to be. The return of religion in the public sphere and the strident tone reached by the

global public debate on the 'clash of civilizations', not to speak of the permanent state of war on terror that ensued from this context, took many anti-humanists by surprise. To speak of a 'return' of religion is inappropriate, as it suggests a regressive movement. What we are experiencing at present is a more complicated situation. The crisis of secularism, defined as the essentialist belief in the axioms of secularity, is a phenomenon that takes place within the social and political horizon of late globalized post-modernity, not in pre-modern times. It is of the here and now. Moreover, it spreads across all religions, amidst both second and third generation descendants of Muslim immigrants; and amidst born-again fundamentalist Christians and by Hindi, Hebrew and others.

This is the paradoxical and violent global context where the posture of Western 'exceptionalism' has taken the form of self-aggrandizing praise of the Enlightenment Humanist legacy. This claim to an exceptional cultural status foregrounds the emancipation of women, gays and lesbians as the defining feature of the West, coupled with extensive geopolitical armed interventions against the rest. Humanism has once again become enlisted in a civilizational crusade. Simultaneously over-estimated in its emancipatory historical role and manipulated for xenophobic purposes by populist politicians across Europe, Humanism may need to be rescued from these over-simplifications and violent abuses. I wonder, therefore, whether nowadays one can continue to uphold a simple anti-humanist position. Is a residual form of Humanism inevitable, intellectually, politically and methodologically, after all? If the new belligerent discourses about the alleged superiority of the West are expressed in terms of the legacy of secular Humanism, while the most vehement opposition to them takes the form of post-secular practices of politicized religion, where can an anti-humanist position rest? To be simply secular would be complicitous with neo-colonial Western supremacist positions, while rejecting the Enlightenment legacy would be inherently contradictory for any critical project. The vicious circle is stifling.

It is out of contradictions of this magnitude that the seemingly endless polemic between Humanism and anti-humanism reaches a dead-end. This position is not only unproductive; it also actively prevents an adequate reading of our immediate

context. Leaving behind the tensions that surround Humanism and its self-contradictory refutation is now a priority. Another option becomes increasingly desirable and necessary: posthumanism as a move beyond these lethal binaries. Let us turn to it next.

## The Posthuman Challenge

Posthumanism is the historical moment that marks the end of the opposition between Humanism and anti-humanism and traces a different discursive framework, looking more affirmatively towards new alternatives. The starting point for me is the anti-humanist death of Wo/Man which marks the decline of some of the fundamental premises of the Enlightenment, namely the progress of mankind through a self-regulatory and teleological ordained use of reason and of secular scientific rationality allegedly aimed at the perfectibility of 'Man'. The posthumanist perspective rests on the assumption of the historical decline of Humanism but goes further in exploring alternatives, without sinking into the rhetoric of the crisis of Man. It works instead towards elaborating alternative ways of conceptualizing the human subject. I will emphasize the priority of the issue of posthuman subjectivity throughout this book.

The crisis of Humanism means that the structural others of the modern humanistic subject re-emerge with a vengeance in postmodernity (Braidotti, 2002). It is a historical fact that the great emancipatory movements of postmodernity are driven and fuelled by the resurgent 'others': the women's rights movement; the anti-racism and de-colonization movements; the anti-nuclear and pro-environment movements are the voices of the structural Others of modernity. They inevitably mark the crisis of the former humanist 'centre' or dominant subject-position and are not merely anti-humanist, but move beyond it to an altogether novel, posthuman project. These social and political movements are simultaneously the symptom of the crisis of the subject, and for conservatives even its 'cause', and also the expression of positive, pro-active alternatives. In the language of my nomadic theory (Braidotti, 2011a, 2011b), they express both the crisis of the majority

and the patterns of becoming of the minorities. The challenge for critical theory consists in being able to tell the difference between these different flows of mutation.

In other words, the posthumanist position I am defending builds on the anti-humanist legacy, more specifically on the epistemological and political foundations of the post-structuralist generation, and moves further. The alternative views about the human and the new formations of subjectivity that have emerged from the radical epistemologies of Continental philosophy in the last thirty years do not merely oppose Humanism but create other visions of the self. Sexualized, racialized and naturalized differences, far from being the categorical boundary-keepers of the subject of Humanism, have evolved into fully fledged alternative models of the human subject. The extent to which they bring about the displacement of the human will become even clearer in the next chapter, which analyses the post-anthropocentric turn. For now, I want to emphasize this shift away from anti-Humanism towards an affirmative posthuman position and examine critically some of its components.

I see three major strands in contemporary posthuman thought: the first comes from moral philosophy and develops a reactive form of the posthuman; the second, from science and technology studies, enforces an analytic form of the posthuman; and the third, from my own tradition of anti-humanist philosophies of subjectivity, proposes a critical post-humanism. Let us look at each of these in turn.

The reactive approach to the posthuman is defended, both conceptually and politically, by contemporary liberal thinkers like Martha Nussbaum (1999, 2010). She develops a thorough contemporary defence of Humanism as the guarantee of democracy, freedom and the respect for human dignity, and rejects the very idea of a crisis of European Humanism, let alone the possibility of its historical decline. Nussbaum does acknowledge the challenges presented by contemporary, technology-driven global economies, but responds to them by re-asserting classical humanist ideals and progressive liberal politics. She defends the need for universal humanistic values as a remedy for the fragmentation and the relativistic drift of our times, which is the result of globalization itself. Humanistic cosmopolitan universalism is also presented as an anti-

dote against nationalism and ethnocentrism, which plague the contemporary world, and to the prevailing American attitude of ignorance of the rest of the world.

Central to the reactive or negative post-humanism of Nussbaum is the idea that one of the effects of globalization is a sort of re-contextualization induced by the market economy. This produces a new sense of inter-connection which in turn calls for a neo-humanist ethics. For Nussbaum, abstract universalism is the only stance that is capable of providing solid foundations for moral values such as compassion and respect for others, which she firmly attaches to the tradition of American liberal individualism. I am very happy that Nussbaum stresses the importance of subjectivity, but less happy about the fact that she re-attaches it to a universalistic belief in individualism, fixed identities, steady locations and moral ties that bind.

In other words, Nussbaum rejects the insights of the radical anti-humanist philosophies of the last thirty years. Notably, she embraces universalism over and against the feminist and post-colonial insights about the importance of the politics of location and careful grounding in geo-political terms. By embracing dis-embedded universalism, Nussbaum ends up being paradoxically parochial in her vision of what counts as the human (Bhabha, 1996a). There is no room for experimenting with new models of the self; for Nussbaum the posthuman condition can be solved by restoring a humanist vision of the subject. As we shall see in the next section, whereas Nussbaum fills the ethical vacuum of the globalized world with classical Humanistic norms, critical post-humanists take the experimental path. They attempt to devise renewed claims to community and belonging by singular subjects who have taken critical distance from humanist individualism.

A second significant posthuman development comes from science and technology studies. This contemporary interdisciplinary field raises crucial ethical and conceptual questions about the status of the human, but is generally reluctant to undertake a full study of their implications for a theory of subjectivity. The influence of Bruno Latour's anti-epistemology and anti-subjectivity position accounts partly for this reluctance. Concretely, it results in parallel and non-

communicating lines of posthuman enquiry. A new segregation of knowledge is produced, along the dividing lines of the 'two cultures', the Humanities and the Sciences, which I will discuss in depth in chapter 4.

For now, let me stress that there is a posthuman agreement that contemporary science and biotechnologies affect the very fibre and structure of the living and have altered dramatically our understanding of what counts as the basic frame of reference for the human today. Technological intervention upon all living matter creates a negative unity and mutual dependence among humans and other species. The Human Genome Project, for instance, unifies all the human species on the basis of a thorough grasp of our genetic structure. This point of consensus, however, generates diverging paths of enquiry. The Humanities continue to ask the question of the epistemological and political implications of the posthuman predicament for our understanding of the human subject. They also raise deep anxieties both about the moral status of the human and express the political desire to resist commercially owned and profit-minded abuses of the new genetic know-how.

Contemporary science and technology studies, on the other hand, adopt a different agenda. They have developed an analytic form of posthuman theory. For instance, Franklin, Lury and Stacey, working within a socio-cultural frame of reference, refer to the technologically mediated world of today as 'panhumanity' (2000: 26). This indicates a global sense of inter-connection among all humans, but also between the human and the non-human environment, including the urban, social and political, which creates a web of intricate inter-dependences. This new pan-humanity is paradoxical in two ways: firstly, because a great deal of its inter-connections are negative and based on a shared sense of vulnerability and fear of imminent catastrophes and, secondly, because this new global proximity does not always breed tolerance and peaceful co-existence; on the contrary, forms of xenophobic rejection of otherness and increasing armed violence are key features of our times, as I will argue in chapter 3.

Another relevant example of the same analytic posthuman thought, within the disciplinary field of science studies, is the work of sociologist Nicholas Rose (2007). He has written

eloquently about the new forms of 'bio-sociality' and bio-citizenship that are emerging from the shared recognition of the bio-political nature of contemporary subjectivity. Resting on a Foucauldian understanding of how bio-political management of Life defines advanced capitalist economies today, Rose has developed an effective, empirically grounded analysis of the dilemmas of the posthuman condition. This posthuman analytic frame advocates a Foucauldian brand of neo-Kantian normativity. I find this position quite helpful, also because it defends a vision of the subject as a relational process, with reference to the last phase of Foucault's work (Foucault 1978, 1985, 1986). As I will argue in detail in the next chapter, however, the return to a notion of Kantian moral responsibility re-instates the individual at the core of the debate. This is not compatible with the Foucauldian process ontology and creates both theoretical and practical contradictions that defeat the stated purpose of developing a posthuman approach.

Another significant case for analytic post-humanism is advocated by Peter-Paul Verbeek (2011). Starting from the recognition of the intimate and productive association between human subjects and technological artefacts, as well as the theoretical impossibility of keeping them apart, Verbeek hints at the need for a post-anthropological turn that links humans to non-humans, but he is also very careful not to trespass certain limits. His analytic form of post-humanism is immediately qualified by a profoundly humanist and thus normative approach to technology itself. Verbeek's main argument is that 'technologies contribute actively to how humans do ethics' (2011: 5); a revised and updated form of humanist ethics gets superimposed on post-humanist technologies.

In order to defend the humanist principle at the heart of contemporary technologies, Verbeek emphasizes the moral nature of technological tools as agents that can guide human decision making on normative issues. He also introduces multiple forms of machinic intentionality, all of them indexed on non-human forms of moral consciousness. Only by taking seriously the morality of things, argues Verbeek, can we hope to integrate our technology into the wider social community and bring a posthuman brand of Humanism into the twenty-

first century. This results in shifting the location of traditional moral intentionality from autonomous transcendental consciousness to the technological artefacts themselves.

The analytic post-humanism of science and technology studies is one of the most important elements of the contemporary posthuman landscape. In terms of critical theories of the subject, which is the focus of my position, however, this position falls wide of the mark, because it introduces selected segments of humanistic values without addressing the contradictions engendered by such a grafting exercise.

The pride in technological achievements and in the wealth that comes with them must not prevent us from seeing the great contradictions and the forms of social and moral inequality engendered by our advanced technologies. Not addressing them, in the name of either scientific neutrality or of a hastily reconstructed sense of the pan-human bond induced by globalization, simply begs the question.

In my eyes, what is striking about the science and technology studies approach, whether it relies theoretically on moral philosophy or on socio-cultural theory, is the high degree of political neutrality it expresses about the posthuman predicament. Both Rose and Franklin et al., for instance, make it clear that the focus of their research is analytic and aims to achieve a better, more thorough and in some ways intimate ethnographic understanding of how these new technologies actually function. Science and technology studies tend to dismiss the implications of their positions for a revised vision of the subject. Subjectivity is out of the picture and, with it, a sustained political analysis of the posthuman condition. In my view, a focus on subjectivity is necessary because this notion enables us to string together issues that are currently scattered across a number of domains. For instance, issues such as norms and values, forms of community bonding and social belonging as well as questions of political governance both assume and require a notion of the subject. Critical posthuman thought wants to re-assemble a discursive community out of the different, fragmented contemporary strands of posthumanism.

I cannot help noticing, moreover, a rather bizarre and highly problematic division of labour on the question of subjectivity between science and technology studies on the

one hand, and political analyses of advanced capitalism on the other. For instance, Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004), or the Italian school of Lazzarato (2004) and Virno (2004), tend to avoid science and technology and not to treat it with anything like the depth and sophistication that they devote to the analysis of subjectivity. I think we may need to review this segregation of discursive fields and work towards a re-integrated posthuman theory that includes both scientific and technological complexity and its implications for political subjectivity, political economy and forms of governance. I will develop this project gradually in the chapters that follow.

There is another fundamental problem with the residual humanism of the analytically posthuman attempts to moralize technology and sideline experiments with new forms of subjectivity, namely their over-confidence about the moral intentionality of the technology itself. More specifically, they neglect the current state of autonomy reached by the machines. The complexity of our smart technologies lies at the core of the post-anthropocentric turn that will be the theme of the next chapter. For now, let us consider just one aspect of our technological smartness.

A recent issue of the weekly magazine *The Economist* (2 June 2012) on 'Morals and the machine' raises some pertinent issues about the degree of autonomy reached by robots and calls for society to develop new rules to manage them. The analysis is significant: in contrast to the modernist idea of the robot as subservient to the human, as exemplified by Isaac Asimov's 'three laws of robotics' formulated in 1942,<sup>7</sup> we are now confronted by a new situation, which makes

<sup>7</sup> These three laws are: (1) A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm. (2) A robot must obey the orders given to it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law. (3) A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws. These rules were set up by Isaac Asimov in a short story in 1942 and then re-printed in the world best-seller: *I, Robot*, in 1950. They became foundational notions in cyber-studies. Later, Asimov added a fourth law which precedes all others: (0) A robot may not harm humanity, or, by inaction, allow humanity to come to harm.

human intervention rather peripheral if not completely irrelevant. *The Economist* argues (2012: 11):

As robots become more autonomous, the notion of computer-controlled machines facing ethical decisions is moving out of the realm of science fiction and into the real world.

Most of these new robots are military in purpose and I will return to them in chapter 3, but many others are used for perfectly reasonable civilian purposes. All of them share a crucial feature: they have made it technologically feasible to by-pass human decision making at both the operational and the moral levels. According to this report, humans will increasingly operate not ‘in the loop’ but ‘on the loop’, monitoring armed and working robots rather than fully controlling them. Only ethical and legal issues remain to be solved to grant responsibility to autonomous machines’ decision making, while the cognitive capacities are already in place.

As they become smarter and more widespread, autonomous machines are bound to make life-or-death decisions and thus assume agency. Whether this high degree of autonomy, however, results in moral decision making is at best an open question. Against claims to the in-built moral intentionality of the technology, I would claim that it is normatively neutral. Take some burning issues, such as: should an unmanned flying vehicle, also known as a drone, fire on a house where a target is known to be hiding, which also shelters civilians? Should robots involved in disaster relief tell people the truth about their conditions, thus causing panic and pain? Such questions lead to the field of ‘machine ethics’, which aims to give machines the ability to make such choices appropriately, in other words, to tell right from wrong. And who is to decide?

According to *The Economist* (2012), a new ethical approach needs to be developed by active experiments. They should focus on three areas especially: firstly, the rule of Laws to determine whether the designer, the programmer, the manufacturer, or the operator is at fault if a machine goes wrong. To allocate responsibility, a detailed logs system is needed so that it can explain the reasoning behind the decision-making process. This has implications for design, with a preference

for systems that obey pre-defined rules rather than decision-making systems. Secondly, when ethical systems are embedded in robots, the judgements they make need to be ones that seem right to most people. The techniques of experimental philosophy, which studies how people respond to ethical dilemmas, should be able to help. Thirdly, new interdisciplinary collaboration is required between engineers, ethicists, lawyers and policy-makers, all of whom would draw up very different rules if left to their own devices. They all stand to gain by working with each other.

What is posthuman about the situation outlined in *The Economist* is that it does not assume a human, individualized self as the deciding factor of main subject. It rather envisages what I would call a transversal inter-connection or an 'assemblage' of human and non-human actors, not unlike Latour's Actor Network Theory (Law and Hassard, 1999). It is significant that a rather cautious and conservative journal like *The Economist*, faced with the challenge of the posthuman powers of the technologies we have developed, does not call for a return to humanist values, but for pragmatic experimentation. This prompts three comments on my part: firstly, that I could not agree more that this is no time for nostalgic longings for the humanist past, but for forward-looking experiments with new forms of subjectivity. Secondly, I want to emphasize the normatively neutral structure of contemporary technologies: they are not endowed with intrinsic humanistic agency. Thirdly, I note that the advocates of advanced capitalism seem to be faster in grasping the creative potential of the posthuman than some of the well-meaning and progressive neo-humanist opponents of this system. I will return in the next chapter to the opportunist brand of the posthuman developed in the contemporary market economy.

## Critical Posthumanism

The third strand of posthuman thought, my own variation, shows no conceptual or normative ambivalence towards posthumanism. I want to move beyond analytic posthumanism and develop affirmative perspectives on the posthuman subject. My inspiration for taking the jump into critical post-

humanism comes from my anti-humanist roots, of course. More specifically, the current of thought that has gone further in unfolding the productive potential of the posthuman predicament can be genealogically traced back to the post-structuralists, the anti-universalism of feminism and the anti-colonial phenomenology of Frantz Fanon (1967) and of his teacher Aimé Césaire (1955). What they have in common in a sustained commitment to work out the implications of posthumanism for our shared understandings of the human subject and of humanity as a whole.

The work of post-colonial and race theorists displays a situated cosmopolitan posthumanism that is supported as much by the European tradition as by non-Western sources of moral and intellectual inspiration. The examples are manifold and deserve more in-depth analysis than I can grant them here; for now, let me pick out the main gist of it.<sup>8</sup>

Edward Said (1978) was among the first to alert critical theorists in the West to the need to develop a reasoned scholarly account of Enlightenment-based secular Humanism, which would take into account the colonial experience, its violent abuses and structural injustice, as well as post-colonial existence. Post-colonial theory developed this insight into the notion that ideals of reason, secular tolerance, equality under the Law and democratic rule, need not be, and indeed historically have not been, mutually exclusive with European practices of violent domination, exclusion and systematic and instrumental use of terror. Acknowledging that reason and barbarism are not self-contradictory, nor are Enlightenment and horror, need not result in either cultural relativism, or in moral nihilism, but rather in a radical critique of the notion of Humanism and its link with both democratic criticism and secularism. Edward Said defends the idea that:

<sup>8</sup> Significant examples are: Avtar Brah's diasporic ethics (1996) echoes Vandana Shiva's anti-global neo-Humanism (1997). African Humanism or Ubuntu is receiving more attention, from Patricia Hill Collins (1991) to Drucilla Cornell (2002). In a more nomadic vein, Edouard Glissant's politics of relations (1997) inscribed multi-lingual hybridity at the heart of the contemporary posthuman condition. Homi Bhabha's 'subaltern secularism' (1994) builds on the huge legacy of Edward Said.

It is possible to be critical of Humanism in the name of Humanism and that, schooled in its abuses by the experience of Eurocentrism and empire, one could fashion a different kind of Humanism that was cosmopolitan and text-and-language bound in ways that absorbed the great lessons of the past [. . .] and still remain attuned to the emergent voices and currents of the present, many of them exilic extraterritorial and unhoused. (2004: 11)

Fighting for such subaltern secular spaces is a priority for a posthuman quest for what is known in some quarters as a 'global ethic for global politics and economics' (Kung, 1998).

Paul Gilroy's planetary cosmopolitanism (2000) also proposes a productive form of contemporary critical posthumanism. Gilroy holds Europe and the Europeans accountable for our collective failure in implementing the ideals of the humanist Enlightenment. Like the feminists, race theorists are suspicious of deconstructing a subject-position, which historically they never gained the right to. Gilroy considers colonialism and fascism as a betrayal of the European ideal of the Enlightenment, which he is determined to defend, holding Europeans accountable for their ethical and political failings. Racism splits common humanity and disengages whites from any ethical sensibility, reducing them to an inhuman moral status. It also reduces non-whites to a subhuman ontological status that exposes them to murderous violence. Taking a strong stand against the return of fundamentalist appeals to ethnic differences by a variety of white, black, Serbian, Rwandan, Texan and other nationalists, Gilroy denounces what Deleuze calls 'micro-fascisms' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) as the epidemics of our globalized times. He locates the site of the ethical transformation in the critique of each nationalistic category, not in the assertion of a new dominant one. He sets diasporic mobility and the transcultural interconnections up against the forces of nationalism. This is a theory of mixture, hybridity and cosmopolitanism that is resolutely non-racial. Against the enduring power of nation states, Gilroy posits instead the affirmative politics of transversal movements, such as anti-slavery, feminism, *Médécins sans frontières* and the like.

An altogether different and powerful source of inspiration for contemporary re-configurations of critical posthumanism

is ecology and environmentalism. They rest on an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or 'earth' others. This practice of relating to others requires and is enhanced by the rejection of self-centred individualism. It produces a new way of combining self-interests with the well-being of an enlarged community, based on environmental inter-connections.

Environmental theory stresses the link between the humanistic emphasis on Man as the measure of all things and the domination and exploitation of nature and condemns the abuses of science and technology. Both of them involve epistemic and physical violence over the structural 'others' and are related to the European Enlightenment ideal of 'reason'. The worldview which equated Mastery with rational scientific control over 'others' also militated against the respect for the diversity of living matters and of human cultures (Mies and Shiva, 1993). The environmental alternative is a new holistic approach that combines cosmology with anthropology and post-secular, mostly feminist spirituality, to assert the need for loving respect for diversity in both its human and non-human forms. Significantly, Shiva and Mies stress the importance of life-sustaining spirituality in this struggle for new concrete forms of universality: a reverence for the sacredness of life, of deeply seated respect for all that lives. This attitude is opposed to Western Humanism and to the West's investment in rationality and secularity as the pre-condition for development through science and technology. In a holistic perspective, they call for the 're-enchantment of the world' (1993: 18), or for healing the Earth and that which has been so cruelly disconnected. Instead of the emphasis on emancipation from the realm of natural necessity, Shiva pleads for a form of emancipation that occurs within that realm and in harmony with it. From this shift of perspective there follows a critique of the ideal of equality as the emulation of masculine modes of behaviour and also the rejection of the model of development that is built upon this ideal and is compatible with world-wide forms of market domination.

Although ecological posthumanists like Shiva take great care to distance themselves from anything that is even remotely related to 'post'-modernism, post-colonialism, or post-feminism, paradoxically, they share in the epistemic

premises of posthuman critiques. For instance, they agree with the post-structuralist generation on the critique of the homogenization of cultures under the effects of globalized advanced capitalism. They propose as an alternative a robust type of environmentalism, based on non-Western neo-humanism. What matters for Mies and Shiva is the reassertion of the need for new universal values in the sense of interconnectedness among humans, on a worldwide scale. Thus, universal needs are amalgamated to universal rights and they cover as much basic and concrete necessities, such as food, shelter, health, safety, as higher cultural needs, like education, identity, dignity, knowledge, affection, joy and care. These constitute the material grounding of the situated claims to new ethical values.

A new ecological posthumanism thus raises issues of power and entitlement in the age of globalization and calls for self-reflexivity on the part of the subjects who occupy the former humanist centre, but also those who dwell in one of the many scattered centres of power of advanced post-modernity (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994).

In my own work, I define the critical posthuman subject within an eco-philosophy of multiple belongings, as a relational subject constituted in and by multiplicity, that is to say a subject that works across differences and is also internally differentiated, but still grounded and accountable. Posthuman subjectivity expresses an embodied and embedded and hence partial form of accountability, based on a strong sense of collectivity, relationality and hence community building.

My position is in favour of complexity and promotes radical posthuman subjectivity, resting on the ethics of becoming, as we shall see in the next chapter. The focus is shifted accordingly from unitary to nomadic subjectivity, thus running against the grain of high humanism and its contemporary variations. This view rejects individualism, but also asserts an equally strong distance from relativism or nihilistic defeatism. It promotes an ethical bond of an altogether different sort from the self-interests of an individual subject, as defined along the canonical lines of classical Humanism. A posthuman ethics for a non-unitary subject proposes an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or 'earth' others, by removing the

obstacle of self-centred individualism. As we saw earlier, contemporary bio-genetic capitalism generates a global form of reactive mutual inter-dependence of all living organisms, including non-humans. This sort of unity tends to be of the negative kind, as a shared form of vulnerability, that is to say a global sense of inter-connection between the human and the non-human environment in the face of common threats. The posthuman recomposition of human interaction that I propose is not the same as the reactive bond of vulnerability, but is an affirmative bond that locates the subject in the flow of relations with multiple others.

As we shall see in the next chapter, for me there is a necessary link between critical posthumanism and the move beyond anthropocentrism. I refer to this move as expanding the notion of Life towards the non-human or *zoe*. This results in radical posthumanism as a position that transposes hybridity, nomadism, diasporas and creolization processes into means of re-grounding claims to subjectivity, connections and community among subjects of the human and the non-human kind. This is the next step of the argument, which I will outline in chapter 2.

## Conclusion

This chapter has traced my own itinerary out of the multiple possible genealogies of the posthuman, including the rise of alternative forms of critical posthumanism. These new formations are postulated on the demise of that 'Man' – the former measure of all things. Eurocentrism, masculinism and anthropocentrism are exposed accordingly as complex and internally differentiated phenomena. This alone is in keeping with the highly complex character of the concept of Humanism itself. There are in fact many Humanisms and my own itinerary, generationally and geo-politically, struggles essentially with one specific genealogical line:

The romantic and positivistic Humanisms through which the European bourgeoisies established their hegemonies over (modernity), the revolutionary Humanism that shook the world and the liberal Humanism that sought to tame it, the

Humanism of the Nazis and the Humanisms of their victims and opponents, the antihumanist Humanism of Heidegger and the humanist antihumanism of Foucault and Althusser, the secularist Humanism of Huxley and Dawkins or the post-humanism of Gibson and Haraway. (Davies, 1997: 141)

The fact that these different humanisms cannot be reduced to one linear narrative is part of the problem and the paradoxes involved in attempting to overcome Humanism. What seems absolutely clear to me is the historical, ethical and political necessity to overcome this notion, in the light of its history of unfulfilled promises and unacknowledged brutality. A key methodological and tactical measure to support this process is to practise the politics of location, or situated and accountable knowledge practices.

Let me conclude with three crucial remarks: firstly, that we do need a new theory of the subject that takes stock of the posthuman turn and hence acknowledges the decline of Humanism. Secondly, as shown by the proliferation of critical posthuman positions both within and outside the Western philosophical tradition, the end of classical Humanism is not a crisis, but entails positive consequences. Thirdly, advanced capitalism has been quick in sensing and exploiting the opportunities opened by the decline of western Humanism and the processes of cultural hybridization induced by globalization. I will address the latter in the next chapter, so let me say something briefly about the other two points.

Firstly, we need to work out the implications of the posthuman predicament in the sense of the decline of European Humanism in order to develop a robust foundation for ethical and political subjectivity. The posthuman era is ripe with contradictions as we shall see in the next two chapters. These call for ethical evaluation, political intervention and normative action. It follows therefore that the posthuman subject is not postmodern, that is to say it is not anti-foundationalist. Nor is it deconstructivist, because it is not linguistically framed. The posthuman subjectivity I advocate is rather materialist and vitalist, embodied and embedded, firmly located somewhere, according to the feminist 'politics of location', which I have stressed throughout this chapter. Why do I stress so much the issue of the subject? Because a theory

of subjectivity as both materialist and relational, ‘nature-cultural’ and self-organizing is crucial in order to elaborate critical tools suited to the complexity and contradictions of our times. A merely analytical form of posthuman thought does not go far enough. More especially, a serious concern for the subject allows us to take into account the elements of creativity and imagination, desire, hopes and aspirations (Moore, 2011) without which we simply cannot make sense of contemporary global culture and its posthuman overtones. We need a vision of the subject that is ‘worthy of the present’.

This brings us to my second concluding remark: the issue of Eurocentrism in terms of ‘methodological nationalism’ (Beck, 2007) and its long-standing bond to Humanism. Contemporary European subjects of knowledge must meet the ethical obligation to be accountable for their past history and the long shadow it casts on their present-day politics.<sup>9</sup> The new mission that Europe has to embrace entails the criticism of narrow-minded self-interests, intolerance and xenophobic rejection of otherness. Symbolic of the closure of the European mind is the fate of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers who bear the brunt of racism in contemporary Europe.

A new agenda needs to be set, which is no longer that of European or Eurocentric universal, rational subjectivity, but rather a radical transformation of it, in a break from Europe’s imperial, fascistic and undemocratic tendencies. As I stated earlier on in this chapter, since the second half of the twentieth century, the crisis of philosophical Humanism – also known as the death of ‘Man’ – both reflected and amplified larger concerns about the decline of the geo-political status of Europe as an imperial world-power. Theory and world-historical phenomena work in tandem when it comes to the question of European Humanism. Because of this resonance between the two dimensions, critical theory has a unique contribution to make to the debate on Europe.

I believe that the posthuman condition can facilitate the task of redefining a new role for Europe in an age where global capitalism is both triumphant and clearly deficient in

<sup>9</sup> As Morin (1987), Passerini (1998), Balibar (2004) and Bauman (2004) have also argued.

terms of sustainability and social justice (Holland, 2011). This hopeful belief rests on the post-nationalist approach (Habermas, 2001; Braidotti, 2006) which expresses the decline of Eurocentrism as a historical event and calls for a qualitative shift of perspective in our collective sense of identity. Seyla Benhabib, in her brilliant work on alternative cosmopolitanism (2007), addresses the question of Europe as a site of transformation. Her emphasis on a pluralist cosmopolitan practice and her commitment to the rights of refugees and stateless people, as well as migrants, innovates on classical universalist notions of cosmopolitanism and calls for situated and context-specific practices. This resonates positively with my situated posthuman ethics. A primary task for posthuman critical theory therefore is to draw accurate and precise cartographies for these different subject positions as spring-boards towards posthuman recompositions of a pan-human cosmopolitan bond.

More specifically, I would like to push the case further than Habermas' social democratic aspiration and argue for a post-human project of 'becoming-minoritarian' or becoming-nomad of Europe (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Braidotti, 2008). This is a way of by-passing a number of binary pitfalls, for instance between a globalized and culturally diverse Europe on the one hand, and the narrow and xenophobic definitions of European identity on the other. The becoming-nomad of Europe entails resistance against nationalism, xenophobia and racism, bad habits of the old imperial Europe. As such, it is the opposite of the grandiose and aggressive universalism of the past, which is replaced by a situated and accountable perspective. It embraces a new political and ethical project, by taking a firm stand also against the 'Fortress Europe' syndrome and reviving tolerance as a tool of social justice (Brown, 2006).

The posthuman turn can support and enhance this project in so far as it displaces the exclusive focus on the idea of Europe as the cradle of Humanism, driven by a form of universalism that endows it with a unique sense of historical purpose. The process of becoming-minoritarian or becoming-nomad of Europe involves the rejection of the self-appointed missionary role of Europe as the alleged centre of the world. If it is the case that a socio-cultural mutation is taking place

in the direction of a multi-ethnic, multi-media society, then the transformation cannot affect only the pole of 'the others'. It must equally dislocate the position and the prerogative of 'the same', the former centre. The project of developing a new kind of post-nationalist nomadic European identity is certainly challenging in that it requires dis-identification from established, nation-bound identities. This project is political at heart, but it has a strong affective core made of convictions, vision and active desire for change. We can collectively empower these alternative becomings.

My posthuman sensibility may come across as visionary and even impatient, but it is very pro-active or, to use my favourite term: affirmative. Affirmative politics combines critique with creativity in the pursuit of alternative visions and projects. As far as I am concerned, the challenge of the post-human condition consists in grabbing the opportunities offered by the decline of the unitary subject position upheld by Humanism, which has mutated in a number of complex directions. For instance: the cultural inter-mixity already available within our post-industrial ethno-scapes and the recompositions of genders and sexualities sizzling under the apparently sedate image of equal opportunities, far from being indicators of a crisis, are productive events. They are the new starting points that bring into play untapped possibilities for bonding, community building and empowerment. Similarly, the current scientific revolution, led by contemporary bio-genetic, environmental, neural and other sciences, creates powerful alternatives to established practices and definitions of subjectivity. Instead of falling back on the sedimented habits of thought that the humanist past has institutionalized, the posthuman predicament encourages us to undertake a leap forward into the complexities and paradoxes of our times. To meet this task, new conceptual creativity is needed.

# Chapter 2

## Post-Anthropocentrism: Life beyond the Species

I loved George Eliot's prose well before I even knew that she actually translated Spinoza, my favourite philosopher, into English. Mary Evans was a woman of many talents and anyone who ever identified with Dorothea in *Middlemarch* (1973) or Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss* (2003) may not be cognitively aware of the fact that s/he stepped – surreptitiously and fatally – into a monistic universe of intersecting affective relations that simply make the world go round. George Eliot has authored my favourite sentence in the English language:

If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk around well wadded with stupidity. (Eliot, 1973: 226)

The roar which lies on the other side of the urbane, civilized veneer that allows for bound identities and efficient social interaction is the Spinozist indicator of the raw cosmic energy that underscores the making of civilizations, societies and their subjects. Vitalist materialism is a concept that helps us make sense of that external dimension, which in fact enfold within the subject as the internalized score of cosmic vibra-

tions (Deleuze, 1992; Deleuze and Guattari, 1994). It also constitutes the core of a posthuman sensibility that aims at overcoming anthropocentrism.

Let me spell out some of these rather dense ideas. A ‘monistic universe’ refers to Spinoza’s central concept that matter, the world and humans are not dualistic entities structured according to principles of internal or external opposition. The obvious target of criticism here is Descartes’ famous mind–body distinction, but for Spinoza the concept goes even further: matter is one, driven by the desire for self-expression and ontologically free. The absence of any reference to negativity and to violent dialectical oppositions caused intense criticism of Spinoza on the part of Hegel and the Marxist-Hegelians. Spinoza’s monistic worldview was seen as politically ineffective and holistic at heart. This situation changed dramatically in the 1970s in France, when a new wave of scholars rehabilitated Spinozist monism precisely as an antidote to some of the contradictions of Marxism and as a way of clarifying Hegel’s relationship to Marx.<sup>1</sup> The main idea is to overcome dialectical oppositions, engendering non-dialectical understandings of materialism itself (Braidotti, 1991; Cheah, 2008), as an alternative to the Hegelian scheme. The ‘Spinozist legacy’ therefore consists in a very active concept of monism, which allowed these modern French philosophers to define matter as vital and self-organizing, thereby producing the staggering combination of ‘vitalist materialism’. Because this approach rejects all forms of transcendentalism, it is also known as ‘radical immanence’. Monism results in relocating difference outside the dialectical scheme, as a complex process of differing which is framed by both internal and external forces and is based on the centrality of the relation to multiple others.

These monistic premises are for me the building blocks for a posthuman theory of subjectivity that does not rely on classical Humanism and carefully avoids anthropocentrism. The

<sup>1</sup> The group around Althusser started the debate in the mid-1960s; Deleuze’s path-breaking study of Spinoza dates from 1968 (in English in 1990); Macherey’s Hegel–Spinoza analysis came out in 1979 (in English in 2011); Negri’s work on the imagination in Spinoza in 1981 (in English in 1991).

classical emphasis on the unity of all matter, which is central to Spinoza, is reinforced by an updated scientific understanding of the self-organizing or ‘smart’ structure of living matter. These ideas are supported by new advances in contemporary biosciences, neural and cognitive sciences and by the informatics sector. Posthuman subjects are technologically mediated to an unprecedented degree. For instance, a neo-Spinozist approach is supported and expanded today by new developments in the mind–body interrelation within the neural sciences (Damasio, 2003). In my view, there is a direct connection between monism, the unity of all living matter and post-anthropocentrism as a general frame of reference for contemporary subjectivity.

## Global Warning

George Eliot’s work is a good lead into at least some aspects of this materialist (or, as I will argue later in the chapter, ‘matter-realist’) worldview. The support is welcome, as many of the assumptions and premises of the post-anthropocentric universe are somewhat counter intuitive, although the term has acquired widespread currency nowadays. In mainstream public debates, for instance, the posthuman is usually coated in anxiety about the excesses of technological intervention and the threat of climate change, or by elation about the potential for human enhancement. In academic culture, on the other hand, the critique of anthropocentrism has even more shattering implications than the transformative agenda of posthumanism which I analysed in the previous chapter. The post-anthropocentric turn, linked to the compounded impacts of globalization and of technology-driven forms of mediation, strikes the human at his/her heart and shifts the parameters that used to define *anthropos*.

In this chapter I want to argue that the issue of the posthuman in relation to post-anthropocentrism is of an altogether different order than in post-humanism. For one thing, whereas the latter mobilized primarily the disciplinary field of philosophy, history, cultural studies and the classical Humanities in general, the issue of post-anthropocentrism enlists also science and technology studies, new media and digital culture, envi-

ronmentalism and earth-sciences, bio-genetics, neuroscience and robotics, evolutionary theory, critical legal theory, primatology, animal rights and science fiction. This high degree of trans-disciplinarity alone adds an extra layer of complexity to the issue. The key question for me is: what understandings of contemporary subjectivity and subject-formation are enabled by a post-anthropocentric approach? What comes after the anthropocentric subject?

How one reacts to this change of perspective depends to a large extent on one's relationship to technology. Being rather technophilic myself, I am quite upbeat. I will always side firmly with the liberatory and even transgressive potential of these technologies, against those who attempt to index them to either a predictable conservative profile, or to a profit-oriented system that fosters and inflates individualism. I do think that one of the most pointed paradoxes of our era is precisely the tension between the urgency of finding new and alternative modes of political and ethical agency for our technologically mediated world and the inertia of established mental habits on the other. Donna Haraway put it with customary wit: the machines are so alive, whereas the humans are so inert! (Haraway, 1985). As if to mirror this, science and technology studies nowadays is a thriving area in academic institutions, whereas the Humanities are in serious trouble.

It may be useful to start by clarifying some aspects of the globalized context in which the decentring of anthropocentrism is taking place. As I argued elsewhere (Braidotti, 2002, 2006), advanced capitalism is a spinning machine that actively produces differences for the sake of commodification. It is a multiplier of deterritorialized differences, which are packaged and marketed under the labels of 'new, dynamic and negotiable identities' and an endless choice of consumer goods. This logic triggers a proliferation and a vampiric consumption of quantitative options. Many of them have to do with cultural 'others', from fusion cooking to 'world music'. Jackie Stacey, in her analysis of the new organic food industry (Franklin et al., 2000) argues that we literally eat the global economy. Paul Gilroy (2000) and Celia Lury (1998) remind us that we also wear it, listen to it and watch it on our many screens, on a daily basis.

The global circulation of goods, data, capital, bits and bytes of information frames the interaction of contemporary subjects on a daily basis. Multiple choices confront consumers at every step, but with varying degrees of actual freedom of choice. Take for instance the transformations incurred by the formerly elementary task of making a call to the local bank. What we have grown to expect nowadays is either an automated posthuman system of replies offering subsets of numbers that connect us to a further web of pre-recorded messages. Or else we welcome the relief of hearing a real-life human voice, knowing all along that it is emanating from some call centre miles away, in one of the emerging economies of the world. The end result is that phone calls are cheaper than ever but the actual length of the calls is definitely getting longer, as the caller wades through multiple new hurdles. Of course Internet communication is replacing all this, but my point is that the spinning differential force of our economic system is such that we have to run twice as fast, across automated replies or transcontinental phone lines, just to stay in the same place.

The most salient trait of the contemporary global economy is therefore its techno-scientific structure. It is built on the convergence between different and previously differentiated branches of technology, notably the four horsemen of the posthuman apocalypse: nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science. The bio-genetic structure of contemporary capitalism is especially important and central to the discussion on the posthuman. This aspect involves the Human Genome project, stem cell research and bio-technological intervention upon animals, seeds, cells and plants. In substance, advanced capitalism both invests and profits from the scientific and economic control and the commodification of all that lives. This context produces a paradoxical and rather opportunistic form of post-anthropocentrism on the part of market forces which happily trade on Life itself.

The commodification of Life by bio-genetic advanced capitalism, however, is a complex affair. Consider my argument: the great scientific advances of molecular biology have taught us that matter is self-organized (autopoietic), whereas monistic philosophy adds that it is also structurally relational and

hence connected to a variety of environments. These insights combine in defining intelligent vitality or self-organizing capacity as a force that is not confined within feedback loops internal to the individual human self, but is present in all living matter. Why is matter so intelligent, though? Because it is driven by informational codes, which both deploy their own bars of information, and interact in multiple ways with the social, psychic and ecological environments (Guattari, 2000). What happens to subjectivity in this complex field of forces and data flows? My argument is that it becomes an expanded relational self, engendered by the cumulative effect of all these factors (Braidotti 1991, 2011a). The relational capacity of the posthuman subject is not confined within our species, but it includes all non-anthropomorphic elements. Living matter – including the flesh – is intelligent and self-organizing, but it is so precisely because it is not disconnected from the rest of organic life. I therefore do not work completely within the social constructivist method but rather emphasize the non-human, vital force of Life, which is what I have coded as *zoe*.

Post-anthropocentrism is marked by the emergence of ‘the politics of life itself’ (Rose, 2007). ‘Life’, far from being codified as the exclusive property or the unalienable right of one species, the human, over all others or of being sacralized as a pre-established given, is posited as process, interactive and open-ended. This vitalist approach to living matter displaces the boundary between the portion of life – both organic and discursive – that has traditionally been reserved for *anthropos*, that is to say *bios*, and the wider scope of animal and non-human life, also known as *zoe*. *Zoe* as the dynamic, self-organizing structure of life itself (Braidotti 2006, 2011b) stands for generative vitality. It is the transversal force that cuts across and reconnects previously segregated species, categories and domains. *Zoe*-centred egalitarianism is, for me, the core of the post-anthropocentric turn: it is a materialist, secular, grounded and unsentimental response to the opportunistic trans-species commodification of Life that is the logic of advanced capitalism. It is also an affirmative reaction of social and cultural theory to the great advances made by the other culture, that of the sciences. The relationship between the two will be addressed in chapter 4.

A posthuman theory of the subject emerges, therefore, as an empirical project that aims at experimenting with what contemporary, bio-technologically mediated bodies are capable of doing. These non-profit experiments with contemporary subjectivity actualize the virtual possibilities of an expanded, relational self that functions in a nature–culture continuum and is technologically mediated.

Not surprisingly, this non-profit, experimental approach to different practices of subjectivity is not exactly the spirit of contemporary capitalism. Under the cover of individualism, fuelled by a quantitative range of consumer choices, that system effectively promotes uniformity and conformism to the dominant ideology. The perversity of advanced capitalism, and its undeniable success, consists in reattaching the potential for experimentation with new subject formations back to an overinflated notion of possessive individualism (MacPherson, 1962), tied to the profit principle. This is precisely the opposite direction from the non-profit experimentations with intensity, which I defend in my theory of posthuman subjectivity. The opportunistic political economy of bio-genetic capitalism turns *Life/zoe* – that is to say human and non-human intelligent matter – into a commodity for trade and profit.

What the neo-liberal market forces are after, and what they financially invest in, is the informational power of living matter itself. The capitalization of living matter produces a new political economy, which Melinda Cooper (2008) calls ‘Life as surplus’. It introduces discursive and material political techniques of population control of a very different order from the administration of demographics, which preoccupied Foucault’s work on bio-political governmentality. The warnings are now global. Today, we are undertaking ‘risk analyses’ not only of entire social and national systems, but also of whole sections of the population in the world risk society (Beck, 1999). Data banks of bio-genetic, neural and mediatic information about individuals are the true capital today, as the success of Facebook demonstrates at a more banal level. ‘Data-mining’ includes profiling practices that identify different types or characteristics and highlights them as special strategic targets for capital investments. This kind of predictive analytics of the human amounts to ‘Life-

mining',<sup>2</sup> with visibility, predictability and exportability as the key criteria.

Cooper sums up lucidly the complications of this political economy (2008: 3):

Where does (re)production end and technical invention begin, when life is out to work at the microbiological or cellular level? What is at stake in the extension of property law to cover everything from the molecular elements of life (biological patents) to the biospheric accident (catastrophe bonds)? What is the relationship between new theories of biological growth, complexity and evolution and recent neoliberal theories of accumulation? And how is it possible to counter these new dogmatisms without falling into the trap of neofundamentalist politics of life (the right-to-life movement or ecological survivalism, for example)?

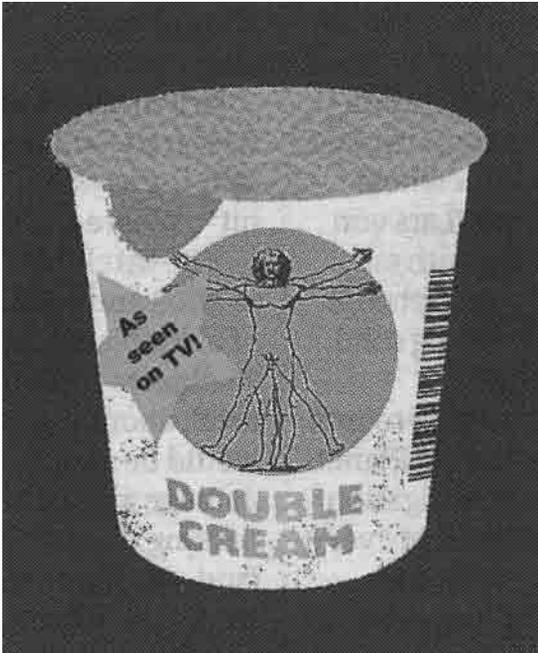
It is significant to note the emphasis Cooper places on the risk of neo-fundamentalist positions, like the biological determinism of 'natural law' advocates, or ecological holism. This essentialist risk is high in our current socio-political context and it requires constant critical scrutiny on the part of scholars who start instead from the posthuman idea of the nature-culture continuum.

Patricia Clough pursues a similar line in her analysis of the 'affective turn' (2008). Because advanced capitalism reduces bodies to their informational substrate in terms of energy resources, it levels out other categorical differences, so that 'equivalencies might be found to value one form of life against another, one vital capacity against another' (Clough, 2008: 17). What constitutes capital value in our social system is the accumulation of information itself, its immanent vital qualities and self-organizing capacity. Clough provides an impressive list of the concrete techniques employed by 'cognitive capitalism' (Moulier Boutang, 2012) to test and monitor the capacities of affective or 'bio-mediated' bodies: DNA testing, brain fingerprinting, neural imaging, body heat detection and iris or hand recognition. All these are also immediately operationalized as surveillance techniques both in civil society and in the war against terror. This necro-political governmentality is the topic of the next chapter.

<sup>2</sup> With thanks to Jose van Dijck for this formulation.

For now, let me stress my main point: the opportunistic political economy of bio-genetic capitalism induces, if not the actual erasure, at least the blurring of the distinction between the human and other species when it comes to profiting from them. Seeds, plants, animals and bacteria fit into this logic of insatiable consumption alongside various specimens of humanity. The image of Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man on a Starbucks coffee cup (see figure 2.1) captures ironically the meretricious character of the posthuman connections engendered by global capital: 'I shop therefore I am!' may well be its motto.

The global economy is post-anthropocentric in that it ultimately unifies all species under the imperative of the market and its excesses threaten the sustainability of our planet as a whole. A negative sort of cosmopolitan interconnection is therefore established through a pan-human bond of vulnerability. The size of recent scholarship on the environmental



**Figure 2.1** Vitruvian Man on Starbucks Coffee Cup  
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crisis and climate change alone testifies to this state of emergency and to the emergence of the earth as a political agent. Post-anthropocentrism is especially thriving in popular culture and has been criticized (Smelik and Lykke, 2008) as a negative tendency to represent the transformations of the relations between humans and technological *apparatus* or machines in the mode of neo-gothic horror. The literature and cinema of extinction of our and other species, including disaster movies, is a successful genre of its own, enjoying broad popular appeal. I have labelled this narrow and negative social imaginary as techno-teratological (Braidotti, 2002), that is to say as the object of cultural admiration and aberration. This dystopian reflection of the bio-genetic structure of contemporary capitalism is crucial to explain the popularity of this genre.

The social theory literature on shared anxiety about the future of both our species and of our humanist legacy is also rich and varied. Important liberal thinkers like Habermas (2003) and influential ones like Fukuyama (2002) are very alert on this issue, as are social critics like Sloterdijk (2009) and Borradori (2003). In different ways, they express deep concern for the status of the human, and seem particularly struck by moral and cognitive panic at the prospect of the posthuman turn, blaming our advanced technologies for it. I share their concern, but as a posthuman thinker with distinct anti-humanist feelings, I am less prone to panic at the prospect of a displacement of the centrality of the human and can also see the advantages of such an evolution.

For instance: once these post-anthropocentric practices blur the qualitative lines of demarcation not only among categories (male/female, black/white, human/animal, dead/alive, centre/margin, etc.), but also within each one of them, the human becomes subsumed into global networks of control and commodification which have taken 'Life' as the main target. The generic figure of the human is consequently in trouble. Donna Haraway puts it as follows:

our authenticity is warranted by a database for the human genome. The molecular database is held in an informational database as legally branded intellectual property in a national laboratory with the mandate to make the text publicly avail-

able for the progress of science and the advancement of industry. This is Man the taxonomic type become Man the brand. (1997: 74)

We know by now that the standard which was posited in the universal mode of 'Man' has been widely criticized (Lloyd, 1984) precisely because of its partiality. Universal 'Man', in fact, is implicitly assumed to be masculine, white, urbanized, speaking a standard language, heterosexually inscribed in a reproductive unit and a full citizen of a recognized polity (Irigaray, 1985b; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). How non-representative can you get? As if this line of criticism were not enough, this 'Man' is also called to task and brought back to its species specificity as *anthropos* (Rabinow, 2003; Esposito, 2008), that is to say as the representative of a hierarchical, hegemonic and generally violent species whose centrality is now challenged by a combination of scientific advances and global economic concerns. Massumi refers to this phenomenon as 'Ex-Man': 'a genetic matrix embedded in the materiality of the human' (1998: 60) and as such undergoing significant mutations: 'species integrity is lost in a bio-chemical mode expressing the mutability of human matter' (1998: 60).

These analyses indicate in my view that the political economy of bio-genetic capitalism is post-anthropocentric in its very structures, but not necessarily or automatically post-humanistic. It also tends to be deeply inhuman(e), as we shall see in the next chapter. The posthuman dimension of post-anthropocentrism can consequently be seen as a deconstructive move. What it deconstructs is species supremacy, but it also inflicts a blow to any lingering notion of human nature, *anthropos* and *bios*, as categorically distinct from the life of animals and non-humans, or *zoe*. What comes to the fore instead is a nature-culture continuum in the very embodied structure of the extended self, as I argued earlier. This shift can be seen as a sort of 'anthropological exodus' from the dominant configurations of the human as the king of creation (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 215) – a colossal hybridization of the species.

Once the centrality of *anthropos* is challenged, a number of boundaries between 'Man' and his others go tumbling

down, in a cascade effect that opens up unexpected perspectives. Thus, if the crisis of Humanism inaugurates the posthuman by empowering the sexualized and racialized human 'others' to emancipate themselves from the dialectics of master–slave relations, the crisis of *anthropos* relinquishes the demonic forces of the naturalized others. Animals, insects, plants and the environment, in fact the planet and the cosmos as a whole, are called into play. This places a different burden of responsibility on our species, which is the primary cause for the mess. The fact that our geological era is known as the 'anthropocene'<sup>3</sup> stresses both the technologically mediated power acquired by *anthropos* and its potentially lethal consequences for everyone else.

Furthermore, the transposition of naturalized others poses a number of conceptual and methodological complications linked to the critique of anthropocentrism. This is due to the pragmatic fact that, as embodied and embedded entities, we are all part of nature, even though academic philosophy continues to claim transcendental grounds for human consciousness. How to reconcile this materialist awareness with the task of critical thought? As a brand of vital materialism, posthuman theory contests the arrogance of anthropocentrism and the 'exceptionalism' of the Human as a transcendental category. It strikes instead an alliance with the productive and immanent force of *zoë*, or life in its non-human aspects. This requires a mutation of our shared understanding of what it means to think at all, let alone think critically.

In the rest of this chapter I will develop this insight into a number of interrelated fields of post-anthropocentric enquiry. My focus is on the productive aspects of the posthuman predicament and the extent to which it opens up perspectives for affirmative transformations of both the structures of subjectivity and the production of theory and knowledge. I have labelled these processes as 'becoming-animal, becoming-earth and becoming-machine', with reference to Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, though I am very independent in relation to them. Thus, the becoming-animal axis of transformation

<sup>3</sup> The term was coined by Nobel Prize winning chemist Paul Crutzen in 2002 and has become widely accepted.



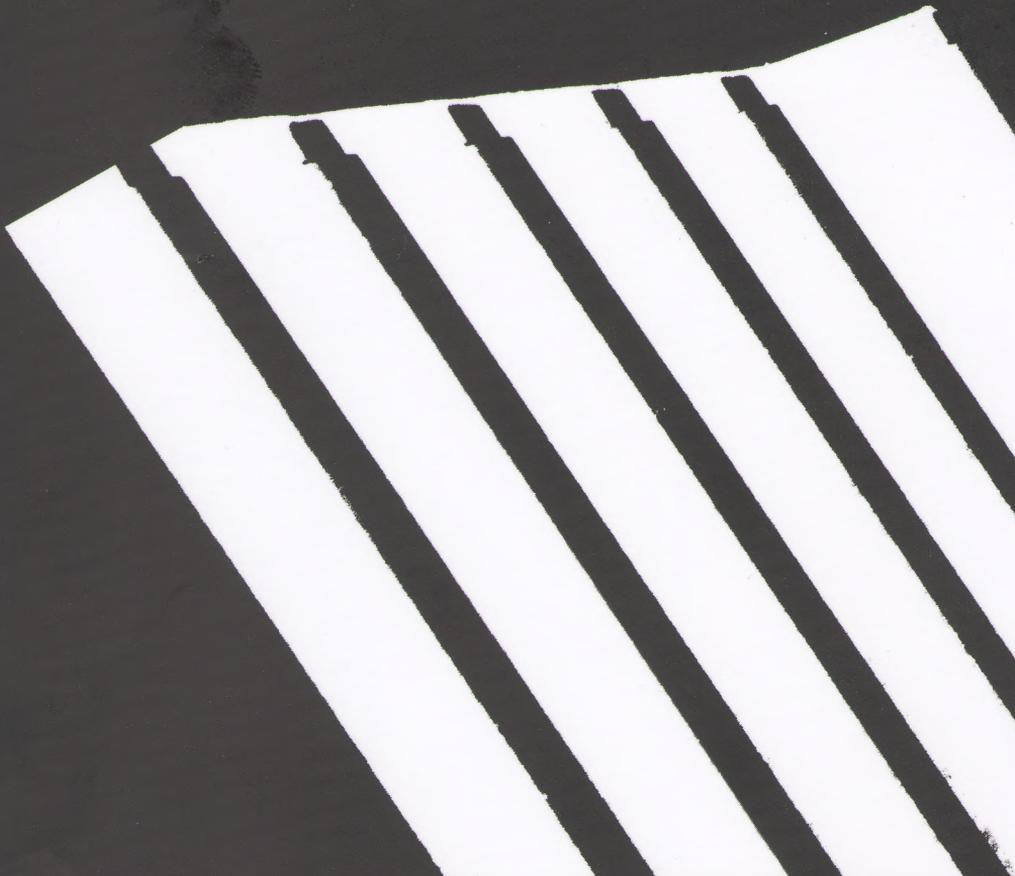
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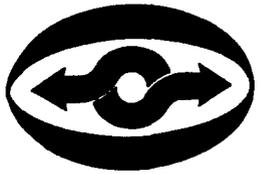
# The Visible and the Invisible

**MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY**

EDITED BY CLAUDE LEFORT

TRANSLATED BY ALPHONSO LINGIS





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*Maurice Merleau-Ponty*

The Visible and  
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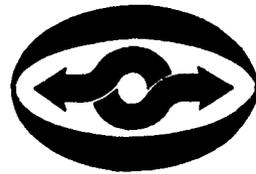
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## *Editor's Foreword*

HOWEVER EXPECTED it may sometimes be, the death of a relative or a friend opens an abyss before us. How much more so when it comes absolutely unannounced, when it can be ascribed neither to illness, nor to age, nor to a visible concourse of circumstances, when, moreover, he who dies is so alive that habitually we had come to relate our thoughts to his, to seek in him the strength we lacked, and to count him among the truest witnesses of our undertakings. Such was the sudden death of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and such was his personality, that all those who were bound to him by friendship knew the bitter truth of this affliction by the shock it sent into their lives. But now they have yet to hear the silence of a voice which, though it had always come to them charged with personal accents, seemed to them to have always spoken and to be destined to speak always.

It is a strange silence to which the interrupted conversation abandons us—where we forget the death of the writer only to return to it by another route. The work has come to an end, and, simply because everything in it is said, we are suddenly confronted with it. The term has come too soon, we think, but this regret does not affect the evidence that the work is born the moment it is closed. From now on it is what it says and nothing more, a complete word that refers only to itself, rests only on itself, and from which the memory of its origin fades away. The writer has disappeared; henceforth we read his work. To it—no longer to him—we turn with expectation. A profound change: for we doubt not that attention and patience will suffice for the meaning the work bears inscribed in itself to come to us. Now

everything induces this meaning, even the ideas we would judge most contestable, since in their own way they also teach us the truth of the discourse. Yesterday we still thought the writer was only responding to the questions we put to ourselves, or formulating those that arose from our common situation in the world. The things at the end of his look were the same as those we saw or could see from our place. His experience was, to be sure, singular, but it developed within the same horizons as our own, nourished itself with the same refusal of ancient truths and the same uncertainty of the future. Whatever was the prestige he enjoyed in our eyes, we knew well that his function invested him with no power, that he only took the risk of naming what in the present had no name, that the route was blazed under his steps as it opens under our own when we set out to advance. Thus we discovered his writings with the astonishment due to all that is new, without ever throwing off our reserve before what we admired most, so little sure were we of what thought they would bring or what consequences they would develop within us, and aware that the author himself did not know how far he would have to go. Without being his equal, we were close to him, because we were subject to the same rhythm of the world, participating in the same time, equally without support. Now that the work owes nothing more to its author, a new distance is established between it and us, and we become another reader. Not that our power to criticize will be diminished. It is possible that we will detect uncertainties, lacunae, discordances, even contradictions; in any case, the variety of the ideas and their genesis are palpable to us: for example, we measure the difference that separates the last writings from the early works. But the critique does not cast doubt on the existence of the work; it is still a means of rejoining it, for this very movement, these divergencies, these contradictions we observe belong to it as its own. The obscurity in which the work remains is no less essential than the luminous passages where its intention appears unveiled. More generally, there is nothing in the work that does not bespeak it and manifest its identity—what it states and what it passes over in silence, the content of its propositions and its style, the frank way it has to proceed to its goal, and its detours or its digressions. Everything that solicits the attention indicates a route that leads to it and is equally an overture to what it is.

Whence comes this shift of the reader's gaze, upon the disappearance of the writer? It is that, metamorphosed now into a work, the sole function of the writer's experience is no longer to render intelligible the reality before which it takes form. Doubtless the work remains a mediator—we seek in it a way of access to the present and past world, learn from it the measure of our own task of knowledge—but the peculiarity of this mediator is that it henceforth is a part of the world to which it leads. The work from which the writer has withdrawn has become a work among others, a part of our cultural milieu, and contributes to situate us in relation to it, since it finds its meaning only within the horizons of that culture and thus renders it present to us while drawing for us a singular figure of it. It is a thing that exists by itself, which, to be sure, would be nothing had it not its origin in the writer and would fall into oblivion if the reader ceased to interest himself in it; yet nevertheless the work does not depend entirely on either—both writer and reader also depend on it, inasmuch as it is true that the memory of what the writer was will survive only through the work and that men will discover the work only on condition that they let themselves be guided by it toward the domain of thought in which it once settled. And as we question after him this thing that has conquered a space of its own in the spiritual universe the writer questioned, it connects up to that spiritual universe in a thousand ways, radiating in all the directions of the past and the future, finally acquiring its true meaning only when it is acknowledged to be a modulation of a thought without origin nor term, an articulation within a discourse perpetually recommenced. The work therefore lives on the outside. Like things of nature, like facts of history, it is a being of the outside, awakening the same astonishment, requiring the same attention, the same exploration of the gaze, promising by its sole presence a meaning of an order other than the significations contained in its statements. It does not belong to the world like the rest, since it exists only in order to name what is and the bond that attaches us to what is. But, in naming, it exchanges its own presence for that of the things, borrows from them their objectivity: it imprints itself in what it expresses. We are compelled to see the world in it only because in the moment it converts all things into things thought, the thought compounds itself with the things,

ballasts itself with their weight, lets itself be caught up in their movement, their duration, their exteriority, and appropriates them to itself only by breaking with its own origins. Such a rupture is no doubt evinced by every work as soon as it is written but is not completely consummated until the thinker is no longer there. For, from then on, the events that marked his life, those of his personal history—the private history that the reader always knows something about, for the writer most discreet about himself never entirely succeeds in dissimulating it, or the history of his activities, his discoveries, his contentions with his contemporaries—and those of the public history, whose effects we undergo while they cede to it the efficacy we attributed to them, cease orientating our gaze and pass into the state of anecdotal references, to give place to the reality of the work which retains from them only their meaning. Deprived of their former figure and their former power, they are inscribed in a new temporality and come to serve a new history; metamorphosed into their meaning, they henceforth sustain an enigmatic correspondence with other events we know likewise to live in the depths of the past; changed into general powers, they hold under their dominion a domain of being to which neither dates nor places are assignable with precision.

Thus the withdrawal of the things from the world accompanies the withdrawal of him who thinks them, and the work exists completely only in virtue of this double absence, when, all things having become thoughts and all thoughts having become things, it suddenly seems to draw the whole of being to itself and to become, by itself alone, a source of meaning.

It is therefore not saying much to say that the work survives the writer, that, when its incompleteness will be forgotten, we will know only the plenitude of its meaning. This plenitude is *de jure*. The work alone seems to have a positive existence, for, even though its fate be suspended on the decision of future readers to let it speak, at least each time they will turn to it, it will come to interpose itself, as on the first day, between him who reads and the world to which he is present, compelling him to question that world in it and to relate his own thoughts to what it is.

Such is the fascination the finished work exercises on its reader that for a moment it renders vain all recrimination of the death of the writer. The writer disappears just when he was preparing for new beginnings, and the creation is interrupted,

forever beneath the expression it announced, from which it was to draw its final justification. But, whatever be the consternation of him who considers the absurd denouement—of him, in particular, to whom is given the sad privilege of entering the room where the writer worked, of measuring with his gaze the abandoned labor, the notes, the plans, the drafts which bear everywhere the palpable trace of a thought in effervescence, on the verge of finding its form—it is still associated with the memory of the man to whom, suddenly, to pursue his task was forbidden. Once this memory fades, it will be of little importance—one persuades oneself—to know when the author died, in what circumstances, and whether or not he still had the power to continue. For just as we cannot imagine, as we have no need to imagine, the movements of thought that accompany his creation, his interior disorder, his hesitations, the endeavors in which he gets bogged down and from which he returns after efforts spent in pure waste, the stammerings among which his language takes form, neither can we find in the ultimate defeat in which his enterprise sinks the matter for a reflection on his work.

But what does it mean that a work becomes foreign to the conditions of its creation? Do we not have to understand that it is beyond completion as well as incompleteness? And, indeed, how could a work ever be completed, in the ordinary sense of that word? To think that it were, one would have to suppose that its meaning were rigorously determined, that it one day would have been able to acquire, by the statement of certain propositions, such a coherence that any new word would have become superfluous; one would have to see in it a long chain of demonstrations destined to reach its term in a final proof. But the power we recognize in the work to solicit the reflection of future readers indefinitely, to join into one same interrogation the questions they put to the work and those that arise out of their own experience would forthwith become unintelligible. A completed work would be a work which the author would have entirely mastered and which, for this very reason, the reader would have only to take possession of in his turn; it would have, consequently, through all those who read it but one sole reader. Then we could not say that it would remain present to men, despite the time passed by since the moment of its creation; not because the truths discovered should cease to be valid as such, but because,

fixed once and for all in operations of cognition that could always be repeated, they would constitute a simple acquisition to which it would be useless to return.

The work, we said, fascinates; the moment the author disappears, it detaches us from him and compels us to see it as future readers will see it—but that does not mean that it has gained a definite identity outside of time. Far from withdrawing from our time, and from all time, it invades the field of the past and of the future under our eyes; it is present beforehand in what is not yet, and the meaning of this presence is in part hidden from us. We have no doubt that it will speak when we will no longer be there to hear it—as the works of the past remotely distant from their author and their first readers continue to speak—and we know likewise that others will read in it what we are not in a position to read, that the most well-founded interpretations will not exhaust its meaning. The new time it initiates, if it be different from the time of *real* history, is not foreign to it, for at every moment it exists in the triple dimension of present, past, and future, and, if it remains the same, it remains always in expectation of its own meaning. It is not only its image that is renewed; it itself endures, for its duration is essential, since it is made to accept the test of the changes of the world and of the thought of the others. Only from this point of view has it a positive existence—not because it is what it is once and for all, but because it provides for thought indefinitely, it will never be wanting to whomever questions it, and tomorrow as yesterday it will be involved with our relations with the world.

Whether the writer's labor seems to have come to its term or not is, therefore, of little importance: as soon as we are confronted with the work, we are faced with the same indetermination; and the more we penetrate into its domain, the more our knowledge increases, and the less we are capable of putting a limit to our questions. In the end we have to admit that we communicate with it only by reason of this indetermination. We truly welcome what thought it gives only because this gift has no name, because it does not sovereignly dispose of its own thoughts but remains under the dominion of the meaning it wishes to transmit.

We have then to reconsider the fate of the work. We thought we had exchanged the misfortune of the interrupted creation for the security and repose of the accomplished work. In it we found

plenitude of meaning and solidity of being. It is true that its presence is reassuring, since it has no limits, since it rightfully has its place among the works of the past and radiates as far as it pleases us to imagine in the direction of the future, since the very idea that it could one day fade out from the memory of men does not change the certitude that so long as literature will convey an interrogation of our relation with the world it will remain a living guidemark. Yet this presence presents an enigma, for the work evokes an attention to itself only to render palpable a certain impossibility of being. The work gives a singular figure to this impossibility but does not overcome it. It is essential to the work that it bear witness to it, remaining separated from itself as it remains separated from the world whose meaning it wishes to capture.

Thus again we discover death in the work, because its power is bound to its final impotency, because all the routes it opens and will always keep open are and will be without issue. In vain we try to brush aside the menace of this death: we imagine that what the work could not say others will say in the future, but what it has not said belongs properly to it, and the thoughts it awakens will be inscribed only far from it in a new work, by virtue of a new beginning. The meaning it dispenses always remains in suspense; the circle it traces circumscribes a certain void or a certain absence.

Such is, perhaps, the reason for our confusion before the uncompleted work; it brutally confronts us with an essential ambiguity from which more often than not we prefer to turn away. What is disconcerting is not that the last part of the discourse has been taken from us or that the goal the writer was approaching will be henceforth inaccessible (since it is a fact that that goal will never be attained); it is that we have discovered necessity inscribed in the work—the underlying movement by which it installs itself in speech so as to open itself to an inexhaustible commentary of the world, its advent to an order of existence in which it seems established for always—and that, in the same moment, this obscure decree which cuts it short of its intention throws it back to the *de facto* frontiers of its expression and suddenly makes doubt arise as to the legitimacy of its undertaking. We can, to be sure, convince ourselves that the uncertainty to which it abandons us motivates and supports our questioning concerning the world, that it still speaks when it is

silent by the power it has to designate what is and what will always be beyond the expressible; yet the fact remains that it was destined for the incessant unveiling of meaning, that all its truth was in that disclosure, and that it could not be terminated without the veil enshrouding it in its turn, and without its ways being lost in the dark.

He to whom these thoughts come is the less disposed to forget them before Maurice Merleau-Ponty's last writing as he knows that they were Merleau-Ponty's own thoughts, and he is still learning from him to see where they lead him. If we reread, for example, "The Philosopher and His Shadow," "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence," the texts written for *Les Philosophes célèbres*, or if we simply read the pages he left us after his death, we will see that he constantly questioned himself about the essence of the philosophical work. It was already a problem for him to understand the strange bond that connected his enterprise with that of his predecessors. Better than anyone, he has brought into the open the ambiguity of a relation that at the same time opens us and closes us to the truth of what was thought by another, disclosing the profusion of meaning behind us and simultaneously revealing an impassable distance from the present to the past in which the meaning of the philosophical tradition dies away and there arises the exigency to take up again in solitude, without exterior support, the labor of expression. And how could the questions he put to himself before the past have ceased to solicit him when he turned to the future of philosophy and sought to measure the import of his own words? It was the same thing to admit that, however rich in meaning they were, the works of the past were never entirely decipherable and did not deliver us from the necessity of thinking the world as if it had to be thought for the first time, and to admit to those who would come after us the right to see, in their turn, with a new view or, at least, to bear the center of the philosophical interrogation *elsewhere*. At the same time he contested the idea that the philosopher's enterprise had ever coincided with the construction of the system, and, for the same motive, he refused to raise his own experience to the absolute and seek in it the law of every possible experience. He was convinced that the work remains a source of meaning only because, in his own time, the writer was able to think what the present had provided for his

thought. He believed that it is in taking possession anew of the former present that we communicate with it, but that this communication is always impeded, necessitated as we are in our turn to conceive all things from the point of view at which we are. He was equally convinced of the legitimacy of his own research, of his power, certainly, to speak for others who would know nothing of his situation, but he was convinced also of his impotency to make that which gave his value to his questions and which depended essentially on his idea of the truth be maintained henceforth in the same light. Thus, he thought, our labor of expression rejoins that of the others only by ways we do not master, and we must always doubt that they come to seek in it what we seek in a movement that seems to us to be the very movement of philosophical truth. And, to be sure, such a doubt never destroyed in his mind the idea of a unity of philosophy. It is precisely because philosophy is, in his eyes, continual questioning, that it each time enjoins us to presuppose nothing, to neglect the acquired, and to run the risk of opening a route that leads nowhere. By virtue of the same necessity, each undertaking presents itself as irremediably solitary, yet akin to all those that have preceded it and will follow it. There is indeed, therefore, in spite of the appearances, a great conversation which develops, within which the words of each merge, for if they never compose a history articulated logically, at least they are caught up in the same thrust of language and destined to the same meaning. But the certitude that such a conversation sustains us could not efface the frontiers between the works and assure us of being true to it when we discover in our experience the summons to thought. The ambiguity is never settled, since at no moment can we detach completely the interrogation from the works in which it has found its form, since it is in penetrating into their enclosure that we are truly initiated into it, and since finally to question by ourselves is still to speak, to find the measure of our search in a language. Thus we always run up against the fact of the work and its obscurity, and all our questions concerning the world, those we think we discover by reading our predecessors and those we think we draw from ourselves, turn out necessarily to be doubled by a question regarding the *being* of language and of the work: a question that does not nullify the conviction that meaning is given to us, but which increases at the same time as that conviction, since the founda-

tion of this meaning and the relation of the work with what is remain obscure.

That we should, now that Merleau-Ponty is dead, look at his work as one work among others, as he himself looked and taught us to look at the work of the others, is in a sense of no help to us. It is not because he does not permit himself to reduce meaning to the thought the world provides him in the present and marks out in advance the place of our freedom that we can more easily assume it, determine what his task was, and what would be our own within philosophy. When the constitutive paradox of the work becomes palpable to us (the fact that it wants to name being as such and confesses that it repeats in its own being the enigma with which it is confronted, that it lays claim to the *whole* of interrogation without being able to do better than to open a route whose direction is for the others forever uncertain) and when the ambiguity of our relation with it is revealed (that is, that we learn to think in it and, in our inability to take possession of its domain, have to bear our thoughts *elsewhere*) our indecision only increases. But perhaps in recalling these questions, which were those of our philosopher, we are better disposed to receive his thought, in particular the last writing he was only able to begin, to weigh the event of this last beginning in which his enterprise was to find its term, and to understand how the meaning of his discourse is attested in the being of his work.

At the time of his death, Merleau-Ponty was preparing a work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, of which only the first part was written. It bears witness to his effort to give a new expression to his thought. A reading of some of the essays reassembled in *Signs*, the preface he wrote for them, and "The Eye and the Mind," all works that belong to the last period of his life, suffice to convince oneself that, far from constituting the definitive state of his philosophy, his first works, justly celebrated, had only laid down the foundations of his enterprise and created in him the necessity to go further.<sup>1</sup> But *The Visible and the Invisible* was to bring fully into the open the route traversed since the double critique of idealism and empiricism had brought him to a

1. *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston, Ill., 1964); "The Eye and the Mind," trans. Carleton Dallery, in *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston, Ill., 1964).

new continent. In the pages that remain for us and the working notes that accompany them, the intention becomes manifest to take up again the early analyses of the thing, the body, the relation between the seer and the visible, in order to dissipate their ambiguity and in order to show that they acquire their full meaning only outside of a psychological interpretation, when they are enveloped in a new ontology. It alone can now ground their legitimacy, as it alone will permit a connection of the criticisms addressed to the philosophy of reflection, dialectics, and phenomenology—criticisms hitherto dispersed and apparently tributary of the empirical descriptions—by disclosing the impossibility of further maintaining the *point of view of consciousness*.

When Merleau-Ponty undertakes this labor, he no doubt judges that he has his work before him, not behind him. He does not think of complementing or correcting his previous writings, making them more accessible to the public, or simply defending them against the attacks made against them as if they had in his eyes a defined identity. What he has already done counts only inasmuch as he discovers in it the finality of a task; his *acquisitions* have value only because they give the capacity to continue, which can be exercised only at the cost of an overturning of the prior work, its reorganization according to new dimensions. The certainty that his first attempts were not vain comes to him only from the necessity to which they commit him to turn back to them in order to think them through and do justice to what they demand.

To be sure, the reader could not entirely share this sentiment. For him, the things said have a weight that binds the writer to them and draws us to them. When he reads the first works of Merleau-Ponty, he discovers what is already a philosophy. While they do awaken in him a thousand questions which dispose him to await the continuation, and even while this expectancy situates him, as we said, in the same time as that of the author, still he perceives ideas, if not theses, of whose consistency he has no doubt. With these ideas he will henceforth confront the writer's words, to seek their confirmation, or, on the contrary, variations, even to see a repudiation. But, for the writer, the *said* weighs with another weight; it institutes a muffled pressure on speaking, it is what he must take charge of, what he will always have to count on—nowise a positive reality. The

ideas he has behind himself are hollow, the more efficacious in that they lack all the thought they call for, and it is this very determined void that supports his enterprise. And, no doubt, nothing can make the writer's perspective coincide with that of the reader, for their illusion arises from complementary motives. As has often been observed, the one cannot see what he writes and writes because he does not see, while the other can only see. The work which the author cannot look at is in his eyes as if it did not exist, and it is always in writing that he seeks to ascertain what it is to be, while, when addressed to our reader's view, the work tempts us to consider it as a thing among others, a thing that is since it is perceived, and of which only its properties have yet to be known. This distance from one perspective to the other suddenly increases infinitely with the death of the philosopher, for it is his whole work that is converted into something said and henceforth gives itself out with the appearance of an object. Even when, upon reading his personal papers, we discover the image of his future work which he formed for himself, it does not unsettle our certitude of being before a work; and the last writing—in spite of its incompleteness—furnishes again the occasion to size up that work, particularly inasmuch as it dispenses final information about its nature. And yet upon discovering this last writing our illusion wavers. Natural as it appears to us to seek in it, if not the final meaning, at least what will give their final meaning to the antecedent works, still it is equally difficult to recognize this completion under the strokes of an introduction where the questions multiply, where the answers are always deferred, where the thought constantly depends on a future discourse, henceforth prohibited.

And, in fact, such is the function of the hundred and fifty manuscript pages to which *The Visible and the Invisible* is reduced: to introduce. The intention is to direct the reader toward a domain which his habits of thought do not make immediately accessible to him. It is a question, in particular, of persuading him that the fundamental concepts of modern philosophy—for example, the distinctions between subject and object, essence and fact, being and nothingness, the notions of consciousness, image, thing, which are in constant use—already implicate a singular interpretation of the world and cannot lay claim to special dignity when our intention is precisely to go back to face

our experience, in order to seek in it the birth of meaning. The author endeavors to state first why it has become necessary to start anew, why we can no longer think within the framework of the former systems, nor even build on the ground in which we see them, different as they are in their orientation, to be enrooted. He calls for an examination of our condition such as it is before science and philosophy compose a translation of it according to the exigencies of their respective languages, and before we come to forget that they themselves have to account for their own origin. But this examination is not presented, it is only announced; only some guidemarks give an indication of what would be a description of experience faithful to the experience. The very form of the discourse is a caution. Constant reservations, allusions to what will be said later, the conditional form forbid enclosing the thought in the present statements. When the time comes, the writer is in effect saying, the true meaning of the exposition will disclose itself; the argument, he adds, would be more extensive were he not in a hurry to indicate first the main lines of his research. It would be wrong to take these precautions to be artifices; the pages left us have to be read as the author wished them to be read, with the thought that all that is said here is still provisional, and, since our waiting for the continuation cannot be satisfied, it is necessary to read them as they are, bound up with the missing pages: however strong may be our inclination to seek in the present field of discourse a meaning that suffices to itself, we cannot ignore the void it bears in its center. The work is the more lacunate in that it takes form before us only to designate what has become impossible for it to say. And no doubt the first justice to be done to it is to see it as it presents itself, to know the state of privation in which it puts us, to measure the loss it makes palpable, to know, finally, that this loss cannot be made good, and that no one could give expression to what has remained for it inexpressible.

But perhaps we err yet more seriously if, thus convincing ourselves that the first part of *The Visible and the Invisible* has the value of an introduction, we would wish to conclude that it does not reach the essential. That would already be a failure to recognize the nature of the work of thought, for in it the initiation is always decisive, the truth of the itinerary is always anticipated in the first step. Even more, at a moment of discourse there is created a relation between what has been said and what

is not yet said, which doubles every statement and brings to birth, beyond the succession of the ideas, a depth of meaning in which they coexist, prove to be consubstantial, and, without ceasing to be inscribed in time, are imprinted simultaneously in one same field—so that, once this dimension is opened, we are put in the presence of the work, and the work survives the amputation inflicted on it by fate. But, in this particular case, it would be especially a failure to recognize the intention of the writer, who, from the start of his work, strives to render palpable the bond between all the questions of philosophy, their reciprocal implication, the necessity of the interrogation whence they proceed, and, far from devoting himself to preliminary considerations, assembles in a first draft most of the themes he means to stir up again and again in the continuation. This first part does not offer us, for example, the exposition of a method: it contains rather a caution against what is commonly called method, that is, against undertaking to define an order of demonstration that would be valid of itself, independently of an effective development of thought. It demands that the meaning emerge from the description of experience and of the difficulties it harbors as soon as we want to think it in terms of the categories of the past philosophy—or think it, in general. It does not wish to state a principle or principles that would permit the reconstructing of experience but proposes to explore it in all directions, at the same time questioning our relation with the world as we think we live it naïvely as well as the cultural environment in which this relation is inscribed and acquires a determined status. But, for this project to take form, we must already have sized up our situation; we must (and this is indeed the task Merleau-Ponty assigns himself in the beginning) examine the movement that inclines us to give our adherence to things and to one another and the ambiguities to which it exposes us: why it is irresistible, and why, as soon as we wish to think it out, it transforms itself into an enigma. We must confront what the writer calls our “perceptual faith” with the truths of science, discover that this science, which appears to sovereignly dispose of its object inasmuch as it constructs it from its definitions and in conformity with its ideal of measurement, is unable to elucidate the experience of the world from which, without saying so, it draws, and, finally, that when in its operations it comes upon the trace of an involvement in the real of the subject of knowledge, it proves to

be as unable as is the common consciousness to give it a status. Finally we must traverse again the route of reflection which is that of modern philosophy—at whose term all the problems appear solved, since thought doubles now the perceptual life over its whole extension and bears into it the principle for a discrimination between the true and the false, the real and the imaginary—and see in what conditions this “solution” is reached, at the cost of what mutilation our situation is converted into a simple object of knowledge, our body into a thing like any other, perception into the thought of perceiving, speech into pure signification, by what artifices the philosopher succeeds in dissimulating to himself his inherence in the world, in history, and in language.

This first elucidation already implies a reciprocating motion between the description of experience and the critique of philosophical knowing, not that we ought to denounce the errors of theory in face of what is, but because, far from rejecting the past philosophy so as to edify a new system on a *tabula rasa*, we learn *in it* to see better, and, taking over its enterprise, seeking only to carry it out all the way, we clarify our own situation starting from what thought it gives us about the world. Thus we are cast into the middle of the research, already occupied in plowing the field of our questions, articulating them in relation to each other, and discovering the necessity that commands them, when we thought we were only beginning to move.

In a sense, there is indeed a beginning, but in another sense this image is misleading. For it is at the same time true that the author calls for a new start and that he nevertheless refuses to search for a point of origin that would permit the tracing out of the way of absolute knowledge. Perhaps in this his enterprise differs most profoundly from that of his predecessors. He was so convinced of the impossibility of philosophy establishing itself as a pure source of meaning that he wished first to denounce its illusion. Thus, in the first drafts for an introduction, he started with the observation that we cannot find an origin in God, in nature, or in man, that such attempts in fact converge in the myth of a total explicitation of the world, of a complete adequation between thought and being, which nowise takes into account our insertion in the being of which we speak; that, moreover, this myth no longer sustains any fruitful research in our time, and that to dissipate it is not to fall back into scepticism

and irrationalism but is to know for the first time the truth of our situation. This is an idea so constant in him that we find it again expressed in the last working note, written two months before his death:

[My plan] must be presented without any compromise with *humanism*, nor moreover with *naturalism*, nor finally with theology—Precisely what has to be done is to show that philosophy can no longer think according to this cleavage: God, man, creatures—which was Spinoza's division (p. 274).

If there is need of a recommencement, it is therefore in a wholly new sense. It is not a matter of clearing out ruins in order to lay a new foundation; it is rather a matter of recognizing that, whatever we may say about being, we inhabit it with our whole selves, our labor of expression is still an installation in it, finally our interrogation is, for the same reason, without origin and without termination, since our questions always arise from older questions and since no answer can dissipate the mystery of our relation with being.

Kafka already said that the things presented themselves to him "not by their roots, but by some point or other situated toward the middle of them." He doubtless said it to express his distress, but the philosopher who frees himself from the myth of the "root" resolutely accepts being situated in this midst and having to start from this "some point or other." This restraint is the sign of his attachment, and it is because he submits to it that the hope is given him of progressing from one domain to another, in the interior labyrinth where the frontiers of the visible fade, where every question about nature leads to a question about history, every question of this kind to a question about the philosophy of nature or of history, every question about being to a question about language. In such an enterprise one can see stages but cannot distinguish the preparations from the exploration itself. Speaking of his research, Merleau-Ponty says in one place that it is an "ascent on the spot"; very often he sees it describe a circle, bringing him to pass by the same stopping points again and again. Whatever the image is, it prevents us from thinking that we would not be at grips with the essential from the beginning. On the contrary, we have to admit that the introduction is the first traversing of the circle and that, brought to its term, the work would not thereby have exceeded the limits

or terminated the movement, inasmuch as it is certain that it is in *these* limits, by *this* movement that it discovers its power of expression.

Thus it is at the same time true that the hundred and fifty manuscript pages to which *The Visible and the Invisible* is now reduced comprise its beginning and still present themselves to us as an introduction, and that they are more than that, bearing the meaning of the work and calling upon us to discover it in them; that the continuation of the work would have been something very different from the illustration or commentary of the ideas stated in the first part, and that the first part anticipates the continuation, permits us to evoke it.

But perhaps this paradox would surprise us less if we saw how it is founded in the language of the work, in the labor of writing such as the writer conceived it. It is a noteworthy fact that should we wish to reconstitute the principal articulations of the work he was preparing, we would find it materially impossible to do so. To be sure, numerous working notes, early drafts, some rare indications of an outline of extreme brevity, all of which do not agree among themselves, give an indication of the amplitude of his research. But to know that it was to return at length to the problem of perception and in particular to devote a good deal of space to the recent works on experimental and Gestalt psychology, that the analysis of the concept of nature would have required a description of the human organism, animal behavior, and the examination of the phenomena of evolution, that these studies themselves would have commanded the critique of what the author called the "complex of Western philosophy," that this critique, in its turn, was to result in a new conception of history and of the nature-history relationship, and that finally (and this is the least dubious of all the hypotheses) the work was to conclude with a reflection on language and that particular form of language which is the philosophical discourse, returning thus at its term to the mystery of its origin—this yet leaves us ignorant of the route that would have been followed, the order of the stages, or the revolutions of the thought. How then could one think that Merleau-Ponty's reluctance to draw up plans, to prepare with schemata what he intended to say, and to hold himself to his projects was a matter of temperament? The truth is indeed rather that his experience as a man philosophiz-

ing coincided with his experience as a writer, prevented him from dominating his own work, as he for whom meaning can be once entirely possessed imagines he dominates his work. In this sense, he would have to test it in the writing. Convinced that there is no privileged point whence nature, history, and being itself, are unveiled, or, as he says so often, that high-altitude thinking detaches us from the truth of our situation, it was necessary at the same time that he forego the illusion of seeing his own work as a spectacle, oblige himself to make his way in semi-obscurity in order to discover the interior connection of his questions, and fully comply with what demands to be said here and now without ever giving himself over to the security of a meaning already traced out, already thought. Thus it is in the end for one sole and same reason that we are led to seek in what is written the essence of the work and prevented from imagining the sequence of the discourse as the simple prolongation of its beginning. The language of the philosopher teaches us a necessity that is not logical but ontological, such that we find in it more than a meaning, a meaning of meaning, and, as soon as it is wanting, we lose contact with what gave depth, movement, and life to the ideas. Attentive as we should be to the word of the writer, allowing it all its resonances in the space it inhabits, we are accordingly forbidden to cross the limits of this space and violate the zone of silence that envelops it. It is this speech and this silence that must be heard together—this silence which succeeds the speech, which is not nothing since it still depends on the speech and henceforth sustains it.

Merleau-Ponty already was meditating on the relation between speech and silence; in a note he writes:

There would be needed a silence that envelops the speech anew, after one has come to recognize that speech enveloped the alleged silence of the psychological coincidence. What will this silence be? As the reduction finally is not for Husserl a transcendental immanence, but the disclosing of the *Weltthesis*, this silence will not be the contrary of language (p. 179).

Thus we were to understand that speech is between two silences: it gives expression to an experience that is mute and ignorant of its own meaning, but only in order to make that experience appear in its purity; it does not break our contact with the things, but it draws us from our state of confusion with

all things only in order to awaken us to the truth of their presence and to render palpable their relief and the tie that binds us to them. At least such is the speech that speaks in conformity with its essence and, where philosophical discourse is concerned, that does not cede to the vertigo of eloquence, does not wish to suffice to itself or close in upon itself and upon its sense, but opens upon and leads to the outside. But if speech, which is born from silence, can seek its conclusion in silence and make that silence not be its contrary, this is because between experience and language there is, in principle, exchange; it is because experience is not something one could coincide with, because it bears a transcendence, since already, in itself, it is differentiation, articulation, structuration, and because in some way it calls for language; it is because language is also experience, because there is, as Merleau-Ponty writes so well, a *being* of language in which the enigma of being is repeated, because beyond the movement of the pure significations there remains the silent mass of the discourse, that which is not of the order of the sayable, and because the greatest merit of expression is to disclose this continuous passage from the word to being and from being to the word, or this double openness of the one upon the other. To think through this exchange is no doubt what *The Visible and the Invisible* was to devote itself to, at the end. But it is disconcerting to find it evoked in the last lines, in the writer's last words. Merleau-Ponty writes:

In a sense the whole of philosophy, as Husserl says, consists in restoring a power to signify, a birth of meaning, or a wild meaning, an expression of experience by experience, which in particular clarifies the special domain of language. And, in a sense, as Valéry said, language is everything, since it is the voice of no one, since it is the very voice of the things, the waves, and the forests. And what we have to understand is that there is no dialectical reversal from one of these views to the other; we do not have to reassemble them into a synthesis: they are two aspects of the reversibility which is ultimate truth (p. 155).

That chance seals the book on *ultimate truth*, that the book, still far from the term it aimed at, yet closes on a thought that is its prefiguration—in this the reader will not fail to see a sign—the trace of an admonition, as it were, that the work, in the absence of the man, was able to receive. But this sign could not make us forget the meaning, and we must also recognize that

what is said here, at the last moment, clarifies the problem of the philosophical work—of the work in general, and of this one we are reading. For in it is disclosed the reversibility of experience and language. It is because it brings or claims to bring the task of expression to its furthest limits, because it wishes to gather up the truth of experience such as it is before it is put into words, and, simultaneously, because it wishes to concentrate and exhaust in it all the powers of speech, that it discovers the impossibility of remaining in either intention, sees its movement reverse itself in both directions, and is finally obliged to declare this indetermination, which constitutes its existence. The reversibility of which the philosopher speaks is set forth before he names it in the form of his work. Better: in naming it he only expresses faithfully the meaning of his undertaking. For if it is not vain, it presupposes that we cannot find an absolute in experience nor make of language an absolute, that that anonymous power we call experience or language is not a positive reality that would suffice to itself alone, that there is in being a sort of need for speech and in speech a sort of need for being, indissociable from one another, that to speak and to live are equally the source of questions, and that these questions refer to one another. Thus the "ultimate truth" upon which *The Visible and the Invisible* comes to an end is also that from which the work draws its origin: this truth does not constitute a stopping point; it does not give rest to thought; it rather designates the point of passage which is for the work that of its continued foundation.

We asked: how are we to understand the silence that follows the word? But if we can do so, it is because the word never abolished the silence, that at each moment it leads beyond itself and forbids us to fall back to the limits of the immediately given meaning. The final silence is only made of those silences reassembled; it extends beyond the discourse because it constantly served as its ground. Hence it is one and the same thing to hear this discourse and this silence, to know where to stop at the frontier of the *said*, and to recognize that there is no frontier between language and the world.

Still it is true that if *The Visible and the Invisible* gives us the ability to listen, it is because the questions we put before the work and its incompleteness rejoin those the author put to himself when he obliged himself to write in such a way that a termina-

tion of his enterprise (let us not say a sudden and unforeseeable cessation of speech) was not contrary to it, a termination, whatever it would be, that was to be not only a termination, but was also to signify the absence of any termination. At a given moment he himself indicates the meaning of this task, when, in the course of the work, he asks what philosophical expression can be:

. . . the words most charged with philosophy are not necessarily those that contain what they say, but rather those that most energetically open upon being, because they more closely convey the life of the whole and make our habitual evidences vibrate until they disjoin. Hence it is a question whether philosophy as the reconquest of brute or wild being can be accomplished by the resources of the eloquent language, or whether it would not be necessary for philosophy to use language in a way that takes from it its power of immediate or direct signification in order to equal it with what it wishes all the same to say (pp. 102-3).

An enigmatic passage, no doubt. The answer does not accompany the question. It is not said what would be a work that would deprive itself of the resources of the eloquent language, what would be, to recall a formula used by the author in another circumstance, an "indirect language" of philosophy. We know only that he constantly claimed for it an original mode of expression and by no means thought of substituting for it the language of art or of poetry. However, when we read the writer, this confidence is clarified, for it turns out that his own words do not contain what they say, that their meaning always overflows immediate or direct signification, and that finally their power to open upon being is bound to the force of interrogation that animates them. Should we not understand that the philosophical language is precisely the interrogative language? If that cannot be affirmed in positive terms, it is because no formula can make understood what interrogation is. Merleau-Ponty can indeed, on several occasions, name it, say what it is not—the statement of questions which, like all the questions of cognition, are to disappear before answers—and why it is indefinitely renewed on contact with our experience. Yet every definition would turn us from it by making us forget that it is in life and in language that it unfolds itself, or, better, that it is only life and language, this life and this language, assumed. To do justice to inquiry, it is not enough for the philosopher to declare that it is interminable, that man is never done with asking questions about his situation in

the world, for, true as that may be, such an idea is too general to have consistency. He must also effectively conduct the questioning, provide a route for it, act in such a way that, in the work, the answers aroused by the questions nowhere terminate the reflection, that the passage from one domain of experience to another is always preserved, that meaning unveils itself in our impossibility to remain in any place, that the whole discourse is as one sole sentence where one can distinguish, certainly, moments, articulations, and pauses, but whose content, in each proposition, is never dissociable from the total movement.

And in fact, from start to finish, *The Visible and the Invisible* is an endeavor to keep the questioning open: not an exercise of a methodic and deliberate doubt from which the subject would draw the illusion of detaching himself from all things and which would prepare the reinstatement of a thought sure of its rights, but the continuous exploration of our perceptual life and of our life of knowledge; not the negation of the common certitudes, the destruction of our faith in the existence of the things and of the others, but the adherence to these certitudes, to this faith, to the extent that the very insistence to espouse them discloses that they are indissociably certitude and incertitude, faith and non-faith; a passage as it were through opinion in order to rejoin the ambiguities it harbors; not a refutation of the theories of philosophers, but a return to what was at their origin in order to discover that they lead beyond the answers they gave; an interrogation, finally, which constantly relates to itself, does not lose sight of the condition of the questioner, knows it is caught up in being while it devotes itself to its expression.

If philosophy finds by this language the means to "equal what it wishes all the same to say," it is because the secret of our temporality is expressed by that of the work, because the work teaches us to recognize the continuity, the indivision of an experience where each moment is caught up with all the others in the same propulsion of time, and, simultaneously, to recognize the movement that prevents the fixing of the meaning of the thing, visible or invisible, and makes arise indefinitely, beyond the present given, the latent content of the world.

But when the work reaches this self-consciousness, when it knows that it is and is only the place of interrogation, does it not then silently correspond with its term? For he who goes all the way to the end of interrogation can only discover and make us

discover the contingency of speech. It is one same thing, for him, to confront the obscure region from which his thoughts arise and that in which they are destined to undo themselves. And it is one same thing for us to read everywhere the signs of its presence and to feel its imminent absence. The true interrogation is a frequenting of death, and we are not surprised that the philosopher who rarely names it has nonetheless such great power, in his last writing, to turn us toward it.

CLAUDE LEFORT

## Editorial Note

MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY died on May 3, 1961. A manuscript was found among his papers which contained the first part of a work whose composition he had begun two years earlier. It is entitled *The Visible and the Invisible*. We have found no trace of this title before March, 1959. Before then notes concerning this project bear the reference "Being and Meaning," or "Genealogy of the True," or, lastly, "The Origin of Truth."

### THE MANUSCRIPT

THE MANUSCRIPT consists of a hundred and fifty large pages covered with a dense handwriting, bearing copious corrections. The text covers both sides of the page.

The date March, 1959 figures on the first page, and page 83 is dated June 1, 1959. Apparently the author composed a hundred and ten pages between spring and summer of the same year; then in the autumn of the following year he returned to the composition of his text, setting aside the last eight pages (pp. 103-10) which would have begun a second chapter. The date November, 1960 is written on the second page 103, above the title "Interrogation and Intuition."

### STRUCTURE OF THE WORK

OUTLINES FOR THE WORK are few and do not agree exactly with one another. It is certain that the author was recast-

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ing his project during the course of its execution. We can, however, presume that the work would have been of considerable length and that the text we possess constitutes only its first part, which was intended to serve as an introduction.<sup>1</sup>

Here are the few schemata we found:

- a) March, 1959 (written at the head of the manuscript):
- Part I. Being and World
    - Chap. I. Reflection and interrogation.
    - Chap. II. Preobjective being: the solipsist world.
    - Chap. III. Preobjective being: intercorporeity.
    - Chap. IV. Preobjective being: the inter-world (*l'entremonde*).
    - Chap. V. Classical ontology and modern ontology.
  - Part II. Nature.
  - Part III. *Logos*.

b) May, 1960 (in a note on the first page):  
Being and World.

- Part I:
- |                    |    |                         |
|--------------------|----|-------------------------|
| The vertical world | or | the interrogative being |
| mute               |    | brute                   |
|                    |    | wild                    |
- Part II will be: Wild being and classical ontology.

(and on the second page:)

- Chap. I. The flesh of the present or the "there is."
- Chap. II. The plot (*tracé*) of time, the movement of ontogenesis.
- Chap. III. The body, the natural light, and the word.
- Chap. IV. The chiasm.
- Chap. V. The inter-world and Being.  
World and Being.

c) May, 1960 (in a note):

- I. Being and World
- Part I: The vertical World or wild Being.
- Part II: Wild Being and classical ontology.
- Nature
- Man
- God.

1. Cf. Editor's Foreword.

Conclusion: the fundamental thought—Passage to the differentiations of wild Being. Nature—*logos* history.  
cultivated being.  
The *Erzeugung*.

## II. *Physis* and *Logos*.

d) October, 1960 (in a note):

### I. Being and World.

Part I: Reflection and interrogation.

Part II: The vertical world and wild Being.

Part III: Wild Being and classical ontology.

e) November, 1960 (in a note):

### I. The visible and nature.

1. Philosophical interrogation.

2. The visible.

3. The world of silence.

4. The visible and ontology (wild Being).

### II. The word and the invisible.

f) (Undated, but probably of November or December, 1960, in a note:)

### I. The visible and nature.

Philosophical interrogation:

interrogation and reflection;

interrogation and dialectic;

interrogation and intuition (what I am doing at the moment).

The visible.

Nature.

Classical ontology and modern ontology.

### II. The invisible and *logos*.

These few indications do not permit us to imagine what the work would have been in its matter and in its form. The reader will form a better idea of it when he reads the working notes we are publishing after the text. But at least we can make use of the outlines in order to discern more clearly the organization of the manuscript itself.

For should we follow only the divisions marked out in the text, we would have to confine ourselves to mentioning a Part

One: "Being and World," and a first chapter: "Reflection and Interrogation," while all the other sections would be parallel, all being equally preceded in the notes by the sign §. But note *f*), which confirms and completes the preceding note and which has the interest of having been written at the same time as the chapter "Interrogation and Intuition" (the author specifies: "what I am doing at the moment"), shows that we cannot retain this division. For the title of the first part, "Being and World," has been abandoned and replaced by "The Visible and Nature," the sections preceded by the sign § have been regrouped in terms of their meaning, and it becomes clear that the last two sections do not have the same function as the prior ones.

We have therefore decided to restructure the text according to the last indications left by the author. We have first distinguished three chapters, setting them under the heading "Philosophical Interrogation." The first chapter, "Reflection and Interrogation," with three subdivisions, covers the critique of the perceptual faith, scientism, and the philosophy of reflection (*la philosophie réflexive*). The second, "Interrogation and Dialectic," divided into two parts, consists of the analysis of Sartrean thought and an elucidation of the relations between dialectics and interrogation. The third, "Interrogation and Intuition," contains essentially the critique of Phenomenology.

There remains the problem of situating the last section entitled "The Intertwining—the Chiasm," which note *f*) does not mention. We could make it either the final chapter of "Philosophical Interrogation" or the first chapter of the announced Part Two: "The Visible." Either decision, we believe, can be justified by serious arguments. But in the absence of express indication by the author, the arguments would never appear decisive. In this situation, we have preferred to adopt the solution that involved the least intervention on our part—that is, to let this chapter follow the others.

## STATE OF THE TEXT

THE MANUSCRIPT of *The Visible and the Invisible* was worked over at length, as its numerous erasures and corrections show. Yet we cannot suppose that it had reached its definitive state. Certain repetitions would no doubt have been

eliminated; perhaps the manuscript would have been recast even more broadly. In particular, the definitiveness of the beginning of the text is open to doubt, since a note evokes the possibility of a new arrangement of the exposition. The author writes:

Perhaps redo pages 1-13, grouping together: 1. the certitudes (the thing) (the other) (the truth); 2. the incertitudes (the Pyrrhonian difficulties, the contradictions of thematization); 3. one can neither accept the antitheses, nor confine oneself to materialized certitudes→passage to reflection.

On the other hand, we note that the author twice uses the same text of Paul Claudel (cf. below, pp. 103 and 121) without advising the reader of this repetition. The function of the citation in the two passages is such that a broad recasting would have been necessary.

### THE WORKING NOTES

WE HAVE THOUGHT IT WELL to include after the text of *The Visible and the Invisible* a certain number of working notes which clarify its meaning. The author was in the habit of jotting down ideas on paper, ordinarily without concerning himself with style nor even obliging himself to compose complete sentences. These notes, which sometimes contain but a few lines and sometimes extend over several pages, constitute drafts for developments that figure in the first part of the work or would have figured in its continuation. From the end of the year 1958 on, they were as a rule dated and labeled.

It was neither possible nor desirable to publish all of them. Their mass would have overshadowed the text, and moreover a good number of them were to be excluded either because they were too elliptical or because they had no direct bearing on the subject of the research.

As soon as a selection proved to be necessary, it posed some problems of interpretation, and we feared lest our judgment be mistaken. But, rather than renounce the project, we have taken on the risk of making a choice among them, convinced as we were that by reason of the variety of the themes taken up, the quality of the reflection, the abrupt but always rigorous expres-

sion of the thought, these notes could render the philosopher's work palpable to the reader.

### EDITING OF THE MANUSCRIPT AND THE NOTES

AS FAR AS THE EDITING of the manuscript is concerned, we have limited ourselves in the text to clarifying the punctuation, in concern for facilitating its reading. But in the working notes we have transcribed the text without modification, so as to leave to the expression its first movement.<sup>2</sup>

Wherever we could, we have furnished the references the working notes required or completed those of the author.

When it was necessary to introduce or restore a term in order to give a sentence its meaning, we have put it between brackets and added an explanatory note at the bottom of the page.

Illegible or doubtful terms are indicated in the course of the text in the following way:

illegible: [?]

uncertain: [truth?].

2. In the English translation, too, we have attempted in the text to remain as faithful to the French as possible, though alterations in punctuation and wording have been made when necessary for clarity. The Working Notes, however, are reproduced exactly as they appeared in the French edition.

French words are given in parentheses when it is helpful to include them. Footnotes of the author, the editor, and the translator are numbered consecutively within each chapter; notes written by the editor or the translator are identified to distinguish them from those of Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty's marginal comments are preceded by an asterisk.

In the Working Notes, short dashes are used as standard punctuation and long dashes are used to separate sentences or quasi-sentences.

A number of mistakes in the French edition have been corrected upon consultation with M. Lefort.—A.L.

## Translator's Preface

*The Visible and the Invisible* was to be MERLEAU-PONTY's phenomenological ontology. It required both a phenomenological inquiry into "the origin of truth" and a philosophy of Nature—of the "wild," uncultivated, preobjective Nature. Most of the manuscript his death interrupted is devoted to a critical examination of Kantian, Husserlian, Bergsonian, and Sartrean method; but one extraordinary constructive chapter—that entitled "The Intertwining—the Chiasm"—introduces the new concepts with which to explore the production of visibility and "the metaphysical structure of our flesh." This manuscript that we now present to the English-speaking public, along with a collection of Merleau-Ponty's working notes, prepares for an ontology of Nature and of truth that shall now come only from its readers. Each reader will find in the range of this thought his own motives to assume and discoveries to appropriate; perhaps this preface may aid him by indicating the central argument that was already forged in the work Merleau-Ponty leaves us.

### METHODS

WHAT IS A VISIBLE THING? What is it that makes the visible a thing? And what is the visibility of the thing? These were the questions of a phenomenology of perception; across its long chapters devoted to the critical examination first of the philosophy interwoven in scientific research, then of transcendental philosophy, dialectical philosophy, and intuitionist philosophy, these are also the questions that command *The Visible*

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and *the Invisible*. To endeavor once more to renew these questions is not simply the coquetry that, in fact only provisionally, tries to make seem questionable visibility itself, that is, the very clarity, the very patency of the real. "If the philosopher questions and hence feigns ignorance of the world and of the vision of the world which are operative and take form continually within him, he does so precisely in order to make them speak, because he believes in them and expects from them all his future science."<sup>1</sup>

Empiricism was a sort of disbelief in the things, an underestimation of the coherence of the things. The sensible thing is not simply a "wandering troop of sensations" (p. 123); it holds together of itself and can be recognized when it returns. Intellectualism is the recognition of this immanent unity of the things: the constituent moments of the thing are not simply contingently contiguous to one another; they are internally, intentionally, or meaningfully related to one another. Only thus can sensuous data announce or manifest a thing—or, at least, that internal principle, that essence, by which it is one thing and by which it is recognizable. In the midst of the sensuous experience there is an intuition of an essence, a sense, a signification. The sensible thing is the place where the invisible is captured in the visible.

But can we really *understand* this conjuncture? How is this compound of the visible and the invisible possible, without undermining all our positive conceptions of what it means to be visible and what it means to be invisibly? How can there be a compound of the visible with the invisible, if to be invisible is to be essence or signification, to exist in universality, in intemporal and aspatial ideality, and if to be visible is to be opaque quale, existing in the here and the now, and in itself, without transcendence, "a message at the same time indecipherable and evident, which one has or has not received, but of which, if one has received it, one knows all there is to know, and about which in the end there is nothing to say" (p. 131)?

To seriously show how the sensible thing exists between the absolute opacity of the sensuous quale and the absolute transparency of the essence, between the particular and the universal, it would be necessary to show a sensible matter which, in its very

1. See below, p. 4. Hereafter all page references to *The Visible and the Invisible* will be placed in parentheses directly following the quotation.

manner of occupying space and time, presides over space and time. It would be necessary to show a sense that is sensuous and a sensible matter that transcends itself, that is dimensional. But transcendental philosophy, dialectical philosophy, and intuitionist philosophy have rather endeavored to compose the sensible thing with our unreformed ideas of the visible and the invisible.

Thus the philosophy of reflection seeks an intrinsic understanding of the conjuncture of the visible and the invisible in the thing by exhibiting its constitution in a signifying act of the understanding. The transcendental reflection shows how the sense that is intuited is constituted in an act transcending the sense-data. It understands the sense-data to be to the essence in the sensible thing in the relation of sign to signified; then the understanding that constitutes the signified meaning *ipso facto* constitutes the sense-data as signs.

But the reflective analysis thus gives us the explanation of how there is constituted not the coherence and cohesion—the very matter or *flesh*—of the visible, but a pure *passage* from the sign to the signified, from the particular to the universal, from the order of opaque qualia to the order of limpid ideality. The visible thing is not this passage; its coherence is a cohesion, and it makes visible and not only comprehensible a depth of latent being.

It is the claim of the philosophy of negativity<sup>2</sup> that it alone rigorously and radically grounds a method of direct scrutiny of the sensible thing itself. It is a philosophy not of reflection but of vision (pp. 75 ff, 99 ff), and it renounces in principle every attempt to reconstruct the thing out of constitutive mental acts. It declares that the sole contribution of the seer is to provide—by auto-nihilation—the clearing, the void, the free space in which the thing can be posited and op-posed to the seer, that is, exhibit itself in its own positivity and objectivity. The negativity of the seer and the invisibility of the eyes are essential, for visibility occurs as the event of a clearing in which the light plays, about which a system of faces of the world phosphoresce.

The description of the being of the thing as massive plenitude, absolute positivity, self-identity, objectivity, is the result of this thought that posits the thing upon the ground of the nothingness provided by the non-being of the seer. This method “describes our factual situation with more penetration than had

2. Cf. Sartre.

ever before been done—and yet one retains the impression that this situation is being surveyed from above, and indeed it is . . .” (p. 87). For the analysis does not begin with the sensible thing itself in its own visibility, arising in relief in a field of latent being spread out in distance and in horizons surrounding and even enveloping the seer; rather the analysis is commanded by the meaning of being and the meaning of nothingness. But the concepts of pure Being and pure Nothingness are *constructa*, they are idealizations, and their meaning is held before the thought only because it is fixed in the positivity of language (p. 88). “Is not the experience of the thing and of the world precisely the ground that we need in order to think nothingness in any way whatever?” (p. 162)

And in fact in seeking to make the openness upon being absolute, the philosophy of negativity makes it unintelligible. If the seer is nothingness, the visible forthwith occupies this void with absolute plenitude and positivity. The absolute ontological distance from nothingness to being produces an absolute presence of being to nothingness. But our openness upon being is not this absolute proximity; openness in being occurs in the form of a world, that is, a field, a topography, where nothing visible shows itself without therewith hiding most of itself, and hiding more of the visible behind itself. What makes the visible an openness is this essential explorability, this depth and horizon-structure; to make of openness a “lake of nothingness” is to over-positivize the visible (pp. 67–68, 76–77) and make unintelligible what is being in degrees, in distance, in depth, and in difference.

And if the openness in being is a horizon-structure and not the production of void, then the seer and the visible need no longer be ontological opposites; the horizon includes the seer,<sup>3</sup> and the world remains horizon because “he who sees is of it and is in it” (p. 100). “The relation between what I see and I who see is not one of immediate or frontal contradiction; the things attract my look, my gaze caresses the things, it espouses their

3. “No more than are the sky or the earth is the horizon a collection of things held together, or a class name, or a logical possibility of conception, or a system of ‘potentiality of consciousness’: it is a new type of being, a being by porosity, pregnancy, or generality, and he before whom the horizon opens is caught up, included within it” (pp. 148–49).

contours and their reliefs, between it and them we catch sight of a complicity" (p. 76).

The extended critique of the philosophy of negativity, that is, of Sartre, may seem to occupy inordinately Merleau-Ponty's attention in the manuscript we have before us.<sup>4</sup> But in fact the strange failure of the philosophy of negativity to produce an account of the visible is decisive for Merleau-Ponty's own conception of philosophy. "The real is to be described, and not constructed or constituted," the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Perception* had explained, with simplicity.<sup>5</sup> But the philosophy that wanted only to empty out the subject of all constitutive power, to make of it a pure openness upon the thing, nonetheless deforms the thing and does not describe it. Positivism was not yet overcome when the *Phenomenology of Perception* showed that the sensible field cannot be reduced to the objective, as empiricism, as well as its intellectualist compensation, supposed; the positivist preconception of being recurs even in the philosophy of negativity, which, indeed, is its radical vindication (pp. 98–99). It is because the primordial sensible being lies definitively at a distance and is not a pure positivity that would come to obturate the gaze that philosophy cannot be pure intuition, pure openness. "The sensible is precisely that medium in which there can be *being* without it having to be posited; the sensible appearance of the sensible, the silent persuasion of the sensible is Being's unique way of manifesting itself without becoming positivity, without ceasing to be ambiguous and transcendent" (p. 214). Philosophy then is and remains interrogation<sup>6</sup>—"but

4. Merleau-Ponty here takes pains to correct some of the defects of his earlier reading of *Being and Nothingness* (cf. *Les Aventures de la dialectique* [Paris, 1955], Chap. V): the ontology of Sartre makes of the subject not a "nothingness in general," an unqualified spontaneity, a self-transparent constitutive freedom, but rather "determinate nothingness," qualified and replete with qualities, opaque to itself, lost in the things; what I *am* is a body and a situation (cf. especially pp. 52–57).

5. *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris, 1945), p. iv. [English translation by Colin Smith, *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York and London, 1962), p. x.]

6. Questioning is not an attitude first made possible on the judicative level with the inversion and negation that would come, into the untroubled positivity of the silent world, with language and grammar. On the contrary, "it is not only philosophy, it is first the gaze that questions the things" (p. 103).

neither expects nor receives an answer in the ordinary sense, because it is not the disclosing of a variable or of an unknown invariant that will satisfy this question, and *because the existing world exists in the interrogative mode*" (p. 103; italics added).

These conclusions are reinforced in the criticisms Merleau-Ponty addresses to intuitionist philosophy—Husserlian or Bergsonian. The one seeking an adequate apprehension of the essence, the other seeking the immediate presence of existence, in both cases being as horizon is excluded from consideration in advance: "These are two positivisms" (p. 127).

Philosophy conceived as essential insight is proclaimed to be a return to the things themselves. To study the thing itself would be to study *what it is*, that is, what structure the thing necessarily realizes when it is this thing. If the philosophy of negativity sought to intuit the thing against the abyss of nothingness, the philosophy of essences seeks to intuit the real as it is borne upon the positive structure of the possible. The intuition of this structure would bring the mind into possession of the essence as the pure ideal possibility which the existing thing accomplishes, or specifies, in a moment of time and at a spot of space.

In fact the "intuition" of essences is produced out of an imaginary variation performed on the primal topography of the visible. Precisely Being is visible as a theme for variation because the visible itself is not *in* time and *in* space, but not outside of them either, since it is what in the present announces and harbors an immense latent content of the past, the future, and the elsewhere (p. 114). The visible being that *occupies* the present does so then not with a plenary positivity, but with pregnancy and latency, caught up in "a system of equivalencies, a *Logos* of lines, lights, colors, reliefs, masses, a conceptless presentation of universal Being."<sup>7</sup> This *Logos* is not the system of positive essences which will be produced from it by abstraction; and the visible it articulates by segregation, modulation, gradation, is not a multiplicity of individual facts each occupying a time and a place in a plenary and univocal fashion—which will be drawn from it by counter-abstraction.

But if the "intuition" of essences is in fact a second operation which aims to put the mind in plenary possession of the ideality

7. *L'Oeil et l'esprit* (Paris, 1964), p. 71. [English translation by Carleton Dallery, *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston, Ill., 1964), p. 182.]

at the origin of the real, the Bergsonian intuition which seeks to come back into the immediate presence of the factual existences is equally second and expresses an equally positivist nostalgia for being. Being is occultated across the very spatio-temporal spread of its apparition, that is true; but what we need then to come into contact with its full spread is not a method of undoing the distances to achieve immediate presence and coincidence with it, but rather the "idea of proximity through distance, of intuition as auscultation or palpation in depth" (p. 128). We should need the theory of the Being that *is* in dehiscence. "The immediate is at the horizon, and must be thought as such; it is only by remaining at the distance that it remains itself" (p. 123).

### THE VISIBLE

NOT AN ASSEMBLAGE OF PARTICULARS each univocally occupying its *hic et nunc*, not a wandering troop of sensations nor a system constituted by ephemeral judgments (p. 123), not a set of objects whose being is fixed in the norms for objectivity, the visible is a landscape, a topography yet to be explored, uncultivated being still, *wild being* still. "True philosophy is to learn again to see the world"<sup>8</sup>—and yet how sophisticated is the phenomenological naïveté! Already the phenomenology of perception could be elaborated only across the conflict of intellectualism and empiricism;<sup>9</sup> now the new vision of the visible and the invisible is acquired not by avoiding the false paths of the philosophy of reflection, dialectical philosophy, and intuitionist philosophy, but rather by pursuing those very paths further still. There "we catch sight of the necessity of another operation besides the conversion to reflection, more fundamental than it, of a sort of *hyper-reflection* that would also take itself and the changes it introduces into the spectacle into account" (p. 38); likewise if the dialectic is "unstable" (p. 92), it is a *hyper-dialectic* we need, which recognizes that the statement of positive theses and negative antitheses does not yet yield a dialectical

8. *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. xvi. [Eng. trans., p. xx.]

9. Cf. J.-B. Pontalis, "Note sur le problème de l'inconscient chez Merleau-Ponty," in *Les Temps modernes*, No. 184-85 (Numéro spécial, 1961), p. 291, n. 9.

definition of being (p. 94); finally it is not intuition that the philosopher rejects—"On the contrary everything comes to pass as though he wished to put into words a certain silence he hearkens to within himself" (p. 125); beyond the naïve notion of intuition as the fulfillment of an empty intention by the plenary positivity of being, "we should have to return to this idea . . . of intuition as auscultation or palpation in depth . . ." (p. 128).

What being becomes visible about these paths of hyper-reflection, hyper-dialectic, intuition-palpation?

In his first work Merleau-Ponty had brought forward the notion of structure, of *Gestalt*, as a third notion between facticity and ideality, to name the manner of being proper to the sensible thing. But what, positively, is the *Gestalt*? To say that it is a whole that is not reducible to the sum of its constituent elements, a configuration that is more than the spatio-temporal juxtaposition of its parts, is to supply a negative, exterior designation (p. 204). And it is not yet to understand what makes of the *Gestalt* a sensible being: what makes the unity in it of sensuousness and sense.

"For me it is . . . transcendence that explains . . ." (p. 237). The sensible thing is transcendent: hitherto this has been taken to state the position of its being, but not the manner of its being: it would mean that the sensible thing is exterior to the being of the subject. Thus the account remains within a subject-object epistemology, and the sensible is assimilated to the objective. Merleau-Ponty, defining the thing as a "field being" and as a dimensional fact, unified with the unity of a style, seeks to exhibit transcendence as the manner of being of what becomes visible.<sup>10</sup>

The sensible thing is not *in* the here and *in* the now, but it is not intemporal and aspatial either, an ideality. It presides over a region, it is a field being.

When through the water's thickness I see the tiling at the bottom of a pool, I do not see it *despite* the water and the reflections there; I see it through them and because of them. If there were no distortions, no ripples of sunlight, if it were without this flesh that I saw the geometry of the tiles, then I would cease to see it *as it is*

10. "We have to pass from the thing (spatial or temporal) as identity, to the thing (spatial or temporal) as difference, i.e., as transcendence, i.e., as always 'behind,' beyond, far-off . . ." (p. 195)

and where it is—which is to say, beyond any identical, specific place. I cannot say that the water itself—the aqueous power, the sirupy and shimmering element—is *in* space; all this is not somewhere else either, but it is not in the pool. It inhabits it, it materializes itself there, yet it is not contained there; and if I raise my eyes toward the screen of cypresses where the web of reflections is playing, I cannot gainsay the fact that the water visits it, too, or at least sends into it, upon it, its active and living essence.<sup>11</sup>

The sensible thing is not in space, but, like a direction, is at work across space, presides over a system of oppositional relationships. It is not inserted in a pre-existing locus of space; it organizes a space of planes and fields about itself. Likewise its presence presents a certain contracted trajectory of time. It is for this that it occupies our vision, that it is not transparent like a sign that effaces before the signified. The sensible thing “stops up my view, that is, time and space extend beyond the visible present, and at the same time they are *behind* it, in depth, in hiding” (p. 113).

The unity of the thing is not that of a contingent cluster of particles, nor that of the ideal foreign to spatial and temporal dispersion; its unity is that of “a certain style, a certain manner of managing the domain of space and time over which it has competency, of pronouncing, of articulating that domain, of radiating about a wholly virtual center—in short a certain manner of being, in the active sense, a certain *Wesen*, in the sense that, says Heidegger, this word has when it is used as a verb” (p. 115).

The moving body gives us the primary analogon of what a style or scheme is. Walking is not a “repeatedly-compensated-for falling”; from the first step already a style of walking, a gait, is initiated, a rhythm of movement that propagates itself. The gesture of the hand is not a simple succession of spasms; from its inaugural phase it is a movement commanded by its final phase. And each gesture which thus accomplishes an ordered system of changes of position across a determined trajectory of time launches itself into a new trajectory of time; every gesture is by essence repeatable, tends to prolong itself into a motor habit. This generation of schemes of unity across time and space, this “instability instituted by the organism itself,” this “*fluctuation organized by it, and consequently dominated*” (p.

11. *L'Oeil et l'esprit*, pp. 70–71. [Eng. trans., p. 182.]

230), this auto-schematizing is the very essence of the living body.

And the things too come into presence, come to command a field of presence, by their style. They hold together like the body holds together. Their unity is neither the unity of pure assemblage nor the unity of a law; it is produced and reproduced as the “bringing of a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being” (p. 139). The style is that interior animation of the color,<sup>12</sup> that interior rhythm that assembles the forms and shadows of the rose (p. 174), that organized fluctuation that makes the thing arise as a relief upon a depth of being.<sup>13</sup> The thing is borne into presence by a scheme of contrasts that commands a constellation, that modulates a trajectory of time, and that makes it leave its place to come reverberate in the receptive sensitive flesh that perceives it. Its way of being is verbal, it is transcendence, its style is “nothing else than a brief, peremptory manner of giving in one sole something, in one sole tone of being, visions past, visions to come, by whole clusters.” The presence of the sensible thing is a presence by allusion (pp. 191–92, 200, 214, 229), and all perception is tele-perception (pp. 258, 273).<sup>14</sup>

Thus the “wild being,” the uncultivated and unconstituted being of the sensible, is not opacity, but dimensionality (p. 257). “What we call a visible is, we said, a quality pregnant with a texture, the surface of a depth, a cross-section upon a massive being, a grain or corpuscle borne by a wave of Being” (p. 136). Serial music, Merleau-Ponty points out (p. 218), discovers the ability of any tone in a series to function as an individual

12. “. . . a naked color, and in general a visible, is not a chunk of absolutely hard, indivisible being, offered all naked to a vision which would be only total or null, but it is rather a sort of straits between exterior horizons and interior horizons ever gaping open, something that comes to touch lightly and make resound at the distances diverse regions of the colored or visible world, a certain differentiation, an ephemeral modulation of this world—less a color or a thing, therefore, than a difference between things and colors, a momentary crystallization of colored being or of visibility” (p. 132).

13. “. . . this piece of wood is neither a collection of colors and tactile data, nor even their total *Gestalt*, but there emanates from it a sort of ligneous essence, these ‘sense-data’ modulate a certain theme or illustrate a certain style which is the wood itself.” *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 514. [Eng. trans., p. 450.]

14. Cf. *Signes* (Paris, 1960), p. 24. [English translation by Richard C. McLeary, *Signs* (Evanston, Ill., 1964), p. 16.]

sounded in a field and as the dominant, the field tone, the level at which the melody plays. In the very measure that a color occupies a here and a now it comes to command a field, begins to exist as dominant or color level. "With one sole movement it imposes itself as particular and ceases to be visible as particular" (pp. 217-18). "This becoming-neutral is not a change of the red into 'another color,' it is a modification of the red by its own duration (as the impact of a figure or a line on my vision tends to become dimensional, and to give it the value of an index of the curvature of space)" (p. 247). In the register of visibility every sensible thing is a universal-particular, every point is a pivot, every line a vector,<sup>15</sup> every color a level, every plane a horizon by transparency, every fact a category (p. 218).

"Perception is not first perception of *things*, but perception of *elements* . . . , of *rays of the world*, things which are dimensions, which are worlds . . ." (p. 218). Once we have understood that the thing is a *dimensional this*, we have already understood that the vision of the rose is already an introduction into rose-ness, into the *species* rose, into a family of like beings (p. 174)—not by an intellectual operation of generalization, but because to be introduced into a style of visible being is already to be introduced to the pregnancy of that style. And pregnancy, Merleau-Ponty tells us, means not only typicality, but also productivity, or generativity (p. 208)—not only the establishing of a type by "a certain manner of managing the domain of space over which it has competency" (p. 115), but generative power, "the equivalent of the cause of itself" (p. 208).

### THE INVISIBLE

IN RECOGNIZING TRANSCENDENCE, being-at-a-distance, being "always further on" (p. 217), as the very manner of being of the visible, we come to recognize that the visible is not a multitude of spatio-temporal individuals that would have to be connected and combined by a mind constitutive of relations; it is a field, a relief, a topography unfolding by differentiation, by segregation, which holds together not by laws, but "through the reflections, shadows, levels, and horizons between things (which

are not things and are not nothing, but on the contrary mark out by themselves the fields of possible variation in the same thing and in the same world)." <sup>16</sup> And once we conceive the "verbal essence" of the visible, the style it promotes across time and space and across all registers of sensoriality, then we understand that the visible holds together of itself, coheres into things. And we no longer need an ideal unity, intuited by and finally constituted by the mind, in order to account for the unity of sense that the sensible thing embodies.

Has Merleau-Ponty not then banished the ideal from the sensible? Is the ideal perhaps to be relegated to the cultural, the linguistic order only?

Certainly we cannot confine the ideal to the order of language and culture without destroying the very possibility of speaking of the visible, of brute being. If we speak about the *things*, it is because the ideal order expressed in language is already prefigured in the things themselves; but if we *speak* about the things it is because what we express is prefigured but not yet accomplished in their silence (pp. 4, 102-3, 125-27, 152-55). But surely it is true that the new morphology of the visible we acquire from Merleau-Ponty's work does implicate a new conception of the ideal, which cannot be defined by opposition to the sensible, nor taken as a second order of positive entities composed in the things (the "positivist bric-a-brac" of concepts, relations, essences . . . [p. 235]).

In the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty often invoked the immanent logic at work in the sensible field, which governs the relief of the things in sizes and shapes and their staggering out in depth, which commands the distribution of tone and texture and grain in the things and holds all things together in a system. This wild *Logos* was shown to be not a set of principles or laws, but rather a system of levels posited in the sensible field by our body in its primal assuming of position before the tasks of the world. Thus to understand the distribution of things in proximity and in distance, or the differentiation of color in the visible field, it was necessary to discern the spatial levels and the level of illumination. Like the light, these levels and dimensions, this system of lines of force, are not *what* we see; they are that *with which*, *according to which*, we see.

15. Cf. *L'Oeil et l'esprit*, pp. 72-77. [Eng. trans., pp. 182-84.]

16. *Signes*, p. 202. [Eng. trans., p. 160.]

This invisible piling upon which the visible is set is therefore not a set of representations or bonds constituted by a priori operations of a mind, nor even a set of positive configurations which would be apprehended, possessed by a mind, converted into "objects of thought." On the contrary to see is to see with, according to the invisible axes and pivots, levels and lines of force of the visible; we are guided by them, *possessed* by them (p. 151). Their authority, their fascinating, indestructible power (p. 150), is precisely due to the fact that here "to comprehend is not to constitute in intellectual immanence, that to comprehend is to apprehend by coexistence, laterally, *by the style*, and thereby to attain at once the far-off reaches of this style . . ." (p. 188).

For the discernment of this invisible filigree everywhere operative in the visible, for the description of this "carnal ideality" of light, of a melody, of relief, of physical voluptuousness, Merleau-Ponty sends us to Proust; but we could also turn to "Eye and Mind," where the "operative essence" of depth, of the line, of the contour, the movement, and the color are analyzed with incomparable virtuosity by Merleau-Ponty himself.

"To see is as a matter of principle to see further than one sees, to reach a being in latency."<sup>17</sup> There is a prejudicative *Logos* that does not emerge into view before eidetic insight or abstraction—that does not emerge into view at all, that remains latent, even in language.

With the first vision, the first contact, the first pleasure, there is initiation, that is, not the positing of a content, but the opening of a dimension that can never again be closed, the establishment of a level in terms of which every other experience will henceforth be situated. The idea is this level, this dimension. It is therefore not a *de facto* invisible, like an object hidden behind another, and not an absolute invisible, that would have nothing to do with the visible. Rather it is the invisible *of* this world, that which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible, its own and interior possibility, the Being of this being (p. 151).

This *Logos*, which we do not constitute, which utters itself in us, is also what is at work in our language. Like the visible, language too is a system of differences, which, when cast into

17. *Signes*, p. 29. [Eng. trans., p. 20.]

operation, when it is operative speech, can capture in its own lines of force and movement something invisible, which is not positive thought content, but is rather an *unthought* (pp. 118–19). Merleau-Ponty was preparing a separate text, to be entitled *Introduction to the Prose of the World*,<sup>18</sup> to explore the divergencies, the disequilibriums, the reverberations back over itself that initiate and animate speech. It would explore not the cultivated language that employs a system of explicit relations between signs and meanings, but the operative language, that of literature, of poetry, of conversation, and of philosophy, which possesses meaning less than it is possessed by it, does not speak of it, but speaks *it*, or speaks *according to it*, or lets it speak and be spoken within us, breaks through our present (p. 118). This language "is open upon the things, called forth by the voices of silence, and continues an effort of articulation which is the Being of every being" (pp. 126–27).

Merleau-Ponty believed that the study of this wild *Logos*, not constituted by a mind and not consisting of positive idealities, was destined to renew our understanding of the imaginary, which is not simply the production of mental images, but the "baroque" proliferation of generating axes for visibility in the duplicity of the real. ". . . [T]he 'great unpenetrated and discouraging night of our soul' is not empty, is not 'nothingness'; but these entities, these domains, these worlds that line it, people it, and whose presence it feels like the presence of someone in the dark, have been acquired only through its commerce with the visible, to which they remain attached" (p. 150). In "Eye and Mind" Merleau-Ponty showed how these axes and schemes for visibility, captured in our flesh, were at the origin of that productive and motor imagination that moves the hand of the painter;<sup>19</sup> in the present text we find several working notes (pp. 180, 189–90, 232, 255, 262–63, 269–70) that claim that the invisible substructure of the visible is the key to the unconscious structure of consciousness.<sup>20</sup> "To see is as a matter of principle to see further than one sees, to reach a being in latency."

18. A fragment from this text was published in the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, LXXII, No. 2 (April–June, 1967), 139–53.

19. Cf. particularly pp. 22 ff. [Eng. trans., pp. 164 ff.]

20. For Merleau-Ponty's quite critical attitude with regard to his own earlier understanding of the unconscious in *The Structure of*

## THE FLESH

THE CONCEPT OF FLESH emerges as the ultimate notion of Merleau-Ponty's thought; it is, he says, an uncomposed notion thinkable by itself (p. 140), and a prototype for Being universally.

The flesh, a concept of "what has no name in any philosophy" (pp. 139, 147), is not just a new term for what the *Phenomenology of Perception* (but already Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*) brought to light as the set of non-objective phenomena by which the subject's own corporeity is given to him as his "lived body" or "I-body," distinguished from his objective body, appearing publicly as a thing among things of the world. The flesh is the body inasmuch as it is the visible seer, the audible hearer, the tangible touch—the sensitive sensible: inasmuch as in it is accomplished an equivalence of sensibility and sensible thing.

The flesh is for itself the *exemplar sensible*. It is so because its manner of being is elemental:<sup>21</sup> "to designate it we should need the old term 'element' . . . in the sense of a *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being" (p. 139). This teaching was prepared in the *Phenomenology of Perception* especially in the analysis of the corporeal schema, or postural model. The body is able to move itself because it has an awareness of itself and of its situation in the world; this awareness is the postural schema. But the postural schema is not a particular image; it rather gives the body to itself as an "I can," as a system of powers organized according to transposable schemes for movement. The continual auto-production of schemes in the body's mobilizing of itself "gives our life the form of generality and prolongs our personal acts into stable dispositions."<sup>22</sup> Thus "my body is to the

*Behavior and Phenomenology of Perception*, see his Preface to A. Hesnard, *L'Oeuvre de Freud* (Paris, 1960).

21. "The flesh is not matter, in the sense of corpuscles of being that would add up or continue on one another to form beings" (p. 139).

22. *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 171. [Eng. trans., p. 146.]

greatest extent what every thing is: a *dimensional this . . . a sensible that is dimensional of itself*" (p. 260).

It is in this elemental being of the flesh that the secret of sensibility is to be sought. The positivist conception of being, which preconceives being as objectivity posited before a subject, requires that the subject free a clearing in the density of being, about which the visible can be spread. Consequently the positivist conception of the visible implicates a negativist conception of the seer, which must be an incorporeal and nonsensorial knowing agency, an immaterial spirit, finally a pure clearing, a nothingness. In destroying the positivist conception of being we no longer think being posited against the ground of nothingness, and come to think the visible exhibited along the invisible dimensions, the levels, the pilings of the world; we discover a world in degrees, in distance, in depth, and in difference. "The perceived world . . . is the ensemble of my body's routes and not a multitude of spatio-temporal individuals" (p. 247). What makes then of the flesh a seer and of being a visibility is not the production of a clearing by nihilation but an elemental event by which the flesh captures the lines of force of the world, brings itself up to the levels about which visibility is modulated, rises upright before vertical being. This inaugural advent of sensibility in one sensible thing was already discerned, in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, in the study of the light that is not something seen but is that with which, or according to which, one sees: what inaugurates vision of things is the elemental alliance with the invisible light. In like manner what inaugurates touch in a tangible thing is not the production of the absolute untouchable void (for we cannot conceive of a being itself intangible that could touch, just as, after all, the only seer known to us is visible), but rather the capture in a hand of that movement and tempo that "effect the forming of tactile phenomena, as light delineates the configuration of a visible surface."<sup>23</sup>

The things can solicit the flesh without leaving their places because they are transcendencies, rays of the world, each promoting a singular style of being across time and space; and the flesh can capture in itself the allusive, schematic presence of the things because it is itself elemental being, self-positing posture, self-moving motion adjusting itself to the routes and levels and

23. *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 364. [Eng. trans., p. 315.]

axes of the visible. This intertwining, this chiasm effected across the substance of the flesh is the inaugural event of visibility.

It is then no incomprehensible conjuncture that the only seer known to us is itself visible (p. 137), and no mystery that the body has two sides, one "phenomenal," the other "objective." For "he who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it, unless he *is of it* . . ." (pp. 134-35); "a mind could not be captured by its representations, it would rebel against this insertion into the visible which is essential to the seer" (p. 139). The seer is not a gap, a clearing, in the fabric of the visible; there is no hole in the weave of the visible where I am; the visible is one continuous fabric, since inside of me there are only "shadows stuffed with organs"—more of the visible" (p. 138). The manifest visibility of the world closes in over itself across the zone of latent visibility of my flesh. "There really is inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration in Being . . ." <sup>24</sup>

As translator of this book, I am indebted to Editions Gallimard for their permission to undertake this work. It is a pleasure to express my gratitude to Madame Merleau-Ponty for her kind encouragement and to M. Claude Lefort for his patient and generous help in the interpretation of the French manuscript.

ALPHONSO LINGIS

24. *L'Oeil et l'esprit*, pp. 31-32. [Eng. trans., p. 167. The translation has been slightly altered.]

## The Visible and Nature: Philosophical Interrogation

# 1 / Reflection and Interrogation

## THE PERCEPTUAL FAITH AND ITS OBSCURITY<sup>1</sup>

WE SEE THE THINGS THEMSELVES, the world is what we see: formulae of this kind express a faith common to the natural man and the philosopher—the moment he opens his eyes; they refer to a deep-seated set of mute “opinions” implicated in our lives. But 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.

What Saint Augustine said of time—that it is perfectly familiar to each, but that none of us can explain it to the others—must be said of the world. [Ceaselessly the philosopher finds himself]<sup>2</sup> obliged to reinspect and redefine the most well-grounded notions, to create new ones, with new words to designate them, to undertake a true reform of the understanding—at whose term the evidence of the world, which seemed indeed to be the clearest of truths, is supported by the seemingly most sophisticated thoughts, before which the natural man now no longer recognizes where he stood. Whence the age-old ill-humor against

1. EDITOR: Opposite the title of the section, the author notes: “Notion of faith to be specified. It is not faith in the sense of decision but in the sense of what is before any position, animal and [?] faith.”

2. EDITOR: “Ceaselessly the philosopher finds himself . . .”: these words, which we introduce to give sense to the following sentences, were the first words of a sentence-body entirely erased by the author.

philosophy is reanimated, the grievance always brought against it that it reverses the roles of the clear and the obscure. The fact that the philosopher claims to speak in the very name of the naïve evidence of the world, that he refrains from adding anything to it, that he limits himself to drawing out all its consequences, does not excuse him; on the contrary he dispossesses [humanity]<sup>3</sup> only the more completely, inviting it to think of itself as an enigma.

This is the way things are and nobody can do anything about it. It is at the same time true that the world is *what we see* and that, nonetheless, we must learn to see it—first in the sense that we must match this vision with knowledge, take possession of it, *say what we* and what *seeing* are, act therefore as if we knew nothing about it, as if here we still had everything to learn. But philosophy is not a lexicon, it is not concerned with “word-meanings,” it does not seek a verbal substitute for the world we see, it does not transform it into something said, it does not install itself in the order of the said or of the written as does the logician in the proposition, the poet in the word, or the musician in the music. It is the things themselves, from the depths of their silence, that it wishes to bring to expression. If the philosopher questions, and hence feigns ignorance of the world and of the vision of the world which are operative and take form continually within him, he does so precisely in order to make them speak, because he believes in them and expects from them all his future science. The questioning here is not a beginning of negation, a perhaps put in the place of being. It is for philosophy the only way to conform itself with the vision we have in fact, to correspond with what, in that vision, provides for thought, with the paradoxes of which that vision is made, the only way to adjust itself to those figured enigmas, the thing and the world, whose massive being and truth teem with impossible details.

For after all, sure as it is that I see my table, that my vision

3. EDITOR: “Dispossesses humanity” is doubtless to be understood. These words belong to the last part of the preceding sentence, erased by the author, and which we reproduce here between brackets: “. . . the grievance always brought against it that it reverses the roles of the clear and the obscure [and that it arrogates to itself the role of making humanity live in a state of alienation, in the most complete alienation, the philosopher claiming to understand humanity better than it understands itself].”

terminates in it, that it holds and stops my gaze with its insurmountable density, as sure even as it is that when, seated before my table, I think of the Pont de la Concorde, I am not then in my thoughts but am at the Pont de la Concorde, and finally sure as it is that at the horizon of all these visions or quasi-visions it is the world itself I inhabit, the natural world and the historical world, with all the human traces of which it is made—still as soon as I attend to it this conviction is just as strongly contested, by the very fact that this vision is *mine*. We are not so much thinking here of the age-old argument from dreams, delirium, or illusions, inviting us to consider whether what we see is not “false.” For to do so the argument makes use of that faith in the world it seems to be unsettling: we would not know even what the false is, if there were not times when we had distinguished it from the true. The argument therefore postulates the world in general, the true in itself; this is secretly invoked in order to disqualify our perceptions and cast them pell-mell back into our “interior life” along with our dreams, in spite of all observable differences, for the sole reason that our dreams were, at the time, as convincing as they—forgetting that the “falsity” of dreams cannot be extended to perceptions since it appears only relative to perceptions and that if we are to be able to speak of falsity, we do have to have experiences of truth. Valid against naïveté, against the idea of a perception that would plunge forth to surprise the things beyond all experience, as the light draws them from the night wherein they pre-existed, the argument does not [elucidate?]; it is marked with this same naïveté itself, since it equalizes the perception and the dream only by setting opposite them a Being that would be in itself only. If, however, as the argument, in the measure that it has validity, shows, we must completely reject this phantasm, then the intrinsic, descriptive differences between the dream and the perceived take on ontological value. And we answer Pyrrhonism sufficiently by showing that there is a difference of structure and, as it were, of grain between the perception or true vision, which gives rise to an open series of concordant explorations, and the dream, which is not *observable* and, upon examination, is almost nothing but blanks. To be sure, this does not terminate the problem of our access to the world; on the contrary it is only beginning. For there remains the problem of how we can be under the illusion of seeing what we do not see, how the rags of the dream can, before the dreamer, be worth the

close-woven fabric of the true world, how the unconsciousness of not having observed can, in the fascinated man, take the place of the consciousness of having observed. If one says that the void of the imaginary remains forever what it is, is never equivalent to the plenum of the perceived and never gives rise to the *same* certitude, that it is *not taken to be worth* the perceived, that the sleeping man has lost every reference mark, every model, every canon of the clear and the articulate, and that one sole particle of the perceived world introduced in it would instantaneously dissipate the enchantment, the fact remains that if we can lose our reference marks *unknown to ourselves* we are never sure of *having* them when we think we have them; if we can withdraw from the world of perception without knowing it, nothing proves to us that we are ever in it, nor that the observable is ever entirely observable, nor that it is made of another fabric than the dream. Then, the difference between perception and dream not being absolute, one is justified in counting them both among "our experiences," and it is above perception itself that we must seek the guarantee and the sense of its ontological function. We will stake out that route, which is that of the philosophy of reflection (*la philosophie réflexive*), when it opens. But it begins well beyond the Pyrrhonian arguments; by themselves they would deter us from any elucidation, since they refer vaguely to the idea of a Being wholly in itself and by contrast count the perceived and the imaginary indiscriminately among our "states of consciousness." At bottom, Pyrrhonism shares the illusions of the naïve man. It is the naïveté that rends itself asunder in the night. Between Being in itself and the "interior life" it does not even catch sight of the *problem of the world*. Whereas it is toward that problem that we are making our way. What interests us is not the reasons one can have to consider the existence of the world "uncertain"—as if one already knew what to exist is and as if the whole question were to apply this concept appropriately. For us the essential is to know precisely what the being of the world means. Here we must presuppose nothing—neither the naïve idea of being in itself, therefore, nor the correlative idea of a being of representation, of a being for the consciousness, of a being for man: these, along with the being of the world, are all notions that we have to rethink with regard to our experience of the world. We have to reformulate the sceptical arguments outside of every ontological preconception and reformulate them

precisely so as to know what world-being, thing-being, imaginary being, and conscious being are.

Now that I have in perception the thing itself, and not a representation, I will only add that the thing is at the end of my gaze and, in general, at the end of my exploration. Without assuming anything from what the science of the body of the other can teach me, I must acknowledge that the table before me sustains a singular relation with my eyes and my body: I see it only if it is within their radius of action; above it there is the dark mass of my forehead, beneath it the more indecisive contour of my cheeks—both of these visible at the limit and capable of hiding the table, as if my vision of the world itself were formed from a certain point of the world. What is more, my movements and the movements of my eyes make the world vibrate—as one rocks a dolmen with one's finger without disturbing its fundamental solidity. With each flutter of my eyelashes a curtain lowers and rises, though I do not think for an instant of imputing this eclipse to the things themselves; with each movement of my eyes that sweep the space before me the things suffer a brief torsion, which I also ascribe to myself; and when I walk in the street with eyes fixed on the horizon of the houses, the whole of the setting near at hand quivers with each footfall on the asphalt, then settles down in its place. I would express what takes place badly indeed in saying that here a "subjective component" or a "corporeal constituent" comes to cover over the things themselves: it is not a matter of another layer or a veil that would have come to pose itself between them and me. The stirring of the "appearance" does not disrupt the evidence of the thing—any more than monocular images interfere when my two eyes operate in synergy. The binocular perception is not made up of two monocular perceptions surmounted; it is of another order. The monocular images *are* not in the same sense that the thing perceived with both eyes *is*. They are phantoms and it is the real; they are pre-things and it is the thing: they vanish when we pass to normal vision and re-enter into the thing as into their daylight truth. They are too far from having its density to enter into competition with it: they are only a certain divergence<sup>4</sup> from the imminent true vision, absolutely

4. TRANSLATOR: *Ecart*. This recurrent term will have to be rendered variously by "divergence," "spread," "deviation," "separation."

bereft of its [prestiges?] and therefore drafts for or residues of the true vision, which accomplishes them by reabsorbing them. The monocular images cannot be *compared* with the synergic perception: one cannot put them side by side; it is necessary to choose between the thing and the floating pre-things. We can effect the passage by *looking*, by awakening to the world; we cannot witness it as spectators. It is not a *synthesis*; it is a metamorphosis by which the appearances are instantaneously stripped of a value they owed merely to the absence of a true perception. Thus in perception we witness the miracle of a totality that surpasses what one thinks to be its conditions or its parts, that from afar holds them under its power, as if they existed only on its threshold and were destined to lose themselves in it. But if it is to displace them as it does, it is necessary that the perception maintain in its depth all their corporeal ties: it is by *looking*, it is still with my eyes that I arrive at the true thing, with these same eyes that a moment ago gave me monocular images—now they simply function *together* and as though *for good*. Thus the relation between the things and my body is decidedly singular: it is what makes me sometimes remain in appearances, and it is also what sometimes brings me to the things themselves; it is what produces the buzzing of appearances, it is also what silences them and casts me fully into the world. Everything comes to pass as though my power to reach the world and my power to entrench myself in phantasms only came one with the other; even more: as though the access to the world were but the other face of a withdrawal and this retreat to the margin of the world a servitude and another expression of my natural power to enter into it. The world is what I perceive, but as soon as we examine and express its absolute proximity, it also becomes, inexplicably, irremediable distance. The “natural” man holds on to both ends of the chain, thinks *at the same time* that his perception enters into the things and that it is formed this side of his body. Yet coexist as the two convictions do without difficulty in the exercise of life, once reduced to theses and to propositions they destroy one another and leave us in confusion.

What if I took not only my own views of myself into account but also the other's views of himself and of me? Already my body as stage director of my perception has shattered the illusion of a coinciding of my perception with the things themselves. Between

them and me there are henceforth hidden powers, that whole vegetation of possible phantasms which it holds in check only in the fragile act of the look. No doubt, it is not entirely my body that perceives: I know only that it can prevent me from perceiving, that I cannot perceive without its permission; the moment perception comes my body effaces itself before it and never does the perception grasp the body in the act of perceiving.\* If my left hand is touching my right hand, and if I should suddenly wish to apprehend with my right hand the work of my left hand as it touches, this reflection of the body upon itself always miscarries at the last moment: the moment I feel my left hand with my right hand, I correspondingly cease touching my right hand with my left hand. But this last-minute failure does not drain all truth from that presentiment I had of being able to touch myself touching: my body does not perceive, but it is as if it were built around the perception that dawns through it; through its whole internal arrangement, its sensory-motor circuits, the return ways that control and release movements, it is, as it were, prepared for a self-perception, even though it is never itself that is perceived nor itself that perceives.<sup>5</sup> Before the science of the body (which involves the relation with the other) the experience of my flesh as gangue of my perception has taught me that perception does not come to birth just anywhere, that it emerges in the recess of a body. The other men who see “as we do,” whom we see seeing and who see us seeing, present us with but an amplification of the same paradox. If it is already difficult to say that my perception, such as I live it, goes unto the things themselves, it is indeed impossible to grant access to the world to the others' perception; and, by a sort of backlash, they also refuse me this access which I deny to them. For where the others (or myself seen by them) are concerned, one must not only say that the thing is caught up by the vortex of exploratory movements and perceptual behaviors and drawn inward. If perhaps there is for me no sense in saying that my perception and the thing it aims at are “in my head” (it is certain only that they are “*not elsewhere*”), I cannot help putting the other, and the perception he has, *behind his body*. More exactly, the thing perceived by the

\* The *ἕνως κόσμος* like the monocular image: it is not interposed, isolated, but it is not nothing.

5. TRANSLATOR: . . . *même si ce n'est jamais lui qu'il perçoit ou lui qui le perçoit.*

other is doubled: there is *the one he perceives*, God knows where, and there is the one I see, outside of his body, and which I call the true thing—as he calls true thing the table *he sees* and consigns to the category of appearances the one I see. The true things and the perceiving bodies are this time no longer in the ambiguous relation which a moment ago we found between *my things* and *my body*. Now the true things and the perceiving bodies, whether close-up or distant, are in any case juxtaposed in the world, and perception, which perhaps is not “in my head,” is nowhere else than in my body as a thing of the world. From now on it seems impossible to remain in the inner certitude of him who perceives: seen from without perception glides over the things and does not touch them. At most one will say, if one wishes to admit the perception’s own perspective upon itself, that each of us has a private world: these private worlds are “worlds” only for their titulars; they are not the world. The sole world, that is, the unique world, would be a *κοινος κόσμος*, and our perceptions do not open upon it.

But upon what then do they open? How are we to name, to describe, such as I see it from my place, that *lived by another* which yet for me is not nothing, since I believe in the other—and that which furthermore concerns me myself, since it is there as another’s view upon me?\* Here is this well-known countenance, this smile, these modulations of voice, whose style is as familiar to me as myself. Perhaps in many moments of my life the other is for me reduced to this spectacle, which can be a charm. But

\* Take up again: Yet, just as above the monocular phantasms could not compete with the thing, so also now one could describe the private worlds as divergence with respect to the *world itself*. How I represent the lived by another to myself: as a sort of duplication of my own lived experience. The marvel of this experience: I can count on what I see, which is in close correspondence with what the other sees (everything attests to this, in fact: we really do see the same thing and the thing itself)—and yet at the same time I never rejoin the other’s lived experience. It is in the world that we rejoin one another. Every attempt to reinstate the illusion of the “thing itself” is in fact an attempt to return to my imperialism and to the value of *my thing*. Therefore it does not bring us out of solipsism: it is a new proof of solipsism.

c) Consequences: underlying obscurity of the natural idea of truth or “intelligible world.”

Science will only prolong this attitude: objectivist ontology which undermines itself and collapses under analysis.

should the voice alter, should the unwonted appear in the score of the dialogue, or, on the contrary, should a response respond too well to what I thought without having really said it—and suddenly there breaks forth the evidence that yonder also, minute by minute, life is being lived: somewhere behind those eyes, behind those gestures, or rather before them, or again about them, coming from I know not what double ground of space, another private world shows through, through the fabric of my own, and for a moment I live in it; I am no more than the respondent for the interpellation that is made to me. To be sure, the least recovery of attention persuades me that this other who invades me is made only of my own substance: how could I conceive, precisely as *his*, *his* colors, *his* pain, *his* world, except as in accordance with the colors I see, the pains I have had, the world wherein I live? But at least my private world has ceased to be mine only; it is now the instrument which another plays, the dimension of a generalized life which is grafted onto my own.

But at the very moment that I think I share the life of another, I am rejoining it only in its ends, its exterior poles. It is in the world that we communicate, through what, in our life, is articulate. It is from this lawn before me that I think I catch sight of the impact of the green on the vision of another, it is through the music that I enter into his musical emotion, it is the thing itself that opens unto me the access to the private world of another. But the thing itself, we have seen, is always for me the thing that *I see*. The intervention of the other does not resolve the internal paradox of my perception: it adds to it this other enigma: of the propagation of my own most secret life in another—another enigma, but yet the same one, since, from all the evidence, it is only through the world that I can leave myself. It is therefore indeed true that the “private worlds” communicate, that each of them is given to its incumbent as a variant of one common world. The communication makes us the witnesses of one sole world, as the synergy of our eyes suspends them on one unique thing. But in both cases, the certitude, entirely irresistible as it may be, remains absolutely obscure; we can live it, we can neither think it nor formulate it nor set it up in theses. Every attempt at elucidation brings us back to the dilemmas.

And it is this unjustifiable certitude of a sensible world common to us that is the seat of truth within us. That a child perceives before he thinks, that he begins by putting his dreams

in the things, his thoughts in the others, forming with them, as it were, one block of common life wherein the perspectives of each are not yet distinguished—these genetic facts cannot be simply ignored by philosophy in the name of the exigencies of the intrinsic analysis. Thought cannot ignore its apparent history, if it is not to install itself beneath the whole of our experience, in a pre-empirical order where it would no longer merit its name; it must put to itself the problem of the genesis of its own meaning. It is in terms of its intrinsic meaning and structure that the sensible world is “older” than the universe of thought, because the sensible world is visible and relatively continuous, and because the universe of thought, which is invisible and contains gaps, constitutes at first sight a whole and has its truth only on condition that it be supported on the canonical structures of the sensible world. If we reconstitute the way in which our experiences, according to their ownmost meaning, depend on one another, and if, in order to better lay bare the essential relations of dependency, we try to break them apart in our thought, we come to realize that all that for us is called thought requires that distance from oneself, that initial openness which a field of vision and a field of future and of past are for us. . . . In any case, since we are here only trying to take a first look at our natural certitudes, there is no doubt that, in what concerns the mind and truth, they rest on the primary stratum of the sensible world and that our assurance of being in the truth is one with our assurance of being in the world. We speak and we understand speech long before learning from Descartes (or rediscovering for ourselves) that thought is our reality. We learn to meaningfully handle language (*language*), in which we install ourselves, long before learning from linguistics the intelligible principles upon which our tongue (*langue*) and every tongue are “based” (supposing that it does teach them). Our experience of the true, when it is not immediately reducible to that of the thing we see, is at first not distinct from the tensions that arise between the others and ourselves, and from their resolution. As the thing, as the other, the true dawns through an emotional and almost carnal experience, where the “ideas”—the other’s and our own—are rather traits of his physiognomy and of our own, are less understood than welcomed or spurned in love or hatred. To be sure, there are motifs, quite abstract categories, that function

very precociously in this wild<sup>6</sup> thought, as the extraordinary anticipations of adult life in childhood show sufficiently; and one can say that the whole of man is already there in his infancy. The child understands well beyond what he knows how to say, responds well beyond what he could define, and this after all is as true of the adult. A genuine conversation gives me access to thoughts that I did not know myself capable of, that I *was* not capable of, and sometimes I feel myself *followed* in a route unknown to myself which my words, cast back by the other, are in the process of tracing out for me. To suppose here that an *intelligible world* sustains the exchange would be to take a name for a solution—and furthermore it would be to grant us what we are maintaining: that it is by borrowing from the world structure that the universe of truth and of thought is constructed for us. When we want to express strongly the consciousness we have of a truth, we find nothing better than to invoke a *τόπος νοητός* that would be common to minds or to men, as the sensible world is common to the sensible bodies. And this is not only an analogy: it is the same world that contains our bodies and our minds, provided that we understand by world not only the sum of things that fall or could fall under our eyes, but also the locus of their compossibility, the invariable style they observe, which connects our perspectives, permits transition from one to the other, and—whether in describing a detail of the landscape or in coming to agreement about an invisible truth—makes us feel we are two witnesses capable of hovering over<sup>7</sup> the same true object, or at least of exchanging our situations relative to it, as we can exchange our standpoints in the visible world in the strict sense. But here again, more than ever, the naïve certitude of the world, the anticipation of an intelligible world, is as weak when it wishes to convert itself into theses as it is strong in practice. As long as we are dealing with the visible, a mass of facts comes to support it: beyond the divergence of the witnesses it is often easy

6. TRANSLATOR: *Savage*: wild in the sense of uncultivated, uncultured. There is doubtless an allusion to Claude Lévi-Strauss’s *The Savage Mind* (*La Pensée sauvage*) in the term.

7. TRANSLATOR: *Survoler*. Merleau-Ponty likes to call the unsituated point of view of objectivist thought a *pensée de survol*—a “high-altitude thinking” (as Benita Eisler translates in John-Paul Sartre’s *Situations* [New York, 1965], p. 229).

to re-establish the unity and concordance of the world. But as soon as one goes beyond the circle of *instituted* opinions, which are undivided among us as are the Madeleine or the Palais de Justice, much less thoughts than monuments of our historical landscape, as soon as one reaches the true, that is, the invisible, it seems rather that each man inhabits his own islet, without there being transition from one to the other, and we should rather be astonished that sometimes men come to agreement about anything whatever. For after all each of them has begun by being a fragile mass of living jelly, and it is already a great deal that they would have taken the same route of ontogenesis; it is still more of a wonder that all, from the bottom of their retreats, would have let themselves be caught up by the same social functioning and the same language; but, when it comes to using these according to their own wills and to saying what no one sees, neither the type of the species nor that of the society guarantees that they should come to compatible propositions. When one thinks of the mass of contingencies that can alter both, nothing is more improbable than the extrapolation that treats the universe of the truth as one world also, without fissures and without impossibles.

#### SCIENCE PRESUPPOSES THE PERCEPTUAL FAITH AND DOES NOT ELUCIDATE IT

ONE MIGHT BE TEMPTED to say that these insoluble antinomies belong to the confused universe of the immediate, lived experience, or the vital man, which by definition is without truth, that hence we must forget them until the sole rigorous knowledge, science, comes to explain these phantasms with which we are troubling ourselves by their conditions and from without. The true is neither the thing that I see, nor the other man whom I also see with my eyes, nor finally that total unity of the sensible world and, at the limit, of the intelligible world which we were presently trying to describe. The true is the *objective*, is what I have succeeded in determining by measurement, or more generally by the *operations* that are authorized by the variables or by the entities I have defined relative to an order of facts. Such determinations owe nothing to our *contact* with the things: they express an effort of approximation that would

have no meaning with regard to the lived experience, since the lived is to be taken as such and cannot also be considered "in itself." Thus science began by excluding all the predicates that come to the things from our encounter with them. The exclusion is however only provisional: when it will have learned to invest it, science will little by little reintroduce what it first put aside as subjective; but it will integrate it as a particular case of the relations and objects that define the world for science. Then the world will close in over itself, and, except for what within us thinks and builds science, that impartial spectator that inhabits us, we will have become parts or moments of the Great Object.

We will too often have to return to the multiple variants of this illusion to deal with them now. Here we have to state only what is necessary to rule out the objection of principle that would stop our research at the start: that is, summarily, that the *κοσμοθεωρῶς* capable of constructing or of reconstructing the existing world with an indefinite series of its own operations, far from dissipating the obscurities of our naïve faith in the world, is on the contrary its most dogmatic expression, presupposes it, maintains itself only by virtue of that faith. During the two centuries that it pursued its task of objectification without difficulty, physics was able to believe that it was simply following out the articulations of the world and that the physical object in itself pre-existed science. But today, when the very rigor of its description obliges physics to recognize as ultimate physical beings in full right relations between the observer and the observed, determinations that have meaning only for a certain situation of the observer, it is the ontology of the *κοσμοθεωρῶς* and of the Great Object correlative to it that figures as a prescientific preconception. Yet it is so natural that the physicist continues to think of himself as an Absolute Mind before the pure object and to count also as truths in themselves the very statements that express the interdependence of the whole of the observable with a situated and incarnate physicist. The formula that permits one to pass from one real perspective on astronomical spaces to another and which, being true of all of them, goes beyond the *de facto* situation of the physicist who speaks, does not, however, surpass it unto an absolute knowledge: for it has meaning in physics only when tallied with observations and inserted into a life of cognitions which, for their part, are always situated. What permits the joining together of views which are

all perspective is not a view of the universe; it is only the methodic usage. If we give to that formula the value of an absolute Knowledge, if, for example, we seek in it the ultimate and exhaustive meaning of time and space, we do so because the pure operation of science here takes up for its own profit our certitude, which is much older than it and much less clear, of having access "to the things themselves" or of having an absolute power to survey the world from above.

When it gained access to domains that are not naturally given to man—to astronomical spaces or microphysical realities—the more inventiveness in the wielding of algorithm science has exhibited, the more conservative it has shown itself to be in what concerns theory of knowledge. Truths that should not have left its idea of Being unchanged are—at the cost of great difficulties of expression and thought—retranslated into the language of the traditional ontology—as if science needed to except itself from the relativities it establishes, to put itself out of play, as if blindness for Being were the price it has to pay for its success in the determination of beings. The considerations regarding scale, for example, if they are really taken seriously, should not relegate all the truths of physics to the side of the "subjective"—a move that would maintain the rights of the idea of an inaccessible "objectivity"—but they should contest the very principle of this cleavage and make the contact between the observer and the observed enter into the definition of the "real." Yet we have seen many physicists seek in the compact structure and the density of macroscopic appearances, or on the contrary in the loose and lacunate structure of certain microphysical domains, arguments in favor of a determinism, or, contrariwise, of a "mental" or "acausal" reality. These alternatives show enough to what point science, where it is a question of an ultimate understanding of itself, is rooted in pre-science and foreign to the question of the *meaning of being*. When the physicists speak of particles that exist for but a milliard of a second, their first movement is always to suppose that they exist in the same sense as directly observable particles, except for much shorter a time. The microphysical field is considered as a macroscopic field of very small dimensions, where the horizon phenomena, the properties without carriers, the collective beings or beings without absolute localization, are by right only "subjective appear-

ances" which the vision of some giant [would reduce to]<sup>8</sup> the interaction of absolute physical individuals. Yet this is to postulate that the considerations of scale are not ultimate; it is again to think them in the perspective of the in itself, at the very moment when there is a suggestion to renounce that perspective. Thus the "strange" notions of the new physics are strange for it only in the sense that a paradoxical opinion surprises common sense, that is, without instructing it in depth and without changing anything of its categories. We are not implying here that the properties of the new physical beings *prove* a new logic or a new ontology. If one takes "proof" in the mathematical sense, the scientists, who are alone in a position to furnish one, are also alone in a position to evaluate it. That some of them refuse such proof as a case of begging the question<sup>9</sup> suffices for the philosopher not to have the right—nor the obligation either—to admit it. What the philosopher can note—what provokes his thought—is that precisely those physicists who maintain a Cartesian representation of the world<sup>10</sup> admit their "preferences," just as a musician or a painter would speak of his preferences for a style. This permits us to advance the notion that no ontology is exactly *required* by the thought proper to physics at work (whatever be the subsequent fate of the microphysical theory), that in particular the classical ontology of the object cannot claim to be enjoined by it, nor can it claim a privilege *by principle*, when, for those who maintain it, it is only a preference. Either by physics and by science we understand a certain way of operating on the facts with algorithm, a certain procedure of cognition of which those who possess the instrument are the sole judges—in which case they are the sole judges also of the sense in which they take their variables, but have neither the obligation nor even the right to give an imaginative translation of them, to decide in their name the question of *what there is*, or to impugn an eventual *contact* with the world. Or, on the contrary, physics means to say *what is*—but then it is today no longer justified in defining Being

8. EDITOR: "Would reduce to" is crossed out and "would find again" is written over it. We restore the first expression, since the correction is manifestly incomplete.

9. For example, Louis de Broglie, *Nouvelles perspectives sur la microphysique* (Paris, 1956).

10. *Ibid.*

by the Being-object, nor in confining lived experience within the order of our "representations" and the sector of "psychological" curiosities; it must recognize as legitimate an analysis of the procedures through which the universe of measures and operations is constituted starting from the life world (*monde vécu*) considered as the source, eventually as the universal source. Without this analysis, in which the relative rights and the limits of the classical objectification would be recognized, a physics that would maintain as is the philosophical equipment of classical science and project its own results into the order of absolute knowledge would, like the perceptual faith from which it proceeds, live in a state of permanent crisis. It is striking to see Einstein disqualify as "psychology" the experience that we have of the simultaneous through the perception of another and the intersection of our perceptual horizons and those of the others: for him there could be no question of giving ontological value to this experience because it is purely a knowledge by anticipation or by principle and is formed without operations, without effective measurings. This is to postulate that what is is not *that upon which we have an openness*, but only *that upon which we can operate*; and Einstein does not dissemble the fact that this certitude of an adequation between the operation of science and Being is with him prior to his physics. He even emphasizes with humor the contrast between his "wildly speculative" science and his claim for it of a truth in itself. We will have to show how the physical idealization goes beyond, and forgets, the perceptual faith. For the moment it was enough to note that it proceeds from that faith, that it does not lift its contradictions, does not dissipate its obscurity, and nowise dispenses us—far from it—from envisaging it in itself.

We would arrive at the same conclusion if, instead of underscoring the inconsistencies of the "objective" order, we would address ourselves to the "subjective" order which, in the ideology of science, is its counterpart and necessary complement—and perhaps our conclusion would be more easily accepted through this way. For here the disorder and the incoherence are manifest, and one can say without exaggeration that our fundamental concepts—that of the psychism and of psychology—are as mythical as the classifications of the societies called archaic. It was believed that we were returning to clarity by exorcising "introspection." And to do so was indeed necessary: for where, when,

and how has there ever been a vision of the inside? There is—and this is something quite different, which retains its value—a life present to itself (*près de soi*), an openness upon oneself, which does not look out upon any world other than the common world—and which is not necessarily a closedness to the others. The critique of introspection too often turns away from that irreplaceable way of access to the other as he is involved in ourselves. And on the other hand, the recourse to the "outside" is by itself nowise a guarantee against the illusions of introspection; it gives only a new form to our confused idea of a psychological "vision"; it only transfers it from the inside to the outside. It would be instructive to make explicit what the psychologists mean by "psychism" and other analogous notions. It is like a deep-lying geological stratum, an *invisible "thing,"* which is found somewhere behind certain living bodies, and with regard to which one supposes that the only problem is to find the correct angle for observation. It is also what, in me, troubles itself with the desire to know the psychism; but there is as it were a continually abortive vocation in it: for how could a thing know itself? The "psychism" is opaque to itself and rejoins itself only in its exterior counterparts. And, in the last analysis, it assures itself that those exterior counterparts resemble itself in the way the anatomist assures himself that he finds in the organ he dissects the very structure of his own eyes: because there is a "species man" . . . If we were to render completely explicit the psychological attitude and the concepts which the psychologist uses as if they were self-evident, we would find a mass of consequences without premises, a very long-standing constitutive labor which is not brought out into the open and whose results are accepted as they are without one even suspecting to what extent they are confused. What is operative here is as always the perceptual faith in the things and in the world. We apply to man as to things the conviction it gives us that we can arrive at what is by an absolute overview, and in this way we come to think of the invisible of man as a thing. The psychologist in his turn establishes himself in the position of the absolute spectator. The investigation of the "psychic," like that of the exterior object, first progresses only by putting itself outside of the play of the relativities it discovers, by tacitly supposing an absolute subject before which is deployed the psychism in general, my own or that of another. The cleavage between the "subjective" and the "objec-

tive" according to which physics defines its domain as it commences, and correlatively psychology also establishes its domain, does not prevent these from being conceived according to the same fundamental structure; on the contrary it requires that: they are finally two orders of objects, to be known in their intrinsic properties by a pure thought which determines what they are in themselves. But, as in physics also, a moment comes when the very development of knowledge calls into question the absolute spectator always presupposed. After all, this physicist of whom I speak and to whom I attribute a system of reference is also the physicist who speaks. After all, this psychism of which the psychologist speaks is also his own. This physics of the physicist and this psychology of the psychologist evince that henceforth, for science itself, the being-object can no longer be being-itself: "objective" and "subjective" are recognized as two orders hastily constructed within a total experience, whose context must be restored in all clarity.

This intellectual overture, whose diagram we have now drawn, has determined the history of psychology for the last fifty years, and particularly of Gestalt psychology. It had wished to constitute for itself its own domain of objectivity; it believed it had discovered it in the structures of behavior. Was there not here an original conditioning which would form the object of an original science, as other less complex structures formed the object of the sciences of nature? As a distinct domain, juxtaposed to that of physics, behavior or the psychism, taken objectively, was in principle accessible through the same methods and had the same ontological structure: in both domains, the object was defined by the functional relations it universally observes. There was indeed, in psychology, a *descriptive* way of access to the object, but by principle it could lead only to the same functional determinations. And, indeed, it was possible to specify the conditions on which in fact such and such a perceptual realization, a perception of an ambiguous figure, a spatial or color level depend. Psychology believed it had finally found its firm foundation and expected henceforth an accumulation of discoveries that would confirm it in its status as a science. And yet, today, forty years after the beginnings of *Gestaltpsychologie*, we have again the sentiment of being at a standstill. To be sure, on many points the initial works of the school have been brought to precision; a number of functional determinations have been

and are being established. But the enthusiasm is no longer with it; nowhere have we the sentiment of approaching a science of man. It is—the authors of the school very quickly realized—that the relationships they establish operate imperatively and are explicative only in the artificial conditions of the laboratory. They do not represent a *first stratum* of behavior, from which one could proceed little by little unto its total determination; rather they are a first form of integration, privileged cases of simple structuration, relative to which the "more complex" structurations are in reality qualitatively different. The functional relation they state has meaning only at their level; it has no explicative force with regard to higher levels, and finally the being of the psychism is to be defined not as an intersection of elementary "causalities," but by the heterogeneous and discontinuous structurations that are realized in it. In the measure that we have to do with more integrated structures, we come to realize that the conditions account for the conditioned less than they are the occasion of its release. Thus the parallelism postulated between the descriptive and the functional was belied. Easy as it is to explain according to its conditions, for example, such and such an apparent movement of a spot of light in a field that has been artificially simplified and reduced by the experimental apparatus, a total determination of the concrete perceptual field of a given living individual at a given moment appears not provisionally unattainable but definitively meaningless, *because it presents structures that do not even have a name in the objective universe of separated and separable "conditions."* When I look at a road that retreats from me toward the horizon, I can relate what I call the "apparent width" of the road at a given distance (i.e., the width I measure, by peering at it with one eye only and gauging it on a pencil I hold before me) with other elements of the field also specified by some procedure of *measurement*, and thus establish that the "constancy" of the apparent size depends on such and such variables, according to the schema of functional dependence that defines the object of classical science. But when I consider the field such as I have it when I look freely with both eyes, outside of every isolating attitude, it is impossible for me to *explain* it by conditionings. Not that these conditionings *escape* me or remain *hidden* from me, but because *the "conditioned" itself ceases to be of an order such as could be described objectively.* For the natural gaze that gives me the landscape, the

road in the distance has no "width" one could even ideally calculate; it is as wide as the road close-up, since it is the same road—and it is not as wide, since I cannot deny that there is a sort of shrinking in perspective. Between the road far-off and close-up there is identity and yet *μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος*, passage from the apparent to the real, and they are incommensurable. Yet I must not understand the appearance even here as a veil cast between me and the real—the perspective contraction is not a deformation, the road close-up is not "more true": the close, the far-off, the horizon in their indescribable contrast form a system, and it is their relationship within the total field that is the perceptual truth. We have entered into the ambiguous order of perceived being, upon which functional dependence has no "grip." The psychology of vision can be only artificially and verbally maintained in this ontological framework: the "conditions" for depth—the disappearance of the retinal images, for example—are not really conditions, since the images are defined as disparate only by relation to a perceptual apparatus that seeks its equilibrium in the fusion of analogous images, and hence here the "conditioned" conditions the condition. To be sure, a perceived world would not appear to a man if these conditions were not given in his body; but it is not they that *explain* that world. A perceived world is in terms of its field laws and laws of intrinsic organization, and not—like the *object*—according to the exigencies of a "side to side" causality. The "psychism" is not an object; but—we emphasize—there is here no question of showing, in terms of the "spiritualist" tradition, that certain realities "escape" scientific determination. Such a demonstration results only in circumscribing a domain of anti-science which ordinarily remains conceived—in the terms of the ontology which precisely is in question—as another "order of realities." Our purpose is not to oppose to the facts objective science coordinates a group of facts that "escape" it—whether one calls them "psychism" or "subjective facts" or "interior facts"—but to show that the being-object and the being-subject conceived by opposition to it and relative to it do not form the alternative, that the perceived world is beneath or beyond this antinomy, that the failure of "objective" psychology is—conjointly with the failure of the "objectivist" physics—to be understood not as a victory of the "interior" over the "exterior" and of the "mental" over the "material," but as a call for the revision of

our ontology, for the re-examination of the notions of "subject" and "object." The same reasons that keep us from treating perception as an object also keep us from treating it as the operation of a "subject," in whatever sense one takes the term. If the "world" upon which it opens, the ambiguous field of horizons and distances, is not a region of the objective world, it resists as much being ranked on the side of "facts of consciousness" or "spiritual acts": psychological or transcendental immanence cannot account for what a horizon or a "remoteness" is any better than can "objective" thought. For whether it be given to itself in "introspection," or whether it be the consciousness constitutive of the perceived, perception would have to be, as it were by position and by principle, knowledge and possession of itself—it could not open upon horizons and distances, that is, upon a world which is there for it from the first, and from which alone it knows itself, as the anonymous incumbent toward which the perspectives of the landscape travel. The idea of the subject, and that of the object as well, transforms into a cognitive adequation the relationship with the world and with ourselves that we have in the perceptual faith. They do not clarify it; they utilize it tacitly, they draw out its consequences. And since the development of knowledge shows that these consequences are contradictory, it is to that relationship that we must necessarily return, in order to elucidate it.

We have addressed ourselves to the psychology of perception in general in order to better show that the crises of psychology result from reasons of principle and not from some delay of the research in this or that particular domain. But once we have seen it in its generality, we find again the same difficulty of principle in the specialized branches of research.

For example, one does not see how a social psychology would be possible within the regime of objectivist ontology. If one really thinks that perception is a *function* of exterior *variables*, this schema is (and approximatively indeed) applicable only to the corporeal and physical conditioning, and psychology is condemned to that exorbitant abstraction that consists in considering man as only a set of nervous terminations upon which physico-chemical agents play. The "other men," a social and historical constellation, can intervene as stimuli only if we also recognize the efficacy of ensembles that have no physical existence

and that operate on man not according to their immediately sensible properties but by reason of their social configuration, within a social space and time, according to a social code, and finally as symbols rather than as causes. From the sole fact that social psychology is practiced, one is outside the objectivist ontology, and one can remain within it only by restricting the "object" one gives oneself in a way that compromises the research. Here the objectivist ideology is directly contrary to the development of knowledge. It was, for example, evident to the man brought up in the objective cognition of the West that magic or myth has no intrinsic truth, that magical effects and the mythical and ritual life are to be explained by "objective" causes and what is left over ascribed to the illusions of Subjectivity. Yet if social psychology wishes truly to *see* our society such as it *is*, it cannot start with this postulate, which itself is part of Western psychology; in adopting it we would be presupposing our conclusions. As the ethnologist in the face of societies called archaic cannot presuppose that, for example, those societies have a lived experience of time like ours—according to the dimensions of a past that is no longer, a future that is not yet, and a present that alone fully is—and must describe a mythical time where certain events "in the beginning" maintain a continued efficacy; so also social psychology, precisely if it wishes to really know our own societies, cannot exclude a priori the hypothesis of mythical time as a component of our personal and public history. To be sure, we have repressed the magical into the subjectivity, but there is no guarantee that the relationship between men does not inevitably involve magical and oneiric components. Since here it is precisely the society of men that is the "object," the rules of "objectivist" thought cannot determine it a priori; on the contrary they must themselves be seen as the particularities of certain socio-historical wholes, to which they do not necessarily give the key. Of course there are also no grounds for postulating at the start that objective thought is only an effect or a product of certain social structures, and has no rights over the others: that would be to posit that the human world rests on an incomprehensible foundation, and this irrationalism also would be arbitrary. The sole attitude proper to a social psychology is to take "objective" thought for what it is, that is, as a method that has founded science and is to be employed without restriction, unto the limit of the possible, but which, where nature, and a fortiori

history are concerned, represents a first phase of elimination<sup>11</sup> rather than a means of total explanation. Social psychology, qua psychology, necessarily encounters the questions of the philosopher—what is another man, what is a historical event, where is the historical event or the State?—and cannot in advance class the other men and history among "objects" or "stimuli." It does not deal with these questions head-on: that is the business of philosophy. It deals with them laterally, by the very manner in which it invests its "object" and progresses toward it. And it does not render useless, it on the contrary requires an ontological elucidation of them.

When it fails to accept resolutely the rules for true "objectivity" in the domain of man and to admit that the laws of functional dependence are here rather a manner of circumscribing the irrational than of eliminating it, psychology will give only an abstract and superficial view of the societies it studies by comparison with what history can offer, and this in fact is what often happens. We said above that the physicist frames with an objectivist ontology a physics that is no longer objectivist. We have to add that it is no different with the psychologist and that it is even from psychology that the objectivist preconceptions return to haunt the general and philosophical conceptions of the physicists. One is struck in this regard when one sees a physicist<sup>12</sup> who has liberated his own science from the classical canons of mechanism and objectivism take up again without hesitation the Cartesian distinction between primary and secondary qualities as soon as he turns to the philosophical problem of the ultimate reality of the physical world, as if the critique of the mechanist postulates within the physical world should in no way affect our manner of conceiving its action upon our body, as if that critique ceased to be valid at the frontier of our body and did not call for a revision of our psycho-physiology. It is, paradoxically enough, more difficult to abandon the schemata of the mechanist explanation in the investigation of the action of the world on man—where they nonetheless have continuously aroused obvious difficulties—than in the investigation of physical actions within the world, where for centuries they could with

11. EDITOR: We should no doubt understand: elimination of the irrational.

12. For example, Eddington. [EDITOR: Arthur Eddington. Cf. in particular *New Pathways in Science* (Cambridge, 1934).]

good reason pass for justified. This is because in physics itself this revolution of thought can apparently be accomplished within the traditional ontological frameworks, whereas in the physiology of the senses it immediately implicates our most inveterate notion of the relations between being and man and the truth. As soon as we cease thinking of perception as the action of the pure physical object on the human body, and the perceived as the "interior" result of this action, it seems that every distinction between the true and the false, between methodic knowledge and phantasms, between science and the imagination, is ruined. Thus it is that physiology is participating less actively than physics in the methodological renewal of today; the scientific spirit sometimes persists there in archaic forms; and the biologists remain more materialist than the physicists. But they too are materialist only when they function as philosophers, and are much less so in the practice of their biology. One day it will indeed be necessary for them to liberate their practice entirely, to pose also the question whether the human body is an object, and hence the question whether its relation with exterior nature is that of function to variable. What is important for us is the fact that this relation has already ceased to be consubstantial with psycho-physiology, as have all the notions that are bound up with it—that of sensation as the proper and constant effect of a physically defined stimulus, and then the notions of attention and judgment as complementary abstractions, charged with explaining what does not follow the laws of sensation. . . . At the same time that it "idealized" the physical world by defining it by wholly intrinsic properties, by what it is in its pure being as an object before a thought itself purified, Cartesianism, whether it intended to do so or not, did inspire a science of the human body that decomposes that body also into a network of objective processes and, with the notion of sensation, prolongs this analysis unto the "psychism." These two idealizations are bound up with one another and must be undone together. It is only by returning to the perceptual faith to rectify the Cartesian analysis that we will put an end to the crisis situation in which our knowledge finds itself when it thinks it is founded upon a philosophy that its own advances undermine.

Because perception gives us faith in a world, in a system of natural facts rigorously bound together and continuous, we have

believed that this system could incorporate all things into itself, even the perception that has initiated us into it. Today we no longer believe nature to be a continuous system of this kind; a fortiori we are far removed from thinking that the islets of "psychism" that here and there float over it are secretly connected to one another through the continuous ground of nature. We have then imposed upon us the task of understanding whether, and in what sense, what is not nature forms a "world," and first what a "world" is, and finally, if world there is, what can be the relations between the visible world and the invisible world. Difficult as it may be, this labor is indispensable if we are to get out of the confusion in which the philosophy of the scientists leaves us. It cannot be accomplished entirely by them because scientific thought moves within and presupposes the world, rather than taking it for its theme. But this labor is not foreign to science; it does not install us outside the world. When along with other philosophers we said that the stimuli of perception are not the causes of the perceived world, that they are rather its developers<sup>13</sup> or its releasers, we do not mean that one could perceive without a body; on the contrary we mean that it is necessary to re-examine the definition of the body as pure object in order to understand how it can be our living bond with nature; we do not establish ourselves in a universe of essences—on the contrary we ask that the distinction between the *that* and the *what*,<sup>14</sup> between the essence and the conditions of existence, be reconsidered by referring to the experience of the world that precedes that distinction. Philosophy is not science, because science believes it can soar over its object and holds the correlation of knowledge with being as established, whereas philosophy is the set of questions wherein he who questions is himself implicated by the question. But a physics that has learned to situate the physicist physically, a psychology that has learned to situate the psychologist in the socio-historical world, have lost the illusion of the absolute view from above: they do not only tolerate, they enjoin a radical examination of our belongingness to the world before all science.

13. TRANSLATOR: *Révéléateur*—in the sense of a photographic developer fluid.

14. TRANSLATOR: "That," "what": in English in the text.

## THE PERCEPTUAL FAITH AND REFLECTION

THE METHODS of *proof* and of *cognition* invented by a thought already established in the world, the concepts of *object* and *subject* it introduces, do not enable us to understand what the perceptual faith is, precisely because it is a faith, that is, an adherence that knows itself to be beyond proofs, not necessary, interwoven with incredulity, at each instant menaced by non-faith. Belief and incredulity are here so closely bound up that we always find the one in the other, and in particular a germ of non-truth in the truth: the certitude I have of being connected up with the world by my look already promises me a pseudo-world of phantasms if I let it wander. It is said that to cover one's eyes so as to not see a danger is to not believe in the things, to believe only in the private world; but this is rather to believe that what is for us is absolutely, that a world we have succeeded in seeing as without danger is without danger. It is therefore the greatest degree of belief that our vision goes to the things themselves. Perhaps this experience teaches us better than any other what the perceptual presence of the world is: not affirmation and negation of the same thing in the same respect, positive and negative judgment, or, as we said a moment ago, belief and incredulity—which would be impossible; 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.

If philosophy is to appropriate to itself and to understand this initial openness upon the world which does not exclude a possible occultation, it cannot be content with describing it; it must tell us how there is openness without the occultation of the world being excluded, how the occultation remains at each instant possible even though we be naturally endowed with light. The philosopher must understand how it is that these two possi-

bilities, which the perceptual faith keeps side by side within itself, do not nullify one another. He will not succeed if he remains at their level, oscillating from the one to the other, saying in turn that my vision is at the thing itself and that my vision is my own or "in me." He must abandon these two views, he must eschew the one as well as the other; since taken literally they are impossible, he must appeal beyond them to himself who is their titular and therefore must know what motivates them from within; he must lose them as a state of fact in order to reconstruct them as his own possibilities, in order to learn from himself what they mean in truth, what delivers him over to both perception and to phantasms—in a word, he must *reflect*. But as soon as he does so, beyond the world itself and beyond what is only "in us," beyond being in itself and being for us, a third dimension seems to open up, wherein their discordance is effaced. With the conversion to reflection, perceiving and imagining are now only two modes of *thinking*.\* From vision and feeling (*sentir*) will be retained only what animates them and sustains them indubitably, the pure thought of seeing or of feeling. It is possible to describe that thought, to show that it is made of a strict correlation between my exploration of the world and the sensorial responses it arouses. The imaginary will be submitted to a parallel analysis, and we will come to realize that the thought of which it is made is not in this precise sense a thought of seeing or of feeling, that it is rather the intent to not apply and even forget the criteria of verification and to take as "good" what is not and could not be seen. Thus the antinomies of the perceptual faith seem to be lifted; it is true indeed that we perceive the thing itself, since the thing is nothing but what we see—but not by the occult power of our eyes. For our eyes are no longer the subjects of vision; they have joined the number of things seen. And what we call vision rises from the power of thought that certifies that the appearance here has responded to the movements of our eyes according to a rule. When perception is full or effective, it is the thought of perceiving. If therefore it reaches the thing itself, it is necessary to say, without this being a contradiction, that it is entirely our work, and our own through and through, like all our thoughts. Open upon the thing itself, the perception is no less our own work, because the thing is

\* Ideality (idea and immanence of truth).

henceforth exactly what we think we see—*cogitatum* or noema. It no more leaves the circle of our thoughts than does the imagination, which is also a thought of seeing, but a thought that does not seek the exercise, the proof, the plenitude, that therefore presumes on itself and is only half-thought. Thus the real becomes the correlative of thought, and the imaginary is, within the same sphere, the narrow circle of objects of thought that are only half-thought, half-objects or phantoms that have no consistency, no place of their own, disappearing before the sun of thought like the mists of dawn, and that are, between the thought and what it thinks, only a thin layer of the unthought. The reflection retains everything contained in the perceptual faith: the conviction that there is something, that there is the world, the idea of truth, the true idea given. It simply reduces that crude (*barbare*) conviction of going to the things themselves—which is incompatible with the fact of illusion—to what it means or signifies. It converts it into its truth; it discovers in it the adequation and assent of the thought with thought, the transparency of what I think for myself who thinks it. The brute and prior existence of the world I thought I found already there by opening my eyes is only the symbol of a being that is for itself as soon as it is because appearing, and therefore appearing to itself, is its whole being—that is the being we call mind.\* Through the conversion to reflection, which leaves nothing but ideates, *cogitata*, or noemata subsisting before the pure subject, we finally leave the equivocations of the perceptual faith, which paradoxically assured us that we have access to the things themselves and that we gain access to them through the intermediary of the body, which therefore opened us to the world only by sealing us up in the succession of our private events. From now on everything seems clear; the blend of dogmatism and scepticism, the confused convictions of the perceptual faith, are called into question. I no longer think I see with my eyes things exterior to myself who sees them: they are exterior only to my body, not to my thought, which soars over it as well as them. Nor do I any longer allow myself to be impressed by that evidence that the other perceiving subjects do not go to the things themselves, that their perception takes place within them—an evidence that ends

\* Passage to ideality as a solution of the antinomies. The world is numerically one with my *cogitatum* and with that of the others insofar as it is ideal (ideal identity, beneath the several and the one).

by rebounding upon my own perception, since after all I am “an other” in their eyes, and my dogmatism, communicated to the others, returns to me as scepticism. For if it is true that, seen from the outside, the perception of each seems to be shut up in some retreat “behind” his body, reflection precisely relegates this exterior view to the number of phantasms without consistency and confused thoughts: one does not think a thought from the outside, by definition thought is thought only inwardly. If then the others are thoughts, as such they are not behind their body which I see—they are, like myself, nowhere; they are, like myself, coextensive with being, and there is no problem of incarnation. At the same time that the reflection liberates us from the false problems posed by bastard and unthinkable experiences, it also accounts for them through the simple transposition of the incarnate subject into a transcendental subject and of the reality of the world into an ideality: we all reach the world, and the same world, and it belongs wholly to each of us, without division or loss, because it is *that which* we think we perceive, the undivided object of all our thoughts. Its unity, if it is not the numerical unity, is not the specific unity either: it is that ideal unity or unity of signification that makes the triangle of the geometer be the same in Tokyo and in Paris, the same in the fifth century before Christ and now. This unity suffices and it untangles every problem, because the divisions that can be opposed to it, the plurality of the fields of perception and of lives, are as nothing before it, do not belong to the universe of ideality and of meaning, and cannot even be formulated or articulated into distinct thoughts, and finally, because we have through reflection recognized at the heart of all the situated, bogged-down, and incarnated thoughts the pure appearing of thought to itself, the universe of internal adequation, where everything *true* that we have is integrated without difficulty. . . .

This movement of reflection will always at first sight be convincing: in a sense it is imperative, it is truth itself, and one does not see how philosophy could dispense with it. The question is whether it has brought philosophy to the harbor, whether the universe of thought to which it leads is really an order that suffices to itself and puts an end to every question. Since the perceptual faith is a paradox, how could I remain with it? And if I do not remain with it, what else can I do except re-enter into myself and seek there the abode of truth? Is it not evident that,

precisely if my perception is a perception of the world, I must find in my commerce with the world the reasons that induce me to see it, and in my vision the meaning of my vision? From whom would I, who am in the world (*suis au monde*), learn what it is to be in the world if not from myself, and how could I say that I am in the world if I did not know it? Without even presuming that I know everything of myself, it is certain at least that, among other things, I am a knowing; this attribute assuredly belongs to me, even if I have others. I cannot imagine that the world irrupts into me or I into it: the world can present itself to this knowing which I am only by offering it a meaning, only in the form of a thought of the world. The secret of the world we are seeking must necessarily be contained in my contact with it. Inasmuch as I live it, I possess the meaning of everything I live, otherwise I would not live it; and I can seek no light concerning the world except by consulting, by making explicit, my frequenting of the world, by comprehending it from within. What will always make of the philosophy of reflection not only a temptation but a route that must be followed is that it is true in what it denies, that is, the exterior relation between a world in itself and myself, conceived as a process of the same type as those that unfold within the world—whether one imagines an intrusion of the world in myself, or, on the contrary, some excursion of my look among the things. But does it conceive properly the natal bond between me who perceives and what I perceive? And because we assuredly must reject the idea of an exterior relation between the perceiving and the perceived, must we pass to the antithesis of immanence, be it wholly ideal and spiritual, and say that I who perceives am the thought of perceiving, and the perceived world a thing thought? Because perception is not an entering of the world into myself and is not centripetal, must it be centrifugal, as is a thought I form or the signification I give by judgment to an indecisive appearance? The philosophy of reflection practices the philosophical interrogation and the resultant effort toward explicitness in a style that is not the sole possible one; it mixes in presuppositions which we have to examine and which in the end reveal themselves to be contrary to what inspires the reflection. It thinks it can comprehend our natal bond with the world only by *undoing* it in order to *remake* it, only by constituting it, by fabricating it. It thinks it finds clarity through analysis, that is, if not in the most simple ele-

ments, at least in the most fundamental conditions implicated in the brute product, in the premises from which it results as a consequence, in a *source of meaning* from which it is derived.\* It is therefore essential to the philosophy of reflection that it bring us back, this side of our *de facto* situation, to a center of things from which we proceeded, but from which we were decentered, that it retravel this time starting from us a route already traced out from that center to us. The very effort toward internal adequation, the enterprise to reconquer explicitly all that we are and do implicitly, signifies that what we are finally as *naturata* we first are actively as *naturans*, that the world is our birthplace only because first we as minds are the cradle of the world. But, in this, if the reflection confines itself to this first movement, if it installs us by regression in the immanent universe of our thoughts and strips whatever may be left over of any probative power with respect to itself, dismissing it as confused, mutilated, or naïve thought, the reflection then falls short of its task and of the radicalism that is its law. For the movement of recovery, of recuperation, of return to self, the progression toward internal adequation, the very effort to coincide with a *naturans* which is already ourselves and which is supposed to unfold the things and the world before itself—precisely inasmuch as they are a return or a reconquest, these operations of reconstitution or of re-establishment which come second cannot by principle be the mirror image of its internal constitution and its establishment, as the route from the Etoile to the Notre-Dame is the inverse of the route from the Notre-Dame to the Etoile: the reflection recuperates everything except itself as an effort of recuperation, it clarifies everything except its own role. The mind's eye too has its blind spot, but, because it is of the mind, cannot be unaware of it, nor treat as a simple state of non-vision, which requires no particular mention, the very act of reflection which is *quoad nos* its act of birth. If it is not unaware of itself—which would be

\* Idea of return—of the latent: idea of the reflection coming back over the traces of a constitution. Idea of intrinsic possibility of which the constituted is its unfolding. Idea of a *naturans* of which it is the *naturata*. Idea of the originating as intrinsic. Hence the reflective thought is an anticipation of the whole; it performs all its operations under the guarantee of the totality that it claims to engender. Cf. Kant: if a world is to be possible. . . . This reflection does not find the originating.

contrary to its definition—the reflection cannot feign to unravel the same thread that the mind would first have woven, to be the mind returning to itself within me, when by definition it is I who reflect. The reflection must appear to itself as a progression toward a subject X, an appeal to a subject X. As the reflection's very assurance that it rejoin a universal *naturans* cannot come from some prior contact with it (since precisely it is still ignorance), reflection evokes it and does not coincide with it. That assurance can come only from the world—or from my thoughts insofar as they form a world, insofar as their cohesion, their vanishing lines, designate beneath reflection a virtual focus with which I do not yet coincide. As an effort to found the existing world upon a *thought* of the world, the reflection at each instant draws its inspiration from the prior presence of the world, of which it is tributary, from which it derives all its energy. When Kant justifies each step of his Analytic with the famous refrain “if a world is to be possible,” he emphasizes the fact that his guideline is furnished him by the unreflected image of the world, that the necessity of the steps taken by the reflection is suspended upon the hypothesis “world,” and that the thought of the world which the Analytic is charged with disclosing is not so much the foundation as the second expression of the fact that for me there has been an experience of a world—in other words, that the intrinsic possibility of the world as a thought rests upon the fact that I can see the world, that is, upon a possibility of a wholly different type, which we have seen borders on the impossible. It is by a secret and constant appeal to this impossible-possible that reflection can maintain the illusion of being a return to oneself and of establishing itself in immanence, and our power to re-enter into ourselves is exactly measured by a power to leave ourselves, which is neither older nor more recent than it, which is exactly synonymous with it. The whole reflective analysis is not false, but still naïve, as long as it dissimulates from itself its own mainspring and as long as, in order to constitute the world, it is necessary to have a notion of the world as preconstituted—as long as the procedure is in principle delayed behind itself. The reply will perhaps be that the great philosophies of reflection know this very well, as the reference to the true idea given in Spinoza or the very conscious reference to a pre-critical experience of the world in Kant shows, but that the circle of the unreflected and the reflection is deliber-

ate in these philosophies—that one begins with the unreflected, because one does have to begin, but that the universe of thought that is opened up by reflection contains everything necessary to account for the mutilated thought of the beginning, which is only the ladder one pulls up after oneself after having climbed it. . . . But if this is so, there is no longer any philosophy of reflection, for there is no longer the originating and the derived; there is a thought traveling a circle where the condition and the conditioned, the reflection and the unreflected, are in a reciprocal, if not symmetrical, relationship, and where the end is in the beginning as much as the beginning is in the end. We are not saying anything different. The remarks we made concerning reflection were nowise intended to disqualify it for the profit of the unreflected or the immediate (which we know only through reflection). It is a question not of putting the perceptual faith in place of reflection, but on the contrary of taking into account the total situation, which involves reference from the one to the other. What is given is not a massive and opaque world, or a universe of adequate thought; it is a reflection which turns back over the density of the world in order to clarify it, but which, coming second, reflects back to it only its own light.

It is indeed true that, in order to disentangle myself from the perplexities in which the perceptual faith casts me, I can address myself only to my experience of the world, to that blending with the world that recommences for me each morning as soon as I open my eyes, to that flux of perceptual life between it and myself which beats unceasingly from morning to night, and which makes my own secret thoughts change the aspect of faces and landscapes for me, as, conversely, the faces and landscapes bring me the help sometimes and the menace sometimes of a manner of being a man which they infuse into my life. But it is just as sure that the relation between a thought and its object, between the *cogito* and the *cogitatum*, contains neither the whole nor even the essential of our commerce with the world and that we have to situate that relation back within a more muted relationship with the world, within an initiation into the world upon which it rests and which is always already accomplished when the reflective return intervenes. We will miss that relationship—which we shall here call the openness upon the world (*ouverture au monde*)—the moment that the reflective effort

tries to capture it, and we will then be able to catch sight of the reasons that prevent it from succeeding, and of the way through which we would reach it. I see, I feel (*sens*), and it is certain that for me to account for what seeing and feeling are I must cease accompanying the seeing and the feeling into the visible and the sensible into which they throw themselves, and I must contrive, on this side of them, a sphere they do not occupy and whence they would become comprehensible according to their sense and their essence. To understand them is to suspend them, since the naïve vision occupies me completely, and since the attention to vision that is added on subtracts something from this total gift, and especially since to understand is to translate into disposable significations a meaning first held captive in the thing and in the world itself. But this translation aims to convey the text; or rather the visible and the philosophical explicitation of the visible are not side by side as two sets of signs, as a text and its version in another tongue. If it were a text, it would be a strange text, which is directly given to us all, so that we are not restricted to the philosopher's translation and can compare the two. And philosophy for its part is more and less than a translation: more, since it alone tells us what the text means; less, since it is useless if one does not have the text at one's disposal. The philosopher therefore suspends the brute vision only in order to make it pass into the order of the expressed: that vision remains his model or measure, and it is upon that vision that the network of significations which philosophy organizes in order to reconquer it must open. Hence the philosopher does not have to *consider as inexistent* what was seen or felt, and the vision or the feeling themselves, to replace them, according to the words of Descartes, with the "thought of seeing and of feeling," which for its part is considered unshakable only because it presumes nothing about what effectively is, only because it entrenches itself in the apparition to the thought of what is thought—from which it is indeed inexpugnable. To reduce perception to the thought of perceiving, under the pretext that immanence alone is sure, is to take out an insurance against doubt whose premiums are more onerous than the loss for which it is to indemnify us: for it is to forego comprehending the effective world and move to a type of certitude that will never restore to us the "there is" of the world. Either the doubt is only a state of rending and obscurity, in which case it teaches me nothing—or if it teaches me some-

thing, it is because it is deliberate, militant, systematic, and then it is an act, and then, even if subsequently its own existence imposes itself upon me as a limit to the doubt, as a something that is not nothing, this something is of the order of acts, within which I am henceforth confined. The illusion of illusions is to think now that to tell the truth we have never been certain of anything but our own acts, that from the beginning perception has been an inspection of the mind, and that reflection is only the perception returning to itself, the conversion from the knowing of the thing to a knowing of oneself of which the thing was made, the emergence of a "binding" that was the bond itself. We think we prove this Cartesian "spirituality," this *identity* of space with the mind, by saying that it is obvious that the "far-off" object is far-off only by virtue of its relation with other objects "further off" or "less distant"—which relation belongs properly to neither of them and is the immediate presence of the mind to all; the doctrine finally replaces our belongingness to the world with a view of the world from above. But it gets its apparent evidence only from a very naïve postulate (and one suggested to us precisely by the world) according to which it is always *the same* thing I think when the gaze of attention is displaced and looks back from itself to what conditions it. This is a massive conviction drawn from external experience, where I have indeed the assurance that the things under my eyes remain *the same* while I approach them to better inspect them, but this is because the functioning of my body as a possibility for changing point of view, a "seeing apparatus," or a sedimented science of the "point of view," assures me that I am approaching the same thing I saw a moment ago from further off. It is the perceptual life of my body that here sustains and guarantees the perceptual explicitation, and far from it itself being a cognition of intra-mundane or inter-objective relations between my body and the exterior things, it is presupposed in every notion of an object, and it is this life that accomplishes the primary openness to the world. My conviction that I see the thing itself does not *result* from the perceptual exploration, it is not a word to designate the proximal vision; on the contrary it is what gives me the notion of the "proximal," of the "best" point of observation, and of the "thing itself." Having therefore learned through perceptual experience what it is to "see well" the thing, that to do so one must and one can approach it, and that the new data thus acquired are deter-

minations of the *same* thing, we transfer this certitude to the interior, we resort to the fiction of a "little man in the man," and in this way we come to think that to reflect on perception is, *the perceived thing and the perception remaining what they were*, to disclose the true subject that inhabits and has always inhabited them. But in fact I should say that there was there a thing perceived and an openness upon this thing which the reflection has neutralized and transformed into perception-reflected-on and thing-perceived-within-a-perception-reflected-on. And that the functioning of reflection, like the functioning of the exploring body, makes use of powers obscure to me, spans the cycle of duration that separates the brute perception from the reflective examination, and during this time maintains the permanence of the perceived and the permanence of the perception under the gaze of the mind only because my mental inspection and my attitudes of mind prolong the "I can" of my sensorial and corporeal exploration. To found the latter on the former, and the *de facto* perception on the essence of perception such as it appears to reflection, is to forget the reflection itself as a distinct act of recovery. In other words, we are catching sight of the necessity of another operation besides the conversion to reflection, more fundamental than it, of a sort of *hyper-reflection* (*sur-réflexion*) that would also take itself and the changes it introduces into the spectacle into account. It accordingly would not lose sight of the brute thing and the brute perception and would not finally efface them, would not cut the organic bonds between the perception and the thing perceived with a hypothesis of inexistence. On the contrary, it would set itself the task of thinking about them, of reflecting on the transcendence of the world as transcendence, speaking of it not according to the law of the word-meanings inherent in the given language, but with a perhaps difficult effort that uses the significations of words to express, beyond themselves, our mute contact with the things, when they are not yet things said. If therefore the reflection is not to presume upon what it finds and condemn itself to putting into the things what it will then pretend to find in them, it must suspend the faith in the world only so as to *see it*, only so as to read in it the route it has followed in becoming a world for us; 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. It must plunge into the world

instead of surveying it, it must descend toward it such as it is instead of working its way back up toward a prior possibility of thinking it—which would impose upon the world in advance the conditions for our control over it. It must question the world, it must enter into the forest of references that our interrogation arouses in it, it must make it say, finally, what in its silence *it means to say*. . . . We know neither what exactly is this order and this concordance of the world to which we thus entrust ourselves, nor therefore what the enterprise will result in, nor even if it is really possible. But the choice is between it and a dogmatism of reflection concerning which we know only too well where it goes, since with it philosophy concludes the moment it begins and, for this very reason, does not make us comprehend our own obscurity.

A philosophy of reflection, as methodic doubt and as a reduction of the openness upon the world to "spiritual acts," to intrinsic relations between the idea and *its* ideate, is thrice untrue to what it means to elucidate: untrue to the visible world, to him who sees it, and to his relations with the other "visionaries." To say that perception is and has always been an "inspection of the mind" is to define it not by what it gives us, but by what in it *withstands* the hypothesis of *non-existence*; it is to identify from the first the positive with a negation of negation; it is to require of the innocent the proof of his non-culpability, and to reduce in advance our contact with Being to the discursive operations with which we defend ourselves against illusion, to reduce the true to the credible, the real to the probable. It has often been pointed out<sup>15</sup> that even the most credible imagination, the most conformable to the context of experience, does not bring us one step closer to "reality" and is immediately ascribed by us to the imaginary—and that conversely an even absolutely unexpected and unforeseeable noise is from the first perceived as real, however weak be its links with the context. This simple fact imposes upon us the idea that with the "real" and the "imaginary" we are dealing with two "orders," two "stages," or two "theaters"—that of space and that of phantasms—which are set up within us before the acts of discrimination (which intervene only in the equivocal cases), and in which what we live comes to settle of

15. EDITOR: In particular by Sartre, *L'Imagination*. [English translation by Forrest Williams, *Imagination: A Psychological Critique* (Ann Arbor, 1962).]

itself, outside of all criteriological control. The fact that sometimes the controls become necessary and result in judgments of reality which rectify the naïve experience does not prove that judgments of this sort are at the origin of this distinction, or constitute it, and therefore does not dispense us from understanding it for itself. If we do so, we then will have to not define the real by its coherence and the imaginary by its incoherence or its lacunae: the real is coherent and probable because it is real, and not real because it is coherent; the imaginary is incoherent or improbable because it is imaginary, and not imaginary because it is incoherent. The least particle of the perceived incorporates it from the first into the "perceived," the most credible phantasm glances off at the surface of the world; it is this presence of the whole world in one reflection, its irremediable absence in the richest and most systematic deliriums, that we have to understand, and this difference is not a difference of the more and the less. It is true that it gives rise to mistakes or to illusions, whence the conclusion is sometimes drawn that it therefore cannot be a difference of nature, and that the real, after all, is only the less improbable or the more probable. This is to think the true by the false, the positive by the negative—and it is to ill-describe indeed the experience of dis-illusion, wherein precisely we learn to know the fragility of the "real." For when an illusion dissipates, when an appearance suddenly breaks up, it is always for the profit of a new appearance which takes up again for its own account the ontological function of the first. I thought I saw on the sands a piece of wood polished by the sea, and *it was* a clayey rock. The breakup and the destruction of the first appearance do not authorize me to define henceforth the "real" as a simple probable, since *they are only another name for the new apparition*, which must therefore figure in our analysis of the *dis-illusion*. The dis-illusion is the loss of one evidence only because it is the acquisition of *another evidence*. If, out of prudence, I decide to say that this new evidence is "in itself" doubtful or only probable (in itself—that is: for me, in a moment, when I will have gotten a little closer to it or looked more closely), the fact remains that at the moment I speak it incontestably gives itself as "real" and not as "very possible" or probable; and if subsequently it breaks up in its turn, it will do so only under the pressure of a new "reality." What I can conclude from these disillusions or deceptions, therefore, is that perhaps "real-

ity" does not belong definitively to any particular perception, that in this sense it lies *always further on*; but this does not authorize me to break or to ignore the bond that joins them one after the other to the real, a bond that cannot be broken with the one without first having been established with the following, so that there is no *Schein* without an *Erscheinung*, that every *Schein* is the counterpart of an *Erscheinung*, and that the meaning of the "real" is not reduced to that of the "probable," but on the contrary the "probable" evokes a definitive experience of the "real" whose accomplishment is only deferred. When faced with a perceptual appearance we not only know that it can subsequently "break up," we also know that it will do so only for having been so well replaced by another that there remains no trace of it, and that we seek in vain in this chalky rock what a moment ago *was* a piece of wood polished by the sea. Each perception is mutable and only probable—it is, if one likes, only an *opinion*; but what is not opinion, what each perception, even if false, verifies, is the belongingness of each experience to the same world, their equal power to manifest it, as *possibilities of the same world*. If the one takes the place of the other so well—to the point that one no longer finds any trace of it a moment after the illusion—it is precisely because they are not successive hypotheses about an unknowable Being, but perspectives upon the same familiar Being, which we know cannot exclude the one without including the other and which we know in any case to be itself beyond contestation. And this is why the very fragility of a perception, attested by its breakup and by the substitution of another perception, far from authorizing us to efface the index of "reality" from them all, obliges us to concede it to all of them, to recognize all of them to be variants of the same world, and finally to consider them not as all false but as "all true," not as repeated failures in the determination of the world but as progressive approximations. Each perception envelops the possibility of its own replacement by another, and thus of a sort of disavowal from the things. But this also means that each perception is the term of an approach, of a series of "illusions" that were not merely simple "thoughts" in the restrictive sense of Being-for-itself and the "merely thought of," but possibilities that could have been, radiations of this unique world that "there is" . . . —and which, as such, never revert to nothingness or to subjectivity as if they had never appeared, but are rather, as Husserl puts it well, "crossed

out" or "cancelled" by the "new" reality. The philosophy of reflection is not wrong in considering the false as a mutilated or partial truth: its error is rather to act as if the partial were only a *de facto* absence of the totality, which does not need to be accounted for. This finally destroys any consistency proper to the appearance, integrates it in advance into Being, deprives it of its tenor of truth because it is partial, makes it disappear into an internal adequation where Being and the reasons for being are one. The movement toward adequation, to which the facts of dis-illusion bear witness, is not the returning to itself of an adequate Thought that would have inexplicably lost sight of itself—nor is it a blind progress of probability, founded on the number of signs and concordances. It is the prepossession of a totality which is there before one knows how and why, whose realizations are never what we would have imagined them to be, and which nonetheless fulfills a secret expectation within us, since we believe in it tirelessly.

The reply will no doubt be that if, in order to save what is original in the "world" as a preobjective theme, we refuse to make of it the immanent correlative of a spiritual act, then the natural light, the openness of my perception upon the world, can result only from a preordination whose effects I record, a finality to whose law I am subjected, as I undergo the law of finality of all my organs. And that moreover once this passivity is introduced in me, it will vitiate everything when I proceed, as one must, to the order of thought and will have to explain how I think about my perceptions. Either I reinstate at this level the autonomy I renounced at the level of the perceived—but then one does not see how this active thinker could recover possession of the reasons of a perception that is given to him ready-made—or (as in Malebranche) the passivity overtakes the order of thought also, which, like the perception, loses every efficacy of its own and has to await its light from a causality that functions in it without it, as the perception obtains its light only through the play of the laws of the union of the soul and the body—and consequently the thought's grasp upon itself and the light of the intelligible become an incomprehensible mystery, in a being for whom the true is at the term of a natural inclination, conformable to the pre-established system according to which his mind functions, and is not *truth*, conformity of self with self, light. . . . And it is indeed certain that every attempt to fit a passivity

upon an activity ends up either in extending the passivity to the whole—which amounts to detaching us from Being, since, for lack of a contact of myself with myself, I am in every operation of knowledge delivered over to an organization of my thoughts whose premises are masked from me, to a mental constitution which is given to me as a fact—or ends up by restoring the activity to the whole. This is in particular the flaw in the philosophies of reflection that do not follow themselves through; after having defined the requirements for thought, they add that these do not impose any law upon the things and evoke an order of the things themselves which, in contradistinction to the order of our thoughts, could receive only exterior rules. But we are not opposing to an interior light an order of the things in themselves into which it could not penetrate. There can be no question of fitting together passivity before a transcendent with an activity of immanent thought. It is a question of reconsidering the interdependent notions of the active and the passive in such a way that they no longer place us before the antinomy of a philosophy that accounts for being and the truth, but does not take the world into account, and a philosophy that takes the world into account, but uproots us from being and the truth. The philosophy of reflection replaces the "world" with the "being-thought." One cannot, while recognizing this deficiency, justify it in spite of everything because of the untenable consequences of an exterior regulation of our thoughts, for only from the point of view of a philosophy of reflection is this the alternative, and it is the reflective analysis that we find questionable. What we propose is not to stop the philosophy of reflection after having started as it does—this is indeed impossible, and, all things considered, a philosophy of total reflection seems to us to go further, be it only in circumscribing what in our experience resists it; what we propose is to take another point of departure.

To remove all equivocation on this point, let us repeat that we reproach the philosophy of reflection not only for transforming the world into a noema, but also for distorting the being of the reflecting "subject" by conceiving it as "thought"—and finally for rendering unthinkable its relations with other "subjects" in the world that is common to them. The philosophy of reflection starts with the principle that if a perception is to be able to be my own it must from the start be one of my "representations"—in other words, that I, qua "thought," must be what effects the

connection between the aspects under which the object presents itself and their synthesis into an object. The reflection, the return to the interior, would not modify the perception, since it would limit itself to bringing out what from the first made up its framework or its joints, and since the thing perceived, if it is not nothing, is the set of connecting operations which the reflection enumerates and makes explicit. One is barely permitted to say that the reflective gaze turns back from the object toward me, since I qua thought am what makes there be a distance and in general any relation whatever from one point of the object to another. With one stroke the philosophy of reflection metamorphoses the effective world into a transcendental field; in doing so it only puts me back at the origin of a spectacle that I could never have had unless, unbeknown to myself, I organized it. It only makes me be consciously what I have always been distractedly; it only makes me give its name to a dimension behind myself, a depth whence, in fact, already my vision was formed. Through the reflection, the I lost in its perceptions rediscovers itself by rediscovering them as thoughts. It thought it had quit itself for them, spread itself out in them; it comes to realize that if it had quit itself they would not be and that the very outspread of the distances and the things was only the "outside" of its own inward intimacy with itself, that the unfolding of the world was the coiling up upon itself of a thought which thinks anything whatever only because it thinks itself first.

Once one is settled in it, reflection is an inexpugnable philosophical position, every obstacle, every resistance to its exercise being from the first treated not as an adversity of the things but as a simple state of non-thought, a gap in the continuous fabric of the acts of thought, which is inexplicable, but about which there is nothing to say since it is literally *nothing*. But are we to enter into reflection? In its inaugural act is concealed a decision to play a double game which, once unmasked, divests it of its apparent evidence; in one move the philosophical lie is perpetrated with which one first pays for this henceforth invulnerable method. It is essential to the reflective analysis that it start from a *de facto* situation. If it did not from the first take as given the true idea, the internal adequation of my thought with what I think, or the thought in act of the world, it should have to suspend every "I think" upon an "I think that I think," and this upon an "I think that I think that I think," and so on. . . . The

search for the conditions of possibility is in principle posterior to an actual experience, and from this it follows that even if subsequently one determines rigorously the *sine qua non* of that experience, it can never be washed of the original stain of having been discovered *post festum* nor ever become what positively founds that experience. This is why we must say not that it precedes the experience (even in the transcendental sense) but that it must be able to accompany it, that is, that it translates or expresses its essential character but does not indicate a prior possibility whence it would have issued. Never therefore will the philosophy of reflection be able to install itself in the mind it discloses, whence to see the world as its correlative. Precisely because it is reflection, re-turn, re-conquest, or re-recovery, it cannot flatter itself that it would simply coincide with a constitutive principle already at work in the spectacle of the world, that, starting with this spectacle, it would travel the very route that the constitutive principle had followed in the opposite direction. But this is what it would have to do if it is really a *return*, that is, if its point of arrival were also the starting point—and this exigency is no optional clause, since if it were not fulfilled the regressive analysis, declining to make any progressive synthesis, would be abandoning the pretension to disclose the sources to us and would be nothing more than the technique of a philosophical quietism. The reflection finds itself therefore in the strange situation of simultaneously requiring and excluding an inverse movement of constitution. It requires it in that, without this centrifugal movement, it should have to acknowledge itself to be a retrospective construction; it excludes it in that, coming in principle after an experience of the world or of the true which it seeks to render explicit, it thereby establishes itself in an order of idealization and of the "after-the-fact" which is not that wherein the world is formed. This is what Husserl brought frankly into the open when he said that every transcendental reduction is also an eidetic reduction, that is: every effort to comprehend the spectacle of the world from within and from the sources demands that we detach ourselves from the effective unfolding of our perceptions and from our perception of the world, that we cease being one with the concrete flux of our life in order to retrace the total bearing and principal articulations of the world upon which it opens. To reflect is not to coincide with the flux from its source unto its last ramifications; it is to disengage

from the things, perceptions, world, and perception of the world, by submitting them to a systematic variation, the intelligible nuclei that resist, and to proceed from one intelligible nucleus to the next in a way that is not belied by experience but gives us only its universal contours. It therefore by principle leaves untouched the twofold problem of the genesis of the existent world and of the genesis of the idealization performed by reflection and finally evokes and requires as its foundation a *hyper-reflection* where the ultimate problems would be taken seriously. To tell the truth, it is not even certain that the reflection that proceeds by way of the essences can accomplish its propaedeutic task and fulfill its role of being a discipline of the understanding. For there is no guarantee that the whole of experience can be expressed in essential invariants, that certain beings—for example, the being of time—do not in principle elude this fixation and do not require from the start, if they are to be able to be thought by us, the consideration of the fact, the dimension of facticity and the hyper-reflection, which would then become, at least in regard to them, not a superior degree at the ultimate level of philosophy, but philosophy itself. But if time should elude the reflection, space too would be involved in this secession, since time is bound to the present through all its fibers, and, through the present, to the simultaneous; one would also have to describe in terms of facticity, and not in terms of essences, a subjectivity situated in space and in time. Little by little it is the whole of experience—the essence itself, and the subject of the essences, and the reflection itself as eidetic—that would require reconsideration. The legitimate function of the fixing of the eidetic invariants would be no longer to confine us within the consideration of the *what*,<sup>16</sup> but to make evident the divergence between the eidetic invariants and the effective functioning and to invite us to bring the experience itself forth from its obstinate silence. . . . In recognizing that every reflection is eidetic and, as such, leaves untouched the problem of our unreflected being and that of the world, Husserl simply agrees to take up the problem which the reflective attitude ordinarily avoids—the discordance between its initial situation and its ends.

Confronting the mind, focus of all clarity, with the world reduced to its intelligible schema, a consistent reflection dissi-

16. TRANSLATOR: In English in the text.

pates every question concerning the relationship between them. Henceforth their relationship will be one of pure correlation: the mind is what thinks, the world what is thought; one could conceive neither of encroachment of the one upon the other, nor of confusion of one with the other, nor of passage from one to the other, nor even of contact between them. Since they are related to one another as the bound to the binding or the *naturata* to the *naturans*, they are too perfectly coextensive for the one to ever be able to be preceded by the other, too irremediably distinct for the one ever to be able to envelop the other. Philosophy therefore impugns as meaningless every encroachment of the world upon the mind, or of the mind upon the world. That the world could pre-exist my consciousness of the world is out of the question: is it not obvious that every world without me that I could think of becomes, by the very fact that I think of it, a world for me; that the private world I divine at the origin of another's gaze is not so private as to prevent me from becoming at that very moment its quasi-spectator? What we express by saying that the world is in itself, or that it is beyond the perception I and the others have of it, is simply the signification "world," which is the same for all and independent of our phantasms, just as the properties of the triangle are the same in all places and at all times and do not begin to be true the day they are recognized. There is a pre-existence of the world with regard to our perception, of the aspects of the world which the other perceives to the perception I will have of them later, of my world to that of men yet to be born, and all these "worlds" make one unique world, but do so only in that the things and the world are objects of thought with their intrinsic properties, are of the order of the true, of the valid, of the signification, and are not of the order of events. The question whether the world be unique for all the subjects loses all meaning once one has admitted the ideality of the world; it no longer makes any sense to ask if my world and that of the other are numerically or specifically the same, since, as an intelligible structure, the world lies always beyond my thoughts as events, but also beyond those of the others, so that it is not divided by the knowledge we acquire of it, nor unique in the sense that each of us is unique. In all that they signify, my perception and the perception another man has of the world are the same, even though our lives be incommensurable, because the *signification*, the meaning—being an internal adequation, a relation of self

with self, pure interiority and total openness all at once—never descend into us as subjected to a perspective (for as such we are never our own light to ourselves), and because thus all our truths as truths rejoin of themselves and form by right one sole system. Thus, with the correlation between thought and the object of thought set up as a principle, there is established a philosophy that knows neither difficulties nor problems nor paradoxes nor reversals: once and for all, I have grasped within myself, with the pure correlation between him who thinks and what he thinks, the truth of my life, which is also the truth of the world and of the other lives. Once and for all, the being-object is placed before me as alone meaningful for me, and every inherence of the others in their bodies, and of myself in my own, is impugned as a confusion—once and for all, the being-self is given to me in the adequation of my thought with itself, and, from this side also, there is no question of taking seriously the compound of the mind with the body. I am forever subjected to the centrifugal movement that makes an object of thought be for a thought, and there is no question of my quitting this position and examining what Being can indeed be before it be thought by me or (what amounts to the same thing) by another, what indeed can be the intermundane space (*l'intermonde*) where our gazes cross and our perceptions overlap: there is no brute world, there is only an elaborated world; there is no intermundane space, there is only a signification "world". . . . And here too the reflective attitude would be inexpugnable if it did not belie in the hypothesis and as reflection what it affirms in the thesis about what is reflected on. For before the reflection I thought myself situated in an actual world by my body, in the midst of other men situated in it by their bodies; I thought I saw them perceive the same world I perceive, and thought I was one of them occupied in seeing their world—and where else have I found, if not in this naïve initiation and in these confused perceptions, the meaning first sighted that I wanted to approach by the reflection? \* How was I able to appeal to myself as to the universal source of meaning—which is to reflect—if not because the spectacle had meaning for me before I discovered that I am he who gives it meaning, that is—since a philosophy of reflection identifies my being with what I think of it—before being this?

\* Show that the reflection suppresses the intersubjectivity.

My access to a universal mind via reflection, far from finally discovering what I always was, is motivated by the intertwining of my life with the other lives, of my body with the visible things, by the intersection of my perceptual field with that of the others, by the blending in of my duration with the other durations. If I pretend to find, through reflection, in the universal mind the premise that had always backed up my experience, I can do so only by forgetting this non-knowing of the beginning which is not nothing, and which is not the reflective truth either, and which also must be accounted for. I was able to appeal from the world and the others to myself and take the route of reflection, only because first I was outside of myself, in the world, among the others, and constantly this experience feeds my reflection. Such is the total situation that a philosophy must account for. It will do so only by admitting the double polarity of reflection and by admitting that, as Hegel said, to retire into oneself is also to leave oneself.\*

\* Perhaps write a separate paragraph (at the end) on reflection as Husserl understands it. It is a reflection that finally is not installed in an active constituting agent (*Auffassungsinhalt-Auffassung*), but finds at the origin of every reflection a massive presence to self, the Retention's *Noch im Griff*, and, through it, the *Urimpression*, and the absolute flux which animates them. It presupposes the reduction of Nature to immanent unities. Yet the *Tönen* is not immanence—unless one understands immanence in the sense of ecstasy!—it utilizes the very structure of the flux.

Distinguish perhaps: 1) reflection, contact with self (Kantian, the Binding)—conditions of possibility. 2) Specular reflection, gaze (Husserl). Thematization of the psychological immanence, of the internal time. 3) Reflection of the absolute flux.

## 2 / Interrogation and Dialectic

### PERCEPTUAL FAITH AND NEGATIVITY

PHILOSOPHY BELIEVED it could overcome the contradictions of the perceptual faith by suspending it in order to disclose the motives that support it. The operation seems to be inevitable, and absolutely legitimate too, since in sum it consists in stating what our life takes as understood. Yet it reveals itself to be fallacious in that it transforms the perceptual faith, which is to be understood; it makes of it a belief among others, founded like any other on reasons—the reasons we have to *think that there is* a world. But it is clear that in the case of perception the conclusion comes before the reasons, which are there only to take its place or to back it up when it is shaken. If we search after the reasons, it is because we no longer succeed in seeing, or because other facts, like that of illusion, incite us to impugn the perceptual evidence itself. But to identify it with the reasons which we have to restore to it some value once it has been shaken is to postulate that the perceptual faith has always been a resistance to doubt, and the positive a negation of negation. The procedure of reflection, as an appeal to “the interior,” retreats back from the world, consigns the faith in the world to the rank of things said or *statements*.<sup>1</sup> But then we have the feeling that this “explicitation” is a transformation without reconversion, that it rests upon itself, on the perceptual faith whose tenor it claims to give us and whose measure it claims to be: it is because first I believe in the world and in the things that I believe in the

1. TRANSLATOR: In English in the text.

order and the connection of my thoughts. We are therefore led to seek, beneath the reflection itself, and as it were *in front of* the philosopher who reflects, the reasons for belief which he seeks within himself, in his thoughts, on the hither side of the world.

This critique of reflection does not only apply to its rudimentary forms, to a psychological reflection which turns away from the things in order to look back upon the “states of consciousness” through which the things are given to us, upon our “thoughts” taken in their formal reality as events situated in a stream of consciousness. Even a reiterated reflection, more self-conscious, which treats the states of consciousness in their turn as unities constituted before an absolute subject, liberates that absolute subject from all inherence in psychological events and defines our thoughts as pure relations to their “objective reality,” their ideate, or their signification—even this purified reflection is not free from the reflective vice of transforming the openness upon the world into an assent of self with self, the institution of the world into an ideality of the world, the perceptual faith into acts or attitudes of a subject that does not participate in the world. If we wish to avoid this first, irretrievable, lie, it is therefore, with and through the reflection, the Being-subject and Being itself that we have to conceive anew, by concentrating our attention on the horizon of the world, at the confines of the universe of reflection. For it is the horizon of the world that secretly guides us in our constructions and harbors the truth of the procedures of reflection by which we pretend to reconstitute it—a first positivity of which no negation of our doubts could be the equivalent.

One will say, then, that before the reflection, and in order to make it possible, a naïve frequenting of the world is necessary, and that the *Self* to which one returns is preceded by an alienated Self or a Self in ec-stasy in Being. The world, the things, what is, is (one will say) of itself, without common measure with our “thoughts.” If we try to find out what “the thing” means for us, we find that it is what rests in itself, that it is exactly what it is, wholly in act, without any virtuality or potency, that it is by definition “transcendent,” outside, absolutely foreign to all interiority. If it is perceived by someone, and in particular by me, this is not constitutive of its meaning as a thing, which on the contrary is to be there in indifference, in the night of identity, as

pure in-itself. Such would be the description of Being to which we would be led if we really wished to rediscover the prereflective zone of the openness upon Being. And in order that this openness take place, in order that decidedly we get out of our thoughts, in order that nothing stand between us and it, it would be correlatively necessary to empty the Being-subject of all the phantoms with which philosophy has encumbered it. If I am to be in ec-stasy in the world and in the things, it is necessary that nothing detain me within myself far from them—no “representation,” no “thought,” no “image,” and not even that epithet “subject,” “mind,” or “Ego,” with which the philosopher wishes to distinguish me absolutely from the things, but which becomes misleading in its turn, since, like every designation, in the end it devolves into the positive, reintroduces a phantom of reality within me, and makes me think that I am a *res cogitans*—a very particular, elusive, invisible thing, but a thing all the same. The only way to ensure my access to the things themselves would be to purify my notion of the subjectivity completely: there is not even any “subjectivity” or “Ego”; the consciousness is without “inhabitant,” I must extricate it completely from the secondary apperceptions that make of it the reverse of a body, the property of a “psychism,” and I must discover it as the “nothing,” the “void,” which has the capacity for receiving the plenitude of the world, or rather which needs it to bear its own emptiness.

It is with this intuition of Being as absolute plenitude and absolute positivity, and with a view of nothingness purified of all the being we mix into it, that Sartre expects to account for our primordial access to the things, always tacitly understood in the philosophies of reflection, and always taken in realism as an action of the things upon us—which is unthinkable. From the moment that I conceive of myself as negativity and the world as positivity, there is no longer any interaction. I go with my whole self to meet a massive world; between it and myself there is neither any point of encounter nor point of reflection, since it is Being and I am nothing. We are and remain strictly opposed and strictly commingled precisely because we are not of the same order. Through the center of myself I remain absolutely foreign to the being of the things—and, precisely as such, destined for them, made for them. Here what one says of being and what one says of nothingness *are* but one and the same thing—they are the obverse and the reverse of the same thought; the clear vision

of being such as it is under our eyes—as the being of the thing that is peaceably, obstinately itself, seated in itself, absolute non-me—is complementary or even synonymous with a conception of oneself as absence and elusion. The intuition of being is solidary with a sort of negintuition of nothingness (in the sense that we speak of negentropy), with the impossibility of our reducing ourselves to anything whatever—a state of consciousness, thought, an *ego*, or even a “subject.”<sup>2</sup> Here everything depends on the strictness with which we will be able to think through the negative. We are not thinking it as negative if we treat it as an “object of thought” or try to say *what it is*: that is to make of it a more subtle or more rarefied species of being, it is to reintegrate it into being.<sup>3</sup> The only way to think of the negative is to think that it *is not*, and the only way to preserve its negative purity is (instead of juxtaposing it to being as a distinct substance, which is to immediately contaminate it with positivity) to see it out of the corner of one’s eye as the sole *frontier* of being, implicated in being as what being would lack, if absolute fullness could lack anything—more precisely, as calling for being in order to not be nothing, and, as such, called forth by being as the sole supplement to being that would be conceivable, a lack of being, but at the same time a lack that constitutes itself into a lack, hence a fissure that deepens in the exact measure that it is filled. Take the *this* which is under my eyes and which seems to choke the void I am with its mass. In reality, this glass, this table, this room can be sensibly present to me only if nothing separates me from them, only if I am in them and not in myself, in my representations or my thoughts, only if I am nothing. Yet (one will say) inasmuch as I have *this* before myself I am not an absolute nothing, I am a determined nothing: not this glass, nor this table, nor this room; my emptiness is not indefinite, and to this extent at least my nothingness is filled or nullified. In reality, this pseudo-positivity of my present is only a more profound or re-

2. I am absolutely foreign to being and this is what makes me be open to being qua “absolute plenitude and entire positivity” (Sartre, *L’Etre et le néant* [Paris, 1943], p. 50). [English translation by Hazel E. Barnes, *Being and Nothingness* (New York, 1956), p. 15. The translations from this book have been slightly altered. A.L.]

3. Sartre accepts all the arguments against the idea of nothingness one could offer: they prove that nothingness is not, which is precisely its sole manner of being.

doubled negation. It has its weight as an effective present; it occupies in full force the field of my life only because it is new, because it [breaks forth?] on the ground of the total world, but this also means that it is about to be reabsorbed into it: in another instant it will have disappeared, while I was speaking of it, and given place to another *this*; it will have fused into the rest of the world. It determines my emptiness only because it is ephemeral, constitutionally menaced by another *this*. What I call its force and its presence is the infinitesimal suspension of this menace, is the momentary retreat of the whole. Its "pressure" on me is only the unsure absence of the rest, the negation of those other negations which the past *thises* "have been" (*ont été*), which the future *thises* "will be," a negation that will soon rejoin them in the actual and will have to be recommenced. Thus to fill up the fissure is in reality to deepen it, since the present one throws into it does not negate the negations that have been or will be in their own time, and displaces them only by exposing itself to the same imminent fate. The very plenitude of the present reveals itself upon examination to be our constitutive void carried to the second power. An effective or primordial negation must bear within itself what it negates, must be actively a negation of itself:

In the measure . . . that the being that lacks— *is not* what it lacks, we apprehend a negation it it. But if this negation is not to vanish into pure exteriority—and along with it all possibility of negation in general—its foundation lies in the necessity for the being that lacks— *to be* what it lacks. Thus the foundation of the negation is a negation of negation. But this negation-foundation is no more a *given* than is the lack of which it is an essential moment: it is as having to be. . . . It is only as a lack *to be suppressed* that the lack can be an internal lack for the for-itself.<sup>4</sup>

Finally it is with the same movement that nothingness hollows itself out and fills itself. A philosophy that really thinks the negation, that is, that thinks it as what is not through and through, is also a philosophy of Being.\* We are beyond monism and dualism, because dualism has been pushed so far that the opposites, no longer in competition, are at rest the one against

4. *L'Être et le néant*, pp. 248–49. [Eng. trans., p. 198.]

\* The destiny of nothingness and that of being are the same if one thinks nothingness properly.

the other, coextensive with one another. Since nothingness is what is not,

. . . knowledge is reabsorbed into being: it is neither an attribute nor a function nor an accident of being; but *there is only being*. . . . At the end of this book we shall even be able to consider this articulation of the For-itself with respect to the In-itself as the perpetually moving outline of a quasi-totality which we can call *Being*. From the point of view of this totality, the upsurge of the For-itself is not only the absolute event of the For-itself, it is also *something that happens to the In-itself*, the sole adventure of the In-itself possible: for everything comes to pass as if the For-itself, by its very nihilation, constituted itself as "consciousness of—" that is, by its very transcendence escapes that law of the In-itself by which affirmation is choked up by the affirmed. The For-itself, through its self-negation, becomes affirmation of the In-itself. The intentional affirmation is like the reverse of the internal negation. . . . But then within the quasi-totality of Being, affirmation *happens* to the In-itself; it is the adventure of the In-itself *to be affirmed*. It happens to the In-itself that this affirmation, which could not be effected as the affirmation of self by the In-itself without destroying its being-in-itself, is realized by the For-itself; it is as a passive ec-stasy of the In-itself, which leaves it unaltered and which nonetheless is effected in it and on the basis of it. Everything comes to pass as if the For-itself had a Passion to lose itself in order that the affirmation "world" happen to the In-itself.<sup>5</sup>

From the point of view of a philosophy of the absolute negativity—which is at the same time a philosophy of the absolute positivity—all the problems of the classical philosophy volatilize, for they were problems about "compound" or "union," and compound and union are impossible between what is and what is not, but, for the same reason that makes the compound impossible, the one could not be thought without the other. Thus disappears the antinomy of idealism and realism: it is true that "knowledge" as nihilation is sustained only by the things themselves in which it is founded, that it could not affect being, that it "adds nothing" to it and "takes nothing" from it,<sup>6</sup> that it is a "shimmering of nothingness" at its surface<sup>7</sup>—and at the same time it is true that, again as nihilation, and inasmuch as nothing-

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 268–69. [Eng. trans., pp. 216–17.]

6. *Ibid.*, p. 232. [Eng. trans., p. 183.]

7. *Ibid.*, p. 268. [Eng. trans., p. 216.]

ness is absolutely unknown to being, "knowledge" gives it this negative but original determination of being "Being *such as it is*," the being recognized or acknowledged, the sole being that *would have a meaning*:

. . . this being which "invests me" from all sides and from which *nothing* separates me, it is precisely *nothing* that separates me from it, and this nothing, because it is nothingness, is untraversable . . . ; the For-itself is immediate presence to being and, at the same time, there slips in as an infinite distance between itself and being.<sup>8</sup>

Likewise it is true that the things are forever distinct from every "object of thought" or every "state of consciousness," transcendent, and at the same time that the consciousness that knows them is defined by its presence to itself, its immanence, the strict identity of appearing and being in it. The consciousness is immanence because it is nihilation, void, transparency; and it is open upon transcendent things because by itself this void would be *nothing*, because the existent consciousness is always gorged full of qualities, engulfed in the being it nihilates and over which it has, so to speak, no motor power, being of another order than it. My apprehension of myself is coextensive with my life, as its own possibility by principle—or, more exactly, it is this possibility that is me; I am this possibility, and, through it, all the others. But it is a possibility of nihilation, it leaves untouched the absolute actuality of my incarnate being as it does that of every being, it leaves intact the opacity of my life as long as I do not apply myself to it by reflection; and the *cogito* as an experience of my own being is a prereflective *cogito*, it does not pose my own being as an object before me. By position, and before all reflection, I touch myself through my situation; it is from it that I am referred back to myself; I am unaware of myself as nothingness, I believe only in the things. Precisely because, in what is most proper to me, I am nothing, nothing ever separates me from myself, but also nothing draws my attention to myself, and I am in ec-stasy in the things. If the negative is recognized for what it is,<sup>9</sup> if we practice negintuition in its regard, there is no longer a choice to be made between the unreflected and the reflection, between the perceptual faith and the immanence of my thoughts

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 269–70. [Eng. trans., pp. 217–18.]

9. One should say: for what it is.

to myself who thinks: it is the same thing to be nothing and to inhabit the world; between the knowledge of self and the knowledge of the world there is no longer any debate over even ideal priority. In particular the world is no longer *founded on* the "I think," as the bound on the binding. What I "am" I am only at a distance, yonder, in this body, this personage, these thoughts, which I push before myself and which are only my least remote distances (*mes lointains les moins éloignés*); and conversely I adhere to this world which is not me as closely as to myself, in a sense it is only the prolongation of my body<sup>10</sup>—I am justified in saying that I am in the world. Idealism and the reflective cramp disappear because the relation of knowledge is based on a "relation of being," because for me to be is not to remain in identity, it is to bear before myself the identifiable, *what there is*, to which I add nothing but the tiny doublet "such as it is." And even this passage from the brute being to the acknowledged being or to its truth is required from the depths of the exterior being by its very quality of being exterior, while self-negation is required by the radical negation that I am.

If now we consider that other certitude of the perceptual faith, that of having access to the very world the others perceive, here is how it is translated in a truly negativist philosophy. *What I see is not mine* in the sense of being a private world. Henceforth the table is the table; even the perspective views which I have of it and which are bound to the position of my body are part of being and not of myself; even the aspects of the table that are bound to my psychophysical constitution—its singular color, if I am color-blind and the table is painted red—are still part of the system of the world. What is mine in my perception are its lacunae, and they would not be lacunae if the thing itself, behind them, did not betoken them to be such. Thus finally there remains, to constitute the "subjective" face of perception, only the secondary redoubling of the thing which is expressed in saying that we see it *such as it is*. Suppose now that there is another

10. As Bergson said in *Les Deux Sources*: my body extends unto the stars. (EDITOR: *Les Deux Sources de la morale et de la religion* [Paris, 1932], p. 277: "For if our body is the matter upon which our consciousness applies itself, it is coextensive with our consciousness. It includes everything that we perceive, it extends unto the stars.") [English translation by R. Ashley Audra and Cloudesley Brereton, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (New York, 1935), p. 246.]

man before me who "looks at" what I call "the table." Between the table of my field (which is not one of my thoughts, but the table itself) and this body, this gaze, a relation is established which is neither of the two relations that a solipsist analysis furnishes: the gaze of the other man on the thing is neither a negation swept away by itself and opening upon the thing itself, nor is it the thing in the night of identity now installing itself in full light through the space I supply for it, or its plenitude now decompressing due to the void I provide about it. For the other's gaze on it is not a nothing for me, its exterior witness; whatever it may be in the last analysis, it is not nothing as I am nothing for myself, it does not have the power I have to push the things unto their truth or their meaning and to grasp them "such as they are." The perception others have of the world always leaves me with the impression that it is a blind palpation, and we are quite surprised when they say something about it that rejoins our perception, as we marvel when an infant begins to "understand." . . . And correlatively, the things, at the end of another's look, do not call for that look as a confirmation of their being, as that which makes them true or acknowledged things. It is always *my* things that the others look at, and the contact they have with those things does not incorporate them into a world that would be theirs. The perception of the world by the others cannot enter into competition with my own perception of it, for my position is not comparable to theirs; I live my perception from within, and, from within, it has an incomparable power of ontogenesis. This very power I have to reach the thing and hence to go beyond my private states of consciousness, because it is proper to the perception lived from within, that is, to my own perception, reduces me to a solipsism (this time transcendental) the very moment I thought myself delivered from it. This power of ontogenesis becomes my speciality and my difference. But for this very reason the intervention of the foreign spectator does not leave my relationship with the things untouched. Insinuating into the world "such as it is" the sub-universe of a behavior or of a private life, his intervention puts my devotion to being to the test; it calls into question the right I arrogated to myself to think it for all, it takes my generosity at its word, it summons me to keep the promises I made when I admitted that I was *nothing* and that I was surpassed by being. The gaze of the other men on the things is being which claims its due and which enjoins me to admit that

my relationship with it passes through them. I remain the sole witness of the ontogenesis, the others can add nothing to the evidence of being for me. Before they intervene I already knew that being owes nothing to my states of consciousness; but the nothing I am and the being I see all the same formed a closed sphere. The other's gaze on the things is a second openness. Within this openness which I am, it is a question mark opposite the *solipsist* sphere, it is the possibility of a divergence between the nothing that I am and being. I remain the sole *ipse*; the other, as long as he does not speak, remains an inhabitant of my world, but he reminds me very imperiously that the *ipse* is a nothing, that this anonymity does not form the spectacle for itself, that it forms it for X, for all those presumptively who might wish to take part in it. One sole condition is laid down for their coming on the scene: that they could present themselves to me as other focuses of negativity. It is true that one does not see how they could fulfill that condition, since they are in front of me, on the side of being. But if one does not very well see how they could appear in the world, and if the privilege of my perspective seems to be absolute and my perception indeclinable, I have only provisionally acquired this privilege: it is not the privilege of a "subjective" series reserved for me; I as it were do everything that depends on me in order that the world lived by me be open to participation by others, since I am distinguishable only as a nothing which takes nothing from it, since I put into the arena of the world my body, my representations, my very thoughts qua mine, and since everything that one calls me is in principle open to a foreign gaze, should it but be willing to appear.

Will it appear? It cannot appear in the things. Whatever be the common opinion, it is not in their bodies, nor *anywhere*, that I see the others. It is not from a point of space that the other's gaze emanates. The other is born *from my side*, by a sort of propagation by cuttings or by subdivision, as the first other, says Genesis, was made from a part of Adam's body. But how is it conceivable that what is nothing be doubled? How would one discern one "nothing" from another? The question only shows that we have forgotten our principle on the way, that we have come to forget that nothingness is not, that we grasp it by negintuition and as the reverse of being. If there can be several beings, there will be as many nothingnesses. The question is not

how one would discern one nothingness from another, for to say that I am nothing (in the sense of identity) is to say that I am (in the active sense) my body and my situation, and, reduced to its true terms, the question is whether there can be more than one body and more than one situation. But as soon as it is put in these terms, it is solved: to be sure, I will never find in *my* situation the proof that there actually are other situations (with their titular incumbents who also make being be—the same being as I do), but if my situation were to prove that, it would prove much more than it should, since then the existence of the other would result from my own existence. All one can ask is that my situation—that region of being that is the least distant from my constitutive nothingness—not be for me just one object among all those over which my look soars, that, as Descartes said, there be a certain particular right by which I call it my own, that it be a region of being which I assume first and foremost, through which I assume all the rest, that I have a certain particular bond with it, that it restrict the universality of my gaze in such a way that my view of being not be coextensive with being, and that beyond what I see the place be marked out for what the others see, if they come to be. But this is included in the very notion of situation and in the negintuition of nothingness: if I am nothing and if in order to come to the world I support myself particularly on one part of being, then, since that part does not thereby cease to be *outside* and to be subject to the actions that traverse the world, and since I am not informed about all those actions, there are some whose consequences I will have to assume as brute facts; my situation is opaque to my own eyes, it presents aspects that escape me and upon which an exterior look, if such were possible, would have more light. What I am all told overflows what I am for myself, my universality as nothingness is only presumption on my part, and since it is operative only through my situation, an exterior look that would encompass that situation would encompass my nothingness also. If I succeed in thinking the non-being of my non-being completely, I would agree that in order to *be* truly non-being, it renounces itself in favor of what I am as a whole or in fact. From then on everything is ready, not for an experience of the other (which we have seen is not positively possible), not for a proof of the other (which would proceed against its objective by rendering the other necessary on the basis of myself), but for an experience of

my passivity within being—not that being could by itself alone close in over my nothingness, but because it includes at least all the attributes which my nothingness is decked out with in fact. Since I inevitably identify myself with these attributes from the sole fact that they are my situation, since being is and nothingness is not, in this measure I am exposed, menaced. That this possibility is realized is in fact attested by the experience of shame, or my being reduced to what is visible in my situation. There is no positive experience of another, but there is an experience of my total being as compromised in the visible part of myself. For reflection, we—the others and myself—could not have in common a world that would be numerically the same, we could only rejoin one another in the common signification of our thoughts and in the indivision of ideality. If, on the contrary, we follow out the consequences of the negintuition all the way, we understand how our transcendental being and our empirical being are the obverse and the reverse of one another; we understand, through this expedient, that we are visible, we are not the adequate cause of all that we are, that the world is not only the term of our private ontogenesis but is what already sustains us while we traverse it with a look that, in its own way, is a part of it. I do not *know* the others, in the strong sense that I *know* myself; I therefore cannot flatter myself in supposing that I participate with them in a thought of the world which would be ideally the same thought. But my perception of the world feels it has an exterior; I feel at the surface of my visible being that my volubility dies away, that I become flesh, and that at the extremity of this inertia that was me there is something else, or rather an other who is not a thing. He then is seated nowhere, he is everywhere around me with the ubiquity of oneiric or mythical beings: for he is not entirely *ipse*—I alone am—but he is not caught up in the fabric of what I call being either. He encompasses it, he is a look come from nowhere and which therefore envelops me, me and my power for ontogenesis, from all sides. I knew very well that I was *nothing* and that this nothing swept itself away in favor of being. There remained for me to learn from the other that even this sacrifice does not suffice to equal the plenitude of being, that my fundamental negation is not complete as long as it has not itself been negated from without, and, by a foreign gaze, counted in with the beings. . . . But at the same time, since there are no degrees in nothingness, the

other's intervention can teach me nothing about my nothingness of which I would have been absolutely ignorant. The solipsist being is already in himself the absolute other which he becomes for himself with the apparition of the other. I already have in the night of the In-itself all that is necessary in order to fabricate the other's private world, as the beyond inaccessible to me. The experience of the other's gaze upon me only prolongs my inward conviction of being nothing, of living only as a parasite on the world, of inhabiting a body and a situation. All told, therefore, a rigorous philosophy of negintuition accounts for the private worlds without shutting us up in them: strictly speaking there is no intermundane space; each one inhabits only his own, sees only according to his own point of view, enters into being only through his situation. But because he is nothing and because his relationship with his situation and with his body is a relation of being, his situation, his body, his thoughts do not form a screen between him and the world; on the contrary they are the vehicle of a relation to Being in which third parties, witnesses, can intervene. Their place is marked out in advance in the lacunae of my private world, which I know very well to be lacunae, since the "nothing" which I am would need the totality of being in order to be completely realized, and since it is evident that my situation, my body, my thoughts are only a part of it. While a philosophy of consciousness or of reflection can justify the perceptual faith in the unicity of the world only by reducing it to a consciousness of the identity of the world, and by making of illusion a simple privation, a philosophy of negativity entirely ratifies the pretension of the perceptual faith to open to us a world numerically one, common to all, through perspectives that are our own, because the *solus ipse*, as fundamental negation, is in advance open upon a background-world that exceeds all its perspectives, because the "incomparable monster" is in its heart convinced that its views are unequal to the whole, is all ready, if it encounters someone, to found a family, and because it has the momentum to go beyond itself. For the philosophy of reflection it is an inextricable difficulty to comprehend how a constitutive consciousness can pose another that would be its equal, and hence also constitutive—since the first must forthwith pass on to the rank of the constituted. The difficulty results from the fact that both are conceived as centrifugal acts, spiritual syntheses, in which case one does not see how they could ebb back toward their

source. On the contrary it is for a philosophy of the negative the very definition of the *ipse* to adhere to a *de facto* situation or to sustain it as its bond with Being. This exterior at the same time confirms it in its particularity, renders it visible as a partial being to the others' look, and connects it back to the whole of Being. What was a stumbling block for the philosophy of reflection becomes, from the point of view of negativity, the principle of a solution. Everything really does come down to a matter of thinking the negative rigorously.

Finally the thought of the negative (*pensée du négatif*) satisfies the third exigency of the perceptual faith we spoke of at the start. We said that before all philosophy, perception is convinced that it has to do with a confused totality where all things, the bodies and the minds, are together, and which it calls the *world*. Here again the reflection attains its rigor only by destroying what we experience: it replaces the pell-mell of the world with a set of parallel consciousnesses, each observing its own law if it had been regulated by the same clockmaker as the others, or each observing the laws of a universal thought that is immanent in all. From the point of view of a negativist philosophy, the synchronism of the consciousnesses is given by their common belongingness to a Being to which no one has the key and whose law they all observe—or rather, let us no longer say that there is synchronization: each experiences himself as involved with the others; there is a meeting ground which is Being itself inasmuch as each of us inheres in it through his situation. "There is only Being": each experiences himself given over to a body, to a situation, through them to being, and what he knows of himself passes entirely over to the other the very instant he experiences the other's medusan power. Hence each one knows that he himself and the others are *inscribed* in the world; what he feels, what he lives, what the others feel and live, even his dreams or their dreams, his illusions and theirs, are not islets, isolated fragments of being: all this, by reason of the fundamental exigency of our constitutive nothingnesses, is *of being*, has existence, order, meaning, and there is a way to comprehend it. Even if what I live at present should reveal itself to be illusory, the critique of my illusion will not simply cast it out of the world, but on the contrary will show me its place, its relative legitimacy, its *truth*. If nothingness is destined for Being, my presence as a

nothingness is an exigency for totality, for cohesion; it postulates that everywhere it is a matter of the same being. . . . All that is partial is to be reintegrated, every negation is in reality a determination, the being-self and the being-other and the being in itself are fragments of one sole being. The negativism, if it is rigorous, absolute, is a sort of positivism. The very movement by which a *this* is pronounced in my life, or this life in the world, is but the climax of negation, the negation that destroys itself. If a nothingness that is truly conceived as nothingness as such eludes all contamination with being and refuses to form a whole by juxtaposition with it, at the same time it demands to be all, it backs up being in its integral exigency, and, through a reversal of the pro and the con, is incorporated into being. When we have gone beyond the first steps, the radical distinction between being and nothingness, the analysis—which are abstract and superficial—we find at the center of things that the opposites are exclusionary to such an extent that the one without the other would be only an abstraction, that the force of being is supported by the frailty of the nothingness which is its accomplice, that the obscurity of the In Itself is for the clarity of the For Itself in general, if not for that of “my consciousness.” The famous ontological problem, the “why is there something rather than nothing” disappears along with the alternative: there is not something *rather than nothing*, the nothing could not *take the place* of something or of being: nothingness inexists (in the negative sense) and being is, and the exact adjusting of the one upon the other no longer leaves room for a question. Everything is obscure when one has not thought out the negative; everything is clear when one has thought it as negative. For then what is called negation and what is called position appear as accomplices and even in a sort of equivalence. They confront one another “in a tumult like unto silence”; the world is like that band of foam on the ocean which appears immobile when seen from an airplane, but which suddenly, because it has extended itself by a line, is understood to be shimmering and living from close up. But one also understands that, seen from high enough, the amplitude of being will never exceed that of nothingness, nor the noise of the world its silence.

In a sense the thought of the negative provides us with what we were searching for, terminates our research, brings philoso-

phy to a standstill. We said that philosophy needs a contact with being prior to reflection, a contact which makes reflection itself possible. The “negintuition” of nothingness is the philosophical attitude that puts reflection and spontaneity in a sort of equivalence. If I really understand that nothingness is not, and that this is its own way of being, I understand that there can be no question of incorporating it into being, that it will always be this side of it, that I qua negativity am always behind all the things, cut off from them by virtue of my status as witness, always capable of suspending my adhesion to the world in order to make of it a thought of the world. And yet at the same time I understand that this thought of the world is *nothing*, that in this return to myself I do not discover a set of premises of which the world would be the consequence, that on the contrary it is the premise and my consciousness of it the consequence, that my intentions in themselves are empty, that they are only the flight of my emptiness after being, and that this flight owes its direction and its meaning to being, that our reconstructions or reconstitutions are suspended upon a primary evidence of the world which itself indicates its articulations to me. What I find “in myself,” is always the reference to this originating presence, and to retire into oneself is identical to leaving oneself. For him who thinks the negative in its purity, there are not two movements—the abandonment to the world and the recovery by reflection; there are not two attitudes—the one, natural, of attention to the things, and the other, philosophical, of attention to the signification of the things, each retaining, as in reserve, the possibility of transforming itself into the other; there is a perception of being and an imperception of nothingness which are coextensive with one another, which are but one. An absolute negativism—that is, one that thinks the negative in its originality—and an absolute positivism—that is, one that thinks being in its plenitude and its self-sufficiency—are exactly synonymous; there is not the least divergence between them. To say that nothingness is not is the same as to say that there is only being—in other words, that one could not find nothingness among the things that are, as one of them, that *therefore* it must be backed up against them, that it must be no more than what makes them not be each for its own account, what makes them be together, what makes them be one sole Being. . . . The perspective in which Being and Nothingness are absolutely opposed, and the perspective in which Being itself,

by definition given as identical with itself, eminently contains a contact—established, broken and re-established—with Nothingness, its being recognized, its negation negated—these two perspectives are but one; as absolutely opposed, Being and Nothingness are indiscernible. It is the absolute inexistence of Nothingness that makes it need Being and makes it hence be not visible except in the guise of “lakes of non-being,” relative and localized non-beings, reliefs or lacunae in the world. It is precisely because Being and Nothingness, the yes and the no, cannot be blended together like two ingredients that, when we see being, nothingness is immediately there, and not in the margin like the zone of non-vision around our field of vision, but over the whole expanse of what we see, as what installs it and disposes it before us as a spectacle. 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? It begins by opposing being and nothingness absolutely, and it ends by showing that the nothingness is in a way within being, which is the unique universe. When are we to believe it? At the beginning or at the end? The answer will be: it amounts to the same thing and there is no difference. Yet there is a difference between Being in the restricted sense with which one begins—which over its whole extension is absolutely exclusive of nothingness, and which nothingness needs if it is to be able to be named—and Being in the broad sense which one ends up with—which in a way contains nothingness, invokes it in order to become fully being, in order to become Being “such as it is.” The two movements—that by which nothingness invokes being and that by which being invokes nothingness—do not merge into one: they cross. According to the first, being is negation of negation, it has an infrastructure of nothingness, it is an attribute of knowledge; according to the second, nothingness finally is reiterated position, position of position, it has an infrastructure of being, and knowledge is an attribute of being. In the first approach, being is considered from the point of view of nothingness. In the second, nothingness is considered from the point of view of being. Even if, in both cases, one ends up at an identification, it takes place in the first case for the profit of nothingness, in the second for

the profit of being, and the two relationships are not identical. Let us examine each in turn.

One can first think starting from the pure negative. One shows that I, who question myself about being, am nothing. With this statement, one circumscribes an anti-nature which is me: I am what has no nature, I am a nothing. This conceptual or verbal fixation is only a first moment of analysis, but it is indispensable to introduce what follows, it commands it. It motivates the conclusions themselves, quite opposed to it, at which the thought of the negative will arrive; it co-determines their meaning by establishing them in advance in an order of univocal truth where the opposites can drive out one another but not pass into one another. In positing that nothingness is not, that non-being is its manner of being, that it is non-being through and through, the thought of the negative condemns itself to define being as absolute plenitude and proximity, it posits that being is. Because he who questions about being is a nothing, it is necessary that everything be absolutely outside of him, at a distance, and one could not conceive of a more or a less in this remoteness which is by principle. He who questions, having been once and for all defined as *nothing*, is installed at infinity; from there he apprehends all things in an absolute equidistance: before what is not, they are all, without any degree, of being, of the absolutely full and positive. Because the negative is the founding, the founded being is absolute positivity. One cannot even say that there is any *inference* here: the negintuition of nothingness is already the immediate presence to being. The power conceded to the philosopher to name this nothingness which he is, to coincide with this fissure in being, is already a variant of the principle of identity which defines being. In thinking on the basis of the pure negative we already decide to think according to identity; we are already in identity, since this negative which nothing can limit in its own order, having to go on to the limit of itself, will be also, and fundamentally, a negation of itself, and therefore will be pronounced in the form of an advent of pure being. There is a trap inherent in the thought of the negative: if we say that it is, we destroy its negativity; but if we maintain strictly that it is not, we still elevate it to a sort of positivity, we confer upon it a sort of being, since through and through and absolutely it is *nothing*. The negative becomes a sort of quality precisely because one

fixes it in its power of refusal and evasion. A negativist thought is identical to a positivist thought, and in this reversal remains the same in that, whether considering the void of nothingness or the absolute fullness of being, it in every case ignores density, depth, the plurality of planes, the background worlds. When, starting from nothingness, it comes to pose being as absolute plenitude and positivity—more: to declare that there is only being and that being in a sense invokes and includes nothingness—it is not reintroducing elements that it would first methodically have excluded, it is not approaching the concrete, it is not following out the articulations of the whole: it is compensating for one abstraction with a counter-abstraction. One must grant to it that the pure negative calls for pure being, but far from one having thus found for philosophy a position where self-consciousness would not be prejudicial to the transcendence of the thing, one compromises both of these, one accumulates the difficulties. For it is quite obvious that there is pure negation only in principle and that the existent For Itself is encumbered with a body, which is not outside if it is not inside, which intervenes between the For Itself and itself. Likewise pure being is nowhere to be found, for every alleged thing soon reveals itself to be an appearance, and these alternating and antagonistic images are not comprehensible as images of one sole being, for lack of degrees of being, for lack of organization in depth, and because this being, in order to be positive and full, must be flat, and hence remains *what it is* beyond the ambivalence to which we are confined. It is in appearance only that the immanent consciousness and the transcendence of being are reconciled by an analytic of Being and Nothingness: it is not being that is transcendent, it is I who hold it at arm's length by a sort of abnegation; it is not the world that is thick, it is I who am agile enough to make it be yonder. When here one moves from nothingness to being, and then to the ec-stasy of being in the nothingness that recognizes that being “such as it is,” in fact there is neither progress nor synthesis, there is no transformation of the initial antithesis: one pushes unto its limits the initial analysis which remains valid to the letter, and which always animates the integral view of Being. Being's invoking of nothingness is *in truth* an invoking of Being by nothingness, an autonegation. Nothingness and being are always absolutely other than one another, it is precisely their isolation that unites them; they are not really united, they only

more quickly succeed one another before thought.\* Since the void of the For Itself fills up, since man is not immediately present to everything, but more especially to a body, to a situation, and only through them to the world, one admits the denseness of an unreflected being in the For Itself, and one admits that the reflective operation is second: one speaks of a *prereflective cogito*. But the ambivalence of the word conveys the ambivalence of a thought that can either remain itself, or negate itself in the night of the In Itself, but cannot find any inertia in itself: is the *prereflective cogito* something in us that is more ourselves than the *cogito* and the reflection that introduces it, or is it a *cogito* that from the depths of ourselves precedes itself, pronounces itself before we have pronounced it, because thought is what we are? The first hypothesis is precluded if I am a nothing; and the second restores to me my emptiness just when the question is to understand how my life can be opaque for itself. The very progress of the investigation cannot change the idea we form of Being and Nothingness; it can only disclose its unnoticed implications, so long as one thinks on the basis of the signification of being and the non-sense of nothingness. Even if the explanation apparently reverses the perspectives, the reversal is not effective; everything takes place between this entity and this negentivity (*négativité*), and being, which is said to undergo a sort of assumption into nothingness, remains pure In Itself, absolute positivity; it is only as such that it knows this adventure—and this pure In Itself was from the beginning destined to be recognized, since it was as an autonegation of the negative that it had appeared. There is no first apprehension of ipseity and being which is transformed or surpassed; the reversal of the pro and the con is another formulation of the initial antithesis, which does not cease in it, which on the contrary is renewed in it. The thought of the pure negative or of the pure positive is therefore a high-altitude thought, which operates on the essence or on the pure negation of the essence, on terms whose signification has been fixed and which it holds in its possession. Sartre does indeed say that *at the end of his book* it will be permissible to move to a broader sense of Being, which

\* I said in turn that “nothingness is not” and “being is” are the same thought—and that nothingness and being are not united. Connect the two: they are not united precisely because they are the same thing in two contradictories = ambivalence.

contains Being and nothingness. But this is not because the initial opposition would have been overcome; it remains in all its rigor, it is that initial opposition that justifies its own reversal, that triumphs in this defeat; the passion of the For Itself, which sacrifices itself in order that being be, is still its own negation by itself. It is tacitly understood that from one end of the book to the other we are speaking of the same nothingness and of the same being, that one unique spectator is witness to the progress, that he is not himself caught up in the movement, and that inasmuch as that is so the movement is illusory. A negativist or positivist thought rediscovers that postulate of the philosophy of reflection that no result of the reflection can retroactively compromise him who operates the reflection nor change the idea we form of him for ourselves. And it cannot be otherwise if one starts with the pure negative: for it will never admit anything into itself, and even if one comes to recognize that it has need of Being, it will need Being only as a distant environment that does not adulterate it. It will dispose it about itself, as a pure spectacle or as what it has to be, it will elevate it to truth or to signification; but it will itself remain the nothingness it was, its devotion to Being will confirm it as nothingness.

The negativist (or positivist) thought establishes between nothingness and being a massive cohesion, both rigid and fragile at the same time: rigid since they are finally indiscernible, fragile since they remain unto the end absolute opposites. Their relation is, as the psychologists say, labile. This will be seen each time it is a question of comprehending how nothingness receives being into itself, and hence not only, as we said a moment ago, when it is a question of comprehending my incarnation, but also when it is a question of comprehending how I can assume the view another has of me, or finally our common belongingness to the world. It is as always by means of the negative purity of the For Itself that one seeks to comprehend the fact that it recognizes beings like unto itself: because I am no thing, and because all the same I have to be this emptiness, to make it be in the world, I take up again on my own account my body and my situation and the other's gaze which I see posed on this exterior that is me. For me there is no activity and presence of an other; there is on my part the experience of a passivity and of an alienation which I recognize concern me, because, being nothing, I have to be my situation. In the last analysis, therefore, the

relationship remains one between me as nothingness and me as a man, and I do not deal with others, at most I deal with a neutral non-me, with a diffused negation of my nothingness. I am drawn out of myself by the other's gaze, but his power over me is exactly measured by the consent which I have given to my body, to my situation; he has alienating force only because I alienate myself. Philosophically speaking, there is no experience of the other. For the encounter with another to be thought, no transformation of the idea of myself that I form by myself is required. The encounter actualizes what was already possible on the basis of me alone. What the encounter brings is only the force of the fact: this consent to my body and to my situation which I prepared, whose principle I possessed, but only the principle, since a passivity that one poses oneself is not effective—here suddenly it is realized. The relation with another, says Sartre, is [evidently?] a fact, otherwise I should not be myself and he would not be other; the other exists in fact and for me exists only in fact. But just as "being is" adds nothing to "nothingness is not" and the recognition of Being as absolute plenitude and positivity changes nothing in the negintuition of nothingness, so also the other's gaze which suddenly congeals me adds to my universe no new dimension—it only confirms for me an inclusion in being which I knew from within; I only learn that there is about my universe an outside in general, as I learn by perception that the things it illuminates lived before it in the night of identity. The other is one of the empirical forms of the engulfment into Being. . . . And, to be sure, this analysis has its truth: to the whole extent that it is true that I am nothing, the other cannot appear to me otherwise than as the ultra-world from which emanates a gaze whose impact I feel on my body alone; to the whole extent that I am a thought, a consciousness, I am compelled to enter into the world only through it, and the other consciousnesses, the other thoughts, will be forever but the doubles or the younger sisters of my own. I will never live any but my own life and the others will never be but other myselfes. But is this solipsism, this aspect of the phenomena, this structure of the relationship with another the whole or even the essential? It is but one empirical variant of it<sup>11</sup>—the ambivalent

11. EDITOR: The preceding sentence, to which the beginning of this one is linked, suffers from an apparently incomplete correction. The first version, which was rejected, was: "but the question is

or labile relationship with the other—in which, moreover, analysis would rediscover the normal, canonical form, subjected in the particular case to a distortion that makes of the other an anonymous, faceless obsession, an other in general.

Let us even suppose that the other be the X titular of this look which I feel posed upon me and which congeals me: I do not advance one step into the elucidation of the phenomenon in saying that it is prepared for by me from within, that I, nothingness, have exposed myself to this look by taking up on my own account my body, my situation, my exterior, and that finally the other is the limiting case of my engulfment in Being. For as long as it is I who insert myself into Being, the one who inserts and the inserted keep their distances. Whereas the other's gaze—and it is here that it brings me something new—envelops me wholly, being and nothingness. This is what, in the relationship with another, depends on no interior possibility and what obliges us to say that it is a pure fact. But though this relationship be a part of my facticity, though it be an encounter that cannot be deduced from the For Itself, still it does present a sense for me; it is not a nameless catastrophe that leaves me petrified (*médusé*), it is the entry on the scene of someone else. I do not simply feel myself frozen, I am frozen by a look, and if it were for example an animal that looked at me, I would know only a feeble echo of this experience. Therefore, far from the sense of the other's look being exhausted in the burning it leaves at the point of my body he looks at, it is necessary that there be something in the other's look that designates it to me as a look of an other. It is necessary that something teach me that I am wholly implicated, being and nothingness, in this perception that takes possession of me and that the other perceive me soul and body. Hence, by making of the ambivalent relation the canonical form of the relationship with the other and by bringing to the foreground the objectification I suffer, one does not avoid having to recognize a positive perception of the ipseity by an exterior ipseity: the ambivalent relation refers to it as to its condition. In other words, the thought of the negative can very well found every position on a negation of negation, every centripetal relation on a centrifugal

whether the negativist or positivist thought disclosing this aspect of the phenomena, this structure of the relationship with another, grasps the whole or even the essential. We say that, in principle, it can only grasp one empirical variant of it. . . .”

relation, but, whether in dealing with being in general or the being of the other, a moment comes when the negation of negation crystallizes into the simplicity of a *this*: there is a thing, here is someone. These events are more than the infrastructure of the For Itself—the For Itself's power for negation henceforth derives from their sovereign positivity. My knowledge only sanctions what being already was in itself, only rejoins it “such as it is”—and, likewise, instead of my shame constituting the whole sense of the other's existence, the other's existence is the truth of my shame. Finally, if we consider my relationship no longer with the solipsist Being and with the other, but now with Being inasmuch as it is aimed at by all of us, inasmuch as it is crammed full of others who perceive one another and perceive the same world—and the same one that I also perceive—the negativist thought is once again faced with the alternative: either remain faithful to the definition of myself as nothingness and Being as pure positivity—in which case we do not have before us a world as the whole of nature, humanity, and history, including me; the negations are only a shimmering on the surface of being, and the hard core of being is found only after one has effaced from it every possible, every past, all movement, all the imaginary or illusory attributes which are of me and not of it. Or if one does not mean to drive being back to this limit of pure positivity where there is nothing, and ascribe to the For Itself what makes up the whole content of our experience, then, in accordance with the very movement of the negativity when it goes all the way in its negation of itself, it is necessary to incorporate into being a whole quantity of negative attributes, the transitions, and the becoming, and the possible. As always the same negativist thought oscillates between these two images without being able to sacrifice one of them nor to unite them. It is ambivalence itself, that is, the absolute contradiction and the identity of being and nothingness, it is the “ventriloquial” thought that Plato speaks of, that which always affirms or denies in the hypothesis what it denies or affirms in the thesis, that which as high-altitude thinking belies the inherence of being in nothingness and of nothingness in being.

A philosophy of reflection, if it is not to be ignorant of itself, is led to question itself about what precedes itself, about our contact with being within ourselves and outside of ourselves,

before all reflection. Yet by principle it can conceive of that contact with being only as a reflection before the reflection, because it develops under the domination of concepts such as "subject," "consciousness," "self-consciousness," "mind," all of which, even if in a refined form, involve the idea of a *res cogitans*, of a positive being of thought—whence there results the immanence in the unreflected of the results of reflection. We have therefore asked ourselves if a philosophy of the negative would not restore to us the brute being of the unreflected without compromising our power of reflection: a subjectivity that is nothing is in the immediate presence of being or in contact with the world, and at the same time as close to itself as one could like, since no opaqueness in it could separate it from itself. And yet, this analytic of being and nothingness leaves us with a difficulty. By principle it opposes them absolutely, it defines them as mutually exclusive—but if they are absolute opposites they are not defined by anything that would be proper to them. As soon as the one is negated the other is there, each of them is only the exclusion of the other, and nothing prevents them, in the end, from exchanging their roles: there subsists only the split between them. Reciprocally alternative as they may be, they together compose one sole universe of thought, since each of them is only its retreat before the other. To think the total being—what is totally, and hence also that to which nothing is lacking, what is the whole of being—it is necessary to be outside of it, a margin of non-being; but this margin excluded from the whole prevents it from being all—the true totality should contain it too, which, since it is a margin of non-being, is quite impossible. Thus, if being and nothingness are absolutely opposed, they are together founded in a sort of Hyper-being, which is mythical, since the force that requires it is their absolute repulsion. Such is the circle we have traversed, and which leads from absolute opposition to an identity which is only another figure of the opposition—either one thinks them in their opposition between what is and what is not, or on the contrary one identifies them by making of being either a redoubling of negation, or, inversely, a positivity so perfect that it contains eminently the recognition that the nothingness brings to it. But there is no progress, transformation, irreversible order from one of these relationships to the other; what leads us from the one to the other is not a movement of what is thought, it is the shifting

of our attention or the choice we make of the one or other point of departure. But this reproach of ambivalence has no cogency against an analytic of Being and Nothingness that is a description in accordance with the fundamental structures of our contact with being: if this contact really is ambivalent, it is for us to accommodate ourselves to it, and logical difficulties cannot prevail against this description. In reality, the definitions of being as what is in all respects and without restriction, and of nothingness as what is not in any respect—this appropriation of an immediate being and of an immediate nothingness by thought, this intuition and this negintuition—are the abstract portrait of an experience, and it is on the terrain of experience that they must be discussed. Do they express well our contact with being, do they express it in full? They do assuredly express the experience of vision: the vision is a panorama; through the holes of the eyes and from the bottom of my invisible retreat, I survey the world and rejoin it where it is. There is a sort of madness in vision such that with it I go unto the world itself, and yet at the same time the parts of that world evidently do not coexist without me (the table in itself has nothing to do with the bed a yard away); the world is the vision of the world and could not be anything else. Being is bordered along its whole extension with a vision of being that is not a being, that is a non-being. For him who really coincides with the gaze and truly installs himself in the position of the seer, this is incontestable. But is this the whole truth, and can one then formulate it by saying that there is the In Itself as position, and that the For Itself inexists as negation? This formula is evidently abstract: taken literally it would make the experience of vision impossible, for if being is wholly in itself, it is itself only in the night of identity, and my look, which draws it therefrom, destroys it as being; and if the For Itself is pure negation, it is not even For Itself, it is unaware of itself for want of *there being* something in it to be known. I never have being as it is, I have it only as interiorized, reduced to its meaning as a spectacle. And, to top it all, I do not have nothingness either—which is entirely pledged to being, and which, it is true, always misses it: but this repeated failure does not render to non-being its purity. What then do I have? I have a nothingness filled with being, a being emptied by nothingness, and if this is not the destruction of each of the terms by the other, of me by the world and of the world by me, it is necessary

that the annihilation of being and the sinking of the nothingness into it not be exterior relations and not be two distinct operations. This is what one tries to achieve by thinking vision as *nihilation*. Understood in this way, it makes the In Itself itself pass to the status of a world seen, and makes the For Itself pass to the status of a For Itself sunken into being, situated, incarnated. As an operative nothingness, my vision is a ubiquitous presence to the world itself, since it is without inertia and without opacity,\* and at the same time irremediably distinct from what it sees, from which it is separated by the very emptiness that permits it to be vision.<sup>12</sup> But we find again here, in the analysis of experience, what we have found above in the dialectic of being and nothingness: if one really abides by their opposition—if to see is to not be, and if what is seen is being—one understands that vision would be an immediate presence to the world, but one does not see how the nothingness I am could at the same time separate me from being. If it does so, if being is transcendent to the vision, it is that then one has ceased to think of it as pure non-being, and moreover has ceased to think of being as pure In Itself. Either the analytic of being and nothingness is an idealism and does not give us the brute or prereflective being we seek, or, if it is something else, this is because it goes beyond and transforms the initial definitions. Then I am no longer the pure negative, to see is no longer simply to nihilate, the relation between what I see and I who see is not one of immediate or frontal contradiction; the things attract my look, my gaze caresses the things, it espouses their contours and their reliefs, between it and them we catch sight of a complicity. As for being, I can no longer define it as a hard core of positivity

\* The layer of the being-for-me of the world reveals: 1) a *depth* of being in itself; 2) an *opacity* of the being for itself.

12. EDITOR: These lines have been inserted here, in the course of the text itself:

"1) To say I am separated from being by a sheath of non-being—is true. But this sheath of non-being is not *me*; vision is not cognition, the I of vision is not nothingness.

2) The hard 'core of being' Sartre speaks of. There is no core with, around the [no ?] that would be me (negations, shimmering at the surface of being). That being is transcendent means precisely: it is appearances crystallizing, it is full and *empty*, it is *Gestalt* with horizon, it is duplicity of planes, it is, itself, *Verborgenheit*—it is it that perceives itself, as it is it that speaks in me."

under the negative properties that would come to it from my vision: if one subtracts them all there no longer remains anything to see; and nothing permits me to attribute them to the For Itself, which moreover is itself sunken into Being. The negations, the perspective deformations, the possibilities, which I have learned to consider as extrinsic denominations, I must now reintegrate into Being—which therefore is staggered out in depth, conceals itself at the same time that it discloses itself, is abyss and not plenitude. The analytic of Being and Nothingness spread over the things themselves an impalpable film: their *being for me*, which let us see them in themselves. Now, while on my side there has appeared the stratum of corporeal being into which my vision sinks, on the side of the things there is a profusion of perspectives which are not as nothing and which oblige me to say that the thing itself is always further on. Vision is not the immediate relationship of the For Itself with the In Itself, and we are invited to redefine the seer as well as the world seen. The analytic of Being and Nothingness is the seer who forgets that he has a body and that what he sees is always beneath what he sees, who tries to force the passage toward pure being and pure nothingness by installing himself in pure vision, who makes himself a visionary, but who is thrown back to his own opacity as a seer and to the depth of being. If we succeed in describing the access to the things themselves, it will only be through this opacity and this depth, which never cease: there is no thing fully observable, no inspection of the thing that would be without gaps and that would be total; we do not wait until we have observed it to say that the thing is there; on the contrary it is the appearance it has of being a thing that convinces us immediately that it would be possible to observe it. In the grain of the sensible we find the assurance for a series of cross-checkings, which do not constitute the *ecceity* of the thing but are derived from it. Conversely, the imaginary is not an absolute inobservable: it finds in the body analogues of itself that incarnate it. This distinction, like the others, has to be reconsidered and is not reducible to that between the full and the void.

For a philosophy that is installed in pure vision, in the aerial view of the panorama, there can be no encounter with another: for the look dominates; it can dominate only things, and if it falls upon men it transforms them into puppets which move only by springs. From the heights of the towers of Notre-Dame, I

cannot, when I like, feel myself to be on equal footing with those who, enclosed within those walls, there minutely pursue incomprehensible tasks. High places attract those who wish to look over the world with an eagle-eye view. Vision ceases to be solipsist only up close, when the other turns back upon me the luminous rays in which I had caught him, renders precise that corporeal adhesion of which I had a presentiment in the agile movements of his eyes, enlarges beyond measure that blind spot I divined at the center of my sovereign vision, and, invading my field through all its frontiers, attracts me into the prison I had prepared for him and, as long as he is there, makes me incapable of solitude. In every case, in the solipsism as in the alienation, how would we ever find a mind, an invisible, at the end of our look? Or, if the other also is pure vision, how would we see his vision? One would have to be him. The other can enter into the universe of the seer only by assault, as a pain and a catastrophe; he will rise up not before the seer, in the spectacle, but laterally, as a radical casting into question of the seer. Since he is only pure vision, the seer cannot encounter an other, who thereby would be a thing seen; if he leaves himself, it will only be by a turning back of the vision upon himself; if he finds an other, it will only be as his own being seen. There is no perception of the other by me; abruptly my ubiquity as a seer is belied, I feel myself seen—and the other is that X yonder which I do indeed have to think in order to account for the visible body that I suddenly feel myself to have. In appearance this manner of introducing the other as the unknown is the sole one that takes into account and accounts for his alterity. If there is an other, by definition I cannot install myself in him, coincide with him, live his very life: I live only my own. If there is an other, he is never in my eyes a For Itself, in the precise and given sense that I am, for myself. Even if our relationship leads me to admit or even to experience that “he too” thinks, that “he too” has a private landscape, I am not that thought as I am my own, I do not have that private landscape as I have my own. What I say of it is always derived from what I know of myself by myself: I concede that *if I inhabited* that body I should have another solitude, comparable to that which I have, and always divergent perspectively from it. But the “if I inhabited” is not a hypothesis; it is a fiction or a myth. The other’s life, such as he lives it, is not for me who

speaks an eventual experience or a possible: it is a prohibited experience, it is an impossible, and this is as it must be if the other is really the other. If the other is really the other, that is, a For Itself in the strong sense that I am for myself, *he must never be so before my eyes*; it is necessary that this other For Itself never fall under my look, it is necessary that there be no perception of an other, it is necessary that the other be my negation or my destruction. Every other interpretation, under the pretext of placing us, him and myself, in the same universe of thought, ruins the alterity of the other and hence marks the triumph of a disguised solipsism. Conversely, it is in making the other not only inaccessible but invisible for me that I guarantee his alterity and quit solipsism. Yet we are not at the end of our troubles, and the labyrinth is still more difficult than we thought. For if we formulate what we have just said into theses—that is: the other can be for me, and hence can be only my being seen, the other is the unknown incumbent of that zone of the not-mine which I am indeed obliged to mark out with dotted lines in being, since I feel myself seen—this agnosticism in regard to the other’s being for himself, which appeared to guarantee his alterity, suddenly appears as the worst of infringements upon it. For he who states it implies that it is applicable to all those who hear him. He does not speak only of himself, of his own perspective, and for himself; he speaks for all. He says: *the For Itself* (in general) is alone . . . , or: *the being for another* is the death of the For Itself, or things of this kind—without specifying whether this concerns the being for itself such as he lives it or the being for itself such as those who hear him live it, the being for another such as he experiences it or the being for another such as the others experience it. This singular that he permits himself—the For Itself, the For the Other—indicates that he means to speak in the name of all, that in his description he implies the power to speak for all, whereas the description contests this power. Hence I only apparently confine myself to my own experience—to my being for myself and to my being for another—and only apparently respect the radical originality of the for itself of another and his being for me. From the sole fact that I open in the wall of my solipsism the breach through which the gaze of another passes, it is no longer a dichotomy that I am dealing with—that of “the” For Itself and of “the” For the Other—it is a

four-term system: my being for me, my being for the other, the for itself of another, and his being for me. The void that I wished to provide at the horizon of my universe, in order to lodge in it the author of my shame and the inconceivable image of me he forms, is not, whatever I may think, a void; it is not the simple or immediate negation of myself and of my universe. From the sole fact that I circumscribe it, be it with dotted lines, it is cut out in my universe; there is an intersection of my universe with that of another. We do not have *the* For Itself in general with *the* In Itself in general which it sustains, *the* For the Other in general, that is, the possibility for *every* For Itself to be incorporated into *the* In Itself in general by a foreign look; in other words we do not have my being for me and my being for the other virtually multiplied to *n* samples—we have face to face my being for myself, this same being for me offered as a spectacle to the other, the gaze of another as bearer of a being for itself which is a rejoinder of my own, but capable of petrifying (*méduser*) my own, and finally this same being for itself of the other aimed at and in some way reached, perceived, by my gaze upon him. There is, to be sure, no question of a reciprocal relationship between me and the other, since I am alone to be myself, since I am for myself the sole original of humanity, and the philosophy of vision is right in emphasizing the inevitable dissymmetry of the I-Other relation. But, in spite of appearances, it is the philosophy of vision that installs itself dogmatically in all the situations at the same time, by declaring them impenetrable, by thinking each of them as the absolute negation of the others. I cannot even go the length of this absolute in negation; the negation here is a dogmatism, it secretly contains the absolute affirmation of the opposites. It is necessary that there be transition from the other to me and from me to the other precisely in order that I and the others not be posed dogmatically as universes equivalent by principle, and in order that the privilege of the For Itself for itself be recognized. In founding the experience of the other upon that of my objectification before him, the philosophy of vision believed it established between him and me a relationship that would be at the same time a relation of being—since it is in my very being that I am affected by the view the other gets of me—and a relation of pure negation, since this objectification which I undergo is literally incomprehensible to me. Here once

again we find that one must choose: either <sup>13</sup> the relationship is really a relationship of being, in which case it is necessary that the other have in my eyes the status of a For Itself, that the outside of myself on which he has a hold also put me at his mercy as a pure For Itself, that my constitutive nothingness sink into my situation under my own eyes. And finally it is necessary that, instead of the other and me being two parallel For Itselfs each on his own stricken with the same mortal evil—the other's presence, which crushes us each in turn in the midst of our own universe of the In Itself—we be some for the others <sup>14</sup> a system

13. EDITOR: There is no *or* expressed in the continuation of the text. The reflection on the first term of the alternative decides the issue of the second. For, as will immediately become apparent, to say that the other does not crush me into my universe of the in itself is the same as to say that he is not the inexplicable negation of the For Itself I am. The author moreover returns to this latter idea in the note below.

14. Some for the others and not only each for the other (*Les uns pour les autres et non pas seulement l'un pour l'autre*). The problem of the other is always posed by the philosophies of the negative in the form of the problem of *the* other, as though the whole difficulty were to pass from the *one* to the *other*. This is significant: the other is not here *an other*; he is the non-I in general, the judge who condemns me or acquits me, and to whom I do not even think of opposing other judges. But, if one can show, as was done, for example, in Simone de Beauvoir's *She Came to Stay*, that a trio decomposes into three couples, and—in supposing that there are, outside of all abstract reciprocity, successful couples—that there can be no trio that would be successful in the same sense, since it adds to the difficulties of the couple those of the concord between the three possible couples of which it is composed—still the fact remains that the problem of the other is not reducible to that of *the* other, and so much the less so in that the most strict couple always has its witnesses in third parties. Perhaps it even would be necessary to reverse the customary order of the philosophies of the negative, and say that the problem of *the* other is a particular case of the problem of others, since the relation with someone is always mediated by the relationship with third parties, that these have relationships among themselves that command those of *the* one and those of *the* other—and that this is so as far back as one goes toward the beginnings of life, since the Oedipus situation is still a triangular one. Now this is not only a matter of psychology, but also of philosophy—not only of the contents of the relationship with an other, but of its form and its essence as well: if the access to the other is an entry into a constellation of others (where there are of course stars of several magnitudes), it is difficult to maintain that the other be nothing but

of For Itselfs, sensitive to one another, such that the one knows the other not only in what he suffers from him, but more generally as a witness, who can be challenged because he is also himself accused, because he is not a pure gaze upon pure being any more than I am, because his views and my own are in advance inserted into a system of partial perspectives, referred to one same world in which we coexist and where our views intersect. For the other to be truly the other, it does not suffice and it is not necessary that he be a scourge, the continued threat of an absolute reversal of pro and con, a judge himself elevated above all contestation, without place, without relativities, faceless like an obsession, and capable of crushing me with a glance into the dust of my world. It is necessary and it suffices that he have the power to decenter me, to oppose his centering to my own, and he can do so only because we are not two nihilations installed in two universes of the In Itself, incomparable, but two entries to the same Being, each accessible to but one of us, but appearing to the other as *practicable by right*, because they both belong to the same Being. It is necessary and it suffices that the other's body which I see and his word which I hear, which are given to me as immediately present in my field, *do present to me in their own fashion what I will never be present to*, what will always be invisible to me, what I will never directly witness—an absence therefore, but not just any absence, a certain absence and a certain difference in terms of dimensions which are from the first common to us and which predestine the other to be a mirror of me as I am of him, which are responsible for the fact

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*the* absolute negation of myself. For when it is a matter of absolute negation there is but one of them; it absorbs into itself every rival negation. Even if we have one *principal other*, from whom are derived many secondary others in our life, the sole fact that he is not the unique other obliges us to comprehend him not as an absolute negation but as a negation-model, that is, in the last analysis, not as what contests my life but as what forms it, not as another universe in which I would be alienated but as the preferred variant of a life that has never been only my own. Even if each of us has his own archetype of the other, the very fact that he is open to participation, that he is a sort of cipher or symbol of the other, obliges us to pose the problem of the other, not as a problem of access to another nihilation, but as a problem of initiation to a symbolics and a typicality of the others of which the *being for itself* and the *being for the other* are reflective variants and not the essential forms.

that we do not have two images side by side of someone and of ourselves, but one sole image in which we are both involved, which is responsible for the fact that my consciousness of myself and my myth of the other are not two contradictories, but rather each the reverse of the other. It is perhaps all that that is meant when it is said that the other is the X responsible for my being-seen. But then it would be necessary to add that he can be this only because I see that he looks at me, and that he can look at me—me, the invisible—only because we belong to the same system of being for itself and being for another; we are moments of the same syntax, we count in the same world, we belong to the same Being. But this has no meaning for man taken as a pure vision: he does indeed have the conviction of going unto the things themselves, but, surprised in the act of seeing, suddenly he becomes one of them, and there is no passage from the one view to the other. Pure seer, he becomes a thing seen through an ontological catastrophe, through a pure event which is for him the impossible. Or, if he can comprehend it, it will be only by backing down on the alleged ubiquity of the vision, by foregoing the idea of being everything, that is, of being nothing, by learning to know, within the vision itself, a sort of palpation of the things, within the overhead survey itself, an inherence. To be sure, our world is principally and essentially visual; one would not make a world out of scents or sounds. But the privilege of vision is not to open *ex nihilo* upon a pure being *ad infinitum*: the vision too has a field, a range. Only at very great distances are the things it gives us pure things, identical to themselves and wholly positive, like the stars, and this horizon of the In Itself is visible only as the background of a zone of nearby things which, for their part, are open and inexhaustible.

Whether we are considering my relations with the things or my relations with the other (the two problems are but one, since the insularity of the For Itselfs is spanned only by their openness to the "same" things), the question is whether in the last analysis our life takes place between an absolutely individual and absolutely universal nothingness behind us and an absolutely individual and absolutely universal being before us—in which case we have the incomprehensible and impossible task of restoring to Being, in the form of thoughts and actions, everything we have taken from it, that is, everything that we are—or whether every relation between me and Being, even vision, even speech, is not a

carnal relation, with the flesh of the world. In this case "pure" being only shows through at the horizon, at a distance which is not nothing, which is not spread out by me, which is something, which therefore itself belongs to being, which, between the "pure" being and myself, is the thickness of its being for me, of its being for the others—and which finally makes what merits the name of being be not the horizon of "pure" being but the system of perspectives that open into it, makes the integral being be not before me, but at the intersection of my views and at the intersection of my views with those of the others, at the intersection of my acts and at the intersection of my acts with those of the others, makes the sensible world and the historical world be always intermundane spaces, since they are what, beyond our views, renders them interdependent among themselves and interdependent with those of the others; they are the instances to which we address ourselves as soon as we live, the registers in which is inscribed what we see, what we do, to become there thing, world, history. Far from opening upon the blinding light of pure Being or of the Object, our life has, in the astronomical sense of the word, an atmosphere: it is constantly enshrouded by those mists we call the sensible world or history, the *one*<sup>15</sup> of the corporeal life and the *one* of the human life, the present and the past, as a pell-mell ensemble of bodies and minds, promiscuity of visages, words, actions, with, between them all, that cohesion which cannot be denied them since they are all differences, extreme divergencies of one same something. Before this inextricable involvement, there are two types of error; one is to deny it—under the pretext that it can be broken up by the accidents of my body, by death, or simply by my freedom. But this does not mean that when it does take place it would be only the sum of the partial processes without which it does not exist. The principle of principles here is that one cannot judge the powers of life by those of death, nor define without arbitrariness life as the sum of the forces that resist death, as if

15. TRANSLATOR: The indefinite pronoun *on* used to name the anonymous, prepersonal subject. "We must conceive of a primordial [*One*] (*on*) that has its own authenticity and furthermore never ceases but continues to uphold the greatest passions of our adult life and to be experienced anew in each of our perceptions" (*Signes* [Paris, 1960], p. 221). [English translation by Richard C. McCleary, *Signs* (Evans-ton, Ill., 1960), p. 175.]

it were the necessary and sufficient definition of Being to be the suppression of non-being. The involvement of men in the world and of men in one another, even if it can be brought about only by means of *perceptions* and *acts*, is transversal with respect to the spatial and temporal multiplicity of the actual. But this must not lead us into the inverse error, which would be to treat this order of involvement as a transcendental, intemporal order, as a system of a priori conditions: that would be to postulate once again that life is only death nullified, since one thinks oneself obliged to explain by an outside principle everything in it that exceeds the simple summation of its necessary conditions. The openness upon a natural and historical world is not an illusion and is not an a priori; it is our involvement in Being. Sartre expressed this by saying that the For Itself is necessarily haunted by an imaginary In-Itself-for-itself. We only say that the In-Itself-for-itself is more than imaginary. The imaginary is without consistence, inobservable; it vanishes when one proceeds to vision. Thus the In-Itself-for-itself breaks up before the philosophical consciousness to give place to the Being which is and the Nothingness which is not, to the rigorous thought of a Nothingness which needs Being, which attains it by being a negation of itself, and which thus accomplishes the silent self-affirmation that was immanent in Being. The truth of the Sartrean In-Itself-for-itself is the intuition of pure Being and the negintuition of Nothingness. It seems to us that on the contrary it is necessary to recognize in it the solidity of myth, that is, of an operative imaginary, which is part of our institution, and which is indispensable for the definition of Being itself. With this difference, we are indeed speaking of the same thing; and Sartre has himself pointed out what intervenes between Being and Nothingness.

A philosophy of negativity, which lays down nothing qua nothing (and consequently being qua being) as the principle of its research, thinks these invisibles in their purity, and at the same time admits that the knowing of nothingness is a nothingness of knowing, that nothingness is accessible only in bastard forms, is incorporated into being. The philosophy of negativity is indissolubly logic and experience: in it the dialectic of being and nothingness is only a preparation for experience, and in return experience, such as it has described it, is sustained and

elaborated by the pure entity of being, the pure negentivity of nothingness. The pure negative, in negating itself, sacrifices itself to the positive; the pure positive, insofar as it affirms itself without restriction, sanctions this sacrifice—this movement of significations, which is only the being of being and the inexistence of nothingness followed into their consequences, the principle of non-contradiction put into application, gives the schema of a pure vision with which the philosopher coincides. If I identify myself with my view of the world, if I consider it in act and without any reflective withdrawal, it is indeed the concentration in a point of nothingness, where being itself, being such as it is in itself, becomes being-seen. What there is common to both the concrete descriptions and the logical analysis—even more: what in a philosophy of the negative identifies the absolute distinction between being and nothingness and the description of nothingness sunken into being—is that they are two forms of immediate thought. On the one hand, one seeks being and nothingness in the pure state, one wishes to approach them as closely as possible, one aims at being itself in its plenitude and nothingness itself in its vacuity, one presses the confused experience until one draws the entity and the negentivity out of it, one squeezes it between them as between pincers; beyond the visible one trusts entirely in *what* we think under the terms of being and nothingness, one practices an “essentialist” thought which refers to significations beyond experience, and thus one constructs our relations with the world. And at the same time one installs oneself in our condition of being seers, one coincides with it, one oneself exercises the vision of which one speaks, one says nothing that does not come from the vision itself lived from within. The clarification of the significations is one with the exercise of life because it is tacitly understood that to live or to think is always (as one wants to say) to identify oneself, or to nihilate. If a philosophy of the negative is at the same time a determination of essences and a coinciding with lived experience, this is not due to accident, inconsistency, or eclecticism, but because spontaneity consists in being in the mode of not-being, the reflective critique in not being in the mode of being, and because these two relationships form a circuit which is us. In this universal ambivalence, the philosophy of the negative is, we said, ungraspable: and indeed everything one opposes to it, it accepts. That nothingness is not? That the idea of nothingness is a pseudo-idea? That

being is transcendent or that the “human reality” is access to a being? That it is not man that has being, but being that has man? It is the first to agree; these are its own principles. The only thing is that in it they are identified with the opposite principles: precisely because the *nichtiges Nichts* is not, the “there is” is reserved to a being unalloyed, positive, full. Precisely because there is no idea of nothingness, nothingness nihilates freely while being is. Precisely because transcendence is access to a Being and flight from the Self, this centrifugal and impalpable force, which is us, presides over every apparition of Being, and it is in starting from the Self, by ec-stasy or alienation, that the “there is” is produced. Being has man, but because man gives himself to it. Whence comes that sort of sentiment of uneasiness that a philosophy of the negative leaves: it described our factual situation with more penetration than had ever before been done—and yet one retains the impression that this situation is one that is being surveyed from above, and indeed it is: the more one describes experience as a compound of being and nothingness, the more their absolute distinction is confirmed; the more the thought adheres to experience, the more it keeps it at a distance. Such is the sorcery of the thought of the negative. But this also means that it cannot be circumscribed or discerned by what it affirms—it affirms everything—but only by what it leaves aside, precisely in its will to be everything: that is to say, the situation of the philosopher who speaks as distinct from what he speaks of, insofar as that situation affects what he says with a certain latent content which is not its manifest content, insofar as it implies a divergence between the essences he fixes and the lived experience to which they are applied, between the operation of living the world and the entities and negentivities in which he expresses it. If one takes this residue into account, there is no longer identity between the lived experience and the principle of non-contradiction; the thought, precisely as thought, can no longer flatter itself that it conveys all the lived experience: it retains everything, save its density and its weight. The lived experience can no longer recognize itself in the idealizations we draw from it. Between the thought or fixation of essences, which is the aerial view, and life, which is inherence in the world or vision, a divergence reappears, which forbids the thought to project itself in advance in the experience and invites it to recommence the description from closer up. For a philosophy con-

scious of itself as a cognition, as a second fixation of a pre-existing experience, the formula *being is, nothingness is not* is an idealization, an approximation of the total situation, which involves, beyond *what* we say, the mute experience from which we draw what we say. And just as we are invited to rediscover behind the vision, as immediate presence to being, the flesh of being and the flesh of the seer, so also must we rediscover the common milieu where being and nothingness are only *λέκτα* laboring each against the other. Our point of departure shall not be *being is, nothingness is not* nor even *there is only being*—which are formulas of a totalizing thought, a high-altitude thought—but: there is being, there is a world, there is *something*; in the strong sense in which the Greek speaks of *τὸ λέγειν*, there is cohesion, there is meaning. One does not arouse being from nothingness, *ex nihilo*; one starts with an ontological relief where one can never say that the ground be nothing. What is primary is not the full and positive being upon a ground of nothingness; it is a field of appearances, each of which, taken separately, will perhaps subsequently break up or be crossed out (this is the part of nothingness), but of which I only know that it will be replaced by another which will be the truth of the first, because there is a world, because there is something—a world, a something, which in order to be do not first have to nullify the nothing. It is still saying too much of nothingness to say that it is *not*, that it is pure negation: that is to fix it in its negativity, to treat it as a sort of essence, to introduce the positivity of words into it, whereas it can count only as what has neither name, nor repose, nor nature. By principle, a philosophy of the negative cannot start from “pure” negation, nor make of it the agent of its own negation. In reversing the positions of the philosophy of reflection, which put all the positive within and treated the outside as a simple negative, by on the contrary defining the mind as the pure negative which lives only from its contact with the exterior being, the philosophy of the negative bypasses the goal: once again, even though now for opposite reasons, it renders impossible that *openness upon being* which is the perceptual faith. The philosophy of reflection did not account for it, for lack of providing a distance between the idea and the idea of the idea, between the reflecting and the unreflected. It is again that distance that is lacking now, since he who thinks, being nothing, cannot be separated by anything from him who perceived

naïvely, nor he who perceived naïvely from what he perceived. There is no openness upon being for a philosophy of thought and of our immanent thoughts—but there is none either for a philosophy of nothingness and being, for no more in this case than in the other is being far-off, at a distance, for good. Thought is too much closed in upon itself, but nothingness is too much outside of itself for one to be able to speak of openness upon being, and in this respect immanence and transcendence are indistinguishable. Let it be so, it will perhaps be said; let us start then with the openness upon being. Yet is it not necessary, in order for there really to be openness, that we leave the metaphysical plenum, that *he* who is open to being and who sees be an absolute lacuna in being, and finally that he be purely negative? Otherwise are we not driven from appearance to appearance, like the vulgar relativism, without the absolute appearance or consciousness, nor being in itself, ever coming to pass? Without the absolute negativity, are we not in a universe of physical or psychic images which float about without anyone being conscious of them? The objection postulates what is in question, that is, that one can think only beings (physical, physiological, “psychic”) or “consciousnesses” absolutely foreign to existence as a thing. It announces the return to the reflective dichotomies of a thought that has less surmounted them than incorporated them in advance into the spontaneous life.

We do not think then that the dichotomy of Being and Nothingness continues to hold when one arrives at the descriptions of nothingness sunken into being; it seems to us therefore that it is an abstract introduction to those descriptions and that from the introduction to the descriptions there is movement, progress, surpassing. Could we not express this simply by saying that for the intuition of being and the negintuition of nothingness must be substituted a *dialectic*? From the most superficial level to the most profound, dialectical thought is that which admits reciprocal actions or interactions—which admits therefore that the total relation between a term *A* and a term *B* cannot be expressed in one sole proposition, that that relation covers over several others which cannot be superimposed, which are even opposed, which define so many points of view logically impossible and yet really united within it—even more that each of these relations leads to its opposite or to its own reversal, and does so by its own movement. Thus Being, through the very exigency of each

of the perspectives, and from the exclusive point of view that defines it, becomes a system with several entries. Hence it cannot be contemplated from without and in simultaneity, but must be effectively traversed. In this transition, the stages passed through are not simply passed, like the segment of the road I have traveled; they have called for or required the present stages and precisely what is new and disconcerting in them. The past stages continue therefore to be in the present stages—which also means that they are retroactively modified by them. Hence there is a question here not of a thought that follows a pre-established route but of a thought that itself traces its own course, that finds itself by advancing, that makes its own way, and thus proves that the way is practicable. This thought wholly subjugated to its content, from which it receives its incitement, could not express itself as a reflection or copy of an exterior process; it is the engendering of a relation starting from the other. Being neither an outside witness nor a pure agent, it is implicated in the movement and does not view it from above. In particular it does not formulate itself in successive statements which would have to be taken as they stand; each statement, in order to be true, must be referred, throughout the whole movement, to the stage from which it arises and has its full sense only if one takes into account not only what it says expressly but also its place within the whole which constitutes its latent content. Thus, he who speaks (and that which he understands tacitly) always codetermines the meaning of what he says, the philosopher is always implicated in the problems he poses, and there is no truth if one does not take into account, in the appraising of every statement, the presence of the philosopher who makes the statement. Between the manifest content and the latent content, there can be not only differences but also contradiction, and yet this double meaning belongs to the statement—as when we want to consider a thing *in itself*, and in doing so, concentrating ourselves on it, we come to determine it such as it is *for us*. Hence for the dialectical thought, the idea of the In Itself and the idea of the For Us have each its truth outside of itself, do not belong to the total or full thought, which would define itself throughout a limitless explicitation. In sum, therefore, whether in the relations within being or in the relations of being with me, dialectical thought is that which admits that each term is itself only by proceeding toward the opposed term, becomes what it is through

the movement, that it is one and the same thing for each to pass into the other or to become itself, to leave itself or to retire into itself, that the centripetal movement and the centrifugal movement are one sole movement, because each term is its own mediation, the exigency for a becoming, and even for an auto-destruction which gives the other. If such is the dialectical thought, is this not what we have tried to apply to the dichotomy of Being and Nothingness? Has not our discussion consisted in showing that the relationship between the two terms (whether one takes them in a relative sense, within the world, or in an absolute sense, as the index of the thinker and of what he thinks) covers a swarm of relations with double meaning, incompatible and yet necessary to one another (complementary, as the physicists say today), and that this complex totality is the truth of the abstract dichotomy from which we started? Is not the dialectic, through its avatars, in every case the reversal of relationships, their solidarity throughout the reversal, the intelligible movement which is not a sum of positions or of statements such as *being is, nothingness is not* but which distributes them over several planes, integrates them into a being in depth? Particularly in what concerns the relations between thought and Being, is not the dialectic the refusal of high-altitude thinking, of the wholly exterior being as well as the reflexivity? Is it not thought at work within Being, in contact with Being, for which it opens a space for manifestation, but in which all its own initiatives are inscribed, recorded, or sedimented, if only as errors surmounted, and take on the form of a history which has its sense, even if it turns in circles or marches in zigzags? In sum, is it not exactly the thought we are seeking, not ambivalent, “ventriloquial,” but capable of differentiating and of integrating into one sole universe the double or even multiple meanings, as Heraclitus has already showed us opposite directions coinciding in the circular movement? This thought is capable of effecting this integration because the circular movement is neither the simple sum of the opposed movements nor a third movement added to them, but their *common meaning*, the two component movements visible as one sole movement, *having become* a totality, that is, a spectacle: thus because the dialectic is the thought of the Being-seen, of a Being that is not simple positivity, the In Itself, and not the Being-posed by a thought, but *Self-manifestation*, disclosure, in the process of forming itself. . . .

The dialectic is indeed all this, and it is, in this sense, what we are looking for. If nonetheless we have not hitherto said so, it is because, in the history of philosophy, it has never been all that unadulteratedly; it is because the dialectic is unstable (in the sense that the chemists give to the word), it is even essentially and by definition unstable, so that it has never been able to formulate itself into theses without denaturing itself, and because if one wishes to maintain its spirit it is perhaps necessary to not even name it. The sort of being to which it refers, and which we have been trying to indicate, is in fact not susceptible of being designated positively. It abounds in the sensible world, but on condition that the sensible world has been divested of all that the ontologies have added to it. One of the tasks of the dialectic, as a situational thought, a thought in contact with being, is to shake off the false evidences, to denounce the significations cut off from the experience of being, emptied—and to criticize itself in the measure that it itself becomes one of them. But this is what it is in danger of becoming as soon as it is stated in theses, in univocal significations, as soon as it is detached from its ante-predicative context. It is essential to it that it be autocritical—and it is also essential to it to forget this as soon as it becomes what we call *a philosophy*. The very formulas by which it describes the movement of being are then liable to falsify that movement. Take the profound idea of *self-mediation* (*médiation par soi*), of a movement through which each term ceases to be itself in order to become itself, breaks up, opens up, negates itself, in order to realize itself. It can remain pure only if the mediating term and the mediated term—which are “the same”—are yet not the same in the sense of identity: for then, in the absence of all difference, there would be no mediation, movement, transformation; one would remain in full positivity. But there is no self-mediation either if the mediator is the simple or absolute negation of the mediated: the absolute negation would simply annihilate the mediated and, turning against itself, would annihilate itself also, so that there would still be no mediation, but a pure and simple retreat toward positivity. It is therefore ruled out that the mediation have its origin in the positive term, as though it were one of its *properties*—but it is likewise precluded that the mediation come to the positive term from an abyss of exterior negativity, which would have no hold on it and would leave it intact. Yet it is in this second manner that the

dialectic is translated when it ceases to be a way of deciphering the being with which we are in contact, the being in the process of manifesting itself, the situational being, and when it wishes to formulate itself once and for all, without anything left over, state itself as a doctrine, sum itself up. Then, to get to the end, the negation is carried to the absolute, becomes negation of itself; at the same time being sinks back to the pure positive, the negation concentrates itself beyond it as absolute subjectivity—and the dialectical movement becomes pure identity of the opposites, ambivalence. It is thus that in Hegel, God, defined as abyss or absolute subjectivity, negates himself in order that the world be, that is, in order that there be a view upon himself that would not be his own and to which he would appear as posterior to being; in other words, God makes himself man—so that the philosophy of Hegel is an ambivalence of the theological and the anthropological. It is not otherwise that, for Sartre, the absolute opposition of Being and Nothingness gives place to a return to the positive, to a sacrifice of the For Itself—except that he rigorously maintains the consciousness of the negative as a margin about being, the negation of negation is not for him a speculative operation, an unfolding of God, and the In-Itself-for-itself consequently remains for him the natural illusion of the For Itself. But, with these reservations, the same metamorphosis of the dialectic, the same relapse into ambivalence occurs in both cases, and for the same reason: because the thought ceases to accompany or to be the dialectical movement, converts it into signification, thesis, or thing said, and thereby falls back into the ambivalent image of the Nothingness that sacrifices itself in order that Being be and of the Being that, from the depths of its primacy, tolerates being recognized by the Nothingness. There is a trap in the dialectic: whereas it is the very movement of the content, as it is realized by auto-constitution, or the art of retracing and following the relations between the appeal and the response, the problem and the solution, whereas the *dialectic* is by principle an epithet, as soon as one takes it as a motto, speaks of it instead of practicing it, it becomes a power of being, an explicative principle. What was Being's manner of being becomes an evil genius. Oh, Dialectic! says the philosopher, when he comes to recognize that perhaps the true philosophy flouts philosophy. Here the dialectic is almost someone; like the irony of things, it is a spell cast over the world that turns our expectations

into derision, a sly power behind our back that confounds us, and, to top it all, has its own order and its rationality; it is not only a risk of non-sense, therefore, but much worse: the assurance that the things have *another sense* than that which we are in a position to recognize in them. Already we are on the way of the bad dialectic, that which, against its own principles, imposes an external law and framework upon the content and restores for its own uses the pre-dialectical thought. Dialectical thought by principle excludes all *extrapolation*, since it teaches that there can always be a supplement of being in being, that quantitative differences veer into the qualitative, that the consciousness as consciousness of the exterior, being partial, abstract, is always deceived by the event. But this very slipping away of life and of history, which resolves the problems otherwise than the consciousness of the exterior would have done (sometimes better, sometimes not so well), is understood as a vector, a polarity of the dialectical movement, a preponderant force that always works in the same direction, that, in the name of the process, extends over the process, and therefore authorizes the determination of the ineluctable. And this is what happens as soon as the *meaning* of the dialectical movement is defined apart from the concrete constellation. The bad dialectic begins almost with the dialectic, and there is no good dialectic but that which criticizes itself and surpasses itself as a separate statement; the only good dialectic is the hyperdialectic. The bad dialectic is that which does not wish to lose its soul in order to save it, which wishes to be dialectical immediately, becomes autonomous, and ends up at cynicism, at formalism, for having eluded its own double meaning. What we call hyperdialectic is a thought that on the contrary is capable of reaching truth because it envisages without restriction the plurality of the relationships and what has been called ambiguity. The bad dialectic is that which thinks it recomposes being by a thetic thought, by an assemblage of statements, by thesis, antithesis, and synthesis; the good dialectic is that which is conscious of the fact that every *thesis* is an idealization, that Being is not made up of idealizations or of things said, as the old logic believed, but of bound wholes where signification never is except in tendency, where the inertia of the content never permits the defining of one term as positive, another term as negative, and still less a third term as absolute suppression of the negative by itself. The point to be noted is this: that the dialectic

without synthesis of which we speak is not therefore scepticism, vulgar relativism, or the reign of the ineffable. What we reject or deny is not the idea of a surpassing that reassembles, it is the idea that it results in a new positive, a new position. In thought and in history as in life the only surpassings we know are concrete, partial, encumbered with survivals, saddled with deficits; there is no surpassing in all regards that would retain everything the preceding phases had acquired, mechanically add something more, and permit the ranking of the dialectical phases in a hierarchical order from the less to the more real, from the less to the more valid. But, on a defined part of the route, there can be progresses; especially there are solutions excluded in the long run. In other words, what we exclude from the dialectic is the idea of the pure negative, what we seek is a dialectical definition of being that can be neither the being for itself nor the being in itself—rapid, fragile, labile definitions, which, as Hegel rightly said, lead us back from the one to the other—nor the In-Itself-for-itself which is the height of ambivalence, [a definition]<sup>16</sup> that must rediscover the being that lies before the cleavage operated by reflection, about it, on its horizon, not outside of us and not in us, but there where the two movements cross, there where “there is” something.

#### PERCEPTUAL FAITH AND INTERROGATION

THESE REMARKS concerning negativity permit us already to make more precise the meaning of our question before the world, for the most difficult part is to avoid mistaking what it is, what it can be, its exact and proper meaning, what it asks. We already know that it is not a question as to whether the world really is, or whether it is only a well-regulated dream: that question covers over others; it supposes that the dream, the image, be known, and be better known—it interrogates the world only in the name of an alleged positivity of the psychic. It casts over the world the shadow of a possible non-existence—but it does not elucidate the mental existence it substitutes for it, which in fact it conceives as a weakened or degraded real existence. And if the doubt thus understood were lifted through some

16. EDITOR: We reintroduce this term between brackets to eliminate ambiguity.

argument, the "real" existence which would be restored to our dreams would be the very same real existence, obscure and incomprehensible, with which we started, and everything would have to be begun over again. We are not asking ourselves if the world exists; we are asking what it is for it to exist. But even thus transformed, the question is not yet radical. For one can understand it still in a surface sense that hides its true mainspring. When we ask what it is for the things and for the world to exist, one might think that it is only a matter of defining a word. After all, the questions take place in language. Even if it seems to us that an affirmative thought can detach itself from words and rest on its internal adequation, negation and especially interrogation, which do not express any property intrinsic to the things, can be sustained only by the apparatus of language. One can therefore be tempted to count the philosophical question concerning the world among the facts of language, and it would seem that the response can be sought only in the meanings of words, since it is in words that the question will be answered. But our previous reflections have already taught us that this would be to evade it: the question concerning the meaning of the world's being is so little solvable by a definition of words—which would be drawn from the study of language, its powers, and the effective conditions for its functioning—that on the contrary it reappears within the study of language, which is but a particular form of it. One can reduce philosophy to a linguistic analysis only by supposing that language has its evidence within itself, that the signification of the word "world" or "thing" presents in principle no difficulty, that the rules for the legitimate use of the word can be clearly read in a univocal signification. But the linguists teach us that this is precisely not the case, that the univocal signification is but one part of the signification of the word, that beyond it there is always a halo of signification that manifests itself in new and unexpected modes of use, that there is an operation of language upon language which, even without other incitements, would launch language back into a new history, and makes of the word-meaning itself an enigma. Far from harboring the secret of the being of the world, language is itself a world, itself a being—a world and a being to the second power, since it does not speak in a vacuum, since it speaks *of* being and *of* the world and therefore redoubles their enigma instead of dissipating it. The philosophical interrogation concerning the world therefore

does not consist in referring from the world itself to what we say of the world, since it is reiterated within language. To philosophize is not to cast the things into doubt in the name of the words, as if the universe of things said were clearer than that of the brute things, as if the effective world were a canton of language, perception a confused and mutilated speech, the signification of words a perfectly reassuring sphere of positivity. But this observation does not only argue against a positivism of language: it affects every attempt to seek the source of meaning in pure significations, even when no mention is made of language. The philosophical interrogation about the world cannot consist, for example, in casting into doubt the world in itself or the things in themselves for the profit of an order of "human phenomena," that is, of the coherent system of appearances such as we men can construct it, in the factual conditions that are ours, according to our psychophysical constitution and the types of connections that make the relation to an "object" possible for us. Whether this construction of the object be understood in terms of the method of the sciences and by the means of algorithm, or whether one confronts the *constructa* with the concrete because science after all wishes to be a *scientia intuitiva*, an understanding of the world itself, or whether finally one envisages more generally rendering explicit the acts and attitudes of all kinds—emotional, practical, axiological—by which a consciousness refers itself to objects or quasi-objects, refers them to one another, and effects the transition from one attitude to another—in all cases the question posed is not yet radical, ultimate. For over against the things and the world, which are obscure, one gives oneself the field of operations of consciousness and of the constructed significations whose terminal product one supposes the world and the things to be—and, before this field as before the field of language (which in fact it presupposes), the philosopher must ask himself if it is closed, if it suffices to itself, if, as an *artefact*,<sup>17</sup> it does not open upon an original perspective of natural being, if, even supposing it decisive in what concerns the being-verified, the being-averred, the being converted into an *object*, it does not have a horizon of brute being and of brute mind, from which the constructed objects and the significations emerge and which they do not account for.

17. TRANSLATOR: In English in the text.

Thus is specified the sense of our astonishment in face of the perceived world. It is not the Pyrrhonian doubt, it is not even the appeal to an immanent domain of positive thought of which the perceived world would be but the shadow: the shadow is in us rather than outside. In suspending the evidence of the world, in seeking recourse in our thought or our consciousness of the world, its operations and its theses, we would find nothing that surpasses or simply equals and explains the solidity of the world under our eyes and the cohesion of our life in it. By reversal of the pro and the con, we have come not only to rehabilitate negative thought as an original way of thinking, but also to formulate negatively—as that without which there is no representation—the principle of causality, and finally to conceive as negativity thought, which for Spinoza was the positive itself. Should it now be necessary to complete or rather to go beyond this reversal by saying that I am not capable of being for myself unless, at the center of myself, I am nothing at all, but that this central void must be borne by being, by a situation, a world, is never knowable except as the focus their perspectives indicate, and that in this sense there is a priority of being over thought? Thus would be brought to a close the cycle opened when Descartes showed that the thought of seeing is more certain than the thing seen or the vision—that the thought, precisely because it is nothing but absolute appearance, is absolutely indubitable and that, midway between being and nothingness, it stands more solid before the doubt than the positive and full things. To be sure, Descartes and Cartesianism had finally pushed this thinking thing which only half is over to the side of Being: since it is after all not nothing, and since nothingness has no properties, it became the sign and the trace of an infinite Being, of a spiritual positivity. But the withdrawal from the world, the return to the interior man, the *no* of reflection had all the same been installed in philosophy by the *cogito*, and had to produce in it all their consequences the day that the thought no longer believed it could grasp in itself the spontaneous genesis of a Being that is self-caused. Then negativity, which is not visible or has no properties, could no longer be borne by anything but by the world itself, could no longer be anything but a lacuna in Being. Between it and the world there would no longer even be room for the suspension of the doubt; the negativity in act would be existence itself, or at least the “there is” of the world, and philos-

ophy would cease to be a question in order to be the consciousness of this double-faced act, of this no that is a yes, of this yes that is a no. The long evolution that had moved the positive from the world over to the side of the consciousness, which had become the correlative of the world and its connecting principle—but that at the same time prepared philosophy to install non-being as the pivot of being—would abruptly be concluded at the extremity of idealism by the rehabilitation and the primacy of the In Itself. . . .

This is what has finally appeared to us to be impossible. It seemed to us that this final avatar overcompensated for idealism rather than overcame it, that my immediate presence to the In Itself, established and undone at the same time by the infinite distance from what is nothing to what is, was, rather than a solution, a seesaw movement from realism to idealism. Philosophy is not a rupture with the world, nor a coinciding with it, but it is not the alternation of rupture and coincidence either. This double relation, which the philosophy of *Being and Nothingness* expresses so well, remains perhaps incomprehensible there because it is still a consciousness—a being that is wholly appearing—that is charged with bearing it. It has seemed to us that the task was to describe strictly our relation to the world not as an openness of nothingness upon being, but simply as openness: it is through openness that we will be able to understand being and nothingness, not through being and nothingness that we will be able to understand openness. From the point of view of *Being and Nothingness*, the openness upon being means that I visit it in itself: if it remains distant, this is because nothingness, the anonymous one in me that sees, pushes before itself a zone of void where being no longer only is, but *is seen*. It is therefore my constitutive nothingness that makes the distance from being as well as its proximity, the perspective as distinct from the thing itself, that constitutes the limits of my field into limits. It crosses these limits, this distance, by forming it; it makes perspectives arise only by first effectuating the flat projection; it goes to the *whole* because it is *nothing*. Then there is no longer any *something* and no longer openness, for there is no longer a labor of the look against its limits, there is no longer that inertia of the vision that makes us say that we have an openness upon the world. That sort of diaphragm of the vision, which through a compromise with the whole to be seen yields my point of view

upon the world, is to be sure not fixed: nothing prevents us from crossing the limits with the movements of the look, but this freedom remains secretly bound; we can only displace our look, that is, transfer its limits elsewhere. But it is necessary that there be always a limit; what is won on one side must be lost from the other. An indirect and muted necessity weighs upon my vision. It is not the necessity of an objective frontier forever impassable, for the contours of my field are not lines. It is not cut out against an expanse of blackness; rather when I approach them, the things dissociate, my look loses its differentiation, and the vision ceases for lack of seer and of articulated things. Even without speaking of my motor power, I am therefore not shut up in one sector of the visible world. But I am curbed all the same, like those animals in zoological gardens without cages or bars, whose freedom gently comes to an end by some trench a little too broad for them to clear at one bound. The openness upon the world implies that the world be and remain a horizon, not because my vision would push the world back beyond itself, but because somehow he who sees is of it and is in it. Philosophy therefore does not seek to analyze our relationship with the world, to *undo* it as if it had been formed by assemblage; but it also does not terminate by an immediate and all-inclusive acknowledgment of Being, of which there would be nothing more to say. Philosophy cannot flatter itself that, by rendering explicit that relationship, it finds again in it what we would have put in it; it cannot reconstruct the thing and the world by condensing in them, in the form of implication, everything we have subsequently been able to think and say of them; rather, it remains a question, it interrogates the world and the thing, it revives, repeats, or imitates their crystallization before us. For this crystallization which is partly given to us ready-made is in other respects never terminated, and thereby we can see how the world comes about. It takes form under the domination of certain structural laws: events let rather general powers show through, powers such as the gaze or the word, which operate according to an identifiable style, according to "if . . . then . . ." relationships, according to a logic in action whose philosophical status must be defined if we wish to get out of the confusion in which the ready-made notions of thought, subject, and object throw us, and if we wish to know finally what the world is and what being is. Philosophy does not decompose our relationship with the world into real elements, or

even into ideal references which would make of it an ideal object, but it discerns articulations in the world, it awakens in it regular relations of prepossession, of recapitulation, of overlapping, which are as dormant in our ontological landscape, subsist there only in the form of traces, and nevertheless continue to function there, continue to institute the new there.

The philosopher's manner of questioning is therefore not that of *cognition*: being and the world are not for the philosopher unknowns such as are to be determined through their relation with known terms, where both known and unknown terms belong in advance to the same order of *variables* which an active thought seeks to approximate as closely as possible. Nor is philosophy an *awakening of consciousness* (*prise de conscience*): it is not a matter of philosophy rediscovering in a legislative consciousness the signification it would have given to the world and to being by nominal definition. Just as we do not speak for the sake of speaking but speak to someone *of something* or *of someone*, and in this initiative of speaking an aiming at the world and at the others is involved upon which is suspended all *that which* we say; so also the lexical signification and even the pure significations which are deliberately reconstructed, such as those of geometry, aim at a universe of brute being and of coexistence, toward which we were already thrown when we spoke and thought, and which, for its part, by principle does not admit the procedure of objectifying or reflective *approximation*, since it is at a distance, by way of horizon, latent or dissimulated. It is that universe that philosophy aims at, that is, as we say, *the object* of philosophy—but here never will the lacuna be filled in, the unknown transformed into known; the "object" of philosophy will never come to fill in the philosophical question, since this obturation would take from it the depth and the distance that are essential to it. The effective, present, ultimate and primary being, the thing itself, are in principle apprehended in transparency through their perspectives, offer themselves therefore only to someone who wishes not to have them but to see them, not to hold them as with forceps, or to immobilize them as under the objective of a microscope, but to let them be and to witness their continued being—to someone who therefore limits himself to giving them the hollow, the free space they ask for in return, the resonance they require, who follows their own movement, who is

therefore not a nothingness the full being would come to stop up, but a question consonant with the porous being which it questions and from which it obtains not an *answer*, but a confirmation of its astonishment. It is necessary to comprehend perception as this interrogative thought which lets the perceived world be rather than posits it, before which the things form and undo themselves in a sort of gliding, beneath the yes and the no.

Our discussion of the negative announces to us another paradox of philosophy, which distinguishes it from every problem of cognition and forbids us to speak in philosophy of a *solution*: as an approach to the far-off as far-off, it is also a question put to what does not speak. It asks of our experience of the world what the world is before it is a thing one speaks of and which is taken for granted, before it has been reduced to a set of manageable, disposable significations; it directs this question to our mute life, it addresses itself to that compound of the world and of ourselves that precedes reflection, because the examination of the significations in themselves would give us the world reduced to our idealizations and our syntax. But in addition, what it finds in thus returning to the sources, it says. It is itself a human construction, and the philosopher knows very well that, whatever be his effort, in the best of cases it will take its place among the *artefacts*<sup>18</sup> and products of culture, as an instance of them. If this paradox is not an impossibility, and if philosophy can speak, it is because language is not only the depository of fixed and acquired significations, because its cumulative power itself results from a power of anticipation or of prepossession, because one speaks not only of what one knows, so as to set out a display of it—but also of what one does not know, in order to know it—and because language in forming itself expresses, at least laterally, an ontogenesis of which it is a part. But from this it follows that the words most charged with philosophy are not necessarily those that contain what they say, but rather those that most energetically open upon Being, because they more closely convey the life of the whole and make our habitual evidences vibrate until they disjoin. Hence it is a question whether philosophy as reconquest of brute or wild being can be accomplished by the resources of the eloquent language, or whether it would not be necessary for philosophy to use language in a way

18. TRANSLATOR: In English in the text.

that takes from it its power of immediate or direct signification in order to equal it with what it wishes all the same to say.

In sum, philosophy interrogates the perceptual faith—but neither expects nor receives an answer in the ordinary sense, because it is not the disclosing of a variable or of an unknown invariant that will satisfy this question, and because the existing world exists in the interrogative mode. Philosophy is the perceptual faith questioning itself about itself. One can say of it, as of every faith, that it is a faith *because* it is the possibility of doubt, and this indefatigable ranging over the things, which is our life, is also a continuous interrogation. It is not only philosophy, it is first the look that questions the things. We do not have a consciousness constitutive of the things, as idealism believes, nor a preordination of the things to the consciousness, as realism believes (they are indiscernible in what interests us here, because they both affirm the adequation of the thing and the mind)—we have with our body, our senses, our look, our power to understand speech and to speak, *measurants* (*mesurants*) for Being, dimensions to which we can refer it, but not a relation of adequation or of immanence. The perception of the world and of history is the practice of this measure, the reading off of their divergence or of their difference with respect to our norms. If we are ourselves in question in the very unfolding of our life, it is not because a central non-being threatens to revoke our consent to being at each instant; it is because we ourselves are one sole continued question, a perpetual enterprise of taking our bearings on the constellations of the world, and of taking the bearings of the things on our dimensions. The very questions of curiosity or those of science are interiorly animated by the fundamental interrogation which appears naked in philosophy.

From time to time, a man lifts his head, sniffs, listens, considers, recognizes his position: he thinks, he sighs, and, drawing his watch from the pocket lodged against his chest, looks at the time. *Where am I?* and, *What time is it?* such is the inexhaustible question turning from us to the world . . .<sup>19</sup>

The watch and the map give here only a semblance of an answer: they indicate to us how what we are living is situated in

19. Claudel, *Art poétique* (Paris, 1951), p. 9.

relation to the course of the stars or to the course of a human day, or in relation to places that have a name. But where are these reference events and these landmarks themselves? They refer us to others, and the answer satisfies us only because we do not attend to it, because we think we are "at home." The question would arise again and indeed would be inexhaustible, almost insane, if we wished to situate our levels, measure our standards in their turn, if we were to ask: but where is the world itself? And why am I myself? <sup>20</sup> How old am I really? Am I really alone to be me? Have I not somewhere a double, a twin? These questions, which the sick man puts to himself in a moment of respite—or simply that glance at his watch, as if it were of great importance that the torment take place at a given inclination of the sun, at such or such hour in the life of the world—expose, at the moment that life is threatened, the underlying movement through which we have installed ourselves in the world and which recommences yet a little more time for itself. The ancients read in the heavens the hour to wage the battle. We no longer believe that it is written down anywhere. But we do and always will believe that what takes place here and now is one with the simultaneous; what takes place would not be entirely real for us if we did not know at what time. Its hour is no longer destined in advance for the event, but, whatever it be, the event appropriates it to itself; the event would not be entirely itself if we did not situate it in the immense simultaneity of the world and within its undivided thrust. Every question, even that of simple cognition, is part of the central question that is ourselves, of that appeal for totality to which no objective being answers, and which we now have to examine more precisely.

20. This is, says Alain, the question that, in *Manon Lescaut*, arises in the depths of woe. Strange caption: we have not located it in *Manon Lescaut*. One may wonder from what depth of reverie it came to Alain, and why disguised as a citation.

### 3 / Interrogation and Intuition

PHILOSOPHY DOES NOT RAISE QUESTIONS and does not provide answers that would little by little fill in the blanks. The questions are within our life, within our history: they are born there, they die there, if they have found a response, more often than not they are transformed there; in any case, it is a past of experience and of knowledge that one day ends up at this open wondering. Philosophy does not take the context as given; it turns back upon it in order to seek the origin and the meaning of the questions and of the responses and the identity of him who questions, and it thereby gains access to the interrogation that animates all the questions of cognition, but is of another sort than they.

Our ordinary questions—"Where am I?" "What time is it?"—are the lack and the provisional absence of a fact or of a positive statement, holes in a fabric of things or of indicatives that we are sure is continuous, since there is a time, a space, and since the only question is at what point of this space and of this time we are. Philosophy, at first sight, only generalizes this type of question. When it asks if space, if time, if movement, if the world exist, the field of the question is more ample, but like the natural question it is still but a semi-question, included within a fundamental faith: there is something, and the only question is if it is really this space, this time, this movement, this world that we think we see or feel. The destruction of beliefs, the symbolic murder of the others and of the world, the split between vision and the visible, between thought and being do not, as they claim, establish us in the negative; when one has subtracted all that,

one installs oneself in what remains, in sensations, opinions. And what remains is not nothing, nor of another sort than what has been struck off: what remains are mutilated fragments of the vague *omnitudo realitatis* against which the doubt was plied, and they regenerate it under other names—appearance, dream, Psyche, representation. It is in the name and for the profit of these floating realities that the solid reality is cast into doubt. One does not quit the something, and doubt as a destruction of certitudes is not a doubt. It is no different when the doubt is made methodic, when it is no longer a fluidification of the certitudes but a deliberate withdrawal, a refusal to embody them. This time one no longer contests that there are evidences and that for the moment they are irresistible; and if one holds them in suspense it is for the sole motive that they are our own, caught up in the flux of our life, and that in order to retain them more than an instant we should have to trust in the obscure time equipment of our internal works, which perhaps gives us only coherent illusions. This deceiving nature, this opaque something that would shut us up in our lights, is only a phantasm of our rigorism, a perhaps. If this possible suffices to hold in check our evidences, it is because we give weight to it by the decision to tacitly presuppose nothing. If, in its name, we feign to nullify lights we could not nullify really, take what is only conditional to be false, make of an eventual divergence between the evident and the true an infinite distance, and of a speculative doubt the equivalent of a condemnation, it is because, as passive beings, we feel ourselves caught up in a mass of Being that escapes us, or even maneuvered by an evil agent, and we oppose to this adversity the desire for an absolute evidence, delivered from all facticity. Thus the methodic doubt, that which is carried out within the voluntary zone of ourselves, refers to Being, since it resists a factual evidence, represses an involuntary truth which it acknowledges to be already there and which inspires the very project of seeking an evidence that would be absolute. If it remains a doubt, it can do so only by reviving the equivocations of scepticism, by omitting to mention the borrowings it makes from Being, or by evoking a falsity of Being itself, a Great Deceiver, a Being that actively conceals itself and pushes before itself the screen of our thought and of its evidences, as if this elusive being were nothing. The philosophical interrogation therefore would not go all the way through with itself if it limited

itself to generalizing the doubt, the common question of the *an sit*, to extending them to the world or to Being, and would define itself as doubt, non-knowing or non-belief. Things are not so simple. In being extended to everything, the common question changes its meaning. Philosophy elects certain beings—"sensations," "representation," "thought," "consciousness," or even a deceiving being—in order to separate itself from all being. Precisely in order to accomplish its will for radicalism, it would have to take as its theme the umbilical bond that binds it always to Being, the inalienable horizon with which it is already and henceforth circumvented, the primary initiation which it tries in vain to go back on. It would have to no longer deny, no longer even doubt; it would have to step back only in order to see the world and Being, or simply put them between quotation marks as one does with the remarks of another, to let them speak, to listen in. . . .

Then, if the question can no longer be that of the *an sit*, it becomes that of the *quid sit*; there remains only to study what the world and truth and being are, in terms of the complicity that we have with them. At the same time that the doubt is renounced, one renounces the affirmation of an absolute exterior, of a world or a Being that would be a massive individual; one turns toward that Being that doubles our thoughts along their whole extension, since they are thoughts of something and since they themselves are not nothing—a Being therefore that is meaning, and meaning of meaning. Not only that meaning that is attached to words and belongs to the order of statements and of things said, to a circumscribed region of the world, to a certain type of Being—but universal meaning, which would be capable of sustaining logical operations and language and the unfolding of the world as well. It will be *that without which* there would be neither world nor language nor anything at all—it will be the essence. When it looks back from the world to what makes it a world, from beings to what makes them be, the pure gaze, which involves nothing implicit (which does not, like the gaze of our eyes, have the darkness of a body and a past behind itself), could apply itself only to something that would be before it without restriction or condition: to what makes the world be a world, to an imperative grammar of Being, to indecomposable nuclei of meaning, systems of inseparable properties. The essences are this intrinsic sense, these necessities by principle.

However may be the realities in which they are compounded and confused (but where their implications constantly make themselves no less felt), they are the sole legitimate or authentic being, which has the pretension and the right to be and which is affirmative of itself, because it is the system of everything that is possible before the eyes of a pure spectator, the diagram or pattern of what, at all the levels, is *something*—something in general, or something material, or something spiritual, or something living.

Through the question *quid sit*, more effectively than through the doubt, philosophy succeeds in detaching itself from all beings, because it changes them into their meaning. This is already the procedure of science, when, to respond to the questions of life which are only a hesitation between the yes and the no, it casts the prevailing categories into question, invents new types of Being, a new heaven of essences. But it does not terminate this labor: it does not entirely disengage its essences from the world; it maintains them under the jurisdiction of the facts, which can tomorrow call for an other elaboration. Galileo gives but a rough draft of the material thing, and the whole of classical physics lives on an essence of *Physis* that is perhaps not the true essence: must one maintain its principles, and, by means of some auxiliary hypothesis, reduce wave mechanics to them however one can? Or, on the contrary, are we in sight of a new essence of the material world? Must we maintain the Marxist essence of history and treat the facts that seem to call it into question as empirical and confused variants, or, on the contrary, are we at a turning point where, *beneath* the Marxist essence of history, a more authentic and more complete essence shows through? The question remains unsettled in scientific knowing because in it truths of fact and truths of reason overlap and because the carving out of the facts, like the elaboration of the essences, is there conducted under presuppositions that remain to be interrogated, if we are to know fully what science means. Philosophy would be this same reading of meaning carried out to its conclusion, an exact science, the sole exact one, because it alone goes all the way in the effort to know what Nature and History and the World and Being *are*, when our contact with them is not only the partial and abstract contact of the physical experiment and calculation, or of the historical analysis, but the total contact of someone who, living in the world and in Being,

means to see his life fully, particularly his life of knowledge, and who, an inhabitant of the world, tries to think himself in the world, to think the world in himself, to unravel their jumbled essences, and to form finally the signification "Being." \*

When philosophy finds beneath the doubt a prior "knowing," finds around the things and the world as facts and as doubtful facts a horizon that encompasses our negations as our affirmations, and when it penetrates into this horizon, certainly it must define anew this new something. Does it define it well or sufficiently by saying that it is the *essence*? Is the question of the essence the ultimate question? With the essence and the pure spectator who sees it, are we really at the source? The essence is certainly dependent. The inventory of the essential necessities is always made under a supposition (the same as that which recurs so often in Kant): if this world is to exist for us, or if there is to be a world, or if there is to be something, then it is necessary that they observe such and such a structural law. But whence do we get the hypothesis, whence do we know that there is something, that there is a world? This knowing is beneath the essence, it is the experience of which the essence is a part and which it does not envelop. The being of the essence is not primary, it does not rest on itself, it is not it that can teach us what Being is; the essence is not *the* answer to the philosophical question, the philosophical question is not posed in us by a pure spectator: it is first a question as to how, upon what ground, the pure spectator is established, from what more profound source he himself draws. Without the necessities by essence, the unshakable connections, the irresistible implications, the resistant and stable structures, there would be neither a world, nor something in general, nor Being; but their authority as essences, their affirmative power, their dignity as principles are not self-evident. We do not have the right to say that the essences we find give the primitive meaning of Being, that they are the possible in itself, the whole possible, and to repute as impossible all that does not obey their laws, nor to treat Being and the world as their consequence: they are only its manner or its style, they are the *Sosein* and not the *Sein*. And if we are justified in saying that every thought respects them as well as does our own, if they have universal value, this is so inasmuch as another thought founded

\* What is true here: what is not nothing is *something*, but: this something is not hard as a diamond, not unconditioned, *Erfahrung*.

on other principles must, if it is to make itself known to us, to enter into communication with us, adapt itself to the conditions of our own thought, of our experience, take its place in our world, and inasmuch as, finally, all the thinkers and all the essences possible open upon one sole experience and upon the same world. We are no doubt using essences in order to establish and state this; the necessity of this conclusion is a necessity of essence. But it only crosses over the limits of one thought and imposes itself upon all, it indeed only survives my own intuition of the moment and is valid for me as a durable truth because my own experience interconnects within itself and connects with that of the others by opening upon one sole world, by inscribing itself in one sole Being. It is to experience therefore that the ultimate ontological power belongs, and the essences, the necessities by essence, the internal or logical possibility, solid and incontestable as they may be under the gaze of the mind, have finally their force and their eloquence only because all my thoughts and the thoughts of the others are caught up in the fabric of one sole Being. The pure spectator in me, which elevates each thing to the essence, which produces its ideas, is assured that it touches Being with them only because it emerges within an actual experience surrounded by actual experiences, by the actual world, by the actual Being, which is the ground of the predicative Being. The possibilities by essence can indeed envelop and dominate *the facts*; they themselves derive from another, and more fundamental, possibility: that which works over my experience, opens it to the world and to Being, and which, to be sure, does not find them before itself as *facts* but animates and organizes *their facticity*. When philosophy ceases to be doubt in order to make itself disclosure, explicitation, the field it opens to itself is indeed made up of significations or of essences—since it has detached itself from the facts and the beings—but these significations or essences do not suffice to themselves, they overtly refer to our acts of ideation which have lifted them from a brute being, wherein we must find again in their wild state what answers to our essences and our significations.

When I ask myself what the something or the world or the material thing is, I am not yet the pure spectator I will become through the act of ideation; I am a field of experience where there is only sketched out the family of material things and other

families and the world as their common style, the family of things said and the world of speech as their common style, and finally the abstract and fleshless style of something in general. In order to pass from this to the essences, it is necessary for me to actively intervene, to vary the things and the field, not through some manipulation, but, without touching them, by supposing changed or putting out of circuit such and such a relationship or such and such a structure, noting how this would affect the others, so as to locate those relationships and structures that are separable from the thing, and those on the contrary that one could not suppress or change without the thing ceasing to be itself. It is from this test that the essence emerges—it is therefore not a positive being. It is an in-variant, it is exactly that whose change or absence would alter or destroy the thing; and the solidity, the essentiality of the essence is exactly measured by the power we have to vary the thing. A pure essence which would not be at all contaminated and confused with the facts could result only from an attempt at total variation. It would require a spectator himself without secrets, without latency, if we are to be certain that nothing be surreptitiously introduced into it. In order to really reduce an experience to its essence, we should have to achieve a distance from it that would put it entirely under our gaze, with all the implications of sensoriality or thought that come into play in it, bring it and bring ourselves wholly to the transparency of the imaginary, think it without the support of any ground, in short, withdraw to the bottom of nothingness. Only then could we know what moments positively make up the being of this experience. But would this still be an experience, since I would be soaring over it? And if I tried to maintain a sort of adhesion to it in thought, is it properly speaking an essence that I would see? Every ideation, because it is an ideation, is formed in a space of existence, under the guarantee of my duration, which must turn back into itself in order to find there again the same idea I thought an instant ago and must pass into the others in order to rejoin it also in them. Every ideation is borne by this tree of my duration and other durations, this unknown sap nourishes the transparency of the idea; behind the idea, there is the unity, the simultaneity of all the real and possible durations, the cohesion of one sole Being from one end to the other. Under the solidity of the essence and of the idea there is the fabric of experience, this flesh of time, and this is

why I am not sure of having penetrated unto the hard core of being: my incontestable power to give myself leeway (*prendre du champ*), to disengage the possible from the real, does not go as far as to dominate all the implications of the spectacle and to make of the real a simple variant of the possible; on the contrary it is the possible worlds and the possible beings that are variants and are like doubles of the actual world and the actual Being. I have leeway enough to replace such and such moments of my experience with others, to observe that this does not suppress it—therefore to determine the inessential. But does what remains after these eliminations belong necessarily to the Being in question? In order to affirm that I should have to soar over my field, suspend or at least reactivate all the sedimented thoughts with which it is surrounded, first of all my time, my body—which is not only impossible for me to do in fact but would deprive me of that very cohesion in depth (*en épaisseur*) of the world and of Being without which the essence is subjective folly and arrogance. There is therefore for me something inessential, and there is a zone, a hollow, where what is not inessential, not impossible, assembles; there is no positive vision that would definitively give me the essentiality of the essence.

Shall we say then that we *fall short* of the essence, that we have it only in principle, that it lies at the limit of an always imperfect idealization? This double thinking that opposes the principle and the fact saves with the term “principle” only a presumption of the essence, although this is the moment to decide if it is justified, and to save the presumption it entrenches us in relativism, although by renouncing the essence that is intemporal and without locality we would perhaps obtain a true thought with regard to the essence. It is on account of having begun with the antithesis of the fact and the essence, of what is individuated in a point of space and time and what is from forever and nowhere, that one is finally led to treat the essence as a limit idea, that is, to make it inaccessible. For this is what obliged us to seek the being of the essence in the form of a second positivity beyond the order of the “facts,” to dream of a variation of the thing that would eliminate from it all that is not authentically itself and would make it appear all naked whereas it is always clothed—to dream of an impossible labor of experience on experience that would strip it of its facticity as if it were an impurity. Perhaps if we were to re-examine the anti-thesis of

fact and essence, we would be able on the contrary to redefine the essence in a way that would give us access to it, because it would be not beyond but at the heart of that coiling up (*enroulement*) of experience over experience which a moment ago constituted the difficulty.

Only a thought that looks at being from elsewhere, and as it were head-on, is forced into the bifurcation of the essence and the fact. If I am *kosmotheoros*, my sovereign gaze finds the things each in its own time, in its own place, as absolute individuals in a unique local and temporal disposition. Since they participate in the same significations each from its own place, one is led to conceive another dimension that would be a transversal to this flat multiplicity and that would be the system of significations without locality or temporality. And then, since it is indeed necessary to connect the two and to comprehend how the two orders are connected up through us, one arrives at the inextricable problem of the intuition of essences. But am I *kosmotheoros*? More exactly: is being *kosmotheoros* my ultimate reality? Am I primitively the power to contemplate, a pure look which fixes the things in their temporal and local place and the essences in an invisible heaven; am I this ray of knowing that would have to arise from nowhere? But even while I am installing myself at this zero point of Being, I know very well that it has a mysterious tie with locality and temporality: tomorrow, in a moment, this aerial view, with everything it encompasses, will fall at a certain date of the calendar; I will assign to it a certain point of apparition on the earth and in my life. One has to believe that time has continued to flow on beneath and that the earth has continued to exist. Since, however, I had crossed over to the other side, instead of saying that I am in time and in space, or that I am nowhere, why not rather say that I am everywhere, always, by being at this moment and at this place?

For the visible present is not *in* time and space, nor, of course, *outside* of them: there is nothing before it, after it, about it, that could compete with its visibility. And yet it is not alone, it is not everything. To put it precisely, it stops up my view, that is, time and space extend beyond the visible present, and at the same time they are *behind* it, in depth, in hiding. The visible can thus fill me and occupy me only because I who see it do not see it from the depths of nothingness, but from the midst of itself; I the seer am also visible. What makes the weight, the thickness,

the flesh of each color, of each sound, of each tactile texture, of the present, and of the world is the fact that he who grasps them feels himself emerge from them by a sort of coiling up or redoubling, fundamentally homogeneous with them; he feels that he is the sensible itself coming to itself and that in return the sensible is in his eyes as it were his double or an extension of his own flesh. The space, the time of the things are shreds of himself, of his own spatialization, of his own temporalization, are no longer a multiplicity of individuals synchronically and diachronically distributed, but a relief of the simultaneous and of the successive, a spatial and temporal pulp where the individuals are formed by differentiation. The things—here, there, now, then—are no longer in themselves, in their own place, in their own time; they exist only at the end of those rays of spatiality and of temporality emitted in the secrecy of my flesh. And their solidity is not that of a pure object which the mind soars over; I experience their solidity from within insofar as I am among them and insofar as they communicate through me as a sentient thing. Like the memory screen of the psychoanalysts, the present, the visible counts so much for me and has an absolute prestige for me only by reason of this immense latent content of the past, the future, and the elsewhere, which it announces and which it conceals. There is therefore no need to add to the multiplicity of spatio-temporal atoms a transversal dimension of essences—what there is is a whole architecture, a whole complex of phenomena “in tiers,” a whole series of “levels of being,”<sup>1</sup> which are differentiated by the coiling up of the visible and the universal over a certain visible wherein it is redoubled and inscribed. Fact and essence can no longer be distinguished, not because, mixed up in our experience, they in their purity would be inaccessible and would subsist as limit-ideas beyond our experience, but because—Being no longer being *before me*, but surrounding me and in a sense traversing me, and my vision of Being not forming itself from elsewhere, but from the midst of Being—the alleged facts, the spatio-temporal individuals, are from the first mounted on the axes, the pivots, the dimensions, the generality of my body, and the ideas are therefore already encrusted in its joints. There is no emplacement of space and time that would not be a variant of the others, as they are of it; there is no

1. Jean Wahl, “*Sein, Wahrheit, Welt*,” *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, LXV, No. 2 (April–June, 1960), 187–94.

individual that would not be representative of a species or of a family of beings, would not have, would not be a certain style, a certain manner of managing the domain of space and time over which it has competency, of pronouncing, of articulating that domain, of radiating about a wholly virtual center—in short, a certain manner of being, in the active sense, a certain *Wesen*, in the sense that, says Heidegger, this word has when it is used as a verb.<sup>2</sup>

In short, there is no essence, no idea, that does not adhere to a domain of history and of geography. Not that it is *confined* there and inaccessible for the others, but because, like that of nature, the space or time of culture is not surveyable from above, and because the communication from one constituted culture to another occurs through the wild region wherein they all have originated. Where in all this is the essence? Where is the existence? Where is the *Sosein*, where the *Sein*? We never have before us pure individuals, indivisible glaciers of beings, nor essences without place and without date. Not that they exist elsewhere, beyond our grasp, but because we are experiences, that is, thoughts that feel behind themselves the weight of the space, the time, the very Being they think, and which therefore do not hold under their gaze a serial space and time nor the pure idea of series, but have about themselves a time and a space that exist by piling up, by proliferation, by encroachment, by promiscuity—a perpetual pregnancy, perpetual parturition, generativity and generality, brute essence and brute existence, which are the nodes and antinodes of the same ontological vibration.

And if one were to ask what is this indecisive milieu in which we find ourselves once the distinction between fact and essence is rejected, one must answer that it is the very sphere of our life, and of our life of knowledge. Now would be the time to reject the

2. The high school building, for us who return to it, thirty years later, as for those who occupy it today, is not so much an object which it would be useful or possible to describe by its characteristics, as it is a certain odor, a certain affective texture which holds sway over a certain vicinity of space. This velvet, this silk, are under my fingers a certain manner of resisting them and of yielding to them, a rough, sleek, rasping power, which respond for an X-spot of my flesh, lend themselves to its movement of muscled flesh, or tempt it in its inertia (*Einführung in die Metaphysik* [Tübingen, 1953], p. 26). [English translation by Ralph Manheim, *Introduction to Metaphysics* (Garden City, N. Y., 1961), pp. 27–28.]

myths of inductivity and of the *Wesenschau*, which are transmitted, as points of honor, from generation to generation. It is nonetheless clear that Husserl himself never obtained one sole *Wesenschau* that he did not subsequently take up again and rework, not to disown it, but in order to make it say what at first it had not quite said. Thus it would be naïve to seek solidity in a heaven of ideas or in a *ground* (*fond*) of meaning—it is neither above nor beneath the appearances, but at their joints; it is the tie that secretly connects an experience to its variants. It is clear also that pure inductivity is a myth. Let us set aside the domain of physics, to show later that the psychoanalysis of objective knowledge is interminable, or rather that, like every psychoanalysis, it is destined not to suppress the past, the phantasms, but to transform them from powers of death into poetic productivity, and that the very idea of objective knowledge and the idea of algorithm as a spiritual automaton and finally the idea of an object that informs itself and knows itself are, as much as any other ideas, and more than any other, supported by our reveries. Let us leave that aside for the moment. In any case, as soon as it is a question of the living being and of the body, and a fortiori of man, it is indeed clear that no fruitful research is pure inductivity, a pure inventorying of constants in themselves, that psychology, ethnology, sociology have taught us something only by putting the morbid or archaic or simply different experience in contact with our experience, by clarifying the one by the other, criticizing the one by the other, by organizing the *Ineinander*, and finally, by practicing that eidetic variation which Husserl was wrong to reserve primarily for the solitary imagination and vision of the philosopher, whereas it is the support and the very locus of that *opinio communis* we call science. Along this route, at least, it is indeed certain that we gain access to objectivity, not by penetrating into an In Itself, but by disclosing, rectifying each by the other, the exterior datum and the internal double of it that we possess insofar as we are sensible-sentients (*sentants-sensibles*), archetypes and variants of humanity and of life, that is, insofar as we are within life, within the human being and within Being, and insofar as it is in us as well, and insofar as we live and know not halfway between opaque facts and limpid ideas, but at the point of intersection and overlapping where families of facts inscribe their generality, their kinship, group themselves about the dimensions and the site of our own existence. This

environment of brute existence and essence is not something mysterious: we never quit it, we have no other environment. The facts and the essences are abstractions: what there is are worlds and a world and a Being, not a sum of facts or a system of ideas, but the impossibility of meaninglessness or ontological void, since space and time are not the sum of local and temporal individuals, but the presence and latency behind each of all the others, and behind those of still others—and what they are we do not know, but we do know at least that they are determinable in principle. This world, this Being, facticity and ideality undividedly, is not one in the sense that being one applies to the individuals it contains, and still less is it two or several in that sense. Yet it is nothing mysterious: it is, whatever we may say, this world, this Being that our life, our science, and our philosophy inhabit.<sup>3</sup>

We shall render explicit the cohesion of time, of space, of space and time, the “simultaneity” of their parts (literal simultaneity in space, simultaneity in the figurative sense in time) and the intertwining (*entrelacs*) of space and time. And we shall render explicit the cohesion of the obverse and the reverse of my body which is responsible for the fact that my body—which is visible, tangible like a thing—acquires this view upon itself, this contact with itself, where it doubles itself up, unifies itself, in such a way that the objective body and the phenomenal body turn about one another or encroach upon one another. For the moment it suffices to show that the unique Being, the dimensionality to which these moments, these leaves, and these dimensions belong, is beyond the classical essence and existence and renders their relationship comprehensible.

Before the essence as before the fact, all we must do is situate ourselves within the being we are dealing with, instead of looking at it from the outside—or, *what amounts to the same thing*, what we have to do is put it back into the fabric of our life, attend from within to the dehiscence (analogous to that of my own body) which opens it to itself and opens us upon it, and

3. EDITOR: Here, in the course of the text itself, are inserted these lines: “in this labor of experience on experience which is the carnal context of the essence, it is necessary to draw attention particularly to the labor of speech (take up again the paragraph under discussion, and the apprehension of the essence as a spread between words [*écart des paroles*]).”

which, in the case of the essence, is the dehiscence of the speaking and the thinking. As my body, which is one of the visibles, sees itself also and thereby makes itself the natural light opening its own interior to the visible, in order for the visible there to become my own landscape, realizing (as it is said) the miraculous promotion of Being to "consciousness," or (as we prefer to say) the segregation of the "within" and the "without"; so also speech (*la parole*)—which is sustained by the thousands of ideal relations of the particular language (*la langue*), and which, therefore, in the eyes of science, is, as a constituted language (*langage*), a certain region in the universe of significations—is also the organ and the resonator of all the other regions of signification and consequently coextensive with the thinkable. Like the flesh of the visible, speech is a total part of the significations, like it, speech is a relation to Being through a being, and, like it, it is narcissistic, eroticized, endowed with a natural magic that attracts the other significations into its web, as the body feels the world in feeling itself. In reality, there is much more than a parallel or an analogy here, there is solidarity and intertwining: if speech, which is but a region of the intelligible world, can be also its refuge, this is because speech prolongs into the invisible, extends unto the semantic operations, the belongingness of the body to being and the corporeal relevance of every being, which for me is once and for all attested by the visible, and whose idea each intellectual evidence reflects a little further. In a philosophy that takes into consideration the operative world, functioning, present and coherent, as it is, the essence is not at all a stumbling block: it has its place there as an operative, functioning, essence. No longer are there essences above us, like positive objects, offered to a spiritual eye; but there is an essence beneath us, a common nervure of the signifying and the signified, adherence in and reversibility of one another—as the visible things are the secret folds of our flesh, and yet our body is one of the visible things. As the world is behind my body, the operative essence is behind the operative speech also, the speech that possesses the signification less than it is possessed by it, that does not speak *of it*, but speaks *it*, or speaks *according to it*, or lets it speak and be spoken within me, breaks through my present. If there is an ideality, a thought that has a future in me, that even breaks through my space of consciousness and has a future with the others, and finally, having become a writing, has a

future in every possible reader, this can be only that thought that leaves me with my hunger and leaves them with their hunger, that betokens a generalized buckling of my landscape and opens it to the universal, precisely because it is rather an *unthought*. Ideas that are too much possessed are no longer ideas; I no longer think anything when I speak of them, as if it were essential to the essence that it be for tomorrow, as if it were only a tacking thread in the fabric of the words. A discussion is not an exchange or a confrontation of ideas, as if each formed his own, showed them to the others, looked at theirs, and returned to correct them with his own. . . . Someone speaks, and immediately the others are now but certain divergencies by relation to his words, and he himself specifies his divergence in relation to them. Whether he speaks up or hardly whispers, each one speaks with all that he is, with his "ideas," but also with his obsessions, his secret history which the others suddenly lay bare by formulating them as ideas. Life becomes ideas and the ideas return to life, each is caught up in the vortex in which he first committed only measured stakes, each is led on by what he said and the response he received, led on by his own thought of which he is no longer the sole thinker. No one thinks any more, everyone speaks, all live and gesticulate within Being, as I stir within my landscape, guided by gradients of differences to be observed or to be reduced if I wish to remain here or to go yonder. Whether in discussion or in monologue, the essence in the living and active state is always a certain vanishing point indicated by the arrangement of the words, their "other side," inaccessible, save for him who accepts to live first and always in them.

As the nervure bears the leaf from within, from the depths of its flesh, the ideas are the texture of experience, its style, first mute, then uttered. Like every style, they are elaborated within the thickness of being and, not only in fact but also by right, could not be detached from it, to be spread out on display under the gaze.

The philosophical interrogation is therefore not the simple expectation of a signification that would come to fill it. "What is the world?" or, better, "what is Being?"—these questions become philosophical only if, by a sort of diplopia, at the same time that they aim at a state of things, they aim at themselves as questions—at the same time that they aim at the signification "being,"

they aim at the being of signification and the place of signification within Being. It is characteristic of the philosophical questioning that it return upon itself, that it ask itself also what to question is and what to respond is. Once this question to the second power is raised, it cannot be effaced. Henceforth nothing can continue to be as if there had never been any question. The forgetting of the question, the return to the positive would be possible only if the questioning were a simple absence of meaning, a withdrawal into the nothingness that is nothing. But he who questions is not nothing, he is—and this is something quite different—a being that questions himself; the negative in him is borne by an infrastructure of being, it is therefore not a nothing that eliminates itself from the account. We said that the doubt is a clandestine positivism and that it is necessary to go beyond it toward the something it negates and yet affirms. But conversely if we wished to go beyond it unto a sphere of absolute certitude that would be the sphere of significations or essences, this absolute positivism would mean that he who questions had distanced Being and the world from himself so much that he was of them no longer. Like the negativism of the doubt, the positivism of the essences says secretly the contrary of what it says openly. The intent to reach the absolutely hard being of the essence conceals the mendacious pretension to be nothing. No question goes toward Being: if only by virtue of its being as a question, it has already frequented Being, it is returning to it. As the view that the question be a real rupture with Being, a lived nothingness, is precluded, also precluded is the view that it be an ideal rupture, an absolutely pure gaze directed upon an experience reduced to its signification or its essence. As is precluded the view that the question be without response, be a pure gaping toward a transcendent Being, also precluded is the view that the response be immanent to the question and that, as Marx said, humanity raise only the questions it can resolve. And these two views are precluded for the same reason, which is that in both hypotheses there would finally be no question, and that in both these views our initial situation is ignored—either, cut off from Being, we would not even have enough of the positive to raise a question, or, already caught up in Being, we would be already beyond every question. The questions of essence to which one wishes to reduce philosophy are not of themselves more philosophical than the questions of fact, and the questions of fact, when the occa-

sion arises, no less philosophical than they. The dimension of philosophy cuts across that of the essence and the [fact].<sup>4</sup> To question oneself about the essence of time and of space is not yet to do philosophy, if one does not then question oneself about the relations of time itself and of space itself with their essence. And in a sense the questions of fact go further than the truths of reason.

From time to time, a man lifts his head, sniffs, listens, considers, recognizes his position: he thinks, he sighs, and, drawing his watch from the pocket lodged against his chest, looks at the time. *Where am I?* and *What time is it?*—such is the inexhaustible question turning from us to the world. . . .<sup>5</sup>

Inexhaustible, because the time and the place change continually, but especially because the question that arises here is not at bottom a question of knowing in what spot of a space taken as given, at what hour of a time taken as given, we are—but first what is this indestructible tie between us and hours and places, this perpetual taking of our bearings on the things, this continual installation among them, through which first it is necessary that I be at a time, at a place, whatever they be. Positive information, a statement whatever it be, only defer that question and beguile our hunger. They refer us to some sort of law of our being that lays down that after a space there is a space, that after a time there is a time, but it is this law itself that our questions of fact are reaching for. If we could scrutinize their ultimate motivation, we would find beneath the questions *where am I?* and *what time is it?* a secret knowledge of space and time as beings to be questioned, a secret knowledge of interrogation as the ultimate relation to Being and as an ontological organ. The necessities by essence will not be the “answer” philosophy calls for, any more than are the facts. The “answer” is higher than the “facts,” lower than the “essences,” in the wild Being where they were, and—behind or beneath the cleavages of our acquired culture—continue to be, undivided.

What we propose here, and oppose to the search for the

4. EDITOR: We reintroduce between brackets the term “fact” erased by error.

5. Claudel, *Art poétique* (Paris, 1951), p. 9. [EDITOR: The reader will notice that the same passage from Claudel has already been cited and commented on (cf. above, pp. 103–4). The repetition is evidence of the unfinished state of the manuscript.]

essence, is not the return to the immediate, the coincidence, the effective fusion with the existent, the search for an original integrity, for a secret lost and to be rediscovered, which would nullify our questions and even reprehend our language. If coincidence is lost, this is no accident; if Being is hidden, this is itself a characteristic of Being, and no disclosure will make us comprehend it. A lost immediate, arduous to restore, will, if we do restore it, bear within itself the sediment of the critical procedures through which we will have found it anew; it will therefore not be the immediate. If it is to be the immediate, if it is to retain no trace of the operations through which we approach it, if it is Being itself, this means that there is no route from us to it and that it is inaccessible by principle. The visible things about us rest in themselves, and their natural being is so full that it seems to envelop their perceived being, as if our perception of them were formed within them. But if I express this experience by saying that the things are in their place and that we fuse with them, I immediately make the experience itself impossible: for in the measure that the thing is approached, I cease to be; in the measure that I am, there is no thing, but only a double of it in my "camera obscura." The moment my perception is to become pure perception, thing, Being, it is extinguished; the moment it lights up, already I am no longer the thing. And likewise there is no real coinciding with the being of the past: if the pure memory is the former present preserved, and if, in the act of recalling, I really become again what I was, it becomes impossible to see how it could open to me the dimension of the past. And if in being inscribed within me each present loses its flesh, if the pure memory into which it is changed is an invisible, then there is indeed a past, but no coinciding with it—I am separated from it by the whole thickness of my present; it is mine only by finding in some way a place in my present, in making itself present anew. As we never have at the same time the thing and the consciousness of the thing, we never have at the same time the past and the consciousness of the past, and for the same reason: in an intuition by coincidence and fusion, everything one gives to Being is taken from experience, everything one gives to experience is taken from Being. The truth of the matter is that the experience of a coincidence can be, as Bergson often says, only a "partial coincidence." But what is a coincidence that is only partial? It is a coincidence always past or always future, an

experience that remembers an impossible past, anticipates an impossible future, that emerges from Being or that will incorporate itself into Being, that "is of it" but is not it, and therefore is not a coincidence, a real fusion, as of two positive terms or two elements of an alloyage, but an overlaying, as of a hollow and a relief which remain distinct. Coming after the world, after nature, after life, after thought, and finding them constituted before it, philosophy indeed questions this antecedent being and questions itself concerning its own relationship with it. It is a return upon itself and upon all things but not a return to an immediate—which recedes in the measure that philosophy wishes to approach it and fuse into it. The immediate is at the horizon and must be thought as such; it is only by remaining at a distance that it remains itself. There is an experience of the visible thing as pre-existing my vision, but this experience is not a fusion, a coincidence: because my eyes which see, my hands which touch, can also be seen and touched, because, therefore, in this sense they see and touch the visible, the tangible, from within, because our flesh lines and even envelops all the visible and tangible things with which nevertheless it is surrounded, the world and I are within one another, and there is no anteriority of the *percipere* to the *percipi*, there is simultaneity or even retardation. For the weight of the natural world is already a weight of the past. Each landscape of my life, because it is not a wandering troop of sensations or a system of ephemeral judgments but a segment of the durable flesh of the world, is qua visible, pregnant with many other visions besides my own; and the visible that I see, of which I speak, even if it is not Mount Hymettus or the plane trees of Delphi, is numerically the same that Plato and Aristotle saw and spoke of. When I find again the actual world such as it is, under my hands, under my eyes, up against my body, I find much more than an object: a Being of which my vision is a part, a visibility older than my operations or my acts. But this does not mean that there was a fusion or coinciding of me with it: on the contrary, this occurs because a sort of dehiscence opens my body in two, and because between my body looked at and my body looking, my body touched and my body touching, there is overlapping or encroachment, so that we must say that the things pass into us as well as we into the things. Our intuition, said Bergson, is a reflection, and he was right; his intuition shares with the philosophies of reflection a sort of

supralapsarian bias: the secret of Being is in an integrity that is behind us. Like the philosophies of reflection, what Bergson lacks is the double reference, the identity of the retiring into oneself with the leaving of oneself, of the lived through with the distance. The return to the immediate data, the deepening of experience on the spot, are certainly the hallmark of philosophy by opposition to naïve cognitions. But the past and the present, the essence and the fact, space and time, are not *given* in the same sense, and none of them is given in the sense of coincidence. The "originating" <sup>6</sup> is not of one sole type, it is not all behind us; the restoration of the true past, of the pre-existence is not all of philosophy; the lived experience is not flat, without depth, without dimension, it is not an opaque stratum with which we would have to merge. The appeal to the originating goes in several directions: the originating breaks up, and philosophy must accompany this break-up, this non-coincidence, this differentiation. The difficulties of coincidence are not only factual difficulties which would leave the principle intact. Already with respect to the intuition of essences we have encountered this system of double truth, which is also a system of double falsity: for what is true *in principle* never being true *in fact*, and conversely the factual situation never committing the principles, each of the two instances condemns the other, and condemns it with reprieve, by leaving to it competency in its own order. If the coincidence is never but partial, we must not define the truth by total or effective coincidence. And if we have the idea of the thing itself and of the past itself, there must be something in the factual order that answers to it. It is therefore necessary that the deflection (*écart*), without which the experience of the thing or of the past would fall to zero, be also an openness upon the thing itself, to the past itself, that it enter into their definition. What is given, then, is not the naked thing, the past itself such as it was in its own time, but rather the thing ready to be seen, pregnant—in principle as well as in fact—with all the visions one can have of it, the past such as it was one day *plus* an inexplicable alteration, a strange distance—bound in principle as well as in fact to a recalling that spans that distance but does not nullify it. What there is is not a coinciding by principle or a

6. TRANSLATOR: We are translating *originnaire* by "originating," to be taken in an active sense. Merleau-Ponty says it means "fundamental and inaugural" (cf. below, p. 159).

presumptive coinciding and a factual non-coinciding, a bad or abortive truth, but a privative non-coinciding, a coinciding from afar, a divergence, and something like a "good error."

It is by considering language that we would best see how we are to and how we are not to return to the things themselves. If we dream of finding again the natural world or time through coincidence, of being identical to the O-point which we see yonder, or to the pure memory which from the depths of ourselves governs our acts of recall, then language is a power for error, since it cuts the continuous tissue that joins us vitally to the things and to the past and is installed between ourselves and that tissue like a screen. The philosopher speaks, but this is a weakness in him, and an inexplicable weakness: he should keep silent, coincide in silence, and rejoin in Being a philosophy that is there ready-made. But yet everything comes to pass as though he wished to put into words a certain silence he hearkens to within himself. His entire "work" is this absurd effort. He wrote in order to state his contact with Being; he did not state it, and could not state it, since it is silence. Then he recommences. . . . One has to believe, then, that language is not simply the contrary of the truth, of coincidence, that there is or could be a language of coincidence, a manner of making the things themselves speak—and this is what he seeks. It would be a language of which he would not be the organizer, words he would not assemble, that would combine through him by virtue of a natural intertwining of their meaning, through the occult trading of the metaphor—where what counts is no longer the manifest meaning of each word and of each image, but the lateral relations, the kinships that are implicated in their transfers and their exchanges. It is indeed a language of this sort that Bergson himself required for the philosopher. But we have to recognize the consequence: if language is not necessarily deceptive, truth is not coincidence, nor mute.

We need only take language too in the living or nascent state, with all its references, those behind it, which connect it to the mute things it interpellates, and those it sends before itself and which make up the world of things said—with its movement, its subtleties, its reversals, its life, which expresses and multiplies tenfold the life of the bare things. Language is a life, is our life and the life of the things. Not that *language* takes possession of life and reserves it for itself: what would there be to say if there

existed nothing but things said? It is the error of the semantic philosophies to close up language as if it spoke only of itself: language lives only from silence; everything we cast to the others has germinated in this great mute land which we never leave. But, because he has experienced within himself the need to speak, the birth of speech as bubbling up at the bottom of his mute experience, the philosopher knows better than anyone that what is lived is lived-spoken, that, born at this depth, language is not a mask over Being, but—if one knows how to grasp it with all its roots and all its foliation—the most valuable witness to Being, that it does not interrupt an immediation that would be perfect without it, that the vision itself, the thought itself, are, as has been said, “structured as a language,”<sup>7</sup> are *articulation* before the letter, apparition of something where there was nothing or something else. Hence the problem of language is, if one likes, only a regional problem—that is, if we consider the ready-made language, the secondary and empirical operation of translation, of coding and decoding, the artificial languages, the technical relation between a sound and a meaning which are joined only by express convention and are therefore ideally isolable. But if, on the contrary, we consider the speaking word, the assuming of the conventions of his native language as something natural by him who lives within that language, the folding over within him of the visible and the lived experience upon language, and of language upon the visible and the lived experience, the exchanges between the articulations of his mute language and those of his speech, finally that operative language which has no need to be translated into significations and thoughts, that language-thing which counts as an arm, as action, as offense and as seduction because it brings to the surface all the deep-rooted relations of the lived experience wherein it takes form, and which is the language of life and of action but also that of literature and of poetry—then this *logos* is an absolutely universal theme, it is the theme of philosophy. Philosophy itself is language, rests on language; but this does not disqualify it from speaking of language, nor from speaking of the pre-language and of the mute world which doubles them: on the contrary, philosophy is an operative language, that language that can be known only from within, through its exercise, is open upon the things, called forth by the

7. Jacques Lacan.

voices of silence, and continues an effort of articulation which is the Being of every being.

We would err as much by defining philosophy as the search for the essences as by defining it as the fusion with the things, and the two errors are not so different. Whether we orientate ourselves upon the essences, which are the more pure in the measure that he who sees them has no part in the world, in the measure, consequently, that we look out from the depths of nothingness, or whether we seek to merge with the existing things, at the very point and at the very instant that they are, this infinite distance, this absolute proximity express in two ways—as a soaring over or as fusion—the same relationship with the thing itself. They are two positivisms. Whether one installs oneself at the level of statements, which are the proper order of the essences, or in the silence of the things, whether one trusts in speech absolutely, or whether one distrusts it absolutely—the ignorance of the problem of speech is here the ignoring of all mediation. Philosophy is flattened to the sole plane of ideality or to the sole plane of existence. On both sides one wants something—internal adequation of the idea or self-identity of the thing—to come stop up the look, and one excludes or subordinates the thought of the far-offs, the horizontal thought. That every being presents itself at a distance, which does not prevent us from knowing it, which is on the contrary the guarantee for knowing it: this is what is not considered. That the presence of the world is precisely the presence of its flesh to my flesh, that I “am of the world” and that I am not it, this is what is no sooner said than forgotten: metaphysics remains coincidence. That there is this thickness of flesh between us and the “hard core” of Being, this does not figure in the definition: this thickness is ascribed to me, it is the sheath of non-being that the subjectivity always carries about itself. Infinite distance or absolute proximity, negation or identification: our relationship with Being is ignored in the same way in both cases. In both cases, one misses it because one thinks one will ensure it more effectively by approaching the essence or the thing as closely as possible. One forgets that this frontal being before us—whether we posit it, whether it posits itself within us qua being-positated—is second by principle, is cut out upon a horizon which is not nothing, and which for its part is not by virtue of com-position. One forgets

that our openness, our fundamental relationship with Being, that which makes it impossible for us to feign to not be, could not be formed in the order of the being-positing, since it is this openness precisely that teaches us that the beings-positing, whether true or false, are not nothing, that, whatever be the experience, an experience is always contiguous upon an experience, that our perceptions, our judgments, our whole knowledge of the world can be changed, crossed out, Husserl says, but not nullified, that, under the doubt that strikes them appear other perceptions, other judgments more true, because we are within Being and because there is something. Bergson had indeed said that the fundamental knowing is not that which wishes to take hold of time as between forceps, wishes to fix it, to determine it by the relations between its parts, to measure it; and that on the contrary time offers itself to him who wishes only to "see it,"<sup>8</sup> and who, precisely because he has given up the attempt to seize it, rejoins, by vision, its internal propulsion. But more often than not the idea of fusion or of coincidence serves as a substitute for these indications, which would call for a theory of the philosophical view or vision as a maximum of true proximity to a Being in dehiscence. . . . We should have to return to this idea of proximity through distance, of intuition as auscultation or palpation in depth, of a view which is a view of self, a torsion of self upon self, and which calls "coincidence" in question.

And thereby we would see finally what the philosophical questioning is. Not the *an sit* and the doubt, where Being is tacitly understood, and not the "I know that I know nothing," where already the absolute certitude of the ideas breaks through, but a true "what do I know?" which is not quite that of Montaigne. For the "what do I know?" could be a simple appeal for the elucidation of the things that we know, without any examination of the idea of knowing. In that case it would be one of those questions of cognition (as can also be the "where am I?") where we are hesitating only about what to call entities—space, knowledge—which are taken as evident in themselves. But already when I say "what do I know?" in the course of a phrase,<sup>9</sup> another

8. *La Pensée et le mouvant* (Paris, 1934), p. 10. [English translation by Mabelle L. Andison, *The Creative Mind* (New York, 1946), p. 13.]

9. TRANSLATOR: *Que sais-je?*—an idiomatic exclamatory turn of phrase in French.

sort of question arises: for it extends to the idea of knowing itself; it invokes some intelligible place where the facts, examples, ideas I lack, should be found; it intimates that the interrogative is not a mode derived by inversion or by reversal of the indicative and of the positive, is neither an affirmation nor a negation veiled or expected, but an original manner of aiming at something, as it were a *question-knowing*, which by principle no statement or "answer" can go beyond and which perhaps therefore is the proper mode of our relationship with Being, as though it were the mute or reticent interlocutor of our questions. "What do I know?" is not only "what is knowing?" and not only "who am I?" but finally: "what is there?" and even: "what is the *there is?*" These questions call not for the exhibiting of something said which would put an end to them, but for the disclosure of a Being that is not posited because it has no need to be, because it is silently behind all our affirmations, negations, and even behind all formulated questions, not that it is a matter of forgetting them in its silence, not that it is a matter of imprisoning it in our chatter, but because philosophy is the reconversion of silence and speech into one another: "It is the experience . . . still mute which we are concerned with leading to the pure expression of its own meaning."<sup>10</sup>

10. Husserl, *Meditations cartésiennes*, French translation (Paris, 1947), p. 33. [English translation by Dorion Cairns, *Cartesian Meditations* (The Hague, 1960), pp. 38–39.]

## 4 / The Intertwining—The Chiasm

IF IT IS TRUE that as soon as philosophy declares itself to be reflection or coincidence it prejudices 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. Seeing, speaking, even thinking (with certain reservations, for as soon as we distinguish thought from speaking absolutely we are already in the order of reflection), are experiences of this kind, both irrecusable and enigmatic. They have a name in all languages, but a name which in all of them also conveys significations in tufts, thickets of proper meanings and figurative meanings, so that, unlike those of science, not one of these names clarifies by attributing to what is named a circumscribed signification. Rather, they are the repeated index, the insistent reminder of a mystery as familiar as it is unexplained, of a light which, illuminating the rest, remains at its source in obscurity. If we could rediscover within the exercise of seeing and speaking some of the living references that assign them such a destiny in a language, perhaps they would teach us how to form our new instruments, and first of all to understand our research, our interrogation, themselves.

The visible about us seems to rest in itself. It is as though our vision were formed in the heart of the visible, or as though there were between it and us an intimacy as close as between the sea

and the strand. And yet it is not possible that we blend into it, nor that it passes into us, for then the vision would vanish at the moment of formation, by disappearance of the seer or of the visible. What there is then are not things first identical with themselves, which would then offer themselves to the seer, nor is there a seer who is first empty and who, afterward, would open himself to them—but something to which we could not be closer than by palpating it with our look, things we could not dream of seeing “all naked” because the gaze itself envelops them, clothes them with its own flesh. Whence does it happen that in so doing it leaves them in their place, that the vision we acquire of them seems to us to come from them, and that to be seen is for them but a degradation of their eminent being? What is this talisman of color, this singular virtue of the visible that makes it, held at the end of the gaze, nonetheless much more than a correlative of my vision, such that it imposes my vision upon me as a continuation of its own sovereign existence? How does it happen that my look, enveloping them, does not hide them, and, finally, that, veiling them, it unveils them? <sup>1</sup>

We must first understand that this red under my eyes is not, as is always said, a *quale*, a pellicle of being without thickness, a message at the same time indecipherable and evident, which one has or has not received, but of which, if one has received it, one knows all there is to know, and of which in the end there is nothing to say. It requires a focusing, however brief; it emerges from a less precise, more general redness, in which my gaze was caught, into which it sank, before—as we put it so aptly—*fixing* it. And, now that I have fixed it, if my eyes penetrate into it, into

I. EDITOR: Here in the course of the text itself, these lines are inserted: “it is that the look is itself incorporation of the seer into the visible, quest for itself, which *is of it*, within the visible—it is that the visible of the world is not an envelope of *quale*, but what is between the qualia, a connective tissue of exterior and interior horizons—it is as flesh offered to flesh that the visible has its aseity, and that it is mine—The flesh as *Sichtigkeit* and generality. → whence vision is question and response. . . . The openness through flesh: the two leaves of my body and the leaves of the visible world. . . . It is between these intercalated leaves that there is visibility. . . . My body model of the things and the things model of my body: the body bound to the world through all its parts, up against it → all this means: the world, the flesh not as fact or sum of facts, but as the locus of an inscription of truth: the false crossed out, not nullified.”

its fixed structure, or if they start to wander round about again, the *quale* resumes its atmospheric existence. Its precise form is bound up with a certain woolly, metallic, or porous [?] configuration or texture, and the *quale* itself counts for very little compared with these participations. Claudel has a phrase saying that a certain blue of the sea is so blue that only blood would be more red. The color is yet a variant in another dimension of variation, that of its relations with the surroundings: this red is what it is only by connecting up from its place with other reds about it, with which it forms a constellation, or with other colors it dominates or that dominate it, that it attracts or that attract it, that it repels or that repel it. In short, it is a certain node in the woof of the simultaneous and the successive. It is a concretion of visibility, it is not an atom. The red dress a fortiori holds with all its fibers onto the fabric of the visible, and thereby onto a fabric of invisible being. A punctuation in the field of red things, which includes the tiles of roof tops, the flags of gatekeepers and of the Revolution, certain terrains near Aix or in Madagascar, it is also a punctuation in the field of red garments, which includes, along with the dresses of women, robes of professors, bishops, and advocate generals, and also in the field of adornments and that of uniforms. And its red literally is not the same as it appears in one constellation or in the other, as the pure essence of the Revolution of 1917 precipitates in it, or that of the eternal feminine, or that of the public prosecutor, or that of the gypsies dressed like hussars who reigned twenty-five years ago over an inn on the Champs-Élysées. A certain red is also a fossil drawn up from the depths of imaginary worlds. If we took all these participations into account, we would recognize that a naked color, and in general a visible, is not a chunk of absolutely hard, indivisible being, offered all naked to a vision which could be only total or null, but is rather a sort of straits between exterior horizons and interior horizons ever gaping open, something that comes to touch lightly and makes diverse regions of the colored or visible world resound at the distances, a certain differentiation, an ephemeral modulation of this world—less a color or a thing, therefore, than a difference between things and colors, a momentary crystallization of colored being or of visibility. Between the alleged colors and visibles, we would find anew the tissue that lines them, sustains them, nourishes them, and which

for its part is not a thing, but a possibility, a latency, and a *flesh* of things.

If we turn now to the seer, we will find that this is no analogy or vague comparison and must be taken literally. The look, we said, envelops, palpates, espouses the visible things. As though it were in a relation of pre-established harmony with them, as though it knew them before knowing them, it moves in its own way with its abrupt and imperious style, and yet the views taken are not desultory—I do not look at a chaos, but at things—so that finally one cannot say if it is the look or if it is the things that command. What is this prepossession of the visible, this art of interrogating it according to its own wishes, this inspired exegesis? We would perhaps find the answer in the tactile palpation where the questioner and the questioned are closer, and of which, after all, the palpation of the eye is a remarkable variant. How does it happen that I give to my hands, in particular, that degree, that rate, and that direction of movement that are capable of making me feel the textures of the sleek and the rough? Between the exploration and what it will teach me, between my movements and what I touch, there must exist some relationship by principle, some kinship, according to which they are not only, like the pseudopods of the amoeba, vague and ephemeral deformations of the corporeal space, but the initiation to and the opening upon a tactile world. This can happen only if my hand, while it is felt from within, is also accessible from without, itself tangible, for my other hand, for example, if it takes its place among the things it touches, is in a sense one of them, opens finally upon a tangible being of which it is also a part. Through this crisscrossing within it of the touching and the tangible, its own movements incorporate themselves into the universe they interrogate, are recorded on the same map as it; the two systems are applied upon one another, as the two halves of an orange. It is no different for the vision—except, it is said, that here the exploration and the information it gathers do not belong “to the same sense.” But this delimitation of the senses is crude. Already in the “touch” we have just found three distinct experiences which subtend one another, three dimensions which overlap but are distinct: a touching of the sleek and of the rough, a touching of the things—a passive sentiment of the body and of its space—and finally a veritable touching of the touch, when my right

hand touches my left hand while it is palpating the things, where the "touching subject" passes over to the rank of the touched, descends into the things, such that the touch is formed in the midst of the world and as it were in the things. Between the massive sentiment I have of the sack in which I am enclosed, and the control from without that my hand exercises over my hand, there is as much difference as between the movements of my eyes and the changes they produce in the visible. And as, conversely, every experience of the visible has always been given to me within the context of the movements of the look, the visible spectacle belongs to the touch neither more nor less than do the "tactile qualities." We must habituate ourselves to think that every visible is cut out in the tangible, every tactile being in some manner promised to visibility, and that there is encroachment, infringement, not only between the touched and the touching, but also between the tangible and the visible, which is encrusted in it, as, conversely, the tangible itself is not a nothingness of visibility, is not without visual existence. Since the same body sees and touches, visible and tangible belong to the same world. It is a marvel too little noticed that every movement of my eyes—even more, every displacement of my body—has its place in the same visible universe that I itemize and explore with them, as, conversely, every vision takes place somewhere in the tactile space. There is double and crossed situating of the visible in the tangible and of the tangible in the visible; the two maps are complete, and yet they do not merge into one. The two parts are total parts and yet are not superposable.

Hence, without even entering into the implications proper to the seer and the visible, we know that, since vision is a palpation with the look, it must also be inscribed in the order of being that it discloses to us; he who looks must not himself be foreign to the world that he looks at. As soon as I see, it is necessary that the vision (as is so well indicated by the double meaning of the word) be doubled with a complementary vision or with another vision: myself seen from without, such as another would see me, installed in the midst of the visible, occupied in considering it from a certain spot. For the moment we shall not examine how far this identity of the seer and the visible goes, if we have a complete experience of it, or if there is something missing, and what it is. It suffices for us for the moment to note that he who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it,

unless he *is of it*,\* unless, by principle, according to what is required by the articulation of the look with the things, he is one of the visibles, capable, by a singular reversal, of seeing them—he who is one of them.†

We understand then why we see the things themselves, in their places, where they are, according to their being which is indeed more than their being-perceived—and why at the same time we are separated from them by all the thickness of the look and of the body; it is that this distance is not the contrary of this proximity, it is deeply consonant with it, it is synonymous with it. It is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication. It is for the same reason that I am at the heart of the visible and that I am far from it: because it has thickness and is thereby naturally destined to be seen by a body. What is indefinable in the *quale*, in the color, is nothing else than a brief, peremptory manner of giving in one sole something, in one sole tone of being, visions past, visions to come, by whole clusters. I who see have my own depth also, being backed up by this same visible which I see and which, I know very well, closes in behind me. The thickness of the body, far from rivaling that of the world, is on the contrary the sole means I have to go unto the heart of the things, by making myself a world and by making them flesh.

The body interposed is not itself a thing, an interstitial matter, a connective tissue, but a *sensible for itself*, which means, not that absurdity: color that sees itself, surface that touches itself—but this paradox [?]: a set of colors and surfaces inhabited by a touch, a vision, hence an *exemplar sensible*, which offers to him who inhabits it and senses it the wherewithal to sense everything that resembles himself on the outside, such that, caught up in the tissue of the things, it draws it entirely to itself, incorporates it, and, with the same movement, communicates to the things upon which it closes over that identity without superposition, that difference without contradiction, that divergence between the within and the without that constitutes its

\* The *Uerpräsentierbarkeit* is the flesh.

† The visible is not a tangible zero, the tangible is not a zero of visibility (relation of encroachment).

natal secret.<sup>2</sup> The body unites us directly with the things through its own ontogenesis, by welding to one another the two outlines of which it is made, its two laps: the sensible mass it is and the mass of the sensible wherein it is born by segregation and upon which, as seer, it remains open. It is the body and it alone, because it is a two-dimensional being, that can bring us to the things themselves, which are themselves not flat beings but beings in depth, inaccessible to a subject that would survey them from above, open to him alone that, if it be possible, would coexist with them in the same world. When we speak of the flesh of the visible, we do not mean to do anthropology, to describe a world covered over with all our own projections, leaving aside what it can be under the human mask. Rather, we mean that carnal being, as a being of depths, of several leaves or several faces, a being in latency, and a presentation of a certain absence, is a prototype of Being, of which our body, the sensible sentient, is a very remarkable variant, but whose constitutive paradox already lies in every visible. For already the cube assembles within itself impossible *visibilia*, as my body is at once phenomenal body and objective body, and if finally it is, it, like my body, is by a tour de force. What we call a visible is, we said, a quality pregnant with a texture, the surface of a depth, a cross section upon a massive being, a grain or corpuscle borne by a wave of Being. Since the total visible is always behind, or after, or between the aspects we see of it, there is access to it only through an experience which, like it, is wholly outside of itself. It is thus, and not as the bearer of a knowing subject, that our body commands the visible for us, but it does not explain it, does not clarify it, it only concentrates the mystery of its scattered visibility; and it is indeed a paradox of Being, not a paradox of man, that we are dealing with here. To be sure, one can reply that, between the two "sides" of our body, the body as sensible and the body as sentient (what in the past we called objective body and phenomenal body), rather than a spread, there is the abyss that

2. EDITOR: Here, in the course of the text itself, between brackets, these lines are inserted: "One can say that we perceive the things themselves, that we are the world that thinks itself—or that the world is at the heart of our flesh. In any case, once a body-world relationship is recognized, there is a ramification of my body and a ramification of the world and a correspondence between its inside and my outside, between my inside and its outside."

separates the In Itself from the For Itself. It is a problem—and we will not avoid it—to determine how the sensible sentient can also be thought. But here, seeking to form our first concepts in such a way as to avoid the classical impasses, we do not have to honor the difficulties that they may present when confronted with a *cogito*, which itself has to be re-examined. Yes or no: do we have a body—that is, not a permanent object of thought, but a flesh that suffers when it is wounded, hands that touch? We know: hands do not suffice for touch—but to decide for this reason alone that our hands do not touch, and to relegate them to the world of objects or of instruments, would be, in acquiescing to the bifurcation of subject and object, to forego in advance the understanding of the sensible and to deprive ourselves of its lights. We propose on the contrary to take it literally to begin with. We say therefore that our body is a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees them and touches them; we say, because it is evident, that it unites these two properties within itself, and its double belongingness to the order of the "object" and to the order of the "subject" reveals to us quite unexpected relations between the two orders. It cannot be by incomprehensible accident that the body has this double reference; it teaches us that each calls for the other. For if the body is a thing among things, it is so in a stronger and deeper sense than they: in the sense that, we said, it *is of them*, and this means that it detaches itself upon them, and, accordingly, detaches itself from them. It is not simply a thing *seen* in fact (I do not see my back), it is visible by right, it falls under a vision that is both ineluctable and deferred. Conversely, if it touches and sees, this is not because it would have the visibles before itself as objects: they are about it, they even enter into its enclosure, they are within it, they line its looks and its hands inside and outside. If it touches them and sees them, this is only because, being of their family, itself visible and tangible, it uses its own being as a means to participate in theirs, because each of the two beings is an archetype for the other, because the body belongs to the order of the things as the world is universal flesh. One should not even say, as we did a moment ago, that the body is made up of two leaves, of which the one, that of the "sensible," is bound up with the rest of the world. There are not in it two leaves or two layers; fundamentally it is neither thing seen only nor seer only, it is Visibility sometimes

wandering and sometimes reassembled. And as such it is not in the world, it does not detain its view of the world as within a private garden: it sees the world itself, the world of everybody, and without having to leave "itself," because it is wholly—because its hands, its eyes, are nothing else than—this reference of a visible, a tangible-standard to all those whose resemblance it bears and whose evidence it gathers, by a magic that is the vision, the touch themselves. To speak of leaves or of layers is still to flatten and to juxtapose, under the reflective gaze, what coexists in the living and upright body. If one wants metaphors, it would be better to say that the body sensed and the body sentient are as the obverse and the reverse, or again, as two segments of one sole circular course which goes above from left to right and below from right to left, but which is but one sole movement in its two phases. And everything said about the sensed body pertains to the whole of the sensible of which it is a part, and to the world. If the body is one sole body in its two phases, it incorporates into itself the whole of the sensible and with the same movement incorporates itself into a "Sensible in itself." We have to reject the age-old assumptions that put the body in the world and the seer in the body, or, conversely, the world and the body in the seer as in a box. Where are we to put the limit between the body and the world, since the world is flesh? Where in the body are we to put the seer, since evidently there is in the body only "shadows stuffed with organs," that is, more of the visible? The world seen is not "in" my body, and my body is not "in" the visible world ultimately: as flesh applied to a flesh, the world neither surrounds it nor is surrounded by it. A participation in and kinship with the visible, the vision neither envelops it nor is enveloped by it definitively. The superficial pellicle of the visible is only for my vision and for my body. But the depth beneath this surface contains my body and hence contains my vision. My body as a visible thing is contained within the full spectacle. But my seeing body subtends this visible body, and all the visibles with it. There is reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other. Or rather, if, as once again we must, we eschew the thinking by planes and perspectives, there are two circles, or two vortexes, or two spheres, concentric when I live naïvely, and as soon as I question myself, the one slightly decentered with respect to the other. . . .

We have to ask ourselves what exactly we have found with

this strange adhesion of the seer and the visible. There is vision, touch, when a certain visible, a certain tangible, turns back upon the whole of the visible, the whole of the tangible, of which it is a part, or when suddenly it finds itself *surrounded* by them, or when between it and them, and through their commerce, is formed a Visibility, a Tangible in itself, which belong properly neither to the body qua fact nor to the world qua fact—as upon two mirrors facing one another where two indefinite series of images set in one another arise which belong really to neither of the two surfaces, since each is only the rejoinder of the other, and which therefore form a couple, a couple more real than either of them. Thus since the seer is caught up in what he sees, it is still himself he sees: there is a fundamental narcissism of all vision. And thus, for the same reason, the vision he exercises, he also undergoes from the things, such that, as many painters have said, I feel myself looked at by the things, my activity is equally passivity—which is the second and more profound sense of the narcissism: not to see in the outside, as the others see it, the contour of a body one inhabits, but especially to be seen by the outside, to exist within it, to emigrate into it, to be seduced, captivated, alienated by the phantom, so that the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen. It is this Visibility, this generality of the Sensible in itself, this anonymity innate to Myself that we have previously called flesh, and one knows there is no name in traditional philosophy to designate it. The flesh is not matter, in the sense of corpuscles of being which would add up or continue on one another to form beings. Nor is the visible (the things as well as my own body) some "psychic" material that would be—God knows how—brought into being by the things factually existing and acting on my factual body. In general, it is not a fact or a sum of facts "material" or "spiritual." Nor is it a representation for a mind: a mind could not be captured by its own representations; it would rebel against this insertion into the visible which is essential to the seer. The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term "element," in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an "element" of Being. Not a fact

or a sum of facts, and yet adherent to *location* and to the *now*. Much more: the inauguration of the *where* and the *when*, the possibility and exigency for the fact; in a word: facticity, what makes the fact be a fact. And, at the same time, what makes the facts have meaning, makes the fragmentary facts dispose themselves about "something." For if there is flesh, that is, if the hidden face of the cube radiates forth somewhere as well as does the face I have under my eyes, and coexists with it, and if I who see the cube also belong to the visible, I am visible from elsewhere, and if I and the cube are together caught up in one same "element" (should we say of the seer, or of the visible?), this cohesion, this visibility by principle, prevails over every momentary discordance. In advance every vision or very partial visible that would here definitively come to naught is not nullified (which would leave a gap in its place), but, what is better, it is replaced by a more exact vision and a more exact visible, according to the principle of visibility, which, as though through a sort of abhorrence of a vacuum, already invokes the true vision and the true visible, not only as substitutes for their errors, but also as their explanation, their relative justification, so that they are, as Husserl says so aptly, not erased, but "crossed out." . . . Such are the extravagant consequences to which we are led when we take seriously, when we question, vision. And it is, to be sure, possible to refrain from doing so and to move on, but we would simply find again, confused, indistinct, non-clarified, scraps of this ontology of the visible mixed up with all our theories of knowledge, and in particular with those that serve, desultorily, as vehicles of science. We are, to be sure, not finished ruminating over them. Our concern in this preliminary outline was only to catch sight of this strange domain to which interrogation, properly so-called, gives access. . . .

But this domain, one rapidly realizes, is unlimited. If we can show that the flesh is an ultimate notion, that it is not the union or compound of two substances, but thinkable by itself, if there is a relation of the visible with itself that traverses me and constitutes me as a seer, this circle which I do not form, which forms me, this coiling over of the visible upon the visible, can traverse, animate other bodies as well as my own. And if I was able to understand how this wave arises within me, how the visible which is yonder is simultaneously my landscape, I can understand a fortiori that elsewhere it also closes over upon

itself and that there are other landscapes besides my own. If it lets itself be captivated by one of its fragments, the principle of captation is established, the field open for other Narcissus, for an "intercorporeity." If my left hand can touch my right hand while it palpates the tangibles, can touch it touching, can turn its palpation back upon it, why, when touching the hand of another, would I not touch in it the same power to espouse the things that I have touched in my own? It is true that "the things" in question are my own, that the whole operation takes place (as we say) "in me," within my landscape, whereas the problem is to institute another landscape. When one of my hands touches the other, the world of each opens upon that of the other because the operation is reversible at will, because they both belong (as we say) to one sole space of consciousness, because one sole man touches one sole thing through both hands. But for my two hands to open upon one sole world, it does not suffice that they be given to one sole *consciousness*—or if that were the case the difficulty before us would disappear: since other bodies would be known by me in the same way as would be my own, they and I would still be dealing with the same world. No, my two hands touch the same things because they are the hands of one same body. And yet each of them has its own tactile experience. If nonetheless they have to do with one sole tangible, it is because there exists a very peculiar relation from one to the other, across the corporeal space—like that holding between my two eyes—making of my hands one sole organ of experience, as it makes of my two eyes the channels of one sole Cyclopean vision. A difficult relation to conceive—since one eye, one hand, are capable of vision, of touch, and since what has to be comprehended is that these visions, these touches, these little subjectivities, these "consciousnesses of . . .," could be assembled like flowers into a bouquet, when each being "consciousness of," being For Itself, reduces the others into objects. We will get out of the difficulty only by renouncing the bifurcation of the "consciousness of" and the object, by admitting that my synergic body is not an object, that it assembles into a cluster the "consciousnesses" adherent to its hands, to its eyes, by an operation that is in relation to them lateral, transversal; that "my consciousness" is not the synthetic, uncreated, centrifugal unity of a multitude of "consciousnesses of . . ." which would be centrifugal like it is, that it is sustained, subtended, by the prereflective and preobjective unity of my

body. This means that while each monocular vision, each touching with one sole hand has its own visible, its tactile, each is bound to every other vision, to every other touch; it is bound in such a way as to make up with them the experience of one sole body before one sole world, through a possibility for reversion, reconversion of its language into theirs, transfer, and reversal, according to which the little private world of each is not juxtaposed to the world of all the others, but surrounded by it, levied off from it, and all together are a Sentient in general before a Sensible in general. Now why would this generality, which constitutes the unity of my body, not open it to other bodies? The handshake too is reversible; I can feel myself touched as well and at the same time as touching, and surely there does not exist some huge animal whose organs our bodies would be, as, for each of our bodies, our hands, our eyes are the organs. Why would not the synergy exist among different organisms, if it is possible within each? Their landscapes interweave, their actions and their passions fit together exactly: this is possible as soon as we no longer make belongingness to one same "consciousness" the primordial definition of sensibility, and as soon as we rather understand it as the return of the visible upon itself, a carnal adherence of the sentient to the sensed and of the sensed to the sentient. For, as overlapping and fission, identity and difference, it brings to birth a ray of natural light that illuminates all flesh and not only my own. It is said that the colors, the tactile reliefs given to the other, are for me an absolute mystery, forever inaccessible. This is not completely true; for me to have not an idea, an image, nor a representation, but as it were the imminent experience of them, it suffices that I look at a landscape, that I speak of it with someone. Then, through the concordant operation of his body and my own, what I see passes into him, this individual green of the meadow under my eyes invades his vision without quitting my own, I recognize in my green his green, as the customs officer recognizes suddenly in a traveler the man whose description he had been given. There is here no problem of the *alter ego* because it is not *I* who sees, not *he* who sees, because an anonymous visibility inhabits both of us, a vision in general, in virtue of that primordial property that belongs to the flesh, being here and now, of radiating everywhere and forever, being an individual, of being also a dimension and a universal.

What is open to us, therefore, with the reversibility of the

visible and the tangible, is—if not yet the incorporeal—at least an intercorporeal being, a presumptive domain of the visible and the tangible, which extends further than the things I touch and see at present.

There is a circle of the touched and the touching, the touched takes hold of the touching; there is a circle of the visible and the seeing, the seeing is not without visible existence; <sup>3</sup> there is even an inscription of the touching in the visible, of the seeing in the tangible—and the converse; there is finally a propagation of these exchanges to all the bodies of the same type and of the same style which I see and touch—and this by virtue of the fundamental fission or segregation of the sentient and the sensible which, laterally, makes the organs of my body communicate and founds transitivity from one body to another.

As soon as we see other seers, we no longer have before us only the look without a pupil, the plate glass of the things with that feeble reflection, that phantom of ourselves they evoke by designating a place among themselves whence we see them: henceforth, through other eyes we are for ourselves fully visible; that lacuna where our eyes, our back, lie is filled, filled still by the visible, of which we are not the titulars. To believe that, to bring a vision that is not our own into account, it is to be sure inevitably, it is always from the unique treasury of our own vision that we draw, and experience therefore can teach us nothing that would not be outlined in our own vision. But what is proper to the visible is, we said, to be the surface of an inexhaustible depth: this is what makes it able to be open to visions other than our own. In being realized, they therefore bring out the limits of our factual vision, they betray the solipsist illusion that consists in thinking that every going beyond is a surpassing accomplished by oneself. For the first time, the seeing that I am is for me really visible; for the first time I appear to myself completely turned inside out under my own eyes. For the first time also, my movements no longer proceed unto the things to be seen, to be touched, or unto my own body occupied in seeing and touching them, but they address themselves to the body in general and for itself (whether it be my own or that of another),

3. EDITOR: Here is inserted between brackets, in the course of the text itself, the note: "what are these adhesions compared with those of the voice and the hearing?"

because for the first time, through the other body, I see that, in its coupling with the flesh of the world, the body contributes more than it receives, adding to the world that I see the treasure necessary for what the other body sees. For the first time, the body no longer couples itself up with the world, it clasps another body, applying [itself to it] <sup>4</sup> carefully with its whole extension, forming tirelessly with its hands the strange statue which in its turn gives everything it receives; the body is lost outside of the world and its goals, fascinated by the unique occupation of floating in Being with another life, of making itself the outside of its inside and the inside of its outside. And henceforth movement, touch, vision, applying themselves to the other and to themselves, return toward their source and, in the patient and silent labor of desire, begin the paradox of expression.

Yet this flesh that one sees and touches is not all there is to flesh, nor this massive corporeity all there is to the body. The reversibility that defines the flesh exists in other fields; it is even incomparably more agile there and capable of weaving relations between bodies that this time will not only enlarge, but will pass definitively beyond the circle of the visible. Among my movements, there are some that go nowhere—that do not even go find in the other body their resemblance or their archetype: these are the facial movements, many gestures, and especially those strange movements of the throat and mouth that form the cry and the voice. Those movements end in sounds and I hear them. Like crystal, like metal and many other substances, I am a sonorous being, but I hear my own vibration from within; as Malraux said, I hear myself with my throat. In this, as he also has said, I am incomparable; my voice is bound to the mass of my own life as is the voice of no one else. But if I am close enough to the other who speaks to hear his breath and feel his effervescence and his fatigue, I almost witness, in him as in myself, the awesome birth of vociferation. As there is a reflexivity of the touch, of sight, and of the touch-vision system, there is a reflexivity of the movements of phonation and of hearing; they have their sonorous inscription, the vociferations have in me their motor echo. This new reversibility and the emergence of

4. EDITOR: These words, which we reintroduce into the text, had been erased apparently by error.

the flesh as expression are the point of insertion of speaking and thinking in the world of silence.<sup>5</sup>

At the frontier of the mute or solipsist world where, in the presence of other seers, my visible is confirmed as an exemplar of a universal visibility, we reach a second or figurative meaning of vision, which will be the *intuitus mentis* or idea, a sublimation of the flesh, which will be mind or thought. But the factual presence of other bodies could not produce thought or the idea if its seed were not in my own body. Thought is a relationship with oneself and with the world as well as a relationship with the other; hence it is established in the three dimensions at the same time. And it must be brought to appear directly in the infrastructure of vision. Brought to appear, we say, and not brought to birth: for we are leaving in suspense for the moment the question whether it would not be already implicated there. Manifest as it is that feeling is dispersed in my body, that for example my hand touches, and that consequently we may not in advance ascribe feeling to a thought of which it would be but a mode—it yet would be absurd to conceive the touch as a colony of assembled tactile experiences. We are not here proposing any empiricist genesis of thought: we are asking precisely what is that central vision that joins the scattered visions, that unique touch that governs the whole tactile life of my body as a unit, that I *think* that must be able to accompany all our experiences. We are proceeding toward the center, we are seeking to comprehend how there is a center, what the unity consists of, we are not

5. EDITOR: Inserted here between brackets: “in what sense we have not yet introduced thinking: to be sure, we are not in the in itself. From the moment we said *seeing, visible*, and described the dehiscence of the sensible, we were, if one likes, in the order of thought. We were not in it in the sense that the thinking we have introduced was *there is*, and not *it appears to me that . . .* (appearing that would make up the whole of being, self-appearing). Our thesis is that this *there is* by inherence is necessary, and our problem to show that thought, in the restrictive sense (pure signification, thought of seeing and of feeling), is comprehensible only as the accomplishment by other means of the will of the *there is*, by sublimation of the *there is* and realization of an invisible that is exactly the reverse of the visible, the power of the visible. Thus between sound and meaning, speech and what it means to say, there is still the relation of reversibility, and no question of priority, since the exchange of words is exactly the differentiation of which the thought is the integral.”

saying that it is a sum or a result; and if we make the thought appear upon an infrastructure of vision, this is only in virtue of the uncontested evidence that one must see or feel in some way in order to think, that every thought known to us occurs to a flesh.

Once again, the flesh we are speaking of is not matter. It is the coiling over of the visible upon the seeing body, of the tangible upon the touching body, which is attested in particular when the body sees itself, touches itself seeing and touching the things, such that, simultaneously, *as* tangible it descends among them, *as* touching it dominates them all and draws this relationship and even this double relationship from itself, by dehiscence or fission of its own mass. This concentration of the visibles about one of them, or this bursting forth of the mass of the body toward the things, which makes a vibration of my skin become the sleek and the rough, makes me *follow with my eyes* the movements and the contours of the things themselves, this magical relation, this pact between them and me according to which I lend them my body in order that they inscribe upon it and give me their resemblance, this fold, this central cavity of the visible which is my vision, these two mirror arrangements of the seeing and the visible, the touching and the touched, form a close-bound system that I count on, define a vision in general and a constant style of visibility from which I cannot detach myself, even when a particular vision turns out to be illusory, for I remain certain in that case that in looking closer I would have had the true vision, and that in any case, whether it be this one or another, *there is a true vision*. The flesh (of the world or my own) is not contingency, chaos, but a texture that returns to itself and conforms to itself. I will never see my own retinas, but if one thing is certain for me it is that *one* would find at the bottom of my eyeballs those dull and secret membranes. And finally, I believe it—I believe that I have a man's senses, a human body—because the spectacle of the world that is my own, and which, to judge by our confrontations, does not notably differ from that of the others, with me as with them refers with evidence to typical dimensions of visibility, and finally to a virtual focus of vision, to a detector also typical, so that at the joints of the opaque body and the opaque world there is a ray of generality and of light. Conversely, when, starting from the body, I ask how it makes itself a seer, when I examine the critical

region of the aesthesiological body, everything comes to pass (as we have shown in an earlier work <sup>6</sup>) as though the visible body remained incomplete, gaping open; as though the physiology of vision did not succeed in closing the nervous functioning in upon itself, since the movements of fixation, of convergence, are suspended upon the advent to the body of a visible world for which they were supposed to furnish the explanation; as though, therefore, the vision came suddenly to give to the material means and instruments left here and there in the working area a convergence which they were waiting for; as though, through all these channels, all these prepared but unemployed circuits, the current that will traverse them was rendered probable, in the long run inevitable: the current making of an embryo a newborn infant, of a visible a seer, and of a body a mind, or at least a flesh. In spite of all our substantialist ideas, the seer is being premeditated in counterpoint in the embryonic development; through a labor upon itself the visible body provides for the hollow whence a vision will come, inaugurates the long maturation at whose term suddenly it will see, that is, will be visible for itself, will institute the interminable gravitation, the indefatigable metamorphosis of the seeing and the visible whose principle is posed and which gets underway with the first vision. What we are calling flesh, this interiorly worked-over mass, has no name in any philosophy. As the formative medium of the object and the subject, it is not the atom of being, the hard in itself that resides in a unique place and moment: one can indeed say of my body that it is not *elsewhere*, but one cannot say that it is *here* or *now* in the sense that objects are; and yet my vision does not soar over them, it is not the being that is wholly knowing, for it has its own inertia, its ties. We must not think the flesh starting from substances, from body and spirit—for then it would be the union of contradictories—but we must think it, as we said, as an element, as the concrete emblem of a general manner of being. To begin with, we spoke summarily of a reversibility of the seeing and the visible, of the touching and the touched. It is time to emphasize that it is a reversibility always imminent and never realized in fact. My left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand touching the things, but I never reach coincidence; the coincidence eclipses at the moment of realization, and

6. *The Structure of Behavior* [trans. Alden L. Fisher (Boston, 1963)].

one of two things always occurs: either my right hand really passes over to the rank of touched, but then its hold on the world is interrupted; or it retains its hold on the world, but then I do not really touch *it*—my right hand touching, I palpate with my left hand only its outer covering. Likewise, I do not hear myself as I hear the others, the sonorous existence of my voice is for me as it were poorly exhibited; I have rather an echo of its articulated existence, it vibrates through my head rather than outside. I am always on the same side of my body; it presents itself to me in one invariable perspective. But this incessant escaping, this impotency to superpose exactly upon one another the touching of the things by my right hand and the touching of this same right hand by my left hand, or to superpose, in the exploratory movements of the hand, the tactile experience of a point and that of the “same” point a moment later, or the auditory experience of my own voice and that of other voices—this is not a failure. For if these experiences never exactly overlap, if they slip away at the very moment they are about to rejoin, if there is always a “shift,” a “spread,” between them, this is precisely because my two hands are part of the same body, because it moves itself in the world, because I hear myself both from within and from without. I experience—and as often as I wish—the transition and the metamorphosis of the one experience into the other, and it is only as though the hinge between them, solid, unshakeable, remained irremediably hidden from me. But this hiatus between my right hand touched and my right hand touching, between my voice heard and my voice uttered, between one moment of my tactile life and the following one, is not an ontological void, a non-being: it is spanned by the total being of my body, and by that of the world; it is the zero of pressure between two solids that makes them adhere to one another. My flesh and that of the world therefore involve clear zones, clearings, about which pivot their opaque zones, and the primary visibility, that of the *quale* and of the things, does not come without a second visibility, that of the lines of force and dimensions, the massive flesh without a rarefied flesh, the momentary body without a glorified body. When Husserl spoke of the horizon of the things—of their exterior horizon, which everybody knows, and of their “interior horizon,” that darkness stuffed with visibility of which their surface is but the limit—it is necessary to take the term seriously. No more than are the sky or the earth is the horizon a collection of

things held together, or a class name, or a logical possibility of conception, or a system of “potentiality of consciousness”: it is a new type of being, a being by porosity, pregnancy, or generality, and he before whom the horizon opens is caught up, included within it. His body and the distances participate in one same corporeity or visibility in general, which reigns between them and it, and even beyond the horizon, beneath his skin, unto the depths of being.

We touch here the most difficult point, that is, the bond between the flesh and the idea, between the visible and the interior armature which it manifests and which it conceals. No one has gone further than Proust in fixing the relations between the visible and the invisible, in describing an idea that is not the contrary of the sensible, that is its lining and its depth. For what he says of musical ideas he says of all cultural beings, such as *The Princess of Clèves* and *René*, and also of the essence of love which “the little phrase” not only makes present to Swann, but communicable to all who hear it, even though it is unbeknown to themselves, and even though later they do not know how to recognize it in the loves they only witness. He says it in general of many other notions which are, like music itself “without equivalents,” “the notions of light, of sound, of relief, of physical voluptuousness, which are the rich possessions with which our inward domain is diversified and adorned.”<sup>7</sup> Literature, music, the passions, but also the experience of the visible world are—no less than is the science of Lavoisier and Ampère—the exploration of an invisible and the disclosure of a universe of ideas.<sup>8</sup> The difference is simply that this invisible, these ideas, unlike those of that science, cannot be detached from the sensible appearances and be erected into a second positivity. The musical idea, the literary idea, the dialectic of love, and also the articulations of the light, the modes of exhibition of sound and of touch speak to us, have their logic, their coherence, their points of intersection, their concordances, and here also the appearances are the disguise of unknown “forces” and “laws.” But it is as though the secrecy wherein they lie and whence the literary expression draws them were their proper mode of existence. For these

7. *Du côté de chez Swann*, II (Paris, 1926), 190. [English translation by C. K. Scott Moncrieff, *Swann's Way* (New York, 1928), p. 503.]

8. *Ibid.*, p. 192. [Eng. trans., p. 505.]

truths are not only hidden like a physical reality which we have not been able to discover, invisible in fact but which we will one day be able to see facing us, which others, better situated, could already see, provided that the screen that masks it is lifted. Here, on the contrary, there is no vision without the screen: the ideas we are speaking of would not be better known to us if we had no body and no sensibility; it is then that they would be inaccessible to us. The "little phrase," the notion of the light, are not exhausted by their manifestations, any more than is an "idea of the intelligence"; they could not be given to us *as ideas* except in a carnal experience. It is not only that we would find in that carnal experience the *occasion* to think them; it is that they owe their authority, their fascinating, indestructible power, precisely to the fact that they are in transparency behind the sensible, or in its heart. Each time we want to get at it<sup>9</sup> immediately, or lay hands on it, or circumscribe it, or see it unveiled, we do in fact feel that the attempt is misconceived, that it retreats in the measure that we approach. The explicitation does not give us the idea itself; it is but a second version of it, a more manageable derivative. Swann can of course close in the "little phrase" between the marks of musical notation, ascribe the "withdrawn and chilly tenderness" that makes up its essence or its sense to the narrow range of the five notes that compose it and to the constant recurrence of two of them: while he is thinking of these signs and this sense, he no longer has the "little phrase" itself, he has only "bare values substituted for the mysterious entity he had perceived, for the convenience of his understanding."<sup>10</sup> Thus it is essential to this sort of ideas that they be "veiled with shadows," appear "under a disguise." They give us the assurance that the "great unpenetrated and discouraging night of our soul" is not empty, is not "nothingness"; but these entities, these domains, these worlds that line it, people it, and whose presence it feels like the presence of someone in the dark, have been acquired only through its commerce with the visible, to which they remain attached. As the secret blackness of milk, of which Valéry spoke, is accessible only through its whiteness, the idea of light or the musical idea doubles up the lights and sounds from beneath, is their other side or their depth. Their carnal texture presents to us

9. EDITOR: It: that is, the idea.

10. *Du côté de chez Swann*, II, 189. [Eng. trans., p. 503.]

what is absent from all flesh; it is a furrow that traces itself out magically under our eyes without a tracer, a certain hollow, a certain interior, a certain absence, a negativity that is not nothing, being limited very precisely to *these* five notes between which it is instituted, to that family of sensibles we call lights. We do not see, do not hear the ideas, and not even with the mind's eye or with the third ear: and yet they are there, behind the sounds or between them, behind the lights or between them, recognizable through their always special, always unique manner of entrenching themselves behind them, "perfectly distinct from one another, unequal among themselves in value and in significance."<sup>11</sup>

With the first vision, the first contact, the first pleasure, there is initiation, that is, not the positing of a content, but the opening of a dimension that can never again be closed, the establishment of a level in terms of which every other experience will henceforth be situated. The idea is this level, this dimension. It is therefore not a *de facto* invisible, like an object hidden behind another, and not an absolute invisible, which would have nothing to do with the visible. Rather it is the invisible *of* this world, that which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible, its own and interior possibility, the Being of this being. At the moment one says "light," at the moment that the musicians reach the "little phrase," there is no lacuna in me; what I live is as "substantial," as "explicit," as a positive thought could be—even more so: a positive thought is what it is, but, precisely, is only what it is and accordingly cannot hold us. Already the mind's volubility takes it elsewhere. We do not possess the musical or sensible ideas, precisely because they are negativity or absence circumscribed; they possess us. The performer is no longer producing or reproducing the sonata: he feels himself, and the others feel him to be at the service of the sonata; the sonata sings through him or cries out so suddenly that he must "dash on his bow" to follow it. And these open vortexes in the sonorous world finally form one sole vortex in which the ideas fit in with one another. "Never was the spoken language so inflexibly necessitated, never did it know to such an extent the pertinence of the questions, the evidence of the responses."<sup>12</sup> The

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*, p. 192. [Eng. trans., p. 505.]

invisible and, as it were, weak being is alone capable of having this close texture. There is a strict ideality in experiences that are experiences of the flesh: the moments of the sonata, the fragments of the luminous field, adhere to one another with a cohesion without concept, which is of the same type as the cohesion of the parts of my body, or the cohesion of my body with the world. Is my body a thing, is it an idea? It is neither, being the measurant of the things. We will therefore have to recognize an ideality that is not alien to the flesh, that gives it its axes, its depth, its dimensions.

But once we have entered into this strange domain, one does not see how there could be any question of *leaving* it. If there is an animation of the body; if the vision and the body are tangled up in one another; if, correlatively, the thin pellicle of the *quale*, the surface of the visible, is doubled up over its whole extension with an invisible reserve; and if finally, in our flesh as in the flesh of things, the actual, empirical, ontic visible, by a sort of folding back, invagination, or padding, exhibits a visibility, a possibility that is not the shadow of the actual but is its principle, that is not the proper contribution of a "thought" but is its condition, a style, allusive and elliptical like every style, but like every style inimitable, inalienable, an interior horizon and an exterior horizon between which the actual visible is a provisional partitioning and which, nonetheless, open indefinitely only upon other visibles—then (the immediate and dualist distinction between the visible and the invisible, between extension and thought, being impugned, not that extension be thought or thought extension, but because they are the obverse and the reverse of one another, and the one forever behind the other) there is to be sure a question as to how the "ideas of the intelligence" are initiated over and beyond, how from the ideality of the horizon one passes to the "pure" ideality, and in particular by what miracle a created generality, a culture, a knowledge come to add to and recapture and rectify the natural generality of my body and of the world. But, however we finally have to understand it, the "pure" ideality already streams forth along the articulations of the aesthesiological body, along the contours of the sensible things, and, however new it is, it slips through ways it has not traced, transfigures horizons it did not open, it derives from the fundamental mystery of those notions "without equivalent," as Proust calls them, that lead their shadowy life in the

night of the mind only because they have been divined at the junctures of the visible world. It is too soon now to clarify this type of surpassing that does not leave its field of origin. Let us only say that the pure ideality is itself not without flesh nor freed from horizon structures: it lives of them, though they be another flesh and other horizons. It is as though the visibility that animates the sensible world were to emigrate, not outside of every body, but into another less heavy, more transparent body, as though it were to change flesh, abandoning the flesh of the body for that of language, and thereby would be emancipated but not freed from every condition. Why not admit—what Proust knew very well and said in another place—that language as well as music can sustain a sense by virtue of its own arrangement, catch a meaning in its own mesh, that it does so without exception each time it is conquering, active, creative language, each time something is, in the strong sense, said? Why not admit that, just as the musical notation is a *facsimile* made after the event, an abstract portrait of the musical entity, language as a system of explicit relations between signs and signified, sounds and meaning, is a result and a product of the operative language in which sense and sound are in the same relationship as the "little phrase" and the five notes found in it afterwards? This does not mean that musical notation and grammar and linguistics and the "ideas of the intelligence"—which are acquired, available, honorary ideas—are useless, or that, as Leibniz said, the donkey that goes straight to the fodder knows as much about the properties of the straight line as we do; it means that the system of objective relations, the acquired ideas, are themselves caught up in something like a second life and perception, which make the mathematician go straight to entities no one has yet seen, make the *operative* language and algorithm make use of a second visibility, and make ideas be the other side of language and calculus. When I think they animate my interior speech, they haunt it as the "little phrase" possesses the violinist, and they remain beyond the words as it remains beyond the notes—not in the sense that under the light of another sun hidden from us they would shine forth but because they are that certain divergence, that never-finished differentiation, that openness ever to be reopened between the sign and the sign, as the flesh is, we said, the dehiscence of the seeing into the visible and of the visible into the seeing. And just as my body sees only because it

is a part of the visible in which it opens forth, the sense upon which the arrangement of the sounds opens reflects back upon that arrangement. For the linguist language is an ideal system, a fragment of the intelligible world. But, just as for me to see it is not enough that my look be visible for X, it is necessary that it be visible for itself, through a sort of torsion, reversal, or specular phenomenon, which is given from the sole fact that I am born; so also, if my words have a meaning, it is not *because* they present the systematic organization the linguist will disclose, it is because that organization, like the look, refers back to itself: the operative Word is the obscure region whence comes the instituted light, as the muted reflection of the body upon itself is what we call natural light. As there is a reversibility of the seeing and the visible, and as at the point where the two metamorphoses cross what we call perception is born, so also there is a reversibility of the speech and what it signifies; the signification is what comes to seal, to close, to gather up the multiplicity of the physical, physiological, linguistic means of elocution, to contract them into one sole act, as the vision comes to complete the aesthesiological body. And, as the visible takes hold of the look which has unveiled it and which forms a part of it, the signification rebounds upon its own means, it annexes to itself the speech that becomes an object of science, it antedates itself by a retrograde movement which is never completely belied—because already, in opening the horizon of the nameable and of the sayable, the speech acknowledged that it has its place in that horizon; because no locutor speaks without making himself in advance allocutary, *be it only for himself*; because with one sole gesture he closes the circuit of his relation to himself and that of his relation to the others and, with the same stroke, also sets himself up as *delocutary*, speech of which one speaks: he offers himself and offers every word to a universal Word. We shall have to follow more closely this transition from the mute world to the speaking world. For the moment we want only to suggest that one can speak neither of a destruction nor of a conservation of silence (and still less of a destruction that conserves or of a realization that destroys—which is not to solve but to pose the problem). When the silent vision falls into speech, and when the speech in turn, opening up a field of the nameable and the sayable, inscribes itself in that field, in its place, according to its truth—in short, when it metamorphoses the structures of the visible world

and makes itself a gaze of the mind, *intuitus mentis*—this is always in virtue of the same fundamental phenomenon of reversibility which sustains both the mute perception and the speech and which manifests itself by an almost carnal existence of the idea, as well as by a sublimation of the flesh. In a sense, if we were to make completely explicit the architectonics of the human body, its ontological framework, and how it sees itself and hears itself, we would see that the structure of its mute world is such that all the possibilities of language are already given in it. Already our existence as seers (that is, we said, as beings who turn the world back upon itself and who pass over to the other side, and who catch sight of one another, who see one another with eyes) and especially our existence as sonorous beings for others and for ourselves contain everything required for there to be speech from the one to the other, speech about the world. And, in a sense, to understand a phrase is nothing else than to fully welcome it in its sonorous being, or, as we put it so well, to *hear what it says* (*l'entendre*). The meaning is not on the phrase like the butter on the bread, like a second layer of “psychic reality” spread over the sound: it is the totality of what is said, the integral of all the differentiations of the verbal chain; it is given with the words for those who have ears to hear. And conversely the whole landscape is overrun with words as with an invasion, it is henceforth but a variant of speech before our eyes, and to speak of its “style” is in our view to form a metaphor. In a sense the whole of philosophy, as Husserl says, consists in restoring a power to signify, a birth of meaning, or a wild meaning, an expression of experience by experience, which in particular clarifies the special domain of language. And in a sense, as Valéry said, language is everything, since it is the voice of no one, since it is the very voice of the things, the waves, and the forests. And what we have to understand is that there is no dialectical reversal from one of these views to the other; we do not have to reassemble them into a synthesis: they are two aspects of the reversibility which is the ultimate truth.

## 5 / Preobjective Being: The Solipsist World

### THE REDUCTION TO THE PREOBJECTIVE

SINCE THE ENIGMA of the brute world is finally left intact by science and by reflection, we are invited to interrogate that world without presupposing anything.<sup>1</sup> It is henceforth understood that in order to describe it we may not resort to any of those established "truths" which we count on each day, and which in reality teem with obscurities from which they could not be freed except precisely by conjuring up the brute world and the labor of knowledge that has posed them over it as a superstructure. For example, everything we can know through experience and science about the "causes" of perception and the action they exercise upon us will be deemed unknown. This is a precept more difficult to follow than one thinks: the temptation to construct perception out of the perceived, to construct our contact with the world out of what it has taught us about the world, is quasi-irresistible. We find authors proving that all "consciousness" is "memory," because I see today a star that perhaps has been extinct for years, and because in general every perception lags behind its object. They do not seem to notice the implications of this "proof": it supposes that the "memory" be defined not by the aspect and characteristics of the remembered but

I. EDITOR: The pagination of the manuscript clearly indicates that the chapter that begins here would not have been retained by the author. It was replaced by "Interrogation and Intuition." Since, however, it was not discarded, we thought it well to present it as an appendix.

from the outside, by the non-existence of an adequate object in the world in itself at that very moment. It therefore presupposes about us this world in itself; between this world and ourselves it presupposes relations of simultaneity and of succession that enclose us in the same objective time with this world; it presupposes a mind capable of knowing this true universe, whose relations, contracted and abbreviated by the short cut of perception, finally make of perception a case of "memory." It is the inverse route we have to follow; it is starting from perception and its variants, described as they present themselves, that we shall try to understand how the universe of knowledge could be constructed. This universe can tell us nothing (except indirectly, by its lacunae and by the aporias in which it throws us) about what is lived by us. It is not because the world called "objective" has such or such properties that we will be authorized to consider them established for the life world: at most they will be for us only a guideline for the study of the means by which we come to recognize those properties in it and encounter them in our life. And, conversely, it is not because in the "objective" world such or such a phenomenon is without visible index that we must forego making it figure in the life world. The discontinuous images of the cinema prove nothing with regard to the phenomenal truth of the movement that connects them before the eyes of the spectator—moreover, they do not even prove that the life world involves movements without a mobile: the mobile could well be projected by him who perceives. Everything that we will advance concerning the world must originate not from the habitual world—where our initiation to being and the great intellectual endeavors that have renewed it in history are inscribed only in the state of confused traces, emptied of their meaning and of their motives—but from that present world which waits at the gates of our life and where we find the means to animate the heritage and, if the occasion arises, to take it up again on our own account. We will not admit a preconstituted world, a logic, except for having seen them arise from our experience of brute being, which is as it were the umbilical cord of our knowledge and the source of meaning for us.

Moreover, we also do not allow ourselves to introduce into our description concepts issued from reflection, whether psychological or transcendental: they are more often than not only correlatives or counterparts of the *objective* world. We must, at

the beginning, eschew notions such as "acts of consciousness," "states of consciousness," "matter," "form," and even "image" and "perception." We exclude the term perception to the whole extent that it already implies a cutting up of what is lived into discontinuous acts, or a reference to "things" whose status is not specified, or simply an opposition between the visible and the invisible. Not that these distinctions are definitively meaningless, but because if we were to admit them from the start, we would re-enter the impasses we are trying to avoid. When we speak of *perceptual* faith and when we assign ourselves the task of returning to the *perceptual* faith, by this we not only do not tacitly presuppose any of the physical or physiological "conditions" that delimit perception for the scientist, nor any of the postulates of a sensualist or empiricist philosophy, nor even any definition of a "first layer" of experience that would concern beings existing at a point of time and space, by opposition to the concept or the idea. We do not yet know what to see is and what to think is, whether this distinction is valid, and in what sense. For us, the "perceptual faith" includes everything that is given to the natural man in the original in an experience-source, with the force of what is inaugural and present in person, according to a view that for him is ultimate and could not conceivably be more perfect or closer—whether we are considering things perceived in the ordinary sense of the word, or his initiation into the past, the imaginary, language, the predicative truth of science, works of art, the others, or history. We are not prejudging the relations that may exist between these different "layers," nor even that they are "layers"; and it is a part of our task to decide this, in terms of what questioning our brute or wild experience will have taught us. Perception as an encounter with natural things is at the foreground of our research, not as a simple sensorial function that would explain the others but as the archetype of the originating encounter, imitated and renewed in the encounter with the past, the imaginary, the idea. We do not even know in advance what our interrogation itself and our method will be. The manner of questioning prescribes a certain kind of response, and to fix it now would be to decide our solution. For example, if we were to say that our problem here is to disengage the essence or the *Eidos* of our life in the different regions upon which it opens, this would be to presume that we will find ideal invariants whose relations will themselves be founded in essence; it would

be to subordinate from the first what there might be that is fluid to what there might be that is fixed in our experience, to subject it to conditions that perhaps are the conditions not of every possible experience but only of an experience already put into words, and it would be in the end to shut ourselves up in an immanent exploration of the significations of words. Or if, in order to prejudge nothing, we take the determining of the essences in a broader sense as an effort to comprehend oneself, then it arouses no suspicion; but that is because it prescribes nothing as to the style of the results. In fact, we know what the pure questioning must not be; what it will be, we will know only by attempting it. The resolution to confine ourselves to the experience of what is in the originating or fundamental or inaugural sense presupposes nothing more than an encounter between "us" and "what is"—these words being taken as simple indexes of a meaning to be specified. The encounter is indubitable, since without it we would ask no question. We have to interpret it at the start neither as an inclusion in us of what is nor as an inclusion of us in what is. And yet in appearance we do indeed have to be "in" the world, in what is, or else what is has to be "in us." Is not the resolution to ask of experience itself its secret already an idealist commitment? We would have made ourselves badly understood if that were the conclusion drawn. It is to our experience that we address ourselves—because every question is addressed to someone or to something and because we can choose no interlocutor less compromising than *the whole of what is for us*. But the choice of this instance does not close the field of possible responses; we are not implicating in "*our experience*" any reference to an *ego* or to a certain type of intellectual relations with being, such as the Spinozist "*experiri*." We are interrogating our experience precisely in order to know how it opens us to what is not ourselves, *This does not even exclude the possibility that we find in our experience a movement toward what could not in any event be present to us in the original and whose irremediable absence would thus count among our originating experiences*. But, if only in order to see these margins of presence, to discern these references, to put them to the test, or to interrogate them, we do indeed first have to fix our gaze on what is apparently *given* to us. It is in this entirely methodic and provisional sense that the subdivisions we will presently use are to be understood. We do not have to choose between a philosophy

that installs itself in the world itself or in the other and a philosophy that installs itself "in us," between a philosophy that takes our experience "from within" and a philosophy, if such be possible, that would judge it from without, in the name of logical criteria, for example: these alternatives are not imperative, since perhaps the self and the non-self are like the obverse and the reverse and since perhaps our own experience is this turning round that installs us far indeed from "ourselves," in the other, in the things. Like the natural man, we situate ourselves in ourselves *and* in the things, in ourselves *and* in the other, at the point where, by a sort of *chiasm*, we become the others and we become world. Philosophy is itself only if it refuses for itself the facilities of a world with one sole entry as well as the facilities of a world with multiple entries, all accessible to the philosopher. Like the natural man, it abides at the point where the passage from the self into the world and into the other is effected, at the crossing of the avenues.

## I. PRESENCE

### *The Thing and the Something*

LET US THEREFORE CONSIDER OURSELVES installed among the multitude of things, living beings, symbols, instruments, and men, and let us try to form notions that would enable us to comprehend what happens to us there. Our first truth—which prejudices nothing and cannot be contested—will be that there is presence, that "something" is there, and that "someone" is there. Before coming to the "someone," let us ask first what the "something" is.

This something to which we are present and which is present to us is, one is tempted to say, "the things"—and everyone knows, apparently, what must be understood by that. This pebble and this shell are things, in the sense that beyond what I see of them, what I touch of them, beyond their grating contact with my fingers or with my tongue, the noise they make in falling on my table, there is in them one unique foundation of these diverse "properties" (and of many others, yet unknown to me), which imposes them upon the pebble or the shell, or which, at least, contains their variations within certain limits. The power of this

principle is not a factual power: I know very well that the pebble, the shell, can be crushed at once by what surrounds them. It is, so to speak, a power *de jure*, a legitimacy: beyond a certain range of their changes, they would cease to be this pebble or this shell, they would even cease to be a pebble or a shell. If they are to subsist as individuals or at least continue to bear these general denominations, they have to exhibit a certain number of properties that are in some way nuclear, that derive from one another, and, all together, emanate from this individual pebble, from this individual shell, or, in general, from every individual of the same name. When we say therefore, that there is here a pebble, a shell, and even this pebble, this shell, we mean that it fulfills these exigencies, that, at least for the moment, this unique foundation of the nuclear properties, which we call briefly "this pebble," or "a pebble," "this shell" or "a shell," manifests itself unimpeded, ready to unfold its nuclear properties under our eyes because they derive from it, because it is without restriction this pebble and this shell, or at least pebble and shell. The thing, therefore, (admitting all that can happen to it and the possibility of its destruction) is a node of properties such that each is given if one is; it is a principle of identity. What it is it is by its internal arrangement, therefore fully, without hesitation, without fissure, totally or not at all. It is what it is of itself or in itself, in an exterior array, which the circumstances allow for and do not explain. It is an object, that is, it spreads itself out before us by its own efficacy and does so precisely because it is gathered up in itself.

If that is what the thing is, for us who live among things, we have to ask if it is really ever involved originally in our contact with anything at all, if it is really through it that we can comprehend the rest, if our experience is in principle an experience of the thing, if the world, for example, is one immense thing, if our experience aims at the things directly, if we have indeed obtained from our experience its own unadulterated response, or if we have not rather introduced as essential elements that in fact are derived and are themselves in need of clarification. The thing, the pebble, the shell, we said, do not have the power to exist in face of and against everything; they are only mild forces that develop their implications on condition that favorable circumstances be assembled. But if that is so, the identity of the thing with itself, that sort of established position of its own, of

rest in itself, that plenitude and that positivity that we have recognized in it already exceed the experience, are already a second interpretation of the experience. Starting with things taken in their native sense as identifiable nuclei, but without any power of their own, we arrive at the thing-object, at the In Itself, at the thing identical with itself, only by imposing upon experience an abstract dilemma which experience ignores. Perhaps the thing has no inner power of its own, but the fact remains that if it is to be able to make itself recognized by us, if it is not to disappear, if we are to be able to speak of things, it is on condition that the appearances behave as though they had an internal principle of unity. It is by opposing to the experience of things the specter of another experience that would not involve things that we force experience to say more than it said. It is by passing through the detour of *names*, by threatening the things with our non-recognition of them, that we finally accredit *objectivity*, self-identity, positivity, plenitude, if not as their own principle, at least as the condition of their possibility *for us*. The thing thus defined is not the thing of our experience, it is the image we obtain of it by projecting it into a universe where experience would not settle on anything, where the spectator would abandon the spectacle—in short, by confronting it with the possibility of nothingness. And so also when we say: even if the thing, *upon analysis*, always lies beyond proof and figures as an extrapolation, still the fact remains that we see pebbles, shells, that, at that moment at least, our exigency is satisfied, and that we have the right to define the thing as that which either is totally itself or is not—this reversal of the pro and the con, this empirical realism founded upon transcendental idealism is still a thinking of experience against the ground of nothingness. But can we think through the experience we have by profiling it over the possibility of nothingness? Is not the experience of the thing and of the world precisely the ground that we need in order to think nothingness in any way whatever? Is not thinking the thing against the ground of nothingness a double error, with regard to the thing and with regard to nothingness, and, by silhouetting it against nothingness, do we not completely denature the thing? Are not the identity, the positivity, the plenitude of the thing—reduced to what they signify in the context in which experience reaches them—quite insufficient to define our openness upon “something”?

## Working Notes

*Origin of Truth*<sup>1</sup>

January, 1959

Introduction

Our state of non-philosophy——Never has the crisis been so radical——

The dialectical “solutions” = either the “bad dialectic” that identifies the opposites, which is non-philosophy—or the “embalmed” dialectic, which is no longer dialectical. End of philosophy or rebirth?

Necessity of a return to ontology——The ontological questioning and its ramifications:

the subject-object question

the question of inter-subjectivity

the question of Nature

Outline of ontology projected as an ontology of brute Being—and of logos. Draw up the picture of wild Being, prolonging my article on Husserl.<sup>2</sup> But the disclosure of this world, of this Being, remains a dead letter as long as we do not uproot “objective philosophy” (Husserl). An *Ursprungsklärung* is needed.

1. EDITOR: *Origin of Truth*: title the author first intended to give his work.

2. EDITOR: “The Philosopher and His Shadow,” in *Edmund Husserl, 1859–1959: Recueil commemoratif* (The Hague, 1959); published in *Signes* (Paris, 1960). [English translation by Richard McCleary, *Signs* (Evanston, 1964).]

Reflection on Descartes's ontologies—the "strabism" of Western ontology<sup>3</sup>—

Reflection on Leibniz's ontology.

Generalization of the problem: there was a passage to the infinite as objective infinity—This passage was a thematization (and forgetting) of the *Offenheit*, of the *Lebenswelt*—We have to start anew from behind that point

Plan for Part One: to see (by immanent analysis) what "Nature" has become—and *consequently* life—and consequently man as psycho-physical subject—Circularity of the research: already what we say about Nature anticipates logic and will be taken up again in Part Two—What we say about the soul or the psycho-physical subject anticipates what we will say about reflection, consciousness, reason, and the absolute.—This circularity is no objection—We are following the order of the material, there is no order of the reasons—The order of the reasons would not give us the conviction that the order of the material gives—philosophy as center and not as construction.

#### Origin of Truth<sup>4</sup>

January, 1959

In showing the divergence between physics and the being of Physis, between biology and the being of life, what is at issue is to effect the passage from being in itself, the objective being, to

3. EDITOR: In the abstract of the lecture course he had given in 1957–58, the author had already written: "In Descartes, for example, the two meanings of the word nature (nature in the sense of 'natural light' and in the sense of 'natural inclination') adumbrate two ontologies (an ontology of the object and an ontology of the existent) . . ." And, further down, he asked: "Would there not be here a sort of 'ontological diplopia,' as it has been put (M. Blondel), which, after so many philosophical efforts, we can not expect to be reduced to rationality, so that the only thing to do would be to take it over fully, as the look takes over the monocular images in order to make of them one sole vision?" (*Annuaire du Collège de France*, 58<sup>e</sup> année [Paris, 1958], pp. 213, 214.)

4. EDITOR: Cf. p. 165, n. 1.

the being of the *Lebenswelt*—And this passage already indicates that no form of being can be posited without reference to the subjectivity, that the body has a *Gegenseite* of consciousness, that it is psycho-physical—

When coming to the incarnate subjectivity of the human body, which I continue to refer to the *Lebenswelt*, I must find something that is not the "psychic" in the sense of psychology (that is, a *Gegenabstraktion* to Nature in itself, the Nature of the *blosse Sachen*), I must reach a subjectivity and an intersubjectivity, a universe of *Geist* that, if it not be a second nature, nonetheless has its solidity and its completeness, but has this solidity and completeness still in the mode of the *Lebenswelt*—That is, I must also, across the objectifications of linguistics, of logic, rediscover the *Lebenswelt* logos.

Likewise, it would be necessary in principle to disclose the "organic history" under the historicity (*Urhistorie*, *erste Geschichtlichkeit*) of truth that has been instituted by Descartes as the infinite horizon of science—This historicity of truth is also what animates Marxism.

In principle it is only then that I would be in a position to define an ontology and to define philosophy. Ontology would be the elaboration of the notions that have to replace that of transcendental subjectivity, those of subject, object, meaning—the definition of philosophy would involve an elucidation of philosophical expression itself (therefore a becoming conscious of the procedure used in what precedes "naïvely," as though philosophy confined itself to reflecting what is) as the science of pre-science, as the expression of what is before expression *and sustains it from behind*—Take as theme here the difficulty: if philosophy wishes to be absolute, it contains itself. But in reality all the particular analyses concerning Nature, life, the human body, language will make us progressively enter into the *Lebenswelt* and the "wild" being, and as I go along I should not hold myself back from entering into their positive description, nor even into the analysis of the diverse temporalities—say this already in the introduction.

1st volume of the *Origin of Truth*<sup>5</sup>

January, 1959

Husserl: human bodies have an "other side"—a "spiritual" side——

(cf. the mode of being of "hidden sides," hidden forever or provisionally—the mode of being of antipodes—the difference is that *by principle* the "spiritual" side of a living body can be *selbstgegeben* to me only as an absence.)

In my first volume—after physical nature and life, make a third chapter where the human body will be described as having a "spiritual" side. Show that the life of the human body cannot be described without it becoming a psycho-physical body. (Descartes—but while remaining with the compound of soul and body)——Give my equivalent of the Cartesian concept of Nature as the institution that makes us have at one stroke what a divine science would make us understand——Give an aesthetics. A conception of time, of the "soul," in the Husserlian sense, of intercorporeity qua "natural"——But all that—which takes up again, deepens, and rectifies my first two books—must be entirely carried out within the perspective of ontology——the description of the perceived world with which this first volume concludes is considerably deepened (perception as spread [*écart*]—the body as the animal of movements and perceptions—transcendence—The order of the *urpräsentierbar*). And especially: the problem of the relation between these "truths" and philosophy as radical reflection, as reduction to transcendental immanence, is posed——The "wild" or "brute" being is introduced—the serial time, that of "acts" and decisions, is overcome—the mythical time reintroduced——The problem of the relations between rationality and symbolic function is posed: the exceeding of the signified by the signifier essential to "reason"——Critique of the reflective distinction between the interior series (the "subjective" the "psychological") and objectivity (such as, according to Lévi-Strauss, our civilizations presuppose it)——Our relation with animality, our "kinship" (Heidegger) made explicit. All this issues in a theory of perception-imperception, and of the

5. EDITOR: Above the title, these lines: "Indicate from the start of the analysis of Nature that there is circularity: what we say here will be taken up again at the level of the logic (2d volume). No matter. One does have to begin."

*Logos endiathetos* (of meaning before logic)——Of the *Lebenswelt*——This new ontology must be presented in a schema in a fourth chapter (1. nature and physics; 2. life; 3. the human body; 4. "wild" being and logos). (4th chapter long, giving to the volume a "definitive" character—while initiating the transition to the study of painting, music, language.<sup>6</sup>)

Bare all the *roots* (the "vertical" world)——Then say that the problem is posed again by the conversion of language, the passage to the "interior" man——It is only then that one will be definitively able to appraise humanism.

### Being and infinity

January 17, 1959

Infinity: it is to be sure a conquest to have conceived the universe as infinity—or at least on the ground of infinity (the Cartesians)——

But have the Cartesians really done so?——Have they really seen the depth of being, which is recognized only with the notion of infinity [an inexhaustible reserve of being which is not only this and that but could have been other (Leibniz) or is effectively more than we know (Spinoza, the unknown attributes)]?

Their notion of infinity is positive. They have devaluated the closed world for the benefit of a positive infinity, of which they speak as one speaks of some thing, which they *demonstrate* in "objective philosophy"——the signs are reversed: all the determinations are negation in the sense of: are *only* negation——This is to elude infinity rather than to recognize it——Infinity congealed or given to a thought that possesses it at least enough to be able to prove it.

The veritable infinity cannot be that: it must be what exceeds us: the infinity of *Offenheit* and not *Unendlichkeit*——Infinity of the *Lebenswelt* and not infinity of idealization——Negative infinity, therefore——Meaning or reason which *are* contingency.

6. EDITOR: The second parenthesis opened is not closed.

The brute or wild Being (= the perceived world) and its relation with the λόγος προφορικός as *Gebilde*, with the "Logic" that we produce—

January, 1959

The "amorphous" perceptual world that I spoke of in relation to painting—perpetual resources for the remaking of painting—which contains no mode of expression and which nonetheless calls them forth and requires all of them and which arouses again with each painter a new effort of expression—this perceptual world is at bottom Being in Heidegger's sense, which is more than all painting, than all speech, than every "attitude," and which, apprehended by philosophy in its universality, appears as containing everything that will ever be said, and yet leaving us to create it (Proust): it is the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος which calls for the λόγος προφορικός—

[Iteration of the *Lebenswelt*: we are making a philosophy of the *Lebenswelt*, our construction (in the mode of "logic") makes us rediscover this world of silence. Rediscover in what sense? Was it already there? How can we say that it was there since nobody knew it before the philosopher said it?—But it is true that it was there: everything we said and say did and does involve it. It was there precisely as non-thematized *Lebenswelt*. In a sense it is still involved as non-thematized by the very statements that describe it: for the statements as such will in their turn be sedimented, "taken back" by the *Lebenswelt*, will be comprehended in it rather than they comprehend it—are already comprehended in it insofar as they imply a whole *Selbstverständlichkeit*—But this does not prevent philosophy from having value, from being something else than and more than the simple partial product of the *Lebenswelt*, enclosed in a language that leads us on. Between the *Lebenswelt* as universal Being and philosophy as a furthestmost product of the world, there is no rivalry or antinomy: it is philosophy that discloses it]

Tacit Cogito

January, 1959

The Cogito of Descartes (reflection) is an operation on significations, a statement of relations between them (and the significations themselves sedimented in acts of expression). It

therefore presupposes a prereflective contact of self with self (the non-thetic consciousness [of] self Sartre) or a tacit cogito (being close by oneself)—this is how I reasoned in *Ph. P.*<sup>7</sup>

Is this correct? What I call the tacit cogito is impossible. To have the idea of "thinking" (in the sense of the "thought of seeing and of feeling"), to make the "reduction," to return to immanence and to the consciousness of . . . it is necessary to have words. It is by the combination of words (with their charge of sedimented significations, which are in principle capable of entering into other relations than the relations that have served to form them) that I *form* the transcendental attitude, that I *constitute* the constitutive consciousness. The words do not refer to positive significations and finally to the flux of the *Erlebnisse* as *Selbstgegeben*. Mythology of a self-consciousness to which the word "consciousness" would refer—There are only *differences* between significations.

Yet there is a world of silence, the perceived world, at least, is an order where there are non-language significations—yes, non-language significations, but they are not accordingly *positive*. There is for example no absolute flux of singular *Erlebnisse*; there are fields and a field of fields, with a *style* and a typicality—Describe the existentials that make up the armature of the transcendental field—And which are always a relation between the agent (I can) and the sensorial or ideal field. The sensorial agent = the body—The ideal agent = speech—All this belongs to the order of the *Lebenswelt* "transcendental," that is, of transcendencies bearing "their" object

Reduction—The true transcendental—the *Rätsel Erscheinungsweise*—world

February, 1959

Wrongly presented—in particular in the C.M.<sup>8</sup>—as a suspending of the *existence of the world*—If that is what it is, it

7. EDITOR: *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris, 1945). On the notion of a tacit Cogito and the critique of the Cartesian Cogito, cf. pp. 460–68. [English translation by Colin Smith, *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York, 1962), pp. 402–9.]

8. EDITOR: Edmund Husserl, *Cartesiansche Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge* (The Hague, 1950). [English translation by Dorion Cairns, *Cartesian Meditations* (The Hague, 1960).]

lapses into the Cartesian defect of being a *hypothesis of the Nichtigkeit of the world*, which immediately has as its consequence the maintenance of the *mens sive anima* (a fragment of the world) as indubitable—Every negation of the world, *but also* every neutrality with regard to the existence of the world, has as its immediate consequence that one misses the transcendental. The *epoché* has the right to be a neutralization only with regard to the world as effective in itself, to the pure exteriority: it must leave extant the phenomenon of this effective in itself, of this exteriority.

The transcendental field is a field of transcendencies. The transcendental, being a resolute overcoming of the *mens sive anima* and the psychological, *goes beyond the subjectivity* in the sense of counter-transcendence and immanence. The passage to intersubjectivity is contradictory only with regard to an insufficient reduction, Husserl was right to say. But a sufficient reduction leads beyond the alleged transcendental “immanence,” it leads to the absolute spirit understood as *Weltlichkeit*, to *Geist* as *Ineinander* of the spontaneities, itself founded on the aesthesiological *Ineinander* and on the sphere of life as sphere of *Einfühlung* and intercorporeity—The notion of *species* = notion of interanimality. The intertwining of biology or psychology and philosophy = *Selbstheit* of the world.

Husserl himself raises the question how the world can have for me another “meaning as to its being” (*Seinssinn*) than that of *my* transcendental intentional object. *Wie kann für mich wirklich Seindes . . . anderes sein als sozusagen Schnittpunkt meiner konstitutiven Synthesis?* (*C.M.*, § 48, p. 135).

It is in this way, says H., that is introduced the *Fremderfahrung Analyse*, which is not a temporal genesis: the objective transcendence is not *posterior* to the position of the other: the world is already there, in its objective transcendence, before this analysis, and it is its very meaning that will be rendered explicit as meaning. . . . [Hence the introduction of the other is not what produces the “objective transcendence”: the other is one of its indexes, a moment of it, but it is in the world itself that the possibility of the other will be found].

The “pure others” (which are not yet “men”) already introduce a Nature of which I am a part (*C.M.*, p. 137)

## Einströmen—Reflection

February, 1959

*Because there is Einströmen*, reflection is not adequation, coincidence: it would not pass *into* the *Strom* if it placed us back at the source of the *Strom*—

Look up the passage (from *Krisis III*, I think) where it is said that the phenomenological reduction *transforms universal history*—

The *Einströmen*: a particular case of sedimentation, that is, of secondary passivity, that is, of *latent intentionality*—It is Péguy's *historical inscription*—It is the fundamental structure of *Zeitigung*: *Urstiftung* of a point of time—[Through?] this *latent intentionality*, intentionality ceases to be what it is in Kant: *pure actualism*, ceases to be a property of consciousness, of its “attitudes” and of its acts, to become *intentional life*—It becomes the thread that binds, for example, my present to my past in its temporal place, such as it was (and not such as I reconquer it by an *act* of evocation) the possibility of this *act* rests on the primordial structure of retention as an interlocking of the pasts in one another plus a consciousness of this interlocking as a *law* (cf. the reflective iteration: the reflection reiterated ever anew would give only “always the same thing” *immer wieder*)—Husserl's error is to have described the interlocking starting from a *Präsensfeld* considered as without thickness, as immanent consciousness: ° it is transcendent consciousness, it is being at a distance, it is the double ground of my life of consciousness, and it is what makes there be able to be *Stiftung* not only of an instant but of a whole *system of temporal indexes*—time (already as time of the body, taximeter time of the corporeal schema) is the model of these symbolic matrices, which are openness upon being.

In OR<sup>10</sup> after analyses of the psychophysical body pass to analyses of memory and of the imaginary—of temporality and *from there* to the Cogito and intersubjectivity.

9. EDITOR: The author already speaks of the *Präsensfeld* or of the field of presence in the *Phénoménologie de la perception*, in the chapter devoted to Space and to Temporality. Cf. in particular pp. 307, 475, 483–84, 492. [Eng. trans., pp. 265, 415–16, 422–23, 430.] But the analysis did not at that time lead to a critique of Husserl.

10. EDITOR: *The Origin of Truth*. Cf. above, p. 165, n. 1.

Philosophy as creation (*Gebilde*), resting on itself—that cannot be the final truth.

For it would be a creation that sets as its goal to express as *Gebilde* what is *von selbst* (the *Lebenswelt*), that therefore negates itself as pure creation—

The point of view of creation, of the human *Gebilde*—and the point of view of the “natural” (of the *Lebenswelt* as Nature) are both abstract and insufficient. One cannot install oneself on either of these two levels.

What there is is a creation that is called forth and engendered by the *Lebenswelt* as operative, latent historicity, that prolongs it and bears witness to it—

(Verbal) *Wesen*—*Wesen* of history

February, 1959

Discovery of the (verbal) *Wesen*: first expression of the being that is neither being-object nor being-subject, neither essence nor existence: what *west* (the being-rose of the rose, the being-society of society, the being-history of history) answers to the question *was* as well as the question *dass*; it is not society, the rose seen by a subject, it is not a being for itself of society and of the rose (contrary to what Ruyer says): it is the roseness extending itself throughout the rose, it is what Bergson rather badly called the “images”—That in addition this roseness gives rise to a “general idea,” that is, that there be several roses, a *species* rose, this is not insignificant, but results from the being-rose considered in all its implications (natural generativity)—In this way—striking all generality from the first definition of the *Wesen*—one suppresses that opposition of the fact and the essence which falsifies everything—

The being society of a society: that whole that reassembles all the views and all the clear or blind wills at grips within it, that anonymous whole which through them *hinauswollt*, that *Ineinander* which nobody sees, and which is not a group-soul either, neither object nor subject, but their connective tissue, which *west* since there will be a result, and which is the sole concession one could legitimately make to a “philosophy of several entries” (for the argument against the alternative thought of Sartre, which is that it does not make up a *world*, that it does not admit

a *Weltlichkeit* of *Geist*, that it remains at the subjective spirit, must not serve to justify a philosophy where all the Egos would be on the same plane, and which thus would purely and simply ignore the problem of the other, and can be realized only as a Philosophy of the Absolute Subject)

The *Wesen* of the table  $\neq$  a being in itself, in which the elements would be arranged  $\neq$  a being for itself, a Synopsis = that which “tablefies” in it, what makes the table be a table.

Tacit Cogito and speaking subject

February, 1959

The dialectic become *thesis* (statement) is no longer dialectical (“embalmed” dialectic).

This is not for the profit of a *Grund* of which one could not say anything. The failure of the thesis, its (dialectical) reversal discloses the *Source of theses*, the physico-historical *Lebenswelt*, to which we have to return To recommence perception, *Einführung*, and in particular speech, and not to eschew them. We know simply that, if it is to remain dialectical, speech can no longer be statement, *Satz*, it must be thinking speech, without reference to a *Sachverhalt*, speaking (*parole*) and not language (*langage*) (and in fact it is indeed the speaking, not the language [*la langue*] that aims at the other as a behavior, not as a “psychism,” that responds to the other before he would have been understood as “psychism,” in a confrontation that repels or accepts his utterances as utterances, as events—It is indeed speaking that constitutes, *in front of* myself as a signification and a subject of signification, a milieu of communication, an intersubjective diacritical system which is the spoken tongue [*la langue*] in the present, not a “human” universe, an objective spirit)—The problem is to restore this, in the present and in the past, the *Lebenswelt* history, to restore the very presence of a culture. The failure of the dialectic as thesis or “dialectical philosophy” is the discovery of this intersubjectivity which is not perspectival but vertical, which is, extended into the past, existential eternity, savage mind (*esprit sauvage*)

The tacit Cogito does not, of course, solve these problems. In disclosing it as I did in *Ph.P.*<sup>11</sup> I did not arrive at a solution (my

11. EDITOR: *Phenomenology of Perception*. Cf. p. 171, n. 7.

chapter on the Cogito is not connected with the chapter on speech): on the contrary I posed a problem. The tacit Cogito should make understood how language is not impossible, but cannot make understood how it is possible—There remains the problem of the passage from the perceptual meaning to the language meaning, from behavior to thematization. Moreover the thematization itself must be understood as a behavior of a higher degree—the relation between the thematization and the behavior is a dialectical relation: language realizes, by breaking the silence, what the silence wished and did not obtain. Silence continues to envelop language; the silence of the absolute language, of the thinking language.—But for these customary developments on the dialectical relation to not be a *Weltanschauung* philosophy, unhappy consciousness, they must issue in a theory of the savage mind, which is the mind of praxis. Like all praxis, language supposes a *selbstverständlich*, an instituted, which is *Stiftung* preparing an *Endstiftung*—The problem is to grasp *what*, across the successive and simultaneous community of speaking subjects, *wishes, speaks, and finally thinks*.

Genealogy of logic  
History of being  
History of meaning

February, 1959

In the introduction (fundamental thought)

say that I must show that what one might consider to be "psychology" (*Phenomenology of Perception*) is in fact ontology. Do so by showing that the being of science can neither be nor be thought as *selbständig*. Whence the chapters on: Physics and Nature—animality—the human body as *nexus rationum* or *vinculum substantiale*.

But being must not only be made manifest through its divergence from the being of Science—In doing so what is at issue is to make it manifest by opposition to being as Object—I must therefore show in the introduction that the being of science is itself a part or an aspect of the objectified Infinity and that the *Offenheit* of the *Umwelt* is opposed to both of these. Whence the chapters on Descartes, Leibniz, Western ontology, which indi-

cate the historico-intentional and ontological implications of the being of science.

In what follows (Physics and Physis—Animality—the human body as psycho-physical), what is at issue is to operate the reduction, that is, for me, to disclose little by little—and more and more—the "wild" or "vertical" world. Show the intentional reference of Physics to Physis, of Physis to life, of life to the "psycho-physical"—a reference by which one nowise passes from the "exterior" to the "interior," since the reference is not a reduction and since each degree "surpassed" remains in fact presupposed (for example, the Physis of the beginning is nowise "surpassed" by what I will say of man: it is the *correlative* of animality as it is of man)—It is necessary then on the way to form the theory of this "reflection" that I practice; it is not a going back up to the "conditions of possibility"—And this is why it is a question of an ascent on the spot (*ascension sur place*)—Conversely everything that follows is already anticipated in what I say about Physis—This is why from the start I must indicate the ontological import of this *Besinnung* on Physis—We will close the circle after the study of logos and history as Proust closes the circle when he comes to the moment where the narrator decides to write. The end of a philosophy is the account of its beginning.—Show this circularity, this intentional implication in a circle—and, at the same time, the *History-philosophy* circularity: \*<sup>12</sup> I clarify my philosophical project by recourse to Descartes and Leibniz, and that project alone will permit knowing what history is. State all this as theses and not only by implication.

Circularity: everything that is said at each "level" anticipates

\* *History-Dichtung* thereby justified, in opposition to Gueroult. Objective history is a dogmatic rationalism, *is a philosophy*, and not what it claims to be, a history of what is. What is criticizable in my *history-Dichtung* is not that it expresses *me* as a philosopher—it is that it does not express me completely, that it also modifies me. The history of philosophy, like science, is a *communis opinio*.

12. EDITOR: For the concept of *history-Dichtung*, cf. Husserl, who speaks of a *Dichtung der Philosophiegeschichte*. (*Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die transcendentale Phänomenologie*, *Husserliana*, Vol. VI [The Hague, 1954], p. 513.) The passage concerned is copiously underlined in the copy of *Krisis* the author owned.

and will be taken up again: for example, I make a description of the aesthesiological *Einführung* which is neither false, nor "true" in the absolute sense: for it is obviously a "layer" separated abstractly—It is not false either, since all the rest is anticipated in it: that is, the *Einführung* of the I think. What is constantly and principally implied throughout this whole first part is the *λόγος*: I speak of the things as if that did not call language into question! The thematization of language overcomes another stage of naïveté, discloses yet a little more the horizon of *Selbstverständlichkeiten*—the passage from philosophy to the absolute, to the transcendental field, to the wild and "vertical" being is *by definition* progressive, incomplete. This is to be understood not as an imperfection (a *Weltanschauung* philosophy, unhappy consciousness of the Encompassing) but as a philosophical *theme*: the incompleteness of the reduction ("biological reduction," "psychological reduction," "reduction to transcendental immanence," and finally "fundamental thought") is not an obstacle to the reduction, it is the reduction itself, the rediscovery of vertical being.—

There will therefore be a whole series of layers of wild being. It will be necessary to recommence the *Einführung*, the Cogito several times.—

For example, at the level of the human body I will describe a pre-knowing; a pre-meaning, a silent knowing.

sense of the perceived: "size" before measurement, the physiognomic size of a rectangle, for example

sense of the other perceived: *Einigung* of my perception of one same man by virtue of existentials which are not literally "perceived" and yet operate in perceptions (Wolff)<sup>13</sup>

sense of "perceived life" (Michotte):<sup>14</sup> what makes an appearance *animate itself* and become "creeping" etc.

But I will then have to disclose a non-explicitated horizon: that of the language I am using to describe all that—And which co-determines its final meaning

13. EDITOR: Werner Wolff, *Selbstbeurteilung und Fremdbeurteilung im wissentlichen und unwissentlichen Versuch*, Ps. Forschung, 1932.

14. EDITOR: A. Michotte, *La Perception de la causalité* (Louvain and Paris, 1946), pp. 176–77. [English translation by T. R. Miles and Elaine Miles, *The Perception of Causality* (New York, 1963).]

Therefore very important, from the introduction on, to introduce the problem of the tacit cogito and the language cogito. Naïveté of Descartes who does not see a tacit cogito under the cogito of *Wesen*, of significations—But naïveté also of a silent cogito that would deem itself to be an adequation with the silent consciousness, whereas its very description of silence rests entirely on the virtues of language. The taking possession of the world of silence, such as the description of the human body effects it, is no longer this world of silence, it is the world articulated, elevated to the *Wesen*, spoken—the description of the perceptual *λόγος* is a usage of *λόγος προφορικός*. Can this rendering characteristic of reflection (which, wishing to return to itself, *leaves itself*) come to an end? There would be needed a silence that envelops the speech anew, after one has come to recognize that speech enveloped the alleged silence of the psychological coincidence. What will this silence be? As the reduction finally is not for Husserl a transcendental immanence, but the disclosing of the *Weltthesis*, this silence will *not be the contrary* of language.

I will finally be able to take a position in ontology, as the introduction demands, and specify its theses exactly, 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. This reversal itself—*circulus vitiosus deus*<sup>15</sup>—is not hesitation, bad faith and bad dialectic, but return to *Σιγή* the abyss.<sup>16</sup> *One cannot make a direct ontology*. My "indirect" method (being in the beings) is alone conformed with being—"negative philosophy" like "negative theology."

15. EDITOR: The expression is in Nietzsche. *Beyond Good and Evil*, § 56, French translation (Paris, 1929), pp. 100–101. [English translation by Walter Kaufmann (New York, 1966), p. 68.]

16. EDITOR: No doubt a reminiscence of Claudel. "Time is the way offered to all that will be to be no longer. It is the *Invitation to die*, for every phrase to decompose in the explicative and total concordance, to consummate the speech of adoration addressed to the ear of *Sigè* the Abyss" (*Art poétique* [Paris, 1951], p. 57).

*Weltlichkeit of Geist*——  
the “invisible world”  
non-being in the object-Being: *Seyn*

February, 1959

One always talks of the problem of “the other,” of “intersubjectivity,” etc. . . .

In fact what has to be understood is, beyond the “persons,” the existentials according to which we comprehend them, and which are the sedimented meaning of all our voluntary and involuntary experiences. This unconscious is to be sought not at the bottom of ourselves, behind the back of our “consciousness,” but in front of us, as articulations of our field. It is “unconscious” by the fact that it is not an *object*, but it is that through which objects are possible, it is the constellation wherein our future is read——It is between them as the interval of the trees between the trees, or as their common level. It is the *Urgemeinschaftung* of our intentional life, the *Ineinander* of the others in us and of us in them.

It is these existentials that make up the (substitutable) *meaning* of what we say and of what we understand. They are the armature of that “invisible world” which, with speech, begins to impregnate all the things we see—as the “other” space, for the schizophrenic, takes possession of the sensorial and visible space——Not that it becomes a visible space in its turn: in the visible there is never anything but ruins of the spirit, the world will always resemble the Forum, at least before the gaze of the philosopher, who does not completely inhabit it——

Our “interior life”: a world in the world, a region within it, a “place from which we speak” (Heidegger) and into which we introduce the others by true speech.

The “invisible world”: it is given originally as *non-Urpräsen-  
tierbar*, as the other is in his body *given originally as absent*—as a divergence, as a transcendence (*Ideen II*)

Describe this experience of qualified non-being

Before *the other* is, the things are such non-beings, divergencies——There is an *Einfühlung* and a lateral relation with the things no less than with the other: to be sure the things are not interlocutors, the *Einfühlung* that gives them gives them as mute—but precisely: they are variants of the successful *Einfühlung*. Like madmen or animals they are *quasi-companions*.

They are lifted from my substance, thorns in my flesh——To say that there is transcendence, being at a distance, is to say that being (in the Sartrean sense) is thus inflated with non-being or with the possible, that it is not only *what it is*. The *Gestalthafte*, if one really wanted to define it, would be that. The very notion of *Gestalt*—if one wishes to define it in its own terms and not a *contrario*, as “what is not” the sum of the elements—is that.

And at the same time the *perception of . . . the Gestalt* cannot be a centrifugal *Sinngebung*, the imposition of an essence, a *vor-stellen*——One cannot distinguish *Empfindung* and *Empfundenes* here. It is *openness*——

If the feeling, the perceiving are understood in this way, one understands that there be *Unwahr in the Wahrheit*.

Science and philosophy <sup>17</sup>

February, 1959

The method of defining language by the pertinent; the that without which. . . . No—one locates *where* the speech passes. But this does not give speech in its full power. One would be led into error if one thought that speech is *in* these congealed relations——It is the error of scientism, which is a scientific error, and reveals itself as such (the impossibility of understanding evolutive linguistics, history——*Reduction to synchrony*——)——What is nonetheless good and necessary in the scientific attitude: *the assuming of a position of complete ignorance with regard to language*, not presupposing our rationalization of language which is inherited. Act as if the language were not our own. Cf. Freud: the assuming of a position of ignorance before the dream, the consciousness——One will interrogate them without *Einfühlung*——Negatively, as a disclosure of the “unknown” language, this attitude is profoundly philosophical, it is constitutive of the attitude of reflection at its best. This reflection is not, and cannot be, a limitation to the phenomenology of the *Erlebnis*. The mistrust with regard to lived experience is philosophical—one postulates that the consciousness deceives us about ourselves and about language and one is right: this is the only

17. EDITOR: This note was written after a lecture given by M. André Martinet at the Ecole Normale Supérieure on February 27, 1959.

way to *see* them. Philosophy has nothing to do with the privilege of the *Erlebnisse*, with the psychology of lived experience, etc. Similarly in history it is not a question of reinstating "decisions" as the causes of the "processes." The interiority the philosopher seeks is in any case the intersubjectivity, the *Urgemein Stiftung* which is well beyond "lived experience"—*Besinnung* versus *Erlebnisse*. But this abstention from all *Einfühlung* with language, with animals, etc. leads back to a superior *Einfühlung*, which is intended to make it possible. The search for the "wild" view of the world nowise limits itself to a return to precomprehension or to prescience. "Primitivism" is only the counterpart of scientism, and is still scientism. The phenomenologists (Scheler, Heidegger) are right in pointing out this precomprehension which precedes inductivity, for it is this that calls in question the ontological value of the *Gegen-stand*. But a return to pre-science is not the goal. The reconquest of the *Lebenswelt* is the reconquest of a *dimension*, in which the objectifications of science themselves retain a meaning and are to be understood as *true* (Heidegger himself says this: every *Seinsgeschick* is true, is part of the *Seinsgeschichte*)—the pre-scientific is only an invitation to comprehend the meta-scientific and this last is not non-science. It is even disclosed *through* the constitutive movements of science, on condition that we reactivate them, that we see that left to themselves they *verdecken*. For example, the structuralist attitude = the verbal chain, language as recreating itself entirely under our eyes in each act of speech, the intent to circumscribe the act of speaking where *it is formed*, is the intent to return to the originating, to the *Ursprung*—on condition that one not shut oneself up in the factual, synchronic determination—is the intent to grasp the cohesion of the synchronic-diachronic whole within speech, the *monumental* speech, therefore, mythical, if one likes—Ambiguity of the constitutive act of science: the exclusive attention to the verbal chain, to phonics and semantics *intertwined*,

is: 1st, the exigency to grasp the *Ursprung*      *Entdeckung* of the *Ursprung*.

2d, the reduction to the *Gegenstand*, i.e. *Verdeckung* of the *Ursprung*.

February, 1959

Make Part One: first outline of ontology—

Start from the present: contradictions etc.  
ruin of philosophy—

Show that that calls in question not only the classical philosophy, but also the philosophies of the dead god (Kierkegaard—Nietzsche—Sartre) inasmuch as they are its contrary. (and also, of course, the dialectic as a "maneuver")

Take up again the whole philosophical movement in a "fundamental thought"—

Results of *Ph.P.*<sup>18</sup>—Necessity of bringing them to ontological explicitation:

the thing—the world—Being  
the negative—the cogito—the Other—language.

The problems that remain after this first description: they are due to the fact that in part I retained the philosophy of "consciousness"

Disclosure of the wild or brute Being by way of Husserl and the *Lebenswelt* upon which one opens. What is Philosophy? The domain of the *Verborgenen* (philosophy and occultism)

Once this whole outline is made, say what an outline is, why an outline is needed and why it is only an outline. It is the beginning necessary and sufficient to see well what is at stake: Being—but not yet to ensure our steps in this land—A *wiederholung* is necessary:

"destruction" of the objectivist ontology of the Cartesians

Rediscovery of *φύσις*, then of *λόγος* and the vertical history starting from our "culture" and the *Winke* of our "science"—

My whole first part to be conceived in a very direct, contemporary manner, like the *Krisis* of Husserl: show our non-philosophy, then seek its origin in a historical *Selbstbesinnung* and in a *Selbstbesinnung* on our culture which is science: in it will be sought the *Winke*

18. EDITOR: *Phenomenology of Perception*.

Time——

[undated, probably February or March, 1959]

The upsurge of time would be incomprehensible as the *creation* of a supplement of time that would push the whole preceding series back into the past. That passivity is not conceivable.

On the other hand every analysis of time that views it from above is insufficient.

Time must *constitute itself*—be always seen from the point of view of someone who *is of it*.

But this seems to be contradictory, and would lead back to one of the two terms of the preceding alternative.

The contradiction is lifted only if the new present is itself a transcendent: one knows that it is not there, that it was just there, one never coincides with it—It is not a segment of time with defined contours that would come and set itself in place. It is a cycle defined by a central and dominant region and with indecisive contours—a swelling or bulb of time——A creation of this sort alone makes possible 1) the influence of the “contents” on time which passes “more quickly” or “less quickly,” of *Zeitmaterie* on *Zeitform*; 2) the acceptance of the truth of the transcendental analysis: time is not an absolute series of events, a tempo—not even the tempo of the consciousness—it is an institution, a system of equivalences

March, 1959

Leray's report at the C.d.F.:<sup>19</sup> the “strange” particles  
The “existence” of a particle that would endure but a billionth of a second. . . .

What does such an *existence* mean?

One conceives it after the model of macroscopic existence: with an enlargement, an adequate temporal magnifying glass, this brief duration would be like one of the durations we do have experience of.

And since the enlargement can always be conceived still greater—one postulates at the same time the *there is* of a minimum

19. EDITOR: Refers to the report of the work of M. Louis Leprince-Ringuet presented by M. Jean Leray to the Assembly of the Professors of the Collège de France, March 15, 1959.

(without which one would not seek the microscopical, under the macroscopical), and that it is always beneath, in horizon. . . . It is the very structure of a horizon—but it is evident that this structure means nothing in the in itself—that it has meaning only in the *Umwelt* of a carnal subject, as *Offenheit*, as *Verborgenheit* of Being. As long as one does not establish oneself in this ontological order, one has a top-heavy thought, an empty or contradictory thought. . . .

Kant's or Descartes's analysis: the world is neither finite nor infinite, it is indefinite—i.e. it is to be thought as *human* experience—of a finite understanding faced with an infinite Being (or: Kant: with an *abyss* of human thought)

This is not at all what Husserl's *Offenheit* or Heidegger's *Verborgenheit* means: the ontological milieu is not thought of as an order of “human representation” in contrast with an order of the in itself——It is a matter of understanding that truth itself has no meaning outside of the relation of transcendence, outside of the *Ueberstieg* toward the horizon—that the “subjectivity” and the “object” are one sole whole, that the subjective “lived experiences” count in the world, are part of the *Weltlichkeit* of the “mind,” are entered in the “register” which is Being, that the object is nothing else than the *tuft* of these *Abschattungen*. . . . It is not we who perceive, it is the thing that perceives itself yonder—it is not we who speak, it is truth that speaks itself at the depths of speech——Becoming-nature of man which is the becoming-man of nature——The world is a *field*, and as such is always open.

Resolve similarly the problem of the unicity or plurality of times (Einstein): by return to the idea of horizon——

Visible and invisible, 2d Part

May, 1959

(Being and the world:  
on Descartes, Leibniz, etc.)

Say: what we say there, is it the thing itself? No, there are historical motivations. the *Lebenswelt* is “subjective”——How disclose them? The history of philosophy will be only the projec-

tion of these views—or will be meaningless by dint of wanting to be “objective.” Our problems and the problems immanent in a philosophy: can one pose the first to the second? (Gouhier)<sup>20</sup> There is but one solution: show that there is transcendence, to be sure, between the philosophies, not reduction to one unique plane, but that, in this spread staggered out in depth, they nevertheless refer to one another, it is nevertheless a question of the same Being—Show between the philosophies a perceptual relation or a relation of transcendence. Hence a vertical history, which has its rights alongside of the “objective” history of philosophy—Apply here the very conception of perceptual being and *Offenheit* that has been developed in Part One—Study how this is different from relativism, how the “projection” of one thought in the other lets a “nucleus of being” appear nevertheless (cf. Lefort’s exposition on Machiavelli: <sup>21</sup> how, in what sense, can one claim to go to the things themselves while refusing this right to the others? It is necessary to account for their views and for oneself—but it is in addition necessary that what is aimed at be interrogation, *Befragung*).

Philosophy: circles that include one another: this Part One is already an exercise of history, it arises from the historical *Lebenswelt*—And conversely the history of philosophy that we will evoke was already a certain kind of *Umwelt*—Concept of ontological history. The rendering explicit of the *Umwelt* of Western ontology, when confronted with our beginning, is to give it solidity, rectify it—(connection of the concepts: Being Nature Man) Of course this will not be exhaustive: they are threads of vertical history, disheveled, they are not essences.

So also the analysis of Nature will be a way to find the beginning again and to rectify it (alleged contact with the thing itself); one rediscovers the originating *a contrario* across the movements of the collective scientific thought.

The recourse to the history of philosophy is already a theory of history, of language, etc.

20. EDITOR: Allusion to M. Henri Gouhier’s *L’Histoire et sa philosophie* (Paris, 1952). The question is raised in particular with regard to Hamelin’s interpretation of Descartes. Cf. pp. 18–20.

21. EDITOR: Unpublished lecture given at the Institut Français de Sociologie in May, 1959.

*The visible and the invisible*

May, 1959

Part one: Ontological outline

Chapter I The world and being

Chapter II Being and the world

(Show that metaphysics is a naïve ontology, is a sublimation of the Entity (*Etant*)—But this is evidently a transposition of metaphysics, interpreted according to the views of Chapter I.

It is necessary to establish the *right* to this transposition. Is it a “putting into perspective” that would be forever indemonstrable? Does one remain in dialectical empiricism and the reciprocity of the perspectives?

No. It is not a matter of “history of philosophy.” The history of philosophy always involves this subjectivity. Show that the interpretation of Descartes by Gueroult, for example, always involves a subjective bringing into perspective (the “subjective” is here precisely the presupposition that philosophy is made of “problems”—cf. the inaugural lecture: that is what he opposes to Bergson<sup>22</sup>).—What I propose is not a “view” of history of philosophy. Or else it is history, but structural: i.e. not the event of such and such a philosophy as a *creation* and a *solution* of “problems,” but this philosophy situated within the hieratic ensemble of Being and the existential eternity, i.e. within an *interrogative* ensemble which, like Lefort’s *Machiavelli*,<sup>23</sup> is not a dogmatism.

Cf. Pingaud, *Madame de La Fayette*:<sup>24</sup> Madame de La Fayette’s book is a Court book (*appearance, restraint*) But, once the Court had disappeared, the book, detached from these historical roots, gives rise to a myth from 1808 onwards. The (mythical) significance would be *created* through ignorance of the social background.

In a sense, the signification is always the divergence: what the other says appears to me to be full of meaning because his *lacunae* are never where mine are. Perspective multiplicity.

22. EDITOR: Inaugural lecture given at the Collège de France on December 4, 1951, by M. Martial Gueroult upon assuming the chair of the history and technology of philosophical systems.

23. EDITOR: Reference to a work in preparation.

24. EDITOR: *Mme. de La Fayette par elle-même* (Paris, 1959).

But this reduction to the myth presupposes a ground of non-mythical positivity which is another myth. One has to understand that *myth, mystification, alienation* etc. are second-order concepts.

Madame de La Fayette is a myth, but not in the sense that the myth is a construction. In the sense that (Lévi-Strauss) every usage of the symbolic function is a myth.

It is not just any text that can acquire this mythical power. Beware of the new *Aufklärung*.

What there is in *The Princess of Clèves* that makes it capable of becoming a myth.

So also Descartes, metaphysics: I do not mean to say that these are myths in the sense of: artifices without truth, a confused view of what ontology *should* be today—There is the truth of Descartes, but on condition that one reads it between the lines; the atmosphere of Descartes's thought, the Cartesian functioning; and this is not the imposition of an exterior point of view upon Descartes, of a *question* that is not his own upon his philosophy. Show that there is an absolute, a philosophy, which is immanent in the history of philosophy, and which nonetheless is not a reabsorption of all the philosophies into one sole philosophy, nor eclecticism and scepticism either. One sees it if one succeeds in making of philosophy a perception, and of the history of philosophy a perception of history—Everything comes down to this: form a theory of perception and of comprehension that shows that to comprehend is not to constitute in intellectual immanence, that to comprehend is to apprehend by coexistence, laterally, *by the style*, and thereby to attain at once the far-off reaches of this style and of this cultural apparatus.

What I will say there about the history of philosophy anticipates what I will say about the Cogito and logos—So also what I say in the first chapter anticipates the conception of the history of philosophy of Chapter II. And likewise all that anticipates the comprehension of science (of Nature) given in the following chapters. There are only anticipations, *Vorhabe*. Philosophy as concentric problems. But it is so—

Perception—unconscious—One<sup>25</sup>—retrograde movement of the true—sedimentation (of which the retrograde movement of the true is a part)

May 2, 1959

The taxi driver at Manchester, saying to me (I understood only a few seconds later, so briskly were the words "struck off"): I will ask the police where *Brixton Avenue* is.—Likewise, in the tobacco shop, the woman's phrase: *Shall I wrap them together?*<sup>26</sup> which I understood only after a few seconds—and *all at once*—cf. recognizing someone from a description, or the event from a schematic prevision: once the meaning is given the signs take on the full value of "signs." But first the meaning must be given. But then *how* is it given? Probably a chunk of the verbal chain is identified, projects the meaning which returns upon the signs—It is not enough to say (Bergson): a coming and going. It is necessary to understand between what and what, and what makes up the interval between them. It is not a series of inductions—It is *Gestaltung* and *Rückgestaltung*. "Retrograde movement of the true" that phenomenon that one can no longer undo oneself from what has once been thought, that one finds it again in the materials themselves. . . .

The meaning is "perceived" and the *Rückgestaltung* is a "perception." This means: there is a *germination* of what *will have been* understood. (*Insight* and *Aha Erlebnis*)—And that means: the perception (the first one) is *of itself* an openness upon a field of *Gestaltungen*—And that means: perception is unconsciousness. What is the unconscious? What functions as a pivot, an existential, and in this sense, is and is not perceived. For one perceives only figures upon levels—And one perceives them only by relation to the level, which therefore is unperceived.—The perception of the level: always *between* the objects, it is that about which. . . .

The occult in psychoanalysis (the unconscious) is of this sort (cf. a woman in the street feeling that they are looking at her breast, and checking her clothing. Her corporeal schema is for itself—for the other—It is the *hinge* of the for itself and the for the other—To have a body is to be looked at (it is not only that), it is to be *visible*—Here the impression of telepa-

25. TRANSLATOR: *On*—the indefinite pronoun.

26. TRANSLATOR: In English in the text.

thy, of the occult = vivacity in reading the look of the other in a flash—Should we say *reading*? It is on the contrary by means of this phenomenon that one comprehends reading—To be sure, if a woman of good faith who closes her coat (or the contrary), were questioned, she would not *know* what she has just done. She would not know it in the language of conventional thought, but she would know it as one knows the repressed, that is, not as a figure on a ground, but as ground. A detail perception: a wave that runs on in the field of the *In der Welt Sein*—

The speaking-understanding relation: the moving oneself-perceiving the goal relation, i.e.: the goal is not posed, but it is what I am lacking, what marks a certain deflection on the dial of the corporeal schema. Likewise I speak by rejoining such and such a modulation of the linguistic space with the linguistic apparatus—the words bound to their sense as the body to its goal.

I do not perceive any more than I speak—Perception has me as has language—And as it is necessary that all the same I be there in order to speak, I must be there in order to perceive—But in what sense? As *one*<sup>27</sup>—What is it that, from my side, comes to animate the perceived world and language?

Husserl *Zeitbewusstsein*—

May, 1959

1. What is the “receptive” element of the absolute consciousness?—H. is right to say that it is not I who constitute time, that it constitutes itself, that it is a *Selbsterscheinung*—But the term “receptivity” is improper precisely because it evokes a Self distinct from the present and who *receives* it—It must be understood simply by opposition to spontaneous acts (thought, etc.)

2. Is it the new present, in its individuality, that pushes the preceding one into the past, and that *fills* a part of the future? In that case there would not be *time*, but *times*—Time must be

27. TRANSLATOR: *On*—the indefinite pronoun. “. . . I ought to say that *one* perceives in me, and not that I perceive. Every sensation bears within itself the germ of a dream or depersonalization . . .” (*Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 215 [French text, p. 249].)

understood as a system that embraces everything—Although it is graspable only for him who *is there*, is at a present

3. What is the impressional consciousness, the *Urerlebnis*? Like the *Selbstgegebenheit* of the exterior thing, it is in reality not a term *effectively* untraversable (temporal knob), but a transcendent, an optimum, an *etwas* . . . (a *Gestalt* and not an individual)—And the “to be conscious” of this *Urerlebnis* is not coincidence, fusion with . . . nor is it an act or *Auffassung* (this Husserl said), nor is it a nihilating (Sartre), it is separation (*écart*), such as the corporeal schema, which is the foundation of space *and of time*, makes comprehensible—It is a perception-imperception, i.e. an operative and not thematized meaning (this is at bottom what Husserl means when he considers retention to be fundamental: that means that the absolute present which I am is as if it were not)—

4. All this still leaves untouched the question: what is “to know,” “to be conscious,” “to perceive,” “to think” in the Cartesian sense—A question never raised—One discusses around theses such as “connection” (*liaison*), “thought of seeing and of feeling” in the sense of presumption, “meaning”—One shows that a binding (*liant*) is needed, that a “pure *denken*” is necessary, or a *Selbsterscheinung*, an auto-apparition, an apparition that is pure apparition. . . . But all this presupposes the idea of the for itself and in the end cannot explain transcendence—Look in a completely different direction: the for itself itself as an incontestable, but derived, characteristic: it is the culmination of separation (*écart*) in *differentiation*—Self-presence *is* presence to a differentiated world—The perceptual separation (*écart*) as making up the “view” such as it is implicated in the reflex, for example—and enclosing being for itself by means of language as differentiation. To be conscious = to have a figure on a ground—one cannot go back any further.

Transcendence of the thing and transcendence of the phantasm  
May, 1959

The transcendence of the thing compels us to say that it is plenitude only by being inexhaustible, that is, by not being all actual under the look—but it promises this total actuality, since *it is there*. . . .

When we say that—on the contrary—the phantasm is not observable, that it is empty, non-being, the contrast with the sensible is therefore not absolute. The senses are apparatus to form concretions of the inexhaustible, to form existent significations—But the thing is not really *observable*: there is always a skipping over in every observation, one is never at the thing itself. What we call the *sensible* is only the fact that the indefinite [succession] of *Abschattungen precipitates*—But, conversely, there is a precipitation or crystallization of the imaginary, of the existentials, of the symbolic matrices—

[on the same page]

“Thought,” “consciousness,” and being at . . .

Retention (inasmuch as it does not posit, does not aim at the immediate past, and only *has it* behind itself), the perceptual presence (for example, the presence of what is behind my back), the presence of my whole past sedimented into existentials, my reference to what I mean in speech, and to the diacritical apparatus of the available significations, my motor reference to the spot I want to go to, the *Vorhabe* (the *Stiftung* of a field or an idea), the installation in a space by the corporeal schema, and the founding of a time in the embryology of behavior—all this turns around the problem of an existence that is not a *thought* of existing—and which Husserl finds again in the heart of the psychological reflection as an absolute retentive flux (but in Husserl there is here the idea of a time of *Empfindung* which is not good: the present in the broad sense is a symbolic matrix and not only a present that breaks up toward the past)—I.e. of a Self-presence that is not an *absence from oneself*, a contact with Self *through* the divergence (*écart*) with regard to Self—The figure on a ground, the simplest “*Etwas*”—the *Gestalt* contains the key to the problem of the mind

see Wertheimer's *Productive Thinking*<sup>28</sup> to determine in what sense the *Gestalt* contains and does not contain the significations of the highest degree

28. EDITOR: New York and London, 1945.

The looks that cross = *eine Art der Reflexion*

May, 1959

It is already the flesh of things that speaks to us of our own flesh, and that speaks to us of the flesh of the other—My “look” is one of those givens of the “sensible,” of the brute and primordial world, that defies the analysis into being and nothingness, into existence as consciousness and existence as a thing, and requires a complete reconstruction of philosophy. The analytics of being and nothingness at the same time discloses and masks this order: it discloses it as a menace of being on nothingness and of nothingness on being, it masks it because the entity and the negentity remain in principle isolable.

the look that kills

decentering, not annihilation.

to call into question for Sartre (nothingness)

= to kill; to be in question = to cease to be

(Bergson) Transcendence—*forgetting*—time

May 20, 1959

I said: the openness to the world such as we rediscover it in ourselves and the perception we divine within life (a perception that at the same time is spontaneous being (thing) and being-self (“subject”))—Bergson once explicitly said, in the text of *La Pensée et le mouvant* where he speaks of the consciousness seeking to see time and not to measure it, that there is a consciousness that is *at the same time spontaneous and reflected*<sup>29</sup> intertwine, encroach upon, or cling to one another.

29. EDITOR: The author refers to this passage: “But this duration which science eliminates, and which is so difficult to conceive and express, is what one feels and lives. Suppose we try to find out what it is? How would it appear to a consciousness which desired only to see it without measuring it, which would then grasp it without stopping it, which in short, would take itself as object, and which, spectator and actor alike, at once spontaneous and reflective, would bring ever closer together—to the point where they would coincide—the attention which is fixed, and the time which passes?” (*La Pensée et le mouvant* [Paris, 1934], p. 10.) [English translation by Mabelle L. Andison, *The Creative Mind* (New York, 1946), p. 13.]

Make clear what that means.

That evokes, beyond the "point of view of the object" and the "point of view of the subject," a common nucleus which is the "winding" (*serpentement*),<sup>30</sup> being as a winding (what I called "modulation of the being in the world"). It is necessary to make understood how that (or any *Gestalt*) is a perception "being formed in the things." This is still only an approximative expression, in the subject-object language (Wahl, Bergson) of what there is to be said. That is, that the things have us, and that it is not we who have the things. That the being that has been cannot stop having been. The "Memory of the World." That language has us and that it is not we who have language. That it is being that speaks within us and not we who speak of being.\*

But then how understand the subjectivity? Inadequacy of the Bergsonian representation of a soul that conserves everything (this makes it impossible that the perceived-imaginary difference be a difference in nature). Insufficiency also of the Malebranche representation of a vision in god: that is the equivalent of the transcendental consciousness, it is "conservation" in the form of "signification." The solution is to be sought in vision itself: memory will be understood only by means of it. Vision has to be already a modulation or a winding in the one, a variant of a perceptual system of the world, in order that memory can be and can involve forgetting. The description of retention in Husserl (and that of subjectivity as time, of the absolute flux, of the pre-intentional retention) is a start, but leaves open the question: whence comes the "shrinking" of the temporal perspective, the passage of the remote retentions into the horizon, the forgetting?

The problem of forgetting: lies essentially in the fact that it is discontinuous. If at each phase of the *Ablaufphänomen*, a segment of the past would fall into oblivion, we would have a field of the present like a diaphragm of an objective, and forgetting would be occultation resulting from the removal of the efficacious stimuli, it would be the point where the *clear image* is no longer produced because the corporeal trace is effaced. Or again, in idealist language: forgetting would be a part of the

30. EDITOR: *Ibid.*, p. 293. [Eng. trans., p. 229.]

\* Finally there is something profound in Ruyer when he says that the in itself and the for itself are the same thing. But not to be understood as: the things are souls.

present-past system, in exact correspondence with a new segment of present descended from the future.

But it is not so: there are retentions that are not forgotten, even very remote ones. There are fragments "perceived" just now, that disappear (have they been perceived? And what exactly is the relation between the perceived and the *imperceived*?)——And besides there is no objective segment of the present that descends from the future. Husserl's diagram is dependent on the convention that one can represent the series of nows by points on a line.<sup>31</sup> To be sure, Husserl at this point adds the whole recasting of the retentions and the retentions of retentions that result therefrom, and it is in this that he does not conceive of time as serial and as a succession of punctual events. But even complicated in this fashion, the representation of the phenomenon of flow is faulty. Not inasmuch as it is spatial. For in fact space does not comprise *points*, *lines* any more than time does. Understand that the *Gestalt* is already transcendence: it makes me understand that a line is a vector, that a point is a center of forces——There are neither absolute lines nor points nor colors in the things. The field vision and the field notion——Bergson saying that the winding perhaps reproduces no *real* line.<sup>32</sup> But there is no line that would be "*real*." Hence space is not to be blamed, as Bergson does. And correlatively it does not suffice to pass to time as fusion to have the solution——That is a false antithesis——We have to pass from the thing (spatial or temporal) as identity, to the thing (spatial or temporal) as difference, i.e. as transcendence, i.e. as always "behind," beyond, far-off . . . the present itself is not an absolute coincidence without transcendence; even the *Urerlebnis* involves not total coincidence, but partial coincidence, because it has horizons and would not be without them——the present, also, is ungraspable from close-up, in the forceps of attention, it is an encompassing. Study exactly the *Erfüllung* of the present: the danger of this metaphor: it makes me think that there is a *certain void* that has

31. EDITOR: Husserl, "Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie der inneren Zeitbewusstseins," *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und Phänomenologische Forschung*, IX (1928), 22. See the exposition and discussion of the analysis of Husserl's diagram in *Phénoménologie de la perception*, pp. 477 ff. [Eng. trans., pp. 417 ff.]

32. EDITOR: *La Pensée et le mouvant*, p. 294. [Eng. trans., p. 230.]

its own dimensions and that is filled by a defined quantity of the present (it is always a field defined by the objective diaphragm). When Husserl speaks of a "norm," he means precisely that one cannot presuppose such a norm as given. It is a question of a *Normierung*. I.e. (Heidegger) of the positing of a *mesurant* (*mesurant*). One sees then that the norm and the diaphragm, etc. *derive* from a total phenomenon which is finally the "world" (cf. Manchester lecture: <sup>33</sup>) (each perception is a "thought," but the whole is "*inscribed*" in the world—Every event belongs to the type of historical event that Péguy speaks of, "a rhythm of the event of the world"—again the winding—the problems of knowing what is the subject of the State, of war, etc. are exactly of the same type as the problem of knowing what is the subject of perception: one will not clear up the philosophy of history except by working out the problem of perception)

Whence the impossibility of a philosophy of *Being and Nothingness*: the future is not nothingness, the past is not the imaginary in the sense Sartre takes it—To be sure *there is* the present, but the transcendence of the present makes it precisely able to connect up with a past and a future, which conversely are not a nihilation—

In short: nothingness (or rather non being) is hollow and not *hole*. The open, in the sense of a *hole*, that is Sartre, is Bergson, is negativism or ultra positivism (Bergson)—indiscernible. There is no *nichtiges Nichts*. Bring to a focus my discussion of Bergson's ideas on nothingness: I am right in saying that Bergson proves too much, but wrong in seeming to conclude from that that Sartre is right. The negintuition of nothingness is to be rejected because nothingness also is always *elsewhere*. The true solution: *Offenheit* of the *Umwelt*, *Horizonhaftigkeit*.

The problem of forgetting: it comes, I said, from the fact that forgetting is discontinuous. It must be conceived not as an occultation (Bergson), not as a passage into nothingness, annihilation—and not as a positive function that envelops a knowledge of what it hides (Freud—Sartre),<sup>34</sup> but as a manner of being to . . . in turning away from . . .—The to-be-conscious itself is

33. EDITOR: Lecture given by the author at the University of Manchester, May 1, 1959.

34. EDITOR: Under the parenthesis, between the lines, as according to the author's habit, these words appear: *positivism, negativism*. The first manifestly refers to Freud and the second to Sartre.

to be conceived as transcendence, as to be surpassed by . . . and hence as ignorance But still there is the perceptual [?]?—Yes, but it is not an immeditation in the sense of *contact*. (And it is not a distance in the way Sartre means it: a *nothing that is me*, and that separates me from the thing)—It is true that it is not in "blending" perception and imperception that one will explain forgetting.

It is in better understanding perception (and hence imperception)—i.e.: understand perception as differentiation, forgetting as undifferentiation. The fact that one no longer sees the memory = not a destruction of a psychic *material* which would be *the sensible*, but its disarticulation which makes there be no longer a *separation* (*écart*), a *relief*. This is the night of forgetting. Understand that the "to be conscious" = to have a figure on a ground, and that it disappears by disarticulation—the figure-ground distinction introduces a third term between the "subject" and the "object." It is *that separation* (*écart*) first of all that is the perceptual *meaning*.

#### Philosophy and Literature

[undated, probably June, 1959]

Philosophy, precisely as "Being speaking within us," expression of the mute experience by itself, is creation. A creation that is at the same time a reintegration of Being: for it is not a creation in the sense of one of the commonplace *Gebilde* that history fabricates: it knows itself to be a *Gebilde* and wishes to surpass itself as *pure Gebilde*, to find again its origin. It is hence a creation in a radical sense: a creation that is at the same time an adequation, the only way to obtain an adequation.

This considerably deepens Souriau's views on philosophy as supreme art: <sup>35</sup> for art and philosophy *together* are precisely not arbitrary fabrications in the universe of the "spiritual" (of "culture"), but contact with Being precisely as creations. Being is *what requires creation of us* for us to experience it.

Make an analysis of literature in this sense: as *inscription* of Being.

35. EDITOR: At the head of the note, this reference: "see Souriau. *L'Instauration philosophique* (Paris, 1939); Gueroult, 'La Voie de l'objectivité esthétique,' *Mélanges Souriau* (Paris, 1952)."

*Being and World*, chapter III<sup>36</sup>

[undated, probably June, 1959]

In accordance with the idea of transcendence (as thought by divergence [*pensée d'écart*], not possession of the object) seek to define a history of philosophy that would not be a flattening of history into "my" philosophy—and that would not be idolatry: a recovery or repetition of Descartes, the sole means of rendering to him *his own* truth, by thinking it once again, that is, starting from ourselves—Intelligible world in facets—The history of philosophy as a *perception* of other philosophers, intentional encroachment upon them, a thought of one's own that does not kill them, either by overcoming them, or by copying them. Follow them in their problems (Gueroult<sup>37</sup>)—but their problems are within the problem of Being: this they all profess, and hence we can, we must think them in this horizon.

Say all that at the beginning of chapter III

And also: this ontological outline is an anticipation of philosophy—and hence of the history of philosophy (it implies the use of language, the use of the history operative within us). It is necessary to disclose the presuppositions. And to do so is more-over to do philosophy and not history.

Mark the relation between chapter III and chapter IV on Nature and science: what will be examined with it is a certain ontology (objectivist).

the dilemma: how to rely on the consciousness?

how to challenge the consciousness?

to be surmounted by the idea of consciousness as *Offenheit*—

Understanding and the implied<sup>38</sup>—History of philosophy

June, 1959

The history of philosophy that would have to be made (alongside of Gueroult's) is the history of implication. For example: Descartes's theses on the distinction of the soul and the body

36. EDITOR: *Being and World*: first title given by the author to the first part of his work.

37. EDITOR: Inaugural Lecture. Cf. n. 22, p. 187.

38. TRANSLATOR: "*Entendement et sous-entendu*."

and on their union cannot be exposed on the plane of the understanding, and justified together by a continuous movement of thought. They can be affirmed together only if one takes them with their *implication*—In the order of implication, the search for the essence and the search for existence are not opposed, are the same thing—Consider language, even philosophical language, not as a sum of statements or of "solutions," but as a veil lifted, a verbal chain woven. . . .

June 4, 1959

Hegel's expression: *an sich oder für uns* = there is a thought (the reflective thought) that, precisely because it would like to grasp the thing in itself immediately, falls back on the subjectivity—And which, conversely, because it is haunted by the being for us, does not grasp it and grasps only the thing "in itself," in signification.

The true philosophy = apprehend what makes the leaving of oneself be a retiring into oneself, and vice versa.

Grasp this chiasm, this reversal. That is the mind.

Philosophy. To define its milieu, start from Gouhier's question: can one put to a philosophy questions that it has not put to itself? To answer no is to make of philosophy separate works, is to deny *philosophy*.<sup>39</sup> To answer yes is to reduce history to philosophy.<sup>40</sup>

My point of view: a philosophy, like a work of art, is an object that can arouse more thoughts than those that are "contained" in it (can one enumerate them? Can one count up a language?), retains a meaning outside of its historical context, even *has* meaning only outside of that context. Give an example of this vertical or philosophical history: Descartes, Malebranche. Is it not necessary to distinguish their problems such as they thought them and the problems that really move them, and that *we* formulate.—Does this lead to conclusions that are always relativistic? that is, that will be overthrown by another time? No,

39. TRANSLATOR: "*La philosophie*."

40. EDITOR: *L'Histoire et sa philosophie* [Gouhier]. It seems the author refers more particularly to the last chapter, where the difference between a history of philosophy and a history of philosophies is emphasized. Cf. pp. 136-39.

if the philosophies in their integrality are a *question*, the interrogative thought which makes them speak is not overcome by what will come later (Lefort on Machiavelli <sup>41</sup>).

## Dualism——Philosophy

July, 1959

The problems posed in *Ph.P.*<sup>42</sup> are insoluble because I start there from the “consciousness”-“object” distinction——

Starting from this distinction, one will never understand that a given fact of the “objective” order (a given cerebral lesion) could entail a given disturbance of the relation with the world—a massive disturbance, which seems to prove that the whole “consciousness” is a function of the objective body——It is these very problems that must be disqualified by asking: *what* is the alleged *objective* conditioning? Answer: it is a way of expressing and noting an event of the order of brute or wild being which, ontologically, is primary. This event is that a given *visible* properly disposed (a body) hollows itself out an invisible sense——The common stuff of which all the structures are made is the *visible*, which, for its part, is nowise of the objective, of the in itself, but is of the transcendent—which is not opposed to the for Itself, which has cohesion only for a Self——the Self to be understood not as nothingness, not as something, but as the unity by transgression or by correlative encroachment of “thing” and “world” (the time-thing, the time-being)

August, 1959

- Show
1. that the modern theory of perception is a phenomenology (Michotte <sup>43</sup>) and discloses brute being, the “vertical” world——
  2. that information theory applied to perception, and operationalism applied to behavior—is in fact, confusedly glimpsed at, the idea of meaning as a view of the organism, the idea of the flesh

41. EDITOR: Allusion to a work being prepared.

42. EDITOR: *Phenomenology of Perception*.

43. EDITOR: *The Perception of Causality*.

3. that the perception-message analogy (coding and decoding) is valid, but on condition that one discerns a) the *flesh* beneath the discriminating behaviors b) speech and its “comprehensible” diacritical systems beneath the information.

## Perceiving subject, speaking subject, thinking subject

September, 1959

The perceiving subject, as a tacit, silent *Being-at* (*Etre-à*), which returns from the thing itself blindly identified, which is only a *separation* (*écart*) with respect to it—the *self* of perception as “nobody,” in the sense of Ulysses, as the anonymous one buried in the world, and that has not yet traced its path. Perception as imperception, evidence in non-possession: it is precisely because one knows too well what one is dealing with that one has no need to posit it as an object. Anonymity and generality. That means: not a *nichtiges Nichts*, but a “lake of non-being,” a certain nothingness sunken into a local and temporal *openness*—vision and feeling in fact, and not thought of seeing and of feeling——If it is said that the thought of seeing and of feeling sustains this vision and this feeling, the world and Being will only be an ideate, the vertical or wild Being will never be able to be rediscovered, the teleology of the “natural light” is converted into ideality.

Speaking subject: it is the subject of a *praxis*. It does not hold before itself the words said and understood as objects of thought or ideates. It possesses them only by a *Vorhabe* which is of the same type as the *Vorhabe* of place by my body that betakes itself unto that place. That is: it is a certain lack of . . . such or such a signifier, which does not construct the *Bild* of what it lacks. There is therefore here a neo-teleology, which no more permits being supported by a *consciousness of* . . . , nor by an ec-stasy, a constructive project, than does the perceptual teleology. The Saussurean analysis of the relations between signifiers and the relations from signifier to signified and between the significations (as differences between significations) confirms and rediscovers the idea of perception as a *divergence* (*écart*) by relation to a *level*, that is, the idea of the primordial Being, of the Convention of conventions, of the speech before speech.

What is to be elucidated: it is the upheaval that speech introduces in pre-linguistic Being. It does not modify it first, it is first itself an "egocentric language." But nevertheless it brings a ferment of transformation that will give the operative signification; then the question is: what is this ferment? This praxis-thought? Is it the same being that perceives and that speaks? Impossible that it not be the same. And if it is the same, is this not to re-establish the "thought of seeing and of feeling," the Cogito, the consciousness of . . . ?

September, 1959

Take up again the analysis of the cube. It is true that the cube itself, with six equal faces, is only for an unsituated gaze, for an *operation* or inspection of the mind seating itself at the center of the cube, for a field of *Being*—And everything one can say about the perspectives upon the cube do not concern it.

But the cube itself *by opposition* to the perspectives—is a negative determination. Here Being is what excludes all non-being, all appearance; the in itself is what is not simply *percipi*. The mind as bearer of this Being is what is nowhere, what envelops every *where*

Hence this *analysis* by the reflective thought, this *refinement* of Being (the wax "all naked" Descartes) by-passes the Being already there, pre-critical—How to describe that Being? No longer by what it *is not*, but by what it *is*. One has then: an openness upon the cube itself by means of a view of the cube which is a distancing, a transcendence—to say that I have a view of it is to say that, in perceiving it, I go from myself unto it, I go out of myself into it. I, my *view*, are caught up in the same carnal world with it; i.e.: my view and my body themselves emerge from the *same* being which is, among other things, a *cube*—The reflection that qualifies them as subjects of vision is that same dense reflection that makes me touch myself touching, i.e. that *the same* in me be seen and seer: I do not even see myself seeing, but *by encroachment* I complete my visible body, I prolong my being-seen beyond my being-visible for myself. And it is for my flesh, my body of vision, that there can be the cube itself which closes the circuit and completes my own being-seen. It is hence finally the massive unity of Being as the encompass-

ing of myself and of the cube, it is the wild, non-refined, "vertical" Being that makes there be a cube.

With this example grasp the upsurge of the pure "signification"—the "signification" cube (such as the geometer defines it), the essence, the Platonic idea, the object are the concretion of the *there is*, are *Wesen*, in the verbal sense, i.e., *ester*<sup>44</sup>—Every *that*<sup>45</sup> involves a *what*<sup>46</sup> because the *that* is not nothing, hence is *etwas*, hence *west*—

Study the way that language and the way that algorithm arouse signification

The problem of analysis

September, 1959

Do we have the right to comprehend the time, the space of the child as an undifferentiation of *our* time, of *our* space, etc. . . . ? This is to reduce the child's experience to our own, at the very moment one is trying to respect the phenomena. For it is to think it as the *negation* of *our* differentiations. It would be necessary to go all the way to thinking it *positively*, unto phenomenology.

But the same question arises with regard to every *other*, to the alter ego in particular—And *to that other than me who is the I reflected on*, for myself who reflects.

Solution: recapture the child, the alter ego, the unreflected within myself by a lateral, pre-analytic participation, which is perception, *ueberschreiten* by definition, intentional transgression. When I perceive the child, he is given precisely in a certain divergence (*écart*) (*originating presentation of the unrepresentable*) and the same for my perceptual lived experience for myself, and the same for my alter ego, and the same for the pre-analytic thing. Here is the common tissue of which we are made. The wild Being. And the perception of this perception (the phenomenological "reflection") is the inventory of this originating depar-

44. EDITOR: *Ester*, as a French translation of *Wesen*, is a term borrowed from Gilbert Kahn. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Introduction à la métaphysique*, French translation (Paris, 1958), p. 239 (Glossary of German terms).

45. TRANSLATOR: In English in the text.

46. TRANSLATOR: In English in the text.

ture whose documents we carry in ourselves, of this *Ineinander* that awakens to itself, it is the usage of the *immer wieder* which is the sensible, the carnal itself (for every reflection is after the model of the reflection of the hand touching by the hand touched, open generality, a prolongation of the body's reserve [*volant*]), hence reflection is not an identification with oneself (thought of seeing or of feeling) but non-difference with self = silent or blind identification. And when the reflection wishes to be done with this horizontal openness, when it wishes to apprehend itself no longer across a horizon and in virtue of an institution of nature, but directly and without anything left over, then all it can do is to sublimate itself in verbalization, give itself a body that would not be natural only, make a language germinate, a "transparent" apparatus that gives the illusion of a pure or empty presence to oneself, and which nonetheless attests only a determined void, empty of this or that . . .

The essential is to describe the vertical or wild Being as that pre-spiritual milieu without which nothing is thinkable, not even the spirit, and by which we pass into one another, and ourselves into ourselves in order to have *our own* time. It is philosophy alone that gives it—

Philosophy is the study of the *Vorhabe* of Being, a *Vorhabe* that is not *cognition*, to be sure, that is wanting with regard to cognition, to operation, but that envelops them as Being envelops the beings.

Piaget's logicism is an absolutization of our culture—so also his psychology which opens upon his logic. Incompatible with an ethnological experience. Psychology, logic, ethnology are rival dogmatisms that destroy one another; philosophy alone, precisely because it aims at the total domain of Being, renders them compatible by relativizing them. The regions of knowledge, left to themselves, are in conflict and in contradiction.

*Gestalt*

September, 1959

What is a *Gestalt*? A whole that does *not* reduce itself to the sum of the parts—a negative, exterior definition—A designa-

tion of the *Gestalt* by contrast with the domain of the in itself in which one is installed—the *Gestalthafte*, says Heidegger, is here left aside—

From within, then, (that is: not by *interior observation*, but by approaching the *Gestalt* as much as possible, by communicating with it, which can be done by considering the others or the visible as well as by considering "states of consciousness") what is a *Gestalt*? What is a contour, what is a segregation, what is a circle or a line? Or an organization in depth, a relief?

These are *not* psychic elements (sensation), assembled psychic spatio-temporal individuals. But what then? To have the experience of a *Gestalt* is not to sense by coincidence, but what then?

It is a principle of distribution, the pivot of a system of equivalencies, it is the *Etwas* of which the fragmentary phenomena will be the manifestation—But is it then an essence, an idea? The idea would be free, intemporal, aspatial. The *Gestalt* is not a spatio-temporal individual, it is ready to integrate itself into a constellation that spans space and time—but it is not free in regard to space and time, it is not aspatial, atemporal, it only escapes the time and space conceived as a series of events in themselves, it has a certain weight that doubtless fixes it not in an objective site and in a point of objective time, but in a region, a domain, which it dominates, where it reigns, where it is everywhere present without one ever being able to say: it is here. It is transcendence. This is what one expresses again in speaking of its generality, of its *Transponierbarkeit*—It is a double ground of the lived.

And who experiences it? A mind that would grasp it as an idea or a signification? No. It is a body—In what sense? My body is a *Gestalt* and it is co-present in every *Gestalt*. It is a *Gestalt*; it also, and eminently, is a heavy signification, it is flesh; the system it constitutes is ordered about a central hinge or a pivot which is openness to . . . , a bound and not a free possibility—And at the same time it is a component of every *Gestalt*. The flesh of the *Gestalt* (the grain of the color, the indefinable something that animates the contour or which, in Michotte's experiments, animates the rectangle that "creeps"<sup>47</sup>) is what

47. EDITOR: *The Perception of Causality*.

responds to its inertia, to its insertion in a "world," to its *field* biases

The *Gestalt* therefore implies the relation between a perceiving body and a sensible, i.e. transcendent i.e. horizontal i.e. vertical and not perspectival world——

It is a diacritical, oppositional, relative system whose pivot is the *Etwas*, the thing, the world, and not the idea——

The idea is the *Etwas* upon which the body is centered no longer qua *sensible* but qua *speaking*——

Every Psychology that places the *Gestalt* back into the framework of "cognition" or "consciousness" misses the meaning of the *Gestalt*——

There remains to understand precisely what the being for itself of the *Gestalt* experience is——It is being for X, not a pure agile nothingness, but an inscription in an open register, in a lake of non being, in an *Eröffnung*, in an *offene*.

Pregnancy, transcendence——

September, 1959

Show that these notions \* represent a getting into contact with being as pure *there is*. One witnesses that event by which there is something. Something rather than nothing and this rather than something else. One therefore witnesses the advent of the positive: this rather than something *else*.

This advent is not a self-realization of a being that would be the cause of itself, identical, objective——And not even the self-realization of a preponderant possible in the sense of the logical possible (Leibniz). The ideology of the logical possible is no different from the ideology of the necessary: the necessary is simply the unique possible; the possible already contains the idea of intrinsic existence; if there is a conflict between several possibles with regard to existence, it is because, by virtue of a veritable mystery (Leibniz), the possibles are not compossible.

Hence the *gestaltung* is not being by definition, essentialization——It is [verbal) *Wesen*, the operation of *ester*, the apparition

\* Pregnancy, *Gestalt*, phenomenon.

tion of an *Etwas* existing by radiation——*Warum ist etwas eine gestalt?* Why is this rather than that a "good" form, or a *strong form*, or an orientation toward a possibility? [see Egon Brunswik<sup>48</sup> and show that the effort of the *New Look*<sup>49</sup> and of information theory is to find an operational, scientific expression of what is not the being-object, the in itself]——[reproduce here my critique of Lévi-Strauss's explanation of the *gestaltung* by the pooling of "chances," by *combination*<sup>50</sup>——yes a combination is needed, but what is elaborated through this combination, the symbolic matrix of the West is not a *product* of causality] Show that since the *Gestalt* arises from polymorphism, this situates us entirely outside of the philosophy of the subject and the object.

Empirical pregnancy and geometrical pregnancy (E. Brunswik<sup>51</sup>)

September, 1959

Profound idea of a pregnancy that is not only that of the forms privileged for reasons of geometrical equilibrium—but also according to an intrinsic regulation, a *Seinsgeschick* of which the geometrical pregnancy is but one aspect. It is in this way that I want to understand "empirical pregnancy"——Understood in this way, it consists in defining each perceived being by a structure or a system of equivalencies about which it is disposed, and of which the painter's stroke—the flexuous line—or

48. EDITOR: Cf. *Perception and the Representative Design of Psychological Experiments* (Berkeley, 1956).

49. TRANSLATOR: In English in the text.

50. EDITOR: We have no knowledge of such a critique; doubtless it was formulated in a course or in a personal note. M. Lévi-Strauss, we recall, had posed in new terms the problem of the cumulative or non-cumulative history of cultures in comparing non-cumulative cultures to players trying for series in roulette. He showed that the collaboration of cultures, voluntary or involuntary, had had an effect analogous to that which would be obtained by "a coalition of gamblers betting on the same series at several different tables, with an agreement that they would pool the numbers which each of them might require to proceed with his series." Cf. *Race and History*, UNESCO (Paris, 1952), pp. 37–38.

51. EDITOR: The problem of empirical pregnancy and geometrical pregnancy is dealt with by Egon Brunswik in *Experimentelle Psychologie in Demonstrationen* (Vienna, 1935).

the sweep of the brush is the peremptory evocation. It is a question of that *λόγος* that pronounces itself silently in each sensible thing, inasmuch as it varies around a certain type of message, which we can have an idea of only through our carnal participation in its sense, only by espousing by our body its manner of "signifying"—or of that *λόγος* uttered whose internal structure sublimates our carnal relation with the world.

To criticize the "little man inside the man"—perception as cognition of an object—to rediscover man finally face to face with the world *itself*, to rediscover the pre-intentional present—is to rediscover that vision of the origins, which sees itself within us, as poetry rediscovers what articulates itself within us, unbeknown to us (Max Ernst in Charbonnier's book <sup>52</sup>).

The principle of ontology: being in indivision

September, 1959

Hence every painting, every action, every human enterprise is a crystallization of time, a cipher of transcendence—At least if one understands them as a certain spread (*écart*) between being and nothingness, a certain proportion of white and black, a certain sampling of the Being in indivision, a certain manner of modulating time and space

*Pregnancy*: the psychologists forget that this means a power to break forth, productivity (*praegnans futuri*), fecundity—Secondarily: it means "typicality." It is the form that has arrived at itself, that *is itself*, that poses itself by its own means, is the equivalent of the cause of itself, is the *Wesen* that is because it *este*,<sup>53</sup> auto-regulation, cohesion of self with self, identity in depth (dynamic identity), transcendence as being-at-a-distance, there is——

52. EDITOR: Georges Charbonnier: *Le Monologue du peintre I* (Paris, 1959), p. 34. During an interview, Max Ernst recalls the terms in which he had once defined the painter's role: "Just as, ever since the celebrated Letter of the Seer, the poet's role consists in writing under the dictation of what thinks itself, what articulates itself within him, the painter's role is to circumscribe and to project forth what sees itself within him."

53. EDITOR: Cf. p. 203, n. 44.

The pregnancy is what, in the visible, requires of me a *correct* focusing, defines its correctness. My body *obeys* the pregnancy, it "responds" to it, it is what is suspended on it, flesh responding to flesh. When a "good" form appears, either it modifies its surroundings by radiation, or it obtains from my body a movement until . . .

This definition of pregnancy as implying motivity a fortiori places it entirely outside of Piaget's alternatives: field effects or sensori-motor activity? When one says that the form is "pre-empirical," "innate," whether with regard to the perceived or to what is thought, what one means in fact is that there is here *Urstiftung* and not simply subsumption, a sense by transcendence and not a recognition of the concept.

September, 1959

Finally one has to admit a sort of truth in the naïve descriptions of perception: *εἰδωλα* or *simulacra*, etc. the thing of itself giving perspectives, etc. But all that takes place in an order that is no longer that of objective Being, that is the order of the lived or of the phenomenal which is precisely to be justified and rehabilitated as the foundation of the objective order.

One can claim that the order of the phenomenal is second by reference to the objective order, is but a province of it, when one considers only the intra-mundane relations between objects. But as soon as one introduces the other and even the living body, the work of art, the historical milieu, one realizes that the order of the phenomenal must be considered as autonomous and that, if one does not recognize this autonomy in it, it is definitively *impenetrable*.

The other, not as a "consciousness," but as an inhabitant of a body, and consequently of the world. Where is the other in this body that I see? He is (like the meaning of the sentence) immanent in this body (one cannot detach him from it to pose him apart) and yet, more than the sum of the signs or the significations conveyed by them. He is that of which they are always the partial and non-exhaustive image—and who nonetheless is attested wholly in each of them. Always in process of an unfin-

ished incarnation——Beyond the objective body as the sense of the painting is beyond the canvas.

September, 1959

Descartes (*Dioptrics*): *who* will see the image painted in the eyes or in the brain? Therefore finally a *thought* of this image is needed——Descartes already sees that we always put a little man in man, that our objectifying view of our own body always obliges us to seek *still further inside* that *seeing man* we thought we had under our eyes.

But what he does not see is that the primordial vision that one must indeed come to cannot be the *thought of seeing*——This thought, this disclosure of being which finally is *for* someone, is still the little man inside man, but this time contracted into a metaphysical point. For finally we know no vision but that by a composite substance, and it is this subtilized vision that we call thought——If being is to disclose itself, it will do so before a transcendence, and not before an intentionality, it will be the engulfed brute being that returns to itself, it will be the *sensible* that hollows itself out——

Ontology——

October, 1959

Take topological space as a model of being. The Euclidean space is the model for perspectival being, it is a space without transcendence, positive, a network of straight lines, parallel among themselves or perpendicular according to the three dimensions, which sustains all the possible situations——Underlying appropriateness of this idea of space (and of velocity, movement, time) with the classical ontology of the *Ens realissimum*, of the infinite entity. The topological space, on the contrary, a milieu in which are circumscribed relations of proximity, of envelopment, etc. is the image of a being that, like Klee's touches of color, is at the same time older than everything and "of the first day" (Hegel), that the regressive thought runs up against without being able to deduce it directly or indirectly (by

"choice of the best") from Being by itself, that is a perpetual *residue*——It is encountered not only at the level of the physical world, but again it is constitutive of life, and finally it finds the *wild* principle of Logos——It is this wild or brute being that intervenes at all levels to overcome the problems of the classical ontology (mechanism, finalism, in every case: artificialism)——the *Theodicy* of Leibniz sums up the effort of Christian theology to find a route between the necessitarian conception of Being, alone possible, and the unmotivated upsurge of brute Being, which latter is finally linked up with the first by a compromise, and, to this extent, the hidden god sacrificed to the *Ens realissimum*.

Sunday, October 10, 1959

Malraux asks why, how, one painter learns from another, of whom he makes copies (Van Gogh of Millet)——to be *himself*, learn himself in the other, with and against him.

Likewise one can ask why he who knows how to handle colors knows also how to handle the pencil or sometimes to sculpture——What there is in *common*——

All this is indeed obscure as long as one thinks that to sketch or to paint is to produce something positive out of nothing. Then the act of sketching and of painting——the act of painting like oneself and that of painting like the other are isolated from one another, and one no longer sees any relation between them. But we would see a relation if we understood that to paint, to sketch, is not to produce something from nothing, that the drawing, the touch of the brush, and the visible work are but the trace of a total movement of Speech, which goes unto Being as a whole, and that this movement contains the expression with lines as well as the expression with colors, *my* expression as well as that of the other painters. We dream of systems of equivalencies, and indeed they do function. But their logic, like the logic of a phonematic system, is summed up in one sole tuft, in one sole gamut, they are all animated with one sole movement, they each and all are one sole vortex, one sole contraction of Being. What is needed is to make explicit this horizontal totality which is not a *synthesis*

Wild perception—The Immediate—Cultural perception—  
—learning.<sup>54</sup>

October 22, 1959

I say that the Renaissance perspective is a cultural fact, that perception itself is polymorphic and that if it becomes Euclidean, this is because it allows itself to be oriented by the system.

Whence the question: how can one return from this perception fashioned by culture to the "brute" or "wild" perception? What does the informing consist in? By what act does one undo it (return to the phenomenal, to the "vertical" world, to lived experience)?

Whence also the question: does this informing of perception by culture, this descent of the invisible into the visible, oblige us to say, as does Egon Brunswik, for example, that the perceptual pregnancy is a *learning*<sup>55</sup> of the ecological milieu, that the auto-constitutional *Gestalten* of the Berlin school are derived from the "empirical *Gestalten*"?<sup>56</sup>

What I maintain is that: 1. there is an informing of perception by culture which enables us to say that culture is perceived—There is a dilatation of perception, a carrying over of the *Aha Erlebnis* of "natural" perception to instrumental relations for example (chimpanzees) which obliges us to put in continuity the perceptual openness to the world (*λόγος ἐνδιάθετος*) and the openness to a cultural world (acquisition of the use of instruments).

2. this original layer above *nature* shows that *learning*<sup>57</sup> is *In der Welt Sein*, and not at all that *In der Welt Sein* is *learning*,<sup>58</sup> in the American sense or in the cognitive sense of Brunswik.

My position in the problem of the "return to the immediate" to be defined: the perceptual in the sense of the non-projective, vertical world—is always given with sense experience (*le sen-*

54. TRANSLATOR: In English in the text.

55. TRANSLATOR: In English in the text.

56. EDITOR: Cf. *Perception and the Representative Design of Psychological Experiments* (Berkeley, 1956). For the discussion of the *Gestalten* of the Berlin school, cf. pp. 132–34; for perception as learning, cf. pp. 122–23.

57. TRANSLATOR: In English in the text.

58. TRANSLATOR: In English in the text.

*tir*), with the phenomenal, with the silent transcendence. And yet someone like Piaget ignores this absolutely, has totally converted his perception into a cultural-Euclidean perception. What right have I therefore to call immediate this original that can be forgotten to such an extent?

Describe very precisely the way perception masks itself to itself, makes itself Euclidean. Show that the pregnancy of the geometrical forms is grounded intrinsically (not culturally) in that they, better than others, allow an ontogenesis (they stabilize being. What Piaget expresses—badly—in saying that in them the "deformations" annul one another<sup>59</sup>), but that this intrinsic pregnancy, in order to retain all its meaning, must be maintained within the zone of transcendence, within the context of the pre-Being, of the *Offenheit* of the *Umwelt*, and not dogmatically considered self-evident—the Euclidean perception has a privilege, but it is not an absolute privilege, and it is contested as absolute by the transcendence—which demands the Euclidean world as one of its aspects—

With life, natural perception (with the savage mind) is perpetually given to us the wherewithal to set up the universe of immanence—And yet, this universe tends of itself to become autonomous, realizes of itself a repression of transcendence—*The key is in this idea that perception qua wild perception is of itself ignorance of itself, imperception, tends of itself to see itself as an act and to forget itself as latent intentionality, as being at—*

Same problem: how every philosophy is language and nonetheless consists in rediscovering silence.

## Perception and language

October 27, 1959

I describe perception as a diacritical, relative, oppositional system—the primordial space as topological (that is, cut out in a

59. EDITOR: Cf. in particular, *La Perception*, Symposium de l'Association psychologique scientifique de langue française (Louvain, 1953; Paris, 1955). Piaget discusses geometrical pregnancy and empirical pregnancy, and writes: "Likewise, we think that a good form is that which, within perceptual structures where everything is deformation, gives rise to maximum compensations, hence to minimum deformations" (p. 19).

total voluminosity which surrounds me, in which I am, which is behind me as well as before me . . . )

This is right. But there is all the same this difference between perception and language, that I *see* the perceived things and that the significations on the contrary are invisible. The natural being is at rest in itself, my look can stop on it. The Being whose home is language cannot be fixed, looked at, it is only from afar. Hence it is necessary to account for this relative positivity of the perceived (even if it is only non-negation, even if it does not resist *observation*, even if every crystallization is illusory in some respect), especially since it is upon it that the positivity of the invisible rests. There is no intelligible world, *there is* the sensible world.

(But also what is this *there is* of the sensible world, of nature?)

The sensible is precisely that medium in which there can be *being* without it having to be posited; the sensible appearance of the sensible, the silent persuasion of the sensible is Being's unique way of manifesting itself without becoming positivity, without ceasing to be ambiguous and transcendent. The sensible world itself in which we gravitate, and which forms our bond with the other, which makes the other be for us, is not, precisely qua sensible, "given" except by allusion—The sensible is that: this possibility to be evident in silence, to be understood implicitly, and the alleged positivity of the sensible world (when one scrutinizes it unto its roots, when one goes beyond the empirical-sensible, the secondary sensible of our "representation," when one discloses the Being of Nature) precisely proves to be an *ungraspable*, the only thing finally that is seen in the full sense is the totality wherein the sensibles are cut out. Thought is only a little further still from the *visibilia*.

The chiasm

November 1, 1959

—the cleavage, in what regards the essential, is not *for Itself for the Other*, (subject-object) it is more exactly that between someone who goes unto the world and who, from the exterior, seems to remain in his own "dream." *Chiasm* by which what announces itself to me as being appears in the eyes of the others

to be only "states of consciousness"—But, like the chiasm of the eyes, this one is also what makes us belong to the same world—a world which is not projective, but forms its unity across impossibilities such as that of *my* world and the world of the other—By reason of this mediation through reversal, this chiasm, there is not simply a for-Oneself for-the-Other antithesis, there is Being as containing all that, first as sensible Being and then as Being without restriction—

Chiasm, instead of the For the Other: that means that there is not only a me-other rivalry, but a co-functioning. We function as one unique body

The chiasm is not only a me other exchange (the messages he receives reach me, the messages I receive reach him), it is also an exchange between me and the world, between the phenomenal body and the "objective" body, between the perceiving and the perceived: what begins as a thing ends as consciousness of the thing, what begins as a "state of consciousness" ends as a thing.

One cannot account for this double "chiasm" by the cut of the For Itself and the cut of the In Itself. A relation to Being is needed that would form itself *within Being*—This at bottom is what Sartre was looking for. But since for him there is no *interior* except me, and every *other* is exteriority, Being for him remains intact after this decompression that occurs in it, it remains pure positivity, object, and the For Itself participates in it only through a sort of folly—

November, 1959

Meaning is *invisible*, but the invisible is not the contradictory of the visible: the visible itself has an invisible inner framework (*membrure*), and the in-visible is the secret counterpart of the visible, it appears only within it, it is the *Nichturpräsentierbar* which is presented to me as such within the world—one cannot see it there and every effort to *see it there* makes it disappear, but it is *in the line* of the visible, it is its virtual focus, it is inscribed within it (in filigree)—

The *comparisons* between the invisible and the visible (the *domain*, the *direction* of thought . . .) are not *comparisons* (Heidegger), they mean that the visible is pregnant with the invisible, that to comprehend fully the visible relations (house) one must go unto the relation of the visible with the invisible. . . . The other's visible is my invisible; my visible is the other's invisible; this formula (that of Sartre) is not to be retained. We have to say: Being is this strange encroachment by reason of which my visible, although it is not superposable on that of the other, nonetheless opens upon it, that both open upon the same sensible world—And it is the same encroachment, the same junction at a distance, that makes the messages from my organs (the monocular images) reassemble themselves into one sole vertical existence and into one sole world.

Hence meaning is not nihilation, nor a sacrifice of the For Itself to the In Itself—To envisage such a sacrifice, such a *creation* of the truth, is still to think according to the model of the In Itself, on the basis of the In Itself, and, since it escapes, to confide in the For Itself the heroic mission of making it be—To envisage that is still to think the *Weltlichkeit* of minds according to the model of that of Cartesian space. Lacking an In Itself of the For Itselfs, the For Itself is charged with the task of *making* it. But I do not think the *Weltlichkeit* of minds in terms of the In Itself—and it is chimerical to seek in the future what is not. The *Weltlichkeit* of minds is ensured by the roots they push forth, not in the Cartesian space, to be sure, but in the aesthetic world. The aesthetic world to be described as a space of transcendence, a space of impossibilities, of explosion, of dehiscence, and not as objective-immanent space. And then thought, the subject, to be described as a spatial situation also, with its own "locality" And hence the spatial "metaphors" to be understood as an indivision of being and nothingness. And hence meaning is not nihilation—

This *separation* (*écart*) which, in first approximation, forms meaning, is not a no I affect *myself* with, a lack which I constitute as a lack by the upsurge of an *end* which I give myself—it is a *natural* negativity, a first institution, always already there—

Consider the right, the left: these are not simply contents within a relational spatiality (i.e. *positive*): they are not *parts* of space (Kant's reasoning is valid here: the whole is primary),

they are total parts, cuts in an encompassing, topological space —Consider the *two*, the *pair*, this is not *two acts*, *two syntheses*, it is a fragmentation of being, it is a possibility for separation (two eyes, two ears: the possibility for *discrimination*, for the use of the diacritical), it is the advent of difference (on the ground of *resemblance* therefore, on the ground of the  $\delta\mu\omicron\upsilon\ \eta\nu\ \pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha$ ).

The visible and the invisible

November, 1959

Must one not say that  
the idea of transcendence = adjourns ad infinitum all *that which*  
we think we touch or see?

No, however: the visible, which is always "further on," is *presented* as such. It is the *Urpräsentation* of the *Nichturpräsentierbar*—*To see* is precisely, in spite of the infinite analysis always possible, and although no *Etwas* ever remains *in our hands*, to have an *Etwas*.

Is this then a pure and simple contradiction? Not at all: the visible ceases to be an inaccessible if I conceive it, not according to the proximal thought, but as an encompassing, lateral investment, *flesh*.

The "senses"—dimensionality—Being

November, 1959

Each "sense" is a "world," i.e. absolutely incommunicable for the other senses, and yet constructing a *something* which, through its structure, is from the first *open* upon the world of the other senses, and with them forms one sole Being. Sensoriality: for example, a color, yellow; it surpasses itself of itself: as soon as it becomes the color of the illumination, the dominant color of the field, it ceases to be such or such a color, it has therefore of itself an ontological function, it becomes apt to represent all things (like engravings, *Dioptrics*, Discourse IV). With one sole movement it imposes itself as particular and ceases to be visible as

particular. The "World" is this whole where each "part," when one takes it for itself, suddenly opens unlimited dimensions—becomes a *total part*.

Now this particularity of the color, of the yellow, and this universality are not a *contradiction*, are *together* sensoriality itself: it is by the same virtue that the color, the yellow, at the same time gives itself as a *certain* being and as a *dimension*, the expression of *every possible being*—What is proper to the sensible (as to language) is to be representative of the whole, not by a sign-signification relation, or by the immanence of the parts in one another and in the whole, but because each part is *torn up* from the whole, comes with its roots, encroaches upon the whole, transgresses the frontiers of the others. It is thus that the parts overlap (transparency), that the present does not stop at the limits of the visible (behind my back). Perception opens the world to me as the surgeon opens a body, catching sight, through the window he has contrived, of the organs in full functioning, taken *in their activity*, seen sideways. It is thus that the sensible initiates me to the world, as language to the other: by encroachment, *Ueberschreiten*. Perception is not first a perception of *things*, but a perception of *elements* (water, air . . .) of *rays of the world*, of things which are dimensions, which are worlds, I slip on these "elements" and here I am in the *world*, I slip from the "subjective" to Being.

The alleged "contradiction" between the yellow as some thing and the yellow as the title of a world: this is not a contradiction, for it is precisely within its particularity as yellow and through it that the yellow becomes a universe or an *element*—That a color can become a level, a fact become a category (exactly as in music: describe a note as particular, i.e. in the field of another *tone*—and "the same" note that has become that within whose key a music is written) = the veritable movement toward the universal. The universal is not above, it is beneath (Claudel), it is not before, but *behind* us—atonal music = the equivalent of the philosophy of Being in indivision. Like paintings without identifiable things, without the *skin* of things, but giving their *flesh*—The *Transponierbarkeit* is a particular case of a more general transposition of which atonal music is the thematization. All this implies the Being in indivision—

This universality of the sensible = *Urpräsentation* of what is

not *Urpräsentierbar* = the sensible hollowed out in the being without restriction, that Being which is *between* my perspective and that of the other, my past and my present.

What is proper to the perceived: to be already there, to not be *through* the act of perception, to be the reason for that act, and not the reverse. Sensoriality = transcendence, or a mirror of transcendence.

## Depth

November, 1959

Depth and "back" (and "behind")—It is pre-eminently the dimension of the hidden—(every dimension is of the hidden)—

There must be depth since there is a point whence I see—since the world surrounds me—

Depth is the means the things have to remain distinct, to remain things, while not being what I look at at present. It is pre-eminently the dimension of the simultaneous. Without it, there would not be a world or Being, there would only be a mobile zone of distinctness which could not be brought here without quitting all the rest—and a "synthesis" of these "views." Whereas, by virtue of depth, they coexist in degrees of proximity, they slip into one another and integrate themselves. It is hence because of depth that the things have a flesh: that is, oppose to my inspection obstacles, a resistance which is precisely their reality, their "openness," their *totum simul*. The look does not overcome depth, it goes round it.

Depth is *urstiftet* in what I see in clear vision as the retention is in the present—without "intentionality"—

cf. Metzger saying that it arises at the moment when it was going to be impossible to have a distinct vision of 2 points at the same time. Then, the two images that are out of phase and not superposable "take" suddenly as profiles of the same thing in depth<sup>60</sup>—This is not an *act* or an intentionality (which would

60. EDITOR: Wolfgang Metzger, *Gesetze des Sehens* (Frankfurt, 1936; 2d ed. expanded, 1953), p. 285.

go to an *in itself* and would give only juxtaposed in itself)——  
It is in general, and by virtue of a field property, that this identification of two impossible views is made, and because depth is open to me, because I have this dimension so as to move my look in it, *this openness*——

November, 1959

Say that the things are structures, frameworks, the stars of our life: not before us, laid out as perspective spectacles, but gravitating about us.

Such things do not presuppose man, who is made of their flesh. But yet their eminent being can be understood only by him who enters into perception, and with it keeps in distant-contact with them——

The essence, the *Wesen*. Underlying kinship between the essence and perception: the essence, likewise, is an inner framework, it is not above the sensible world, it is beneath, or in its depth, its thickness. It is the secret bond—the Essences are *Etwases* at the level of speech, as the things are Essences at the level of Nature. Generality of the things: why are there several samples of each thing? This is imposed by the very definition of the things as field beings: how could there be a field without generality?

With transcendence I show that the visible is invisible, *that vision is in principle what convinces me by an appearance already-there that there is no room to seek a proximal being* perception, what assures me of an inappreciated (of a hidden-revealed: transparency, encroachment) This invisible of the visible is then what enables me to rediscover in productive thought all the structures of vision, and to radically distinguish thought from operation, from logic.

I-the other, an inadequate formula

November, 1959

The I-other relation to be conceived (like the intersexual relation, with its indefinite substitutions cf. Schilder *Image and*

*Appearance*, p. 234<sup>61</sup>) as complementary roles one of which cannot be occupied without the other being also: masculinity implies femininity, etc. Fundamental polymorphism by reason of which I do not have to constitute the other *in face of* the Ego: he is already there, and the Ego is conquered from him. Describe the pre-egology, the “syncretism,” indivision or transitivity. What is it that *there is* at this level? There is the vertical or carnal universe and its polymorphic matrix. Absurdity of the *tabula rasa* on which *cognitions* would be arranged: not that there be cognitions before cognitions, but because there is the *field*. The I-other problem—a *Western* problem.

November, 1959

Philosophy has never spoken—I do not say of *passivity*: we are not effects—but I would say of the passivity of our activity, as Valéry spoke of a *body of the spirit*: new as our initiatives may be, they come to birth at the heart of being, they are connected onto the time that streams forth in us, supported on the pivots or hinges of our life, their *sense* is a “direction”——The soul always thinks: this is in it a property of its state, it cannot not think because a *field* has been opened in which *something* or the *absence* of something is always inscribed. This is not an *activity* of the soul, nor a production of thoughts in the plural, and I am not even the author of that hollow that forms within me by the passage from the present to the retention, it is not I who makes myself think any more than it is I who makes my heart beat. From there leave the philosophy of *Erlebnisse* and pass to the philosophy of our *Urstiftung*

November 26, 1959

A “direction” of thought——This is not a *metaphor*——There is no *metaphor* between the visible and the invisible (the invisible: either my thought for myself or the sensible given to

61. EDITOR: P. Schilder, *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body* (London, 1955).

the other for me): *metaphor* is too much or too little: too much if the invisible is really invisible, too little if it lends itself to transposition—

There is no metaphor: 1) because thought involves a quasi-locality that has to be described (locality not by inherence in a spatio-temporal point—but locality by elastic tie: one cannot say that a mind is here, but one can say that it is *not there*—this negation little by little extends to all parts of the world and of the lived body (*corps propre*)—and yet there is a locality by investment, and, when all that is said, there is a theater of apparition of the other)

2) because the originating locality, even in what concerns the “things” or the “direction” of a movement of things is not identifiable in objective space either, not a relation *in* objective space—A *direction* is not *in* space: it is in filigree across it—It is therefore transposable to thought—

The mind is neither here, nor here, nor here. . . . And yet it is “attached,” “bound,” it is *not without bonds*—Negation of negation and position: one does not have to choose between them. The mind is in no objective site, and yet it is invested in a site which it rejoins by its environs, which it circumvents, as my locality for myself is the point that all the vanishing lines of my landscape designate to me, and which is itself *invisible*.

Leibniz

December, 1959

In denying the conception of perception-reproduction (on my body in itself of the exterior thing in itself), I open up access to a brute Being with which I would not be in the *subject and object* relation, and still less in the relation of effect with cause. The *In der Welt Sein* relation will take the place held in Leibniz by the relation of reciprocal expression of the perspectives taken on the world, and hence god as the unique author of these diverse perspectives which emanate from him as thoughts. The Being thus discovered is to be sure not the god of Leibniz, the “monadology” thus disclosed is not the system of monads—substances; but certain Leibnizian descriptions—that each of the views of the world is a world apart, that nonetheless “what is

particular to one would be public to all,” that the monads would be in a relation of expression between themselves and with the world, that they differ from one another and from it as perspectives—are to be maintained entirely, to be taken up again in the brute Being, to be separated from the substantialist and ontotheological elaboration Leibniz imposes upon them—

The expression of the universe in us is certainly not the harmony between our monad and the others, the presence of the ideas of all things in it—but it is what we see in perception, to be taken as such instead of *explaining* it. Our soul has no windows: that means *In der Welt Sein*—

The pre-established harmony (like occasionalism) always maintains the in itself and simply connects it with what we experience through a relation from substance to substance founded in god—instead of making of it the cause of our thoughts—but it is precisely a question of rejecting entirely the idea of the In Itself—

It is the recovery of the theme of perception that transforms the significance of the Leibnizian idea of expression.

*Vertical world and vertical history*

“World”

December, 1959

A “world” (it is a whole world, the world of sound, of color, etc. . . .) = an organized ensemble, which is *closed*, but which, strangely, is representative of all the rest, possesses its symbols, its equivalents for everything that is not itself. Painting for space, for example.

A “world” has dimensions. By definition they are not the sole possible ones (by passage to a 3rd dimension, spatial beings separated in the first two can be connected). But by definition also they have the value of an inner framework, they are more than singularities of content: the values in a pencil sketch are representative of the whole.

Thus the painting is a “world” by opposition to the unique and “real” world—In any case, it forms a world with all the other paintings—The *same* sensible elements signify something else there than in the prosaic world.

Replace the notions of concept, idea, mind, representation with the notions of *dimensions*, articulation, level, hinges, pivots, configuration—The point of departure = the critique of the usual conception of the *thing* and its *properties* → critique of the logical notion of the subject, and of logical inherence → critique of the *positive* signification (differences between significations), signification as a separation (*écart*), theory of predication—founded on this diacritical conception

The passage to a superior dimension = *Urstiftung* of a meaning, reorganization. In what sense is it prepared for in the given structure? As the sensible structure can be understood only through its relation to the body, to the flesh—the invisible structure can be understood only through its relation to logos, to speech—The invisible meaning is the inner framework of speech—The world of perception encroaches upon that of movement (which also is *seen*) and inversely movement has [eyes?] Likewise the world of ideas encroaches upon language (one thinks it) which inversely encroaches upon the ideas (one thinks because one speaks, because one writes)——

The others' words make me speak and think because they create within me an other than myself, a divergence (*écart*) by relation to . . . what I see, and thus designate it to me myself. The other's words form a grillwork through which I see my thought. Did I have it before this conversation? Yes, as a unique fundamental tone, *Weltthesis*, not as *thoughts*, significations or statements—To be sure, it is necessary to think in order to speak, but to think in the sense of being in the world (*être au monde*) or in the vertical Being of *Vorhabe*. Thoughts are the coinage of this total being—Delimitations—within it.

Husserl *lebendige Gegenwart* <sup>62</sup>

December, 1959

My body is never *in movement perspektivisch*, as are the other things——

62. EDITOR: Reference to an unpublished text of Husserl, classified as D.12.IV, and reproduced under the title "Die Welt der lebendigen Gegenwart und die Konstitution der ausserleiblichen Umwelt," in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (March, 1946).

It is not *in rest* either like some of them. It is beneath objective rest and movement——

The movements it will perform by the *Ich gehe* (and which are not "perspectival") will always be *possible rests* at each moment——*Possible* in what sense? It is certainly not a question of a certain *Ort in which* my body *could* be, i.e. of the evocation of a logical possibility of being there. It is a question of a power—of an I can.

*Veränderung* and *Unveränderung*—Build a doctrine of the negative on these phenomena. The positive and the negative are the two "sides" of a Being; in the *vertical* world, every being has this structure (To this structure is bound the ambiguity of the consciousness, and even a sort of blindness of the consciousness, of imperception in perception——To see is to not see—to see the other is essentially to see my body as an object, so that the other's body object could have a psychic "side." The experience of my own body and the experience of the other are themselves the two sides of one same Being: where I say that I see the other, in fact it especially happens that I objectify my body, the other is the horizon or other side of this experience——It is thus that one speaks *to the other* although one has only to do with oneself).

Against the doctrine of contradiction, absolute negation, the *either or*——Transcendence is identity within difference.

Science and ontology

Monday, January 4, 1960

Justify science as an operation within the given situation of knowledge—and thereby make apparent the necessity of the ontology "complementary" with this operational science——

Characterize the scientific treatment of being, time, evolution, etc., as a locating of "features" of the Universe or of "features" of Beings, a systematic explanation of what they imply in virtue of their role as *hinges*. *By principle* science is not an *exhausting*, but a physiognomic portrait——Its freedom of manipulation, its operational freedom is immediately synonymous with an intra-ontology. The equivalence that analytic geometry establishes between space and number to be understood, not as a spiritualization of space (Brunschvicg), but indeed as a spatialization of the understanding, as an intuition of the ontological

equivalence of space and number before a subject of knowledge that is *of the world*.

The scientific deduction-experimental fact parallelism is neither to be contested, nor to be understood as a proof of a *realism* of science. It is founded on the fact that the deductive science renders explicit the structures, the *pivots*, certain traits of the inner framework of the world. This *truth* of science, far from making a philosophy useless, is founded and guaranteed only by a relation of transcendence with Being, an inherence of the subject and the object of science in a preobjective Being.

*Scale*—Ontological significance of this notion.

*Endo-ontology* cf. Husserl's phenomenological absolute.

January 20, 1960

It is a going beyond the ontology of the In itself—and expresses this overcoming in terms of the in itself—Scale: a *projective* notion: one imagines a being in itself marked on a map in itself, where it appears transposed according to a given ratio of sizes, so that the representations on different scales are different “visual pictures” of the same in itself—One goes one step further in suppressing the *model In itself*: there is no longer anything but representations on different scales. But they remain of the order of the “visual picture” or of the in itself by an inevitable inconsistency as long as one has not reached the problematic of philosophy.—It is a question of understanding that the “views” at different scales are not projections upon corporeities—screens of an inaccessible In itself, that they and their lateral implication in one another are the reality, exactly: that the reality is their common inner framework (*membrure*), their nucleus, and not something *behind them*: behind them, there are only other “views” still conceived according to the in itself-projection schema. The real is *between them*, this side of them. The macrophenomenon and the microphenomenon are not two more or less enlarged projections of a real in itself *behind them*: the macrophenomena of evolution are not less real, the microphenomena *not more* real. There is no hierarchy between them.

The content of my perception, microphenomenon, and the large-scale view of the enveloping phenomena are not two pro-

jections of the In itself: Being is their common inner framework. Each field is a dimensionality, and Being is dimensionality itself. It is therefore accessible indeed by my perception. It is even my perception that presents to me in a spectacle the reference of lateral transcendence from the “appearances” to the essence as a nucleus of (verbal) *Wesen*—The cognitions at a  $>$  or  $<$  scale (microphysical-macrophenomena) are a determination in dotted lines (by mathematical instruments, i.e. inventory of the structures) of nuclei of being whose actuality perception alone gives me, and which can be conceived only by derivation from its inner framework.

It is necessary to suppress the causal thought which is always: view of the world from without, from the point of view of a Kosmotheoros with, in anti-thesis, the antagonistic and inseparable movement of the reflective recuperation—I must no longer think myself *in the world* in the sense of the objective spatiality, which amounts to autopositing myself and installing myself in the *Ego uninteressiert*—What replaces causal thought is the idea of transcendence, that is, of a world seen within inherence in this world, by virtue of it, of an Intra ontology, of a Being encompassing-encompassed, of a vertical, dimensional Being, dimensionality—And what replaces the antagonistic and solitary reflective movement (the immanence of the “idealists”) is the fold or hollow of Being having by principle an *outside*, the architectonics of the configurations. There is no

longer { —consciousness  
—projections  
—In itself or object

There are fields in intersection, in a field of fields wherein the “subjectivities” are integrated, as Husserl indicates in the unpublished text on teleology and the phenomenological absolute, since they bear in their intrastructure a *leistende subjectivität* which is wholly *supported* on them.

The Invisible, the negative, vertical Being

January, 1960

A certain relation between the visible and the invisible, where the invisible is not only non-visible<sup>63</sup> (what has been or

63. Or *possibly* visible (in different degrees of possibility: the past has been, the future will be able to be seen).

will be seen and is not seen, or what is seen by an other than me, not by me), but where its absence counts in the world (it is "behind" the visible, imminent or eminent visibility, it is *Ur-präsentiert* precisely as *Nichturpräsentierbar*, as another dimension) where the lacuna that marks its place is one of the points of passage of the "world." It is this negative that makes possible the *vertical* world, the union of the impossibles, the being in transcendence, and the topological space and the time in joints and members, in dis-junction and dis-membering<sup>64</sup>—and the possible as a claimant of existence (of which "past" and "future" are but partial expressions)—and the male-female relation (the two pieces of wood that children see fitting together of themselves, irresistibly, because each is the *possible of the other*)—and the "divergence," and the totality above the divergencies—and the thought-unthought relation (Heidegger)—and the relation of *Kopulation* where two intentions have *one sole Erfüllung*

January, 1960

Husserl too thinks that one sole world is possible, this one (cf. unpublished texts at the Sorbonne: <sup>65</sup> unicity of the world, *like of God*). The "other possible worlds" are ideal variants of this one.—But this unique possible which our world is is not, in its very fabric, made of actuality—The Leibnizian notion of the possible as non-contradictory, as not involving negativity, is not the contrary of actualism: it is its counterpart, it is positivist like it. And finally the actual for Leibniz is only the limiting case of that possibility, the full possibility, it is what does not involve moral contradiction, what is not bad or what is *the best possible* in the twofold sense of: as good as can be, and the very best one of the possibles. With Husserl, the unicity of the world means not that it is actual and that every other world is imaginary, not that it is in itself and every other world for us only, but that it is at the root of every thought of possibles, that it even is surrounded with a halo of possibilities which are its attributes, which are *Möglichkeit an Wirklichkeit* or *Weltmöglichkeit*, that, taking on the form of the world of itself, this singular and

64. It is the same thing: the [?] is *Kopulation* (Husserl).

65. EDITOR: Unpublished text, 1930, classified E.III.4.

perceived being has a sort of natural destination to be and to embrace every possible one can conceive of, to be *Weltall*. Universality of our world, not according to its "content" (we are far from knowing it entirely), not as recorded fact (the "perceived") but according to its configuration, its ontological structure which envelops every possible and which every possible leads back to. The eidetic variation, therefore, does not make me pass to an order of separated essences, to a logical possible, the invariant that it gives me is a structural invariant, a Being in infrastructure which in the last analysis has its *Erfüllung* only in the *Weltthesis* of this world.

Problematic of the visible and the invisible

January, 1960

Principle: not to consider the invisible as an *other visible* "possible," or a "possible" visible for an other: that would be to destroy the inner framework that joins us to it. Moreover since this "other" who would "see" it—or this "other world" it would constitute would necessarily be connected to our own, the true possibility would necessarily reappear within this connection—The invisible is *there* without being an *object*, it is pure transcendence, without an ontic mask. And the "visibles" themselves, in the last analysis, they too are only centered on a nucleus of absence—

Raise the question: the invisible life, the invisible community, the invisible other, the invisible culture.

Elaborate a phenomenology of "the other world," as the limit of a phenomenology of the imaginary and the "hidden"—

Perception—Movement—Primordial unity of the sensible field—Transcendence synonym of incarnation—Endo-ontology—Soul and body—Qualitative integration and differentiation—

January, 1960

When I move myself, the perceived things have an apparent displacement that is inversely proportional to their distance—

the closest move more—The extent of the displacement can serve as an index for the distance.

Fundamental: it is absolutely *artificial* to recompose the phenomenon as geometrical optics does, to construct it on the basis of the angular displacement on the retina of images corresponding to *such* or *such* a point. I am ignorant of this geometry, and what is given to me phenomenally is not a set of *displacements* or *non-displacements* of this kind, it is the *difference* between what takes place at one distance and at another distance, it is the integral of those differences; the “points” that the optico-geometric analysis *gives* itself are, phenomenally, not points, but very small structures, monads, *metaphysical* points or transcendences. How name this system of differentiation of *Veränderung* and *Unveränderung*? In fact, to designate it thus, to describe it thus, is already to substitute for it its “projection” on a space for objective analysis. To tell the truth, movements, rests, distances, apparent sizes, etc., are only different indexes of refraction of the transparent medium that separates me from the *things themselves*, different expressions of that coherent distention across which Being shows itself and conceals itself. To pose the problem on the strength of such or such an index of distance as psychology does is already to break the structural unity of the world and to engage in the isolating attitude. Absolute primacy of the World and of Being for a “vertical” philosophy which really takes perception in the present—

For this same philosophy, therefore, the “partial” phenomena (here *Veränderung*, there *Unveränderung*), are not to be considered as positive, to be represented by a geometrical diagram where positive *lines* on a neutral *ground* connect positive *points*. On the contrary, each of these points result, by differentiation and objectification, from the movement of *Übergang* and from the intentional encroachment that sweeps the field. Absolute primacy of movement, not as *Ortsveränderung*, but as instability instituted by the organism itself (cf. F. Meyer<sup>66</sup>), as *fluctuation organized by it*, and, consequently, dominated. My mobility is the means of compensating for the mobility of the things, and hence of comprehending it and of surveying it from above (*survoler*).

66. EDITOR: François Meyer, *Problématique de l'évolution*, (Paris, 1954).

It is by principle that every perception is movement. And the unity of the world, the unity of the perceiver are this living unity of displacements compensated for. There is a point of fixation that does not budge in the movements of my body (compensated for by those of the eyes); on this side of that point there are apparent displacements of the objects when my head moves, beyond that point there are apparent displacements in the inverse direction: both are plus or minus variants of the *Unveränderung* of the fixed point (which results from the fact that my eyes move, compensating for the movements of my head)—The fixity of the fixed point and the mobility of what is this side of it and beyond it are not partial, local phenomena, and not even a set of phenomena: it is one sole transcendence, one sole graduated series of *divergencies*—The structure of the visual field, with its near-bys, its far-offs, its horizon, is indispensable for there to be *transcendence*, the model of every transcendence. Apply to the perception of space what I said about the perception of time (in Husserl): Husserl's diagram as a *positivist* projection of the vortex of temporal differentiation.<sup>67</sup> And the *intentional* analysis that tries to compose the field with intentional threads does not see that the threads are emanations and idealizations of one fabric, differentiations of the fabric.

If this vertical-perceptual view of the world and of being is recovered, there is no reason to seek to construct in the objective body, as the physiology of the nervous system does, a whole mass of hidden nervous phenomena by which the stimuli defined objectively would be *elaborated* into the total perception. The same critique applies to these physiological reconstructions and to the intentional analysis: neither sees that never will one construct perception and the perceived world with these *positive* terms and relations. The endeavor is *positivist*: with something *innerweltlich*, with traits of the world, to *fabricate* the architectonics of the *Welt*. It is a thought that acts as if the world wholly positive were given, and as if the problem were to make the perception of the world first considered as nonexistent arise therefrom. This problematic is of the type: why is there a perception of the world and *not no perception*. It is causal, positivist, negativist thought. Starting from the positive, it is obliged to hollow out lacunae in it (the organism as a *cavity*, the subjectiv-

67. EDITOR: Cf. above, p. 195, n. 31.

ity as the retreat of for Itself) and paradoxically wants these lacunae to be apparatus, dispositions of nervous functionings. . . . That's a case of trying to drink up the sea. And it entails the false idea that we have only the result of these complicated operations, that we exist on a sea of processes of which we know nothing. The postulate that the sole *Weltlichkeit* of the mind is of the type of the *Weltlichkeit* by end-to-end causality, the kind that reigns between the Cartesian *Blosse Sachen*—That, whether one [?] the psychological processes (unconscious) or the physiological processes ("mystery" of the brain). Criticize Freud's unconscious in this manner: as it is necessary to return to the phenomenal in order to understand the so-called play of perceptual "indexes"—which is clarified at once when we rediscover the evidence of the equivalencies of the *world*—so also the overdetermination, the ambiguity of the motivations must be understood by rediscovering our quasi-perceptual relationship with the human world through quite simple and nowise hidden existentials: only they are, like all structures, *between* our acts and our aims and not behind them—Redescribe the whole interhuman and even spiritual life in these terms, the *Weltlichkeit* of the mind, its non-insularity, its bonds with other minds and with truth also to be understood as differentiations of a spatio-temporal architectonics—

Once that is done, there is no more cause to pose the problem of the relations between the *soul* and the *body* as between two positive substances, nor to introduce an "institution of nature" that compels the soul to function according to the apparatus of the body and also the body to furnish ready-made thoughts to the soul—nor to envisage a *parallelism* which is a complete misconception, since it presupposes that the soul and the body contain respectively a bound series of phenomena or of ideas each rigorously continuous. The bond between the soul and the body is not a parallelism (and finally an identity in an objective infinite Being, of which the totality body and the totality soul are two expressions)—nor is it the absolute opacity of an institution that reconnects by the efficacy of decision two orders each of which would suffice to itself—It is to be understood as the bond between the convex and the concave, between the solid vault and the hollow it forms—No correspondence (parallelism or of pure occasionalism) is to be sought between what takes place "in

the body" and what takes place "in the soul" in perception: it is the same misconception to seek in the physical world an exact equivalent of the organisms or in the organisms an integral microcausal explanation—The soul is *planted* in the body as the stake in the ground, without point by point correspondence between ground and stake—or rather: the soul is the hollow of the body, the body is the distention of the soul. The soul adheres to the body as their signification adheres to the cultural things, whose reverse or other side it is—

But this (plenum and hollow) does not suffice: for idealism also says that, and we do not say it in the same sense. The soul, the for itself is *a hollow and not a void*, not absolute non-being with respect to a Being that would be plenitude and hard core. The sensibility of the others is "the other side" of their aesthesiological body. And I can surmise this other side, *nichturpräsentierbar*, through the articulation of the other's body on *my sensible*, an articulation that does not empty me, that is not a hemorrhage of my "consciousness," but on the contrary redoubles me with an *alter ego*. The other is born in the body (of the other) by an overhanging of that body, its investment in a *Verhalten*, its interior transformation which I witness. The coupling of the bodies, that is, the adjustment of their intentions to *one sole Erfüllung*, to one sole wall they run into from two sides, is latent in the consideration of one sole sensible world, open to participation by all, which is given to each. The unicity of the visible world, and, by encroachment, the invisible world, such as it presents itself in the rediscovery of the vertical Being, is the solution of the problem of the "relations between the soul and the body"—

What we have said at the start concerning my perception as integration-differentiation, my being set up on a universal diacritical system, makes of my incarnation no longer a "difficulty," a fault in the clear diamond of philosophy—but the typical fact, the essential articulation of my constitutive transcendence: it is necessary that a body perceive bodies if I am to be able to be not ignorant of myself—

When the embryo's organism starts to perceive, there is not a creation of a For itself by the body in itself, and there is not a descent into the body of a pre-established soul, it is that the vortex of the embryogenesis suddenly centers itself upon the

interior hollow it was preparing—A certain fundamental divergence, a certain constitutive dissonance emerges—The mystery is the same as that by which a child slides into language, learns, as that by which an absent *arrives*, becomes (again) present. The absent also is of the in itself; no longer counts in the relief of the “vertical.”<sup>68</sup> It is in the universal structure “world”—encroachment of everything upon everything, a being by promiscuity—that is found the reservoir whence proceeds this new absolute life. All verticality comes from the vertical Being—

We must accustom ourselves to understand that “thought” (*cogitatio*) is not an invisible contact of self with self, that it lives outside of this intimacy with oneself, *in front of us*, not in us, always eccentric. Just as we rediscover the field of the sensible world as interior-exterior (cf. at the start: as global adhesion to the infinity of motor indexes and motivations, as my belongingness to this *Welt*), so also it is necessary to rediscover as the reality of the inter-human world and of history a surface of separation between me and the other which is also the place of our union, the unique *Erfüllung* of his life and my life. It is to this surface of separation and of union that the existentials of my personal history proceed, it is the geometrical locus of the projections and introjections, it is the invisible hinge upon which my life and the life of the others turn to rock into one another, the inner framework of intersubjectivity

Human body      Descartes

February 1, 1960

The Cartesian idea of the human body as human *non-closed*, open inasmuch as governed by thought—is perhaps the most profound idea of the union of the soul and the body. It is the soul intervening in a body that is *not of the in itself*, (if it were, it would be closed like an animal body), that can be a body and living—human only by reaching completion in a “view of itself” which is thought—

68. Cf. Freud, mourning.

Husserl: the *Erwirken* of Thought and historicity  
“Vertical” conception of Thought

February, 1960

Husserl: the *Gebilde* whose *Seinsart* is *Gewordenheit aus menschlichen Aktivität* are *originär “erfasst”* in a pure *Erwirken* (Text of *Ursprung* given by Fink,<sup>69</sup> which was not taken up by Louvain)

Extraordinary: the consciousness I have of *producing* my thoughts, my significations, is identical with my consciousness of their “human” origin—It is precisely as a step into the invisible, outside of all nature, of all Being, radical freedom, therefore, that thought is a bond with a human activity—I rejoin *man* precisely in my absolute non being. Humanity is invisible society. The self-consciousness forms a system with the self-consciousness of the other, precisely through its absolute solitude—

I don’t like that—It is very close to Sartre—but it presupposes an activity-passivity *split* which Husserl himself knows does not exist since there is a secondary passivity, since every *Vollzug* is a *Nachvollzug* (even the first: language and its reference to a *Vollzug* before every *Vollzug*), since sedimentation is the sole mode of being of ideality—

I would like to develop that in the sense: the invisible is a hollow in the visible, a fold in passivity, not pure production. For that make an analysis of language, showing to what extent it is a quasi-natural displacement.

But what is fine is the idea of taking literally the *Erwirken* of thought: it is really *empty*, is of the *invisible*—All the positivist bric-a-brac of “concepts,” “judgments,” “relations” is eliminated, and the mind quiet as water in the fissure of Being—We must not look for spiritual things, there are only structures of the void—But I simply wish to plant this void in the visible Being, show that it is its *reverse side*—in particular the reverse side of language.

69. EDITOR: Edmund Husserl, “Die Frage nach dem Ursprung der Geometrie als intentional-historisches Problem,” *Revue internationale de philosophie* (January 15, 1939), p. 209.

Just as it is necessary to restore the *vertical* visible world, so also there is a *vertical* view of the mind, according to which it is not made of a multitude of memories, images, judgments, it is one sole movement that one can coin out in judgments, in memories, but that holds them in one sole cluster as a spontaneous *word* contains a whole becoming, as *one sole grasp* of the hand contains a whole chunk of space.

Essence——Negativity.

February, 1960

I do not oppose quality to quantity, nor perception to idea——I seek in the perceived world nuclei of meaning which are in-visible, but which simply are not invisible in the sense of the absolute negation (or of the absolute positivity of the “intelligible world”), but in the sense of the *other dimensionality*, as depth hollows itself out behind height and breadth, as time hollows itself out behind space——The other dimensionality grafts itself onto the preceding ones starting from a *zero of depth* for example. But this too is contained in Being as universal dimensionality.

Husserl's eidetic variation, and its in-variant, designates only these *hinges* of Being, these structures accessible through quality as well as through quantity——

In order to study the insertion of every dimensionality in Being——study the insertion of depth in perception, and that of language in the world of silence——

Show that there is no eidetic variation without *speech*; show this starting from the *imaginary* as support of the eidetic variation, and speech as support of the imaginary

Problem of the negative and of the concept  
Gradient

February, 1960

The problem of negativity is the problem of depth. Sartre speaks of a world that is not vertical, but in itself, that is, flat, and for a nothingness that is absolute abyss. In the end, for him

depth does not exist, because it is bottomless——For me, the negative means absolutely nothing, and the positive neither (they are synonymous) and that not by appeal to a vague “compound” of being and nothingness, the structure is not a “compound.” I take my starting point where Sartre ends, in the Being taken up by the for Itself——It is for him the finishing point because he starts with being and negentivity and *constructs* their union. For me it is structure or transcendence that explains, and being and nothingness (in Sartre's sense) are its two abstract properties. For an ontology from within, transcendence does not have to be constructed, from the first it is, as Being doubled with nothingness, and what is to be explained is its doubling (which, moreover, is never finished)——Describe structure, everything is there, and the integration of structures in *Sein*, and meaning as meaning by investment (the meaning of the words I say to someone “hits him” (“*tombe sur la tête*”), *takes hold* of him before he has understood, draws the response from him——We are in humanity as a horizon of Being, because the horizon is what *surrounds* us, us no less than the things. But it is the horizon, not humanity, that is being——*Like humanity (Menschheit) every concept is first a horizontal generality, a generality of style*——There is no longer a problem of the concept, generality, the idea, when one has understood that the sensible itself is *invisible*, that the *yellow* is capable of setting itself up as a level or a horizon——

For Sartre, it is always *I* who forms depth, who hollows it out, who does everything, and who closes from within my prison in upon myself——

For me, on the contrary, even the most characterized acts, the decisions (a Communist's break with the Party), *this is not a non-being that makes itself be (to be a Communist, or to be a non-Communist)*——These decisions that *settle* are for me ambiguous (Communist outside of communism, if I break, non-Communist within communism, if once again I rally to it), and this ambiguity, it must be admitted, said, is of the same sort as the impartiality of past history, when it puts our former choices or the former doctrines beyond the true and the false for me the truth is this beyond the truth, this depth where there are still *several relationships* to be considered.

The concept, the signification are the singular *dimensionalized*, the *formulated* structure, and there is no vision of this

invisible hinge; nominalism is right: the significations are only *defined separations* (*écarts*)——

The gradient: not linear being, but structured being

The “representational” acts and the others——Consciousness and existence

February, 1960

Husserl admitted (L.U.<sup>70</sup>) that the representational acts are always founding with respect to the others—and that the others are not reducible to them——the consciousness was defined by priority as cognition—but it is admitted that *Werthen* is original——

This is the sole possible position in a Philosophy of consciousness——

Is it still maintained in the unpublished texts where, for example, sexual instinct is considered “from the transcendental point of view”?<sup>71</sup> Does that not mean that non-representational “acts” (?) have an ontological function? But how could they, with the same rights as cognition, since they do not give “objects” and are *fungierende* rather than *acts*? (like time)

In fact, the solution of the L.U. is provisional, bound to the omnipotence of the eidetic method, that is, of reflexivity——It corresponds to a period when Husserl calmly distinguished the reflected and the unreflected (language that functions and language as ideality) as *Wesen* and *Tatsache*——If one remained with that, the intervention of “non-objectifying acts,” their ontological function would be purely and simply the overthrow of the consciousness, irrationalism.

One does not get out of the rationalism-irrationalism dilemma as long as one thinks “consciousness” and “acts”——The decisive step is to recognize that in fact a consciousness is intentionality without acts, *fungierende*, that the “objects” of con-

70. EDITOR: Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*, 1st ed., 2 vols. (Halle, 1900–1901); 2d ed., 3 vols. (Halle, 1913–21).

71. EDITOR: Unpublished text entitled *Universale Teleologie*, classified E.III.5, published and translated into Italian in the volume *Tempo e Intentionalità*, in *Archivio di Filosofia*, Organo dell’ Istituto di Studi filosofici (Padua, 1960).

sciousness themselves are not something positive *in front of* us, but nuclei of signification about which the transcendental life pivots, specified voids—and that the consciousness itself is an *Urpräsentierbar* for Itself which is presented as *Nichturpräsentierbar* for the other, that sense experience (*le sentir*) is an *Urpräsentation* of what by principle is *Nichturpräsentierbar*, the transcendent, the thing, the “quale” become “level” or dimension—that the chiasm, the intentional “encroachment” are irreducible, which leads to the rejecting of the notion of subject, or to the defining of the subject as a field, as a hierarchized system of structures opened by an inaugural *there is*.

As a result of this reform of the “consciousness,” immediately the non-objectifying intentionalities are no longer in the alternative of being *subordinate* or *dominant*, the structures of the affectivity are constitutive with the same right as the others, for the simple reasons that they are already the structures of knowledge being those of *language*. We must no longer ask why we have *affections* in addition to “representative sensations,” since the representative sensation also (taken “vertically” to its insertion in our life) is affection, being a presence to the world through the body and to the body through the world, being *flesh*, and language is also. Reason too is *in* this horizon—promiscuity with Being and the world

Philosophy of speech and malaise of culture

March, 1960

There is a danger that a philosophy of speech would justify the indefinite proliferation of writings—and even of pre-writings (working notes—Husserl’s *Forschungsmanuskript*. With him notion of the *Arbeitsprobleme*——*Arbeit*: that impossible enterprise of grasping the transcendental consciousness in the act)—the habit of speaking without knowing what one is saying, the confusion of style and of thought etc.

Yet: 1) it has always been that way in fact—the works that escape this profusion are “academic” works

2) there is a remedy, which is not to return to the American analytic-academic method—which would be to retreat from the problem—but to proceed over and beyond by facing the things again

Rays of past  
of world

March, 1960

The interior monologue—the “consciousness” itself to be understood not as a series of individual (sensible or non sensible) *I think that's*, but as openness upon *general* configurations or constellations, rays of the past and rays of the world at the end of which, through many “memory screens” dotted with lacunae and with the imaginary, pulsate some almost sensible structures, some individual memories. It is the Cartesian idealization applied to the mind as to the things (Husserl) that has persuaded us that we were a flux of individual *Erlebnisse*, whereas we are a field of Being. Even in the present, the landscape is a configuration.

The “associations” of psychoanalysis are in reality “rays” of time and of the world.

For example the memory screen of a yellow-striped butterfly (Freud, *The Wolf Man*<sup>72</sup>) reveals upon analysis a connection with yellow-streaked pears that in Russian call to mind *Grusha* which is the name of a young maid. There are not here three memories: the butterfly—the pear—the maid (of the same name) “associated.” There is a certain play of the butterfly in the colored *field*, a certain (*verbal*) *Wesen* of the butterfly and of the pear—which communicate with the language *Wesen* *Grusha* (in virtue of the force of incarnation of language)—There are three *Wesen* connected by their center, belonging to the same ray of being. The analysis shows in addition that the maid spread open her legs like the butterfly its wings. Hence there is an *overdetermination* of the association—Perhaps valid in general: there is no association that comes into play unless there is overdetermination, that is, a relation of relations, a coincidence that cannot be fortuitous, that has an *ominal* sense. The tacit *Cogito* “thinks” only overdeterminations. I.e. symbolic matrices—Overdetermination *always* occurs: the retrograde movement of the true (= the pre-existence of the ideal) (i.e. according

72. EDITOR: Sigmund Freud, *Cinq Psychanalyses*, French translation (Paris, 1954). [English translation by James Strachey, *An Infantile Neurosis*, Vol. XVII of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London, 1955), p. 90.]

to Husserl the very fact of Speech as invocation of the nameable) furnishes always still other reasons for a given association—

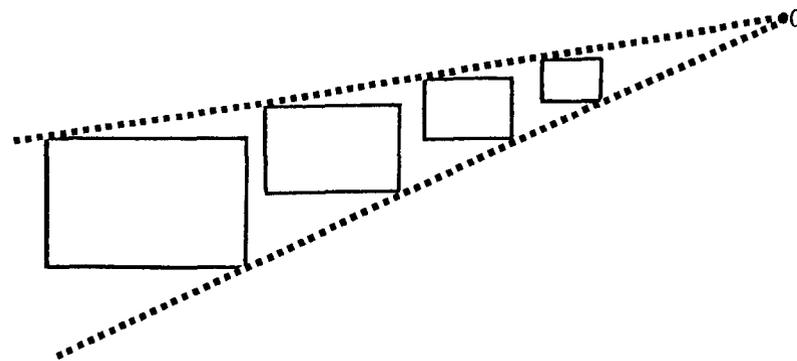
For this see *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*—(cf. in *Cinq Psychanalyses*,<sup>73</sup> p. 397: subject dreams of an *Espe* whose wings are torn out—but it is *Wespe*—but his initials are SP—he is the castrated one—Analyze this operation of verbal castration which is also a displaying of his initials (overdetermination)—The “castrating subject” is not a Thinker who knows the true and who strikes it out. It is lateral junction of SP and castration)—In general: Freud's *verbal* analyses appear incredible because one realizes them in a Thinker. But they must not be *realized* in this way. Everything takes place in non-conventional thought.

Notion of “ray of the world” (Husserl—Unpublished texts) (or line of the universe)

March, 1960

It is the idea not of a slice of the objective world between me and the horizon, and not of an objective ensemble organized synthetically (under an idea), but of an axis of equivalencies—of an axis upon which all the perceptions that can be met with there are equivalent, not with respect to the objective conclusion they authorize (for in this respect they are quite different) but in that they are all under the power of my vision of the moment

elementary example: all the perceptions are implicated in my actual I can—



73. Eng. trans., *An Infantile Neurosis*, p. 94.

what is seen can be an object near and small or large and far-off.

The ray of the world is not represented here: what I represent here is a series of "visual pictures" and their law—The ray of the world is neither this series of logical possibles, nor the law that defines them—(interobjective relation)—It is the gaze within which they are all simultaneous, fruits of my I can—It is the very vision of depth—The ray of the world does not admit of a noema-noesis analysis. This does not mean that it presupposes *man*. It is a leaf of Being.

The "ray of the world" is not a synthesis and not "reception," but *segregation* i.e. implies that one is already *in the world or in being*. One carves in a being that remains in its place, of which one does not make a *synopsis*—and which is not in itself—

#### *The visible and the invisible*

April, 1960

The second part of the book (which I am beginning) with my description of the visible as in-visible, must lead in the third to a confrontation with the Cartesian ontology (finish Gueroult's Descartes—read his Malebranche—see Leibniz and Spinoza). The confrontation directed by this idea: Descartes = no *Weltlichkeit* of the mind, the mind consigned to the side of a god who is beyond thought—This leaves open the problem of the communication of the substances (occasionalism, harmony, parallelism)—My descriptions, my rehabilitation of the perceived world with all its consequences for the "subjectivity," in particular my description of corporeity and the "vertical" Being, all this is to lead to a mind-body, mind-mind communication, to a *Weltlichkeit* that would not be the *Weltlichkeit* of Nature simply transposed as in Leibniz, where the little perceptions and God as flat projection re-establish, on the side of the mind, a continuity symmetrical with that of Nature. This continuity, no longer existing even in Nature, a fortiori does not exist on the side of the mind. And yet there is a *Weltlichkeit* of the mind, it is not insular. Husserl showing that the mind is that milieu where there is *action at a distance* (memory) (text published in *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie*<sup>74</sup>) The Leibnizian postulate of

74. EDITOR: "L'Esprit collectif," an unedited text of Husserl, trans. R. Toulemont, *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie*, XXVII (July-Dec., 1959), 128.

a projection of Nature in the monads (punctual correspondence) is typically a postulate of the "visual picture," an unconsciousness of the "wild" or perceived world

"Indestructible" past,  
and intentional analytic—and ontology

April, 1960

The Freudian idea of the unconscious and the past as "indestructible," as "intemporal" = elimination of the common idea of time as a "series of *Erlebnisse*"—There is an architectonic past. cf. Proust: the *true* hawthorns are the hawthorns of the past—Restore this life without *Erlebnisse*, without interiority—which is what Piaget calls, badly indeed, egocentrism—which is, in reality, the "monumental" life, *Stiftung*, initiation.

This "past" belongs to a mythical time, to the time before time, to the prior life, "farther than India and China"—

What is the *intentional analysis* worth in regard to it? It gives us: every past *sinngemäß* has been present, i.e. its past being has been founded in a presence—And, certainly, that is so true [of ?] it that it *is still present*. But precisely there is here something that the intentional analytic cannot grasp, for it cannot rise (Husserl) to this "simultaneity" which is meta-intentional (cf. Fink article on the *Nachlass*<sup>75</sup>). The intentional analytic tacitly assumes a place of absolute contemplation *from which* the intentional explicitation is made, and which could embrace present, past, and even openness toward the future—It is the order of the "consciousness" of significations, and in this order there is no past-present "simultaneity," there is the evidence of their divergence—Whereas the *Ablaufphänomen* that Husserl describes and thematizes contains in itself something quite different: it contains the "simultaneity," the *passage*, the *nunc stans*, the Proustian corporeity as guardian of the past, the immersion in a Being in transcendence not reduced to the "perspectives" of the "consciousness"—it contains an intentional reference which is not only from the past<sup>76</sup> to the

75. EDITOR: E. Fink, "Die Spätphilosophie Husserls in der Freiburger Zeit," in *Edmund Husserl, 1859-1959* (The Hague, 1960), pp. 99-115.

76. EDITOR: Above the word "past," the author notes between parentheses, "subordinated."

factual, empirical present, but also and inversely from the factual present to a dimensional present or *Welt* or Being, where the past is "simultaneous" with the present in the narrow sense. This *reciprocal* intentional reference marks the limit of the intentional analytic: the point where it becomes a philosophy of transcendence. We encounter this *Ineinander* each time the intentional reference is no longer that from a *Sinngebung* to a *Sinngebung* that *motivates* it but from a "noema" to a "noema." And in fact here it is indeed the past that adheres to the present and not the *consciousness* of the past that adheres to the *consciousness* of the present: the "vertical" past contains in itself the exigency to have been perceived, far from the consciousness of having perceived bearing that of the past. The past is no longer here a "modification" or modalization of the *Bewusstsein von*. . . . Conversely it is the *Bewusstsein von*, the having perceived that is borne by the past as massive Being. I have perceived it *since it was*. The whole Husserlian analysis is blocked by the framework of *acts* which imposes upon it the philosophy of *consciousness*. It is necessary to take up again and develop the *fungierende* or *latent* intentionality which is the intentionality within being. That is not compatible with "phenomenology," that is, with an ontology that obliges whatever is not nothing to *present* itself to the *consciousness* across *Abschattungen* and as deriving from an originating donation which is an *act*, i.e. one *Erlebnis* among others (cf. Fink's critique of Husserl in the early article from the colloquium on phenomenology<sup>77</sup>). It is necessary to take as primary, not the *consciousness* and its *Ablaufspänomen* with its distinct intentional threads, but the vortex which this *Ablaufspänomen* schematizes, the spatializing-temporalizing vortex (which is flesh and not *consciousness* facing a noema)

Telepathy——Being for the other——Corporeity

April, 1960

Organs to be seen (Portmann<sup>78</sup>)——My body as an organ to be seen——I.e.: to perceive a part of my body is also to perceive

77. EDITOR: E. Fink, "L'Analyse intentionnelle," in *Problèmes actuels de la phénoménologie* (Bruges, 1952).

78. EDITOR: A. Portmann, *Tiergestalt*. [English translation, *Animal Forms and Patterns: A Study of the Appearance of Animals*

it as *visible*, i.e. *for the other*. And to be sure it assumes this character because in fact someone does look at it——But this *fact* of the other's presence would not itself be possible if antecedently the part of the body in question were not *visible*, if there were not, around each part of the body, a halo of *visibility*——But this visible not actually seen is not the Sartrean *imaginary*: presence to the absent or of the absent. It is a presence of the imminent, the latent, or the hidden——Cf. Bachelard saying that each sense has its own imaginary.

This visibility of my body (for me—but also *universal* and, eminently, for the other) is what is responsible for what is called telepathy. For a minute indication of the other's behavior suffices to activate this danger of visibility. For example, a woman feels her body desired and looked at by imperceptible signs, and without even herself looking at those who look at her. The "telepathy" here is due to the fact that she anticipates the other's effective perception (nymphomania) cf. *Psychoanalysis and the Occult*<sup>79</sup>——One feels oneself looked at (burning neck) not because something passes from the look to our body to burn it at the point seen, but because to feel one's body is also to feel its aspect for the other. One would here have to study in what sense the other's sensoriality is implicated in my own: to feel my eyes is to feel that they are threatened with being seen——But the correlation is not always thus of the seer with the seen, or of speaking with hearing: my hands, my face also are of the visible. The case of reciprocity (seeing seen), (touching touched in the handshake) is the major and perfect case, where there is *quasi-reflection* (*Einfühlung*), *Ineinander*; the general case is the adjustment of a visible for me to a tangible for me and of this visible for me to a visible for the other——(for example, my hand)

(London, 1952).] The author is applying to the human body certain of Portmann's remarks concerning the animal organism. Cf. notably p. 113: the body patterns of certain animals "must be appraised as a special organ of reference in relationship to a beholding eye and to the central nervous systems. The eye and what is to be looked at form together a functional unit which is fitted together according to rules as strict as those obtaining between food and digestive organs."

79. EDITOR: Georges Devreux, *Psychoanalysis and the Occult* (New York, 1953).

Ἐγώ and οὐτις

April, 1960

The I, really, is nobody, is the anonymous; it must be so, prior to all objectification, denomination, in order to be the Operator, or the one to whom all this occurs. The named I, the I named (*Le Je dénommé, le dénommé Je*), is an object. The primary I, of which this one is the objectification, is the unknown to whom all is given to see or to think, to whom everything appeals, before whom . . . there is something. It is therefore negativity—ungraspable in person, of course, since it is *nothing*.

But is this *he who thinks*, reasons, speaks, argues, suffers, enjoys, etc.? Obviously not, since it is nothing—He who thinks, perceives, etc. is this negativity as openness, by the body, to the world—Reflexivity must be understood by the body, by the relation to self of the body, of speech. The speaking-listening duality remains at the heart of the I, its negativity is but the *hollow* between speaking and hearing, the point where their equivalence is formed—The body-negative or language-negative duality is the subject—the body, language, as alter ego—The “among ourselves” (*entre-nous*) (Michaux) of my body and me—my duplication—which does not prevent the passive-body and the active-body from being welded together in *Leistung*—from *overlapping*, being non-different—This, even though every *Leistung* accomplished (animated discussion, etc.), always gives me the impression of having “left myself”——

Visible—Invisible

May, 1960

When I say that every visible: 1) involves a ground which is not visible in the sense the figure is

2) even in what is figural or figurative in it, is not an objective *quale*, an in Itself surveyed from above, but slips under the gaze or is swept over by the look, is born in silence under the gaze (when it arises straight ahead, it comes from the horizon, when it comes on the scene laterally, it does so “noiselessly”—in the sense that Nietzsche says great ideas are born *noiselessly*)—hence, if one means by visible the

objective *quale*, it is in this sense not visible, but *Unverborgen*

When I say then that every visible is invisible, that perception is imperception, that consciousness has a “*punctum caecum*,” that to see is always to see more than one sees—this must not be understood in the sense of a *contradiction*——It must not be imagined that I add to the visible perfectly defined as in Itself a non-visible (which would be only objective absence) (that is, objective presence *elsewhere*, in an *elsewhere* in itself)——One has to understand that it is the visibility itself that involves a non-visibility——In the very measure that I see, I do not know *what* I see (a familiar person is not defined), which does not mean that there would be *nothing* there, but that the *Wesen* in question is that of a ray of the world tacitly touched——The perceived world (like painting) is the ensemble of my body's routes and not a multitude of spatio-temporal individuals——The invisible of the visible. It is its belongingness to a ray of the world——There is a *Wesen* of red, which is not the *Wesen* of green; but it is a *Wesen* that in principle is accessible only through the seeing, and is accessible as soon as the seeing is given, has then no more need to be *thought*: seeing is this sort of thought that has no need to think in order to possess the *Wesen*——It *este*<sup>80</sup> in the red like the memory of the high school building in its odor<sup>81</sup>——Understand this active *Wesen*, coming from the red itself, perhaps as the articulation of the red upon the other colors or under the lighting. From this, understand that the red has in itself the possibility to become neutral (when it is the color of the lighting), dimensionality——This becoming-neutral is not a change of the red into “another color”; it is a modification of the red by its own duration (as the impact of a figure or a line on my vision tends to become dimensional, and to give it the value of an index of the curvature of space)——And since there are such structural modifications of the quality by space (transparency, constancies) as well as by the other qualities, we must understand that the *sensible world* is this perceptual logic, this system of equivalencies, and not a pile of spatio-temporal individuals. And this logic is neither *produced* by our psychophysical constitution, nor produced by our categorial equipment, but

80. EDITOR: See above, p. 203, n. 44.

81. EDITOR: Allusion to Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (Tübingen, 1953), pp. 25–26. [English translation, *Introduction to Metaphysics* (Garden City, N. Y., 1961), pp. 27–28.]

lifted from a *world* whose inner framework our categories, our constitution, our "subjectivity" render explicit——

Blindness (*punctum caecum*) of the "consciousness"

May, 1960

What it does not see it does not see for reasons of principle, it is because it is consciousness that it does not see. What it does not see is what in it prepares the vision of the rest (as the retina is blind at the point where the fibers that will permit the vision spread out into it). What it does not see is what makes it see, is its tie to Being, is its corporeity, are the existentials by which the world becomes visible, is the flesh wherein the *object* is born. It is inevitable that the consciousness be mystified, inverted, indirect, in principle it sees the things *through the other end*, in principle it disregards Being and prefers the object to it, that is, a Being with which it has broken, and which it posits beyond this negation, by negating this negation——In it it ignores the non-dissimulation of Being, the *Unverborgenheit*, the non-mediated presence which is not something positive, which is being of the far-offs (*être des lointains*)

Flesh of the world—Flesh of the body—Being

May, 1960

*Flesh of the world*, described (apropos of time, space, movement) as segregation, dimensionality, continuation, latency, encroachment——Then interrogate once again these phenomena-questions: they refer us to the perceiving-perceived *Einfühlung*, for they mean that we are already *in* the being thus described, that we *are of it*, that between it and us there is *Einfühlung*

That means that my body is made of the same flesh as the world (it is a perceived), and moreover that this flesh of my body is shared by the world, the world *reflects* it, encroaches upon it and it encroaches upon the world (the felt [*senti*] at the same time the culmination of subjectivity and the culmination of materiality), they are in a relation of transgression or of overlapping——This also means: my body is not only one perceived

among others, it is the mesurant (*mesurant*) of all, *Nullpunkt* of all the dimensions of the world. For example, it is not one mobile or moving among the mobiles or movings, I am not conscious of its movements as a *distance taken by relation to me*, it *sich bewegt* whereas the things *are moved*. This means a sort of "reflectedness" (*sich bewegen*), it thereby constitutes itself *in itself*——In a parallel way: it touches *itself*, sees *itself*. And consequently it is capable of *touching or seeing* something, that is, of being open to the things in which (Malebranche) it reads its own modifications (because we have no idea of the soul, because the soul is a being of which there is no idea, a being *we are* and do not see). The touching oneself, seeing oneself, a "knowing by sentiment"——

The *touching itself, seeing itself* of the body is itself to be understood in terms of what we said of the seeing and the visible, the touching and the touchable. I.e. it is not an act, it is a being at (*être à*). To touch *oneself*, to see *oneself*, accordingly, is not to apprehend oneself as an object, it is to be open to oneself, destined to oneself (narcissism)——Nor, therefore, is it to reach *oneself*, it is on the contrary to escape *oneself*, to be ignorant of *oneself*, the self in question is by divergence (*décart*), is *Unverborgenheit of the Verborgenen* as such, which consequently does not cease to be hidden or latent——

The feeling that one feels, the seeing one sees, is not a thought of seeing or of feeling, but vision, feeling, mute experience of a mute meaning——

The quasi "reflective" redoubling, the reflexivity of the body, the fact that it touches itself touching, sees itself seeing, does not consist in surprising a connecting activity behind the connected, in reinstalling oneself in this constitutive activity; the self-perception (sentiment of oneself, Hegel would say) or perception of perception does not convert what it apprehends into an object and does not coincide with a constitutive source of perception: in fact I do not entirely succeed in touching myself touching, in seeing myself seeing, the experience I have of myself perceiving does not go beyond a sort of *imminence*, it terminates in the invisible, simply this invisible is *its* invisible, i.e. the reverse of *its* specular perception, of the concrete vision I have of my body in the mirror. The self-perception is still a perception, i.e. it gives me a *Nicht Urpräsentierbar* (a non-visible, myself), but this it

gives me through an *Urpräsentierbar* (my tactile or visual appearance) in transparency (i.e. as a latency)—My invisibility for myself does not result from my being a *positive* mind, a *positive* "consciousness," a *positive* spirituality, an existence as consciousness (i.e. as pure *appearing to self*), it comes from the fact that I am he who: 1) has a visible world, i.e. a dimensional body, and open to participation; 2) i.e. a body visible for itself; 3) and therefore, finally, a self-presence that is an absence from self—The progress of the inquiry toward the *center* is not the movement from the conditioned unto the condition, from the founded unto the *Grund*: the so-called *Grund* is *Abgrund*. But the abyss one thus discovers is not such *by lack of ground*, it is upsurge of a *Hoheit* which supports from above (*tient par le haut*) (cf. Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*<sup>82</sup>), that is, of a negativity that *comes to the world*.

The flesh of the world is not explained by the flesh of the body, nor the flesh of the body by the negativity or self that inhabits it—the 3 phenomena are *simultaneous*—

The flesh of the world is not *self-sensing* (*se sentir*) as is my flesh—It is sensible and not sentient—I call it flesh, nonetheless (for example, the relief, depth, "life" in Michotte's experiments<sup>83</sup>) in order to say that it is a *pregnancy* of possibles, *Weltmöglichkeit* (the possible worlds variants of this world, the world beneath the singular and the plural) that it is therefore absolutely not an object, that the *blosse Sache* mode of being is but a partial and second expression of it. This is not hylozoism: inversely, hylozoism is a conceptualization—A false thematization, in the order of the explicative-Entity, of our experience of carnal presence—It is by the flesh of the world that in the last analysis one can understand the lived body (*corps propre*)—The flesh of the world is of the Being-seen, i.e. is a Being that is *eminently percipi*, and it is by it that we can understand the *percipere*: this perceived that we call my body applying itself to the rest of the perceived, i.e. treating itself as a perceived by itself and hence as a perceiving, all this is finally possible and means something only because *there is* Being, not Being in itself,

82. EDITOR: *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Tübingen, 1959), p. 13. "Die Sprache ist: Sprache. Die Sprache spricht. Wenn wir uns in den Abgrund, den dieser Satz nennt, fallen lassen, stürzen wir nicht ins Leere weg. Wir fallen in die Höhe. Deren Hoheit öffnet eine Tiefe."

83. EDITOR: Cf. above, p. 178, n. 14.

identical to itself, in the night, but the Being that also contains its negation, its *percipi*—cf. Bergson saying: we have already given ourselves the consciousness by positing the "images," and therefore we do not have to deduce it at the level of the "conscious" living being, which is *less* and not more than the universe of images, which is one concentration or abstraction of them—It was meaningless to thus realize the consciousness before the consciousness. And this is why we say, for our part, that what is primary is not the diffuse "consciousness" of the "images" (a diffuse consciousness which is nothing, since Bergson explains that there is consciousness only through the "camera obscura" of the centers of indetermination and the bodies<sup>84</sup>), it is Being

Metaphysics—Infinity  
World—*Offenheit*

May, 1960

World and Being:  
their relation is that of the visible with the invisible (latency) the invisible is not another visible ("possible" in the logical sense) a positive only *absent*

It is *Verborgenheit* by principle i.e. invisible of the visible, *Offenheit* of the *Umwelt* and not *Unendlichkeit*—*Unendlichkeit* is at bottom the *in itself*, the *object*—For me the infinity of Being that one can speak of is *operative*, militant finitude: the openness of the *Umwelt*—I am against finitude in the empirical sense, a factual existence that *has limits*, and this is why I am for metaphysics. But it lies no more in infinity than in the factual finitude

84. EDITOR: Bergson says that "living beings constitute 'centers of indetermination' in the universe . . .," and further he explains: ". . . if we consider any other given place in the universe we can regard the action of all matter as passing through it without resistance and without loss, and the photograph of the whole as translucent: here there is wanting behind the plate the black screen on which the image could be shown. Our 'zones of indetermination' play in some sort the part of the screen." *Matière et mémoire* (10th ed., Paris, 1913), pp. 24, 26–27. [English translation by N. M. Paul and W. Scott Palmer, *Matter and Memory* (London, 1912), pp. 28, 32.]

The philosophy of the sensible as literature

May, 1960

The scientific psychology thinks that there is nothing to say about quality as a phenomenon, that phenomenology is "at the limit impossible" (Bresson<sup>85</sup>) (and yet what are we talking about, even in scientific psychology, if not phenomena? The facts have no other role there than to awaken dormant phenomena)—The truth is that the *quale* appears opaque, inexpressible, as life inspires nothing to the man who is not a writer. Whereas the sensible is, like life, a treasury ever full of things to say for him who is a philosopher (that is, a writer). And just as each finds to be true and rediscovers in himself what the writer says of life and of the sentiments, so also the phenomenologists are understood and made use of by those who say that phenomenology is impossible. The root of the matter is that the sensible indeed offers nothing one could state if one is not a philosopher or a writer, but that this is not because it would be an ineffable in Itself, but because of the fact that one does not know how to speak. Problems of the "retrospective reality" of the true—It results from the fact that the world, Being, are polymorphism, mystery and nowise a layer of flat entities or of the in itself

"Visual picture" → "representation of the world"

*Todo y Nada*

May, 1960

Generalize the critique of the visual picture into a critique of "Vorstellung"—

For the critique of the visual picture is not a critique of realism or of idealism (synopsis) only—It is essentially a critique of the meaning of being given by both to the *thing* and to the *world*.

That is, the meaning of being *In Itself*—(in itself not re-

85. EDITOR: François Bresson, "Perception et indices perceptifs," in Bruner, Bresson, Morf, and Piaget, *Logique et perception* (Paris, 1958), p. 156. "The phenomenological description is at the limit unrealizable and interior experience ineffable. Consequently it is no longer the object of any communication and of any science, and it would suffice to admit the existence of this experience, without occupying oneself with it any further."

ferred to what alone gives it meaning: *distance*, divergence, transcendence, the flesh)

but if the critique of the "visual picture" is that, it generalizes itself into a critique of *Vorstellung*: for if our relation with the world is *Vorstellung*, the world "represented" has the In Itself as the meaning of its being. For example, the Other represents the world to himself, i.e. there is for him an internal object which is nowhere, which is *ideality*, and apart from which there exists the world itself.

What I want to do is restore the world as a meaning of Being absolutely different from the "represented," that is, as the vertical Being which none of the "representations" exhaust and which all "reach," the wild Being.

This is to be applied not only to perception, but to the Universe of predicative truths and significations as well. Here also it is necessary to conceive the signification (wild) as absolutely distinct from the In Itself and the "pure consciousness"—the (predicative-cultural) truth as this Individual (prior to the singular and the plural) upon which the acts of significations *cross* and of which they are cuttings.

Moreover the distinction between the two planes (natural and cultural) is abstract: everything is cultural in us (our *Lebenswelt* is "subjective") (our perception is cultural-historical) and everything is natural in us (even the cultural rests on the polymorphism of the wild Being).

The meaning of being to be disclosed: it is a question of showing that the ontic, the "*Erlebnisse*," "sensations," "judgments"—(the objects, the "represented," in short all idealizations of the Psyche and of Nature) all the bric-a-brac of those *positive* psychic so-called "realities" (and which are lacunar, "insular," without *Weltlichkeit* of their own) is in reality abstractly carved out from the ontological tissue, from the "body of the mind"—

Being is the "place" where the "modes of consciousness" are inscribed as structurations of Being (a way of thinking oneself within a society is implied in its social structure), and where the structurations of Being are modes of consciousness. The in itself-for itself integration takes place not in the absolute consciousness, but in the Being in promiscuity. The perception of the world is formed in the world, the test for truth takes place in Being.

Sartre and classical ontology      The historical Totalization which Sartre always assumes—is the reflection of his “nothingness”—since nothing, in order to “be in the world,” must support itself on “all.”

Touching—touching oneself  
seeing—seeing oneself  
the body, the flesh as *Self*

May, 1960

To touch and to touch oneself (to touch oneself = touched-touching) They do not coincide in the body: the touching is never exactly the touched. This does not mean that they coincide “in the mind” or at the level of “consciousness.” Something else than the body is needed for the junction to be made: it takes place in the *untouchable*. That of the other which I will never touch. But what I will never touch, he does not touch either, no privilege of oneself over the other here, it is therefore not the *consciousness* that is the *untouchable*—“The consciousness” would be something positive, and with regard to it there would recommence, does recommence, the duality of the reflecting and the reflected, like that of the touching and the touched. The *untouchable* is not a *touchable* in fact inaccessible—the unconscious is not a representation in fact inaccessible. The negative here is not a *positive that is elsewhere* (a transcendent)—It is a true negative, i.e. an *Unverborgenheit* of the *Verborgenheit*, an *Urpräsentation* of the *Nichturpräsentierbar*, in other words, an original of the *elsewhere*, a *Selbst* that is an Other, a *Hollow*—Hence no sense in saying: the touched-touching junction is made by Thought or Consciousness: Thought or Consciousness is *Offenheit* of a corporeity to . . . World or Being

The *untouchable* (and also the *invisible*<sup>86</sup>: for the same analysis can be repeated for vision: what stands in the way of my seeing myself is first a *de facto* invisible (my eyes invisible for me), but, beyond this invisible (which lacuna is filled by the other and by my generality) a *de jure* invisible: I cannot see myself in movement, witness my own movement. But this *de*

86. EDITOR: The parenthesis opened here is not closed: the rest of the paragraph will deal with the invisible.

*de jure* invisible signifies in reality that *Wahrnehmen* and *Sich bewegen* are synonymous: it is for this reason that the *Wahrnehmen* never rejoins the *Sich bewegen* it wishes to apprehend: it is another of the same. But, this failure, this invisible, precisely attests that *Wahrnehmen* is *Sich bewegen*, there is here a success in the failure. *Wahrnehmen* fails to apprehend *Sich bewegen* (and I am for myself a zero of movement even during movement, *I do not move away from myself*) precisely because they are homogeneous, and this failure is the proof of this homogeneity: *Wahrnehmen* and *Sich bewegen* emerge from one another. A sort of reflection by Ec-stasy, they are the same tuft.

To touch is to touch oneself. To be understood as: the things are the prolongation of my body and my body is the prolongation of the world, through it the world surrounds me—If I cannot touch my own movement, this movement is entirely woven out of contacts with me—The touching oneself and the touching have to be understood as each the reverse of the other—The negativity that inhabits the touch (and which I must not minimize: it is because of it that the body is not an empirical fact, that it has an ontological signification), the *untouchable* of the touch, the *invisible* of vision, the unconscious of consciousness (its central *punctum caecum*, that blindness that makes it consciousness i.e. an indirect and *inverted* grasp of all things) is the *other side* or the *reverse* (or the other dimensionality) of sensible Being; one cannot say that it is *there*, although there would assuredly be points where it *is not*—It is there with a presence by investment in another dimensionality, with a “double-bottomed” presence the flesh, the *Leib*, is not a sum of *self-touchings* (of “tactile sensations”), but not a sum of tactile sensations plus “kinestheses” either, it is an “I can”—The corporeal schema would not be a *schema* if it were not this contact of *self* with *self* (which is rather *non-difference*) (common presentation to . . . X)

The flesh of the world (the “quale”) is indivision of this sensible Being that I am and all the rest which feels itself (*se sent*) in me, pleasure-reality indivision—

The flesh is a *mirror phenomenon* and the mirror is an extension of my relation with my body. Mirror = realization of a *Bild* of the thing, and I-my shadow relation = realization of a (verbal) *Wesen*: extraction of the essence of the thing, of the pellicle of Being or of its “Appearance”—To touch oneself, to

see oneself, is to obtain such a specular extract of oneself. I.e. fission of appearance and Being—a fission that already takes place in the touch (duality of the touching and the touched) and which, with the mirror (Narcissus) is only a more profound adhesion to Self. The visual *projection* of the world in me to be understood not as intra-objective things-my body relation. But as a shadow-body relation, a community of verbal *Wesen* and hence finally a “resemblance” phenomenon, transcendence.

The vision-touch divergence (not *superposable*, one of the universes overhangs the other) to be understood as the most striking case of the overhanging that exists within each sense and makes of it “*eine Art der Reflexion*.”

This divergence, one will say, is simply a fact of our *organization*, of the presence of such receptors with such thresholds, etc. . . .

I do not say the contrary. What I say is that these *facts* have no *explicative power*. They express differently an ontological relief which they cannot efface by incorporating it to one unique plane of physical causality, since there is no physical explanation for the constitution of the “singular points” which are our bodies (cf. F. Meyer<sup>87</sup>) nor therefore our aesthesiology—

Phenomenology is here the recognition that the theoretically *complete*, full world of the physical explanation is not so, and that therefore it is necessary to consider as ultimate, inexplicable, and *hence as a world by itself* the whole of our experience of sensible being and of men. A world by itself: i.e. it is necessary to translate into *perceptual logic* what science and positive psychology treat as fragments of the In Itself *absque praemissis*.

{ touching—touching oneself  
(the things  
the lived body [*le corps propre*])  
seeing—seeing oneself  
hearing—*hearing oneself* (Radio)  
understanding—speaking  
hearing—singing  
{ Unity by *nervure*  
pre-objective—

The touch = movement that touches  
and movement that is touched

87. EDITOR: *Problématique de l'évolution*.

To elucidate *Wahrnehmen* and *Sich bewegen*, show that no *Wahrnehmen* perceives except on condition of being a *Self of movement*.

*One's own movement* (*mouvement propre*), attestation of a *thing-subject*: a movement like that of the things, but movement *that I make*—

Start from there in order to understand language as the foundation of the I think: it is to the I think what movement is to perception. Show that the movement is *carnal*—It is in the carnal that there is a relation between the Movement and its “self” (the Self of the movement described by Michotte) with the *Wahrnehmen*.

Visible and invisible

May, 1960

The invisible is

- 1) what is not actually visible, but could be (hidden or inactual aspects of the thing—hidden things, situated “elsewhere”—“Here” and “elsewhere”)
- 2) what, relative to the visible, could nevertheless not be seen as a thing (the existentials of the visible, its dimensions, its non-figurative inner framework)
- 3) what exists only as tactile or kinesthetically, etc.
- 4) the λέκτα, the Cogito

I am not uniting these 4 “layers” *logically* under the category of the *in-visible*—

That is impossible first for the simple reason that since the *visible* is not an *objective positive*, the *invisible* cannot be a negation in the logical sense—

It is a question of a negation-reference (zero of . . .) or separation (*écart*).

This negation-reference is common to all the *invisibles* because the visible has been defined as dimensionality of Being, i.e. as universal, and because therefore everything that is not a *part* of it is necessarily *enveloped in it* and is but a modality of the same transcendence.

Visible invisible

May, 1960

The sensible, the visible, must be for me the occasion to say what nothingness is——

Nothingness is nothing more (nor less) than the invisible.

Start from an analysis of the total philosophical error which is to think that the visible is an *objective* presence (or the idea of this presence) (visual picture)

this entails the idea of the *quale* as in itself

Show that the *quale* is always a certain type of *latency*

Sartre saying that the image of Pierre who is in Africa is only a “manner of living” the very being of Pierre, his visible being, the only one there would be——

In reality this is something else than the free image: it is a sort of perception, a teleperception——

The sensible, the visible must be defined not as that with which I have in fact a relation by effective vision—but also as that of which I can subsequently have a teleperception——For the thing seen is the *Urstiftung* of these “images”——

Like the *Zeitpunkt* the *Raumpunkt* is the *Stiftung* once and for all of a Being-there

History, Transcendental geology,  
Historical time, historical space | Philosophy

June 1, 1960

Oppose to a philosophy of history such as that of Sartre (which is finally a philosophy of the “individual praxis”—and in which history is the encounter of this praxis with the inertia of the “worked-over matter,” of the authentic temporality with what *congeals* it), not, doubtlessly, a philosophy of geography (it would be as vain to take as axis the encounter of the individual praxis with the spatial in Itself as his encounter with the inert, the “relations between persons” mediatized by space as the relations between persons mediatized by time)—but a philosophy of structure which, as a matter of fact, will take form better on contact with geography than on contact with history. For history is too immediately bound to the individual praxis, to interiority, it hides too much its thickness and its flesh for it not to be easy to

reintroduce into it the whole philosophy of the person. Whereas geography—or rather: the Earth as *Ur-Arche* brings to light the carnal *Urhistorie* (Husserl—*Umsturz* . . .<sup>88</sup>) In fact it is a question of grasping the *nexus*—neither “historical” nor “geographic” of history and transcendental geology, this very time that is space, this very space that is time, which I will have rediscovered by my analysis of the visible and the flesh, the simultaneous *Urstiftung* of time and space which makes there be a historical landscape and a quasi-geographical inscription of history. Fundamental problem: the sedimentation and the reactivation

Flesh—Mind

June, 1960

Define the mind as the *other side* of the body——We have no idea of a mind that would not be *doubled* with a body, that would not be established on this *ground*——

The “other side” means that the body, inasmuch as it has this other side, is not describable in *objective* terms, in terms of the in itself—that this other side is really the other side of the *body*, *overflows* into it (*Ueberschreiten*), encroaches upon it, is hidden in it—and at the same time needs it, terminates in it, is *anchored* in it. There is a body of the mind, and a mind of the body and a chiasm between them. The other side to be understood not, as in objective thought, in the sense of another projection of the same flat projection system, but in the sense of *Ueberstieg* of the body toward a depth, a dimensionality that is not that of extension, and a transcendence of the negative toward the sensible.

The essential notion for such a philosophy is that of the flesh, which is not the objective body, nor the body thought by the soul as its own (Descartes), which is the sensible in the twofold sense of what one senses and what senses. What one senses = the sensible thing, the sensible world = the correlate of my active body, what “responds” to it——What senses = I cannot posit one sole sensible without positing it as torn from my flesh, lifted off my flesh, and my flesh itself is one of the sensi-

88. EDITOR: *Umsturz der Kopernikanischen Lehre: die Erde als ur-Arche bewegt sich nicht* (unpublished text).

bles in which an inscription of all the others is made, the sensible pivot in which all the others participate, the sensible-key, the dimensional sensible. My body is to the greatest extent what every thing is: a *dimensional this*. It is the universal thing—But, while the things become dimensions only insofar as they are received in a *field*, my body is this field itself, i.e. a sensible that is dimensional *of itself*, universal measurant—The relation of my body as sensible with my body as sentient (the body I touch, the body that touches) = immersion of the being-touched in the touching being and of the touching being in the being-touched—The sensoriality, its *SICH-bewegen* and its *SICH-wahrnehmen*, its coming to *self*—A self that has an environment, that is the reverse of this environment. In going into the details of the analysis, one would see that the essential is the *reflected in offset* (*refléchi en bougé*), where the touching is always *on the verge* of apprehending itself as tangible, misses its grasp, and completes it only in a *there is*—The *wahrnehmen-sich bewegen* implication is a thought-language implication—The flesh is this whole cycle and not only the inherence in a spatio-temporally individuated this. Moreover a spatio-temporally individuated this is an *Unselbständig*: there are only radiations of (verbal) essences, there are no spatio-temporal indivisibles. The sensible thing itself is borne by a transcendency.

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

Visible-seer

November, 1960

In what sense exactly visible?—What I see of myself is never exactly the seer, in any case not the seer of the mo-

ment—But the seer is *of* the visible (is of it), is in the prolongation of the signs of the visible body, in dotted lines (visible for another)—To tell the truth even for the other is it properly speaking visible as a seer?—No in the sense that it is always *a little behind* what the other sees—To tell the truth neither behind, nor in front—nor *where* the other looks.

It is always *a little further* than the spot I look at, the other looks at, that the seer I am is.—*Posed* on the visible, like a bird, clinging to the visible, not *in* it. And yet in chiasm with it—

So also the touched-touching. This structure exists in one sole organ—The flesh of my fingers = each of them is phenomenal finger and objective finger, outside and inside of the finger in reciprocity, in chiasm, activity and passivity coupled. The one encroaches upon the other, they are in a relation of real opposition (Kant)—Local *self* of the finger: its space is felt-feeling.—

There is no coinciding of the seer with the visible. But each borrows from the other, takes from or encroaches upon the other, intersects with the other, is in chiasm with the other. In what sense are these multiple chiasms but one: not in the sense of synthesis, of the originally synthetic unity, but always in the sense of *Uebertragung*, encroachment, radiation of being therefore—

The things touch me as I touch them and touch myself: flesh of the world—distinct from my flesh: the double inscription outside and inside. The inside receives without flesh: not a “psychic state,” but intra-corporeal, reverse of the outside that my body shows to the things.

In what sense it is *the same* who is seer and visible: the same not in the sense of ideality nor of real identity. The same in the structural sense: same inner framework, same *Gestalthafte*, the same in the sense of openness of another dimension of the “same” being.

The *antecedent* unity me-world, world and its parts, parts of my body, a unity before segregation, before the multiple dimensions—and so also the unity of time—Not an architecture of noeses-noemata, posed upon one another, relativizing one another without succeeding in unifying themselves: but there is first their underlying bond by *non-difference*—All this is *exhibited* in: the sensible, the visible. A sensible (even exterior)

involves all that (this is what forms the so-called synopsis, the perceptual synthesis)——

Visible-seer = projection-introjection They both must be abstracts from one sole tissue.

The visible-seer (for me, for the others) is moreover not a psychic something, nor a behavior of vision, but a perspective, or *better*: the world itself with a certain coherent deformation——  
The chiasm truth of the pre-established harmony——Much more exact than it: for it is between local-individuated facts, and the chiasm binds as obverse and reverse ensembles unified in advance in process of differentiation

whence in sum a world that is neither *one* nor two in the objective sense—which is pre-individual, generality——

language and chiasm

Dream  
Imaginary

November, 1960

Dream. The *other stage* of the dream——

Incomprehensible in a philosophy that *adds* the imaginary to the real—for then there will remain the problem of understanding how all that belongs to the same consciousness——

understand the dream starting from the body: as being in the world (*l'être au monde*) without a body, without "observation," or rather with an imaginary body without weight. Understand the imaginary sphere through the imaginary sphere of the body——And hence not as a *nihilation* that *counts as* observation but as the true *Stiftung* of Being of which the observation and the articulated body are special variants.

——what remains of the *chiasm* in the dream?

the dream is *inside* in the sense that the internal double of the external sensible is *inside*, it is on the side of the sensible wherever the world is not——this is that "stage," that "theater" of which Freud speaks, that place of our oneiric beliefs——and not "the consciousness" and its image-making folly.

The "subject" of the dream (and of anguish, and of all life) is the *one*<sup>89</sup>——i.e. the body as *enclosure* (*enceinte*)——

Enclosure which we leave since the body is *visible*, a "sort of reflection."

Chiasm——Reversibility

November 16, 1960

Speech does indeed have to enter the child as silence——break through to him through silence and as silence (i.e. as a thing simply perceived——difference between the word *Sinnvoll* and the word-perceived)——Silence = absence of the word due. It is this fecund negative that is instituted by the flesh, by its dehiscence——the negative, nothingness, is the doubled-up, the two leaves of my body, the inside and the outside articulated over one another——Nothingness is rather the difference between the identicals——

Reversibility: the finger of the glove that is turned inside out——There is no need of a spectator who would be *on each side*. It suffices that from one side I see the wrong side of the glove that is applied to the right side, that I touch the one *through* the other (double "representation" of a point or plane of the field) the chiasm is that: the reversibility——

It is through it alone that there is passage from the "For Itself" to the For the Other——In reality there is neither me nor the other as positive, positive subjectivities. There are two caverns, two openesses, two stages where something will take place——and which both belong to the same world, to the stage of Being

There is not the For Itself and the For the Other They are each the other side of the other. This is why they incorporate one another: projection-introjection——There is that line, that frontier surface at some distance before me, where occurs the veering I-Other Other-I——

The axis alone given——the end of the finger of the glove is nothingness——but a nothingness one can turn over, and where

89. TRANSLATOR: *On*——the indefinite pronoun.

then one sees *things*—The only “place” where the negative would really be is the fold, the application of the inside and the outside to one another, the turning point—

Chiasm I—the world  
I—the other—

chiasm my body—the things, realized by the doubling up of my body into inside and outside—and the doubling up of the things (their inside and their outside)

It is because there are these 2 doublings-up that are possible: the insertion of the world between the two leaves of my body the insertion of my body between the 2 leaves of each thing and of the world

This is not anthropologism: by studying the 2 leaves we ought to find the structure of being—

Start from this: there is not identity, nor non-identity, or non-coincidence, there is inside and outside turning about one another—

My “central” nothingness is like the point of the stroboscopic spiral, which is *who knows where*, which is “nobody”

The *I—my body chiasm*: I know this, that a body [*finalized?*] is *Wahrnehmungsbereit*, offers itself to . . . , opens upon . . . an imminent spectator, is a *charged field*—

Position, negation, negation of negation: this side, the other, the other than the other. What do I bring to the problem of the same and the other? This: that the same be the other than the other, and identity difference of difference—this 1) does not realize a surpassing, a dialectic in the Hegelian sense; 2) is realized on the spot, by encroachment, thickness, *spatiality*—

November, 1960

Activity: passivity—Teleology

The chiasm, reversibility, is the idea that every perception is doubled with a counter-perception (Kant’s real opposition), is an act with two faces, one no longer knows who speaks and who

listens. Speaking-listening, seeing-being seen, perceiving-being perceived circularity (it is because of it that it seems to us that perception forms itself *in the things themselves*)—Activity = passivity.

This is obvious when one thinks of what nothingness is, that is, *nothing*. How would this nothing be active, efficacious? And if the subjectivity is not it, but it plus my body, how would the operation of the subjectivity not be borne by the teleology of the body?

What then is my situation with regard to *finalism*? I am not a finalist, because the interiority of the body (= the conformity of the internal leaf with the external leaf, their folding back on one another) is not something *made, fabricated*, by the assemblage of the two leaves: they have never been apart—

(I call the evolutionist perspective in question I replace it with a cosmology of the visible in the sense that, considering endotime and endospace, for me it is no longer a question of origins, nor limits, nor of a series of events going to a first cause, but one sole explosion of Being which is forever. Describe the world of the “rays of the world” beyond every serial-eternitarian or ideal alternative—Posit the existential eternity—the eternal body)

I am not a finalist because there is dehiscence, and not positive production—through the finality of the body—of a man whose teleological organization our perception and our thought would prolong

Man is not the *end* of the body, nor the organized body the *end* of the components: but rather the subordinated each time slides into the void of a new dimension opened, the lower and the higher gravitate around one another, as *the high and the low* (variants of the side-other side relation)—Fundamentally I bring the high-low distinction into the vortex where it rejoins the side-other side distinction, where the two distinctions are integrated into a *universal dimensionality* which is Being (Heidegger)

There is no other meaning than carnal, figure and ground—Meaning = their dislocation, their gravitation (what I called “leakage” [*échappement*] in *Ph.P* °)

90. EDITOR: *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 221. [Eng. trans., p. 189.]

Politics——Philosophy——Literature

November, 1960

. . . . .  
 . . . the idea of *chiasm*, that is: every relation with being is *simultaneously* a taking and a being taken, the hold is held, it is *inscribed* and inscribed in the same being that it takes hold of.

Starting from there, elaborate an idea of philosophy: it cannot be total and active grasp, intellectual possession, since what there is to be grasped is a dispossession——It is not *above* life, overhanging. It is beneath. It is the simultaneous experience of the holding and the held in all orders. *What* it says, its *significations*, are not absolutely invisible: it shows by words. Like all literature. It does not install itself in the reverse of the visible: it is on both sides

No *absolute* difference, therefore, between philosophy or the transcendental and the empirical (it is better to say: the ontological and the ontic)——No absolutely pure philosophical word. No purely philosophical politics, for example, no philosophical rigorism, when it is a question of a Manifesto.

Yet philosophy is not immediately non-philosophy——It rejects from non-philosophy what is positivism in it, militant non-philosophy—which would reduce history to the visible, would deprive it precisely of its depth under the pretext of adhering to it better: irrationalism, *Lebensphilosophie*, fascism and communism, which do indeed have philosophical meaning, but hidden from themselves

The imaginary

November, 1960

For Sartre it is negation of negation, *an order in which nihilation is applied to itself*, and consequently counts as a positing of being although it would absolutely not be its equivalent, and although the least fragment of true, transcendent being immediately reduces the imaginary.

This assumes then a bipartite analysis: perception as observation, a close-woven fabric, without any gaps, locus of the simple or immediate nihilation  
 the imaginary as locus of the self-negation.

Being and the imaginary are for Sartre “objects,” “entities”——

For me they are “elements” (in Bachelard’s sense), that is, not objects, but fields, subdued being, non-thetic being, being before being—and moreover involving their auto-inscription their “subjective correlate” is a part of them. The *Rotempfindung* is part of the *Rotempfundene*——this is not a *coincidence*, but a dehiscence that knows itself as such

Nature

November, 1960

“Nature is at the first day”: it is there today This does not mean: myth of the original indivision and coincidence as *return*.

The *Urtümlich*, the *Ursprünglich* is not of long ago.

It is a question of finding in the present, the flesh of the world (and not in the past) an “ever new” and “always the same”——A sort of time of sleep (which is Bergson’s nascent duration, ever new and always the same). The sensible, Nature, transcend the past present distinction, realize from within a passage from one into the other Existential eternity. The indestructible, the barbaric Principle

Do a psychoanalysis of Nature: it is the flesh, the mother.

A philosophy of the flesh is the condition without which psychoanalysis remains anthropology

In what sense the visible landscape under my eyes is not exterior to, and bound synthetically to . . . other moments of time and the past, but has them really *behind itself* in simultaneity, inside itself and not it and they side by side “in” time

Time and chiasm

November, 1960

The *Stiftung* of a point of time can be transmitted to the others without “continuity” without “conservation,” without fictitious “support” in the psyche the moment that one understands time as chiasm

Then past and present are *Ineinander*, each enveloping-enveloped—and that itself is the flesh

November, 1960

.....  
 The very pulp of the sensible, what is indefinable in it, is nothing else than the union in it of the “inside” with the “outside,” the contact in thickness of self with self—The absolute of the “sensible” is this stabilized explosion i.e. involving return

The relation between the circularities (my body-the sensible) does not present the difficulties that the relation between “layers” or linear orders presents (nor the immanence-transcendent alternative)

In *Ideen II*, Husserl, “disentangle” “unravel” what is entangled The idea of chiasm and *Ineinander* is on the contrary the idea that every analysis that *disentangles* renders unintelligible— This bound to the very meaning of *questioning* which is not to call for a response in the indicative—

It is a question of creating a new type of intelligibility (intelligibility through the world and Being as they are—“vertical” and not *horizontal*)

#### Silence of Perception

Silent speech, without express signification and yet rich in meaning—language—thing

November, 1960

Silence of perception = the object made of wires of which I could not say what it is, nor how many sides it has, etc. and which nonetheless is there (it is the very criterion of the observable according to Sartre that is here contradicted—and the criterion of the imaginary according to Alain that intervenes in perception)—

There is an analogous silence of language i.e. a language that no more involves acts of reactivated signification than does this perception—and which nonetheless functions, and inventively it is it that is involved in the fabrication of a book—

“The other”

November, 1960

What is interesting is not an expedient to solve the “problem of the other”—

It is a transformation of the problem

If one starts from the visible and the vision, the sensible and the sensing, one acquires a wholly new idea of the “subjectivity”: there are no longer “syntheses,” there is a contact with being through its modulations, or its reliefs—

The other is no longer so much a freedom seen *from without* as destiny and fatality, a rival subject for a subject, but he is caught up in a circuit that connects him to the world, as we ourselves are, and consequently also in a circuit that connects him to us—And this world is *common* to us, is intermundane space—And there is transitivity by way of generality—And even freedom has its generality, is understood as generality: activity is no longer *the contrary* of passivity

Whence carnal relations, from below, no less than from above and the fine point Entwining

Whence the essential problem = not to make common in the sense of creation *ex nihilo* of a common situation, of a common event plus engagement by reason of the past, but in the sense of uttering—language—

the other is a relief as I am, not absolute vertical existence

Body and flesh—

Eros—

Philosophy of Freudianism

December, 1960

Superficial interpretation of Freudianism: he is a sculptor because he is anal, because the feces are already clay, molding, etc.

But the feces are not the *cause*: if they were, everybody would be sculptors

The feces give rise to a character (*Abscheu*) only if the subject lives them in such a way as to find in them a dimension of being—

It is not a question of renewing empiricism (feces imprinting

a certain character on the child). It is a question of understanding that the relationship with feces is in the child a concrete ontology. Make not an existential psychoanalysis, but an *ontological* psychoanalysis

Overdetermination (= circularity, chiasm) = any entity can be *accentuated* as an emblem of Being (= character) → it is to be read as such

In other words to be anal *explains* nothing: for, to be so, it is necessary to have the ontological capacity (= capacity to take a being as representative of Being)——

Hence what Freud wants to indicate are not chains of causality; it is, on the basis of a polymorphism or amorphism, what is contact with the Being in promiscuity, in transitivity, the fixation of a “character” by investment of the openness to Being in an Entity—which, henceforth, takes place *through this Entity*

Hence the philosophy of Freud is not a philosophy of the body but of the flesh——

The Id, the unconscious—and the Ego (correlative) to be understood on the basis of the flesh

The whole architecture of the notions of the psychology (perception, idea—affection, pleasure, desire, love, Eros) all that, all this bric-a-brac, is suddenly clarified when one ceases to think all these terms as *positive* (the more or less dense “spiritual”) in order to think them not as negatives or negentivities (for that brings back the same difficulties), but as *differentiations* of one sole and *massive* adhesion to Being which is the flesh (eventually as “lace-works”)——Then problems such as those of Scheler (how to understand the relation of the intentional with the affective which it crosses transversally, a love being transversal to the oscillations of pleasure and pain → personalism) disappear: for there is no *hierarchy* of orders or layers or planes (always founded on the individual-essence distinction), there is dimensionality of every fact and facticity of every dimension——This in virtue of the “ontological difference”——

The body in the world.

The specular image——resemblance

December, 1960

My body *in* the visible. This does not simply mean: it is a particle of the visible, there there is the visible and here (as

variant of the there) is my body. No. It is *surrounded* by the visible. This does not take place on a plane of which it would be an inlay, it is really surrounded, circumvented. This means: it sees itself, it is a visible—but it sees itself seeing, my look which finds it *there* knows that it is here, at its own side——Thus the body *stands* before the world and the world upright before it, and between them there is a relation that is one of embrace. And between these two vertical beings, there is not a frontier, but a contact surface——

The flesh = this fact that my body is passive-active (visible-seeing), mass in itself *and* gesture——

The flesh of the world = its *Horizonthaftigkeit* (interior and exterior horizon) surrounding the thin pellicle of the strict visible between these two horizons——

The flesh = the fact that the visible that I am is seer (look) or, what amounts to the same thing, has an *inside*, plus the fact that the exterior visible is also *seen*, i.e. has a prolongation, in the enclosure of my body, which is part of its being

The specular image, memory, resemblance: fundamental structures (resemblance between the thing and the thing-seen). For they are structures that are immediately derived from the body-world relation——the reflections resemble the reflected = the vision commences in the things, certain things or couples of things call for vision——Show that our whole expression and conceptualization of the mind is derived from these structures: for example *reflection*.

“Vertical” and existence

December, 1960

Sartre: the circle is not inexplicable, it is explicable by the rotation of a line around its end——But also the circle does not exist——Existence is inexplicable. . . .

What I call the *vertical* is what Sartre calls existence—but which for him immediately becomes the fulguration of nothingness which makes the world arise, the operation of the for itself.

In fact the circle exists and existence is not man. The circle exists, inexplicable, as soon as I take into account not only the circle-*object*, but this *visible* circle, this circular physiognomy which no intellectual genesis nor physical causality explains, and which *has* the very properties that I do not yet know

It is this whole field of the "vertical" that has to be awakened. Sartre's existence is not "vertical," not "upright": it certainly cuts across the plane of beings, it is transversal with respect to it, but precisely it is too distinct from it for one to be able to say that it is "upright." What is upright is the existence that is threatened by weight, that leaves the plane of objective being, but not without dragging with it all the adversity and favors it brought there.

The body always presents itself "from the same side"—(by principle: for this is apparently contrary to reversibility)

It is that *reversibility* is not an actual *identity* of the touching and the touched. It is their identity by principle (always abortive)——Yet it is not ideality, for the body is not simply a *de facto* visible among the visibles, it is visible-seeing, or look. In other words, the fabric of possibilities that closes the exterior visible in upon the seeing body maintains between them a certain *divergence* (*écart*). But this divergence is not a *void*, it is filled precisely by the flesh as the place of emergence of a vision, a passivity that bears an activity—and so also the divergence between the exterior visible and the body which forms the upholstering (*capitonnage*) of the world

It is wrong to describe by saying: the body presents itself always *from the same side* (or: we remain always on a certain side of the body—it has an inside and an outside). For this unilaterality is not simply *de facto* resistance of the phenomenon body: it has a reason for being: the unilateral presentation of the body condition for the body to be a seer i.e. that it not be a visible among visibles. It is not a truncated visible. It is a visible-archetype—and could not be so if it could be surveyed from above.

Descartes

March, 1961

Study the pre-methodic Descartes, the *spontaneae fruges*, that natural thought "that always precedes the acquired thought"—and the post-methodic Descartes, that of after the VIth Meditation, who lives in the world after having methodically explored

it—the "vertical" Descartes soul and body, and not that of the *intuitus mentis*——And the way he chooses his models ("light," etc.) and the way that, in the end, he goes beyond them, the Descartes of before and after the order of reasons, the Descartes of the Cogito before the Cogito, who always knew that he thought, with a knowing that is ultimate and has no need of elucidation—ask what the evidence of this spontaneous thought consists of, *sui ipsius contemplatio reflexa*, what this refusal to constitute the Psyche means, this knowing more clear than all constitution and which he counts on

Descartes—*Intuitus mentis*

March, 1961

The definition of the *intuitus mentis*, founded on analogy with vision, itself understood as thought of a visual indivisible (the *details* that the artisans see)——The apprehension of "the sea" (as "element," not as individual thing) considered as imperfect vision, whence the ideal of *distinct* thought.

This analysis of vision is to be completely reconsidered (it presupposes what is in question: the thing itself)——It does not see that the vision is tele-vision, transcendence, crystallization of the impossible.

Consequently, the analysis of the *intuitus mentis* also has to be done over: there is no indivisible by thought, no simple nature—the simple nature, the "natural" knowledge (the evidence of the I think, as clearer than anything one can add to it), which is apprehended totally or not at all, all these are "figures" of thought and the "ground" or "horizon" has not been taken into account—The "ground" or "horizon" is accessible only if one begins by an analysis of the *Sehen*——Like the *Sehen*, the *Denken* is not identity, but non-difference, not distinction, but clarity at first sight.

Flesh

March, 1961

To say that the body is a seer is, curiously enough, not to say anything else than: it is visible. When I study what I mean in

saying that it is the body that sees, I find nothing else than: it is "from somewhere" (from the point of view of the other—or: in the mirror for me, in the three-paneled mirror, for example) visible in the act of looking——

More exactly: when I say that my body is a seer, there is, in the experience I have of it, something that founds and announces the view that the other acquires of it or that the mirror gives of it. I.e.: it is visible for me in principle or at least it counts in the *Visible* of which *my* visible is a fragment. I.e. to this extent my visible turns back upon it in order to "understand" it——And how do I know that if not because my visible is nowise my "representation," but flesh? I.e. capable of embracing my body, of "seeing" it——It is through the world first that I am seen or thought.

My plan: I The visible  
II Nature  
III Logos

March, 1961

must be presented without any compromise with *humanism*, nor moreover with *naturalism*, nor finally with *theology*——Precisely what has to be done is to show that philosophy can no longer think according to this cleavage: God, man, creatures——which was Spinoza's division.

Hence we do not begin *ab homine* as Descartes (the 1st part is not "reflection") we do not take Nature in the sense of the Scholastics (the 2d part is not Nature in itself, a philosophy of Nature, but a description of the man-animality *intertwining*) and we do not take Logos and truth in the sense of the Word (the Part III is neither logic, nor teleology of consciousness, but a study of the language that has man)

*The visible* has to be described as something that is realized through man, but which is nowise anthropology (hence against Feuerbach-Marx 1844)

Nature as the other side of man (as flesh—nowise as "matter")

Logos also as what is realized in man, but nowise as his *property*.

So that the conception of history one will come to will be

nowise *ethical* like that of Sartre. It will be much closer to that of Marx: Capital as a *thing* (not as a partial object of a partial empirical inquiry as Sartre presents it), as "*mystery*" of history, expressing the "speculative mysteries" of the Hegelian logic. (The "*Geheimnis*" of merchandise as "fetish") (every historical object is a fetish)

Worked-over-matter-men = *chiasm*

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## PREFACE

The five essays collected here were all written after September 11, 2001, and in response to the conditions of heightened vulnerability and aggression that followed from those events. It was my sense in the fall of 2001 that the United States was missing an opportunity to redefine itself as part of a global community when, instead, it heightened nationalist discourse, extended surveillance mechanisms, suspended constitutional rights, and developed forms of explicit and implicit censorship. These events led public intellectuals to waver in their public commitment to principles of justice and prompted journalists to take leave of the time-honored tradition of investigative journalism. That US boundaries were breached, that an unbearable vulnerability was exposed, that a terrible toll on human life was taken, were, and are, cause for fear and for mourning; they are also instigations for patient political reflection. These events

posed the question, implicitly at least, as to what form political reflection and deliberation ought to take if we take injurability and aggression as two points of departure for political life.

That we can be injured, that others can be injured, that we are subject to death at the whim of another, are all reasons for both fear and grief. What is less certain, however, is whether the experiences of vulnerability and loss have to lead straightaway to military violence and retribution. There are other passages. If we are interested in arresting cycles of violence to produce less violent outcomes, it is no doubt important to ask what, politically, might be made of grief besides a cry for war.

One insight that injury affords is that there are others out there on whom my life depends, people I do not know and may never know. This fundamental dependency on anonymous others is not a condition that I can will away. No security measure will foreclose this dependency; no violent act of sovereignty will rid the world of this fact. What this means, concretely, will vary across the globe. There are ways of distributing vulnerability, differential forms of allocation that make some populations more subject to arbitrary violence than others. But in that order of things, it would not be possible to maintain that the US has greater security problems than some of the more contested and vulnerable nations and peoples of the world. To be injured means that one has the chance to reflect upon injury, to find out the mechanisms of its distribution, to find out who else suffers from permeable borders, unexpected violence, dispossession, and fear, and in what ways. If national sovereignty is challenged, that does not mean it must be shored up at all costs, if that results in suspending civil liberties and suppressing political dissent. Rather, the dislocation from First World privilege, however temporary, offers a chance to start to imagine a world in which that violence might be minimized, in which an inevitable interdependency becomes

acknowledged as the basis for global political community. I confess to not knowing how to theorize that interdependency. I would suggest, however, that both our political and ethical responsibilities are rooted in the recognition that radical forms of self-sufficiency and unbridled sovereignty are, by definition, disrupted by the larger global processes of which they are a part, that no final control can be secured, and that final control is not, cannot be, an ultimate value.

These essays begin the process of that imagining, although there are no grand utopian conclusions here. The first essay begins with the rise of censorship and anti-intellectualism that took hold in the fall of 2001 when anyone who sought to understand the “reasons” for the attack on the United States was regarded as someone who sought to “exonerate” those who conducted that attack. Editorials in the *New York Times* criticized “excuseniks,” exploiting the echoes of “peaceniks”—understood as naive and nostalgic political actors rooted in the frameworks of the sixties—and “refuseniks”—those who refused to comply with Soviet forms of censorship and control and often lost employment as a result. If the term was meant to disparage those who cautioned against war, it inadvertently produced the possibility of an identification of war resisters with courageous human rights activists. The effort at disparagement revealed the difficulty of maintaining a consistently negative view of those who sought a historical and political understanding of the events of September 11 much less of those who opposed war against Afghanistan as a legitimate response.

I argue that it is not a vagary of moral relativism to try to understand what might have led to the attacks on the United States. Further, one can—and ought to—abhor the attacks on ethical grounds (and enumerate those grounds), feel a full measure of grief for those

losses, but let neither moral outrage nor public mourning become the occasion for the muting of critical discourse and public debate on the meaning of historical events. One might still want to know what brought about these events, want to know how best to address those conditions so that the seeds are not sown for further events of this kind, find sites of intervention, help to plan strategies thoughtfully that will not beckon more violence in the future. One can even experience that abhorrence, mourning, anxiety, and fear, and have all of these emotional dispositions lead to a reflection on how others have suffered arbitrary violence at the hands of the US, but also endeavor to produce another public culture and another public policy in which suffering unexpected violence and loss and reactive aggression are not accepted as the norm of political life.

The second piece, "Violence, Mourning, Politics," takes up a psychoanalytic understanding of loss to see why aggression sometimes seems so quickly to follow. The essay pursues the problem of a primary vulnerability to others, one that one cannot will away without ceasing to be human. It suggests as well that contemporary forms of national sovereignty constitute efforts to overcome an impressionability and violability that are ineradicable dimensions of human dependency and sociality. I also consider there how certain forms of grief become nationally recognized and amplified, whereas other losses become unthinkable and ungrievable. I argue that a national melancholia, understood as a disavowed mourning, follows upon the erasure from public representations of the names, images, and narratives of those the US has killed. On the other hand, the US's own losses are consecrated in public obituaries that constitute so many acts of nation-building. Some lives are grievable, and others are not; the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary

conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as a livable life and a grievable death?

"Indefinite Detention" considers the political implications of those normative conceptions of the human that produce, through an exclusionary process, a host of "unlivable lives" whose legal and political status is suspended. The prisoners indefinitely detained in Guantanamo Bay are not considered "subjects" protected by international law, are not entitled to regular trials, to lawyers, to due process. The military tribunals that have, at this date, not been used, represent a breach of constitutional law that makes final judgments of life and death into the prerogative of the President. The decision to detain some, if not most, of the 680 inmates currently in Guantanamo is left to "officials" who will decide, on uncertain grounds, whether these individuals present a risk to US security. Bound by no legal guidelines except those fabricated for the occasion, these officials garner sovereign power unto themselves. Whereas Foucault argued that sovereignty and governmentality can and do coexist, the particular form of that coexistence in the contemporary war prison has yet to be charted. Governmentality designates a model for conceptualizing power in its diffuse and multivalent operations, focusing on the management of populations, and operating through state and non-state institutions and discourses. In the current war prison, officials of governmentality wield sovereign power, understood here as a lawless and unaccountable operation of power, once legal rule is effectively suspended and military codes take its place. Once again, a lost or injured sovereignty becomes reanimated through rules that allocate final decisions about life and death to the executive branch or to officials with no elected status and bound by no constitutional constraints.

These prisoners are not considered "prisoners" and receive no protection from international law. Although the US claims that its

imprisonment methods are consistent with the Geneva Convention, it does not consider itself bound to those accords, and offers none of the legal rights stipulated by that accord. As a result, the humans who are imprisoned in Guantanamo do not count as human; they are not subjects protected by international law. They are not subjects in any legal or normative sense. The dehumanization effected by “indefinite detention” makes use of an ethnic frame for conceiving who will be human, and who will not. Moreover, the policy of “indefinite detention” produces a sphere of imprisonment and punishment unfettered by any laws except those fabricated by the Department of State. The state itself thus attains a certain “indefinite” power to suspend the law and to fabricate the law, at which point the separation of powers is indefinitely set aside. The Patriot Act constitutes another effort to suspend civil liberties in the name of security, one that I do not consider in these pages, but hope to in a future article. In versions 1 and 2 of the Patriot Act, it is the public intellectual culture that is targeted for control and regulation, overriding long-standing claims to intellectual freedom and freedom of association that have been central to conceptions of democratic political life.

“The Charge of Anti-Semitism: Jews, Israel, and the Risks of Public Critique” considers one effort to quell public criticism and intellectual debate in the context of criticisms of Israeli state and military policy. The remark made by Harvard’s President, Lawrence Summers, that to criticize Israel is to engage in “effective” anti-Semitism is critically examined for its failure to distinguish between Jews and Israel, and for the importance of acknowledging publicly those progressive Jewish (Israeli and diasporic) efforts of resistance to the current Israeli state. I consider the consequential implications of his statement, one that expressed sentiments that many people and organizations share, for censoring certain kinds of critical speech by allying those who speak critically with anti-Semitic aims. Given how

heinous any identification with anti-Semitism is, especially for progressive Jews who wage their criticisms as Jews, it follows that those who might object to Israeli policy or, indeed, to the doctrine and practice of Zionism, find themselves in the situation of either muting critical speech or braving the unbearable stigma of anti-Semitism by virtue of speaking publicly about their views. This restriction on speaking is enforced through the regulation of psychic and public identifications, specifically, by the threat of having to live in a radically uninhabitable and unacceptable identification with anti-Semitism if one speaks against Israeli policy or, indeed, Israel itself. When the charge of anti-Semitism is used in this way to quell dissent on the matter of Israel, the charge becomes suspect, thereby depriving the charge of its meaning and importance in what surely must remain an active struggle against existing anti-Semitism.

The public sphere is constituted in part by what cannot be said and what cannot be shown. The limits of the sayable, the limits of what can appear, circumscribe the domain in which political speech operates and certain kinds of subjects appear as viable actors. In this instance, the identification of speech that is critical of Israel with anti-Semitism seeks to render it unsayable. It does this through the allocation of stigma, and seeks to preclude from viable discourse criticisms on the structure of the Israeli state, its preconditions of citizenship, its practices of occupation, and its long-standing violence. I argue in favor of the cessation of both Israeli and Palestinian violence, and suggest that opening up the space for a legitimate public debate, free of intimidation, on the political structure of Israel/Palestine is crucial to that project.

“Precarious Life” approaches the question of a non-violent ethics, one that is based upon an understanding of how easily human life is annulled. Emmanuel Levinas offers a conception of ethics that rests upon an apprehension of the precariousness of life, one that

begins with the precarious life of the Other. He makes use of the "face" as a figure that communicates both the precariousness of life and the interdiction on violence. He gives us a way of understanding how aggression is *not* eradicated in an ethics of non-violence; aggression forms the incessant matter for ethical struggles. Levinas considers the fear and anxiety that aggression seeks to quell, but argues that ethics is precisely a struggle to keep fear and anxiety from turning into murderous action. Although his theological view conjures a scene between two humans each of which bears a face that delivers an ethical demand from a seemingly divine source, his view is nevertheless useful for those cultural analyses that seek to understand how best to depict the human, human grief and suffering, and how best to admit the "faces" of those against whom war is waged into public representation.

The Levinasian face is not precisely or exclusively a human face, although it communicates what is human, what is precarious, what is injurable. The media representations of the faces of the "enemy" efface what is most human about the "face" for Levinas. Through a cultural transposition of his philosophy, it is possible to see how dominant forms of representation can and must be disrupted for something about the precariousness of life to be apprehended. This has implications, once again, for the boundaries that constitute what will and will not appear within public life, the limits of a publicly acknowledged field of appearance. Those who remain faceless or whose faces are presented to us as so many symbols of evil, authorize us to become senseless before those lives we have eradicated, and whose grievability is indefinitely postponed. Certain faces must be admitted into public view, must be seen and heard for some keener sense of the value of life, all life, to take hold. So, it is not that mourning is the goal of politics, but that without the capacity to mourn, we lose that keener sense of life we need in order to oppose

violence. And though for some, mourning can only be resolved through violence, it seems clear that violence only brings on more loss, and the failure to heed the claim of precarious life only leads, again and again, to the dry grief of an endless political rage. And whereas some forms of public mourning are protracted and ritualized, stoking nationalist fervor, reiterating the conditions of loss and victimization that come to justify a more or less permanent war, not all forms of mourning lead to that conclusion.

Dissent and debate depend upon the inclusion of those who maintain critical views of state policy and civic culture remaining part of a larger public discussion of the value of policies and politics. To charge those who voice critical views with treason, terrorist-sympathizing, anti-Semitism, moral relativism, postmodernism, juvenile behavior, collaboration, anachronistic Leftism, is to seek to destroy the credibility not of the views that are held, but of the persons who hold them. It produces the climate of fear in which to voice a certain view is to risk being branded and shamed with a heinous appellation. To continue to voice one's views under those conditions is not easy, since one must not only discount the truth of the appellation, but brave the stigma that seizes up from the public domain. Dissent is quelled, in part, through threatening the speaking subject with an uninhabitable identification. Because it would be heinous to identify as treasonous, as a collaborator, one fails to speak, or one speaks in throttled ways, in order to sidestep the terrorizing identification that threatens to take hold. This strategy for quelling dissent and limiting the reach of critical debate happens not only through a series of shaming tactics which have a certain psychological terrorization as their effect, but they work as well by producing what will and will not count as a viable speaking subject and a reasonable opinion within the public domain. It is precisely because one does not want to lose one's status as a viable speaking

being that one does not say what one thinks. Under social conditions that regulate identifications and the sense of viability to this degree, censorship operates implicitly and forcefully. The line that circumscribes what is speakable and what is livable also functions as an instrument of censorship.

To decide what views will count as reasonable within the public domain, however, is to decide what will and will not count as the public sphere of debate. And if someone holds views that are not in line with the nationalist norm, that person comes to lack credibility as a speaking person, and the media is not open to him or her (though the internet, interestingly, is). The foreclosure of critique empties the public domain of debate and democratic contestation itself, so that debate becomes the exchange of views among the like-minded, and criticism, which ought to be central to any democracy, becomes a fugitive and suspect activity.

Public policy, including foreign policy, often seeks to restrain the public sphere from being open to certain forms of debate and the circulation of media coverage. One way a hegemonic understanding of politics is achieved is through circumscribing what will and will not be admissible as part of the public sphere itself. Without disposing populations in such a way that war seems good and right and true, no war can claim popular consent, and no administration can maintain its popularity. To produce what will constitute the public sphere, however, it is necessary to control the way in which people see, how they hear, what they see. The constraints are not only on content—certain images of dead bodies in Iraq, for instance, are considered unacceptable for public visual consumption—but on what “can” be heard, read, seen, felt, and known. The public sphere is constituted in part by what can appear, and the regulation of the sphere of appearance is one way to establish what will count as reality, and what will not. It is also a way of establishing whose lives can be marked as

lives, and whose deaths will count as deaths. Our capacity to feel and to apprehend hangs in the balance. But so, too, does the fate of the reality of certain lives and deaths as well as the ability to think critically and publicly about the effects of war.

*Berkeley, California  
July, 2003*

on more sustaining grounds. This means, in part, hearing beyond what we are able to hear. And it means as well being open to narration that decenters us from our supremacy, in both its right- and left-wing forms. Can we hear that there were precedents for these events and even know that it is urgent to know and learn from these precedents as we seek to stop them from operating in the present, at the same time as we insist that these precedents do not “justify” the recent violent events? If the events are not understandable without that history, that does not mean that the historical understanding furnishes a moral justification for the events themselves. Only then do we reach the disposition to get to the “root” of violence, and begin to offer another vision of the future than that which perpetuates violence in the name of denying it, offering instead names for things that restrain us from thinking and acting radically and well about global options.

## 2

## VIOLENCE, MOURNING, POLITICS

I propose to consider a dimension of political life that has to do with our exposure to violence and our complicity in it, with our vulnerability to loss and the task of mourning that follows, and with finding a basis for community in these conditions. We cannot precisely “argue against” these dimensions of human vulnerability, inasmuch as they function, in effect, as the limits of the arguable, even perhaps as the fecundity of the inarguable. It is not that my thesis survives any argument against it: surely there are various ways of regarding corporeal vulnerability and the task of mourning, and various ways of figuring these conditions within the sphere of politics. But if the opposition is to vulnerability and the task of mourning itself, regardless of its formulation, then it is probably best not to regard this opposition primarily as an “argument.” Indeed, if there were no opposition to this thesis, then there would be no reason

to write this essay. And, if the opposition to this thesis were not consequential, there would be no political reason for reimagining the possibility of community on the basis of vulnerability and loss.

Perhaps, then, it should come as no surprise that I propose to start, and to end, with the question of the human (as if there were any other way for us to start or end!). We start here not because there is a human condition that is universally shared—this is surely not yet the case. The question that preoccupies me in the light of recent global violence is, Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, What *makes for a grievable life*? Despite our differences in location and history, my guess is that it is possible to appeal to a “we,” for all of us have some notion of what it is to have lost somebody. Loss has made a tenuous “we” of us all. And if we have lost, then it follows that we have had, that we have desired and loved, that we have struggled to find the conditions for our desire. We have all lost in recent decades from AIDS, but there are other losses that afflict us, from illness and from global conflict; and there is the fact as well that women and minorities, including sexual minorities, are, as a community, subjected to violence, exposed to its possibility, if not its realization. This means that each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies—as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of a publicity at once assertive and exposed. Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure.

I am not sure I know when mourning is successful, or when one has fully mourned another human being. Freud changed his mind on this subject: he suggested that successful mourning meant being able to exchange one object for another;<sup>1</sup> he later claimed that incorporation, originally associated with melancholia, was essential to the

task of mourning.<sup>2</sup> Freud’s early hope that an attachment might be withdrawn and then given anew implied a certain interchangeability of objects as a sign of hopefulness, as if the prospect of entering life anew made use of a kind of promiscuity of libidinal aim.<sup>3</sup> That might be true, but I do not think that successful grieving implies that one has forgotten another person or that something else has come along to take its place, as if full substitutability were something for which we might strive.

Perhaps, rather, one mourns when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly for ever. Perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say *submitting* to a transformation) the full result of which one cannot know in advance. There is losing, as we know, but there is also the transformative effect of loss, and this latter cannot be charted or planned. One can try to choose it, but it may be that this experience of transformation deconstitutes choice at some level. I do not think, for instance, that one can invoke the Protestant ethic when it comes to loss. One cannot say, “Oh, I’ll go through loss this way, and that will be the result, and I’ll apply myself to the task, and I’ll endeavor to achieve the resolution of grief that is before me.” I think one is hit by waves, and that one starts out the day with an aim, a project, a plan, and finds oneself foiled. One finds oneself fallen. One is exhausted but does not know why. Something is larger than one’s own deliberate plan, one’s own project, one’s own knowing and choosing.

Something takes hold of you: where does it come from? What sense does it make? What claims us at such moments, such that we are not the masters of ourselves? To what are we tied? And by what are we seized? Freud reminded us that when we lose someone, we do not always know what it is *in* that person that has been lost.<sup>4</sup> So when one loses, one is also faced with something enigmatic: something is

hiding in the loss, something is lost within the recesses of loss. If mourning involves knowing what one has lost (and melancholia originally meant, to a certain extent, not knowing), then mourning would be maintained by its enigmatic dimension, by the experience of not knowing incited by losing what we cannot fully fathom.

When we lose certain people, or when we are dispossessed from a place, or a community, we may simply feel that we are undergoing something temporary, that mourning will be over and some restoration of prior order will be achieved. But maybe when we undergo what we do, something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us. It is not as if an "I" exists independently over here and then simply loses a "you" over there, especially if the attachment to "you" is part of what composes who "I" am. If I lose you, under these conditions, then I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself. Who "am" I, without you? When we lose some of these ties by which we are constituted, we do not know who we are or what to do. On one level, I think I have lost "you" only to discover that "I" have gone missing as well. At another level, perhaps what I have lost "in" you, that for which I have no ready vocabulary, is a relationality that is composed neither exclusively of myself nor you, but is to be conceived as *the tie* by which those terms are differentiated and related.

Many people think that grief is privatizing, that it returns us to a solitary situation and is, in that sense, depoliticizing. But I think it furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order, and it does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility. If my fate is not originally or finally separable from yours, then the "we" is traversed by a relationality that we cannot

easily argue against; or, rather, we can argue against it, but we would be denying something fundamental about the social conditions of our very formation.

A consequential grammatical quandary follows. In the effort to explain these relations, I might be said to "have" them, but what does "having" imply? I might sit back and try to enumerate them to you. I might explain what this friendship means, what that lover meant or means to me. I would be constituting myself in such an instance as a detached narrator of my relations. Dramatizing my detachment, I might perhaps only be showing that the form of attachment I am demonstrating is trying to minimize its own relationality, is invoking it as an option, as something that does not touch on the question of what sustains me fundamentally.

What grief displays, in contrast, is the thrall in which our relations with others hold us, in ways that we cannot always recount or explain, in ways that often interrupt the self-conscious account of ourselves we might try to provide, in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control. I might try to tell a story here about what I am feeling, but it would have to be a story in which the very "I" who seeks to tell the story is stopped in the midst of the telling; the very "I" is called into question by its relation to the Other, a relation that does not precisely reduce me to speechlessness, but does nevertheless clutter my speech with signs of its undoing. I tell a story about the relations I choose, only to expose, somewhere along the way, the way I am gripped and undone by these very relations. My narrative falters, as it must.

Let's face it. We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something.

This seems so clearly the case with grief, but it can be so only because it was already the case with desire. One does not always stay intact. One may want to, or manage to for a while, but despite one's

best efforts, one is undone, in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of the touch, by the memory of the feel. And so, when we speak about “my sexuality” or “my gender,” as we do and as we must, we nevertheless mean something complicated that is partially concealed by our usage. As a mode of relation, neither gender nor sexuality is precisely a possession, but, rather, is a mode of being dispossessed, a way of being *for* another or *by virtue of* another. It won’t even do to say that I am promoting a relational view of the self over an autonomous one or trying to redescribe autonomy in terms of relationality. Despite my affinity for the term relationality, we may need other language to approach the issue that concerns us, a way of thinking about how we are not only constituted by our relations but also dispossessed by them as well.

We tend to narrate the history of the feminist and lesbian/gay movement, for instance, in such a way that ecstasy figured prominently in the sixties and seventies and midway through the eighties. But maybe ecstasy is more persistent than that; maybe it is with us all along. To be ec-static means, literally, to be outside oneself, and thus can have several meanings: to be transported beyond oneself by a passion, but also to be *beside oneself* with rage or grief. I think that if I can still address a “we,” or include myself within its terms, I am speaking to those of us who are living in certain ways *beside ourselves*, whether in sexual passion, or emotional grief, or political rage.

I am arguing, if I am “arguing” at all, that we have an interesting political predicament; most of the time when we hear about “rights,” we understand them as pertaining to individuals. When we argue for protection against discrimination, we argue as a group or a class. And in that language and in that context, we have to present ourselves as bounded beings—distinct, recognizable, delineated, subjects before the law, a community defined by some shared features. Indeed, we

must be able to use that language to secure legal protections and entitlements. But perhaps we make a mistake if we take the definitions of who we are, legally, to be adequate descriptions of what we are about. Although this language may well establish our legitimacy within a legal framework ensconced in liberal versions of human ontology, it does not do justice to passion and grief and rage, all of which tear us from ourselves, bind us to others, transport us, undo us, implicate us in lives that are not our own, irreversibly, if not fatally.

It is not easy to understand how a political community is wrought from such ties. One speaks, and one speaks for another, to another, and yet there is no way to collapse the distinction between the Other and oneself. When we say “we” we do nothing more than designate this very problematic. We do not solve it. And perhaps it is, and ought to be, insoluble. This disposition of ourselves outside ourselves seems to follow from bodily life, from its vulnerability and its exposure.

At the same time, essential to so many political movements is the claim of bodily integrity and self-determination. It is important to claim that our bodies are in a sense *our own* and that we are entitled to claim rights of autonomy over our bodies. This assertion is as true for lesbian and gay rights claims to sexual freedom as it is for transsexual and transgender claims to self-determination, as it is to intersex claims to be free of coerced medical and psychiatric interventions. It is as true for all claims to be free from racist attacks, physical and verbal, as it is for feminism’s claim to reproductive freedom, and as it surely is for those whose bodies labor under duress, economic and political, under conditions of colonization and occupation. It is difficult, if not impossible, to make these claims without recourse to autonomy. I am not suggesting that we cease to make these claims. We have to, we must. I also do not wish to imply that we have to make these claims reluctantly or strategically. Defined

within the broadest possible compass, they are part of any normative aspiration of a movement that seeks to maximize the protection and the freedoms of sexual and gender minorities, of women, and of racial and ethnic minorities, especially as they cut across all the other categories.

But is there another normative aspiration that we must also seek to articulate and to defend? Is there a way in which the place of the body, and the way in which it disposes us outside ourselves or sets us beside ourselves, opens up another kind of normative aspiration within the field of politics?

The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all these as well. Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own. The body has its invariably public dimension. Constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine. Given over from the start to the world of others, it bears their imprint, is formed within the crucible of social life; only later, and with some uncertainty, do I lay claim to my body as my own, if, in fact, I ever do. Indeed, if I deny that prior to the formation of my "will," my body related me to others whom I did not choose to have in proximity to myself, if I build a notion of "autonomy" on the basis of the denial of this sphere of a primary and unwilld physical proximity with others, then am I denying the social conditions of my embodiment in the name of autonomy?

At one level, this situation is literally familiar: there is bound to be some experience of humiliation for adults, who think that they are exercising judgment in matters of love, to reflect upon the fact that, as infants and young children, they loved their parents or other primary others in absolute and uncritical ways—and that something

of that pattern lives on in their adult relationships. I may wish to reconstitute my "self" as if it were there all along, a tacit ego with acumen from the start; but to do so would be to deny the various forms of rapture and subjection that formed the condition of my emergence as an individuated being and that continue to haunt my adult sense of self with whatever anxiety and longing I may now feel. Individuation is an accomplishment, not a presupposition, and certainly no guarantee.

Is there a reason to apprehend and affirm this condition of my formation within the sphere of politics, a sphere monopolized by adults? If I am struggling for autonomy, do I not need to be struggling for something else as well, a conception of myself as invariably in community, impressed upon by others, impinging upon them as well, and in ways that are not fully in my control or clearly predictable?

Is there a way that we might struggle for autonomy in many spheres, yet also consider the demands that are imposed upon us by living in a world of beings who are, by definition, physically dependent on one another, physically vulnerable to one another? Is this not another way of imagining community, one in which we are alike only in having this condition separately and so having in common a condition that cannot be thought without difference? This way of imagining community affirms relationality not only as a descriptive or historical fact of our formation, but also as an ongoing normative dimension of our social and political lives, one in which we are compelled to take stock of our interdependence. According to this latter view, it would become incumbent on us to consider the place of violence in any such relation, for violence is, always, an exploitation of that primary tie, that primary way in which we are, as bodies, outside ourselves and for one another.

We are something other than "autonomous" in such a condition, but that does not mean that we are merged or without boundaries. It

does mean, however, that when we think about who we “are” and seek to represent ourselves, we cannot represent ourselves as merely bounded beings, for the primary others who are past for me not only live on in the fiber of the boundary that contains me (one meaning of “incorporation”), but they also haunt the way I am, as it were, periodically undone and open to becoming unbounded.

Let us return to the issue of grief, to the moments in which one undergoes something outside one’s control and finds that one is beside oneself, not at one with oneself. Perhaps we can say that grief contains the possibility of apprehending a mode of dispossession that is fundamental to who I am. This possibility does not dispute the fact of my autonomy, but it does qualify that claim through recourse to the fundamental sociality of embodied life, the ways in which we are, from the start and by virtue of being a bodily being, already given over, beyond ourselves, implicated in lives that are not our own. If I do not always know what seizes me on such occasions, and if I do not always know what it is *in* another person that I have lost, it may be that this sphere of dispossession is precisely the one that exposes my unknowingness, the unconscious imprint of my primary sociality. Can this insight lead to a normative reorientation for politics? Can this situation of mourning—one that is so dramatic for those in social movements who have undergone innumerable losses—supply a perspective by which to begin to apprehend the contemporary global situation?

Mourning, fear, anxiety, rage. In the United States, we have been surrounded with violence, having perpetrated it and perpetrating it still, having suffered it, living in fear of it, planning more of it, if not an open future of infinite war in the name of a “war on terrorism.” Violence is surely a touch of the worst order, a way a primary human vulnerability to other humans is exposed in its most terrifying way, a way in which we are given over, without control, to the will of

another, a way in which life itself can be expunged by the willful action of another. To the extent that we commit violence, we are acting on another, putting the other at risk, causing the other damage, threatening to expunge the other. In a way, we all live with this particular vulnerability, a vulnerability to the other that is part of bodily life, a vulnerability to a sudden address from elsewhere that we cannot preempt. This vulnerability, however, becomes highly exacerbated under certain social and political conditions, especially those in which violence is a way of life and the means to secure self-defense are limited.

Mindfulness of this vulnerability can become the basis of claims for non-military political solutions, just as denial of this vulnerability through a fantasy of mastery (an institutionalized fantasy of mastery) can fuel the instruments of war. We cannot, however, will away this vulnerability. We must attend to it, even abide by it, as we begin to think about what politics might be implied by staying with the thought of corporeal vulnerability itself, a situation in which we can be vanquished or lose others. Is there something to be learned about the geopolitical distribution of corporeal vulnerability from our own brief and devastating exposure to this condition?

I think, for instance, that we have seen, are seeing, various ways of dealing with vulnerability and grief, so that, for instance, William Safire citing Milton writes we must “banish melancholy,”<sup>5</sup> as if the repudiation of melancholy ever did anything other than fortify its affective structure under another name, since melancholy is already the repudiation of mourning; so that, for instance, President Bush announced on September 21 that we have finished grieving and that *now* it is time for resolute action to take the place of grief.<sup>6</sup> When grieving is something to be feared, our fears can give rise to the impulse to resolve it quickly, to banish it in the name of an action invested with the power to restore the loss or return the world to a

former order, or to reinvigorate a fantasy that the world formerly was orderly.

Is there something to be gained from grieving, from tarrying with grief, from remaining exposed to its unbearability and not endeavoring to seek a resolution for grief through violence? Is there something to be gained in the political domain by maintaining grief as part of the framework within which we think our international ties? If we stay with the sense of loss, are we left feeling only passive and powerless, as some might fear? Or are we, rather, returned to a sense of human vulnerability, to our collective responsibility for the physical lives of one another? Could the experience of a dislocation of First World safety not condition the insight into the radically inequitable ways that corporeal vulnerability is distributed globally? To foreclose that vulnerability, to banish it, to make ourselves secure at the expense of every other human consideration is to eradicate one of the most important resources from which we must take our bearings and find our way.

To grieve, and to make grief itself into a resource for politics, is not to be resigned to inaction, but it may be understood as the slow process by which we develop a point of identification with suffering itself. The disorientation of grief—"Who have I become?" or, indeed, "What is left of me?" "What is it in the Other that I have lost?"—posits the "I" in the mode of unknowingness.

But this can be a point of departure for a new understanding if the narcissistic preoccupation of melancholia can be moved into a consideration of the vulnerability of others. Then we might critically evaluate and oppose the conditions under which certain human lives are more vulnerable than others, and thus certain human lives are more grievable than others. From where might a principle emerge by which we vow to protect others from the kinds of violence we have suffered, if not from an apprehension of a common human vulnerability? I do

not mean to deny that vulnerability is differentiated, that it is allocated differentially across the globe. I do not even mean to presume upon a common notion of the human, although to speak in its "name" is already (and perhaps only) to fathom its possibility.

I am referring to violence, vulnerability, and mourning, but there is a more general conception of the human with which I am trying to work here, one in which we are, from the start, given over to the other, one in which we are, from the start, even prior to individuation itself and, by virtue of bodily requirements, given over to some set of primary others: this conception means that we are vulnerable to those we are too young to know and to judge and, hence, vulnerable to violence; but also vulnerable to another range of touch, a range that includes the eradication of our being at the one end, and the physical support for our lives at the other.

Although I am insisting on referring to a common human vulnerability, one that emerges with life itself, I also insist that we cannot recover the source of this vulnerability: it precedes the formation of "I." This is a condition, a condition of being laid bare from the start and with which we cannot argue. I mean, we can argue with it, but we are perhaps foolish, if not dangerous, when we do. I do not mean to suggest that the necessary support for a newborn is always there. Clearly, it is not, and for some this primary scene is a scene of abandonment or violence or starvation, that theirs are bodies given over to nothing, or to brutality, or to no sustenance.

We cannot understand vulnerability as a deprivation, however, unless we understand the need that is thwarted. Such infants still must be apprehended as given over, as given over to no one or to some insufficient support, or to an abandonment. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to understand how humans suffer from oppression without seeing how this primary condition is exploited and exploitable, thwarted and denied. The condition of primary vulnerability, of

being given over to the touch of the other, even if there is no other there, and no support for our lives, signifies a primary helplessness and need, one to which any society must attend. Lives are supported and maintained differently, and there are radically different ways in which human physical vulnerability is distributed across the globe. Certain lives will be highly protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilize the forces of war. Other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as "grievable."

A hierarchy of grief could no doubt be enumerated. We have seen it already, in the genre of the obituary, where lives are quickly tidied up and summarized, humanized, usually married, or on the way to be, heterosexual, happy, monogamous. But this is just a sign of another differential relation to life, since we seldom, if ever, hear the names of the thousands of Palestinians who have died by the Israeli military with United States support, or any number of Afghan people, children and adults. Do they have names and faces, personal histories, family, favorite hobbies, slogans by which they live? What defense against the apprehension of loss is at work in the blithe way in which we accept deaths caused by military means with a shrug or with self-righteousness or with clear vindictiveness? To what extent have Arab peoples, predominantly practitioners of Islam, fallen outside the "human" as it has been naturalized in its "Western" mold by the contemporary workings of humanism? What are the cultural contours of the human at work here? How do our cultural frames for thinking the human set limits on the kinds of losses we can avow as loss? After all, if someone is lost, and that person is not someone, then what and where is the loss, and how does mourning take place?

This last is surely a question that lesbian, gay, and bi-studies have asked in relation to violence against sexual minorities; that transgendered people have asked as they are singled out for harassment

and sometimes murder; that intersexed people have asked, whose formative years are so often marked by unwanted violence against their bodies in the name of a normative notion of the human, a normative notion of what the body of a human must be. This question is no doubt, as well, the basis of a profound affinity between movements centering on gender and sexuality and efforts to counter the normative human morphologies and capacities that condemn or efface those who are physically challenged. It must also be part of the affinity with anti-racist struggles, given the racial differential that undergirds the culturally viable notions of the human, ones that we see acted out in dramatic and terrifying ways in the global arena at the present time.

I am referring not only to humans not regarded as humans, and thus to a restrictive conception of the human that is based upon their exclusion. It is not a matter of a simple entry of the excluded into an established ontology, but an insurrection at the level of ontology, a critical opening up of the questions, What is real? Whose lives are real? How might reality be remade? Those who are unreal have, in a sense, already suffered the violence of derealization. What, then, is the relation between violence and those lives considered as "unreal"? Does violence effect that unreality? Does violence take place on the condition of that unreality?

If violence is done against those who are unreal, then, from the perspective of violence, it fails to injure or negate those lives since those lives are already negated. But they have a strange way of remaining animated and so must be negated again (and again). They cannot be mourned because they are always already lost or, rather, never "were," and they must be killed, since they seem to live on, stubbornly, in this state of deadness. Violence renews itself in the face of the apparent inexhaustibility of its object. The derealization of the "Other" means that it is neither alive nor dead, but interminably

spectral. The infinite paranoia that imagines the war against terrorism as a war without end will be one that justifies itself endlessly in relation to the spectral infinity of its enemy, regardless of whether or not there are established grounds to suspect the continuing operation of terror cells with violent aims.

How do we understand this derealization? It is one thing to argue that first, on the level of discourse, certain lives are not considered lives at all, they cannot be humanized, that they fit no dominant frame for the human, and that their dehumanization occurs first, at this level, and that this level then gives rise to a physical violence that in some sense delivers the message of dehumanization that is already at work in the culture. It is another thing to say that discourse itself effects violence through omission. If 200,000 Iraqi children were killed during the Gulf War and its aftermath,<sup>7</sup> do we have an image, a frame for any of those lives, singly or collectively? Is there a story we might find about those deaths in the media? Are there names attached to those children?

There are no obituaries for the war casualties that the United States inflicts, and there cannot be. If there were to be an obituary, there would have had to have been a life, a life worth noting, a life worth valuing and preserving, a life that qualifies for recognition. Although we might argue that it would be impractical to write obituaries for all those people, or for all people, I think we have to ask, again and again, how the obituary functions as the instrument by which grievability is publicly distributed. It is the means by which a life becomes, or fails to become, a publicly grievable life, an icon for national self-recognition, the means by which a life becomes noteworthy. As a result, we have to consider the obituary as an act of nation-building. The matter is not a simple one, for, if a life is not grievable, it is not quite a life; it does not qualify as a life and is not worth a note. It is already the unburied, if not the unburi-able.

It is not simply, then, that there is a "discourse" of dehumanization that produces these effects, but rather that there is a limit to discourse that establishes the limits of human intelligibility. It is not just that a death is poorly marked, but that it is unmarkable. Such a death vanishes, not into explicit discourse, but in the ellipses by which public discourse proceeds. The queer lives that vanished on September 11 were not publicly welcomed into the idea of national identity built in the obituary pages, and their closest relations were only belatedly and selectively (the marital norm holding sway once again) made eligible for benefits. But this should come as no surprise, when we think about how few deaths from AIDS were publicly grievable losses, and how, for instance, the extensive deaths now taking place in Africa are also, in the media, for the most part unmarkable and ungrievable.

A Palestinian citizen of the United States recently submitted to the *San Francisco Chronicle* obituaries for two Palestinian families who had been killed by Israeli troops, only to be told that the obituaries could not be accepted without proof of death.<sup>8</sup> The staff of the *Chronicle* said that statements "in memoriam" could, however, be accepted, and so the obituaries were rewritten and resubmitted in the form of memorials. These memorials were then rejected, with the explanation that the newspaper did not wish to offend anyone. We have to wonder under what conditions public grieving constitutes an "offense" against the public itself, constituting an intolerable eruption within the terms of what is speakable in public? What might be "offensive" about the public avowal of sorrow and loss, such that memorials would function as offensive speech? Is it that we should not proclaim in public these deaths, for fear of offending those who ally themselves with the Israeli state or military? Is it that these deaths are not considered to be real deaths, and that these lives not grievable, because they are Palestinians, or because they are victims

of war? What is the relation between the violence by which these ungrievable lives were lost and the prohibition on their public grievability? Are the violence and the prohibition both permutations of the same violence? Does the prohibition on discourse relate to the dehumanization of the deaths—and the lives?

Dehumanization's relation to discourse is complex. It would be too simple to claim that violence simply implements what is already happening in discourse, such that a discourse on dehumanization produces treatment, including torture and murder, structured by the discourse. Here the dehumanization emerges at the limits of discursive life, limits established through prohibition and foreclosure. There is less a dehumanizing discourse at work here than a refusal of discourse that produces dehumanization as a result. Violence against those who are already not quite living, that is, living in a state of suspension between life and death, leaves a mark that is no mark. There will be no public act of grieving (said Creon in *Antigone*). If there is a "discourse," it is a silent and melancholic one in which there have been no lives, and no losses; there has been no common bodily condition, no vulnerability that serves as the basis for an apprehension of our commonality; and there has been no sundering of that commonality. None of this takes place on the order of the event. None of this takes place. In the silence of the newspaper, there was no event, no loss, and this failure of recognition is mandated through an identification with those who identify with the perpetrators of that violence.

This is made all the more apparent in United States journalism, in which, with some notable exceptions, one might have expected a public exposure and investigation of the bombing of civilian targets, the loss of lives in Afghanistan, the decimation of communities, infrastructures, religious centers. To the extent that journalists have accepted the charge to be part of the war effort itself, reporting itself

has become a speech act in the service of the military operations. Indeed, after the brutal and terrible murder of the *Wall Street Journal's* Daniel Pearl, several journalists started to write about themselves as working on the "front lines" of the war. Indeed, Daniel Pearl, "Danny" Pearl, is so familiar to me: he could be my brother or my cousin; he is so easily humanized; he fits the frame, his name has my father's name in it. His last name contains my Yiddish name.

But those lives in Afghanistan, or other United States targets, who were also snuffed out brutally and without recourse to any protection, will they ever be as human as Daniel Pearl? Will the names of the Palestinians stated in that memorial submitted to the *San Francisco Chronicle* ever be brought into public view? (Will we feel compelled to learn how to say these names and to remember them?) I do not say this to espouse a cynicism. I am in favor of the public obituary but mindful of who has access to it, and which deaths can be fairly mourned there. We should surely continue to grieve for Daniel Pearl, even though he is so much more easily humanized for most United States citizens than the nameless Afghans obliterated by United States and European violence. But we have to consider how the norm governing who will be a grievable human is circumscribed and produced in these acts of permissible and celebrated public grieving, how they sometimes operate in tandem with a prohibition on the public grieving of others' lives, and how this differential allocation of grief serves the derealizing aims of military violence. What follows as well from prohibitions on avowing grief in public is an effective mandate in favor of a generalized melancholia (and a derealization of loss) when it comes to considering *as dead* those the United States or its allies have killed.

Finally, it seems important to consider that the prohibition on certain forms of public grieving itself constitutes the public sphere on the basis of such a prohibition. The public will be created on the

condition that certain images do not appear in the media, certain names of the dead are not utterable, certain losses are not avowed as losses, and violence is derealized and diffused. Such prohibitions not only shore up a nationalism based on its military aims and practices, but they also suppress any internal dissent that would expose the concrete, human effects of its violence.

Similarly, the extensive reporting of the final moments of the lost lives in the World Trade Center are compelling and important stories. They fascinate, and they produce an intense identification by arousing feelings of fear and sorrow. One cannot help but wonder, however, what humanizing effect these narratives have. By this I do not mean simply that they humanize the lives that were lost along with those that narrowly escaped, but that they stage the scene and provide the narrative means by which "the human" in its grievability is established. We cannot find in the public media, apart from some reports posted on the internet and circulated mainly through email contacts, the narratives of Arab lives killed elsewhere by brutal means. In this sense, we have to ask about the conditions under which a grievable life is established and maintained, and through what logic of exclusion, what practice of effacement and denominalization.

Mourning Daniel Pearl presents no problem for me or for my family of origin. His is a familiar name, a familiar face, a story about education that I understand and share; his wife's education makes her language familiar, even moving, to me, a proximity of what is similar.<sup>9</sup> In relation to him, I am not disturbed by the proximity of the unfamiliar, the proximity of difference that makes me work to forge new ties of identification and to reimagine what it is to belong to a human community in which common epistemological and cultural grounds cannot always be assumed. His story takes me home and tempts me to stay there. But at what cost do I establish the familiar as the criterion by which a human life is grievable?

Most Americans have probably experienced something like the loss of their First Worldism as a result of the events of September 11 and its aftermath. What kind of loss is this? It is the loss of the prerogative, only and always, to be the one who transgresses the sovereign boundaries of other states, but never to be in the position of having one's own boundaries transgressed. The United States was supposed to be the place that could not be attacked, where life was safe from violence initiated from abroad, where the only violence we knew was the kind that we inflicted on ourselves. The violence that we inflict on others is only—and always—selectively brought into public view. We now see that the national border was more permeable than we thought. Our general response is anxiety, rage; a radical desire for security, a shoring-up of the borders against what is perceived as alien; a heightened surveillance of Arab peoples and anyone who looks vaguely Arab in the dominant racial imaginary, anyone who looks like someone you once knew who was of Arab descent, or who you thought was—often citizens, it turns out, often Sikhs, often Hindus, even sometimes Israelis, especially Sephardim, often Arab-Americans, recent arrivals or those who have been in the US for decades.

Various terror alerts that go out over the media authorize and heighten racial hysteria in which fear is directed anywhere and nowhere, in which individuals are asked to be on guard but not told what to be on guard against; so everyone is free to imagine and identify the source of terror.

The result is that an amorphous racism abounds, rationalized by the claim of "self-defense." A generalized panic works in tandem with the shoring-up of the sovereign state and the suspension of civil liberties. Indeed, when the alert goes out, every member of the population is asked to become a "foot soldier" in Bush's army. The loss of First World presumption is the loss of a certain horizon of experience, a certain sense of the world itself as a national entitlement.

I condemn on several ethical bases the violence done against the United States and do not see it as “just punishment” for prior sins. At the same time, I consider our recent trauma to be an opportunity for a reconsideration of United States hubris and the importance of establishing more radically egalitarian international ties. Doing this involves a certain “loss” for the country as a whole: the notion of the world itself as a sovereign entitlement of the United States must be given up, lost, and mourned, as narcissistic and grandiose fantasies must be lost and mourned. From the subsequent experience of loss and fragility, however, the possibility of making different kinds of ties emerges. Such mourning might (or could) effect a transformation in our sense of international ties that would crucially rearticulate the possibility of democratic political culture here and elsewhere.

Unfortunately, the opposite reaction seems to be the case. The US asserts its own sovereignty precisely at a moment in which the sovereignty of the nation is bespeaking its own weakness, if not its growing status as an anachronism. It requires international support, but it insists on leading the way. It breaks its international contracts, and then asks whether other countries are with America or against it. It expresses its willingness to act consistently with the Geneva Convention, but it refuses to be bound to that accord, as is stipulated by its signatory status. On the contrary, the US decides whether it will act consistently with the doctrine, which parts of the doctrine apply, and will interpret that doctrine unilaterally. Indeed, in the very moment in which it claims to act consistently with the doctrine, as it does when it justifies its treatment of the Guantanamo Bay prisoners as “humane,” it decides unilaterally what will count as humane, and openly defies the stipulated definition of humane treatment that the Geneva Convention states in print. It bombs unilaterally, it says that it is time for Saddam Hussein to be removed, it decides when and

where to install democracy, for whom, by means dramatically anti-democratic, and without compunction.

Nations are not the same as individual psyches, but both can be described as “subjects,” albeit of different orders. When the United States acts, it establishes a conception of what it means to act as an American, establishes a norm by which that subject might be known. In recent months, a subject has been instated at the national level, a sovereign and extra-legal subject, a violent and self-centered subject; its actions constitute the building of a subject that seeks to restore and maintain its mastery through the systematic destruction of its multi-lateral relations, its ties to the international community. It shores itself up, seeks to reconstitute its imagined wholeness, but only at the price of denying its own vulnerability, its dependency, its exposure, where it exploits those very features in others, thereby making those features “other to” itself.

That this foreclosure of alterity takes place in the name of “feminism” is surely something to worry about. The sudden feminist conversion on the part of the Bush administration, which retroactively transformed the liberation of women into a rationale for its military actions against Afghanistan, is a sign of the extent to which feminism, as a trope, is deployed in the service of restoring the presumption of First World impermeability. Once again we see the spectacle of “white men, seeking to save brown women from brown men,” as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak once described the culturally imperialist exploitation of feminism.<sup>10</sup> Feminism itself becomes, under these circumstances, unequivocally identified with the imposition of values on cultural contexts willfully unknown. It would surely be a mistake to gauge the progress of feminism by its success as a colonial project. It seems more crucial than ever to disengage feminism from its First World presumption and to use the resources of feminist theory, and activism, to rethink the meaning of the tie, the bond, the

alliance, the relation, as they are imagined and lived in the horizon of a counterimperialist egalitarianism.

Feminism surely could provide all kinds of responses to the following questions: How does a collective deal, finally, with its vulnerability to violence? At what price, and at whose expense, does it gain a purchase on "security," and in what ways has a chain of violence formed in which the aggression the United States has wrought returns to it in different forms? Can we think of the history of violence here without exonerating those who engage it against the United States in the present? Can we provide a knowledgeable explanation of events that is not confused with a moral exoneration of violence? What has happened to the value of critique as a democratic value? Under what conditions is critique itself censored, as if any reflexive criticism can only and always be construed as weakness and fallibility?

Negotiating a sudden and unprecedented vulnerability—what are the options? What are the long-term strategies? Women know this question well, have known it in nearly all times, and nothing about the triumph of colonial powers has made our exposure to this kind of violence any less clear. There is the possibility of appearing impermeable, of repudiating vulnerability itself. Nothing about being socially constituted as women restrains us from simply becoming violent ourselves. And then there is the other age-old option, the possibility of wishing for death or becoming dead, as a vain effort to preempt or deflect the next blow. But perhaps there is some other way to live such that one becomes neither affectively dead nor mimetically violent, a way out of the circle of violence altogether. This possibility has to do with demanding a world in which bodily vulnerability is protected without therefore being eradicated and with insisting on the line that must be walked between the two.

By insisting on a "common" corporeal vulnerability, I may seem to be positing a new basis for humanism. That might be true, but I am

prone to consider this differently. A vulnerability must be perceived and recognized in order to come into play in an ethical encounter, and there is no guarantee that this will happen. Not only is there always the possibility that a vulnerability will not be recognized and that it will be constituted as the "unrecognizable," but when a vulnerability *is* recognized, that recognition has the power to change the meaning and structure of the vulnerability itself. In this sense, if vulnerability is one precondition for humanization, and humanization takes place differently through variable norms of recognition, then it follows that vulnerability is fundamentally dependent on existing norms of recognition if it is to be attributed to any human subject.

So when we say that every infant is surely vulnerable, that is clearly true; but it is true, in part, precisely because our utterance enacts the very recognition of vulnerability and so shows the importance of recognition itself for sustaining vulnerability. We perform the recognition by making the claim, and that is surely a very good ethical reason to make the claim. We make the claim, however, precisely because it is not taken for granted, precisely because it is not, in every instance, honored. Vulnerability takes on another meaning at the moment it is recognized, and recognition wields the power to reconstitute vulnerability. We cannot posit this vulnerability prior to recognition without performing the very thesis that we oppose (our positing is itself a form of recognition and so manifests the constitutive power of the discourse). This framework, by which norms of recognition are essential to the constitution of vulnerability as a precondition of the "human," is important precisely for this reason, namely, that we need and want those norms to be in place, that we struggle for their establishment, and that we value their continuing and expanded operation.

Consider that the struggle for recognition in the Hegelian sense requires that each partner in the exchange recognize not only that the

other needs and deserves recognition, but also that each, in a different way, is compelled by the same need, the same requirement. This means that we are not separate identities in the struggle for recognition but are already involved in a reciprocal exchange, an exchange that dislocates us from our positions, our subject-positions, and allows us to see that community itself requires the recognition that we are all, in different ways, striving for recognition.

When we recognize another, or when we ask for recognition for ourselves, we are not asking for an Other to see us as we are, as we already are, as we have always been, as we were constituted prior to the encounter itself. Instead, in the asking, in the petition, we have already become something new, since we are constituted by virtue of the address, a need and desire for the Other that takes place in language in the broadest sense, one without which we could not be. To ask for recognition, or to offer it, is precisely not to ask for recognition for what one already is. It is to solicit a becoming, to instigate a transformation, to petition the future always in relation to the Other. It is also to stake one's own being, and one's own persistence in one's own being, in the struggle for recognition. This is perhaps a version of Hegel that I am offering, but it is also a departure, since I will not discover myself as the same as the "you" on which I depend in order to be.

I have moved in this essay perhaps too blithely among speculations on the body as the site of a common human vulnerability, even as I have insisted that this vulnerability is always articulated differently, that it cannot be properly thought of outside a differentiated field of power and, specifically, the differential operation of norms of recognition. At the same time, however, I would probably still insist that speculations on the formation of the subject are crucial to understanding the basis of non-violent responses to injury and, perhaps most important, to a theory of collective responsibility. I

realize that it is not possible to set up easy analogies between the formation of the individual and the formation, say, of state-centered political cultures, and I caution against the use of individual psychopathology to diagnose or even simply to read the kinds of violent formations in which state- and non-state-centered forms of power engage. But when we are speaking about the "subject" we are not always speaking about an individual: we are speaking about a model for agency and intelligibility, one that is very often based on notions of sovereign power. At the most intimate levels, we are social; we are comported toward a "you"; we are outside ourselves, constituted in cultural norms that precede and exceed us, given over to a set of cultural norms and a field of power that condition us fundamentally.

The task is doubtless to think through this primary impressionability and vulnerability with a theory of power and recognition. To do this would no doubt be one way a politically informed psychoanalytic feminism could proceed. The "I" who cannot come into being without a "you" is also fundamentally dependent on a set of norms of recognition that originated neither with the "I" nor with the "you." What is prematurely, or belatedly, called the "I" is, at the outset, enthralled, even if it is to a violence, an abandonment, a mechanism; doubtless it seems better at that point to be enthralled with what is impoverished or abusive than not to be enthralled at all and so to lose the condition of one's being and becoming. The bind of radically inadequate care consists of this, namely, that attachment is crucial to survival and that, when attachment takes place, it does so in relation to persons and institutional conditions that may well be violent, impoverishing, and inadequate. If an infant fails to attach, it is threatened with death, but, under some conditions, even if it does attach, it is threatened with non-survival from another direction. So the question of primary support for primary vulnerability is an ethical one for the infant and for the child. But there are broader ethical

consequences from this situation, ones that pertain not only to the adult world but to the sphere of politics and its implicit ethical dimension.

I find that my very formation implicates the other in me, that my own foreignness to myself is, paradoxically, the source of my ethical connection with others. I am not fully known to myself, because part of what I am is the enigmatic traces of others. In this sense, I cannot know myself perfectly or know my "difference" from others in an irreducible way. This unknowingness may seem, from a given perspective, a problem for ethics and politics. Don't I need to know myself in order to act responsibly in social relations? Surely, to a certain extent, yes. But is there an ethical valence to my unknowingness? I am wounded, and I find that the wound itself testifies to the fact that I am impressionable, given over to the Other in ways that I cannot fully predict or control. I cannot think the question of responsibility alone, in isolation from the Other; if I do, I have taken myself out of the relational bind that frames the problem of responsibility from the start.

If I understand myself on the model of the human, and if the kinds of public grieving that are available to me make clear the norms by which the "human" is constituted for me, then it would seem that I am as much constituted by those I do grieve for as by those whose deaths I disavow, whose nameless and faceless deaths form the melancholic background for my social world, if not my First Worldism. Antigone, risking death herself by burying her brother against the edict of Creon, exemplified the political risks in defying the ban against public grief during times of increased sovereign power and hegemonic national unity.<sup>11</sup> What are the cultural barriers against which we struggle when we try to find out about the losses that we are asked not to mourn, when we attempt to name, and so to bring under the rubric of the "human," those whom the United States and its allies have killed? Similarly, the cultural barriers that

feminism must negotiate have to take place with reference to the operation of power and the persistence of vulnerability.

A feminist opposition to militarism emerges from many sources, many cultural venues, in any number of idioms; it does not have to—and, finally, cannot—speak in a single political idiom, and no grand settling of epistemological accounts has to be required. This seems to be the theoretical commitment, for instance, of the organization Women in Black.<sup>12</sup> A desideratum comes from Chandra Mohanty's important essay "Under Western Eyes," in which she maintains that notions of progress within feminism cannot be equated with assimilation to so-called Western notions of agency and political mobilization.<sup>13</sup> There she argues that the comparative framework in which First World feminists develop their critique of the conditions of oppression for Third World women on the basis of universal claims not only misreads the agency of Third World feminists, but also falsely produces a homogeneous conception of who they are and what they want. In her view, that framework also reproduces the First World as the site of authentic feminist agency and does so by producing a monolithic Third World against which to understand itself. Finally, she argues that the imposition of versions of agency onto Third World contexts, and focusing on the ostensible lack of agency signified by the veil or the burka, not only misunderstands the various cultural meanings that the burka might carry for women who wear it, but also denies the very idioms of agency that are relevant for such women.<sup>14</sup> Mohanty's critique is thorough and right—and it was written more than a decade ago. It seems to me now that the possibility of international coalition has to be rethought on the basis of this critique and others. Such a coalition would have to be modeled on new modes of cultural translation and would be different from appreciating this or that position or asking for recognition in ways that assume that we are all fixed and frozen in our various locations and "subject-positions."

We could have several engaged intellectual debates going on at the same time and find ourselves joined in the fight against violence, without having to agree on many epistemological issues. We could disagree on the status and character of modernity and yet find ourselves joined in asserting and defending the rights of indigenous women to health care, reproductive technology, decent wages, physical protection, cultural rights, freedom of assembly. If you saw me on such a protest line, would you wonder how a postmodernist was able to muster the necessary "agency" to get there today? I doubt it. You would assume that I had walked or taken the subway! By the same token, various routes lead us into politics, various stories bring us onto the street, various kinds of reasoning and belief. We do not need to ground ourselves in a single model of communication, a single model of reason, a single notion of the subject before we are able to act. Indeed, an international coalition of feminist activists and thinkers—a coalition that affirms the thinking of activists and the activism of thinkers and refuses to put them into distinctive categories that deny the actual complexity of the lives in question—will have to accept the array of sometimes incommensurable epistemological and political beliefs and modes and means of agency that bring us into activism.

There will be differences among women, for instance, on what the role of reason is in contemporary politics. Spivak insists that it is not *reason* that politicizes the tribal women of India suffering exploitation by capitalist firms, but a set of values and a sense of the sacred that come through religion.<sup>15</sup> And Adriana Cavarero claims that it is not because we are reasoning beings that we are connected to one another, but, rather, because we are *exposed* to one another, requiring a recognition that does not substitute the recognizer for the recognized.<sup>16</sup> Do we want to say that it is our status as "subjects" that binds us all together even though, for many of us, the "subject" is

multiple or fractured? And does the insistence on the subject as a precondition of political agency not erase the more fundamental modes of dependency that do bind us and out of which emerge our thinking and affiliation, the basis of our vulnerability, affiliation, and collective resistance?

What allows us to encounter one another? What are the conditions of possibility for an international feminist coalition? My sense is that to answer these questions, we cannot look to the nature of "man," or the a priori conditions of language, or the timeless conditions of communication. We have to consider the demands of cultural translation that we assume to be part of an ethical responsibility (over and above the explicit prohibitions against thinking the Other under the sign of the "human") as we try to think the global dilemmas that women face. It is not possible to impose a language of politics developed within First World contexts on women who are facing the threat of imperialist economic exploitation and cultural obliteration. On the other hand, we would be wrong to think that the First World is *here* and the Third World is *there*, that a second world is *somewhere else*, that a subaltern subtends these divisions. These topographies have shifted, and what was once thought of as a border, that which delimits and bounds, is a highly populated site, if not the very definition of the nation, confounding identity in what may well become a very auspicious direction.

For if I am confounded by you, then you are already of me, and I am nowhere without you. I cannot muster the "we" except by finding the way in which I am tied to "you," by trying to translate but finding that my own language must break up and yield if I am to know you. You are what I gain through this disorientation and loss. This is how the human comes into being, again and again, as that which we have yet to know.

## PRECARIOUS LIFE

... the surplus of every sociality over every solitude.

*Levinas*

At a recent meeting, I listened to a university press director tell a story. It was unclear whether he identified with the point of view from which the story was told, or whether he was relaying the bad news reluctantly. But the story he told was about another meeting, where he was listening, and there a president of a university made the point that no one is reading humanities books anymore, that the humanities have nothing more to offer or, rather, nothing to offer for our times. I'm not sure whether he was saying that the university president was saying that the humanities had lost their moral authority, but it sounded like this was, in fact, someone's view, and

that it was a view to take seriously. There was an ensuing set of discussions at the same meeting in which it was not always possible to tell which view was owned by whom, or whether anyone really was willing to own a view. It was a discussion that turned on the question, Have the humanities undermined themselves, with all their relativism and questioning and "critique," or have the humanities been undermined by all those who *oppose* all that relativism and questioning and "critique"? Someone has undermined the humanities, or some group of people has, but it was unclear who, and it was unclear who thought this was true. I started to wonder whether I was not in the middle of the humanities quandary itself, the one in which no one knows who is speaking and in what voice, and with what intent. Does anyone stand by the words they utter? Can we still trace those words to a speaker or, indeed, a writer? And which message, exactly, was being sent?

Of course, it would be paradoxical if I were now to argue that what we really need is to tether discourse to authors, and in that way we will reestablish both authors and authority. I did my own bit of work, along with many of you, in trying to cut that tether. But what I do think is missing, and what I would like to see and hear return is a consideration of the structure of address itself. Because although I did not know in whose voice this person was speaking, whether the voice was his own or not, I did feel that I was being addressed, and that something called the humanities was being derided from some direction or another. To respond to this address seems an important obligation during these times. This obligation is something other than the rehabilitation of the author—subject *per se*. It is about a mode of response that follows upon having been addressed, a comportment toward the Other only after the Other has made a demand upon me, accused me of a failing, or asked me to assume a responsibility. This is an exchange that cannot be assimilated into the schema in which the

subject is over here as a topic to be reflexively interrogated, and the Other is over there, as a theme to be purveyed. The structure of address is important for understanding how moral authority is introduced and sustained if we accept not just that we address others when we speak, but that in some way we come to exist, as it were, in the moment of being addressed, and something about our existence proves precarious when that address fails. More emphatically, however, what binds us morally has to do with how we are addressed by others in ways that we cannot avert or avoid; this impingement by the other's address constitutes us first and foremost against our will or, perhaps put more appropriately, prior to the formation of our will. So if we think that moral authority is about finding one's will and standing by it, stamping one's name upon one's will, it may be that we miss the very mode by which moral demands are relayed. That is, we miss the situation of being addressed, the demand that comes from elsewhere, sometimes a nameless elsewhere, by which our obligations are articulated and pressed upon us.

Indeed, this conception of what is morally binding is not one that I give myself; it does not proceed from my autonomy or my reflexivity. It comes to me from elsewhere, unbidden, unexpected, and unplanned. In fact, it tends to ruin my plans, and if my plans are ruined, that may well be the sign that something is morally binding upon me. We think of presidents as wielding speech acts in willful ways, so when the director of a university press, or the president of a university speaks, we expect to know what they are saying, and to whom they are speaking, and with what intent. We expect the address to be authoritative and, in that sense, to be binding. But presidential speech is strange these days, and it would take a better rhetorician than I am to understand the mysteriousness of its ways. Why should it be, for instance, that Iraq is called a threat to the security of the "civilized world" while missiles flying from North Korea, and even

the attempted hostage-taking of US boats, are called "regional issues"? And if the US President was urged by the majority of the world to withdraw his threat of war, why does he not seem to feel obligated by this address? But given the shambles into which presidential address has fallen, perhaps we should think more seriously about the relation between modes of address and moral authority. This may help us to know what values the humanities have to offer, and what the situation of discourse is in which moral authority becomes binding.

I would like to consider the "face," the notion introduced by Emmanuel Levinas, to explain how it is that others make moral claims upon us, address moral demands to us, ones that we do not ask for, ones that we are not free to refuse. Levinas makes a preliminary demand upon me, but his is not the only demand that I am bound to follow these days. I will trace what seem to me the outlines of a possible Jewish ethic of non-violence. Then I will relate this to some of the more pressing questions of violence and ethics that are upon us now. The Levinasian notion of the "face" has caused critical consternation for a long time. It seems to be that the "face" of what he calls the "Other" makes an ethical demand upon me, and yet we do not know which demand it makes. The "face" of the other cannot be read for a secret meaning, and the imperative it delivers is not immediately translatable into a prescription that might be linguistically formulated and followed.

Levinas writes:

The approach to the face is the most basic mode of responsibility .... The face is not in front of me (*en face de moi*), but above me; it is the other before death, looking through and exposing death. Secondly, the face is the other who asks me not to let him die alone, as if to do so were to become an accomplice in his death. Thus the

face says to me: you shall not kill. In the relation to the face I am exposed as a usurper of the place of the other. The celebrated "right to existence" that Spinoza called the *conatus essendi* and defined as the basic principle of all intelligibility is challenged by the relation to the face. Accordingly, my duty to respond to the other suspends my natural right to self-survival, *le droit vitale*. My ethical relation of love for the other stems from the fact that the self cannot survive by itself alone, cannot find meaning within its own being-in-the-world .... To expose myself to the vulnerability of the face is to put my ontological right to existence into question. In ethics, the other's right to exist has primacy over my own, a primacy epitomized in the ethical edict: you shall not kill, you shall not jeopardize the life of the other.<sup>1</sup>

Levinas writes further:

The face is what one cannot kill, or at least it is that whose meaning consists in saying, "thou shalt not kill." Murder, it is true, is a banal fact: one can kill the Other; the ethical exigency is not an ontological necessity .... It also appears in the Scriptures, to which the humanity of man is exposed inasmuch as it is engaged in the world. But to speak truly, the appearance in being of these "ethical peculiarities"—the humanity of man—is a rupture of being. It is significant, even if being resumes and recovers itself.<sup>2</sup>

So the face, strictly speaking, does not speak, but what the face means is nevertheless conveyed by the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." It conveys this commandment without precisely speaking it. It would seem that we can use this biblical command to understand something of the face's meaning, but something is missing here, since the "face" does not speak in the sense that the mouth does; the

face is neither reducible to the mouth nor, indeed, to anything the mouth has to utter. Someone or something else speaks when the face is likened to a certain kind of speech; it is a speech that does not come from a mouth or, if it does, has no ultimate origin or meaning there. In fact, in an essay entitled "Peace and Proximity," Levinas makes plain that "the face is not exclusively a human face."<sup>3</sup> To explain this, he refers to Vassili Grossman's text *Life and Fate*, which he describes as:

the story ... of the families, wives, and parents of political detainees traveling to the Lubyanka in Moscow for the latest news. A line is formed at the counter, a line where one can see only the backs of others. A woman awaits her turn: [She] had never thought that the human back could be so expressive, and could convey states of mind in such a penetrating way. Persons approaching the counter had a particular way of craning their neck and their back, their raised shoulders with shoulder blades like springs, which seemed to cry, sob, and scream. (PP, 167)

Here the term "face" operates as a catachresis: "face" describes the human back, the craning of the neck, the raising of the shoulder blades like "springs." And these bodily parts, in turn, are said to cry and to sob and to scream, as if they were a face or, rather, a face with a mouth, a throat, or indeed, just a mouth and throat from which vocalizations emerge that do not settle into words. The face is to be found in the back and the neck, but it is not quite a face. The sounds that come from or through the face are agonized, suffering. So we can see already that the "face" seems to consist in a series of displacements such that a face is figured as a back which, in turn, is figured as a scene of agonized vocalization. And though there are many names strung in a row here, they end with a figure for what cannot be named, an utterance that is not, strictly speaking, linguistic. Thus the

face, the name for the face, and the words by which we are to understand its meaning—"Thou shalt not kill"—do not quite deliver the meaning of the face, since at the end of the line, it seems, it is precisely the wordless vocalization of suffering that marks the limits of linguistic translation here. The face, if we are to put words to its meaning, will be that for which no words really work; the face seems to be a kind of sound, the sound of language evacuating its sense, the sonorous substratum of vocalization that precedes and limits the delivery of any semantic sense.

At the end of this description, Levinas appends the following lines, which do not quite accomplish the sentence form: "The face as the extreme precariousness of the other. Peace as awakens to the precariousness of the other" (PP, 167). Both statements are similes, and they both avoid the verb, especially the copula. They do not say that the face *is* that precariousness, or that peace *is* the mode of being awake to an Other's precariousness. Both phrases are substitutions that refuse any commitment to the order of being. Levinas tells us, in fact, that "humanity is a rupture of being" and in the previous remarks he performs that suspension and rupture in an utterance that is both less and more than a sentence form. To respond to the face, to understand its meaning, means to be awake to what is precarious in another life or, rather, the precariousness of life itself. This cannot be an awakens, to use his word, to my own life, and then an extrapolation from an understanding of my own precariousness to an understanding of another's precarious life. It has to be an understanding of the precariousness of the Other. This is what makes the face belong to the sphere of ethics. Levinas writes, "the face of the other in its precariousness and defenselessness, is for me at once the temptation to kill and the call to peace, the 'You shall not kill'" (PP, 167). This last remark suggests something quite disarming in several senses. Why would it be that the very precariousness of the Other

would produce for me a temptation to kill? Or why would it produce the temptation to kill *at the same time* that it delivers a demand for peace? Is there something about my apprehension of the Other's precariousness that makes me want to kill the Other? Is it the simple vulnerability of the Other that becomes a murderous temptation for me? If the Other, the Other's face, which after all carries the meaning of this precariousness, at once tempts me with murder and prohibits me from acting upon it, then the face operates to produce a struggle for me, and establishes this struggle at the heart of ethics. It would seem that it is God's voice that is represented by the human voice, since it is God who says, through Moses, "Thou shalt not kill." The face that at once makes me murderous and prohibits me from murder is the one that speaks in a voice that is not its own, speaks in a voice that is no human voice.<sup>4</sup> So the face makes various utterances at once: it bespeaks an agony, an injurability, at the same time that it bespeaks a divine prohibition against killing.<sup>5</sup>

Earlier in "Peace and Proximity," Levinas considers the vocation of Europe, and wonders whether the "Thou shalt not kill" is not precisely what one should hear in the very meaning of European culture. It is unclear where his Europe begins or ends, whether it has geographical boundaries, or whether it is produced every time the commandment is spoken or conveyed. This is, already, a curious Europe whose meaning is conjectured to consist in the words of the Hebrew God, whose civilizational status, as it were, depends upon the transmission of divine interdictions from the Bible. It is Europe in which Hebraism has taken the place of Hellenism, and Islam remains unspeakable. Perhaps Levinas is telling us that the only Europe that ought to be called Europe is the one that elevates the Old Testament over civil and secular law. In any case, he seems to be

returning to the primacy of interdiction to the meaning of civilization itself. And though we might be tempted to understand this as a nefarious Eurocentrism, it is probably also important to see that there is no recognizable Europe that can be derived from his view. In fact, it is not the existence of the interdiction against murder that makes Europe Europe, but the anxiety and the desire that the interdiction produces. As he continues to explain how this commandment works, he refers to Genesis, chapter 32, in which Jacob learns of his brother and rival Esau's imminent approach. Levinas writes, "Jacob is troubled by the news that his brother Esau—friend or foe—is marching to meet him 'at the head of four hundred men.' Verse 8 tells us: 'Jacob was greatly afraid and anxious.'" Levinas then turns to the commentator Rashi to understand "the difference between fright and anxiety," and concludes that "[Jacob] was frightened of his own death but was anxious he might have to kill" (PP, 164).

Of course, it is unclear still why Levinas would assume that one of the first or primary responses to another's precariousness is the desire to kill. Why would it be that the spring of the shoulder blades, the craning of the neck, the agonized vocalization conveying another's suffering would prompt in anyone a lust for violence? It must be that Esau over there, with his four hundred men, threatens to kill me, or looks like he will, and that in relation to that menacing Other or, indeed, the one whose face represents a menace, I must defend myself to preserve my life. Levinas explains, though, that murdering in the name of self-preservation is not justified, that self-preservation is never a sufficient condition for the ethical justification of violence. This seems, then, like an extreme pacifism, an absolute pacifism, and it may well be. We may or may not want to accept these consequences, but we should consider the dilemma they pose as constitutive of the ethical anxiety: "Frightened for his own life, but anxious he might have to kill." There is fear for one's own survival, and there is anxiety

about hurting the Other, and these two impulses are at war with each other, like siblings fighting. But they are at war with each other in order *not* to be at war, and this seems to be the point. For the non-violence that Levinas seems to promote does not come from a peaceful place, but rather from a constant tension between the fear of undergoing violence and the fear of inflicting violence. I could put an end to my fear of my own death by obliterating the other, although I would have to keep obliterating, especially if there are four hundred men behind him, and they all have families and friends, if not a nation or two behind them. I could put an end to my anxiety about becoming a murderer by reconciling myself to the ethical justification for inflicting violence and death under such conditions. I could bring out the utilitarian calculus, or appeal to the intrinsic rights of individuals to protect and preserve their own rights. We can imagine uses of both consequentialist and deontological justifications that would give me many opportunities to inflict violence righteously. A consequentialist might argue that it would be for the good of the many. A deontologist might appeal to the intrinsic worth of my own life. They could also be used to dispute the primacy of the interdiction on murder, an interdiction in the face of which I would continue to feel my anxiety.

Although Levinas counsels that self-preservation is not a good enough reason to kill, he also presumes that the desire to kill is primary to human beings. If the first impulse towards the other's vulnerability is the desire to kill, the ethical injunction is precisely to militate against that first impulse. In psychoanalytic terms, that would mean marshaling the desire to kill in the service of an internal desire to kill one's own aggression and sense of priority. The result would probably be neurotic, but it may be that psychoanalysis meets a limit here. For Levinas, it is the ethical itself that gets one out of the circuitry of bad conscience, the logic by which the prohibition against aggression becomes the internal conduit for aggression itself. Aggression is then

turned back upon oneself in the form of super-egoic cruelty. If the ethical moves us beyond bad conscience, it is because bad conscience is, after all, only a negative version of narcissism, and so still a form of narcissism. The face of the Other comes to me from outside, and interrupts that narcissistic circuit. The face of the Other calls me out of narcissism towards something finally more important.

Levinas writes:

The Other is the sole being I can wish to kill. I can wish. And yet this power is quite the contrary of power. The triumph of this power is its defeat as power. At the very moment when my power to kill realizes itself, the other has escaped me . . . I have not looked at him in the face, I have not encountered his face. The temptation of total negation . . . this is the presence of the face. To be in relation with the other face to face is to be unable to kill. It is also the situation of discourse. (9)

*It is also the situation of discourse . . .*

. . . this last is no idle claim. Levinas explains in one interview that "face and discourse are tied. It speaks, it is in this that it renders possible and begins all discourse" (*EI*, 87). Since what the face "says" is "Thou shalt not kill," it would appear that it is through this primary commandment that speaking first comes into being, so that speaking first comes into being against the backdrop of this possible murder. More generally, discourse makes an ethical claim upon us precisely because, prior to speaking, something is spoken to us. In a simple sense, and perhaps not quite as Levinas intended, we are first spoken to, addressed, by an Other, before we assume language for ourselves. And we can conclude further that it is only on the condition that we are addressed that we are able to make use of

language. It is in this sense that the Other is the condition of discourse. If the Other is obliterated, so too is language, since language cannot survive outside of the conditions of address.

But let us remember that Levinas has also told us that the face—which is the face of the Other, and so the ethical demand made by the Other—is that vocalization of agony that is not yet language or no longer language, the one by which we are awakened to the precariousness of the Other's life, the one that rouses at once the temptation to murder and the interdiction against it. Why would it be that the inability to kill is the situation of discourse? Is it rather that the tension between fear for one's own life and anxiety about becoming a murderer constitutes the ambivalence that is the situation of discourse? That situation is one in which we are addressed, in which the Other directs language towards us. That language communicates the precariousness of life that establishes the ongoing tension of a non-violent ethics. The situation of discourse is not the same as what is said or, indeed, what is sayable. For Levinas, the situation of discourse consists in the fact that language arrives as an address we do not will, and by which we are, in an original sense, captured, if not, in Levinas's terms, held hostage. So there is a certain violence already in being addressed, given a name, subject to a set of impositions, compelled to respond to an exacting alterity. No one controls the terms by which one is addressed, at least not in the most fundamental way. To be addressed is to be, from the start, deprived of will, and to have that deprivation exist as the basis of one's situation in discourse.

Within the ethical frame of the Levinasian position, we begin by positing a dyad. But the sphere of politics, in his terms, is one in which there are always more than two subjects at play in the scene. Indeed, I may decide *not* to invoke my own desire to preserve my life as a justification for violence, but what if violence is done to someone I love? What if there is an Other who does violence to another Other?

To which Other do I respond ethically? Which Other do I put before myself? Or do I then stand by? Derrida claims that to try and respond to every Other can only result in a situation of radical irresponsibility. And the Spinozists, the Nietzscheans, the utilitarians, and the Freudians all ask, "Can I invoke the imperative to preserve the life of the Other even if I cannot invoke this right of self-preservation for myself?" And is it really possible to sidestep self-preservation in the way that Levinas implies? Spinoza writes in *The Ethics* that the desire to live the right life requires the desire to live, to persist in one's own being, suggesting that ethics must always marshal some life drives, even if, as a super-egoic state, ethics threatens to become a pure culture of the death drive. It is possible, even easy, to read Levinas as an elevated masochist and it does not help us to avert that conclusion when we consider that, when asked what he thought of psychoanalysis, he is said to have responded, *is that not a form of pornography?*

But the reason to consider Levinas in the context of today is at least twofold. First, he gives us a way of thinking about the relationship between representation and humanization, a relationship that is not as straightforward as we might like to think. If critical thinking has something to say about or to the present situation, it may well be in the domain of representation where humanization and dehumanization occur ceaselessly. Second, he offers, within a tradition of Jewish philosophy, an account of the relationship between violence and ethics that has some important implications for thinking through what an ethic of Jewish non-violence might be. This strikes me as a timely and urgent question for many of us, especially those of us supporting the emergent moment of post-Zionism within Judaism. For now, I would like to reconsider first the problematic of humanization if we approach it through the figure of the face.

When we consider the ordinary ways that we think about humanization and dehumanization, we find the assumption that those who gain representation, especially self-representation, have a better chance of being humanized, and those who have no chance to represent themselves run a greater risk of being treated as less than human, regarded as less than human, or indeed, not regarded at all. We have a paradox before us because Levinas has made clear that the face is not exclusively a human face, and yet it is a condition for humanization.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, there is the use of the face, within the media, in order to effect a dehumanization. It would seem that personification does not always humanize. For Levinas, it may well evacuate the face that does humanize; and I hope to show, personification sometimes performs its own dehumanization. How do we come to know the difference between the inhuman but humanizing face, for Levinas, and the dehumanization that can also take place through the face?

We may have to think of different ways that violence can happen: one is precisely *through* the production of the face, the face of Osama bin Laden, the face of Yasser Arafat, the face of Saddam Hussein. What has been done with these faces in the media? They are framed, surely, but they are also playing to the frame. And the result is invariably tendentious. These are media portraits that are often marshaled in the service of war, as if bin Laden's face were the face of terror itself, as if Arafat were the face of deception, as if Hussein's face were the face of contemporary tyranny. And then there is the face of Colin Powell, as it is framed and circulated, seated before the shrouded canvas of Picasso's *Guernica*: a face that is foregrounded, we might say, against a background of effacement. Then there are the faces of the Afghan girls who stripped off, or let fall, their burkas. One week last winter, I visited a political theorist who proudly displayed these faces on his refrigerator door, right next to some apparently valuable super-market coupons, as a sign of the success of democracy. A few days

later, I attended a conference in which I heard a talk about the important cultural meanings of the burka, the way in which it signifies belonging-ness to a community and religion, a family, an extended history of kin relations, an exercise of modesty and pride, a protection against shame, and operates as well as a veil behind which, and through which, feminine agency can and does work.<sup>7</sup> The fear of the speaker was that the destruction of the burka, as if it were a sign of repression, backwardness or, indeed, a resistance to cultural modernity itself, would result in a significant decimation of Islamic culture and the extension of US cultural assumptions about how sexuality and agency ought to be organized and represented. According to the triumphalist photos that dominated the front page of the *New York Times*, these young women bared their faces as an act of liberation, an act of gratitude to the US military, and an expression of a pleasure that had become suddenly and ecstatically permissible. The American viewer was ready, as it were, to see the face, and it was to the camera, and for the camera, after all, that the face was finally bared, where it became, in a flash, a symbol of successfully exported American cultural progress. It became bared to us, at that moment, and we were, as it were, in possession of the face; not only did our cameras capture it, but we arranged for the face to capture our triumph, and act as the rationale for our violence, the incursion on sovereignty, the deaths of civilians. Where is loss in that face? And where is the suffering over war? Indeed, the photographed face seemed to conceal or displace the face in the Levinasian sense, since we saw and heard through that face no vocalization of grief or agony, no sense of the precariousness of life.

So we seem to be charting a certain ambivalence. In a strange way, all of these faces humanize the events of the last year or so; they give a human face to Afghan women; they give a face to terror; they give a

face to evil. But is the face humanizing in each and every instance? And if it is humanizing in some instances, in what form does this humanization occur, and is there also a dehumanization performed in and through the face? Do we encounter those faces in the Levinasian sense, or are these, in various ways, images that, through their frame, produce the paradigmatically human, become the very cultural means through which the paradigmatically human is established? Although it is tempting to think that the images themselves establish the visual norm for the human, one that ought to be emulated or embodied, this would be a mistake, since in the case of bin Laden or Saddam Hussein the paradigmatically human is understood to reside outside the frame; this is the human face in its deformity and extremity, not the one with which you are asked to identify. Indeed, the disidentification is incited through the hyperbolic absorption of evil into the face itself, the eyes. And if we are to understand ourselves as interpellated anywhere in these images, it is precisely as the unrepresented viewer, the one who looks on, the one who is captured by no image at all, but whose charge it is to capture and subdue, if not eviscerate, the image at hand. Similarly, although we might want to champion the suddenly bared faces of the young Afghan women as the celebration of the human, we have to ask in what narrative function these images are mobilized, whether the incursion into Afghanistan was really in the name of feminism, and in what form of feminism did it belatedly clothe itself. Most importantly, though, it seems we have to ask what scenes of pain and grief these images cover over and derealize. Indeed, all of these images seem to suspend the precariousness of life; they either represent American triumph, or provide an incitement for American military triumph in the future. *They are the spoils of war or they are the targets of war.* And in this sense, we might say that the face is, in every instance, defaced, and that this is one of the representational and philosophical consequences of war itself.

It is important to distinguish among kinds of unrepresentability. In the first instance, there is the Levinasian view according to which there is a "face" which no face can fully exhaust, the face understood as human suffering, as the cry of human suffering, which can take no direct representation. Here the "face" is always a figure for something that is not literally a face. Other human expressions, however, seem to be figurable as a "face" even though they are not faces, but sounds or emissions of another order. The cry that is represented through the figure of the face is one that confounds the senses and produces a clearly improper comparison: that cannot be right, for the face is not a sound. And yet, the face can stand for the sound precisely because it is *not* the sound. In this sense, the figure underscores the incommensurability of the face with whatever it represents. Strictly speaking, then, the face does not represent anything, in the sense that it fails to capture and deliver that to which it refers.

For Levinas, then, the human is not *represented by* the face. Rather, the human is indirectly affirmed in that very disjunction that makes representation impossible, and this disjunction is conveyed in the impossible representation. For representation to convey the human, then, representation must not only fail, but it must *show* its failure. There is something unrepresentable that we nevertheless seek to represent, and that paradox must be retained in the representation we give.

In this sense, the human is not identified with what is represented but neither is it identified with the unrepresentable; it is, rather, that which limits the success of any representational practice. The face is not "effaced" in this failure of representation, but is constituted in that very possibility. Something altogether different happens, however, when the face operates in the service of a personification that claims

to "capture" the human being in question. For Levinas, the human cannot be captured through the representation, and we can see that some loss of the human takes place when it is "captured" by the image.<sup>8</sup>

An example of that kind of "capture" takes place when evil is personified through the face. A certain commensurability is asserted between that ostensible evil and the face. This face *is* evil, and the evil that the face *is* extends to the evil that belongs to humans in general—generalized evil. We personify the evil or military triumph through a face that is supposed to be, to capture, to contain the very idea for which it stands. In this case, we cannot hear the face through the face. The face here masks the sounds of human suffering and the proximity we might have to the precariousness of life itself.

The face over there, though, the one whose meaning is portrayed as captured by evil is precisely the one that is not human, not in the Levinasian sense. The "I" who sees that face is not identified with it: the face represents that for which no identification is possible, an accomplishment of dehumanization and a condition for violence.

Of course, a fuller elaboration of this topic would have to parse the various ways that representation works in relation to humanization and dehumanization. Sometimes there are triumphalist images that give us the idea of the human with whom we are to identify, for instance the patriotic hero who expands our own ego boundary ecstatically into that of the nation. No understanding of the relationship between the image and humanization can take place without a consideration of the conditions and meanings of identification and disidentification. It is worth noting, however, that identification always relies upon a difference that it seeks to overcome, and that its aim is accomplished only by reintroducing the difference it claims to have vanquished. The one with whom I identify is not me, and that "not being me" is the condition of the identification. Otherwise, as

Jacqueline Rose reminds us, identification collapses into identity, which spells the death of identification itself.<sup>9</sup> This difference internal to identification is crucial, and, in a way, it shows us that dis-identification is part of the common practice of identification itself. The triumphalist image can communicate an impossible overcoming of this difference, a kind of identification that believes that it has overcome the difference that is the condition of its own possibility. The critical image, if we can speak that way, works this difference in the same way as the Levinasian image; it must not only fail to capture its referent, but *show* this failing.

The demand for a truer image, for more images, for images that convey the full horror and reality of the suffering has its place and importance. The erasure of that suffering through the prohibition of images and representations more generally circumscribes the sphere of appearance, what we can see and what we can know. But it would be a mistake to think that we only need to find the right and true images, and that a certain reality will then be conveyed. The reality is not conveyed by what is represented within the image, but through the challenge to representation that reality delivers.<sup>10</sup>

The media's evacuation of the human through the image has to be understood, though, in terms of the broader problem that normative schemes of intelligibility establish what will and will not be human, what will be a livable life, what will be a grievable death. These normative schemes operate not only by producing ideals of the human that differentiate among those who are more and less human. Sometimes they produce images of the less than human, in the guise of the human, to show how the less than human disguises itself, and threatens to deceive those of us who might think we recognize another human there, in that face. But sometimes these normative schemes work precisely through providing no image, no name, no narrative, so that there never was a life, and there never was a death.

These are two distinct forms of normative power: one operates through producing a symbolic identification of the face with the inhuman, foreclosing our apprehension of the human in the scene; the other works through radical effacement, so that there never was a human, there never was a life, and no murder has, therefore, ever taken place. In the first instance, something that has already emerged into the realm of appearance needs to be disputed as recognizably human; in the second instance, the public realm of appearance is itself constituted on the basis of the exclusion of that image. The task at hand is to establish modes of public seeing and hearing that might well respond to the cry of the human within the sphere of appearance, a sphere in which the trace of the cry has become hyperbolically inflated to rationalize a gluttonous nationalism, or fully obliterated, where both alternatives turn out to be the same. We might consider this as one of the philosophical and representational implications of war, because politics—and power—work in part through regulating what can appear, what can be heard.

Of course, these schemas of intelligibility are tacitly and forcefully mandated by those corporations that monopolize control over the mainstream media with strong interests in maintaining US military power. The war coverage has brought into relief the need for a broad de-monopolizing of media interests, legislation for which has been, predictably, highly contested on Capitol Hill. We think of these interests as controlling rights of ownership, but they are also, simultaneously, deciding what will and will not be publicly recognizable as reality. They do not show violence, but there is a violence in the frame in what is shown. That latter violence is the mechanism through which certain lives and deaths either remain unrepresentable or become represented in ways that effects their capture (once again) by the war effort. The first is an effacement through occlusion; the second is an effacement through representation itself.

What is the relation between the violence by which these ungrivable lives were lost and the prohibition on their public grievability? Is the prohibition on grieving the continuation of the violence itself? And does the prohibition on grieving demand a tight control on the reproduction of images and words? How does the prohibition on grieving emerge as a circumscription of representability, so that our national melancholia becomes tightly fitted into the frame for what can be said, what can be shown? Is this not the site where we can read, if we still read, the way that melancholia becomes inscribed as the limits of what can be thought? The derealization of loss—the insensitivity to human suffering and death—becomes the mechanism through which dehumanization is accomplished. This derealization takes place neither inside nor outside the image, but through the very framing by which the image is contained.

In the initial campaign of the war against Iraq, the US government advertised its military feats as an overwhelming visual phenomenon. That the US government and military called this a “shock and awe” strategy suggests that they were producing a visual spectacle that numbs the senses and, like the sublime itself, puts out of play the very capacity to think. This production takes place not only for the Iraqi population on the ground, whose senses are supposed to be done in by this spectacle, but also for the consumers of war who rely on CNN or Fox, the network that regularly interspersed its war coverage on television with the claim that it is the “most trustworthy” news source on the war. The “shock and awe” strategy seeks not only to produce an aesthetic dimension to war, but to exploit and instrumentalize the visual aesthetics as part of a war strategy itself. CNN has provided much of these visual aesthetics. And although the *New York Times* belatedly came out against the war, it also adorned its front pages on a daily basis with romantic images of military ordnance against the setting sun in Iraq or “bombs

bursting in air” above the streets and homes of Baghdad (which are not surprisingly occluded from view). Of course, it was the spectacular destruction of the World Trade Center that first made a claim upon the “shock and awe” effect, and the US recently displayed for all the world to see that it can and will be equally destructive. The media becomes entranced by the sublimity of destruction, and voices of dissent and opposition must find a way to intervene upon this desensitizing dream machine in which the massive destruction of lives and homes, sources of water, electricity, and heat, are produced as a delirious sign of a resuscitated US military power.

Indeed, the graphic photos of US soldiers dead and decapitated in Iraq, and then the photos of children maimed and killed by US bombs, were both refused by the mainstream media, supplanted with footage that always took the aerial view, an aerial view whose perspective is established and maintained by state power. And yet, the moment the bodies executed by the Hussein regime were uncovered, they made it to the front page of the *New York Times*, since those bodies must be grieved. The outrage over their deaths motivates the war effort, as it moves on to its managerial phase, which differs very little from what is commonly called “an occupation.”

Tragically, it seems that the US seeks to preempt violence against itself by waging violence first, but the violence it fears is the violence it engenders. I do not mean to suggest by this that the US is responsible in some causal way for the attacks on its citizens. And I do not exonerate Palestinian suicide bombers, regardless of the terrible conditions that animate their murderous acts. There is, however, some distance to be traveled between living in terrible conditions, suffering serious, even unbearable injuries, and resolving on murderous acts. President Bush traveled that distance quickly, calling for “an end to grief” after a mere ten days of flamboyant mourning. Suffering can yield an experience of humility, of vulnerability, of

impressionability and dependence, and these can become resources, if we do not "resolve" them too quickly; they can move us beyond and against the vocation of the paranoid victim who regenerates infinitely the justifications for war. It is as much a matter of wrestling ethically with one's own murderous impulses, impulses that seek to quell an overwhelming fear, as it is a matter of apprehending the suffering of others and taking stock of the suffering one has inflicted.

In the Vietnam War, it was the pictures of the children burning and dying from napalm that brought the US public to a sense of shock, outrage, remorse, and grief. These were precisely pictures we were not supposed to see, and they disrupted the visual field and the entire sense of public identity that was built upon that field. The images furnished a reality, but they also showed a reality that disrupted the hegemonic field of representation itself. Despite their graphic effectivity, the images pointed somewhere else, beyond themselves, to a life and to a precariousness that they could not show. It was from that apprehension of the precariousness of those lives we destroyed that many US citizens came to develop an important and vital consensus against the war. But if we continue to discount the words that deliver that message to us, and if the media will not run those pictures, and if those lives remain unnameable and ungrievable, if they do not appear in their precariousness and their destruction, we will not be moved. We will not return to a sense of ethical outrage that is, distinctively, for an Other, in the name of an Other. We cannot, under contemporary conditions of representation, hear the agonized cry or be compelled or commanded by the face. We have been turned away from the face, sometimes through the very image of the face, one that is meant to convey the inhuman, the already dead, that which is not precariousness and cannot, therefore, be killed; this is the face that we are nevertheless asked to kill, as if ridding the world of this face would return us to the human rather than

consummate our own inhumanity. One would need to hear the face as it speaks in something other than language to know the precariousness of life that is at stake. But what media will let us know and feel that frailty, know and feel at the limits of representation as it is currently cultivated and maintained? If the humanities has a future as cultural criticism, and cultural criticism has a task at the present moment, it is no doubt to return us to the human where we do not expect to find it, in its frailty and at the limits of its capacity to make sense. We would have to interrogate the emergence and vanishing of the human at the limits of what we can know, what we can hear, what we can see, what we can sense. This might prompt us, affectively, to reinvigorate the intellectual projects of critique, of questioning, of coming to understand the difficulties and demands of cultural translation and dissent, and to create a sense of the public in which oppositional voices are not feared, degraded or dismissed, but valued for the instigation to a sensate democracy they occasionally perform.

## NOTES

### 1 EXPLANATION AND EXONERATION, OR WHAT WE CAN HEAR

1. *Guardian*, September 29, 2001.
2. Mary Kaldor, *The Nation*, November 5, 2001, p. 16.
3. Forbes.com, October 11, 2001.
4. *New York Times*, November 2, 2001.

### 2 VIOLENCE, MOURNING, POLITICS

1. Sigmund Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917) Standard Edition, 14: pp. 243–58, London: Hogarth Press, 1957.
2. Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (1923) Standard Edition, 19: pp. 12–66, London: Hogarth Press, 1961.

3. Sigmund Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia*.
4. Ibid.
5. William Safire, "All Is Not Changed", *New York Times*, September 27, 2001, p. A:21.
6. "A Nation Challenged; President Bush's Address on Terrorism before a Joint Meeting of Congress," *New York Times*, September 21, 2001, p. B:4.
7. Richard Garfield, "Morbidity and Mortality among Iraqi Children from 1990 through 1998: Assessing the Impact of the Gulf War and Economic Sanctions," in *Fourth Freedom Forum*, March, 2002. See [www.fourthfreedom.org/php/p-index.php?hinc=garf.hinc](http://www.fourthfreedom.org/php/p-index.php?hinc=garf.hinc).
8. The memorials read as follows: "In loving memory of Kamla Abu Sa'id, 42, and her daughter, Amna Abu-Sa'id, 13, both Palestinians from the El Bureij refugee camps. Kamla and her daughter were killed May 26, 2002 by Israeli troops, while working on a farm in the Gaza Strip. In loving memory of Ahmed Abu Seer, 7, a Palestinian child, he was killed in his home with bullets. Ahmed died of fatal shrapnel wounds to his heart and lung. Ahmed was a second-grader at Al-Sidaak elementary school in Nablus, he will be missed by all who knew him. In loving memory of Fatime Ibrahim Zakarna, 30, and her two children, Bassem, 4, and Suhair, 3 all Palestinian. Mother and children were killed May 6, 2002 by Israeli soldiers while picking grape leaves in a field in the Kabatiya village. They leave behind Mohammed Yussef Zukarneh, husband and father, and Yasmine, daughter and age 6." These memorials were submitted by the San Francisco chapter of Arab-American Christians for Peace. The *Chronicle* refused to run the memorials, even though these deaths were covered by, and verified by, the Israeli Press (private email).
9. Daniel Pearl's wife Marianne's statement in Felicity Barringer and Douglas Jehl, "US Says Video Shows Captors Killed Reporter," *New York Times*, February 22, 2002, p. A:1.

10. Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 303.
11. See Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.
12. Joan W. Scott, "Feminist Reverberations," unpublished paper presented at Twelfth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, June 2002, University of Connecticut at Storrs.
13. Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Chandra Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991, pp. 61-88.
14. See also Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?" paper presented at symposium "Responding to War," Columbia University, February 1, 2002; and "Interview with Nermeen Shaikh," *Asia Source*, March 20, 2002, [http://www.asiasource.org/news/special\\_reports/lila.cfm](http://www.asiasource.org/news/special_reports/lila.cfm). Lila Abu-Lughod, ed., *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998.
15. Mahasweta Devi, *Imaginary Maps: Three Stories*, trans. and intro. Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak, New York and London: Routledge, 1995, p. 199.
16. Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, trans. P. Kottman, New York: Routledge, 2000.

### 3 INDEFINITE DETENTION

1. "Detention, Treatment, and Trial of Certain Non-Citizens in the War Against Terrorism," Department of Defense, December 12, 2001. This statement clarifies the statement made on November

- 13 by President Bush announcing the creation of military tribunals for non-US citizens (or non-citizens) suspected of engaging in military terrorism.
2. "Governmentality," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, pp. 87–104.
  3. Foucault clearly said as much when, for instance, he remarked that "we need to see things not in terms of the replacement of a society of sovereignty by a disciplinary society and the subsequent replacement of a disciplinary society by a society of government; in reality, one has a triangle, sovereignty–discipline–government, which has as its primary target the population and as its essential mechanism the apparatuses of security." "Governmentality," p. 102.
  4. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, New York: Schocken, 1968, p. 263.
  5. Geoffrey Miller made these remarks in a May 24, 2003 interview with David Dennie of the *Daily Telegraph* in Australia. See news.com.au reports from May 26, 2003.
  6. "The Governmentality of Tolerance," in Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: A Critique of Tolerance in the Age of Identity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, forthcoming.
  7. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
  8. For a discussion of the "state of exception" as a paradigm for government see Giorgio Agamben, *État d'exception: Homo Sacer, II, 1*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2003, pp. 1–55. See also the section entitled "Life that Does Not Deserve to Live" in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, pp. 136–43.
  9. Department of Defense, March 21, 2002.

10. If the prisoners are being detained to protect them (and others) for their faulty mental functioning, then it is surely paradoxical that the mental health of prisoners deteriorated excessively during the first year and half of their incarceration. Two dozen prisoners reportedly attempted suicide through hanging or strangling themselves, and several engaged in hunger strikes. Apparently one man who attempted to kill himself remains in a coma at the time of this writing. And another is alleged by the *Guardian*, July 20, 2003, to have died in the course of an interrogation session whose tactics appear to conform to the definition of torture.
11. "Some Detainees Held on Guantanamo Are Young Foot Soldiers Caught Up in the Afghan War, US Officials Say," Associated Press, March 29, 2002.
12. For an excellent consideration of the criteria for determining human consideration and its applicability to the Guantanamo prisons, see *Human Rights Watch Backgrounder*, January 29, 2002.
13. The American Bar Association expressed its unwillingness (July, 2003) to encourage lawyers to take on the defense of six detainees marked for trials because they did not want their participation to be construed as an agreement that these tribunals are legitimate.

#### 4 THE CHARGE OF ANTI-SEMITISM: JEWS, ISRAEL, AND THE RISKS OF PUBLIC CRITIQUE

1. David Gelles, "Summers Says Anti-Semitism Lurks Locally," *Harvard Crimson*, September 19, 2002. The full transcript can be found at [www.yucommentator.com/v67i4/israelcorner/address.html](http://www.yucommentator.com/v67i4/israelcorner/address.html).
2. Remarks reported in the *Boston Globe*, October 16, 2002.
3. For an extended discussion of how Zionism itself has come to rely upon and perpetuate the notion that Jews, and only Jews, can be

- victims, see Adi Ophir, "The Identity of the Victims and the Victims of Identity: A Critique of Zionist Ideology for a Post-Zionist Age," in Laurence Silberstein, ed., *Mapping Jewish Identities*, New York: New York University Press, 2000.
4. Robert Fisk writes, "The all-purpose slander of 'anti-semitism' is now being used with ever-increasing promiscuity against people who condemn the wickedness of Palestinian suicide bombings every bit as much as they do the cruelty of Israel's repeated killing of children in an effort to shut [those people] up." "How to Shut Up Your Critics With a Single Word," *The Independent*, October 21, 2002.
  5. Note in the full version of the statement offered as an epigraph to this essay how Summers couples anti-Semitism and anti-Israeli views: "Where anti-Semitism and views that are profoundly anti-Israel have traditionally been the primary reserve of poorly educated right-wing populists, profoundly anti-Israeli views are increasingly finding support in progressive intellectual communities." In this statement he begins by coupling anti-Semitism with anti-Israeli views, without precisely saying that they are the same. But by the end of the sentence, anti-Semitism is absorbed into and carried by the term "anti-Israeli" (rather than anti-*Israel*, as if it were the people who are opposed, rather than the state apparatus) so that we are given to understand not only that anti-Israeli positions, but anti-Semitism itself is finding support among progressive intellectual communities.
  6. One can see this letter and its signatories at [www.peacemideast.org](http://www.peacemideast.org).
  7. See Adi Ophir's discussion of Uri Ram's vision of post-Zionism: "For the post-Zionist, nationality should not determine citizenship, but vice-versa: citizenship should determine the boundaries of the Israeli nation. Judaism would then be regarded as a religion, a community affair, or a matter of a particular ethnicity, one among many." Adi Ophir, "The Identity of the Victims and the Victims of

- Identity," p. 186. See also Uri Ram's contribution along with other pieces in Laurence Silberstein, *The Postzionist Debates: Knowledge and Power in Israeli Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1999.
8. AIPAC, the America Israel Public Affairs Committee, is the largest Jewish lobby in the US and is almost always supportive of Israel in its current form and practices.
  9. See [www.britzedek.org](http://www.britzedek.org).
  10. See [www.ffipp.org](http://www.ffipp.org).
  11. See <http://oasisofpeace.org>.
  12. See [www.ipcri.org](http://www.ipcri.org).
  13. See [www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org) and [www.gush-shalom.org](http://www.gush-shalom.org).
  14. See [www.shministim.org](http://www.shministim.org) for information on Yesh G'vul. See also Ronit Chacham, *Breaking Ranks: Refusing to Serve in the West Bank and Gaza*, New York: The Other Press, 2003.
  15. See <http://taayush.tripod.com>. Citation quoted with the permission of the author.
  16. Yitzhak Ior, "Will the Circle Be Unbroken?" *Ha'aretz*, August 2, 2002.

## 5 PRECARIOUS LIFE

1. Emmanuel Levinas and Richard Kearney, "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," in *Face to Face with Levinas*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1986, pp. 23–4. Levinas develops this conception first in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969, pp. 187–203. I cull quotations from his later work because I believe they give a more mature and incisive formulation of the face.
2. Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. Richard A. Cohen, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985, p. 87. Cited in the text

as *EI*.

3. Emmanuel Levinas, "Peace and Proximity," in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996. p. 167. Cited in the text as PP.
4. The theological background of this can be found in Exodus. God makes clear to Moses that no one can see God's face, that is, that the divine face is not for seeing and not available to representation: "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live" (33: 20, *King James*); later, God makes plain that the back can and will substitute for the face: "And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts; but my face shall not be seen" (33: 23). Later, when Moses is carrying God's words in the form of the commandments, it is written, "And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him" (34: 30). But Moses' face, carrying the divine word, is also not to be represented. When Moses returns to his human place, he can show his face: "And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a veil on his face. But when Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he came out, and spake unto the children of Israel that which he was commanded. And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone: and Moses put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him." I thank Barbara Johnson for calling these passages to my attention.
5. Levinas writes, "But that face facing me, in its expression—in its mortality—summons me, demands me, requires me: as if the invisible death faced by the face of the other ... were 'my business.' As if, unknown by the other whom already, in the nakedness of his face, it concerns, it 'regarded me' before its confrontation with me, before being the death that stares me, myself, in the face. The death

- of the other man puts me on the spot, calls me into question, as if I, by my possible indifference, became the accomplice of that death, invisible to the other who is exposed to it; as if even before being condemned to it myself, I had to answer for that death of the other, and not leave the other alone to his deathly solitude," in Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, pp. 24–5.
6. Levinas distinguishes sometimes between the "countenance" understood as the face within perceptual experience, and the "face" whose coordinates are understood to transcend the perceptual field. He also speaks on occasion about "plastic" representations of the face that efface the face. For the face to operate as a face, it must vocalize or be understood as the workings of a voice.
  7. See Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Others," *American Anthropologist*, 104: 3, pp. 783–90.
  8. For an extended discussion of the relation between the media image and human suffering, see Susan Sontag's provocative *Regarding the Pain of Others*, New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002.
  9. For a discussion of "failure" as basic to a psychoanalytic conception of the psyche, see Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, London: Verso, 1986, pp. 91–3.
  10. Levinas writes, "one can say that the face is not 'seen.' It is what cannot become a content, which your thought would embrace; it is uncontainable, it leads you beyond" (*EI*, pp. 86–7).

A Body, Undone:  
Living On after Great Pain

Christina Crosby

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# 1

## Your Puny, Vulnerable Self

On October 1, 2003, I caught a branch in the spokes of the front wheel of my bicycle, and hurtled toward the pavement. My chin took the full force of the blow, which smashed my face and broke the fifth and sixth cervical vertebrae in my neck. The broken bone scraped my spinal cord, and in an instant I was paralyzed. There's no knowing right away exactly what impairments will result from a spinal cord injury, but as the days passed, it became clear that I had lost the use not only of my leg muscles, but also the muscles of my torso, arms, and hands, and that the loss of muscle compromised my body's circulatory systems. I also lost control of my bladder and bowels. (The cord was not severed, so over many months I regained limited, but functional, strength in my arms and, to a significantly lesser degree, my hands.) Lying in the intensive care unit of Hartford hospital, I knew very little about the present and nothing about the future. I only knew that I had been grievously injured, and was lost in space. Not until I reached the rehab hospital a month after the accident could I begin to put into words a body that seemed beyond the reach of language.

The accident occurred twenty-nine days after my fiftieth birthday. Quadriplegia suddenly encountered at fifty years of age has made vividly clear to me both the vulnerability of the human body, and the myriad ways my well-being depends on both the regard and the labors of others. I hope that your life is much easier in this respect than mine. Nonetheless, because humans are born wholly vulnerable and incomplete, you have already received what is known as "total care," which you may again need at the end of your life, should you live long enough to grow feeble in mind or body. I know for sure that we are much more profoundly interdependent

creatures than we often care to think, and I know imperatively that we need a calculus that can value caring labor far differently than we do today. Life is precarious, a fact that has been borne in on me by my injury, recovery, and continuing dependence on others for survival and well-being.<sup>1</sup>

The weight of sudden spinal cord injury is crushing, and can at first be sustained only if spread out, as a suspension bridge spans great distances by hanging the roadway from cables that multiply as it reaches further across the void. Simply to save my life required the work of so many—from the EMTs who first tended my broken body, to all who in some way touched me over the next three and a half weeks of surgeries in Hartford Hospital. After five months rehabilitation at the Hospital for Special Care, I was discharged to the “care of one.” That’s a standard used by the insurance companies to determine when you can be sent home. From that point on—in principle—I needed only one person to transfer me from bed to wheelchair and back again, to watch for pressure sores, to dress and undress me, to bathe me and brush my teeth, to feed me and help me drink, to help me relieve myself, and to purchase and administer my pharmacopeia of drugs. To keep me alive. The burden of my care was now to be transferred to private life, where one untrained person was charged with taking over. In most cases this would be a mother or wife. In my case the burden of my care came to my lover, Janet.

Janet and I had successfully spent a night together, alone, in an apartment set up in the Hospital for Special Care to test whether patients and their caretakers are able to manage on their own. Over forty-two weeks of rehabilitation, she had learned the routine of care, and had helped the overworked certified nurse’s assistants (CNAs) do their jobs. Our relationship scandalized no one, I think, because Janet’s help made everyone’s life easier. Lesbians were a-okay, or at least we were. That night she successfully cared for me in the apartment—transferred me to the bed,

undressed me, and did all the other necessary tasks. So on March 8, 2004, I was sent home with my lover. Thank God that Donna, a CNA who had cared for me at the hospital, accepted our offer of a second job working for us every weekday morning. She suggested that we hire her sister Shannon, also a CNA, to cover the weekends. I needed so much help. Janet needed so much help helping me. Who's to know what might have become of us had not Donna, Shannon, and a network of caring friends, colleagues, acquaintances, and others assisted us at every turn, and remained steadfast for the two years that I worked my way through outpatient physical and occupational therapies. So here I am, alive.

What does it take to make a life *livable*? That's a slightly different matter, because it addresses the whole person, body and mind—bodymind—together. In 2005, I returned to work half-time, reassuming some of my duties as a professor of English literature and feminist, gender, and sexuality studies at Wesleyan University. My workplace has responded positively to my requests for “reasonable accommodation,” the terms of which are established by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), comprehensive legislation that mandates the removal of barriers to participation in public life by those whose bodies are impaired or minds are nonnormative—the political victory won in 1992 by activists for disability rights. The university supported my recovery and continues to make good faith efforts to increase physical accessibility. I am remarkably fortunate that I can continue to do the work I did before I was injured, though I'm able to work only half a many hours a week. Working is hard, but not working is harder. Engaging in the classroom, in my office talking with students and colleagues, reading and writing all take me out of myself, and distract me from chronic pain and incapacity. It's a hard truth that I hurt myself just when entering the peak earning years of my profession, which makes me angry every time I think of it. Nonetheless, with Janet's income added to my

reduced paycheck, I still have enough money to be insulated from the indignities of an unjust world in which so many disabled people suffer because their welfare depends on poorly paid personal aides sent out from agencies, public transportation that is often unreliable, and housing that is only barely or not at all accessible.

I now understand better what all disabled people owe to the early activists who demanded full access to and participation in the public sphere. Like all other civil rights law, the ADA was passed only after years of activism—people in wheelchairs picketing for curb cuts, the Deaf President Now student movement at Gallaudet, lawyers suing school boards for supports needed for disabled kids to learn alongside their peers, and so on—and the activism that yielded the ADA was only a start. The struggle for recognition of discrimination against “the handicapped” now extends not only to the streets and courtrooms, but also to the classrooms of higher education. Scholars have convincingly argued that disability is not a personal attribute of crippled bodies or minds, but a social phenomenon that bars the full participation in public life of persons so impaired. Impassable barriers and narrowly conceived measurements of ability make it hard to acknowledge and address nonnormative bodyminds. We are conveniently invisible because we are all too often immured in private spaces. Disability is created by building codes and education policy, subway elevators that don’t work and school buses that don’t arrive, and all the marginalization, exploitation, demeaning acts, and active exclusions that deny full access and equality to “the disabled.” To focus on intractable pain, then, or grief at the loss of able-bodiedness, as I do here, may be thought to play into a pathologizing narrative that would return disability to “misshapen” bodies and “abnormal” minds. When I presented some of this work to a study group, one guy in a wheelchair more or less told me to “man up” and get on with my life—after all, that’s what he had done decades ago, before the ADA, even.

Chronic pain and grief over loss nonetheless remain as unavoidable facts of lives shaped by catastrophic accident, chronic and progressive illness, or genetic predisposition. Despite their strategic elision in disability studies or transcendence in happy stories in the popular press about trauma overcome, bodily pain and grief persist, to be accounted for as best one can. This book is my contribution to that record. I find that Emily Dickinson is right—in the wake of great pain, the pulse of life slows, and the interval between life-sustaining beats interminably extends. Life is suspended. In that interval, the difference between the one you once were and the one you have become must be addressed, the pain acknowledged and the grief admitted. It can be a treacherous process, given all that might be lost

In the months after the accident, as I lay in my hospital bed unmoving and in a firestorm of neurological pain, I sometimes—many times—wished I had died at the instant my chin struck the pavement. Had it not been for Janet, my dear lover, this wish would, I believe, have gathered darkness around it to become an active desire for death. This is not to say that I live *for* her. What a weaseling evasion that would be, and a truly impossible burden to foist on one I love so dearly. Janet, whose life was intertwined with mine before the accident, made it clear from the beginning that she desires me and desires my touch. “I’m your physical lover,” she said to me in the hospital, and she meant it. She is infinitely precious to me. Yet I know that I need more if my life is to be truly livable. Those first two years after the accident, as I recovered and reoriented myself, I was especially in need of the love of my friends, and I’m deeply grateful that so many gave so freely of their time and attention.

When I was in the Hospital for Special Care, Maggie, who had been an undergraduate student of mine ten years earlier, drove up to New Britain from New York City many Saturdays so that Janet could have a break. Waking in a haze of pain and confusion, I would find her

quietly beside the bed, watching over me, waiting, sometimes writing in a spiral-bound notebook. I was not surprised—language had always been, for her, the most likely medium for addressing the imponderable. Later on she told me she had written poems about the hospital and about my body. Was it okay to publish? She would gracefully honor whatever decision I made. I trust Maggie implicitly, and with no further investigation of the question, I said publish. In 2007 I held in my hands her fourth book of poetry, *Something Bright, Then Holes*.

In the middle of the book you'll find a section of those poems. This is the short, first one.

### Morning En Route to the Hospital

Snow wafts off the little lake

along Route 66, momentarily encasing the car

in a trance of glitter

Live with your puny, vulnerable self

Live with her<sup>2</sup>

Anything can happen, at any moment—a trance of glitter, a rush of injury—and we must live with one another and our unhoused selves. Simply live with. You can't always be intent on protecting yourself or fixing someone else, always looking for some way to “make it better.” My friend offered her open, loving proximity, the gift of her presence. I fell asleep, and awoke, and she was still with me. Maggie's poems were a second gift to me, for they represent to me my life as another saw it in those first months after my injury. The poems recall a time that left a deep, confused, and overwhelmingly painful impress on me, and suspend my life in the richness of poetic language.

I wish I could have similarly helped and sheltered my brother, who was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in his late twenties. Voice-recognition technology, exactly what I'm using to

write at this moment, allowed him to keep working as a lawyer even as his body became ever less functional. He had the support of his law practice. All the people there helped him work far, far longer than he would've been able to without their help. MS finally forced his retirement when he was forty-nine years old. Over the decades, my mind veered away from imagining his home life with his wife, Beth, and their children, Kirsten and Colin, as the disease undermined his capacities. It's complicated, as family stories always are. As he came into adulthood, his life flowed into familiar religious and familial channels. Mine did not. I was never alienated from my family—we all loved one another dearly—but from my college days on, I needed to love at a distance. I suppose I feared being conscripted through my affections into obligations I'd quietly resent, while everyone enacted around me a family life that undid me in ways that will take a lifetime to understand. So I kept my counsel and my distance—and felt my difference.

After my injury, as I lay in the hospital thinking about Jeff, I felt the strangeness of being on the other side of the looking glass. Suddenly I was quadriplegic, too, just like my brother. The odds against that doubling just beggared my imagination. It seemed a terrible and uncanny repetition of an intermittent childhood fantasy of mine. Jeff and I were born just thirteen months apart, and, when young, I could imagine myself as his twin. We played active, physical games together all the time. In the small, rural Pennsylvania town where we grew up in the 1950s, gender figured as a boring hierarchical dualism, masculine/feminine, and was treated as a law of nature. How some people lived their lives creatively affronted that order, of course, as I did with my “tomboy” ways when a child, for gender is neither binary nor natural, but a variable state wound up with power that can both enhance life and subject you to rigidly normative stylizations. My childhood of play with Jeff was an intimation of gender's pleasurable malleability, even as I felt the pinch of its reductive strictures. When we reached junior high, that

theater of puberty where gender's normative powers are enthusiastically enforced, I suffered as only a thirteen-year-old girl unable to master femininity can suffer. Jeff and I went our separate ways thenceforth into adulthood—then came his diagnosis, and slow but implacable paralysis.

In our middle age, I joined him in quadriplegia. In this account, I represent much that takes place behind closed doors, and draw back the curtain behind which the chronic pain and dependency created by damage to the central nervous system are managed, revelations that may carry a whiff of the apocalyptic—my straightforward discussion of moving paralyzed bowels, for example, where I lay out a protocol necessary to both Jeff's life and mine, thus representing the fundamentals of the fundament. Diving into the wreck of my body. I have no wish to embarrass you or mortify myself, but I do believe that living *in extremis* can clarify what is often obscure, in this case the fragility of our beautiful bodies and the dependencies of all human being.

Dad died thirteen years before my accident. Mother lived on after his death for eighteen years, though she became increasingly diminished by senility and the afflictions of old age in the last ten years of her life. Thankfully her grace and generosity remained unchanged, and her difficulty in forming new memories in the end preserved me as I had been before the accident. Eight years earlier, Mother had decided to move from our family home. Jeff was in a wheelchair. He took care of the paperwork and I did the physical labor, the Herculean task of completely emptying a two-story house that had been lived in for forty years, including attic, basement, and garage. The role of the healthy, strong one had come to me alone. About a year before I broke my neck, Jeff retired, and while I was in the hospital, Mother suddenly needed a major operation. As the shadow of mortality lengthened over her, so did death approach Jeff more nearly. Mother died in October 2008, Jeff in January 2010. By the time I was fifty-six, all my immediate family were gone, as was the body I had delighted in all my active, athletic life.

\* \* \*

Grieving undoes you and casts you off, far from the workaday world uninflected by loss. That's why you're told to move through grief, to transform it into a quieter and more tractable sorrow, and get on with life. Loosen your attachments to whatever is gone. Recognize that the influence of what you've lost is still with you, and will remain incorporated into your life. Reengage in the present, and orient yourself to the future. These dictates make sense, but trouble me because my grief is multifaceted and its objects incommensurate. The loss of my mother, whom I loved very much, was profound, even though she was ninety-two and had lived a life full of love and backlit with joy. The loss of Jeff was shocking, despite his long decline, because he was himself so oriented to life, so vital and enthusiastic. The loss of the life I was leading with Janet before I broke my neck is of another kind. Its most important element is wholly intact, for we continue to love each other as richly we did before October 1, 2003. Our sex life is fun and profound, sometimes both at once. All the same, sex is very different, because my body has lost its ability to register its exquisite pleasures. Life no longer feels radiant. The more mundane enjoyments of everyday life—making a peach pie in August, feeling sexy in leather pants and silver jewelry—are also gone, because they depended on a body radically different from mine now. I can no longer feel the satisfaction of cycling forty miles, or hiking up a desert canyon, or kayaking in the ocean, or riding my gorgeous Triumph motorcycle. I don't want to forget how those pleasures felt in my body, and I fear the erosion of embodied memory.

I started writing this book to create something from an otherwise confounded life. Only through writing have I arrived at the life I now lead, the body I now am. I've done this work in language, because my profession is the study of literature. It's what I have and what I know. I have found solace in tropes, since figurative language helps us approach what's otherwise unapproachable or incommunicable. Emily Dickinson writes,

After great pain, a formal feeling comes –

The nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs –

...

This is the hour of lead – . . .

I begin in that leaden place where pain seems on the other side of language, and work toward living on.

## 2

## The Event as It Was Told Me

I will never know what happened. The last I remember is climbing a hill, and the next is an exceedingly blurry scene in the ICU, where Janet was with me, and a nurse was . . . somewhere. The light was very bright. I had lost two days of my life and was about to lose many more.

In the time bracketed by those memories, I had caught a branch in the spokes of my front bicycle wheel, just as I crested a small hill about three miles into my usual seventeen-mile ride. I considered myself a serious cyclist, in that I hoped to ride at least four days out of seven, and challenged myself, sometimes by choosing a route that included steep climbs, and almost always by paying attention to my speed. I did my best to maintain a steady, fast cadence, and to keep a good position on the bicycle—let the legs do the work and keep the torso steady, low, and forward, with your hands over the brake hoods. Pedal through the circle, as though you're scraping mud off your foot when you get to the bottom, rather than simply pushing down with one and then the other leg. Get up out of the saddle with your body weight forward when charging up a hill.

I rode alone most of the time. Coming home tired from my office, I knew that changing clothes and getting on the bicycle would be hard to do, so as an incentive I'd promise myself to take it easy and not keep looking at the speedometer. But then, after the first three miles or so, I'd be warmed up and riding hard, easy be damned. On October 1, 2003, my bicycle was in the shop, getting new shifters and brakes. That Wednesday I was worried about a dinner the next day with the trustees and some colleagues, which I had to host as the Chair of the Faculty. I took that position seriously, perhaps too seriously, because I thought that there was a possibility of

creating some kind of pushback to certain of the Wesleyan administration's policies that undermined faculty governance and were demoralizing many of my colleagues. I knew that, starting Thursday evening, October 2, I'd be in meetings and meals for the next three days, so when the bike shop unexpectedly called and said, "It's ready to go," I was delighted. I wasn't going to be moving my body much for the immediate future. The days were getting shorter and the evenings colder.

"Hey, Jake," I said into the phone, "they just called from Pedal Power to tell me that the bike's fixed, so I get to ride today—thank God—because the trustees are in town tomorrow through Saturday dinner. At least I'll get out today, which is great, since they told me it wouldn't be ready before Friday." So when I got home, I tossed my work clothes on the bed, got into cycling gear—including a reflective vest and a helmet—and went out. I imagine I started shifting up as I got to the top of the hill, moving into a higher gear ratio to keep my cadence regular as the climb leveled out. The shifters were new to me that day and shaped differently from my old ones. I was worried about the trustees and my responsibility to my colleagues, as I understood it. Whatever was going on in my head and the rest of my body, I didn't see a branch lying in my way.

The physics of the event are beyond me, but apparently I came to a dead stop when the branch got wedged in the spokes of my front wheel, which pitched the bicycle instantly over to the right. The force of my full body weight, coupled with the force of violently arrested forward movement, slammed my chin into the pavement. Despite my fast reflexes, my hands were untouched, because it happened too quickly for me to throw them out to break my fall, nor were my shoulders hurt, because I didn't have time to twist my body. The impact of my chin hyperextended my neck so violently that I fractured the fifth and sixth cervical vertebra, which

scraped the spinal cord those bones are made to protect. Serious neurological damage started instantly—blood engorged the affected site, and the tissue around the lesion began to swell, causing more and more damage as the cord pressed against the broken vertebrae.

I also smashed my chin into tiny pieces, tore open my lips, slashed open my nose, breaking the cartilage, and multiply fractured the maxilla bone underneath my right eye. Since I hit my chin just slightly to the right of center—I must've been reflexively trying to turn my head—the damage runs from that side, through my lips, and across my nose in a diagonal cut. The wire-rim glasses I was wearing were deeply enough embedded in the bridge of my nose to leave a dark half-moon scar that I see in the mirror arching between my eyebrows. Everything bled fiercely, as facial wounds always do, and loss of blood was the most immediate danger. My front teeth were left dangling and one in the lower front was half broken. I didn't lose consciousness—how is that possible?—and was able to tell my name when asked, but nothing else. No, I didn't know what year it was. No, I didn't know who the president was. No, I didn't know where I lived or whom to call. And I had with me no identifying papers of any sort. "I don't feel well. I . . . Don't feel . . . Well," I said, a statement of fact that yielded no useful information.

On one count I was very fortunate. A car was behind, preparing to pass me, when my bicycle pitched sideways so fast that even though the driver had his eye on me, he said he couldn't see what had happened—I just disappeared. The branch caught in a mass of broken spokes told the story. Thankfully, he stopped to help and dialed 911 on his cell phone. When the EMTs arrived, they immediately called the rapid-response helicopter from Hartford Hospital. It landed on the grounds of a graveyard directly across the road from where I lay shattered, bleeding, and unmoving. I imagine a dramatic scene, just at dusk, with lots of flashing lights and

whirring helicopter blades. I had left the house wearing my reflective vest just after 6:00, so darkness was coming on fast.

The state trooper who arrived at the scene, Officer Milardo, was left with the task of trying to figure out where I lived. He knew my name, got my address in Middletown, Connecticut, and drove over to the house to see if anyone was there who should know that I was gravely injured and in the emergency room of Hartford Hospital. Friends happen to live directly across the street—when I was in my study I could look over to Anthony’s, and he could do likewise see mine. He had watched me headed off for a ride some time before, so when the cruiser pulled up, he went out to check if something was wrong.

“They’re *partners*,” Anthony said, gesturing emphatically. “*Partners*.” He was trying to tell the officer whom to call. “She’s in New York City, and they’re partners,” he said, striking the back of his open right hand in the palm of his left for emphasis. So Officer Milardo called Janet in New York City, and reached her in her office at Barnard College. When he identified himself as a state trooper and said, “Are you a friend of Christina Crosby . . .,” she instantly broke in, “How bad? How bad? How bad?” The officer told her that I was in no danger of dying, although I was very seriously hurt. “How are you going to get to Hartford?” “Rent a car,” Janet said distractedly, to which he replied, “Take the train. This is no time to drive.”

She got onto Metro-North, having called Lori, who lived in New Haven pretty close to the train station. They drove in haste up I-91 to Hartford. Janet had my power of attorney in hand, because she was prepared to do anything to get into the intensive care unit, where only family members are allowed. Imagining me lying there alone . . . she could think only of being by my side. Doug and Midge Bennett, the president of Wesleyan and his wife, were in the waiting room, keeping vigil.

“We’ve been able to see her. They asked, ‘Are you her parents?’ and I just lied,” Midge said, and Janet was suddenly overcome. Sobbing the first of so many tears, she cried, “I was so afraid, so afraid, no one was here, she was alone.” “No, no, we’ve been by her bed—but you know she’s not conscious because she’s heavily sedated . . .” At the last, Janet had no need to flourish the power of attorney to come to where I lay motionless, clean, intubated to protect against further swelling that could obstruct my breathing, and quite unconscious.

I was unable to recognize or speak to her until the end of the following day.

### 3

# Bewilderment

How can I give an account of myself after “catastrophic injury”? That’s a technical term used by physicians and insurance companies for a severe, radically life-changing event like a spinal cord injury. A chasm—impassable, unbridgeable—opened the instant my chin hit the pavement, injuring my central nervous system and stranding me in a violent and unceasing neurological storm. I have no memory of the minutes leading up to the accident, and the accident itself is utterly obliterated. I lost days of my life in the ICU—it’s only a blur of fluorescent light. The month that I underwent major surgeries is lost forever, and the long months in the rehab hospital only gradually came into focus. Janet reported to friends that I was severely injured but had suffered no loss of my “personhood.” I can’t say how happy that makes me—my face acted as a crumple zone and protected my brain from injury—but *I* feel alienated, sometimes profoundly alienated, from “myself.” My skepticism about my “self” is not only that of the intellectual taught to be suspicious of such a clearly bounded rationality, but also an inability to recognize who I have become.

Because of my condition, I’ve been pondering the reality that everybody has/is a body. Your body emerges through the perception of others as different from yourself, at a touchable distance, and selfhood is not self-contained. What you want, who you are, how you feel are all brought into being over time and in relation to others, and those thoughts and feelings are repeatedly inscribed, creating powerful circuits that organize a sense of embodied self. Such is human interdependency that my self-regard depends on your regard for me. I need and want a more fully livable life, which turns importantly, if not exclusively, on this play of recognition.<sup>1</sup>

Spinal cord injury has cast me into a surreal neurological wasteland that I traverse day and night. This account is an effort to describe the terrain. I want you to know, and I, myself, want better to understand, a daily venture of living that requires considerable fortitude on my part and a great dependency on others, without whose help my life would be quite literally unlivable.

Whenever you offer an account of yourself to others, you labor to present yourself as coherent and worthy of recognition and attention, as I am doing right now. Yet because my sense of a coherent self has been so deeply affronted, I've also been thinking about stories that are devoted more to affect than to reason, and because the accident and its aftermath were so horrific, horror stories suddenly make sense to me in a way they didn't before. Such stories gather affective intensity as their narratives develop, and often create eerie, uncanny effects by presenting doubles—two where only one should be. Hitchcock uses this device in some of his most famous films. In *Vertigo*, for instance, the story revolves around the emotions of a detective who sees a woman he desires fall to her death while he is paralyzed by vertigo and unable to save her. Then some months later he catches sight of her again, or someone so alike that the resemblance to the dead woman is uncanny. The one he loved seems returned to him, and they begin to date. The uncanny doubling of one woman into two urges doubts that gather into a malevolent uncertainty that haunts their interactions. If she *is* the woman he loved, she's one of the undead dead and must be threatening. If she's *not* the woman he loved, she's playing an elaborate confidence game with him and must be dangerous. But she is so beautiful, and resembles his beloved so strongly, that he finds himself drawn on in spite of his doubts. A sense of dread increasingly suffuses their interactions.

The childhood in which I was so close to my brother, when we were fiercely competitive and evenly matched, ended in seventh grade, in the junior high where femininity engulfed me.

We grew up and grew apart, lovingly enough. He married and went to law school, while I discovered the passions of lesbian feminist practice and politics and went to graduate school. Just as he graduated and was beginning to clerk for a judge, he was diagnosed with MS, and by his late forties was quadriplegic. The contrast in our lives could hardly have been more complete—he was seriously disabled and I was not. In an instant, at the symbolic age of fifty, that contrast collapsed and my childhood fantasy of being his twin seemed malevolently realized, for there we were, each with seriously incapacitating damage to the central nervous system, each in a wheelchair, each requiring intensive assistance just to make it through each day. My brother/myself. Is quadriplegia doubled a fantastic coincidence or foreboding sign? If I am myself, what the hell/who the hell is this body!/? My life feels split in two. The horror, the horror.

Spinal cord injury has undone my body, bewildering me and thwarting my understanding. Yet I am certain about one thing—whatever chance I have at a good life, in all senses of that phrase, depends on my openness to the undoing wrought by spinal cord injury, because there is no return to an earlier life. I know that the life I live now depends on my day-by-day relations with others, as it did before, but to an incalculably greater extent. Now I need you to know from the inside, as it were, how it feels to be so radically changed. If I can show you, perhaps I'll be able to see, too. The intricacies of bodymind interactions defy certainties and confound representation, but I see no other way to go on—how else will I understand? How will you?

## 4

# Falling into Hell

Because I was so powerfully and thankfully drugged, the three weeks that I spent in Hartford Hospital are a jumble of disconnected impressions. The neurosurgeons and the plastic surgeons debated who should go first. My face would remain workable only so long before starting to set, yet my neck was unstable, and needed to be shored up with bone taken from my hip and installed on either side of the fractured vertebrae, or I stood the risk of further damage to the spinal cord. I was in no way conscious of these discussions. Janet was, although the conversation was really among the physicians. The plastic surgeons operated first, and then sent me back to the intensive care unit from which I'd come.

Coming to consciousness, I felt an obstruction in my throat, the tube that prevented me from choking on my tongue. Although its purpose is to allow you to breathe, it felt as though I couldn't, and I remember struggling against it in my mind. When the neurosurgeons put me under, I was once again intubated, only this time when I returned to consciousness my mouth and throat were filled with mucus. I drew each breath through that thick fluid, which seemed to be drowning me. Janet watched over me, using a kind of vacuum tube to suction out some of the goop gurgling in my throat.

These were experiences of powerful discomfort and fear more than of pain, since I was so out of it. Because I had to recover after each surgery, I was in Hartford Hospital for a bit more than three weeks, able to talk, more or less, when I was awake, only a few hours a day. I have a jumbled recollection of being told I had broken my neck and might be paralyzed, or perhaps not—the MRI showed the damage to the spinal cord clearly enough, but there was no knowing

what kind of damage it actually had sustained until the swelling began to abate, and that takes a long time. Because Janet was by my side every day, I had the security of her love, which mitigated my fears for the future. I didn't really understand much of what I was being told.

I recall as a kind of dream seeing the stunningly white brightness of an operating room one time as I was being wheeled in. I know that dear friends came to visit me. I know that one day my bowels let loose and I fouled the sheets with liquid waste. I know that I went from the ICU, to the operating room, to the ICU, and then to a "step down" unit, only to return to the operating room and repeat the sequence. My mouth was full of metal, arch bars that ran from side to side to keep the roof of my mouth from caving in-- somehow the bits of bone that had been my chin were pinned together, as were other bones in my face--and I wore a very high, tight, and rigid cervical collar around my neck. I could not turn my body or sit up. I could not move my legs or feet. I could not lift my arms or use my hands, which were uselessly curled up into loose fists by atrophying muscles and tightening ligaments.

Right before I was to be discharged to the rehab hospital, orderlies appeared to wheel me away through the corridors, and I watched the labyrinthine greenish ceilings and walls pass by. I was headed for the first of two procedures ("minor surgeries"). The first put a Greenfield filter just at my crotch, in the big vein coming up from my leg, there to catch blood clots that develop when circulation is compromised. For the second, a surgeon ran a gastrointestinal tube through my abdominal wall and into my stomach so as to pump food into me—I had been on IVs for a month, but when I got to the rehab hospital that would change. When at last I was released from Hartford Hospital, I was delivered by ambulance to the Hospital for Special Care about thirty minutes away. October was nearly over, and I was to stay at HSC until early March. It was there that I knew I was in pain.

\* \* \*

I had been living on an IV drip, ingesting all the while a remarkable quantity of narcotic drugs that slow down the body's systems, and now I was being fed through the GI tube. Every night I was hooked up to a machine that forced pureed food into my stomach, so I imperatively had to begin moving my bowels. Thus the horror of gastrointestinal gas began, which left my skin savagely tight over my distended abdomen. Although I was being given NuLytely, a mightily powerful drug used to empty bowels—you may have used it when cleaning yourself out before a colonoscopy—I could not relieve myself. You're quickly in big trouble if you're not moving waste from your body. As I learned, "bowels lead," a simple truth with profound ramifications. Constipation, uncomfortable for anyone, is a real threat when emerging from surgery, because the body recovers from general anesthesia slowly. I had been under twice, and each time for a long time.

The doctors needed to know whether there was a bowel obstruction, which raised the specter of another surgery. I was therefore transferred out of my bed onto a stretcher and wheeled through this new hospital, into a big stainless steel box of an elevator, and down to the radiology unit. In a dark and cold room, a technician prepared to do a sonogram of my poor abdomen. When she began spreading the gel on me, I begged her to stop—It burns! It burns! It burned because the gel was cool, and I was so neurologically scrambled that cool felt hot on my belly. How was I to describe this pain, lost in a body so foreign to me I could translate it into speech only in the most primitive way? The gas I understood, because my gastrointestinal tract has always gone awry when I'm under stress. I suffered terrible car sickness when I was a kid, and later on in college lived with acid indigestion I treated with Roloids from a great big jar I kept on my desk. As an adult, I'd experienced gas pains that at times left me doubled over. Nothing, however, prepared me for the experience of intestinal gas so high and so impossible to

pass. I literally could not fart. All below my rib cage was more or less paralyzed, increasingly so as you moved down my body and that included, of course, my bowels, my rectum, my anus. So I was turned on my side, and Winnie, my kind, thoughtful, and skillful nurse, inserted into me a tube with a plastic bag on the end that would inflate if gas passed out of me. Maggie, who day after day sat with me, reports that one time when suffering this way I said, “Winnie, the pain in my intestine is coming from my unconscious.” Doubtless I was at least partly right. No surprise, your unconscious awaits as you begin to recover from catastrophic injury.

I was plagued with thirst. The arch bars in my mouth and the pins in my face were causing the muscles in my face and throat to atrophy. The bones in my face were still unstable, the many tiny parts not yet fused with the pins. I couldn't swallow water, although I could manage a thicker liquid like yogurt. Nor could I keep my mouth closed. My lower lip had been split open, and even now does not completely close to make a seal with my upper—I hold my lips together with my hand when I rinse with mouthwash. At the time, I understood nothing of this. All I knew is that night after night after night I would awake with a raging thirst. That phrase, raging thirst, is a cliché only because when you are really thirsty, your need for water feels so exigent that the thirst holds you hostage, loudly raging for water, water, water. Water. Water. Please, water. My mouth was so terribly dry. The whole of my being felt desperate with thirst. When a CNA would appear in response to my call, she would fill a small paper cup with ice water and immerse a little green sponge on the end of a wooden stick, then put the wet sponge in my mouth. I would suck at it. The cold water felt so good, but I got just a tiny amount, and would ask for more. More, please, more. Are you done, the aide would ask. No. Another, please. Please. But she was pressed for time, and would move away, and I would close my eyes and try despairingly to breathe through my nose, feeling my lips begin to part all the while.

Late at night, as the earth turned toward the small hours, when I was wrenched from sleep by my thirst, I would awake on a wholly different floor, somewhere upstairs in the hospital—so I thought in my confusion. There I was cared for by a beneficent Polish woman in her later middle age who helped me when I called, on fire. She would fill the cup and give me the icy, wet sponge, again, yet again, yes, please, yes. Finally, smiling kindly, she would turn the small paper cup upside down. “All gone, you drank it all!” She would fill it again and stay with me until I said, “Enough, thank you.” I am uncertain of her name (Elizabeth?), but will be forever grateful for her compassion.

More dreadful than the gas or the gel, even more terrible than the terrible thirst, were the painful currents running through my body. I’d never felt anything remotely like it. My drugged sleep yielded up a vivid nightmare—my skeleton was burning, every bone outlined in red. Pain felt like electricity somehow let loose on me, a statement that is both figurative and not, because the signal that passes biochemically from one neuron to another, lighting up neural networks, is, in fact, electricity—the passage of ions down the axon of a neuron and across the synapse to another neuron, continually, instantly accomplished trillions of times in complex networks all through your body. Trillions. My central nervous system was sending out solar flares. Perhaps the most terrible night came weeks into my stay at the Hospital for Special Care, when I finally grasped the extent of my paralysis. I awoke at night on fire, my skin crisping from the soles of my feet, up my legs and back, tight around my abdomen right up to just under my rib cage, and down my arms onto my hands. I was burning the way you burn when shocked with static electricity, but the shock was infinitely multiplied and running thickly, continuously under my skin. This ferocious buzzing was let loose on me by scrambled nerves that will never ever fully recover, neurological pain that could outline my body by thickly fizzing my skin, as it did that

night, or more deeply penetrate my extremities, as was sometimes the case. What a horror, to finally and viscerally understand how profoundly I was hurt! I “knew,” of course, from bedside conversations with my physicians and with Janet all that was known about the injury I had sustained. My mind was intact, but how could I understand a body so fundamentally transformed? I had no real idea until then of the *scope* of my injury, how far up on my body it came. And what a horror that the drugs I was being given didn’t make it stop!

It called to mind another hospital. I was seven years old and having a tonsillectomy. On my back in the operating room, I looked up at the gowned and gloved adults who were looking down at me. “Count backwards from one hundred,” I was instructed, as a mask hissing ether was put over my nose and mouth. Then in the seconds it took for me to lose consciousness I felt myself falling free, nauseated and gassed, through black space dotted all over with points of colored light. I clearly saw myself, outlined as if by a gingerbread cookie cutter, plummeting down, down. I was, for those seconds, sure I was going to hell.

Now I was there.

\* \* \*

Years after my discharge from the Hospital for Special Care, there’s no discernible pattern that I can see to account for the good nights and bad nights. Most often I lie on my side, having positioned my legs so that the top one is drawn up, bent at the knee with my foot resting on a pillow so that the bony protrusion of my bunion, where thin skin stretches tightly over bone, does not touch the sheet and begin to throb. (Bunions, I’ve learned, are big toes that have been drawn in toward the smaller ones so that the joint on the side of the foot sticks out, making it wider at that point. These malformations developed as the ligaments and tendons of my foot contracted, which has also given me hammer toes.) After arranging my foot, I lie down and put one hand under the pillow, palm up and fingers spread, so that the weight of my head will stretch it open.

So positioned, now and then I realize to my surprise that the electricity has been turned off and I'm not in pain. Unless I consciously try to move my legs, they're just there. I can feel the weight of the duvet, and feel that one leg is bent, the other straight—though just where each leg rests on the sheet can get confusing. I lie there quietly.

More often than not I feel myself buzzing. Eleven years after the accident, on good days, pain recedes into the background of life, and when I'm outwardly engaged I don't think about the fact that I almost always feel a current running through my body. Yet sometimes I can't ignore the pain, when my skin feels thick, electrified, and vibrating. You can imagine a wet suit, the kind you'd use when windsurfing. I had one—it was made of neoprene that hugged my body tightly, and when wet held next to my skin a thin layer of water warmed by my body heat. My skin feels like that neoprene, thick and pliable, with an electric current carried through the underside wetness of blood and lymph. At this very moment of writing, I feel that current making a bold outline of my body. My feet and ankles (which swell, sometimes prodigiously, over the course of the day) buzz all the way through, while my thighs and sit bones press uncomfortably against the seat. My fingers are cold, thick, and buzzing, and stay cold unless the temperature's above 80°. This phenomenon plagues me because the injury to my spinal cord is right at the level where the spinal nerves connecting my hands to my brain branch out between the vertebrae, and those neural networks are implacably compromised. There was a pharmacologist on the staff of the rehab hospital who had a round, white button pinned on the lapel of his lab coat—PAIN was spelled out in red letters, with the international “forbidden” line in black drawn diagonally through the word from upper right to lower left. My chronic neurological pain gave the lie to that button by insistently breaching that line when I was in the hospital, and continues—though moderated—to break through whatever drug is on offer.

Sometimes the buzzing is more like burning, so that my skin feels like crinkly hot Saran wrap. That's what happened last night. It reminded me of just how horrible I felt in the hospital, and how long I felt horrible, when I wondered in rehab whether I would ever be free of that pain. Most of the time, pain only seeps through the narcotic and other chemical barriers set against it, yet it still can feel terrifying, not necessarily in the moment, but as a fated repetition. Sometimes at night I wake to it, and sometimes I fall asleep, drugged, in it. Sometimes the burning is accompanied by spasticity, as my left leg—or my right one—begins to stiffen and shake for a few seconds, and then relax, but relax for less than a minute, only to go into another spasm. The spasticity itself comes in waves: cramping, quivering, jumping, jerking my leg so that there is no sleep for me—or for Janet—without further pharmacological intervention. So I take a Valium, and lie there in bed, thinking about embodied life until I'm knocked out.

Coldness has pursued me from the first, in the hospital where Janet would find me in my overheated room, lying in bed, freezing. She would warm up flannel sheets in the clothes dryer down the hall, three at a time, and wrap me up in them. The warmth was wonderfully soothing, but so wretchedly transient, because the coldness emerges from deep within my body. I have long since left the hospital, but my circulation will always be impaired, my nerves damaged, and my hands cold.

If only pain could be vanquished. It is inescapable, unless you resort to illegal drugs, and even then pain waits on the other side. The cocktail of drugs against pain that I was given in the Hospital for Special Care included OxyContin, the artificial opiate that's like heroin, only made in a lab rather than derived from opium poppies grown in Afghanistan. Now on the streets it's often preferred to heroin—it's uniform in effect and less likely to kill you. One time, and one time only, OxyContin was put into my body pulverized along with all my other drugs, which

were given to me nightly through the gastrointestinal tube. As always during that time, I was in pain, cold, and desperate for some relief. Lying there, I felt a soothing warmth coursing through my body, warm honey in my veins, which spread and spread, engulfing me. So sweet. How unspeakably \*lovely\* are these drugs!—a thought I held onto for maybe fifteen minutes, floating along before sleep took me. If only I could take my OxyContin that way always! My mind was relieved from the fear that I would always be in pain, and when I'm buzzing, cold, or burning, I sometimes remember the sensation of being warmed through and suspended in no-pain, weightless. Then I long to be taken out of myself and the pain that plagues me, as I was that one time. If I were to crush and swallow my OxyContin tablets, pain would give way to a surplus of pleasure, sweetly running all through my body toward oblivion. I would drift away. Nodding off on OxyContin would, of course, in the end make my pain fatally unbearable. OxyContin is an extended-release formulation of the narcotic. If I crushed the tablets I would get a concentrated hour of bliss. But I would have used in an hour a dose meant for twelve, so I've never crushed a tablet, and they all remain whole in the pill organizer. As a result, I am almost never completely pain free.

Pain brings with it a dour companion, loneliness. I feel an unassuageable loneliness, because I will never be able to adequately describe the pain I suffer, nor can anyone accompany me into the realm of pain. I've learned that the recourse to analogy is not mine alone, since pain is so singular that it evades direct description, so isolating because in your body alone. Crying, and screaming, and raging against pain are the sign of language undone.<sup>1</sup> "As if" is pain's rhetorical signature, which requires the displacement of metaphor to signify—its properties can be articulated only by way of something else, and the tropes of pain display the awkwardness of catachresis. My electrified neoprene skin holds me in its tight, suffusing embrace. The current

races close to the surface, yet somehow also deeply penetrates the tissue. My fingers fumble. My toes curl upward.

If you went to the doctor's office complaining of pain, you would be asked first to rank it, on a scale of 1 to 10. There is a chart, exactly the same everywhere, showing faces as emoticons—a smiling face, with an upward curving line for the mouth, dots for eyes, with happy eyebrows drawn above—that's 1, feeling no pain. Ten, by contrast, has a sharply downturned mouth, pinched eyebrows, and dot eyes leaking tears. When I complained of pain in the hospital, the nurse invariably asked me to rate it on that 1–10 scale, an exercise I found quite confusing—the night of fiery, engirdling pain was the worst I'd suffered, so for a while any other pain felt relatively trivial. I would be buzzing and intolerably cold, but would only say, "5 or maybe 6." That ranking yielded but one short-acting dose of oxycodone (different from OxyContin's extended-release formulation). Even though giving my pain a higher number could get me two, I was afraid of ranking it too high, for fear of not being able to go high enough when it got excruciating.

Before too long, however, my rankings crept upward, and I would ask for as much narcotic help as I could get, with inevitable side effects. I would fall asleep in the middle of speaking a sentence. It was January, and Lori had just returned from her motorcycle tour of New Zealand, by lesbians, for lesbians—we had talked excitedly together about this adventure in the summer of 2003, when I had the Triumph and she was riding a Kawasaki. She had taken ravishing photographs of the landscape, plus some great pictures of the bikes. I wanted to know about it all, but I struggled, frustrated and helpless, against a kind of narcotic narcolepsy. Yet I wanted those drugs. My bowels, already a great trouble to me since they're slowed by paralysis, had an even harder time moving—but that didn't matter. When electricity stormed through my

body, I just wanted relief. The hardest part was waiting in pain after I pushed the button on my call bell. A CNA would eventually show up to ask what I needed, and then she had to find a nurse with access to the locked-down drugs. The nurse inevitably would be working with someone else, and there was nothing to do but wait. When I suffered at the time of a shift change, I knew that I'd have to be patient. Moreover, HSC was routinely understaffed, as are all hospitals now. I learned to rank my pain quite high and to request all the meds that I could get, side effects be damned.

In the years just before I broke my neck, I was deeply happy. I was joyfully engaged with my lover, delighting in her body and my own. One afternoon together, we discovered an anatomy book in a downtown Tucson store with a miscellaneous stock—toys for kids, funky sunglasses, witty postcards, and suchlike. Among the stuff was an illustrated book anatomizing the human body, with lovely simplified drawings of the viscera, the skin, the spinal cord, the fiber of nerves coated with myelin, ball and socket joints, the skeleton, blue veins and red arteries, the heart with its four chambers, sexual organs with the hydraulic apparatuses clearly detailed. Lying in bed, we would look at this book and consider the myriad pleasures of the flesh. Embodied life was then an affirmation of fully realized pleasures integrated with a rich intellectual life. One evening, when we lay side by side, reading, I repeatedly interrupted her to exclaim about some sentence in my book, *The Volatile Body*, by the philosopher Elizabeth Grosz.<sup>2</sup> I'll always remember the warm, dry desert air, the lamplight, our proximity, and the book, because then the question of how to represent embodiment was a question of pleasure, first and foremost, and of the mysterious way language could amplify that pleasure. Now, representing bodily sensations is no longer a matter of finding words for the ever renewable resource of shared sexual pleasures, but of finding words for the beyond, the nowhere of pain

that I suffer alone.

Janet takes exception to that last sentence, observing that, while she can't feel in her body what I feel in mine, my pain does affect her. She is pained by my suffering—she so wishes it were different, and her desire to make it so is baffled. She's right. Pain does radiate out into the social world, because it changes the person who feels the bodily pain, which in turn cannot but affect those to whom she relates. I have no exact account of how pain changes my interactions with my students and my colleagues, but I know there are times when I don't feel fully present. It's not that the pain is so bad that it commands all my attention, but rather that it's so chronic as to act like a kind of screen. I don't talk much about the pain to anybody other than my therapist, who is not my lover, or my friend, or a member of my family, or my colleague. To her I will complain bitterly, but not to others. I won't complain about the pain because such complaints become corrosive, and would eat at the ties that bind me to others. It's not that I'm bravely suffering in silence, but rather that I know there's nothing to be done.

## 5

# Caring at the Cash Nexus

“Ah Goddamn it—Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ . . .” I moaned and cursed the pain electrifying my body as I lay in my bed at the Hospital for Special Care. A CNA was by my side, and when I glanced up, I saw a small gold cross on a delicate chain around her neck. Miserable as I was, I thought that I must have offended her sensibilities, and apologized. Her voice was quiet and gentle. “You couldn’t have called on a better name.”

This simple affirmation of her faith relieved me of embarrassment, for Donna transfigured my oath into praise for her Lord. I decided then and there it would be better for me to stop swearing in company, reserving oaths and obscenities for my private relief. I now say “gosh,” “heck,” “darn,” “goodness,” the acceptable refuges of offensive language, and those words no longer feel foreign in my mouth. The only time that I really let loose as I used to do is when I’m alone and have dropped something for the fifth time, or have spilled something, or am troubled with a spasm, or the dog has made a mess—then my language is as foul as it ever was. Moxie Doxie, our alert little dog, doesn’t know I’m taking the Lord’s name in vain.

When Janet and I were trying to prepare ourselves for my return to our home, we were simply overwhelmed. I’d been hospitalized and under the care of aides, nurses, therapists, and physicians for more than five months, and the thought of managing my care alone was terrifying. Friends were an invaluable help, but I honestly don’t know how we could’ve managed that first week or the ones that followed without the help of a CNA. We needed someone to put on the compression boots and elevate my legs, bring me breakfast and feed it to me, and help me with the wretchedly painful work of stretching out ligaments, tendons, and muscles that had atrophied.

We needed help getting me to a tub, because our only bathroom was on the second floor. Janet had gotten installed a chair that ran on a rail up the side of the stairs so that I could get up there, but my arrival felt like an epic achievement, every time. To get me to the tub and shower me, Donna had to transfer me (1) from the bed onto my wheelchair, (2) from the wheelchair onto the stair-lift chair that would take me upstairs, (3) off it and onto a folding wheelchair that was stored in a closet outside the bathroom, (4) from that wheelchair onto the shower bench straddling the toilet and the tub, and (5) finally onto the shower chair (like a commode, but without the bowl) in the tub itself. She and Janet together held me upright, played the water over me, washed my hair and my body, and then reversed all those steps to take me back to bed—without Donna to do those ten transfers, helped by Janet, I would have had sponge baths for months and months. Donna had been a steady, sure, skilled help to me, working the second shift every weekend of my long months at the Hospital for Special Care. I knew that I felt comfortable with her. Her mother had died right around the time that I broke my neck, so as I was crying over my broken body and upended life, she was in the first flood of deep, deep grief for her mother. We were both in mourning. Sometimes we talked, more often we were silent, and both were okay. So I asked, will you come to Middletown and work for me 8:00–12:30, Monday through Friday? To my enormous relief, she said yes.

\* \* \*

Donna still cares for me, and will continue to far into the future, if I continue fortunate. I love her, and she loves me, for a decade of intimate care has created an intimate bond. We've talked about a world of things. She knows that I'm not a church-going Christian, though I come from a Christian family, and I've told her directly that I respect her religious faith and religious practices. I've told her lots of stories about my family life, and have gone on at some length about the evils of capitalism as we know it. She understands that Janet has become the chief

executive officer of our home, and goes to her when medical supplies need to be replenished—indeed, when any household matter needs to be addressed. She knows me, what I can—and, as importantly, can't—do. She knows a lot about my relationship with Janet and the terms in which we understand ourselves.

For my part, I know that Donna is a Pentecostal Protestant and has had the life-transforming experience of being saved. She actively studies the Bible and regularly attends the church to which her mother took her five children every Sunday. I know that her loving mother moved those children to Hartford from Brooklyn after her husband was robbed and shot dead in his cab. Donna was six years old. I know how hard Donna has worked to rear well her daughter and son, and now Kyla has graduated from college and Tyler has graduated from high school. I know that she looks to God every day—every hour—for help, and the gospels that she hums as she works suggest that her mind is often on her Savior. I know in a way that I never could have learned otherwise than through such an intimate relationship how bitterly, sometimes desperately, hard it is to be working poor. To have only the change from a twenty that you broke when you got gas, and you have yet to get groceries. To be indentured to the used car dealer who will sell to you even when you have lousy credit, only to trap you in a debt with compounding interest that will continue to demand repayment long after the car has been towed away.

Donna works harder than anyone else I've ever known, and still has constant, nagging, impossible-to-forget worries about upcoming bills. She picks up extra shifts at the hospital all the time, even as she is working a second job for me. She works “doubles,” sixteen hours straight through. Yet the bills keep coming. We've talked about how easy it is to get a “payday loan”—just google the phrase and you can see for yourself. Online or in person, the application takes but a moment, and will screw you for years. Check out [CashAdvance.com](http://CashAdvance.com). Here's what you'll learn

about interest rates if you scroll down, down the page past the many smiling faces to the small print:

The APR on a short term loan can range *from 200% to 2,290%* depending on how the APR is calculated (nominal vs. effective), the duration of the loan, loan fees incurred, late payment fees, non-payment fees, loan renewal actions, and other factors. Keep in mind that the APR range is not your finance charge and your *finance charge will be disclosed later on.* (my emphasis throughout)

CNA work is hard and low wage, which means that in Connecticut and New York City many of the workers are African Americans or Caribbean immigrants, though here in central Connecticut, the working class also includes many immigrant Poles and Latin@s. Most patients in a rehab hospital are unable to stand without assistance, let alone walk. Many are simply dead weight. Aides must transfer them from bed to wheelchair and wheelchair to bed several times a day, and help people on and off the toilet, all day long. They have to lift and turn patients in bed, a task which will simply kill your back if you don't do it right. CNA's everywhere now work short staffed as a matter of course—it's called "enhanced productivity." While profits as bright and light as digital numbers flow upward, bodies remain intransigently heavy. Donna's in her early forties. She has a bulging disc in her neck, which radiates pain, and a knee badly in need of replacement. Frequent headaches are just a fact of life. Not a day passes without pain, though some days are worse than others. I'll see her put a hand to her back or rub her neck, involuntary gestures that announce she's hurting, and now and then she walks with a pronounced limp. Her doctor advises her to wait for surgery until she absolutely can't stand the knee pain, because a mechanical joint lasts only fifteen to twenty years. Artificial joints wear out like the body parts they replace, and eventually the replacement has to be replaced, so best to push back the first

operation as long as possible. Working in the hospital is also highly stressful. Short staffing requires that the CNAs on the job always have patients *waiting* for care, with their call lights reproachfully blinking. Aides and nurses are always behind. Donna keeps her responsibilities alive in her head, which is great for me—she remembers my schedule even when I don't, and anticipates what I need. In the hospital, however, that organizational capacity of hers is wearing, because while she's helping one person, she'll have in mind the woman who needs to get from her bed to the toilet, the other woman who asked for pain medication, and the paralyzed man with a bedsore who has to be turned right on schedule, right *now*. That's high-stress work, and a very hard way to make a living.

I've read that certain populations in our country are given over to "slow death," among them workers in the bottom-level jobs of the one reliably expanding industry in the United States, healthcare.<sup>1</sup> The business section of the New York Times reports that "personal care aides will make up the fastest-growing occupation this decade[,and an] Economic Policy Institute study found that some 57 percent of them live in poverty."<sup>2</sup> That phrase, "slow death," captures the endless process of wearing down, the hush enervating demand of small yet consequential decisions (can I bring take-out home for the kids tonight? How much can I pay on the electric bill so they don't shut it off?), and the quiet despair that can suffuse everyday life. Wellness programs, like the one directed at CNAs at the Hospital for Special Care, are just another reason to feel bad about yourself—why aren't you going to the gym, with weight machines and elliptical machines and a heated pool, just waiting for you? Regular exercisemoreover, is just the beginning of what's required for a healthy body. With Michelle Obama's bright encouragement, you know you have only yourself to blame for making poor "choices" that undermine your family's health, starting with decisions about food. Such decisions, however, can

be imagined to be those of an autonomous and freely willing subject only if you abstract the embodied realities of grinding poverty into weightless ideas—it's called “grinding” precisely because it wears you down and wears you out.

I smoked cigarettes in college, but gave it up years ago. No one I know at Wesleyan still smokes, though when I came in 1982 I could always bum a cigarette at a party. Now the people who smoke are the ones working low-wage, high-stress, physically demanding jobs. People smoke in order to take a break and hang out in the parking lot with their friends, and they smoke to schedule in the sharp pleasure of doing what their bodies desire in an otherwise dreary and repetitive day.<sup>3</sup> Coke delivers caffeine and a much-needed sugar kick that feels good in the moment. Fried food tastes right and at McDonald's reliably will taste right every time. You can pick it up at the drive-through and eat it in your car driving to your second job. If you look at the advertisements on daytime TV, you'll see (1) personal injury lawyers asking if you've been injured at work, and (2) diets organized around prepackaged food that costs a lot just because it's prepackaged, and (3) smoking-cessation programs. You may be on your couch watching daytime TV because you were hurt on the job, but you could, nonetheless, lose weight and quit smoking. You could make healthy choices—if you don't, it's your own damn fault.

\* \* \*

I know a lot about Donna, yet her life remains, in many regards, unknown to me and unknowable. She works *for* me, in *my* home, and has to learn *my* ways and the ways of *my* household. It's just a fact that black people know “the ways of white folk,” in Langston Hughes's turn of phrase.<sup>4</sup> Black people in this country have been taking care of white people in their homes as domestic workers for centuries, necessarily amassing many generations of knowledge about the oddities of how white people live. I listen to arias from Baroque operas that were written for castrati who sang in the soprano range, music now performed by countertenors, who

are men singing in falsetto. How bizarre is that? Neither I nor the white women who are my colleagues will be taking jobs in the homes of black women, and getting to know their lives as only a caretaker can—intimately, every day, over time. *Of course* Donna knows more about me than I know about her. I know that we depend on each other. Our mutual dependence does not, however, bring me into her household, and there's plenty I don't know about her life, despite our personal closeness.

To rebuild our lives after my terrible accident, Janet and I turned to our families and friends. Their financial support made so much possible that otherwise would have simply been out of reach that first terrible year, and I continue to be actively thankful for their open-handed generosity. We've told Donna that if there's ever a crisis she can come to us, and forgo the payday loan. Borrowing from us, she would be spared onerous interest rates. We can get our hands on money. She can't. Our good intentions, however, can't transcend the structural racism that has advantaged us so grandly, and disadvantaged her so wrongly. I am seriously worried about patronage, for which there are all too many precedents. The black artists of the Harlem Renaissance, including Langston Hughes, were patronized by well-off "white folks" who supported "their" authors, facilitated the production of "their" artists' books, and then took the privilege money afforded them to suggest how "their" artists should go about their lives. What if Janet or I somehow patronize Donna? The prospect makes me ill. My delicate feelings, however, are no guarantee against patronage—our intimacy is very real, but it's we who have the money.

There's a constitutional amendment forbidding slavery, and indentured servitude has long since been a thing of the past, but as of the early twenty-first century, white people with money too often still do not honor the workers who labor in their homes or compensate them fairly. Were wages calculated on a different scale, according to how dearly loved are those in need of

care, domestic labor would no longer come so cheap! Righteous anger may be some relief, but there's no ethically safe solution for me, or for any employer of caring labor. Political action is the only effective response to systematic injustice. My contribution as an educator has been teaching *Valuing Domestic Work*, the fifth in the Barnard Center for Research on Women's series *New Feminist Solutions*.<sup>5</sup> It's a report "based on a three-year collaboration with Domestic Workers United (DWU) and the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA)," which lays out the political groundwork required for transformative action. I don't confuse putting this report on my syllabus with the work of organizing. Teaching the report is instead a way to name social reproduction as an object of knowledge consequential to feminist thought, and to link my dependency to a broader vision of caring labor and reproductive work. It is to see the political in the personal and the personal in the political.

I must simply admit, however, that my personal relationship to Donna is an irresolvable contradiction. We meet at the cash nexus, the labor market. Donna brings to that market her bodily capacity for work and her imperative need for money, while I bring money and my imperative need for help with my bodily incapacities. Donna can't live without money, and I am glad to pay her what I owe. Yet money cannot begin to measure the value of her work. Money cannot calculate what Donna's presence does for me or how she goes about the profoundly intimate work of helping me manage my body. *I value her for who she is*, the beautiful, gentle, skillful, kind, sad, singular person that I love.

## 17

## The Horror! The Horror!

Years before my accident, I was sitting in my study preparing to teach George Eliot's novel *The Mill on the Floss* to the thirty-two students in my course titled Reading the Victorians. Tears were running down my cheeks, and I knew that I wanted the students to understand how words on a page could elicit such strong emotion. So I worked that afternoon to teach the class how the conventions of realism project a space-time populated with "round" characters whose imagined lives we follow, often with real interest. We discussed how the happenings of this fictional world can move readers even when—or perhaps especially when—melodramatic conventions intrude. *The Mill on the Floss* is the second of Eliot's eight novels, written before she had fully mastered the genre, so the opening scenes prefigure somewhat too heavily the tragedy that will overtake the novel's passionate heroine, Maggie, who conforms only with difficulty and great inward effort to the narrow dictates that tell her how to be a good girl. The conclusion is flawed, too, veering close to melodrama as the heroine's virtues—manifestly evident to us throughout, but unrecognized by those she loves—are at last witnessed by her upright and judgmental brother, Tom, just moments before they are together overwhelmed by the waters of a great flood she had braved to rescue him. "In their death they were not divided." It's a story about a brother and sister, so of course I was moved. Melodramatic tactics work, and I was crying not only over the death of the heroine, but over missed chances to overcome the painful distance from her brother, the impossibility of turning back the flow of time so that Maggie's life could be different, the impossible regret of "if only" so central to melodrama.

What one scholar has called the "realist consensus" upholds the widely shared belief in

the morally complex characters realist conventions create, characters whose depths are accommodated by the expansive, three-dimensional space in which they appear.<sup>1</sup> We take “depth of character” for granted, as characters repeatedly display the attributes that we recognize as belonging to them, seen first from this angle and then that, which is one of the reasons that Victorian novels are a pleasure to read. A masterful writer like Eliot can create and populate a whole town and its environs. Her narrators encourage readers to pass moral judgments, though with a writer as accomplished as Eliot, we’re not readily tempted to become moralistic and imagine ourselves above it all. So even when a novel governed by the realist consensus takes a melodramatic turn and ends tragically, as happens in *The Mill on the Floss*, the narrative has created an ordered imaginative world where my mind can rest, and characters whose contradictions I can understand.

Realism progresses through chronologically sequential time toward a knowable future, and creates an imagined world you find continuous with your own. Most importantly, the realist consensus urges certain beliefs, perhaps most importantly the idea that “we” are all complexly motivated, but knowable human beings, fundamentally alike. I have grave reservations about such beliefs, which presuppose history as progressive and unified in space and time -- imagined from a European point of view, of course, since Europe is clearly where humanity is furthest advanced. These premises are contradicted by the world we live in. I know that the “realist consensus” does not produce novels that “reflect real life.” Rather, a comprehensible world is conjured by the imagination of an artist, illuminated by the austere, searching light of the Anglo-European Enlightenment, and laid out on the premises that history progresses organically and that we all belong to the family of man. Knowing how these books call upon readers to participate in the realist consensus and legitimate its claims does not, however, diminish my

pleasure in entering into an imaginary world ordered according to its unspoken rules. To the contrary—it's a familiar and reassuring domain that offers the substantial comfort of knowing where I am, especially since I needn't believe what I read.

“Of course you have to begin with the preface!” I said decisively from the hospital bed where I was lying for a third day awash in the bright lights and encompassing whiteness of the intensive care unit. “You can't skip!” I was instructing Janet, who was sitting in a chair by my bedside, holding *Middlemarch* on her lap. Apparently I had asked for this book the previous day when I'd emerged from my induced unconsciousness, which suggests the hold that this novel has on my imagination. “You know it's a parable that situates the ‘ardent’ and ‘theoretic’ character of Dorothea—besides, there's the voice of that comprehensively instructive narrator!” (Several years before, Janet and I had gone to a conference on narrative form, where she met some of my Victorianist friends, and came away amused and impressed by my colleagues' belief that you must attend to every detail, down to the very syntax of Eliot's sentences.) So she began at the beginning. *Middlemarch* is Eliot's penultimate novel, and demonstrates her truly masterful control of realist conventions. No heavy-handed forecasting or “if only” regrets, just the slow accretion of detail that populates an imagined provincial manufacturing town and its surrounding countryside with a multitude of fully rounded characters and their intricate web of interactions over time.

I was so bewildered by my injuries and sedated by drugs that I have no memory of Janet reading aloud to me. I do know that when I got to the Hospital for Special Care, she borrowed from the public library in Middletown a twenty-three-cassette edition read by an accomplished speaker of British English. That way I could enter the imagined provincial world of *Middlemarch* when Janet was not there and I was not doing therapy, during the long, empty

hours in the unimaginable world I had entered and the incomprehensible body I'd become. I was far better off in the Vincys' hospitable house, or the oppressively evangelical Mr. Bulstrode's office at the bank, or with young, vibrant Dorothea in the Lowick house of the Rev. Mr. Casaubon, where she is slowly coming to understand that her husband is far from the great divine she had imagined him to be. Day after day, I had only to patiently wait for the CNA to answer my call bell when I needed to have one cassette taken out and another put into the small boombox sitting on the table next to me.

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The realist consensus is an achievement of Renaissance humanism and Anglo-European Enlightenment, and the world it represents is expansive, comprehensible, and rationally ordered. Not so the neurological storm of spinal cord injury. I was lost in its vastness and shades of unilluminated darkness, and in desperate need of familiar things. Of course I asked for *Middlemarch*! Given this fact, I can hardly fault memoirists who answer to the dictates of the realist consensus when writing about disability. Many accounts of living with a disabling incapacity begin at the beginning—the discovery at birth of a supposed “defect,” the account of a genetic anomaly, diagnostic test, or catastrophic accident. The narrative develops chronologically after the advent of incapacity, all the while implicitly articulating events into a consequential order. Moving through time is simultaneously moving through space, of course, and that space is three-dimensional, oriented by a single vanishing point in the distance toward which the narrative moves as it develops. You conjure this space in your imagination as you read, and discover the common horizon that organizes the trajectories of all the characters, including yourself as you become absorbed in the story. You enter into the scenes and follow the incapacitated person as she seeks to regain lost abilities or discover new ones, and sympathize when she must persevere through setbacks and disappointments. Authors and audience alike rely

on common sense, and the story moves sequentially from beginning to end.

From the very first pages, you are reading with the “anticipation of retrospection.”<sup>2</sup> Readers attend to the details of the emerging narrative with the expectation that the author has organized his story to end with a satisfying sense of conclusion. Frank discussions of setbacks tend toward workable solutions and the discovery by the protagonist that he is, in fact, living his life—a difficult life, yes, and certainly different from what he had expected, but a life with its satisfactions and pleasures. The quadriplegic poet Paul Guest has written a memoir I admire, *One More Theory About Happiness*, in which he describes the blankness that followed from his terrible bicycle accident when he was thirteen, just on the verge of puberty. He does not shy from representing the dark moods and thwarted desires that inform his writing and shadow his growth into manhood and his development as a poet. The poem “My Index of Slightly Horrifying Knowledge” is a catalog of indignities large and small that I read with a wry, nearly bitter, laugh of recognition. Yet the narrative of his memoir, which begins in childhood and ends when he is engaged to be married, is motivated by his longing for a fully adult life, imagined as the familiar story of reciprocated heterosexual fulfillment. This happy narrative arc is at odds with the dark comedy of the horrifying knowledge he represents with an enviable poetic precision. A longing for heterosexual normalcy drives Guest’s narrative, which in consequence I can’t reckon as one *more* theory about happiness. Narratives of disability may be grim at some points, but they almost always move toward a satisfying conclusion of lessons learned and life recalibrated to accommodate, even celebrate, a new way of being in the world.

Nothing of the sort is happening here, because I can’t resolve the intractable difficulties of disabling incapacity, any more than I can suggest that everything will be (more or less) okay. Even the most accomplished cripple you can imagine is undone, and living some part of her life

in another dimension, under a different dispensation than that of realist representation. In my case, spinal cord injury casts a very long shadow, the penumbra of which will only grow darker as the years pass and the deficits of age begin to diminish me still further. I'm living a life beyond reason, even if I have invoked some of the stabilizing conventions of realism in this narrative. Those conventions are the ones I know best, but profound neurological damage actually feels to me more like a horror story, a literary genre governed not by rational exposition but rather by affective intensification and bewilderment.

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In horror stories “the boundary between the real and the fictive, the interpretations of experience by the audience and the characters, is continually drawn and effaced,” Susan Stewart writes in an essay on the epistemology of the genre. “Both the story and its context of telling dissolve into a uniformity of effect. Hence, the ‘didn’t really happen’ of the fiction is transformed into a ‘really happened,’ a fear which is ‘real,’ yet which has no actual referent.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, such a story depends on the feeling of fear that it evokes in its characters, and the simultaneous unease it engenders in you. Edgar Allan Poe’s story “The Fall of the House of Usher” works this way. From the opening paragraph’s “dull, dark, and soundless days of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens” to the “full, setting, and blood-red moon” of the end, Poe’s first-person narrator inhabits a terrible world, and as you read, you discover that there’s never a relief from the sense that something very bad is upon you.<sup>4</sup> Every element of the narrative is overcharged with significance, every detail mysteriously endowed with a blank surplus that oppresses rather than enlightens. Horror stories insist on this referential surplus to overwhelm our efforts to figure out what’s going on. Such stories defy the cerebral undertaking they seem to encourage, because their meaning is affective, not referential. The fear they induce is the fear of fear itself.

In Poe's story, the unnamed narrator, who in his anonymity could be any one of us, begins the story as he is approaching the House of Usher, where he comes in response to the urgent call of an old friend who is terrified. Of what? He doesn't know, but the setting is desolately foreboding and the narrator increasingly uneasy. He attempts to soothe his friend, to no avail. His friend has a twin sister, but she is ill, and he glimpses her but once. "[T]he lady Madeline . . . passed slowly through a remote portion of the apartment and . . . disappeared. I regarded her with an utter astonishment not unmixed with dread—and yet I found it impossible to account for such feelings." After several gloomy days, her brother "informs him abruptly that the lady Madeline is no more." She has died—of what? We never know. His host fears her medical men, implying they would dig up the corpse for dissection, though the story affords meager evidence of this particular threat. It must be, he declares, interred in a crypt below the mansion. The men together do the work. The atmosphere of foreboding grows only stronger in the days following, and at last the narrator finds himself giving way to "unaccountable horror." As a wild storm whirls outside, he discovers his friend in a kind of trance, muttering that he's heard his sister alive in her coffin, when a great gust blows open the heavy door that communicates with the crypt. There she stands in her shroud with arms outstretched, his terrifying doppelgänger, only to pitch forward in her final agony into her brother's embrace. Her death calls for his, and both fall lifeless at the feet of the narrator. In great haste he leaves the mansion, and just in time, for as he looks back, a jagged fissure divides the House of Usher down the middle. "My brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder," he tells us, and "there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters—and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the 'House of Usher.'" In this horror story, the brother and sister twins in their mimetic relationship terrify as René Girard

says they must always do.

The tumultuous end leaves unanswered all causal questions, which actually never had purchase in the story, anyway. In a horror story, *how* the characters and events of the story are ordered and discussed collapses into the *what* of those events that gathers affective force. The result is generalized fear, a feeling that doesn't *refer* to anything real, but *is itself real*. From the title of "The Fall of the House of Usher" forward, we've been waiting for a collapse, an end that's reached as the narrator flees. The house first splits in two, a violent rending apart of what had been perversely conjoined, and is then entirely obliterated. Readers have been aligned throughout with the narrator by virtue of the first-person address to an implicit "you," and with him readers experience the fear of fear that amplifies into horror. This horror detaches the audience from the realm of the ordinary and precipitates us elsewhere.

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I find myself repeatedly, daily, relentlessly, and wearily horrified by the elsewhere of spinal cord injury. All too often I feel as if I'm living in another world, a dark realm overshadowed by the life-threatening accident that didn't kill me, but obliterated the life I had been living and put me in a mimetic relationship to my brother. I'm advancing toward something that evokes horror in me, the referent of which is shrouded in a baleful mystery rendered more menacing as I proceed, my horror gathering as I realize that whatever "it" is, it has already happened, yet worse lies ahead. I'm not writing a horror story, I'm living one. In becoming Jeff's twin, my world was destroyed, and the terrifying aura of neurological destruction and paralytic incapacity encompassed me.

What is it I'm so afraid of? I've turned this over in my mind repeatedly, and think that I have some glimmer of what's at stake. I don't relive the day of the accident. The fact is, I don't remember anything about the accident itself. My memory stops about a half mile before the spot

where the branch caught my spokes, pitching my bicycle sideways in an instant—in a nanosecond—so quickly that I arrived at the hospital with my chin obliterated, and not another scratch on me. My face was smashed and I broke my neck. Yet my fear is not retrospective, incessantly returning to the accident that so wrecked my life, but prospective. Something horrible awaits—the future. Life will go on, day after day, until I die. I fear getting older and bearing the trials of aging in my deeply compromised body. I fear living with interminable pain, both neuropathic and emotional, and I fear interminable grief. It colors the world and is just too hard sometimes to bear. I fear not death, but living.

Otto Kernberg, in a psychoanalytic account of the process of mourning, makes this observation:

Daily reality militates against the full appreciation of a loving relationship, and only retrospectively emerges the possibility of a perspective that fully illuminates the potential implications of every moment lived together. The paradox of the capacity to only appreciate fully what one had after having lost it, a profoundly human paradox, cannot be resolved by communicating this experience to others. It is an internal learning process fostered by the painful, yet creative aspect of mourning.<sup>5</sup>

No. Damn it, no! I appreciated every moment of the life that Janet and I made together and I fully appreciated her. I knew what I had. I could not integrate my intellectual and sexual passions until I was forty-six, so all the more reason to be alert to the joys of daily life. Take the motorcycle, for example.

I had always wanted a bike, and bought a used Honda Nighthawk 750 in the first year of my life with Janet. It was a great bike. The world of motorcycles now breaks down into sport

bikes with engines whining at really high RPMs and seats that pitch the rider aggressively forward into a racing position, versus low-slung cruisers with engines that rumble, the louder, the better. Cruisers put the rider in a cool laid-back position—think *Easy Rider*. The 1984 Nighthawk is what's called a hybrid, more of a sport bike, but with a bench seat that can accommodate a passenger. I happily rode it the fifty-mile round-trip to New Haven when I was in psychoanalysis—the only happy part of my analysis, I might add—but it wasn't really comfortable for Janet. To celebrate my fiftieth birthday, we decided to buy a bike that would be great for both rider and passenger. Looking around, I found a black Honda Shadow, a cruiser with great lines, the kind of bike I thought I wanted. But when I took it out for a ride, I didn't like how cumbersome it felt, with its wide handlebars and foot pegs set out in front. Leafing through the classifieds on a Sunday morning in spring 2003, we found the right bike—a black-and-silver Triumph with a lovely 900cc “speed triple” engine and the shorter turning radius and maneuverability of a sport bike, plus the lower carriage of a road bike. It had a seat contoured to carry a passenger, was highly polished, beautifully cared for, and looked brand-new. It even came with black leather saddle bags. When we went over to Poughkeepsie to get the motorcycle, I came back on Interstate 84 among the tractor-trailers, which reminded me of riding my bicycle in the scrum of taxis in New York City. I was proud of myself and loved the bike. I printed a photo from the Triumph website that showed it to perfection, and Janet had it hanging on the door to her office.

On September 2, my birthday, I had meetings in the morning, and went off to work carrying anxieties about my job that year as the chair of the faculty, a highly visible position that burdened me with responsibility even as I was glad my colleagues thought well enough of me to vote me into it. When I returned home for lunch, my worries about work vanished. There was

Janet, all proud and happy, dressed in a sexy, sleeveless black velvet top, a silver velvet skirt, and silver sandals. The garage door was open, showcasing the black-and-silver bike with black-and-silver wrapped gifts piled on it. A red ribbon accent picked up the thin red sporting stripe on the gas tank. The presents themselves were little things—on this occasion, the real gift was the presenter and presentation. I vividly remember how happy I was.

Photographs confirm that memory. We used to take pictures all the time, and recalled our pleasures as we put them into photo albums, where we have six years of happiness on page after page. One day a couple of years ago, wondering whether my memory had somehow burnished past happiness, I dared to search for the birthday photographs. Was I inflating in my memory the daily pleasures of my life with Janet and the moments of sheer joy that illuminated those days and years? I found the pictures seemingly untouched in their Mystic Photo Labs envelope. Flipping through them, I realized that I had not exaggerated my happiness, and that the photos fairly hum with merriment and desire.

I don't know if Janet's ever looked them over. I've never talked about it with her. We've certainly never gone through those photos together, as we used to do with each new envelope of negatives and prints, and I've looked at them only that once. They are still out in the living room. That envelope is somewhere. At this moment, eleven years after my accident, they still feel like green kryptonite to me. Dangerous, dangerous. Love, passion, giddiness, joy, pleasure, desire fairly burn through those photos and the ones arrayed in the albums that record six years of birthdays, holidays, and everyday adventures. There's no way to rewrite what happens, my lost body is forever lost, and I am forever reliving the events of the past that take on a dangerous golden glow. It's the glow of illuminated amber in which my remembered body is transfixed. Dr. Kernberg would have it that "the painful, yet creative act of mourning" will allow me to fully

appreciate in retrospect what I've lost. This "internal learning process" is a concept so innocent of complexity that I really can't stand it. I knew what I had. I know what I've lost.

Besides, the analytic talk about grief is always focused on the relationship between the dead and the living. No one's dead in this case, although I often wished in the early months and years that the accident had killed me and sometimes still do. Janet got angry at me one evening after I'd been home a couple of months, as she was pushing the wheelchair toward the dining room that was serving as our bedroom. I had been worrying with my tongue what felt like a new tooth protruding from my gums just below my lower front teeth, and I wondered aloud what it could be. "It's probably a bone chip," Janet said, and I cried out, "I am so fucking fucked, I can't believe how fucked I am," thinking of my broken face pinned together by the surgeons and wondering what else would emerge. "What does that say about me?" Janet said, her voice rising, clearly pissed. "When you talk like that you're just erasing me and all the work I do, as if it were for nothing." Immediately scared, certainly because of my dependence on her, and perhaps contrite, I said I was sorry. But she went on, indignantly, "All my work, all my care . . . and me—it's as though I don't matter to you at all." I protested the contrary, and again apologized, saying that I'd think about her position. It's very true that I loved her dearly and was sorry to have hurt her.

"It's not just the labor—although that's part of it, for sure. There's something else, though, and it's this—You also overlooked—no, refused to see—negated—my love for you. You may not love your body, but I do—you should know by now that I want to be your physical lover. I'm working on understanding and accepting the fact that you do not love your body and, from the way you talk about it, it doesn't seem likely you ever will. But saying you're completely fucked is saying that my desire for you and my love is of no consequence." We were

drinking our morning tea in bed, and Janet was describing how she'd felt the night before. As we talked, I came to understand the logic of her complaint, and from that moment forward I vowed not to break out in imprecations against my life, a life that is sustained by her considerable and absolutely necessary labor and even more by her loving regard. Yet on a bad day of pain and discomfort that abstracts and alienates me from my life, I feel my attachment to the world attenuate, and cannot contemplate aging, with its attendant physical and mental decline, with anything but horror. At such a moment, death turns a benignant aspect to me.

\* \* \*

What is it about my injured life that militates against mourning and keeps grief fresh? What makes it feel like a horror story? In a horror story, you begin by being afraid, and all its devices are dedicated to stoking the fear of fear, making it clear that there's worse to come, that, if you're afraid now, you'll be terrified in a moment. When? Wait. Just you wait. You'll see. You'll see . . .

I'm afraid I'll stop grieving and equally afraid that I'll never stop grieving. If I *do* stop grieving, I will necessarily have come to terms with my profoundly changed body and my profoundly changed life, for I can leave off mourning only by no longer cherishing and burnishing my memories of the past.

I may be perverse, but I'm terrified of what I'll lose in making my peace with what I've lost. I fear I'm forgetting how it felt to be comfortable in my body as time does its wearing work. I fear I'm losing how my embodied passions felt through my whole body, and I'm afraid that I'll forget the feeling of joy.

If I *don't* stop grieving, and refuse to move on, I fear that I'll be always missing the body and the life I had at the moment I broke my neck. I'll be caught in the sticky resin of amber. New pleasures will be foreclosed. I fear being impossible to live with—and I fear not wanting to live.

## 18

# Living On

Yet here I am. I'm sitting at my desk, outlined by and suffused with neuropathic pain, that tingling, vibrating, burning sensation that I've been describing from the very beginning. The pain is uncomfortable—today, that's all. When I'm concentrating, my bodymind turns to the task at hand and this sensation becomes background, only to reassert itself as I lose focus and return, as it were, to my resting state. How am I to represent this complex embodied fugue? My skin is an organ of sense that runs imperceptibly from inside my body to the outside, or from outside to inside, which defeats the idea that I'm living *in* my body. There are 108 single-word prepositions in the English language, and none is adequate to representing the relation of mind to body. Body and mind are simultaneously one and the same and clearly distinct. Thinking my body, I am thinking in my body, as my body, through my body, of my body, about my body, and I'm oriented around my body. I'm beside myself. Perhaps the most powerful effect of the realist consensus is what Ermarth calls the "concordance of difference," the summing up at the end of a novel that's sometimes explicitly offered to the readers by an author, as Eliot apprises us of where and how her characters live on after the end of her story in *Middlemarch*. The more detail, the more exhilarating and exhaustive is the effort to orient it all toward a single vanishing point, and the more perspectives from which we see a character like Dorothea, the more she acts differently, but always like "herself." Differences multiply, but in the end they add up with no remainder. The account balances. My account doesn't. I can't make sense of this body, which continues to

surprise and baffle me.

When I was first hurt, I began to feel a dense and obdurate need to put into words a body that seemed beyond the reach of language. I searched for words to describe to Doctor Seetherama phenomenological realities that made no sense to me, and tried to explain what I felt to the aides who were turning me in bed. I live on in a neurological storm—it's electric, even now sometimes violent enough to be overwhelming, and certainly endless enough to be horrifying. Yet my life is not in truth a horror story, and I have no wish to claim that it is, however powerfully that genre has helped me conceptualize my fear of the future.

I have lived on eleven years beyond the accident, through the suspension of life occasioned by terrible loss that Emily Dickinson represents with such fierce precision in her poem "After Great Pain." The experience may be so intense that it freezes rather than burns. Then death beckons.

This is the Hour of Lead –

Remembered, if outlived,

As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow –

First – Chill – then Stupor – then the letting go –<sup>xvi</sup>

Sportswriter Brian Phillips describes this state, which he experienced once when stranded for several hours on an icepack in the Bering Strait. "It was the first time I ever understood why freezing to death is sometimes described as . . . *just like falling asleep*. . . . It was like certain parts of [my] body just accrued this strange hush."<sup>xvii</sup> I recognize the temptation to lay down the burden of living, because I felt it when my body metabolized crushed OxyContin. I left my body and went elsewhere as my bodymind

knew the strange rushing hush of nonbeing. Nodding off, I experienced the relief from my suffering as complete . . . myself gathered into a blissful absence of pain, below zero on the pain scale. Lovely, easeful, unsustainable, unlivable life.

Janet's told me how deeply relieved she was when I greeted her with "Hi, Jake" the second day she came to visit me in the ICU, where I had emerged from deep sedation. She further reports that the second thing I said was, "How was your conference?" In so doing, I immediately recognized her and her projects. She was reassured. I had a spinal cord injury, she had no idea what that would bring, but I knew her for herself and wanted to hear about her work. In other words, I was myself, which, in turn, helped her to recover a sense of who she was that had been terribly shaken over the preceding forty-eight hours. Our lives are intertwined, and my life is not mine alone, but shared with her. My living makes her life better, and she tells me so—it's that simple and that profound. I think it's accurate to call my injuries "catastrophic," and it's a testament to the sheer durability of our feelings for each other that the love that was so vital and alive before the accident survived without a scratch. This fact, more than any other, makes my inexpressibly difficult life livable, and I know that Janet and I enjoy a reciprocity of feeling that's very precious to us both.

Writing, no matter about what subject, has its way with the writer. Writing helps to teach us what we can't know otherwise, which makes it a demanding and invaluable discipline. Writing offers, not a way out, but a way into the impossible dilemmas of not-knowing. Each sentence begun can wander off, sometimes irretrievably into confusion and mistake, sometimes to greater clarity. Tropes transport memories and transform them, as resin is transformed under pressure into amber, sometimes with a small, ancient

bit of life suspended inside. Amber can be remarkably clear, but the piece that conserves a suspended life is often more valuable. Writing works on memory, compressing and doubtless distorting the past, and offers bodies for the inspection of reader and writer alike.

Writing has turned me in ways I didn't know I was going to go—outward as well as inward. Attending to my family led toward a particular intimacy with my brother, Jeff, with whom I shared so much. Searching to represent unfathomable experience—both his and mine—has sent me repeatedly to the dictionary and to the concentrated language of lyric poetry, to ways of knowing like phenomenology and psychoanalysis that seek to understand human subjectivity, and to feminist and queer thinking about embodied and relational life. I've reached backward in memory to my childhood and young adulthood, but the process of writing has taken me forward, and continues to do so. Sentences unfold before me, always into the future, even as I return and work over what's already there.

I understand that every day I'm faced with an impossible choice—remembrance of things past or living on into a future that is troubling, even terrifying, but nonetheless underdetermined. I don't know what is going to happen, and I can't forget the past. I won't. I need it, I want and I need to remember the body that I once was. That body has suffered grievous injury, and to believe in myself as a strong, competent, and desirable woman I **build** on my memories of the many moments when I felt all that. Forgetting is impossible.

Forgetting is also imperiously necessary. In order to live on I must actively forget the person I once was, and be committed to forgetting more mindfully than you probably

are as you go about your daily life. I am no longer what I once was—yet come to think of it, neither are you. All of us who live on are not what we were, but are becoming, always becoming. I have chosen, and for the immediately foreseeable future, will choose, to live as fully and passionately as I can. Every time I make that choice, I move further from the past, and am increasingly detached from what once was. It's a taxing process.

When I was rehabilitating at the Hospital for Special Care, paralysis had so weakened my hands that I couldn't turn a page of the Penguin paperbacks that line the bookshelves in my study. As you know, I was unable even to grasp a Kleenex and move it from right to left on my tray table, when Patty instructed me to do so. I cried tears of despair and rage, bitter tears. Day after day in therapy, I very slowly strengthened my grip as I followed her instructions. Several months after she had tried the tissue, Patty returned with a pencil and a book. She opened the book flat before me, and holding the pencil with the eraser facing outward, used it to grab the edge of a page. She turned it over. Then she handed the pencil to me. I grasped it with all my strength, and as Janet and my nurse, Winnie, watched, I turned a page. "I have my life back," I said with tears overflowing. I said again, "I have my life back," and we all four cried together.

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<sup>1</sup> See Judith Butler, *Precarious Life* (New York: Verso, 2004).

## Chapter 3. Bewilderment

<sup>2</sup> Maggie Nelson, *Something Bright, Then Holes* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2007), 42.

<sup>1</sup> See Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

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## Chapter 4. Falling into Hell

- 1 Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4, 5.
- 2 Elizabeth Grosz, *The Volatile Body* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

## Chapter 5. Caring at the Cash Nexus

- 1 Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
- 2 Eduardo Porter, “Unionizing the Bottom of the Pay Scale,” *New York Times*, December 5, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/05/business/unionizing-at-the-low-end-of-the-pay-scale.html>, accessed March 7, 2015.
- 3 See Richard Kline, *Cigarettes Are Sublime* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).
- 4 Langston Hughes, *The Ways of White Folk* (1934; New York: Vintage Classics, 1990).
- 5 Premilla Nadasen and Tiffany Williams, *Valuing Domestic Work*, New Feminist Solutions, vol. 5 (New York: Barnard Center for Research on Women, 2009), <http://bcrw.barnard.edu/wp-content/nfs/reports/NFS5-Valuing-Domestic-Work.pdf>, accessed March 6, 2015.

## Chapter 6. Lost in Space

- 1 Elizabeth Ermarth, *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1985), 23, 323.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Stewart, “The Epistemology of the Horror Story,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 95.375 (Jan. - Mar., 1982): 35-36.

<sup>4</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839), *Literature Network*, <http://www.online-literature.com/poe/31/>, accessed June 26, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Otto Kernberg, “Some Observations on the Process of Mourning,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 91.3 (June 2010): 601–619.

## Chapter 18. Living On

<sup>xvi</sup> Emily Dickenson, “After great pain, a formal feeling comes –,” Poetry Foundation, accessed July 3, 2015.

<sup>xvii</sup> Brian Phillips, “Out in the Great Alone,” *Grantland (ESPN.com)*, [http://espn.go.com/espn/feature/story/\\_/id/9175394/out-great-alone](http://espn.go.com/espn/feature/story/_/id/9175394/out-great-alone), accessed June 8, 2015.

# TRANSMATERIALITIES

## Trans\*/Matter/Realities and Queer Political Imaginings

**Karen Barad**

*L*ightning is a reaching toward, an arcing dis/juncture, a striking response to charged yearnings.<sup>1</sup>

A dark sky. Deep darkness, without a glimmer of light to settle the eye. Out of the blue, tenuous electrical sketches scribbled with liquid light appear/disappear faster than the human eye can detect. Flashes of potential, hints of possible lines of connection alight now and again. Desire builds, as the air crackles with anticipation. Lightning bolts are born of such charged yearnings. Branching expressions of prolonged longing, barely visible filamentary gestures, disjointed tentative luminous doodlings—each faint excitation of this desiring field is a contingent and suggestive inkling of the light show yet to come. No continuous path from sky to ground can satisfy its wild imaginings, its insistence on experimenting with different possible ways to connect, playing at all matter of errant wanderings in a virtual exploration of diverse forms of coupling and dis/connected alliance. Against a dark sky it is possible to catch glimmers of the wild energetics of indeterminacies in action.

Like lightning, this article is an exploration of charged yearnings and the sparking of new imaginaries. It is an experimental article about matter's experimental nature—its propensity to test out every un/imaginable path, every im/possibility. Matter is promiscuous and inventive in its agential wanderings: one might even dare say, imaginative. Imaginings, at least in the scientific imagination, are clearly material. Like lightning, they entail a process involving electrical potential buildup and flows of charged particles: neurons transmitting electrochemical signals across synaptic gaps and through ion channels that spark awareness in our

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brains. This is not to suggest that imagination is merely an individual subjective experience, nor a unique capacity of the human mind. Nor is it to rely solely on a scientific imaginary of what matter is, nor a materialism that would elide questions of labor. Nor is the point to merely insist on an accounting of the material conditions of possibility for imagining, though this is surely important. Rather, what is at issue here is the nature of matter and its agential capacities for imaginative, desiring, and affectively charged forms of bodily engagements. This article explores the materiality of imagining together with the imaginative capacities of materiality—although it does so less by linear argumentation than by the zig-zagged dis/continuous musings of lightning. Electrical energy runs through disparate topics in what follows: lightning, primordial ooze, frogs, Frankenstein, trans rage, queer self-birthing, the quantum vacuum, virtual particles, queer touching, bioelectricity, Franken-frogs, monstrous re/generations.

This is an experimental piece with a political investment in creating new political imaginaries and new understandings of imagining in its materiality. Not imaginaries of some future or elsewhere to arrive at or be achieved as a political goal but, rather, imaginaries with material existences in the thick now of the present—imaginaries that are attuned to the condensations of past and future condensed into each moment; imaginaries that entail superpositions of many beings and times, multiple im/possibilities that coexist and are iteratively intra-actively reconfigured; imaginaries that are material explorations of the mutual indeterminacies of being and time.<sup>2</sup>

### **Electrifying Origins/Flashes of Things to Come**

“During this short voyage I saw the lightning playing on the summit of Mont Blanc in the most beautiful figures.”

—Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

Lightning is an energizing play of a desiring field. Its tortuous path is an enlivening exploration of possible connections. Not a trail from the heavens to the ground but an electrifying yearning for connection that precedes this and that, here and there, now and then.<sup>3</sup>

Lightning is a striking phenomenon. It jolts our memories, flashing images on the retina of our mind's eye. Lightning arouses a sense of the primordial, enlivening questions of origin and materialization. It conjures haunting cultural images of the summoning of life through its energizing effects, perhaps most memorable in the classic films *Der Golem* (1920) and *Frankenstein* (1931). And it brings to mind

credible (if not uncontroversial) scientific explanations of the electrifying origins of life: nature's fury shocking primordial ooze to life, an energizing jump start. Lightning, it seems, has always danced on the razor's edge between science and imagination.

Working with his mentor, the Nobel laureate Harold Urey, in 1953, the chemist Stanley Miller began a series of experiments that would lend support to Alexander Oparin and J. S. B. Haldane's hypothesis that primitive conditions on earth would be favorable for the production of organic molecules (the basis for the evolution of life) out of inorganic ones.<sup>4</sup> Miller used a sparking device to mimic lightning, a crucial ingredient in this genesis story. Filling a flask with water, methane, ammonia, and hydrogen, Miller sent electrical currents through the mixture. Analyzing the resulting soup of chemicals, he found the evidence that he was looking for: "a brown broth rich in amino acids, the building blocks of proteins."<sup>5</sup> "It was as if they were waiting to be bidden into existence. Suddenly the origin of life looked easy."<sup>6</sup>

Marking the beginning of experimental research into the origins of life, the Miller-Urey experiment did not seal the deal, but it was powerfully evocative of what might (yet) have been. The theory of the electrical origins of life—inorganic matter shocked into life's organic building blocks by an electrifying energy (whose own animacy seems to belie the alleged lifelessness of so-called inanimate matter)—is a controversial piece of science that created a fair amount of heat during Miller's lifetime. But no matter how many times skeptics claim to have put it to rest, it continues to be revived.

Miller's latest experiment was completed in 2008. He was dead by then. The experiment had begun fifty-five years earlier. Miller's intellectual offspring discovered, after his death, that he had not analyzed all his data. Opening the well-marked vials that lay dormant for decades, the researchers performed the analysis. They were shocked and delighted to be able to draw a significantly more compelling result from a once-dead experiment that would breathe new life into the theory: Miller's data revealed not five but twenty-three amino acids!

Characterizing Miller's experimental apparatus as a "Frankensteinesque contraption of glass bulbs," *Scientific American* completes the electrical circuit of cultural associations.<sup>7</sup>

Shocking brute matter to life. What makes us think that matter is lifeless to begin with?

Lightning mucks with origins. Lightning is a lively play of in/determinacy, troubling matters of self and other, past and future, life and death. It electrifies our imaginations and our bodies. If lightning enlivens the boundary between life and

death, if it exists on the razor's edge between animate and inanimate, does it not seem to dip sometimes here and sometimes there on either side of the divide?

It was in witnessing lightning's enormous power that Victor Frankenstein took upon himself the mantle of science.

When I was about fifteen years old, . . . we witnessed a most violent and terrible thunderstorm. . . . As I stood at the door, on a sudden I beheld a stream of fire issue from an old and beautiful oak which stood about twenty yards from our house; and so soon as the dazzling light vanished, the oak had disappeared, and nothing remained but a blasted stump. . . .

Before this I was not unacquainted with the more obvious laws of electricity. On this occasion a man of great research in natural philosophy was with us, and excited by this catastrophe, he entered on the explanation of a theory which he had formed on the subject of electricity and galvanism, which was at once new and astonishing to me.<sup>8</sup>

And thus Victor Frankenstein was converted to galvanism.

Galvanism inspired both Mary Shelley and her famed protagonist. Shelley was fascinated by the experiments of her contemporary, Luigi Galvani, an eighteenth-century physician, anatomist, and physiologist who, while preparing dinner on his balcony one stormy night—the atmosphere crackling with electrical buildup—noticed something uncanny that would change the course of his scientific studies. As he touched the frog legs—strung out on a line before him—with a pair of scissors, they twitched. Thereafter, he took it upon himself to study in a systematic fashion the application of electricity—the “spark of life,” as Shelley referred to it—to frog legs and other animal parts. Galvani concluded that electricity was an innate force of life, that an “animal electricity” pervaded living organisms. As Jessica Johnson writes, “Galvani proved not only that recently-dead muscle tissue can respond to external electrical stimuli, but that muscle and nerve cells possess an intrinsic electrical force responsible for muscle contractions and nerve conduction in living organisms.”<sup>9</sup>

It was a short leap from there to consider that if dead frog legs could be animated by electricity—the secret of life—the harnessing of nature's fury might be used to resurrect the dead or even give life to a creature made of human parts gathered from an array of different corpses. In the introduction to *Frankenstein*, Shelly writes, “Perhaps a corpse would be re-animated; galvanism had given token of such things: perhaps the component parts of a creature might be manufactured, brought together, and endured with vital warmth.” Galvani's experiments

sparked the interest of other scientists, and soon severed limbs and an assortment of dissected and expired animals and animal parts were animated by electrical impulses. Perhaps most (in)famously, his nephew, the physicist Giovanni Aldini, stimulated animal parts like those of cows, dogs, horses, and sheep.

Electrified by galvanism, Aldini was ready to shock nearly anything, alive or dead, that he could get his hands on. He was among the first to use electroshock treatment on those deemed mentally ill, and reported complete electrical cures. Not satisfied with his experiments on animal corpses, he performed his shock treatments on executed criminals. He recorded the findings of his 1803 experiment on the executed body of George Foster:

The jaw began to quiver, the adjoining muscles were horribly contorted, and the left eye actually opened. . . . The action even of those muscles furthest distant from the points of contact with the arc was so much increased as almost to give an appearance of re-animation. . . . vitality might, perhaps, have been restored, if many circumstances had not rendered it impossible.<sup>10</sup>

It is not difficult to complete the circuit of sparking disjuncture between Aldini's ghoulish experiments and those of Dr. Frankenstein.

Even while Shelley labored to write *Frankenstein*, the scientific atmosphere crackled with controversy over the nature of the relationship between life and electricity.

Bioelectricity was in the air, sparking the imagination of nineteenth-century scientists. As Cynthia Graber reports, "Many efforts, including using electricity to treat hysteria and melancholia, amounted to little more than quackery."<sup>11</sup> But some explorations gained scientific credibility and established the basis for current medical practices. For example, a textbook published in 1816 suggests the use of electric shock to revive a stopped heart.<sup>12</sup>

### **Monstrous Selves, Transgender Empowerment, Transgender Rage**

The monster always represents the disruption of categories, the destruction of boundaries, and the presence of impurities and so we need monsters and we need to recognize and celebrate our own monstrosities.

—Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows*

Electricity can arrest the heart. It is also capable of bringing a heart back from a state of lifelessness. It can animate its rhythmic drumbeat—the periodic pulsing of life’s electrical song—in once arrested or arrhythmic hearts. Monstrosity, like electrical jolts, cuts both ways. It can serve to demonize, dehumanize, and demoralize. It can also be a source of political agency. It can empower and radicalize.

In an unforgettable, powerful, and empowering performative piece, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix,” Susan Stryker embraces the would-be epithet of monstrosity, harnessing its energy and power to transform despair and suffering into empowering rage, self-affirmation, theoretical inventiveness, political action, and the energizing vitality of materiality in its animating possibilities.<sup>13</sup> Remarking on her affinity with Frankenstein’s monster, she writes:

The transsexual body is an unnatural body. It is the product of medical science. It is a technological construction. It is flesh torn apart and sewn together again in a shape other than that in which it was born. In these circumstances, I find a deep affinity between myself as a transsexual woman and the monster in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Like the monster, I am too often perceived as less than fully human due to the means of my embodiment; like the monster’s as well, my exclusion from human community fuels a deep and abiding rage in me that I, like the monster, direct against the conditions in which I must struggle to exist.<sup>14</sup>

Making political and personal alliance with Frankenstein’s monster, she intervenes in naturalizing discourses about the nature of nature, an emphasis that resonates with themes in this essay.

Hearken unto me, fellow creatures. I who have dwelt in a form unmatched with my desire, I whose flesh has become an assemblage of incongruous anatomical parts, I who achieve the similitude of a natural body only through an unnatural process, I offer you this warning: the Nature you bedevil me with is a lie. Do not trust it to protect you from what I represent, for it is a fabrication that cloaks the groundlessness of the privilege you seek to maintain for yourself at my expense. You are as constructed as me; the same anarchic womb has birthed us both. I call upon you to investigate your nature as I have been compelled to confront mine.<sup>15</sup>

This passage speaks with razor-sharp directedness to those who would position their own bodies as natural against the monstrosity of trans embodiment: examine

your own nature, stretch your own body out on the examining table, do the work that needs to be done on yourself (with all this charge's intended multiple meanings), and discover the seams and sutures that make up the matter of your own body. Materiality in its entangled psychic and physical manifestations is always already a patchwork, a suturing of disparate parts.<sup>16</sup>

Toward the end of the piece, Stryker embraces the fecundity of the "chaos and blackness"—the "anarchic womb"—as the matrix for generative nonheterosexual-reproductive birthing, "for we have done the hard work of constituting ourselves on our own terms, against the natural order. Though we forgo the privilege of naturalness, we are not deterred, for we ally ourselves instead with the chaos and blackness from which Nature itself spills forth."<sup>17</sup> This is a reference to the entangled birthing story that Stryker tells. She begins by sharing with the reader the joys and the pain of being in intimate connection with her partner while she was giving birth. This is a birth born of queer kinship relations: not the product of a heteronormative coupling, but a phenomenon rich with multiple entanglements, including a markedly nonnormative delivery room support team. Stryker is attuned to her partner during the birth, bodily and emotionally, yet she is also painfully aware that the physicality of birthing a being from her own womb is denied to her by the specificity of her constructed enfleshment. She describes the raw pain of being part of a process that she could not bring to fruition in the bodily way that she yearns for. This gives way to a painful birthing of transgender rage that becomes, in turn, the womb through which she rebirths herself. This radically queer configuring of spacetime mattering constitutes an uncanny topological dynamic that arrests straight tales of birthing and kinship, and gives birth to new modes of generativity, including but not limited to the generativity of a self-birther womb. It is nearly impossible not to feel the tug of other entanglements in this queer origin story. In particular, this story reverberates with a queer reading of the Genesis moment when the earth emerges out of the chaos and the void, from a chaotic nothingness, an electrifying atmosphere silently crackling with thunderous possibilities. Nature emerges from a self-birther womb fashioned out of a raging nothingness. A queer origin, an originary queerness, an originary birthing that is always already a rebirthing. Nature is birthed out of chaos and void, *tohu v'vohu*, an echo, a diffracted/differentiating/différencing murmuring, an originary repetition without sameness, regeneration out of a fecund nothingness.

### Quantum Field Theory: Nothingness as the Scene of Wild Activities

Physicists . . . took the vacuum as something substantial . . . the scene of wild activities.

—Cao and Schweber

Nothingness. The void. An absence of matter. The blank page. Utter silence. No thing, no thought, no awareness. Complete ontological insensibility.<sup>18</sup>

From the viewpoint of classical physics, the vacuum is complete emptiness: it has no matter and no energy. But the quantum principle of ontological indeterminacy calls the existence of such a zero-energy, zero-matter state into question or, rather, makes it into a question with no decidable answer. Not a settled matter or, rather, no matter. And if the energy of the vacuum is not determinately zero, it is not determinately empty. In fact, this indeterminacy not only is responsible for the void not being nothing (while not being something) but may in fact be the source of all that is, a womb that births existence.

Birth and death, it turns out, are not the sole prerogative of the animate world; so-called inanimate beings also have finite lives. “Particles can be born and particles can die,” explains one physicist. In fact, “it is a matter of birth, life, and death that requires the development of a new subject in physics, that of quantum field theory. . . . Quantum field theory is a response to the ephemeral nature of life.”<sup>19</sup>

Quantum field theory (QFT) was invented in the 1920s, shortly after the development of (nonrelativistic single-particle) quantum mechanics. It is a theory that combines insights from the classical theory of electromagnetic fields (mid-nineteenth century), special relativity (1905), and quantum mechanics (1920s). QFT takes us to a deeper level of understanding of quantum physics.<sup>20</sup> It has important things to say about the nature of matter and nothingness and the indeterminateness of their alleged distinguishability and separability. QFT is a call, an alluring murmur of the insensible within the sensible to radically work the nature of being and time. According to QFT, the vacuum cannot be determinately nothing because the indeterminacy principle allows for fluctuations of the quantum vacuum. How can we understand “vacuum fluctuations”? First, it is necessary to know a few things about what physicists mean by the notion of a *field*.

A field in physics is something that has a physical quantity associated with every point in space-time. Or you can think of it as a pattern of energy distributed across space and time. It may be difficult to grasp this notion without specific examples. Consider a bar magnet with iron filings sprinkled around it. The filings will quickly line up in accordance with the strength and direction of the magnetic

field at every point. Or consider an electric field. The electric field is a desiring field born of charged yearnings.<sup>21</sup> When it comes to mutual attraction the rule is opposites (i.e., opposite charges) attract. The notion of a field is a way to express the desires of each entity for the other. The attraction between a proton (a positively charged particle) and an electron (a particle with negative charge) can be expressed in terms of fields as follows: the proton emanates an electric field; the field travels outward in all directions at the speed of light. When the electric field of the proton reaches the electron, it feels the proton's desire pulling it toward it. Likewise, the electron sends out its own field, which is felt by the proton. Sitting in each other's fields, they feel a mutual tug in each other's direction.<sup>22</sup>

Now we add quantum physics and special relativity to classical field theory. Quantum physics enters into QFT most prominently in terms of the discretization of physical observables (quantizing or making discrete physical quantities that classical physics assumed were continuous), and the play of indeterminacy in energy and time. And special relativity speaks to matter's impermanence: matter can be converted into energy and vice versa. Putting these ideas together, we get the following. Fields are patterns of energy. When fields are quantized, the energy is quantized. But energy and matter are equivalent. And so an essential feature of QFT is that there is a correspondence between fields (energy) and particles (matter). The quantum of the electromagnetic field is a photon—a quantum of light. And electrons are understood to be the quanta of an electron field. (There are many other kinds of quanta. For example, the quantum of the gravitational field is a graviton.)

Now let us return to our question: what is a vacuum fluctuation? When it comes to the quantum vacuum, as with all quantum phenomena, ontological indeterminacy is at the heart of (the) matter . . . and no matter. Indeed, it is impossible to pin down a state of no matter or even of matter, for that matter. The crux of this strange non/state of affairs is the so-called energy-time indeterminacy principle, but because energy and matter are equivalent we will sometimes call it the “being-time” or “time-being” indeterminacy principle. The point, for our purposes, is that an indeterminacy in the energy of the vacuum translates into an indeterminacy in the number of particles associated with the vacuum, which means the vacuum is not (determinately) empty, nor is it (determinately) not empty. These particles that correspond to the quantum fluctuation of the vacuum, that are and are not there as a result of the time-being indeterminacy relation, are called “virtual particles.” *Virtual particles are quantized indeterminacies-in-action.* Virtual particles are not present (and not absent), but they are material. In fact, *most of what matter is, is virtual.* Virtual particles do not traffic in a metaphysics of presence. They do not

exist in space and time. They are ghostly non/existences that teeter on the edge of the infinitely fine blade between being and nonbeing. Virtuality is admittedly difficult to grasp. Indeed, this is its very nature.

Virtual particles are not in the void but *of* the void. They are on the razor's edge of non/being. The void is a lively tension, a desiring orientation toward being/becoming. The void is flush with yearning, bursting with innumerable imaginings of what might yet (have) be(en). Vacuum fluctuations are virtual deviations/variations from the classical zero-energy state of the void. That is, *virtuality is the material wanderings/wonderings of nothingness; virtuality is the ongoing thought experiment the world performs with itself*. Indeed, quantum physics tells us that *the void is an endless exploration of all possible couplings of virtual particles, a "scene of wild activities."*

The quantum vacuum is more like an ongoing questioning of the nature of emptiness than anything like a lack. The ongoing questioning of itself (and *itself* and *it* and *self*) is what generates, or rather *is*, the structure of nothingness. The vacuum is no doubt doing its own experiments with non/being. In/determinacy is not the state of a thing but an unending dynamism.

*Pace* Democritus, particles do not take their place in the void; rather, they are constitutively inseparable from it. And the void is not vacuous. It is a living, breathing indeterminacy of non/being. The vacuum is an extravagant inexhaustible exploration of virtuality, where virtual particles are having a field day performing experiments in being and time.<sup>23</sup>

### **Electric Interlude: Virtual Touch**

Touch, for a physicist, is but an electromagnetic interaction.<sup>24</sup>

A common explanation for the physics of touching is that one thing it does not involve is . . . well, touching. That is, there is no actual contact involved. You may think that you are touching a coffee mug when you are about to raise it to your mouth, but your hand is not actually touching the mug. Sure, you can feel the smooth surface of the mug's exterior right where your fingers come into contact with it (or seem to), but what you are actually sensing, physicists tell us, is the electromagnetic repulsion between the electrons of the atoms that make up your fingers and those that make up the mug. (Electrons are tiny negatively charged particles that surround the nuclei of atoms, and having the same charges they repel one another, much like powerful little magnets. As you decrease the distance between them—say, between the electrons that constitute the outer edges of the atoms of your fingers and those of the mug—the repulsive force increases.) Try as you might, you cannot bring two electrons into direct contact with each other.

The reason that the desk feels solid, or the cat's coat feels soft, or we can (even) hold coffee cups and one another's hands, is an effect of electromagnetic repulsion. All we really ever feel is the electromagnetic field, not the other whose touch we seek. Atoms are mostly empty space, and electrons, which lie at the farthest reaches of an atom, hinting at its perimeter, cannot bear direct contact. Electromagnetic repulsion: negatively charged particles communicating at a distance push each other away. That is the tale physics usually tells about touching. Repulsion at the core of attraction. See how far that story gets you with lovers. No wonder the Romantic poets had had enough.

### **Lightning: Responses to a Desiring Field**

Lightning is an energizing response to a highly charged field. The buildup to lightning electrifies the senses; the air crackles with desire.<sup>25</sup>

By some mechanism that scientists have yet to fully explain, a storm cloud becomes extremely electrically polarized—electrons are stripped from the atoms that they were once attached to and gather at the lower part of the cloud closest to the earth, leaving the cloud with an overall negative charge. In response, the electrons that make up atoms of the earth's surface burrow into the ground to get farther away from the buildup of negative charges at the near edge of the cloud, leaving the earth's surface with an overall positive charge. In this way a strong electric field is set up between earth and cloud, and the yearning will not be satisfied without the buildup being discharged. The desire to find a conductive path joining the two becomes all-consuming.

The first inklings of a path have a modest beginning, offering no indication of the lightning bolt to come. "It begins as a small spark inside the cloud five miles up. A spurt of electrons rushes outwards, travels a hundred meters then stops and pools for a few millionths of a second. Then the stream lurches off in a different direction, pools again, and again. Often the stream branches and splits. *This is not a lightning bolt yet*" (my emphasis).<sup>26</sup> These barely luminous first gestures are called stepped leaders. But the buildup of negative charges (electrons) in the lower portion of the cloud does not resolve itself by a direct channel of electrons making their way to the earth in this fashion. Instead, *the ground* responds next with an upward signal of its own. "When that step leader is within ten or a hundred meters of the ground, the ground is now *aware* of there being a big surplus" of charge, and "certain objects on the earth respond by launching little streamers up toward the stepped leader, weakly luminous plasma filaments, which are trying to connect with what's coming down." This is a sign that objects on the ground are attending to the cloud's seductive overtures. When it finally happens that one of the upward

responses is met by a downward gesture, the result is explosive: a powerful discharge is effected in the form of a lightning bolt. But even after a connecting path has been playfully suggested, the discharge does not proceed in a continuous fashion: “The part of the channel nearest the ground will drain first, then successively higher parts, and finally the charge from the cloud itself. So the visible lightning bolt moves up from ground to cloud as the massive electric currents flow down.”

An enlivening, and indeed lively, response to difference if ever there was one. The lightning expert Martin Uman explains this strangely animated inanimate relating in this way: “What is important to note . . . is that the usual stepped leader starts from the cloud without any ‘knowledge’ of what buildings or geography are present below. In fact, it is thought . . . that the stepped leader is ‘unaware’ of objects beneath it until it is some tens of yards from the eventual strike point. When ‘awareness’ occurs, a traveling spark is initiated from the point to be struck and propagates upward to meet the downward moving stepped leader, completing the path to ground.”<sup>27</sup> What mechanism is at work in this communicative exchange between sky and ground when *awareness* lies at the crux of this strangely animated inanimate relating? And how does this exchange get ahead of itself, as it were?<sup>28</sup> What kind of queer communication is at work here? What are we to make of a communication that has neither sender nor recipient until transmission has already occurred? That is, what are we to make of the fact that the existence of sender and receiver follows from this nonlocal relating rather than preceding it? What strange causality is effected?

A lightning bolt is not a straightforward resolution of the buildup of a charge difference between the earth and a storm cloud: a lightning bolt does not simply proceed from storm cloud to the earth along a unidirectional (if somewhat erratic) path; rather, flirtations alight here and there and now and again as stepped leaders and positive streamers gesture toward possible forms of connection to come. The path that lightning takes not only is not predictable but does not make its way according to some continuous unidirectional path between sky and ground. Though far from microscopic in scale, it seems that we are witnessing a quantum form of communication—a process of iterative intra-activity.<sup>29</sup>

### **Back to Quantum Field Theory: A Touchy Subject**

When it comes to quantum field theory, it is not difficult to find trouble—epistemological trouble, ontological trouble, a troubling of kinds, of identities, of the nature of touching and self-touching, of being and time, to name a few.<sup>30</sup> It is not

so much that trouble is around every corner; according to quantum field theory, it inhabits us and we inhabit it, or rather, trouble inhabits everything and nothing—matter and the void.

How does quantum field theory understand the nature of matter? Let us start with the electron, one of the simplest particles—a point particle—a particle devoid of structure. Even the simplest bit of matter causes all kinds of difficulties for quantum field theory. For, as a result of time-being indeterminacy, the electron does not exist as an isolated particle but is always already inseparable from the wild activities of the vacuum. In other words, the electron is always (already) intra-acting with the virtual particles of the vacuum in all possible ways. For example, the electron will emit a virtual photon and then reabsorb it. This possibility is understood as the electron electromagnetically intra-acting with itself. Part of what an electron is, is its self-energy intra-action.<sup>31</sup> But the self-energy intra-action is not a process that happens in isolation either. All kinds of more involved things can and do occur in this frothy virtual soup of indeterminacy that we ironically think of as a state of pure emptiness. For example, in addition to the electron exchanging a virtual photon with itself (that is, touching itself), it is possible for that virtual photon to enjoy other intra-actions with *itself*: for example, the virtual photon can metamorphose/transition—change its very identity. It can transform into a virtual electron-positron pair, that subsequently annihilate each other and morph back into a single virtual photon before it is reabsorbed by the electron. (A positron is the electron's antiparticle—it has the same mass but the opposite charge and goes backward in time. Even the direction of time is indeterminate.) And so on. This “and so on” is shorthand for an infinite set of possibilities involving every possible kind of intra-action with every possible kind of virtual particle it can intra-act with. That is, there is a virtual exploration of every possibility. And this infinite set of possibilities, or infinite sum of histories, entails a particle touching itself, and the particle that transmits the touch transforming itself, and then that touching touching itself, and transforming, and touching other particles that make up the vacuum, and so on, ad infinitum. (Not everything is possible given a particular intra-action, but an infinite number of possibilities exist.) Every level of touch, then, is itself touched by all possible others. Particle self-intra-actions entail particle transitions from one kind to another in a radical undoing of kinds—queer/trans\*formations.<sup>32</sup> Hence *self-touching is an encounter with the infinite alterity of the self. Matter is an enfolding, an involution, it cannot help touching itself, and in this self-touching it comes in contact with the infinite alterity that it is.* Polymorphous perversity raised to an infinite power: talk about a queer/trans\* intimacy!

What is being called into question here is the very nature of the “self,” and in terms of not just being but also time. That is, in an important sense, *the self is dispersed/diffracted through time and being*.

Commenting specifically on the electron’s self-energy intra-action, the physicist Richard Feynman, who won a Nobel prize for his contributions to developing QFT, expressed *horror* at the electron’s monstrous nature and its perverse ways of engaging with the world: “Instead of going directly from one point to another, the electron goes along for a while and suddenly emits a photon; then (horrors!) it absorbs its own photon. Perhaps there’s something ‘immoral’ about that, but the electron does it!”<sup>33</sup> This self-energy/self-touching term has also been labeled a perversion of the theory because the calculation of the self-energy contribution is infinite, which is an unacceptable answer to any question about the nature of the electron (such as what is its mass or charge?). Apparently, touching oneself, or being touched by oneself—the ambiguity/undecidability/indeterminacy may itself be the key to the trouble—is not simply troubling but a *moral* violation, the very source of all the trouble.

The “problem” of self-touching, especially self-touching the other, is a perversity of quantum field theory that goes far deeper than we can touch on here. The gist of it is this: this perversity that is at the root of an unwanted infinity, that threatens the very possibility of calculability, gets “renormalized” (obviously—should we expect anything less?!). How does this happen? Physicists conjectured that there are two different kinds of infinities/perversions involved in this case: one that has to do with self-touching and another that has to do with nakedness. That is, in addition to the infinity related to self-touching, there is an infinity associated with the “bare” point particle, that is, with the metaphysical assumption we started with that there is only an electron—the “undressed,” “bare” electron—and the void, each separate from the other. Renormalization is the systematic cancellation of infinities: an intervention based on the idea that the subtraction of (different size) infinities can be a finite quantity. Perversion eliminating perversion. The cancellation idea is this: the infinity of the “bare” point particle cancels the infinity associated with the “cloud” of virtual particles; in this way, the “bare” point particle is “dressed” by the vacuum contribution (that is, the cloud of virtual particles). The “dressed” electron—the electron in drag—that is, the physical electron, is thereby renormalized, that is, made “normal” (finite). (I am using technical language here!) Renormalization is the mathematical handling/taming of these infinities. That is, the infinities are “subtracted” from one another, yielding a finite answer. Mathematically speaking, this is a tour de force. Conceptually, it is a queer theorist’s delight. It shows that all of matter, *matter in its “essence”* (of

course, that is precisely what is being troubled here), is a massive overlaying of perversities: an infinity of infinities.<sup>34</sup>

To summarize, quantum field theory radically deconstructs the ontology of classical physics. The starting point ontology of particles and the void—a foundational reductionist essentialism—is undone by quantum field theory. According to QFT, perversity and monstrosity lie at the core of being—or rather, it is threaded through it. All touching entails an infinite alterity, so that touching the other is touching all others, including the “self,” and touching the “self” entails touching the stranger within. Even the smallest bits of matter are an unfathomable multitude. Each “individual” always already includes all possible intra-actions with “itself” through all possible virtual others, including those (and itself) that are noncontemporaneous with itself. *That is, every finite being is always already threaded through with an infinite alterity diffracted through being and time.* Indeterminacy is an un/doing of identity that unsettles the very foundations of non/being.

Electrons, for example, are inherently chimeras—cross-species cross-kind mixtures—made of virtual configurations/reconfigurings of disparate kinds of beings dispersed across space and time in an undoing of kind, being/becoming, absence/presence, here/there, now/then. So much for natural essence. The electron—a point particle without structure—is a patchwork of kinds sutured together in uncanny configurations. Trying out new appendages made of various particle-antiparticle pairs, producing and absorbing differences of every possible kind in a radical undoing of “kind” as essential difference: its identity is the undoing of identity. Its very nature is unnatural, not given, not fixed, but forever transitioning and transforming itself. Electrons (re)birth themselves in their engagement with all others, not as an act of self-birthing, but in an ongoing re-creating that is an un/doing of itself. Electrons are always already untimely. It is not that electrons sometimes engage in such perverse explorations: these experiments in intra-active trans\*material performativity are what an electron is.<sup>35</sup>

Ontological indeterminacy, a radical openness, an infinity of possibilities, is at the core of mattering. How strange that indeterminacy, in its infinite openness, is the condition for the possibility of all structures in their dynamically reconfiguring in/stabilities. Matter in its iterative materialization is a dynamic play of in/determinacy. Matter is never a settled matter. It is always already radically open. Closure cannot be secured when the conditions of im/possibilities and lived indeterminacies are integral, not supplementary, to what matter is. *In an important sense, in a breathtakingly intimate sense, touching, sensing, is what matter does, or rather, what matter is: matter is condensations of responses, of response-ability.*

Each bit of matter is constituted in response-ability; each is constituted as responsible for the other, as being in touch with the other. *Matter is a matter of untimely and uncanny intimacy, condensations of being and times.*

### **The Body Electric: Regenerating What (Never) Was and Might Yet (Have) Be(en)**

“It’s alive!”<sup>36</sup> Galvanism is alive and well in Medford, Massachusetts, where the biologists Michael Levin and Dany Adams of Tufts University have taken up the mantle of Dr. Frankenstein, or if not that of the good doctor’s, then surely that of famous frog electro-animator Luigi Galvani. Wedding galvanism to more mainstream contemporary biological endeavors like gene therapy, Levin and Adams have performed a series of experiments with electrifying results for understanding developmental and regenerative biological processes.<sup>37</sup>

Regeneration is a capacity shared by all living creatures, but not equally. Planarian flatworms can regenerate their entire bodies (including their brains) from a small bit of the original animal. Liver tissue regeneration is one of the few regenerative talents that humans have. Ecosystems can regenerate if they are not too badly damaged. Brittle stars, salamanders, lobsters, and other critters are famous for their ability to regenerate lost limbs. But something quite different is happening in the Tufts University lab, where regeneration has taken on uncanny new shapes. Let us take a tour through some of Levin and Adam’s key laboratory experiments.

Like Galvani, Levin and Adams have a fondness for frogs. There are solid scientific reasons for choosing this favored organism. For example, the African clawed frog, *Xenopus laevis*, or *Xenopus* for short, an aquatic native of sub-Saharan Africa, holds the honor of being a model organism in developmental biology, cell biology, toxicology, and neuroscience because of its “relative evolutionary closeness” to humans and laboratory cooperativeness.<sup>38</sup> It does not hurt that the embryos are transparent and that they are prolific reproducers. *Xenopus* is not only evolutionarily close to humans, relatively speaking, it is directly entangled in human kinship relations. “It is an invasive species all over the world because it was used in human pregnancy tests in the 1940’s. When more effective means of pregnancy tests were made available, many *X. laevis* were released all over the world.”<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, “*Xenopus* oocytes are a leading system for studies of ion transport and channel physiology.”<sup>40</sup> All in all, a mixture of human and *Xenopus* reproductive capacities led to its employment in developmental biology laboratories. Levin happened to conduct his doctoral studies in one such lab. *Xenopus*’s entanglement with heteronormative reproduction notwithstanding, Levin

and Adams have found themselves entranced by its regenerative, rather than reproductive, capabilities.<sup>41</sup>

Much like the way that human children have the ability to grow back a severed fingertip until the age of seven, *Xenopus* tadpoles can regenerate their tails, provided these are lost during the first seven days of life. By day eight—right around the time the tadpole begins to metamorphose into a frog—it begins to lose that capacity, and at ten days the ability has gone completely. Growing back a tail is different than regrowing skin at the site of an injury. “A tail is a complex organ containing multiple cell types: muscle, peripheral nerves, spinal cord, notochord, skin, and vasculature.”<sup>42</sup> In a breakthrough series of studies on the effects of electricity on regeneration, Levin and colleagues showed that it was possible to get tadpoles to regenerate their tails outside the specified time frame by manipulating the electric field around the missing tail.

What accounts for this success? In a world where molecular biology rules, it is unusual to find a scientist willing to align himself with the field of bioelectricity, with all its troubling and spotted past, littered with charges of charlatanism and quackery. But as much as Levin likes to fancy himself a scientific maverick, he has strategically hitched the old wagon of bioelectricity to the brand-new, shiny, high-powered machinery of molecular biology. The techniques of molecular biology are key to his exploration of bioelectrically controlled regeneration. Levin’s approach is “to understand the genetic components that underlie bioelectrical events during development and regeneration.”<sup>43</sup> Make no mistake: this is not an Aldini performance; this is galvanism with a contemporary face. One science writer explains it this way:

In a paper that could help bring the study of bioelectricity into the mainstream of 21st century science, [Levin and colleagues] . . . identified a protein that serves as a natural source of regenerative electricity. By manipulating the protein, an ion transporter, they were able to induce frog tadpoles to regrow tails at a stage of development when such regrowth is typically not possible. . . .

What had been missing from studies until now is an understanding of how electricity—the flow of charged particles—works at a molecular level to bring about regeneration.<sup>44</sup>

Levin and his colleagues have provided evidence that large-scale electrical patterning of bodily morphology plays a causal role in embryonic development and regeneration. This is surely not the conventional approach to follow in this age

of genomics, where all causes are molecular and things are built from the bottom up. This bioelectrical approach is unique and producing some electrifying results. So while the majority of biologists focus on stem cells and other biochemical and genetic factors, the dynamic duo are intent on cracking the “bioelectric” code of the body. As Levin explains, “All cells, not just nerve cells, use bioelectrical signals to communicate pattern information to each other. . . . you can tweak those signals artificially to get them to do what you want them to do.”<sup>45</sup>

Trying out their exciting understandings of the linkage between bioelectric fields and regeneration, researchers in Levin’s lab took on the challenge of seeing if they could get body parts that are not normally capable of regeneration to regenerate by using the same techniques of molecularly producing electrical fields that would induce the appropriate regeneration. “Dr. Levin and his colleagues have been able to stimulate the regeneration of complete frog legs. Frog legs don’t usually grow back (or regenerate) like salamander legs. But by providing appropriate electrical gradients at the frog’s wound site, these researchers stimulated the growth of an entirely new limb.”<sup>46</sup>

Regeneration is one thing, but what about stimulating the growth of limbs, organs, and other body parts that have never been? Manipulating the bioelectric fields by changing various ion channels, the researchers were able to use the bioelectric fields to monstrous effect, growing extra heads, limbs, and eyes. Four-headed planaria, six-legged frogs, two-tailed worms, and one bioelectrical mutation really caught the imagination of science reporters.

An article titled “‘Franken-Tadpoles’ See with Eyes on Their Backs” reports that “using genetic manipulation of membrane voltage in *Xenopus* (frog) embryos, biologists at Tufts University’s School of Arts and Sciences were able to cause tadpoles to grow eyes outside of the head area.”<sup>47</sup> Vaibhav P. Pai, a postdoc fellow working in their lab, explains, “This suggests that cells from anywhere in the body can be driven to form an eye.”<sup>48</sup> Not only that, it turns out that some of these monstrous eyes can see!<sup>49</sup>

This is rather dramatic evidence in support of epigenetics. Clearly, there is more at work biologically speaking than a genetic code: bioelectrical signaling evidently plays a significant role in the determination of bodily morphology. But perhaps the most striking finding was the result of a combination of serendipity and Adams’s scientific instincts.

Adams had hooked up her research camera to a microscope to film the early stages of *Xenopus* tadpole development. Having achieved an image of remarkable clarity (which is particularly difficult when imaging tiny critters), Adams decided to leave the camera on overnight, for the heck of it, anticipating that the images

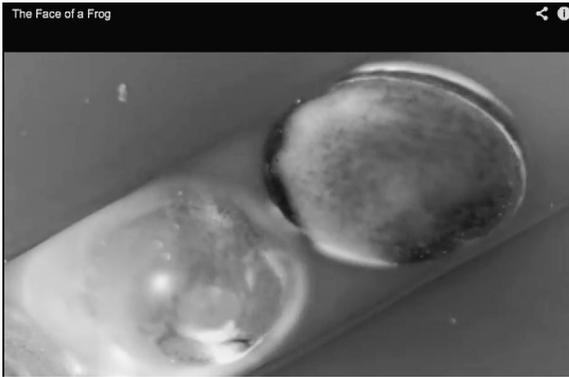


Figure 1. Still from *Electric Face*. Courtesy Dany Spencer Adams

would blur as the embryos moved. When she returned to her lab she did in fact find that the images were blurry, but she was able to get surprisingly clear images after computer processing. She developed a time-lapse video using a sequence of photographs, and the result was “jaw dropping.” The video, she says, was “unlike anything I had ever seen. I was completely blown away.”<sup>50</sup> (Fig. 1 is a still from the video. I strongly encourage the reader to stop reading and watch the video. It has to be seen to be fully appreciated. The image shows two frog embryos. The light flashes on the left embryo indicate the electric potential as it traces out a face to come—a face that does not yet exist but only exists in potential for a brief moment and then vanishes!)

“The images show an embryonic frog ‘light show’ in fast forward,” Adams said. “When a frog embryo is just developing, *before it gets a face*, a pattern for that face lights up on the surface of the embryo. . . . We believe this is the first time such patterning has been reported for an entire structure, not just for a single organ. I would never have predicted anything like it” (my emphasis).

The face-to-come of the embryo flashes in electrical patterns across the surface of the embryo.<sup>51</sup> It is important to take in the fact that the “electric face” appears and disappears *before* any actual features develop, that is, prior to cell differentiation! For example, the “eye field” electrically paints out the location and structure of the eye and vanishes *prior* to differentiation. “To assess whether this bioelectric pattern is crucial to proper development or just an interesting by-product, the researchers disrupted the biochemical pump that generates electric potential. This affected specific critical genes, which resulted in abnormal tadpole facial development. Apparently, the genes are activated by the bioelectricity.”<sup>52</sup> That is, what we may be witnessing are electric traces of a bioelectric epigenetic switch that regulates genes expression or the pattern of where genes are expressed.<sup>53</sup>

“Our research shows that the electrical state of a cell is fundamental to development. Bioelectrical signaling appears to regulate a sequence of events, not

just one,” explains Laura Vandenberg, a postdoctoral associate who works with Adams.<sup>54</sup> “Developmental biologists are used to thinking of sequences in which a gene produces a protein product that in turn ultimately leads to development of an eye or a mouth. But our work suggests that something else—a bioelectrical signal—is required before that can happen.” Adams does not hold back on touting the possible implications of this finding: “If it holds that these bioelectrical signals are controlling gene expression, or the patterns of where genes are expressed, we have a whole new approach to correcting birth defects, or preventing them, or spotting them before they happen.”

Wedding bioelectricity to molecular genetics, and charged cultural imaginaries from the past with future hopes for regenerative medicine, Levin, the lab’s director, delights in playing the errant genius in search of one of life’s most profound and promising secrets. As one Tufts University reporter puts it: “In the world where Michael Levin’s vision has come to life, people who lose a limb in an accident are able to re-grow it. Birth defects can be repaired in the womb. Cancer cells are detected and rendered harmless before they become tumors. Any number of other diseases are conquered as cells are altered and adjusted.”<sup>55</sup> “Grow Your Own,” the article’s headline, makes an apt motto for the lab, even if this autopoietic framing belies the enormous labors, the patchwork of entangled practices that will be necessary to move toward anything like this futuristic goal. But this futuristic imaginary is no doubt currently sparking the interest of a host of potential funders.

### **Quantum Phenomena: Entanglements of Disparate Parts**

This article is a patchwork. Made of disparate parts. Or so it may seem. But why should we understand parts as individually constructed building blocks or disconnected pieces of one or another forms of original wholeness? After all, to be a part is not to be absolutely apart but to be constituted and threaded through with the entanglements of part-ing. That is, if “parts,” by definition, arise from divisions or cuts, it does not necessarily follow that cuts sever or break things off, either spatially or temporally, producing absolute differences of this and that, here and there, now and then. *Intra-actions* enact cuts that cut (things) together-apart (one move). So a patchwork would not be a sewing together of individual bits and pieces but a phenomenon that always already holds together, whose pattern of differentiating-entangling may not be recognized but is indeed re-membered. Memory is not the recording of events held by a mind but marked historicalities ingrained in the world’s becoming. Memory is a field of enfolded patterns of differentiating-entangling. Remembering is not a process of recollection, of the reproduction of what was, of assembling and ordering events like puzzle pieces fit together by fixing where each

has its place. Rather, it is a matter of re-membering, of tracing entanglements, responding to yearnings for connection, materialized into fields of longing/belonging, of regenerating what never was but might yet have been. This article is dedicated to re-memberings, to reconfiguring anew seemingly disparate parts.

The task now is to attempt to stitch together, if only imperfectly, the pieces of this monstrous article by tracing a few of the uncountable and generative entanglements in their ongoing reconfiguring. What do we have so far? Lightning, primordial ooze, electrifying origins, frogs, galvanism, Frankenstein, trans rage, queer self-birthing/regeneration, fecund void, quantum vacuum, virtual particles, indeterminate wanderings, lightning's errant pathways, queer touching, bioelectricity, Franken-frogs, monstrous re/generations, the promise of monsters, future cures, and radical im/possibilities.

Let us begin by learning just a bit more about the striking phenomena of lightning and bioelectricity. To see lightning from above the earth's atmosphere (again I encourage the reader to stop reading and have a look at this impressive phenomenon) is to see something visually akin to the flashings of the electric (pre) face of the embryonic tadpole.<sup>56</sup> Both the becoming of lightning and the becoming of face exhibit flashes that mark out the traces of (what might yet) be-coming. Preceding the flash of a lightning bolt, and preceding gene involvement in cell differentiation, electrons and photons play at making virtual diagrams, flashes of light painting possibilities across the sky and across an embryo, hinting at things-to-come. What I am suggesting is that as instances of the virtual play of electron-photon intra-actions that QFT tells us are the elemental happenings of electromagnetic phenomena (all such phenomena, including the ones presently under consideration), these electromagnetic phenomena in their (ongoing) be-coming illuminate an intrinsic feature of materiality: *matter's ongoing experimenting with itself—the queer dance of being-time indeterminacy, the imaginative play of presence/absence, here/there, now/then*, that holds the disparate parts together-apart.

### ***Embryonic Lightning***

At the US Air Force Atmospheric Research Center in Colorado Springs, Geoff McHarg, an atmospheric physicist, is trying to capture the elusive birth of a lightning bolt. McHarg is using a new generation super-slow-motion camera that can record thousands of images per second—visually resolving temporality on unprecedented scales that allow the human eye for the first time to see how very much happens in the “flash of an eye.”

What does embryonic lightning look like? The Discovery Channel program shows McHarg at his computer terminal replaying the video of his lucky first-ever catch of the “birth of a lightning bolt,” although, as we soon learn, what we are wit-

nessing is arguably not its birth but the display of its embryonic electrical stirrings before any part of a lightning bolt begins to manifest.

The video playback shows “a flash of light dart out of a cloud and zigzag downward in roughly 50 yard segments.”<sup>57</sup> (Once again I encourage the reader to watch this remarkable video now.) What the Discovery program narrator does not mention, but the viewer is witnessing in the video, is a stunning feature of the not-yet-lightning flashes: the flashes of light do not just head downward for fifty yards and then change direction and head out again (much like a child’s drawing of lightning). Rather, one sees erratic, disjointed sets of flashes tentatively testing out different pathways. The trace of each trial gesture vanishing as quickly as it appears. The narrator’s voice continues, “This first stage of lightning is called a stepped leader.” Then the scientist’s voice: “You can see the stepped leader coming down here looking for a ground, going back and forth. You can see the tortuous channel it is taking as it divides back and forth.” Look closely, and you can see that the so-called back and forth motion is a discontinuous pattern of flashing (it flashes here and then over there, some distance away), and that some of the gestures are upward rather than downward. That is, what McHarg’s film seems to have captured is a stepped leader gesturing toward the earth, variously expressing its yearnings. It is important to keep in mind that this is not a lightning bolt yet or even the birth of one. Stepped leaders are the barely luminous first gestures of a lightning bolt-to-come. What we are witnessing is the potential face of lightning yet to be born—a *discontinuous exploration of different possible pathways*—before a lightning stroke explodes and shatters the darkness.

Uman points to the fractal-like nature of the stepped leader’s musings and attributes this wondering/wandering to a kind of electrical confusion:

There are zigs and zags 100 yards long and, within these, other zigs and zags 10 yards long, and within these yet smaller zigs and zags. . . . Why is the lightning channel so tortuous? The answer is not known, but some reasonable guesses may be made. The larger-scale tortuosity in the channel (representing, say, tens of yards or more) is due to the fact that the stepped leader makes such an errant trip to ground. Why does it do this? Possibly various airborne regions of charge (space charge) divert the leader on its trip. *More likely, the leader just doesn’t know exactly where it wants to go, except that ultimately it wants to move downward.* (my emphasis)<sup>58</sup>

It is as if the electrons are trying out different paths, feeling out this desiring field, exploring entanglements of yearning, before any discharge to the ground takes place. Remember that the buildup of negative charges (electrons) in the lower

portion of the cloud does not resolve itself by a direct channel of electrons making their way to the earth by a stepped leader moving to the ground. Instead, *the ground* responds next with an upward signal of its own. These gestures are material imaginings, electrical flirtations signaling connections-to-come. Lightning is born of discontinuous spooky-action-at-a-distance signaling in a decidedly queer communication between earth and sky as they exchange gestures toward the other before either exists, signals of the desiring field that animates their intra-active becoming.<sup>59</sup> If this is reminiscent of the indeterminate exploration of the multiple errant pathways of a quantum phenomenon, it may not be that surprising. Lightning is, after all, the luminous activity of strong electromagnetic fields where photons and electrons engage in a quantum exploration of multiple temporalities and polymorphous/polyamorous couplings—the dance of indeterminacy.

### ***Lightning Face of an Embryo***

The “electric face” phenomenon that Adams caught on video is a blend of the fantastic and the scientific, utterly mesmerizing. We catch the glimpse of a face that does/not (yet) exist, but before we can fully discern its indeterminate features, it is gone, in a flash. As Adams describes it:

The result is so remarkable it almost doesn't seem real. As cells divide within the ball of the embryo, lines and shapes glow and disappear. A slash where the mouth will form shimmers into view, only to quickly fade away. A dot, signifying an eye, appears briefly on the left side of the embryo; a moment later, a matching dot flashes on the right. Vertiginous time-lapse photography is a staple of nature documentaries, but this is different. *These features—the mouth, the eyes—didn't actually exist.* In fact, many of the genes that are linked to their development hadn't even been turned on. *It's only after the patterns fade, the ghost of features yet to come, that all the necessary proteins are activated.* (my emphasis)

The electric traces of a face flash across the cells of the undifferentiated tadpole embryo and disappear. Much like the faint traces of embryonic lightning that tease with the promise of an electrifying connection, the flashes of light that paint out the face of the tadpole offer tantalizing glimpses of what does not (yet) exist. What we witness are traces of differentiating materializations-to-come, virtual explorations of making face. Internally generated lightning flashes are coursing through the embryonic body exploring different possibilities of what might yet be/have been. What I am suggesting by drawing on quantum field theoretic imagery to describe this event is that what Adams captured is in fact a *quantum* feature of the

biophysical epigenetic phenomenon she and her colleagues have been studying: the material play of indeterminacy, the teasing gestures of what might yet be/have been.<sup>60</sup> If my conjecture is correct, it places the Levin-Adams regeneration investigations within the emerging field of quantum biology. The stunning nature of this example is that what it shows is not merely (nonrelativistic single particle) *quantum mechanical* effects (e.g., quantum entanglement) that scientists now believe account for photosynthesis, bird navigation, and olfactory function, but *quantum field theoretical* effects, like virtual explorations of what might yet materialize (or what might yet have been) as an integral part of ongoing processes of materialization in the dynamical play of indeterminacies in being and time.<sup>61</sup> The sky and the embryo, like the quantum field theory void, are having brain flashes, imagining all matter of becomings. They are trying on different faces, electrical patterns of differencing/différencing, diffraction patterns of differential mattering. *Experiments in virtuality—explorations of possible trans\*formations—are integral to each and every (ongoing) be(com)ing.*

### Virtual TransMatterRealities and Queer Political Imaginaries

I find no shame . . . in acknowledging my egalitarian relationship with non-human material Being; everything emerges from the same matrix of possibilities.

—Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix”

The promise of monsters is a regenerative politics, an invitation to explore new ways of being in touch, new forms of becoming, new possibilities for kinship, alliance, and change.<sup>62</sup> Regeneration understood as a quantum phenomenon brings indeterminacy’s radical potential to the fore. *The indeterminacy of being-time/time-being means that matter/materiality is a matter of material wanderings/wonderings, a virtual exploration of what might yet be/have been, dispersed across spacetimebeing and condensed into each material bit-here-now, every morsel (each “dressed point”) of spacetimemattering.*

The virtual is not a set of individual possibilities, one of which might yet be realized or actualized.<sup>63</sup> Virtual possibilities are not what is absent relative to the real’s presence. They are not the roads not taken or some yet unrealized potential future, the other to actual lived reality. The virtual is a superposition of im/possibilities, energetic throbs of the nothingness, material forces of creativity and generativity. Virtual possibilities are material explorations that are integral to what matter

is. Matter is not the given, the unchangeable, the bare facts of nature. It is not inanimate, lifeless, eternal. Matter is an imaginative material exploration of non/being, creatively regenerative, an ongoing trans\*/formation. Matter is a condensation of dispersed and multiple beings-times, where the future and past are diffracted into now, into each moment. Matter is caught up in its own and others' desiring fields. It cannot help but touch itself in an infinite exploration of its (im/possible) be(com)ing(s). And in touching it/self, it partners promiscuously and perversely with otherness in a radical ongoing deconstruction and (re)configuring of itself. Matter is a wild exploration of trans\* animacy, self-experimentations/self-re-creations, not in an autopoietic mode, but on the contrary, in a radical undoing of "self," of individualism. Ever lively, never identical with itself, it is uncountably multiple, mutable. Matter is not mere being, but its ongoing un/doing. Nature is agential trans\*materiality/ trans-matter-reality in its ongoing re(con)figuring, where trans is not a matter of changing *in* time, from this to that, but an undoing of "this" and "that," an ongoing reconfiguring *of* spacetimemattering in an iterative reworking of past, present, future integral to the play of the indeterminacy of being-time.<sup>64</sup>

The electric body—at *all scales*, atmospheric, subatomic, molecular, organismic—is a quantum phenomenon generating new imaginaries, new lines of research, new possibilities.<sup>65</sup> The (re)generative possibilities are endless. Fodder for potent trans\* imaginaries for reconfiguring future/past lived realities, for regenerating what never was but might yet have been. Can we cultivate bioelectrical science's radical potential, subverting Dr. Frankenstein's grab for power over life itself, aligning (neo)galvanism with trans\* desires, not in order to have control over life but to empower and galvanize the disenfranchised and breathe life into new forms of queer agency and embodiment? Can we (re)generate what was missing in fleshiness but materially present in virtuality? Can we (re)generate what our bodies sense but cannot yet touch? Can we find ways to adjust the appropriate ion potential to activate and generate new fields of re-remembering? Can we learn to reconfigure our fleshiness bit by bit by slowly changing the flow of ions? Can dis-membering as well as re-remembering be facilitated through such charged reconfigurings of molecular flows? Can we trans/form, regenerate, dismember, and re-member anew fleshly bodies in their materiality? And if these fleshy hopes feel cruel to us sometimes, especially perhaps when reality seems impossibly hard and fixed and our own naturalcultural bodies and desires feel immobilized, if there are times when we have to face the knife, tear ourselves open, draw blood, might a regenerative politics with all its monstrously queer possibilities still serve to recharge our imaginations and our electric body-spirits, helping us transition from momentary political and spiritual rigor mortis to living raging animacy?

Surely these imaginings of the queer potential of regenerative science (and quantum theory more generally) should not be (mis)understood as an uncritical embrace of science's utopian promise. No meditation on Frankenstein could entertain for a moment such a straight alliance with the scripted equation "science = progress," indeed, as the very incarnation of this promise. There is no illusion of queer regeneration being a bloodless affair.

The promise of regenerative medicine is surely not inherently innocent, progressive, or liberatory. It does not constitute an innocent mode of engagement with science, divorced from any heteronormative reproductive impulses. Indeed, its own quite explicit commitment to normative ideas of embodiment, able-bodiedness, and naturalness belie any such suggestion. On the contrary, its goals are to renormalize and eliminate bodily irregularities in a quest to honor Nature and her intentions, if only by doing her one better. The current bioelectric studies of regeneration are already aligning themselves with promises of curing cancer, birth defects, and disabilities because of lost body parts.<sup>66</sup> Levin's initial motivation was to create robots that could heal themselves. Projects in the service of the military-industrial complex, capitalism, racism, and colonialism cannot be disentangled from the practices of modern science. Nonetheless, even as "science seeks to contain and colonize the radical threat posed by a particular transgender strategy of resistance to the coerciveness of gender," and even if "its cultural politics are aligned with a deeply conservative attempt to stabilize gendered identity in service of the naturalized heterosexual order," this is not reason to believe that trans\* desires can be corralled into cooperation.<sup>67</sup> In alliance with this crucial point, this article engages with science in a mode that invites us to imagine not only the possibilities of subverting science's conservative agendas from the outside, as it were, but also those of opening up science from the inside and serving as mid-wife to its always already deconstructive nature.

Significantly, according to QFT nature is an ongoing questioning of itself—of what constitutes naturalness. Indeed, nature's indeterminacy entails its ongoing un/doing. In other words, nature itself *is* an ongoing deconstructing of naturalness. As I have shown in this brief encounter with quantum field theory, the void is "the scene of wild activities," perverse and promiscuous couplings, queer goings-on that make pre-AIDS bathhouses look tame. The void is a virtual exploration of all manner of possible trans\*/formations. Nature is perverse at its core; nature is unnatural. For trans\*, queer, and other marginalized people, "The collective assumptions of the naturalized order [can] overwhelm [us]. Nature exerts such a hegemonic oppression."<sup>68</sup> The stakes in denaturalizing nature are not insignificant. Demonstrating nature's queerness, its trans\*-embodiment, expos-

ing the monstrous face of nature itself in the undoing of naturalness holds significant political potential. The point is that the monstrously large space of agency unleashed in the indeterminate play of virtuality in all its un/doings may constitute a trans-subjective material field of im/possibilities worth exploring. And the political potential does not stop with regeneration, for there are other wild dimensions within and without that rage with possibilities. *For all its entangled history with capitalism, colonialism, and the military-industrial complex, QFT not only contains its own undoing—in a performative exploration/materialization of a subversive materialism—but in an important sense makes that very undoing its im/proper object of study.*<sup>69</sup>

The point is not to make trans or queer into universal features and dilute their subversive potentials. The point is to make plain the undoing of universality, the importance of the radical specificity of materiality as iterative materialization. Nor is this to set trans as an abstraction, to deny it its fleshly lived reality, sacrificing its embodiment in an appropriative embrace of the latest theory trends. What is needed is not a universalization of trans or queer experience stripped of all its specificities (as inflected through race, nationality, ethnicity, class, and other normalizing apparatuses of power), setting these terms up as concepts that float above the materiality of particular embodied experiences, but to make alliances with, to build on an already existing radical tradition (a genealogy going back at least to Marx) that troubles nature and its naturalness “all the way down.” In doing so, it would be a mistake to neglect the spaces of political agency *within* science—its own deconstructive forces produce radical openings that may help us imagine not only new possibilities, new matter/realities, but also new understandings of the nature of change and its possibilities.

Queer kinship is a potent political formation, crucial to Stryker’s forceful analysis. Imagine how the possibilities for alliance with nature’s ongoing radical deconstruction of naturalness might enable the (re)making of queer kinship with nature. What would it mean to reclaim our trans\* natures as natural? Not to align ourselves with essence, or the history of the mobilization of “nature” on behalf of oppression, but to recognize ourselves as part of nature’s doings in its very undoing of what is natural?

Stryker’s queer topological musings, both in “My Words to Victor Frankenstein,” where she is giving birth to her rage that births her, and also in more recent works, reverberate with the trans\* generative mode being explored here:

From my forward-facing perspective I look back on my body as a psychically bounded space or container that becomes energetically open through

the break of its surface—a rupture experienced as interior movement, a movement that becomes generative as it encloses and invests in a new space, through a perpetually reiterative process of growing new boundaries and shedding abandoned materialities: a mobile, membranous, temporally fleeting and provisional sense of enfolding and enclosure. This is the utopian space of my ongoing poesis.<sup>70</sup>

This topological dynamic reverberates with QFT processes, much like the one that perverse kinds of self-touching/self-re-creating electrons enact. An electron touching itself, rebirthing/regenerating itself (there is no singular birth moment, no origin, only rebirthings/regenerating), in a process of intra-active becoming, of reconfiguring and trans-forming oneself in the self's multiple and dispersive sense of it-self where the self is intrinsically a nonself.

In her “Frankenstein” piece, Stryker writes poetically of her transgender (re)birthing in a manner that echoes the literal passage of birthed body from the liquid darkness of the womb. Her voice solicits me to diffractively intercut her words there (italicized in the text below) with those (nonitalicized below) of an electron I imagine to be speaking contrapunctually of its own perpetual (re) birthing.<sup>71</sup>

I am an electron. I am inseparable from the darkness, the void. *It is dark. I see a shimmering light above me.* I am one with the void I was allegedly immersed in, but from which there is no possibility of extrication. There is no myself that is separable from it. *Inside and out I am surrounded by it. Why am I not dead if there is no difference between me and what I am in?* While I struggle to come into being I am virtually annihilated and re(sub)merge into the nothingness, over and over again. Time has no meaning, no directionality. My being no more than an im/possible indeterminate yearning. Bubbling up from the nothingness, I fall back into the void that fills me and surrounds me. I return to the void and reemerge once more only to fall back again. *This [void] annihilates me. I cannot be, and yet—an excruciating impossibility—I am. I will do [everything] not to be here. . . .*

I will try out every im/possibility, every virtual intra-action with all beings, all times.

*I will die for eternity.*

*I will learn to breathe the [void].*

*I will become the [void].*

*If I cannot change my situation I will change myself.*

I am transforming in intra-action with the light above me, below me, and within me, and with all manner of other beings. I am not myself. I am becoming multiple, a dispersion of disparate kinds.

*In this act of magical transformation*

*I recognize myself again.*

*I am groundless and boundless movement.*

*I am a furious flow.*

*I am one with the darkness . . .*

*And I am enraged.*

*Here at last is the chaos I held at bay.*

*Here at last is my strength.*

*I am not the [void] —*

*I am [a] wave [a raging amplitude, a desiring field surging, being born],  
and rage*

*is the force that moves me.*

*Rage*

*gives me back my body*

*as its own fluid medium.*

*Rage*

*punches a hole in [void]*

*around which I coalesce*

*to allow the flow to come through me.*

*Rage*

*constitutes me in my primal form.*

*It throws my head back*

*pulls my lips back over my*

*opens my throat*

*and rears me up to howl:*

*: and no sound*

*dilutes*

*the pure quality of my rage.*

*form.*

*teeth*

*No sound*

*exists*

*in this place without language*

*my rage is a silent raving.*

I am one with the speaking silence of the void, the cries of im/possibility move through me, until there erupts a raging scream without sound, without language, without comprehensibility or articulation.

*Rage*

*throws me back at last*

*into this mundane reality*

*in this transfigured flesh*

*that aligns me with the power of my Being.*

*In birthing my rage,*

*my rage has rebirthed me.*

Let us align ourselves with the raging nothingness, the silent howling of the void, as it trans\*figures fleshy possibilities. Wandering off the straight and narrow path, wonderings alight. Trans\* desires surge forth electrifying the field of dreams and transmaterialities-to-come.

## Notes

I am grateful to Mel Chen and Dana Luciano for their patience and enthusiasm and for wonderful suggestions for reeling in an article that had grown to monstrous proportions. I would like to thank Susan Stryker for graciously accepting my proposal to have some of her poetics diffractively read through mine and, especially, her willingness to have her powerful poetry interrupted by the murmurings of the void (in particular, the musings of a virtual electron that is inseparable from the void). As ever, I am grateful to Fern Feldman for her feedback and ongoing support.

1. TransMaterialities is a term that arose in the planning of UCSC's 2009 "Trans-Materialities: Relating across Difference" Science Studies Cluster graduate student conference, co-organized by Harlan Weaver and Martha Kenney, with faculty sponsors Donna Haraway and Karen Barad. The first time I saw the playful term *matter-materialities* was at a conference run by Monika Buscher at Lancaster University in 2007.
2. Inspired by QFT's understanding of each moment as a condensation of other beings, places, and times, this ontological-political project resonates with Marco Cuevas-Hewitt's call for a "futurology of the present": "The futurology of the present does not prescribe a single monolithic future, but tries instead to articulate the many alternative futures continually emerging in the perpetual present. The goal of such an endeavor is to make visible the living, breathing alternatives all around us" ("Futurology of the Present: Notes on Writing, Movement, and Time," *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest* 8 [Winter 2011–12], [joaap.org/issue8/futurology.htm](http://joaap.org/issue8/futurology.htm)).

3. For more on lightning's queer quantum nature, see below, and also Karen Barad, "Nature's Queer Performativity (the authorized version)," *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning/Women, Gender, and Research* 1–2 (2012): 25–53; and Vicki Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies: Life at Large* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
4. Charles Darwin seems to have suggested as much. See, for example, Helen Fields, "The Origins of Life," *Smithsonian Magazine*, October 2010, [www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/The-Origins-of-Life.html](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/The-Origins-of-Life.html).
5. Douglas Fox, "Primordial Soup's On: Scientists Repeat Evolution's Most Famous Experiment," *Scientific American*, May 28, 2007, [www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=primordial-soup-urey-miller-evolution-experiment-repeated](http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=primordial-soup-urey-miller-evolution-experiment-repeated).
6. Nick Lane, quoted in Cynthia Graber, *Electric Shock: How Electricity Could Be the Key to Human Regeneration* (2012), [readmatter.com](http://readmatter.com).
7. Douglas Fox, "Primordial Soup's On."
8. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* (n.p., 1818), 15.
9. Jessica P. Johnson, "Animal Electricity, circa 1781," *Scientist*, September 28, 2011, [www.the-scientist.com/?articles.view/articleNo/31078/title/Animal-Electricity—circa-1781/](http://www.the-scientist.com/?articles.view/articleNo/31078/title/Animal-Electricity—circa-1781/).
10. Aldini quoted in Anne K. Mellor, "Frankenstein: A Feminist Critique of Science," in *One Culture: Essays in Science and Literature*, 287–312, eds. George Lewis Levine and Alan Rauch (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 304.
11. Graber, *Electric Shock*.
12. J. D. Roger, "1816 Textbook Suggests Use of Electric Shock in Treatment of Cardiac Arrest," *Canadian Journal of Cardiology* 20, no. 14 (2004): 1486.
13. Susan Stryker, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix," *GLQ* 1 (1994): 237–54.
14. Stryker, "My Words," 238.
15. Stryker, "My Words," 240–41.
16. For one thing, as Judith Butler points out, "Not only is the gathering of attributes under the category of sex suspect . . . indeed, the 'unity' imposed upon the body by the category of sex is a 'disunity,' a fragmentation" (quoted in *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007], 60). But there is much more to this point. For more details on an agential realist reworking of the nature of nature, matter/ing, and the cutting together-apart of disparate parts, see Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*.
17. Stryker, "My Words," 251. I am left wondering why Stryker talks about the womb as a place of "blackness" rather than say "darkness," or even, as I suggest, "nothingness" (the void). Part of my political investment in enlarging the scope of my project to include quantum field theory (QFT) is its ability to trouble the underlying metaphysics of colonialist claims such as *terrae nullius*—the alleged void that the white settler claims to encounter in "discovering undeveloped lands," that is, lands allegedly devoid of the marks of "civilization"—a logic that associates the beginning of space

and time, of place and history, with the arrival of the white man. In contrast to this doctrine, according to QFT the void is full and fecund, rich and productive, actively creative and alive. Which, of course, is not the only way to contest the racist and colonialist impulses at work but is to try to further unearth and unsettle how space and time are themselves racialized.

18. Parts of this section are borrowed from Karen Barad, *What Is the Measure of Nothingness? Infinity, Virtuality, Justice / Was ist das Maß des Nichts? Unendlichkeit, Virtualität, Gerechtigkeit*, dOCUMENTA (13): 100 Notes—100 Thoughts / 100 Notizen—100 Gedanken | Book N°099, English and German edition (2012).
19. A. Zee, *Quantum Field Theory in a Nutshell*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 4.
20. Quantum field theory does not negate the findings of quantum mechanics but builds on them. Similarly, these explorations help further articulate agential realism. As I argue below: QFT entails a radical deconstruction of identity and of the equation of matter with essence in ways that transcend even the profound un/doings of (nonrelativistic) quantum mechanics.
21. The more general term *electromagnetic field*, rather than *electric field*, is sometimes used. The interchangeability is due to the fact that electricity and magnetism were unified into a single electromagnetic force in the mid-nineteenth century.
22. While the idea of a field may seem like a convenient fiction, and was in fact originally introduced as an imaginary construct to facilitate calculations, physicists in the nineteenth century began to embrace the idea that fields are real. This shift was a result of the finding that light is an electromagnetic wave made of (nothing but) changing electric and magnetic fields.
23. This is a subtle point that I develop further elsewhere (Barad, “On Touching: The Inhuman That Therefore I Am,” *differences* 22, no. 3 [2012]: 206–23): namely, the difference between the play of indeterminacy and a rapid appearance and disappearance of particles as the hallmark of virtuality. I would argue that “flashes” of potential are traces of virtuality synchronized to clock time, but this very particular manifestation is far from the only set of possibilities in the play of virtuality. I address these issues further in a forthcoming publication.
24. Parts of this section are borrowed from Barad, “On Touching.”
25. Parts of this section are borrowed from Barad, “Nature’s Queer Performativity.”
26. All quotations in this paragraph are from the Discovery Channel television program “Discovery Wonders of Weather: Lightning Phenomena,” September 2007, [www.discovery.com/video-topics/other/lightning-phenomena.htm](http://www.discovery.com/video-topics/other/lightning-phenomena.htm).
27. Martin Uman, *All about Lightning* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1986), 49–50.
28. I am indebted to Vicki Kirby’s writings on lightning, and in particular her attention to the untimely nature of lightning’s connective engagement. See Vicki Kirby, *Quantum Anthropologies: Life at Large* (Duke, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

29. I have repeatedly made the point that quantum phenomena are not restricted to some alleged “micro” domain. Perhaps a(nother) large scale example like this one will help to defeat that misconception.
30. Parts of this section are borrowed from Barad, “On Touching.” See also Barad, “On Touching—The Inhuman That Therefore I Am (v1.1),” in *Power of Material/ Politics of Materiality*, eds. Susanne Witzgall and Kerstin Stakemeier (Zurich-Berlin: Diaphanes, 2015).
31. The virtual photon can also be absorbed by another particle, and that would constitute an electromagnetic interaction between them, but that is not my focus here, which is how to understand an “individual” particle.
32. *Trans\** is a term that employs the wildcard symbol (\*) for internet searches. It is at once a term meant to be broadly inclusive (e.g., transgender, transsexual, trans woman, trans man, trans person, and also genderqueer, Two Spirit, genderfuck, gender fluid, masculine of center) of an array of subversive gender identities, and also self-consciously tuned into practices of exclusion. As “Anony Mouse” notes in a response to a posting on the Q-Center of Portland web page: “When you see a [starred] word or sentence while reading [a] book or articles, you automatically look [to] the margin to see if it has any more meaning to it.” See, for example, [www.pdxqcenter.org/bridging-the-gap-trans-what-does-the-asterisk-mean-and-why-is-it-used/](http://www.pdxqcenter.org/bridging-the-gap-trans-what-does-the-asterisk-mean-and-why-is-it-used/) (written by Addie Jones, “Bridging the Gap — Trans\*: What Does the Asterisk Mean and Why Is It Used?,” posted August 8, 2013).
33. Richard Feynman, *QED: The Strange Theory of Light and Matter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 115–16.
34. Renormalization is a sign of physics’ ongoing (auto)deconstruction. Physics continually finds ways to open itself up to new possibilities, to iterative re(con)figurings.
35. Electrons are not an arbitrary choice for this article. Electrons are not only the source of our body electric, the genesis of our own inter- and intracellular lightning flashes; in an important sense, “electrons R us”: we are made of electrons and their wanderings. Note: to suggest that electrons are trans/material configurations/reconfigurings is not to naturalize trans (or queer for that matter), but rather to acknowledge the radically transgressive potential of nature itself in its own undoing/deconstruction of naturalness (sufficiently subversive, in this case, to instill “horror” in those who would propose to know it fully).
36. This material was presented during my talk, “Multispecies Intra-actions: Queerness and Virtuality,” Distinguished Lecturer for Environmental Humanities, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, July 11, 2013. I am grateful for the lively discussion it generated.
37. Research into bioelectricity and regeneration has a history going back to the nineteenth century. Although some articles covering the research activities of Tufts University Center for Regenerative and Developmental Biology position Michael Levin,

the center's director, as the direct descendent of Galvani and a scientific maverick in the sole pursuit of bioelectricity and regeneration in contemporary times, this is an ongoing field of research that has multiple devotees. For a history of bioelectricity and regeneration, see, for example, Joseph W. Vanable Jr., "Bioelectricity and Regeneration Research," in *A History of Regeneration Research: Milestones in the Evolution of a Science*, ed. Charles E. Dinsmore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 151–78. What is important and cutting-edge about Levin et al.'s approach is the study of bioelectricity using the techniques of molecular biology.

38. "This animal is widely used because of its powerful combination of experimental tractability and close evolutionary relationship with humans, at least compared to many model organisms" (Wikipedia, "Xenopus," en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xenopus [accessed October 28, 2013]).
39. "During the 1940's, female *X. laevis* were injected with the urine of a woman. If the human was pregnant, then the injected frog would start to produce eggs. *Xenopus laevis* was the first vertebrate cloned in the laboratory." Both quotes from the entry for "Xenopus laevis," Animal Diversity Web, University of Michigan, animaldiversity.umz.umich.edu/accounts/Xenopus\_laevis/ (accessed October 28, 2013).
40. Wikipedia, "Xenopus."
41. Brittle stars are organisms that combine the two: reproduction and regeneration. Some species of brittle stars asexually reproduce via regeneration, for example, via the fissioning of the central disk (Wikipedia, "Brittle Star," en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brittle\_star [accessed October 28, 2013]). For more remarkable features of this creative creature, see Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, chap. 8.
42. Ai-Sun Tseng et al., "Induction of Vertebrate Regeneration by a Transient Sodium Current," *Journal of Neuroscience* 30, no. 39 (2010): 13192–200.
43. Dany S. Adams, Alessio Masi, and Michael Levin, "H<sup>+</sup> pump-dependent changes in membrane voltage are an early mechanism necessary and sufficient to induce Xenopus tail regeneration," in *Development* 134 (2007): 1323–35.
44. Misia Landau, "Regenerative Biology: The Body Electric," *Focus: News from Harvard Medical, Dental, and Public Health Schools*, March 9, 2007, archives.focus.hms.harvard.edu/2007/030907/regenerative\_biology.shtml.
45. Helen Ragovin, "Grow Your Own," *Tufts Journal*, January 14, 2009, tuftsjournal.tufts.edu/2009/01\_1/features/01/.
46. "Unlocking the Biological Code," *What A Year! Introducing Medical Discoveries to Biology Students*, www.whatayear.org/06\_13.php.
47. "Researchers Discover That Changes in Bioelectric Signals Trigger Formation of New Organs," *Tufts Now*, December 8, 2011, now.tufts.edu/news-releases/researchers-discover-changes-bioelectric-sign.
48. "Researchers Discover."
49. "When new tissue is introduced, Levin explains, it sends out axons to make connections with host tissue. In these tadpoles, the eyes' axons almost universally connected

- with either the spinal cord or the gut (Levin, quoted in Michael Price, “‘Franken-Tadpoles’ See with Eyes on Their Backs,” February 27, 2013, [news.sciencemag.org/plants-animals/2013/02/franken-tadpoles-see-eyes-their-backs](http://news.sciencemag.org/plants-animals/2013/02/franken-tadpoles-see-eyes-their-backs)). The ones that connected to the spinal cord were able to see.
50. The video is available on the Tufts University website: “The Face of a Frog: Time-lapse Video Reveals Never-Before-Seen Bioelectric Pattern, [now.tufts.edu/news-releases/face-frog-time-lapse-video-reveals-never-seen#sthash.DgsjzC7y.dpuf](http://now.tufts.edu/news-releases/face-frog-time-lapse-video-reveals-never-seen#sthash.DgsjzC7y.dpuf). If any of the videos mentioned in this article aren’t current, see [people.ucsc.edu/~kbarad](http://people.ucsc.edu/~kbarad).
  51. “The flashes are caused by a process called ion flux, which causes groups of cells to form patterns marked by different membrane voltage and pH levels. When stained with dye, the negatively charged areas shine brightly, while the other areas appear darker. The result? ‘Electric face.’” Jennifer Viegas, “Electrical Patterns Found on Frog Face,” July 20, 2011, [news.discovery.com/animals/electrical-patterns-frog-110720.htm](http://news.discovery.com/animals/electrical-patterns-frog-110720.htm).
  52. Brian Thomas, “Tadpole Faces Form by Bioelectric Patterning,” July 27, 2011, [www.icr.org/article/tadpole-faces-form-by-bioelectric-patterning/](http://www.icr.org/article/tadpole-faces-form-by-bioelectric-patterning/).
  53. Daisy Yuhas, “It’s Electric: Biologists Seek to Crack Cell’s Bioelectric Code,” *Scientific American*, May 27, 2013. [www.scientificamerican.com/article/bioelectric-code/?mobileFormat=false](http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/bioelectric-code/?mobileFormat=false).
  54. See [now.tufts.edu/news-releases/face-frog-time-lapse-video-reveals-never-seen#sthash.DgsjzC7y.dpuf](http://now.tufts.edu/news-releases/face-frog-time-lapse-video-reveals-never-seen#sthash.DgsjzC7y.dpuf).
  55. Ragovin, “Grow Your Own.”
  56. See [www.discovery.com/video-topics/other/lightning-phenomena.htm](http://www.discovery.com/video-topics/other/lightning-phenomena.htm).
  57. “Lightning in Super Slow Motion,” a segment from the Discovery Channel video on lightning (2007), [www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLWIBrweSU8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLWIBrweSU8).
  58. Uman, *All about Lightning*, 83, 90.
  59. “Spooky-action-at-a-distance” is the notion that Albert Einstein introduced in his objection to the nonlocality of quantum phenomenon. Today, this nonlocality is understood to be a feature of quantum entanglements. See Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, chap. 7; and Karen Barad, “Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/continuities, SpaceTime Enfoldings, and Justice-to-Come,” *Derrida Today* 3, no. 2 (2010): 240–68, special issue, “Deconstruction and Science,” edited by H. Peter Steeves and Nicole Anderson.
  60. Indeed, this is further evidence that quantum effects, falsely believed to exist only at micro scales, are being detected at larger and larger spatial scales. Here we may be witnessing yet another inherently quantum effect at the molecular level, at the level of biology, orders of magnitude larger than the atomic scale (of the so-called microworld).
  61. Note that untimeliness and temporal indeterminacy are intrinsic to the nature of virtuality.
  62. This is an invocation of Donna Haraway, “The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others,” in *Cultural Studies*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg,

Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), 295-337. I have in mind here also brittle stars among other creatures who display an array of nonhetero-normative modes of reproduction, including asexual reproduction through regeneration. See the discussion of the brittle star in Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, chap. 8.

63. Although a common story of measurement in quantum theory is that the “wavefunction,” which represents a superposition of possibilities, is collapsed on measurement and one of the possibilities is realized, I argue that there is no collapse, that measurement intra-actions reconfigure possibilities. For more details on an agential realist solution to the measurement problem, see Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, chap. 7. The notion of the *virtual* discussed here is based on my interpretation of quantum field theory. It is not the same as Gilles Deleuze’s notion of the *virtual*, although there are some interesting resonances. I discuss this further in a future publication.
64. Thinking the temporalities of transitioning outside linear and external conceptions of time seems important, and this ontology gives us new understandings of being and time that may be useful. For example, what is at issue, then, is not necessarily a matter of discovering a past that was already there or remaking a past through the lens of the present but a reconfiguring, a cutting together-apart of past-present-future in the wild play of dis/identities and untimely temporalities.
65. I have tried to make the point over and over again that quantum phenomena are *not* restricted to the so-called micro scale. Scale does not precede phenomena; scale is only materialized/defined within particular phenomena.
66. This is not to suggest that curing cancer and addressing birth defects and disabilities are not worthy goals, on the contrary. But the question of what constitutes a “defect” and a “disability” needs to be thought through in conversation with disability scholars and activists, among others.
67. Stryker. “My Words,” 242.
68. Stryker, “My Words,” 248. The notion of a natural order is certainly important to scientific racism as well. On the historical links between scientific racism and scientific discourses on sexuality, see, for example, Siobhan Somerville, “Scientific Racism and the Emergence of the Homosexual Body,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5, no. 2 (1994): 243–266.
69. I take up this issue in depth in Barad, *Infinity, Nothingness, and Justice-to-Come* (book manuscript).
70. Susan Stryker, “Dungeon Intimacies: The Poetics of Transsexual Sadomasochism,” *Parallax* 14, no. 1 (2008): 36–47.
71. With apologies to Susan Stryker for disrupting her powerful poem, and with gratitude to her for her generosity and willingness to be open to this experiment in entangled poetics.

ÉDOUARD GLISSANT

# Poetics of Relation



*translated by Betsy Wing*

Ann Arbor

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*for Michael Smith, assassinated poet  
for the archipelagos laden with palpable death*

*Sea is History.*

DEREK WALCOTT

*The unity is sub-marine.*

EDWARD KAMAU BRATHWAITE

POETICS OF RELATION

## IMAGINARY



*Thinking thought usually amounts to withdrawing into a dimensionless place in which the idea of thought alone persists. But thought in reality spaces itself out into the world. It informs the imaginary of peoples, their varied poetics, which it then transforms, meaning, in them its risk becomes realized.*

*Culture is the precaution of those who claim to think thought but who steer clear of its chaotic journey. Evolving cultures infer Relation, the overstepping that grounds their unity-diversity.*

*Thought draws the imaginary of the past: a knowledge becoming. One cannot stop it to assess it nor isolate it to transmit it. It is sharing one can never not retain, nor ever, in standing still, boast about.*

I

APPROACHES

*One way ashore, a thousand channels*

*slave trade*

## The Open Boat

For the Africans who lived through the experience of deportation to the Americas,\* confronting the unknown with neither preparation nor challenge was no doubt petrifying.

The first dark shadow was cast by being wrenched from their everyday, familiar land, away from protecting gods and a tutelary community. But that is nothing yet. Exile can be borne, even when it comes as a bolt from the blue. The second dark of night fell as tortures and the deterioration of person, the result of so many incredible Gehennas. <sup>cells</sup> Imagine two hundred human beings crammed into a space barely capable of containing a third of them. Imagine vomit, naked flesh, swarming lice, the dead slumped, the dying crouched. Imagine, if you can, the swirling red of mounting to the deck, the ramp they climbed, the black sun on the horizon, vertigo,

\*The Slave Trade came through the cramped doorway of the slave ship, leaving a wake like that of crawling desert caravans. It might be drawn like this:  African countries to the East; the lands of America to the West. This creature is in the image of a fibril.

African languages became deterritorialized, thus contributing to creolization in the West. This is the most completely known confrontation between the powers of the written word and the impulses of orality. The only written thing on slave ships was the account book listing the exchange value of slaves. Within the ship's space the cry of those deported was stifled, as it would be in the realm of the Plantations. This confrontation still reverberates to this day.

this dizzying sky plastered to the waves. Over the course of more than two centuries, twenty, thirty million people deported. Worn down, in a debasement more eternal than apocalypse. But that is nothing yet.

What is terrifying partakes of the abyss, three times linked to the unknown. First, the time you fell into the belly of the boat. For, in your poetic vision, a boat has no belly; a boat does not swallow up, does not devour; a boat is steered by open skies. Yet, the belly of this boat dissolves you, precipitates you into a nonworld from which you cry out. This boat is a womb, a womb abyss. It generates the clamor of your protests; it also produces all the coming unanimity. Although you are alone in this suffering, you share in the unknown with others whom you have yet to know. This boat is your womb, a matrix, and yet it expels you. This boat: pregnant with as many dead as living under sentence of death.

The next abyss was the depths of the sea. Whenever a fleet of ships gave chase to slave ships, it was easiest just to lighten the boat by throwing cargo overboard, weighing it down with balls and chains. These underwater signposts mark the course between the Gold Coast and the Leeward Islands. Navigating the green splendor of the sea—whether in melancholic transatlantic crossings or glorious regattas or traditional races of *yoles* and *gommiers*—still brings to mind, coming to light like seaweed, these lowest depths, these deeps, with their punctuation of scarcely corroded balls and chains. In actual fact the abyss is a tautology: the entire ocean, the entire sea gently collapsing in the end into the pleasures of sand, make one vast beginning, but a beginning whose time is marked by these balls and chains gone green.

But for these shores to take shape, even before they could be contemplated, before they were yet visible, what sufferings came from the unknown! Indeed, the most petrifying face of the abyss lies far ahead of the slave ship's bow, a pale murmur; you do not know if it is a storm cloud, rain or drizzle, or

smoke from a comforting fire. The banks of the river have vanished on both sides of the boat. What kind of river, then, has no middle? Is nothing there but straight ahead? Is this boat sailing into eternity toward the edges of a nonworld that no ancestor will haunt?

Paralleling this mass of water, the third metamorphosis of the abyss thus projects a reverse image of all that had been left behind, not to be regained for generations except—more and more threadbare—in the blue savannas of memory or imagination.

The asceticism of crossing this way the land-sea that, unknown to you, is the planet Earth, feeling a language vanish, the word of the gods vanish, and the sealed image of even the most everyday object, of even the most familiar animal, vanish. The evanescent taste of what you ate. The hounded scent of ochre earth and savannas.

“Je te salue, vieil Océan!” You still preserve on your crests the silent boat of our births, your chasms are our own unconscious, furrowed with fugitive memories. Then you lay out these new shores, where we hook our tar-streaked wounds, our reddened mouths and stifled outcries.

Experience of the abyss lies inside and outside the abyss. The torment of those who never escaped it: straight from the belly of the slave ship into the violet belly of the ocean depths they went. But their ordeal did not die; it quickened into this continuous/discontinuous thing: the panic of the new land, the haunting of the former land, finally the alliance with the imposed land, suffered and redeemed. The unconscious memory of the abyss served as the alluvium for these metamorphoses. The populations that then formed, despite having forgotten the chasm, despite being unable to imagine the passion of those who foundered there, nonetheless wove this sail (a veil). They did not use it to return to the Former Land

but rose up on this unexpected, dumbfounded land. They met the first inhabitants, who had also been deported by permanent havoc; or perhaps they only caught a whiff of the ravaged trail of these people. The land-beyond turned into land-in-itself. And this undreamt of sail, finally now spread, is watered by the white wind of the abyss. Thus, the absolute unknown, projected by the abyss and bearing into eternity the womb abyss and the infinite abyss, in the end became knowledge.

Not just a specific knowledge, appetite, suffering, and delight of one particular people, not only that, but knowledge of the Whole, greater from having been at the abyss and freeing knowledge of Relation within the Whole.

Just as the first uprooting was not marked by any defiance, in the same way the prescience and actual experience of Relation have nothing to do with vanity. Peoples who have been to the abyss do not brag of being chosen. They do not believe they are giving birth to any modern force. They live Relation and clear the way for it, to the extent that the oblivion of the abyss comes to them and that, consequently, their memory intensifies.

For though this experience made you, original victim floating toward the sea's abysses, an exception, it became something shared and made us, the descendants, one people among others. Peoples do not live on exception. Relation is not made up of things that are foreign but of shared knowledge. This experience of the abyss can now be said to be the best element of exchange.

For us, and without exception, and no matter how much distance we may keep, the abyss is also a projection of and a perspective into the unknown. Beyond its chasm we gamble on the unknown. We take sides in this game of the world. We hail a renewed Indies; we are for it. And for this Relation

made of storms and profound moments of peace in which we may honor our boats.

This is why we stay with poetry. And despite our consenting to all the indisputable technologies; despite seeing the political leap that must be managed, the horror of hunger and ignorance, torture and massacre to be conquered, the full load of knowledge to be tamed, the weight of every piece of machinery that we shall finally control, and the exhausting flashes as we pass from one era to another—from forest to city, from story to computer—at the bow there is still something we now share: this murmur, cloud or rain or peaceful smoke. We know ourselves as part and as crowd, in an unknown that does not terrify. We cry our cry of poetry. Our boats are open, and we sail them for everyone.

## Errantry, Exile

Roots make the commonality of errantry<sup>1</sup> and exile, for in both instances roots are lacking. We must begin with that.<sup>2</sup>

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari criticized notions of the root and, even perhaps, notions of being rooted. The root is unique, a stock taking all upon itself and killing all around it. In opposition to this they propose the rhizome, an enmeshed root system, a network spreading either in the ground or in the air, with no predatory rootstock taking over permanently. The notion of the rhizome maintains, therefore, the idea of rootedness but challenges that of a totalitarian root. Rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I call the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other.

These authors extol nomadism, which supposedly liberates Being, in contrast, perhaps, to a settled way of life, with its law based upon the intolerant root. Already Kant, at the beginning of *Critique of Pure Reason*, had seen similarities between skeptics and nomads, remarking also that, from time to time, "they break the social bond." He seems thus to establish correlations between, on the one hand, a settled way of life, truth, and society and, on the other, nomadism, skepticism, and anarchy. This parallel with Kant suggests that the rhizome concept appears interesting for its anticonformism, but one cannot infer from this that it is subversive or that rhizomatic thought has the capacity to overturn the

rhizoma  
en  
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order of the world—because, by so doing, one reverts to ideological claims presumably challenged by this thought.<sup>3</sup>

But is the nomad not overdetermined by the conditions of his existence? Rather than the enjoyment of freedom, is nomadism not a form of obedience to contingencies that are restrictive? Take, for example, circular nomadism: each time a portion of the territory is exhausted, the group moves around. Its function is to ensure the survival of the group by means of this circularity. This is the nomadism practiced by populations that move from one part of the forest to another, by the Arawak communities who navigated from island to island in the Caribbean, by hired laborers in their pilgrimage from farm to farm, by circus people in their peregrinations from village to village, all of whom are driven by some specific need to move, in which daring or aggression play no part. Circular nomadism is a not-intolerant form of an impossible settlement.

Contrast this with invading nomadism, that of the Huns, for example, or the Conquistadors, whose goal was to conquer lands by exterminating their occupants. Neither prudent nor circular nomadism, it spares no effort. It is an absolute forward projection: an arrowlike nomadism. But the descendants of the Huns, Vandals, or Visigoths, as indeed those of the Conquistadors, who established their clans, settled down bit by bit, melting into their conquests. Arrowlike nomadism is a devastating desire for settlement.\*

Neither in arrowlike nomadism nor in circular nomadism are roots valid. Before it is won through conquest, what "holds" the invader is what lies ahead; moreover, one could almost say that being compelled to lead a settled way of life

\* The idea that this devastation can turn history around in a positive manner (in relation to the decline of the Roman Empire, for example) and beget some fertile negative element does not concern us here. Generally speaking, what is meant is that arrowlike nomadism gives birth to new eras, whereas circular nomadism would be endogenous and without a future. This is a pure and simple legitimization of the act of conquest.

would constitute the real uprooting of a circular nomad. There is, furthermore, no pain of exile bearing down, nor is there the wanderlust of errantry growing keener. Relation to the earth is too immediate or too plundering to be linked with any preoccupation with identity—this claim to or consciousness of a lineage inscribed in a territory. Identity will be achieved when communities attempt to legitimate their right to possession of a territory through myth or the revealed word. Such an assertion can predate its actual accomplishment by quite some time. Thus, an often and long contested legitimacy will have multiple forms that later will delineate the afflicted or soothing dimensions of exile or errantry.

In Western antiquity a man in exile does not feel he is helpless or inferior, because he does not feel burdened with deprivation—of a nation that for him does not yet exist. It even seems, if one is to believe the biographies of numerous Greek thinkers including Plato and Aristotle, that some experience of voyaging and exile is considered necessary for a being's complete fulfillment. Plato was the first to attempt to base legitimacy not on community within territory (as it was before and would be later) but on the City in the rationality of its laws. This at a time when his city, Athens, was already threatened by a "final" deregulation.\*

In this period identification is with a culture (conceived of as civilization), not yet with a nation.\*\* The pre-Christian West along with pre-Columbian America, Africa of the time of the great conquerors, and the Asian kingdoms all shared this mode of seeing and feeling. The relay of actions exerted

\*Platonic Dialogues take over the function of the Myth. The latter establishes the legitimacy of the possession of a territory based usually on the uninterrupted rigors of filiation. The Dialogue establishes the City's justice based on the revelation of a superior reason organizing rigorous successions of a political order.

\*\*Through the entirely Western notion of civilization the experience of a society is summed up, in order to project it immediately into an evolution, most often an expansion as well. When one says civilization, the immediate implication is a will to civilize. This idea is linked to the passion to impose civilization on the Other.

by arrowlike nomadism and the settled way of life were first directed against generalization (the drive for an identifying universal as practiced by the Roman Empire). Thus, the particular resists a generalizing universal and soon begets specific and local senses of identity, in concentric circles (provinces then nations). The idea of civilization, bit by bit, helps hold together opposites, whose only former identity existed in their opposition to the Other.

During this period of invading nomads the passion for self-definition first appears in the guise of personal adventure. Along the route of their voyages conquerors established empires that collapsed at their death. Their capitals went where they went. "Rome is no longer in Rome, it is wherever I am." The root is not important. Movement is. The idea of errantry, still inhibited in the face of this mad reality, this too-functional nomadism, whose ends it could not know, does not yet make an appearance. Center and periphery are equivalent. Conquerors are the moving, transient root of their people.

The West, therefore, is where this movement becomes fixed and nations declare themselves in preparation for their repercussions in the world. This fixing, this declaration, this expansion, all require that the idea of the root gradually take on the intolerant sense that Deleuze and Guattari, no doubt, meant to challenge. The reason for our return to this episode in Western history is that it spread throughout the world. The model came in handy. Most of the nations that gained freedom from colonization have tended to form around an idea of power—the totalitarian drive of a single, unique root—rather than around a fundamental relationship with the Other. Culture's self-conception was dualistic, pitting citizen against barbarian. Nothing has ever more solidly opposed the thought of errantry than this period in human history when Western nations were established and then made their impact on the world.

At first this thought of errantry, bucking the current of nationalist expansion, was disguised "within" very personal-

ized adventures—just as the appearance of Western nations had been preceded by the ventures of empire builders. The errantry of a troubadour or that of Rimbaud is not yet a thorough, thick (opaque) experience of the world, but it is already an arrant, passionate desire to go against a root. The reality of exile during this period is felt as a (temporary) lack that primarily concerns, interestingly enough, language. Western nations were established on the basis of linguistic intransigence, and the exile readily admits that he suffers most from the impossibility of communicating in his language. The root is monolingual. For the troubadour and for Rimbaud errantry is a vocation only told via detour. The call of Relation is heard, but it is not yet a fully present experience.

However, and this is an immense paradox, the great founding books of communities, the Old Testament, the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Chansons de Geste*, the *Islandic Sagas*, the *Aeneid*, or the African epics, were all books about exile and often about errantry. This epic literature is amazingly prophetic. It tells of the community, but, through relating the community's apparent failure or in any case its being surpassed, it tells of errantry as a temptation (the desire to go against the root) and, frequently, actually experienced. Within the collective books concerning the sacred and the notion of history lies the germ of the exact opposite of what they so loudly proclaim. When the very idea of territory becomes relative, nuances appear in the legitimacy of territorial possession. These are books about the birth of collective consciousness, but they also introduce the unrest and suspense that allow the individual to discover himself there, whenever he himself becomes the issue. The Greek victory in the *Iliad* depends on trickery; Ulysses returns from his *Odyssey* and is recognized only by his dog; the Old Testament David bears the stain of adultery and murder; the *Chanson de Roland* is the chronicle of a defeat; the characters in the *Sagas* are branded by an unstemmable fate, and so forth. These books are the begin-

ning of something entirely different from massive, dogmatic, and totalitarian certainty (despite the religious uses to which they will be put). These are books of errantry, going beyond the pursuits and triumphs of rootedness required by the evolution of history.

Some of these books are devoted entirely to the supreme errantry, as in the Egyptian Book of the Dead. The very book whose function is to consecrate an intransigent community is already a compromise, qualifying its triumph with revelatory wanderings.\*

In both *L'Intention poétique* (*Poetic Intention*) and *Le Discours antillais* (*Caribbean Discourse*)—of which the present work is a reconstituted echo or a spiral retelling—I approached this dimension of epic literature. I began wondering if we did not still need such founding works today, ones that would use a similar dialectics of rerouting,<sup>4</sup> asserting, for example, political strength but, simultaneously, the rhizome of a multiple relationship with the Other and basing every community's reasons for existence on a modern form of the sacred, which would be, all in all, a Poetics of Relation.\*\*

This movement, therefore (one among others, equally important, in other parts of the world), has led from a primordial nomadism to the settled way of life of Western nations then to Discovery and Conquest, which achieved a final, almost mystical perfection in the Voyage.

In the course of this journey identity, at least as far as the Western peoples who made up the great majority of voyagers, discoverers, and conquerors were concerned, consolidates

\*Hegel, in book 3 of his *Aesthetics*, shows how the founding works of communities appear spontaneously at the moment in which a still naive collective consciousness reassures itself about its own legitimacy, or, not to mince words: about its right to possess a land. In this sense Epic thought is close to that of Myth.

\*\*The necessary surpassing of mythic and epic thought took place in the political reason organizing the City. Epic expression is obscure and unfathomable, one of the conditions of naïveté. Political discourse is obvious. Surpassing can be contradiction.

itself implicitly at first ("my root is the strongest") and then is explicitly exported as a value ("a person's worth is determined by his root").\* The conquered or visited peoples are thus forced into a long and painful quest after an identity whose first task will be opposition to the denaturing process introduced by the conqueror. A tragic variation of a search for identity. For more than two centuries whole populations have had to assert their identity in opposition to the processes of identification or annihilation triggered by these invaders. Whereas the Western nation is first of all an "opposite,"\*\* for colonized peoples identity will be primarily "opposed to"—that is, a limitation from the beginning. Decolonization will have done its real work when it goes beyond this limit.

The duality of self-perception (one is citizen or foreigner) has repercussions on one's idea of the Other (one is visitor or visited; one goes or stays; one conquers or is conquered). Thought of the Other cannot escape its own dualism until the time when differences become acknowledged. From that point on thought of the Other "comprehends"<sup>5</sup> multiplicity, but mechanically and still taking the subtle hierarchies of a generalizing universal as its basis. Acknowledging differences does not compel one to be involved in the dialectics of their totality. One could get away with: "I can acknowledge your difference and continue to think it is harmful to you. I can think that my strength lies in the Voyage (I am making History) and that your difference is motionless and silent." Another step remains to be taken before one really enters the dialectic of totality. And, contrary to the mechanics of the Voyage, this dialectic turns out to be driven by the thought of errantry.

\*That is, as we have said, essentially by his language.

\*\*If the idea of civilization holds opposites together, a generalizing universal will be the principle of their action in the world, the principle that will allow them to realize conflicts of interest in a finalist conception of History. The first colonist, Christopher Columbus, did not voyage in the name of a country but of an idea.

Let us suppose that the quest for totality, starting from a nonuniversal context of histories of the West, has passed through the following stages:

- the thinking of territory and self (ontological, dual)
- the thinking of voyage and other (mechanical, multiple)
- the thinking of errantry and totality (relational, dialectical).

\* We will agree that this thinking of errantry, this errant thought, silently emerges from the destructuring of compact national entities that yesterday were still triumphant and, at the same time, from difficult, uncertain births of new forms of identity that call to us.

In this context uprooting can work toward identity, and exile can be seen as beneficial, when these are experienced as a search for the Other (through circular nomadism) rather than as an expansion of territory (an arrowlike nomadism). Totality's imaginary allows the detours that lead away from anything totalitarian.

Errantry, therefore, does not proceed from renunciation nor from frustration regarding a supposedly deteriorated (deteriorialized) situation of origin; it is not a resolute act of rejection or an uncontrolled impulse of abandonment. Sometimes, by taking up the problems of the Other, it is possible to find oneself. Contemporary history provides several striking examples of this, among them Frantz Fanon, whose path led from Martinique to Algeria. That is very much the image of the rhizome, prompting the knowledge that identity is no longer completely within the root but also in Relation. Because the thought of errantry is also the thought of what is relative, the thing relayed as well as the thing related. The thought of errantry is a poetics, which always infers that at some moment it is told. The tale of errantry is the tale of Relation.

In contrast to arrowlike nomadism (discovery or conquest), in contrast to the situation of exile, errantry gives-on-and-with the negation of every pole and every metropolis, whether connected or not to a conqueror's voyaging act. We have repeatedly mentioned that the first thing exported by the conqueror was his language. Moreover, the great Western languages were supposedly vehicular languages, which often took the place of an actual metropolis. Relation, in contrast, is spoken multilingually. Going beyond the impositions of economic forces and cultural pressures, Relation rightfully opposes the totalitarianism of any monolingual intent.

At this point we seem to be far removed from the sufferings and preoccupations of those who must bear the world's injustice. Their errantry is, in effect, immobile. They have never experienced the melancholy and extroverted luxury of uprooting. They do not travel. But one of the constants of our world is that a knowledge of roots will be conveyed to them from within intuitions of Relation from now on. Traveling is no longer the locus of power but, rather, a pleasurable, if privileged, time. The ontological obsession with knowledge gives way here to the enjoyment of a relation; in its elementary and often caricatural form this is tourism. Those who stay behind thrill to this passion for the world shared by all. Or, indeed, they may suffer the torments of internal exile.

I would not describe the physical situation of those who suffer the oppression of an Other within their own country, such as the blacks in South Africa, as internal exile. Because the solution here is visible and the outcome determined; force alone can oppose this. Internal exile strikes individuals living where solutions concerning the relationship of a community to its surroundings are not, or at least not yet, consented to by this community as a whole. These solutions, precariously outlined as decisions, are still the prerogative of only a few, who, as a result, are marginalized. Internal exile is the voyage out of this enclosure. It is a motionless and exac-

erbat introduction to the thought of errantry. Most often it is diverted into partial, pleasurable compensations in which the individual is consumed. Internal exile tends toward material comfort, which cannot really distract from anguish.

Whereas exile may erode one's sense of identity, the thought of errantry—the thought of that which relates—usually reinforces this sense of identity. It seems possible, at least to one observer, that the persecuted errantry, the wandering of the Jews, may have reinforced their sense of identity far more than their present settling in the land of Palestine. Being exiled Jews turned into a vocation of errantry, their point of reference an ideal land whose power may, in fact, have been undermined by concrete land (a territory), chosen and conquered. This, however, is mere conjecture. Because, while one can communicate through errantry's imaginary vision, the experiences of exiles are incommunicable.

The thought of errantry is not apolitical nor is it inconsistent with the will to identity, which is, after all, nothing other than the search for a freedom within particular surroundings. If it is at variance with territorial intolerance, or the predatory effects of the unique root (which makes processes of identification so difficult today), this is because, in the poetics of Relation, one who is errant (who is no longer traveler, discoverer, or conqueror) strives to know the totality of the world yet already knows he will never accomplish this—and knows that is precisely where the threatened beauty of the world resides.

Errant, he challenges and discards the universal—this generalizing edict that summarized the world as something obvious and transparent, claiming for it one presupposed sense and one destiny. He plunges into the opacities of that part of the world to which he has access. Generalization is totalitarian: from the world it chooses one side of the reports, one set of ideas, which it sets apart from others and tries to impose by

exporting as a model. The thinking of errantry conceives of totality but willingly renounces any claims to sum it up or to possess it.

The founding books have taught us that the sacred dimension consists always of going deeper into the mystery of the root, shaded with variations of errantry. In reality errant thinking is the postulation of an unyielding and unfading sacred. We remember that Plato, who understood the power of Myth, had hoped to banish the poets, those who force obscurity, far from the Republic. He distrusted the fathomless word. Are we not returning here, in the unforeseeable meanders of Relation, to this abyssal word? Nowhere is it stated that now, in this thought of errantry, humanity will not succeed in transmuting Myth's opacities (which were formerly the occasion for setting roots) and the diffracted insights of political philosophy, thereby reconciling Homer and Plato, Hegel and the African griot.

But we need to figure out whether or not there are other succulencies of Relation in other parts of the world (and already at work in an underground manner) that will suddenly open up other avenues and soon help to correct whatever simplifying, ethnocentric exclusions may have arisen from such a perspective.

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As far as literature is concerned (without my having to establish a pantheon, an isolation these works would refuse), there are two contemporary bodies of work, it seems to me, in which errantry and Relation are at play.

Faulkner's work, somehow theological. This writing is about digging up roots in the South—an obvious place to do so in the United States. But the root begins to act like a rhi-zome; there is no basis for certainty; the relation is tragic. Because of this dispute over source, the sacred—but henceforth unspeakable—enigma of the root's location, Faulkner's

world represents one of the thrilling moments in the modern poetics of Relation. At one time I regretted that such a world had not gone farther, spreading its vision into the Caribbean and Latin America. But, perhaps, this was a reaction of unconscious frustration on the part of one who felt excluded.

And Saint-John Perse's erratic work, in search of that which moves, of that which goes—in the absolute sense.<sup>6</sup> A work leading to totality—to the out-and-out exaltation of a universal that becomes exhausted from being said too much.

## Poetics

In the nineteenth century, after the Spanish language had expanded into South America and the Portuguese language into Brazil, the French and English languages successfully accompanied the widespread expansion of their own respective cultures around the world. Other Western languages, German, Italian, or Russian, for example, despite some limited attempts at colonization, were not driven by this propensity for self-exportation that nearly always generates a sort of vocation for the universal. As for non-Western languages, Quechua, Swahili, Hindi, or Chinese, they remain endogenous and nonproliferating; their poetics do not yet hint at involvement in the evolution of world histories.

Our aim here is to advance the notion that, within the limited framework of one language—French—competing to discover the world and dominate it, literary production is partly determined by this discovery, which also transforms numerous aspects of its poetics; but that there persists, at least as far as French is concerned, a stubborn resistance to any attempt at clarifying the matter. Everything just goes along as if, at the moment it entered into the poetics of worldwide Relation, ready to replace the former hegemony, collective thought working within the language chose to cover up its expressive relationship with the other, rather than admit any participation that would not be one of preeminence.

With generally good results literary theoreticians have been content to define the poetics deemed responsible for

ever, it is only the human imaginary that cannot be contaminated by its objects. Because it alone diversifies them infinitely yet brings them back, nonetheless, to a full burst of unity. The highest point of knowledge is always a poetics.

## Distancing, Determining

Contemporary violence is the response societies make to the immediacy of contacts and is exacerbated by the brutality of the flash agents of Communication.<sup>1</sup> It is not all that easy to forego the comfortable expanses of time formerly allowing changes to occur imperceptibly. In cities this speed becomes concentrated, and the response explodes. These same mechanisms are at work both in cultures of intervention and in emerging cultures: New York or Lagos.\* In the shantytowns and ghettos of even the smallest cities the same gears engage: the violence of poverty and mud but also an unconscious and desperate rage at not “grasping” [*com-prendre*] the chaos of the world. Those who dominate benefit from the chaos; those who are oppressed are exasperated by it.

This speeding up of relationships has repercussions on how the full-sense of identity is understood. The latter is no longer linked, except in an occasionally anachronistic or more often lethal manner, to the sacred mystery of the root. It depends on how a society participates in global relation, registers its speed, and controls its conveyance or doesn't. Identity is no longer just permanence; it is a capacity for variation, yes, a variable—either under control or wildly fluctuating.

The old idea of identity as root, whenever it proves hard to

\*The cultures that I call “emerging” are those that do not have at their disposal the institutionalized—nor, for that matter, improvised—means of speaking up in the planetary flow of Communication.

define or impossible to maintain, leads inexorably to the refuges of generalization provided by the universal as value. This is how the elite populations in southern countries have usually reacted when choosing to renounce their own difficult definition. A generalizing universal reassures them.

Identity as a system of relation, as an aptitude for "giving-on-and-with" [*donner-avec*], is, in contrast, a form of violence that challenges the generalizing universal and necessitates even more stringent demands for specificity. But it is hard to keep in balance.\* Why is there this paradox in Relation? Why the necessity to approach the specificities of communities as closely as possible? To cut down on the danger of being bogged down, diluted, or "arrested" in undifferentiated conglomerations.

But, in any case, the speed with which geocultural entities, aggregates formed through encounters and kinships, change in the world is relative. For example, there is a real situational community among the creolizing cultures of the Caribbean and those of the Indian Ocean (in Réunion or Seychelles). However, there is nothing to say that accelerated evolution will not soon entail equally powerful and decisive encounters between the Caribbean region and Brazil, or among the smaller Antillean islands (both French- and English-speaking), that will lead to the formation of new zones of relational community. It would not be possible to base ontological thinking on the existence of entities such as these, whose very nature is to vary tremendously within Relation. This variation is, on the contrary, evidence that ontological thought no longer "functions," no longer provides a founding certainty that is stock-still, once and for all, in a restrictive territory.

In such an evolution we are justified in maintaining the following principle: "Relation exists, especially as the particulars that are its interdependent constituent have first freed themselves from any approximation of dependency."

\*There is a growing tendency in Western aesthetic theories, from ethnopoetics to geopoetics to cosmopoetics, to make some claim of going beyond notions or dimensions of identity.

Gradually, premonitions of the interdependence at work in the world today have replaced the ideologies of national independence that drove the struggles for decolonization. But the absolute presupposition of this interdependence is that instances of independence will be defined as closely as possible and actually won or sustained. Because it is only beneficial to all (it only stops being a pretext or ruse) at the point at which it governs the distancings that are determinant.

One of the most dramatic consequences of interdependence concerns the hazards of emigration. When identity is determined by a root, the emigrant is condemned (especially in the second generation) to being split and flattened. Usually an outcast in the place he has newly set anchor, he is forced into impossible attempts to reconcile his former and his present belonging.

Despite their French citizenship, most of the Antilleans who live in France, participating in the widespread movement of emigration into this country (North Africans, Portuguese, Senegalese, etc.), have not been spared this condition. It is through a rather impressive turnabout in history, in Martinique, that its leaders are now speaking up to suggest that it would not, after all, be such a bad thing to participate in a dignified manner in this citizenship.

Summarizing what we know concerning the varieties of identity, we arrive at the following:

*Root identity*

- is founded in the distant past in a vision, a myth of the creation of the world;
- is sanctified by the hidden violence of a filiation that strictly follows from this founding episode;
- is ratified by a claim to legitimacy that allows a community to proclaim its entitlement to the possession of a land, which thus becomes a territory;
- is preserved by being projected onto other territories,

making their conquest legitimate—and through the project of a discursive knowledge.

Root identity therefore rooted the thought of self and of territory and set in motion the thought of the other and of voyage.

*Relation identity*

- is linked not to a creation of the world but to the conscious and contradictory experience of contacts among cultures;
- is produced in the chaotic network of Relation and not in the hidden violence of filiation;
- does not devise any legitimacy as its guarantee of entitlement, but circulates, newly extended;
- does not think of a land as a territory from which to project toward other territories but as a place where one gives-on-and-with rather than grasps.

Relation identity exults the thought of errantry and of totality.

The shock of relating, hence, has repercussions on several levels. When secular cultures come into contact through their intolerances, the ensuing violence triggers mutual exclusions that are of a sacred nature and for which any future reconciliation is hard to foresee. When a culture that is expressly composite, such as the culture of Martinique, is touched by another (French) that “entered into” its composition and continues to determine it, not radically but through the erosion of assimilation, the violence of reaction is intermittent and unsure of itself. For the Martinican it has no solid rootstock in any sacred territory or filiation. This, indeed, is a case in which specificity is a strict requirement and must be defined as closely as possible. For this composite culture is fragile in the extreme, wearing down through contact with a masked colonization.

Consequently, wouldn't it be best just to go along with it? Wouldn't it be a viable solution to embellish the alienation,

to endure while comfortably receiving state assistance, with all the obvious guarantees implied in such a decision? This is what the technocratic elite, created for the management of decoy positions, have to talk themselves into before they convince the people of Martinique. Their task is all the less difficult since they use it to give themselves airs of conciliation, of cooperative humanism, of a realism anxious to make concrete improvements in circumstances. Not counting the pleasures of permissive consumption. Not counting the actual advantages of a special position, in which public funds (from France or Europe) serve to satisfy a rather large number of people (to the benefit, however, of French or European companies that are more and more visible in the country or castes of *békés* converted from former planters into a tertiary sector and thus won over to the ideas of this elite) and serve to foster the hopes of an even greater number.\*

And it is true that in a context of this sort one spares oneself both the sacred violence, which is boundless, and the violence of absolute destitution, which is spreading with such lightning speed over half the planet. What remains here is only the suppressed and intermittent violence of a community convulsively demonstrating its sense of disquiet. What sense of disquiet? The one that comes from having to consume the world without participating in it, without even the least idea of it, without being able to offer it anything other than a vague homily to a generalizing universal. Privileged disquiet.

Traumatic reaction is not, however, the only form of resistance in Martinique. In a nonatavistic society of this sort three rallying points have grown in strength: relationship with the natural surroundings, the Caribbean; defense of the

\*This year (1990) Martinique, which is an underdeveloped country with 40 percent unemployment, consumed 1.3 tons of Iranian caviar (imported from France) and forty million francs' worth of champagne; there are 173,000 cars registered for its 320,000 inhabitants. As the television newscaster, in a felicitous commentary on these figures, said, “We'll do better next year!”

people's language, Creole; protection of the land, by mobilizing everyone. Three modes of existence that challenge the establishment (three cultural reflexes that are not without ambiguity themselves), that do not link, however, the severe demand for specificity to the intolerance of a root but, rather, to an ecological vision of Relation.

Ecology, going above and beyond its concerns with what we call the environment, seems to us to represent mankind's drive to extend to the planet Earth the former sacred thought of Territory. Thus, it has a double orientation: either it can be conceived of as a by-product of this sacred and in this case be experienced as mysticism, or else this extending thought will bear the germ of criticism of territorial thought (of its sacredness and exclusiveness), so that ecology will then act as politics.

The politics of ecology has implications for populations that are decimated or threatened with disappearance as a people. For, far from consenting to sacred intolerance, it is a driving force for the relational interdependence of all lands, of the whole Earth. It is this very interdependence that forms the basis for entitlement. Other factors become null and void.

Concerning the Antilles, for example, there is a lot of discussion concerning the legitimacy of land "possession." According to the mysterious laws of rootedness (of filiation), the only "possessors" of the Archipelago would be the Caribs or their predecessors, who have been exterminated. The restrictive force of the sacred always tends to seek out the first occupants of a territory (those closest to an original "creation"). So, in the Caribbean would this be Caribs and Arawaks or other older and, consequently, more legitimate and "determining" populations? The massacre of the Indians, uprooting the sacred, has already invalidated this futile search. Once that had happened, Antillean soil could not become a territory but, rather, a rhizomed land. Indeed, Martinican soil does not belong as a rooted absolute either to the

descendants of deported Africans or to the *békés* or to the Hindus or to the mulattoes. But the consequences of European expansion (extermination of the Pre-Columbians, importation of new populations) is precisely what forms the basis for a new relationship with the land: not the absolute ontological possession regarded as sacred but the complicity of relation. Those who have endured the land's constraint, who are perhaps mistrustful of it, who have perhaps attempted to escape it to forget their slavery, have also begun to foster these new connections with it, in which the sacred intolerance of the root, with its sectarian exclusiveness, has no longer any share.

Ecological mysticism relies on this intolerance. A reactionary, that is to say infertile, way of thinking about the Earth, it would almost be akin to the "return to the land" championed by Pétain, whose only instinct was to reactivate the forces of tradition and abdication while at the same time appealing to a withdrawal reflex.

In Western countries these two ecological options (political and mystical) come together in action. Still, one cannot ignore the differences that drive them. Not acknowledging these differences in our countries predisposes us in favor of mimetic practices that are either quite simply imported because of the pressures of Western opinion or else the baggage of standardized fashion, such as jogging and hiking.

We end up every time with the following axiom—one not given in advance: Pronouncing one's specificity is not enough if one is to escape the lethal, indistinct confusion of assimilations; this specificity still has to be put into action before consenting to any outcome.

But the axiom, though not a priori, is unbending when applied. A perilous equilibrium exists between self-knowledge and another's practice. If we are to renounce intolerances, why hold out against outright consent? And, if we are to follow our freedom to its "logical consequences," why not have the right to confirm it in a radical negation of the Other?

These dilemmas have their own particular areas of application to govern. Such as the need for poor countries to exercise self-sufficiency that is economically and physically sustaining. Such as the definition of how forms of independence are experienced or hoped for. Such as the putting into practice of ethnotechnology as an instrument of self-sufficiency. Never have obligations been so chancy in reality.

To oppose the disturbing affective standardization of peoples, whose affect has been diverted by the processes and products of international exchange, either consented to or imposed, it is necessary to renew the visions and aesthetics of relating to the earth.

But, since sensibilities have already been diverted widely by these processes of exchange, it will not be easy to get anyone to replace products bearing an intense relational charge, such as Coca-Cola, wheat bread, or dairy butter with yams, breadfruit or a revived production of *madou*, *mabi* or any other "local" products. All the more since products of this sort, whose excellence depends on their fragility, do not tend to keep well, which is one of the secrets of large-scale commerce. Standardization of taste is "managed" by the industrial powers.

There are plenty of native Martinicans who will confess that when they were children they used to hate breadfruit (a staple vegetable and, therefore, intimately associated with the idea of poverty and the reality of destitution). Then the reverse has become true with age, especially for those who have lived for a long time away from the island—they have acquired a lasting taste for it. Any survey taken would show the same to be true today for most of the children in Martinique. With a fierce "tchip!" of the lips, children reject even the thought of breadfruit and relish the idea of dried sausage. In countries in which imports reign, childhood is the first deportee.

I made note of someone who, claiming to criticize novelists from Martinique whose vision of reality is expressed in

the poetics of a language irrigated by Creole, spoke disdainfully of "*dachinismé*" (from the word *dachine* [dasheen], or Chinese cabbage, another local vegetable). Thus, the same negativity is used to punish any production that does not consent to international standardization or conform to the generalizing universal.

In rich nations, in which imports are balanced with more or less difficulty by exports and in which, consequently, foreign goods offered for consumption are exchanged more or less indirectly against local production, it is easier to maintain equilibrium between the levels. The international product has a less severe impact on sensibilities; "desire" for it is not so implacable.

In poor countries any appeal for self-sufficiency grounded solely in economics and good sense is doomed to failure. Good sense is of no consequence in the tangle of world Relation. Sensibilities have become so profoundly contaminated, in most cases, and the habit of material comfort is so well established, even in the midst of the greatest poverty, that political dictates or proclamations are inadequate remedies. Here, as elsewhere, one must figure out how much we have to consent to the planetary evolution toward standardization of consumer products (the present course in Martinique, with French products widely imported) and how much we should push for invention and a new sensibility in association with "national" products.

This is where the imagination and expression of an aesthetics of the earth—freed from quaint naïveté, to rhizome instead throughout our cultures' understanding—become indispensable.

It is certainly true that we do not work the land, are no longer the country people we used to be, with our same old instinctive patience. Too many international parameters come into this relationship. A man involved in agriculture is inevitably a man involved in culture: he can no longer produce innocently.

Daily we hear about how occupations connected with the land are among the sorriest that exist. The farmer's traditional solitude has become exacerbated by the embarrassed thought that his work is anachronistic, in developed countries, or pathetic, in poor countries. In the former he struggles against productivity, taxes, markets, and surplus; in the latter against dust, the lack of tools, epidemics, and shortages. Both here and there the display of technological wealth overwhelms him. It would be obnoxious to indulge in idiotic praise of the peasantry when it is going downhill this way everywhere. Will it die, or will it be transformed into a reserve labor force for advanced techniques?

It is said—a commonplace—that the future of humanity is at stake, unless, before extinction, such techniques make possible the massive production of artificial foods that would take care of the richest. Picture an uncultivated land when the factories producing synthetics have provided enough for the stomachs of the chosen few. It would only be used for leisure, for a kind of Voyage in which seeking and knowledge would have no place at all. It would become scenery. That is what would happen to our countries, since it is entirely possible that the aforesaid factories would never be located in them (unless they are really responsible for producing too much waste). We would inhabit Museums of Natural Non-History. Reactivating an aesthetics of the earth will perhaps help differ this nightmare, air-conditioned or not.

This trend toward international standardization of consumption will not be reversed unless we make drastic changes in the diverse sensibilities of communities by putting forward the prospect—or at least the possibility—of this revived aesthetic connection with the earth.

How can such a poetics be resuscitated, when its mind-set drifts between the obsolete mysticism that we noted and the mockery of production that is emerging everywhere? An aesthetics of the earth seems, as always, anachronistic or naive: reactionary or sterile.

But we must get beyond this seemingly impossible task. If we don't, all the prestige (and denaturation) felt in internationally standardized consumption will triumph permanently over the pleasure of consuming one's own product. The problem is that these denaturations create imbalance and dry things up. Understood in its full-sense, passion for the land where one lives is a start, an action we must endlessly risk.

An aesthetics of the earth? In the half-starved dust of Africas? In the mud of flooded Asias? In epidemics, masked forms of exploitation, flies buzz-bombing the skeleton skins of children? In the frozen silence of the Andes? In the rains uprooting *favelas* and shantytowns? In the scrub and scree of Bantu lands? In flowers encircling necks and ukuleles? In mud huts crowning goldmines? In city sewers? In haggard aboriginal wind? In red-light districts? In drunken indiscriminate consumption? In the noose? The cabin? Night with no candle?

Yes. But an aesthetics of disruption and intrusion. Finding the fever of passion for the ideas of "environment" (which I call surroundings) and "ecology," both apparently such futile notions in these landscapes of desolation. Imagining the idea of love of the earth—so ridiculously inadequate or else frequently the basis for such sectarian intolerance—with all the strength of charcoal fires or sweet syrup.

Aesthetics of rupture and connection.

Because that is the crux of it, and almost everything is said in pointing out that under no circumstances could it ever be a question of transforming land into territory again. Territory is the basis for conquest. Territory requires that filiation be planted and legitimated. Territory is defined by its limits, and they must be expanded. A land henceforth has no limits. That is the reason it is worth defending against every form of alienation.

Aesthetics of a variable continuum, of an invariant discontinuum.

Self-sufficiency can be worked out. With the sole condition that it not end up in the exclusivity of territory. A necessary condition but not enough to incite the radicalities capable of saving us from ambiguity, rallied together within a landscape—reforming our taste, without our having to force ourselves into it.

Thus, within the pitiless panorama of the worldwide commercial market, we debate our problems. No matter where you are or what government brings you together into a community, the forces of this market are going to find you. If there is profit to be made, they will deal with you. These are not vague forces that you might accommodate out of politeness; these are hidden forces of inexorable logic that must be answered with the total logic of your behavior. For example, one could not accept state assistance and at the same time pretend to oppose it. You must choose your bearing. And, to get back to the question raised earlier, simply consenting would not be worth it, in any case. Contradiction would knot the community (which ceases to be one) with impossibilities, profoundly destabilizing it. The entire country would become a Plantation, believing it operates with freedom of decision but, in fact, being outer directed. The exchange of goods (in this case in Martinique: the exchange of imported public money against exported private profit) is the rule. Bustling commerce only confirms the fragmentation and opposition to change. Minds get used up in this superficial comfort, which has cost them an unconscious, enervating braining.

This is the dilemma to be resolved. We have learned that peremptory declarations, grounded in the old Manichaeism of liberation, are of no use here, because they only contribute to reinforcing a stereotypical language with no hold in reality. These are all liabilities whose dialectics must first be either realized or bypassed.

Thinking, for example, that ethnotechnology would save us from excessive importation, protect the vivid physical quality of the country, find an equilibrium for our drive to con-

sume, and cement links among all the individuals concerned with producing and creating amounts to saying that we would return to a pretechnical, artisan level, elevated to the rank of a system, leaving it to others to take care of providing us with the spin-off from their dizzying experiments, making us admire from afar the achievements of their science, and renting us (but under what conditions) the fruits of their industry. Have something to exchange that isn't just sand and coconut trees but, instead, the result of our creative activity. Integrate what we have, even if it is sea and sun, with the adventure of a culture that is ours to share and for which we take responsibility.

There is no value to practicing self-sufficiency, or consenting to interdependence, or mastering ethnotechnology, unless these processes constitute both distancings from and accord with (and in relation to) their referent: the multiform elsewhere always set forth as a monolithic necessity in any country that is dominated.

We struggle against our problems, without knowing that throughout the world they are widespread. There is no place that does not have its elsewhere. No place where this is not an essential dilemma. No place where it is not necessary to come as close as possible to figuring out this dialectic of interdependencies or this difficult necessity for ethnotechniques.

The massive and diffracted confluence of cultures thus makes every distancing (from a suggested or imposed pre-norm) be determinant but also makes every (self-)determination be a generative distancing.

Now let us try to summarize the things we don't yet know, the things we have no current means of knowing, concerning all the singularities, all the trajectories, all the histories, all the forms of denaturation, and all the syntheses that are at work or that have resulted from our confluences. How have cultures—Chinese or Basque, Indian or Inuit, Polynesian or Alpine—made their way to us, and how have we reached them? What remains to us of all the vanished cultures, col-

lapsed or exterminated, and in what form? What is our experience, even now, of the pressure of dominant cultures? Through what fantastic accumulations of how many existences, both individual and collective? Let us try to calculate the result of all that. We will be incapable of doing so. Our experience of this confluence will forever be only one part of its totality.

No matter how many studies and references we accumulate (though it is our profession to carry out such things), we will never reach the end of such a volume; knowing this in advance makes it possible for us to dwell there. Not knowing this totality is not a weakness. Not wanting to know it certainly is. Consequently, we imagine it through a poetics: this imaginary realm provides the full-sense of all these always decisive differentiations. A lack of this poetics, its absence or its negation, would constitute a failing.\*

Similarly, thought of the Other is sterile without the other of Thought.

Thought of the Other is the moral generosity disposing me to accept the principle of alterity, to conceive of the world as not simple and straightforward, with only one truth—mine. But thought of the Other can dwell within me without making me alter course, without “prizing me open,” without changing me within myself. An ethical principle, it is enough that I not violate it.

The other of Thought is precisely this altering. Then I have to act. That is the moment I change my thought, without renouncing its contribution. I change, and I exchange.

\*I see the extent to which this imaginary appears to me to have a certain form in space: I spoke of circularity (imitating, perhaps, those curvatures of space-time that Einstein invented) and of volume, the spherical nature of concepts, of various poetics and the realities of the *chaos-monde*, all of which reconstitutes (for me) the image of the mother planet, an Earth that would be primordial. But mothering is excluded from this symbolic system—at least, I believe that it is. As well as the idea (so dear to Aristotle and Ptolemy) of a perfection in circularity.

This is an aesthetics of turbulence whose corresponding ethics is not provided in advance.

If, thus, we allow that an aesthetics is an art of conceiving, imagining, and acting, the other of Thought is the aesthetics implemented by me and by you to join the dynamics to which we are to contribute. This is the part fallen to me in an aesthetics of chaos, the work I am to undertake, the road I am to travel. Thought of the Other is occasionally presupposed by dominant populations, but with an utterly sovereign power, or proposed until it hurts by those under them, who set themselves free. The other of Thought is always set in motion by its confluences as a whole, in which each is changed by and changes the other.

Common sense tells us that the world through which we move is so profoundly disturbed (most would call it crazy) and has such direct repercussions on each one of us that some are obliged to exist in absolute misery and others in a sort of generalized suspension. We line one day up after the other, day after day, as if the world did not exist, though daily it seeks us out with such violence. Yes, we act as if. For if we stopped to think about it really we would let everything go. A commonplace—one I have heard so often repeated.

To suspend the suspense we have recourse to this imaginary construct of totality, by means of which we transmute for ourselves this mad state of the world into a chaos that we are able to contemplate. An imaginary rekindled by the other of Thought. A distancing in relation to the predetermined or imposed norm but also perhaps in relation to the norms or beliefs that we have passively inherited. How can we put this distancing into practice if we have not fully mastered beforehand the things that are ours or part of us? Dependencies are infirmities of Relation, obstacles to the hard work of its entanglement. Independencies, for the same reasons, despite being uncomfortable or precarious, are always worth something.

The suffering of human cultures does not confine us permanently within a mute actuality, mere presence grievously closed. Sometimes this suffering authorizes an absence that constitutes release, soaring over: thought rising from the prisms of poverty, unfurling its own opaque violence, that gives-on-and-with every violence of contact between cultures. The most peaceful thought is, thus, in its turn a violence, when it imagines the risky processes of Relation yet nonetheless avoids the always comfortable trap of generalization. This antiviolence violence is no trivial thing; it is opening and creation. It adds a full-sense to the operative violence of those on the margins, the rebels, the deviants, all specialists in distancing.

The marginal and the deviant sense in advance the shock of cultures; they live its future excess. The rebel paves the way for such a shock, or at least its legibility, by refusing to be cramped by any tradition at all, even when the force of his rebellion comes from the defense of a tradition that is ridiculed or oppressed by another tradition that simply has more powerful means of action. The rebel defends his right to do his own surpassing; the lives of marginal and deviant persons take this right to extremes.

We have not yet begun to imagine or figure out the results of all the distancings that are determinant. They have emerged from everywhere, bearing every tradition and the surpassing of them all, in a confluence that does away with trajectories (itineraries), all the while realizing them in the end.

Though the cultural contacts of the moment are terrifyingly "immediate," another vast expanse of time looms before us, nonetheless: it is what will be necessary to counterbalance specific situations, to defuse oppressions, to assemble the poetics. This time to come seems as infinite as galactic spaces.

Meanwhile, contemporary violence is one of the logics—organic—of the turbulence of the *chaos-monde*. This violence

is what instinctively opposes any thought intending to make this chaos monolithic, grasping it to control it.

Distancings are necessary to Relation and depend on it: like the coexistence of sea olive and manchineel.