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The self, ethics and power : depth in Augustine, Foucault and Merleau-Ponty.

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THE SELF, ETHICS AND POWER:
DEPTH IN AUGUSTINE, FOUCAULT AND MERLEAU-PONTY

A Dissertation Presented

by

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The winds and images of the western Massachusetts landscape blow throughout these pages. They helped me remember that, as Merleau-Ponty writes, the earth is the soil of our thought as it is of our life.

ABSTRACT

THE SELF, ETHICS AND POWER:

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This dissertation seeks to address the problems of nihilism, normalization and atomistic egoism through a discussion of the self, ethics and power. It aims at the exploration and elaboration of a dialogical artistic ethos that accents the value of diversity. Augustine is an important figure in this project because of his critique of the egoism of the Roman pagan self. Equally important is his alternative confessing-self which seeks to divert the externally directed lust of the egoistic self inward into the self's depths where it seeks God's truth. Augustine's alternative is problematic, and some of these problems come to light in Foucault's critique of the confessing quality of modern selves even though the latter are not to be equated with Augustine's conception. Foucault's critique of the modern episteme and modern practices sheds light on modernity's tendencies towards nihilism and normalization. This essay argues that far

from being nihilistic, Foucault's notion of a dialogical artistic ethos goes a good distance towards addressing the problems of nihilism and normalization he acutely identifies. Merleau-Ponty's philosophy in many ways enhances Foucault's position. Merleau-Ponty's theory of "depth being" elucidates the intercorporeality of world in a way that emphasizes the value of our dialogical relations with different others. His discussions of aesthetics and artists are important for a further elaboration of the dialogical artistic ethos and his political writings allow us to develop the interrelations between this ethos and democratic politics. Yet there are important differences between Merleau-Ponty and Foucault and they stem in large part from Merleau-Ponty's effort to salvage - albeit in a radically transformed manner - certain theoretical dimensions we find in Augustine's thought. In the final chapter the three theorists are brought together to access the relative merits of their rhetorical and philosophical similarities and differences. Much of the discussion revolves around each philosopher's conception of depth, since the latter is a central concern of each, through which each develops positions on the central problems addressed in this dissertation.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Natural ecologists know that the boundaries between two different ecological communities - for example, that between a forest and a meadow - often harbor a greater variety and density of life than either of the two distinct communities alone. These edges are "special meeting grounds" and "the mingling of animals from different ecosystems charges such border zones with evolutionary potential."[1] This fertility is often referred to as the "edge effect" and the edge itself wears the formal nomenclature "ecotone." The etymology of the latter word is of some significance, stemming from the Greek "oikos" or habitation and "tonos" or tension. "Ecotone" and "edge effect" call our attention to the life-engendering character of the ambiguous tension-laden dwelling which emerges at the intersection between differently constituted regions: they speak of the pregnancy of edges.

This dissertation is about edges, not those between forests and grasslands, but those between self and other, and those between differences within the self. The edges humans are most familiar with are often not pregnant with life, but rather zones of destruction, boundaries between

warring countries. Western civilization has a long and dark history with respect to edges; it tends to view them as indicative of an evil that lies on the other side; it constitutes them as regions to be forever thrust back and ultimately eliminated at the moment when we conquer the Other. Yet it is not just specific edges which pose problems, but edges per se - we are a civilization that on the whole - at least since Plato - dreams of a reality without wild edges, a world encompassed within one Reason. In the shadow of this dream it is little wonder that our approach to edges is obliterating and that when we are involved, edges are localities desolate rather than fructiferous.

Yes, our wretched edges are a hauntingly ubiquitous phenomenon. Our history is overflowing with barren boundaries; those between master and slave, capitalist and worker, humans and nature, male and female, white and black, "normal" and "abnormal." Of course, each of these oppositions is distinguished by specificities that are far greater than the thin breath of ink called "comma" which separates them might indicate. Yet there is sense in this sequence. In each case, the hegemonic category seeks to master and determine that which it is not. The master masters the slave by ensuring both the distinction between the two and the former's rule over the latter. The "normal" masters the "abnormal" sometimes through

categorization, condemnation and ostracization, sometimes by "helping," "healing" and pressuring in ways which draw it into the circle of the Same. In both cases however, what is - or is to be - eliminated is the unmastered voice and being of the Other. Thus, even where a difference is constituted and perpetuated as essential - for example, master and slave - the dynamic is fundamentally edge-denying insofar as it seeks to obliterate the other's Otherness. [That is, here, constituting the other as other (slave) is at the center of the obliterative dynamic.] Hence even many of our socially constituted differences and the boundaries which emerge at the interstice operate to a very large degree to extend mastery, thrust back edges and eliminate others' differences.

In contrast to what appears to me to be the fundamental bent of our history, this dissertation seeks the beginnings of an ethos that is attuned to the value of edges and those differences whose communication makes them fertile. I seek a reevaluation of edges and difference - not simply a new conceptualization of edges, but a new reality as well, in light of a different conceptual approach to and participation in the formation of edges. It is my sense that the project of formulating an edge-affirming ethos, and creating differences in light of this ethos, must be one of the most fundamental dimensions

of our efforts to remedy our contemporary social and political problems. So long as edges and diversity remain anathema, we are doomed to a politics and life of explicit or insidious conquest, a politics that seeks to obliterate the otherness of others and in so doing devitalizes the human and natural world. Of course, I am not arguing that worldly change can be accomplished by the development of a new ethos alone. Our ideas, attitudes and practices to a large extent germinate within and are perpetuated by the institutions we inhabit, and change requires that careful attention be given to reality in all its dimensions. My argument is simply that the ethical dimension is critical and in this dissertation it is my primary focus.

Augustine, whom I explore in the first section is a fascinating figure in light of these issues, for he has a heightened sense and profound analysis of one important mode of being which transforms the edge into a war zone as it seeks to master all that is not the self: namely, that of the egoistic self of ontological conceit which takes itself as the ground of being. By carefully developing Augustine's critique of the Roman pagan self, we gain a critical elaboration of the dynamics and consequences of egoism which is extremely insightful and serves as a warning beacon of that from which we must steer clear in our efforts to formulate an ethos with a greater appreciation of difference.

Augustine attempts, through his notion of the confessing-self, to formulate an ethos which does not collapse everything to the self. The latter turns away from the lust to dominate the world and towards the depths of its soul, where it seeks to fashion even its most fleeting desires in obedience to God's truth and morality. Augustine seeks to escape the tyranny of others' domination and conform to God in the depths of his soul, and this involves a profound recognition that others too are deep, diverse signs of God's polyphonous voice rather than beings flattened to their "being-for-the-self." Yet if Augustine opens the space for an appreciation of others that appears to have been lacking in decadent Rome, his relation to that which does not "face God" is - in a sense developed in the concluding section - monological: that which is not obedient to God is "nothingness" and hence we discover that the confessing-self confronts its Other - that which is not sanctioned by God - in a manner that is very different but every bit as relentless and extirpating as the pagan self. For all of Augustine's profound insights into depth, remembering, willing and unifying the scattered self in confession, the edge at which he faces the non-Christian - even within himself - is still a battlefield, not a region of fertile intermingling. Thus, in this respect, Augustine's confessing-self inadvertently

provides another beacon of warning of an ethos that still seeks to endlessly thrust back edges, one that proceeds not from the self, but from the one true God.

In section two I begin by elaborating Foucault's analysis of the "normalizing" tendencies that characterize much of the concrete functioning of power in modernity. I briefly summarize his critique of normalization as it operates through "panoptic power" and confessing practices which assert that we harbor "deep truths" within us which we must carefully decipher and follow. I then explore these themes at a meta-theoretical level in his writing on the modern episteme in The Order of Things. When Foucault's theoretical work is read in light of his genealogies and vice versa, his work as a whole acquires a level of profundity missed by many of his interpreters. In contrast to Augustine, for whom depth is the dimension of freedom, according to Foucault, depth is the dimension of subjugation. It is that dimension in which we rout out the other and constitute ourselves in light of hegemonic norms. That we cannot "get to the bottom" of depth in modernity does not signify that we have somehow come to accept a degree of otherness, rather it merely ensures the endlessness of subjugative interrogations.

Yet if Foucault's critique is extremely illuminating of modern approaches to edges, equally interesting is the alternative "ethos" which has guided most of his work.

In contrast to most of Foucault's critics, who essentially charge Foucault with nihilism, I argue that Foucault's work - the content of his critique, its style and the positive directions towards which it gestures - is constituted around a dialogical artistic ethic which affirms the importance of difference and the desirability of giving shape to our individual lives and social milieu in light of a "limit attitude" that affirms edges and enriches human relations. Indeed, far from being a nihilist, Foucault offers us important insights into the possibility of ethics in a post-metaphysical age.

Merleau-Ponty, to whom I devote section three, is a philosopher and political theorist for whom depth is a central concern. Yet depth is not a dimension which promises total identification, but rather a dimension of the concealed in which things always partially exceed and resist our gaze. Through an exploration of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of depth (Etre profond) I begin to articulate an ontology which harbors a profound awareness and reverence for the edge between the self and other as well as that which inhabits the terrain beyond this edge. This insight acquires a particularly social significance in light of Merleau-Ponty's thoughts on the "intercorporeality" of depth. I attempt to gather these insights together, and draw on his writings on art and politics as well, in an effort to develop an ethics and politics

of depth and distinction which extends the dialogical artistic ethos initially formulated in the section on Foucault.

In the conclusion I contemplate the virtues and dangers of each theorist in light of the insights offered by the others. Particular focus is given to the significance of the ontological and rhetorical differences between Merleau-Ponty and Foucault with respect to their mutual gestures towards a dialogical artistic ethos. Finally, a brief and highly provisional effort is made to formulate a few of the concrete social and political implications of the insights which emerge in this dissertation.

CHAPTER II

AUGUSTINE

Introduction

From unfathomable depths a question emerges whose answer lies most profoundly in the question itself. Augustine queries: "What then am I, O my God? What nature am I?"[1] This is the question through which the Confessions are created; the restless question through which Augustine is created; and hence the mysterious question that transforms the self - the question's answer - as both the subject and object of the question. It is a question whose character and limits are defined by the God he evokes - a God who guides the most sincere questioners. With a passion rarely equaled in the history of western thought Augustine pursues this question in search of the deep truths within himself. In his peculiar occupation of this question he signifies the dawn of the hermeneutic self. In his most revealing moment he answers the question thus: "I have become a question to myself."[2]

"What is Augustine?" Augustine is a being whose being is defined by the restlessness and depth of his self-examination. Augustine is a confessing-self; a self that continually faces itself in the endless task of discovering and telling the deepest truths about

itself. Augustine is a self that is itself a "soil" into which it continually delves; a soil "heavy with sweat."

Augustine's Confessions is an exemplary manifestation of a new way of being. It is the gesture, the expression, the act of a new form of self. Long before Michel Foucault, Augustine himself defined the Christian self in contrast to all previous forms of selves, in part through the act of confession. Even the Platonists, with so many insights which Augustine respected, inhabited a region far on the other side of a gigantic chasm with respect to the type of selves they were. "Their pages show nothing of the tears of confession."[3]

The confessing-self is distinguished from previous selves in that it is constituted through a very peculiar movement: the movement of the self towards deciphering its own depths. In a most fundamental sense, the confessing-self is this movement. In its ceaseless journey to reveal and examine its interior, it becomes a being of depth. The confessing-self dwells in its depth, the dimension which is simultaneously its most profound discovery and that which makes confession both possible and necessary.

As we inhabit the movements of Augustine's heart and mind in his Confessions, we can begin to sense in a profound and not entirely expressible manner, how it was

to be as Augustine was. The remarkable manner in which Augustine attempts to confront the deepest realms of himself, offers us a valuable access to Augustine's being-as-confessor.

Yet continual confession is not a way of being of which Augustine is merely an innocent and unwitting manifestation. As a particular expression of a new way of being, a way of being which one <u>is not</u> unless one chooses to become such through conversion, Augustine continually makes explicit the fact that he is a confessing-self. Unlike modern "western man," who inhabits a world which Michel Foucault argues has "become a singularly confessing society,"[4] a society in which confession is a constitutive element of so many of our practices, institutions, discourses and ideals, one in which all confess and all are born to be confessors - Augustine inhabits a world in which non-confessing modes of being have been hegemonic. Augustine's world is one in which people are for the most part born non-confessors and the techniques for producing confessing-selves with which the modern world is saturated are largely absent. Hence Augustine is quite aware that deep reflexivity is a "different" mode of being. (This is not to say that Augustine was one of the only confessing-selves of his day. The early monastic self-examinations and the "self-publication" in penitential rites were both important

mechanisms for producing confessing-selves.[5] Further, as Peter Brown has noted, Augustine associated with a group of people concerned with "the events of their inner life."[6] Yet the techniques of confession were not nearly as pervasive nor as dominant as they are today - and Augustine in any case was extreme in his confessing.[7])

The Confessions offers us more than an experience of an early Christian's attempt to truly become a confessing-self. What makes this book - this act of self-reflection - so fertile, is that it is largely about deep self-reflection itself. Augustine confesses about confession. I know of few books that are so thoroughly about themselves. Hence, the Confessions provides us with an opportunity to begin to apprehend confession as a confessing-self apprehended it from within confession. Through a close reading of the Confessions, we can start to perceive the way in which a confessor at the dawn of confession could affirm confession as a mode of being.

Yet if we are to begin to experience and understand this early confessing-self, it is insufficient to look merely at this self's self-understanding. Augustine's conversion and subsequent life as a confessor welled out of his perception of the late antique Roman pagan world and the type of selves which he believed constituted that world. If it is true that Augustine was a confessing-self because he thought confession was synonymous with being,

it is equally true and equally important, that Augustine viewed the non-confessing Roman self as the origin of <u>non-being</u>. Hence it is only through a textured understanding of Augustine's analysis of the way of being which he rejected, that we can comprehend the mode he affirmed.

In the discussions of the Roman pagan self and the Christian confessing self which follow, I have focused particularly upon the specificity of and interrelationships between three dimensions which consistently characterize Augustine's analysis. One of these is the importance Augustine places upon attempting to understand both the implicit and explicit ontological framework within which different selves constitute themselves. Closely related to this dimension are Augustine's efforts to disclose the deep psychological characteristics of selves. Indeed, the ontological and psychological dimensions are generally so inextricably intertwined in Augustine's analysis that we might best describe his studies as "psycho-ontological." Finally, it is crucial to realize that Augustine does not view the self as a static entity, but rather as a being characterized by its dynamic relations with itself and the world. It is these relations which Augustine seeks to discern; and because they are dynamic he is primarily concerned with the trajectory that different types of selves assume: either

towards strength, unity, love, truth and God or towards weakness, dispersion, concupiscence and illusion.

The salience of these three dimensions will become clearer in light of the following discussion. We will begin with Augustine's critique of the Roman pagan self in an effort to situate the discussion of Augustine's confessing-self which will follow.

Augustine's Critique of the Roman Pagan Self

Augustine recounts the history of Rome as a long dark succession of conquests, civil wars, tyrannies, rapes - a seemingly endless tale of subjugation. It is a history of cruelty that was driven by the "lust for domination"[8] and the quest for glory. Even Rome's peace was structured around the dominion of some people over others. Yet domination is never understood by Augustine to rise out of particular social and political organizations. Instead, Rome's social structures and the horrors so often associated with them, are always perceived to originate from the Roman pagan self's way of being. Slavery, poverty, bloodshed and obscenities are simply manifestations of selves in error: selves of *civitas terrena*. How does Augustine understand this Roman pagan self - this self whose pervasive causality echoes so violently across the face of the earth?

Following scripture, Augustine argues that pride is the start of the evil will [and]...of every kind of sin."[9] Rome's lust for dominion originates in pride. Yet what is pride? Simply a moral error? Pride certainly has a moral and psychological character, but more profoundly, the psychological "longing for a perverse kind of exaltation"[10] is intertwined with an ontological error. Viewed ontologically, "this then is the original evil: man regards himself as <u>his own light</u>"[11] (my emphasis).

For Augustine, God is the ground and origin of all being. He is the "light" which gives Being, Truth and Goodness to all beings and He illuminates His creation and thereby makes it perceptible to these beings. The ontological error committed by the proud, is to view themselves as self-originating light: self-originating being. Under the sway of this profound ontological error people view themselves as the independent source of their own existence and as the source of the light in which the truth about other beings is illuminated as well. For the proud self, being and truth originate in the self alone. Concerning the fall from the garden Augustine writes that Adam and Eve "made themselves their own ground" instead of adhering to the "real ground of their being."[12]

Already we begin to see the way in which psychology and ontology are inseparable in Augustine's analysis. He argues that this perverse "exaltation derives from

a fault in character"[13] (my emphasis). The fault in character however, is a very specific fault which refers to the ontological dimension, namely the desire to be self-originating being. The essence of the conceit that is the origin of all evil is that it is ontological conceit. As the primordial conceit, ontological conceit is the origin and basis for all other conceit.

In taking itself to the origin of its own being, the self of the purest form of ontological conceit renunciates its relations of reciprocity with and its dependence upon the world, others and God. Freed from all necessary relationships with anything that is "other" than itself, the self becomes conditionless and absolute. As absolute, the self lives according to itself and grants itself universal status. In Augustine's words, the self lives "by the rule of itself."[14]

Lest we fall prey to an oversimplification of Augustine's understanding of pagan selves and the possibility of a misleading anachronism, these lines should be read with caution and deserve further clarification. Augustine's description of the "origin of all evil" should not be construed in a manner that would establish an identity between Roman pagan selves and "modern subjects." If pagan selves could simply be reduced to the pure form of ontological conceit described above, such a comparison might be inviting. Modern subjects as we find described

and criticized variously in many of Heidegger and Hegel's texts (among others) seem to exemplify some of the qualities that Augustine believed were most at the heart of evil: the self being its own ground, living according to its own rule. Yet - with the exception of Augustine's analysis of the most wicked who seek to master the earth - his writing on the Roman pagan self reflects an awareness of the extent to which ontological conceit manifests itself in a highly differentiated world of beliefs and events; a world originating in, sustained and exacerbated by ontological conceit, yet one in which the latter frequently did not appear on the surface of beliefs and events in the pure form described here. Certainly it is a world far from that of modern selves in important ways. Once humans take themselves to be their "own light," they lose the truths that Augustine believed only God's light could illuminate and fall into an extended progression of errors. Often these errors were purely self-centered, but often as well, they were more complicated. In error, the Romans invented "false gods" and religious worship that connected them to a metaphysical world upon which they were dependent. Augustine does not argue that in the complicated world of pagan cosmology all selves explicitly conceived of themselves as self-originating. Rather he describes their metaphysics as "pitiable folly":[15] pitiable not only for its falsity, but also because of

the extent to which this metaphysics harbored and nurtured the germ cells of the ontological conceit which produced enormous cruelty and led them beyond all bounds - even those posed by pagan religion. According to Augustine, the behavior and exploits - the violence, cruelty, lusts - of the pagan gods was emblematic of and hence fostered the very ontological conceit and lust for dominion in which they originated. While the self was not the explicit center of Roman paganism in the large sense, nevertheless, on Augustine's account this paganism generated and encouraged thoughts, desires and practices - the self's mode of being - that were purely self-aggrandizing. Hence most essentially, the pagan selves were for Augustine selves of ontological conceit. His discussion of ontological conceit is an attempt to capture the origin, essence of and driving force underneath and implicit in the desires, thoughts and practices of Roman pagan selves - not an attempt to reductively equate all of their thoughts and practices with ontological conceit in its purest form. I am interested in Augustine's analysis of the qualities and dynamic of this essence and hence pitch my discussion at this level. I do not wish to imply a reduction of the explicit religious beliefs of this self. It is interesting to note - as I develop in the next chapter - that Augustine believes that he only escapes ontological conceit when he becomes a confessing Christian

self. Though he endorsed Christian belief a good deal before his conversion, he did not truly become a Christian until he overcame his ontological conceit - implicit in the willing of his everyday life - by turning inward towards his depths and God. Christianity's superiority, in Augustine's eyes, lies not only in the humble place it accords man in the grand scheme of things, but in the humble mode of experiencing the everyday world at the basic level of desire, perception, judgment.

When the self dwells in the ontology of conceit, its experience of the world - a combination of perception and judgment - is fundamentally transformed. For Augustine, "it is the nature of things considered in itself, without regard to our convenience or inconvenience, that gives glory to the creator."[16] Thus, "he lives in justice who is an unprejudiced assessor of the intrinsic value of things."[17] Just judgment is that which judges the intrinsic, which for Augustine always refers to God as the condition of all beings. Because we are finite beings with an incomplete perspective on the world, the intrinsic is always to a greater or lesser extent elusive. The world's meaning is rarely if ever simply identical with the meanings we discover. Hence for Augustine, the Christian self is always aware of the incompleteness that always points beyond to something "other" than itself and its own experience; an incompleteness that can only be

filled by faith. Everything is part of that deep design which no human being can completely discover.[18]

For the purely self-originating self, beings in the world cease to have intrinsic value as creatures of God and cease to be evaluated with respect to the ordered whole of creation. Instead, all beings - the world itself, all that is "other" - are reduced to being experienced as objects that exist for this self which takes itself as the origin of being. The being of all that is not the self, all that is "other," is reduced to being a "being-for-the-self" of ontological conceit, because this self has only itself to refer to. The salience of this problem is indicated in the first paragraph of the City of God where Augustine characterizes the city of this world as a place where justice is absent from judgment. No one can be sure they judge justly, but Roman pagan selves do not even attempt to judge in a just manner in Augustine's view. They judge not the intrinsic value of things, but the things' value for the self.

The proud self lives and experiences the world according to the "flesh," by which Augustine does not refer primarily to our physical flesh, but rather to the self as a whole, soul and body. Examining St. Paul's "Epistle to the Galatians," Augustine notes that works of the flesh "include 'faults of the mind' such as enmity, animosity and envy as well as bodily lusts."[19] To live by

the flesh is to "<u>live by the rule of the self</u>," and it is thus that man "becomes like the Devil"[20] (my emphasis). To experience the world according to the flesh is to experience the world exclusively from the perspective of self-centered being, and this for Augustine is to live in "lust" in the worst sense of the word. Again however, "lust" is not meant in this sense to refer fundamentally to the physical dimension, but rather to the <u>desire</u> of the self of ontological conceit for an <u>object</u>. Lust as conceited objectifying desire, can take a bodily form (<u>libido carnalis</u>) or a more psychological form as in the lust for power (<u>libido dominandi</u>).

Lust is not a possibility for the proud self - it is a <u>necessity</u> imposed by the experience it has of the world. The self which strove for absolute freedom by taking itself to be the condition of its own being - its own light, its own ground - culminates in the most depraved state of slavery. The self experiences around itself a world of beings which have been flattened out to their value for-the-self. However, this experience of the object flattens and drains the subject as well as the object. Each object, as for-the-self, demands that the self desire and appropriate it. The self is flattened to the single dimension of lust as it strives to conquer a world that invites - a world that <u>insists</u> - that the self subjugate it. But at the same time the subject is

flattened, it is crushed and dispersed into as many objects as it desires.

Hence the world as experienced through ontological conceit leads to life lived in "lust" according to the "flesh." The great intensity of this experience can be gleaned from Augustine's account of his attempt to overcome it prior to his conversion:

> When I rose against you in my pride...those lower things became greater than I and pressed me under so that I could neither loosen their grip nor so much as breathe. Wherever I looked they bore in upon me, massed thick; and when I tried to think, the images of corporeal things barred me from turning back towards the truth, as though they said: "Where are you going base and unclean?" All these things had grown out of my wound, for You humble the proud like one wounded; and I was separated from You by my own swollenness, as though my cheeks had swelled out and closed up my eyes.[21]

Augustine views this pre-conversion period as one when he was so enslaved by his experience of the world (a world of objects and images of objects which grew "out of his wound") that despite his faith in holy scripture and Christ, he was still unable to free himself from its grip even though he longed to do so. In spite of his efforts to think, the world he experienced - a world revealed in ontological conceit - conscripted him into other forms of toil. In this state, he was blinded by false experiences which he could not escape. The desire for the self's

absolute hegemony over objects fosters a relentless and in some ways more profound hegemony of objects over the self.

Let us explore two of the most important and most "enslaving" lusts that Augustine addresses, in order to gain a more textured understanding of his interpretation of the Roman pagan self.

"The most pitiless domination," Augustine argues, "is that exercised by this very lust for domination."[22] It is this lust to dominate other people which dominates "the city of this world."[23] The selves of ontological conceit view themselves (at least implicitly, on Augustine's account) as absolute subjects and "live according to their own rule." As the self ground of being, the proud self seeks to impose its being and its standards upon "others." For if others were to live according to "other" standards, the self's absoluteness and independence would be jeopardized. The only way this self, which Augustine describes as a "perverted imitation of God,"[24] can maintain the illusion of being independent and absolute in its involvement with others is by obliterating others' otherness. Hence the self "seeks to impose its own dominion on fellow men in place of God's rule."[25] "The wicked...desire to make all men their own people, if they can, so that all men can be subservient to one master."[26] Indeed, the only peace this "puffed up" self

can accept, is one where it is absolutely hegemonic. Such a peace would confirm the illusions which well out of ontological conceit - all other peace mocks these falsehoods. Augustine asks rhetorically, "when can that lust for power come to rest until after passing from one office to another, it arrives at sovereignty."[27]

Yet in attempting to impose its dominion, the self confronts other similar selves with antithetical objectives. "Hence human society is generally divided against itself."[28] In absence of fear, the libido dominandi ran its unchecked course after the destruction of Carthage, resulting in "bloody insurrection... disastrous quarrels...the slaughter of civil wars... torrents of bloodshed...greed and monstrous seething cruelty...."[29] The desire to impose the self's rule on others is the most pitiless lust, because it is the most impossible lust to satisfy, and because it is the most cruel.

While Augustine sees the dynamic of libido dominandi play itself out time and time again throughout history, it is important to note that this dynamic is a tendency of, but not an absolute necessity for, the self of conceited ontology. There are times when these selves constitute situations where this tendency is largely contained. Fear for example, such as that which existed in the rivalry between Rome and Carthage, might produce "a period of high

moral standards."[30] Yet the fear in which these high standards were based, was itself grounded in the unstable lusts of conceited ontology, lusts which could not rest long in a state of relative equality with others. The libido dominandi destroyed the unlikely preconditions of its containment and "first established victory in a few powerful individuals, and then crushed the rest of an exhausted country beneath the yoke of slavery."[31]

Likewise, the passion for glory, which itself stems from and is "puffed up with empty conceit"[32] may check the other lusts for a period of time. The object which glory seeks is "the judgment of men when they think well of others."[33] Here, the self desires subjects more than objects for itself. The self that seeks glory depends upon others to recognize it as the origin of the greatness which it continually attempts to demonstrate. Blinded by its conceited ontology, this self strives "to do things so that others will be 'converted' to itself."[34] In this sense the desire for glory is another "perverted imitation of God."

Yet while Augustine states that glory is a vice, he recognizes that it can be regarded as a virtue as well, in the sense that it checks other vices. In its best form, glory, though it seeks "merely human praise, is anxious for the good opinion of enlightened judges."[35] This desire for glory seeks to identify itself with a good

that is not merely its own good, but a good for others as well. Augustine praises this glory in the early Romans:

> They took no account of their own material interests compared with the common good...they resisted the temptation of avarice; they acted for the country's well-being with disinterested concern; they were guilty of no offence against the law, they succumbed to no sensual indulgence. By such immaculate conduct, they labored towards honours, power and glory, by what they took to be the true way.[36]

This is an extremely interesting passage, because it illustrates Augustine's belief that the ontology of conceit could generate desires for social recognition that could actually give rise to what he considered to be altruistic "praiseworthy" behavior. (It is noteworthy that the desire for glory is considered good in Augustine's view only when it takes form in the world in a way that stands in sharp contrast to the conceit in which it is born.) Yet like the situation of fear, the desire for glory, as Roman history itself attests, is an extremely unstable basis for virtue, for it preserves a conceited ontology that constantly threatens to engender more depraved lusts. Hence, at first the passion for glory gave rise to a love of liberty, "but when liberty had been won, such a passion for glory took hold of them,

that liberty alone did not satisfy - they had to acquire dominion."[37] The conceit that had taken an altruistic form, undermined this very altruism when freedom and altruism became mundane and insufficient to feed the thirst for glory.

Thus Augustine writes that although there is a difference between the desire for glory and the lust for dominion, "there is a slippery slope...from the excessive delight in the praise of men to the burning passion for domination."[38] The best desire for glory seeks the praise of "enlightened judges," but it harbors within it the germ cells of deceit and domination. Furthermore, in its (most common) degraded form, it enslaves people to the judgments of other evil men. In this sense it enhances an experience of the world that obliterates the space for the self as well as the other - the world that Augustine describes as "massed thick." It leads to a world that "bore in upon" him and "pressed him under."

Let us turn now to another lust which one comes across in Augustine's writings: <u>libido carnalis</u> or sexual lust. Here, I believe, Augustine is responding to another form of what he perceived to be flattening objectification. Without wishing in this work to explore the history of antique sexual practices in any detail, let me simply note a few references that might caution us against a trite dismissal of Augustine's concern over sexuality on

the basis of the belief that it was due simply to his weird personality, his personal obsessions, etc. However "weird" Augustine may have been, there is reason to suspect that he was not responding to nothing.

There are good reasons to believe that antique and late antique "sexuality" was constituted within a set of practices and understandings based on a rigid split between those who were subjects and those who were objects. In the four volumes of Histoire de la Sexualité, Michel Foucault conducts an archeological and genealogical study of sexuality during different periods of western history. His discussion of antique Greek sexuality is particularly interesting in that it addresses the subject-object dichotomy which we have argued was central to Augustine's critique of the Roman pagan self.

Foucault rejects the notion that the modern French "sexualité" can be used to translate the Greek term "aphrodisia."

> Our idea of "sexuality" does not just cover a wider area; it applies to a reality of another type, and it functions quite differently in our morals and knowledge. Moreover, we do not have a concept that specifies and subsumes a set analogous to that of aphrodisia.[39]

Hence he employs the Greek term to maintain the distance between our notions of those of antiquity. While there are many important differences, the one that interests

us here is the way in which antique "aphrodisia" was totally a subject-object dichotomized activity. When "aphrodisiazien" (the verb corresponding to aphrodisia) was employed in its active form it referred to the masculine subject of the sexual relation. The passive form of the verb referred to the passive object - generally women, boys, slaves or those who through violence found themselves "reduced to being the object of the other's pleasure."[40] The sexual act was one in which active subjects viewed their potential "partners" as objects for the subject's pleasure. According to Foucault, this mode of perception and thought was a frequent theme in antique Greek thought. The fundamental assumption was that the "other" (generally non-adult male) in the sexual relation was an object-for-the-self.

With respect to Rome there are indications of objectifying sexual practices as well (though I do not imply an identity here). While in Book Two of The Art of Love, Ovid argues that "men and women should share the same pleasures,"[41] his instructions are aimed at teaching the reader how to find an "object for your love," and Ovid assumes and affirms that each person views others as potential objects for the self's pleasure and dominion. When the "other" is viewed as a subject (of pleasure, perception of action), it is almost always in an effort to enhance the self's dominion over the other. One finds

evidence of the close association between sexual pursuit and domination in the metaphors and analogies which are employed in Ovid's poetry. The male who pursues women is continually equated with the soldier and (to a lesser extent) the hunter. Indeed, "love is a species of warfare."[42] Ovid suggests that his poetic instructions on love should be used as weapons: "As Vulcan made arms for Achilles, so have I done for you: then use my gift, as he did, to conquer."[43] In both Ovid and Petronius the male sexual organ is referred to as a weapon. In Petronius' Satyricon, Polyaenus attempts to apologize for his impotence and writes to Circe: "Remember this one thing, not I but my instruments were at fault. The soldier was ready, but I had no weapons."[44]

In short, sexual pursuit here seems to be largely identified with struggle for dominion. The greater the intensity of struggle, the greater the pleasure of conquest. Perhaps Fellini's Satyricon provides us with an illuminating modern artistic rendering of the intertwining of sexuality, domination and conceit in Rome - an illumination which might help us situate Augustine.

I have come across no passages where sexual lust is explicitly identified with the lust for dominion in Augustine's own writing. Rather, the closeness of the two seems to be an assumption that haunts his work. The arguments in the City of God shift to and fro between

the two lusts with an ease that is often difficult for the modern reader (given his or her assumptions about sexuality) to follow. As G. I. Bonner argues, one area where sexuality and the lust for domination are brought into a particularly close relation to one another is in Augustine's discussion of Roman pagan religion.

> In significant fashion...the twin *libidines* are brought together in the official worship of pagan Rome.... The glories of conquest are thought to depend upon ritual obscenities.[45]

According to Augustine both lusts originate in ontological conceit and both are manifestations of the enslavement of the self that occurs as the result of our own "disobedience." It is this latter point (which sexual lust illustrates more lucidly than any other lust) that Augustine seeks to elucidate throughout much of his discussion of *libido carnalis*. In a sense it seems to be the sexual lust's domination over the self (a recurrent theme in Ovid as well) that Augustine finds more profound than its domination over others (this latter point was perhaps so obvious that it was taken largely for granted).

As we have seen, the self of ontological conceit attempts to become an absolute subject who lives according to his own rule and denies any dependence upon God and the world. Yet the ultimate irony of this self's claim to be independent, self originary and self-controlling being,

is that it initiates an atomization of subjectivity which continues beyond the level of the self. In becoming a self of ontological conceit the self becomes a kind of being that is unable to control - and falls victim to - the process of disintegration which it sets in motion. The conceited self is a self which, as it tries to separate itself off from the true source of being and become absolute, initiates a process of separation and disintegration in which parts within the self make similar demands for autonomy and control which the self cannot resist.

Augustine writes that, "the retribution for disobedience is simply disobedience itself. For man's wretchedness is nothing but his disobedience to himself."[46]

> ...he who in his pride had pleased himself was by God's justice handed over to himself. But the result of this was not that he was in every way under his own control, but that he was at odds with himself, and lived a life of harsh pitiable slavery, instead of the freedom he so ardently desired....[47]

It seems that Augustine has two (related) interpretations of man's fall into disobedience to himself. In one sense, this disobedience was inflicted upon man by God as a form of retribution for man's pride. God transformed man's body - it became mortal, and certain

parts of his flesh ceased to submit to his will. In another sense however, Augustine views this disobedience to be connected in a far more organic manner to the mode of being to which the self of ontological conceit gives rise to. As we have seen, the self of ontological conceit is trapped in a mode of experiencing the world which holds sway over it even when it tries to resist this mode. Within this experience, the world demands that the self dominate it. Hence as we have seen, the lust for domination is a form of compulsion which the self is unable to control. The self becomes subject to a disobedient lust within itself. Yet this slavery may or may not be apparent to the self, depending upon the extent to which the self unquestioningly <u>affirms</u> its domination over others.

It is the sexual lust which most undeniably announces the self's disobedience to itself. Even those who affirm this lust are continuously and obviously subject to it:

> In fact, not even the lovers of this kind of pleasure are moved...just when they have so willed. Sometimes the impulse is an unwanted intruder, sometimes it abandons the eager lover, and desires to cool off in the body while it is at boiling heat in the mind. Thus strangely does the lust refuse to be a servant...it is quite often divided against itself. It arouses the mind, but does not follow its own lead and arouse the body.[48]

The self of ontological conceit is linked to the world in multiple ways through the immediacy of desires that are evoked by the self's erroneous experience within which the world appears as an object-for-itself. The proud self is continually thrown outside of itself in its lust to appropriate the world. "It casts away what is most inward to it, and swells greedily for outward things."[49] Embroiled in the unmediated desire for the world around it, the self is consequently an unreflective self. Augustine describes his pre-conversion period as one where he was "behind (his) own back."[50]

It is at precisely this point that the proud self becomes a victim of its demand to be a self-originating subject. For the type of self which results from this demand is so unreflective and beyond itself that it is unable to control the various parts of its own body and soul. The self's ontological conceit incites the various parts of the self in such an immediate and powerful manner, that they become autonomous subjects themselves. The pagan self, as an unreflective conglomeration of these desires, is unable to control them. Thus according to Augustine, the atomization which the self initiated for its own advantage when it claimed to be a self-originating being independent from creation and God, proceeds beyond the level of the self and actually disintegrates the ones who attempt to "swell."

The proud self becomes the locus of multiple subjects, each of which attempts to govern the whole. Sexual lust becomes uncontrollable, and at its height leads to a "total extinction of mental alertness."[51] The undeniability of the autonomy of the sexual lust which originates in pride, leads to shame. Humans are according to Augustine, universally "embarrassed by the insubordination of their flesh."[52]

Thus, Augustine tries to show not only that the self of ontological conceit objectifies and attempts to dominate the world around it, but further that it is an assemblage of self-defeating motives. Born in pride, this self ends in shame. Its quest for absolute freedom leads to slavery. Its attempt to be the self-centered locus of expansion culminates in the disintegration and dispersion of the self. In short, the attempt to live as self-grounded being leads the self further and further away from being. "Vanity," says Augustine, "is nothingness."[53]

And nothingness has a powerful inertia. For to the extent that the proud are absorbed in the external world, they are "behind their own backs," non-reflective and victims of habit. Trapped in immediacy, the self of ontological conceit is "pressed under" by an experience of the world that is "massed thick" and provides exceedingly little room for self-examination which might lead to self-criticism and change. Augustine laments, "I know how

great is the effort needed to convince the proud of the power and excellence of humility."[54]

The ontology of conceit and the absence of self-relection are inseparably linked in a mutually reinforcing dynamic according to Augustine. Conceited ontology develops in those who are blind to their own dependence upon God and the world and unable to see their weaknesses. For Augustine, it is impossible to be face to face with oneself and still affirm that one is the origin of Being, Truth and Goodness. Likewise, unreflectiveness proliferates in those who dwell in the confidence and immediacy of their ontological error.

As Augustine stared into the face of the darkness of his age, he saw at the origin of a multifarious evil, a self that willed an ontology of conceit and was constantly outside itself in its relentless expansive appropriation of the world. His cure would consist in changing the self's trajectory; rerouting its outward course back toward the inner depths of the soul in search of the voice of God within. The self would become a problem for itself, and in the process a new self would be created: a confessing-self. But what would remain hauntingly familiar in Augustine's portrayal of and his existence as a confessing-self, is a certain quality of relentlessness.

Augustine's Confessing-Self

In opposition to a world that was "massed thick" with selves who were "outside themselves" and experienced others as objects-for-the-self - a world largely dominated by the lust for dominion - Augustine sought to nurture the civitas Dei. However, the City of God would not be fundamentally understood in terms of a different institutional structuring of life any more than the problems of the city of earth were understood fundamentally to result from any particular social arrangement. Rather, the City of God would represent a type of self that stands in diametrical opposition to the self of the ontology of conceit.

But what would this Christian self be like? Would it worship God and follow his commandments? Certainly, but the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian selves would run far deeper than a set of beliefs or a moral code. Augustine's conception of the Christian self was most fundamentally concerned with the trajectory of the soul. If the self of the ontology of conceit had engendered a way of being whose fundamental motion was one of "going outside itself" in its unreflective enslavement to the immediacy of lust, the new self would have to change this motion if it was to recover a truer way of being and a truer ontology. Instead of moving away, the Christian self in Augustine's view would be fundamentally

defined by its perpetual trajectory towards the depths of itself in order to rout out Godless desires and conform one's soul to the will of God. In a most profound way, the Christian self would be this reflective trajectory. Its existence would be transformed by this motion, through which it would purify and create itself.

For Augustine, in the most fundamental sense, to become a Christian is to be perpetually engaged in this hermeneutics of the self. To be a Christian self, that is, to be, is to be a confessing-self: a self that has itself as an object for deep and endless Christian discernment. The confessing-self has the perpetual task of finding and telling the truth about itself, for it is only through this ceaseless confession that the Christian can be a being capable of truly embracing Christian metaphysics and Christian moral standards. Augustine believes that in absence of confession the ontology of conceit and the "slippery slope" towards the lust for dominion would continually reemerge. Put simply, in absence of the deep self-reflection and self-discipline according to God's light which occurred in confession, vanity would assert itself and the self would be too dispersed and multiple to be a responsible, just and Christian human being.

To be just is not simply a matter of occasional reflection for Augustine. Instead, the self must strive

to <u>be</u> a deeply reflective confessing being: always. To be a confessing-self is an endless and demanding course requiring the continuous consumption of one's life and one's energy. Yet for Augustine, the life and quality and quantity of energy which one gains through confession far surpasses that which is expended. To put it in these terms however, is much too modern. For Augustine it was a question of <u>being or nothingness</u>. The trajectory of the soul - towards or away from itself and God - within one's daily life determined the larger trajectory of one's life: towards justice and Being on the one hand, or the "slippery slope" towards domination and nothingness on the other.

The slippery slope was far easier to follow than the ascending path towards justice and God. Slaves took the former direction, those struggling for freedom took the latter. The self as it naturally occurred in the fallen world (or one might say <u>unnaturally</u>, in the sense that selves in this world were fallen) was, as long as it remained in this unreflective state, insufficient for the struggle for freedom. The confessing-self was a creation which might make this struggle - this journey - possible; and this journey would eventually make confession easier. God was essential to both.

The fallen self however, with its lusts and deeply buried dark drives would never simply be transcended while

humans lived on earth. Rather it would always lurk in the background; a source of suspicion which always called for further reflection. Human evil was too ubiquitous, too deeply rooted and too recalcitrant for the confessing-self to ever cease its inward gaze.

Conversion: The Birth of the Confessing Self

Augustine's life prior to conversion was not one that was completely devoid of self-reflection. For years he was aware of and disturbed by his sexual lusts. But when and where reflection was not completely absent, it was at best intermittent and false in Augustine's view. Augustine the confessor, reflects upon his pre-conversion life as one where he was a slave to his lusts and his pride. When he saw evil within: "I very much preferred to excuse myself and accuse some other thing that was in me but was not I."[55] (Augustine's debate with the Manichees should be situated within the overriding issue of deep self-consciousness.) Of his iniquity Augustine writes: I had known it, but I had pretended not to see it, had deliberately looked the other way and let it go from my mind."[56]

In short, Augustine had tried to avoid self-reflection, and where he could not avoid it, he attempted to view the origin of evil in such a way that he would

not have to identify with it and thus consider it more seriously. Augustine was reflective in the sense that he was consumed with questions on the nature of evil and God, but he was not truly self reflective in the deep sense which would later seem so unavoidable to him. These former philosophical questions had a distance from his inner soul which they would never have after his conversion.

Augustine's conversion occurs after Ponticianus tells him and Alypius about the conversion of two officials prompted by a written account of the life of St. Anthony. The experience of conversion as the birth of deep self-reflection is striking in the passage that follows:

> This was the story Ponticianus told. But You, Lord, while he was speaking, turned me back towards myself, taking me from behind my own back where I had put myself all the time that I preferred not to see myself. And you set me there before my own face that I might see how vile I was, how twisted and unclean and spotted and ulcerous. I saw myself and was horrified; but there was no way to flee from myself. If I tried to turn my gaze from myself, there was Ponticianus telling what he was telling; and again You were setting me face to face with myself, forcing me upon my own sight, that I might see my iniquity and loath it. I had known it, but I had pretended not to see it, had deliberately looked the other way and let it go from my mind.[57] (My emphasis.)

Conversion, for Augustine, is not most fundamentally a change in "belief." Speaking to God of his thoughts prior to conversion Augustine says:

> I believed that You were...and that in Christ Your Son Our Lord, and in the Holy Scriptures which the authority of Your Catholic Church acknowledges, You had established the way of man's salvation.[58]

Yet the explicit faith in Christianity was superficial insofar as it remained outside of the inner movements of his soul, movements which implicated the self at this deep and truest level in a very conceited metaphysics. If in conversion one comes to <u>truly</u> face God for the first time, the even more profound change which allows the self to face God, as we begin to see in the above passage, is that the self comes to <u>truly</u> face <u>itself</u> in God's light: its "iniquity" and iniquity's implications. It is a fundamental change in the self's being that transforms the quality which God has for the self and the self's relation to God.

There is probably no way for a modern human being to feel the trauma of this conversion experience, for deep self-reflection is one of the defining characteristics of our age, albeit a deep self-reflection that is not explicitly Christian and is inscribed in a very different constellation of power - part of a very

different epistemic terrain. (This theme is explored more thoroughly in chapters that follow.) For Augustine, becoming a confessing-self is the most traumatic experience of his life. At the age of thirty-one Augustine's existence undergoes a transformation which may properly be conceived of as one of the most profound transformations of the self in Western history. This is not to say that Augustine's conversion is a watershed event which marks the birth of the confessing-self. Augustine was by no means the first confessor. Yet his own life (as is the case with many lives of Christians in late antiquity) is divided by this critical disjuncture: on one side Augustine dwells as a non-confessing being - a type of being he would later despise; and on the other he is a confessing-self - a self which earlier was incomprehensible to him. (One of the things that makes Augustine's thinking so interesting is that though he writes as a confessing-self, he writes as one who has dwelled within two radically different epistemes.) That such a transformation was understood as the beginning of a radically new life should not surprise us. That any continuity remained at all is astounding.

"The day was come when I stood naked in my own sight and my conscience accused me."[59] In the passage quoted at length above, Augustine declares repeatedly in astonishment, the experience of becoming a deeply

self-reflective being. These are the redundant cries of one who confronts - in this case becomes - the unbelievable. At first Augustine felt horrified and trapped, but finally there was "no way to flee" from confession. Augustine has become a confessing-self.

Being-as-Confession: "What Am I?"

Face to face with himself, Augustine asks, "What then am I, O my God? What nature am I?"[60] Augustine finds no simple answer to this question and he continues to ask it in various ways throughout his life. However, at one point - a moment of remarkable insight - Augustine discovers an answer that refers back to the question itself. At the end of a wrenching inner debate over whether or not the church should resonate with beautiful melodies or bland monotonic psalms (to prevent ensnaring pleasures) as well as the question of how his own desires might be implicated in the answers he poses, Augustine writes: "I have become a question to myself."[61] Augustine will ask the question "What am I?" endlessly, but each time he asks, the question will further illustrate the truth of this assertion. Augustine *is*, as a question to himself.

However, this self-understanding gives rise to another question: *Why* does Augustine affirm being a

confessing-self? Why is Augustine a question to himself? Given that Augustine is so thoroughly a confessing-self, always seeking a reason or motive behind each thought and action, it is not surprising that he addresses this question. Nor is it surprising that this question leads him to explore other dimensions of the question "What am I?" For Augustine, the questions "what" and "why" endlessly refer to one another.

Hence, in trying to understand Augustine as a confessor we will have to keep these questions in close proximity to each other. In addition, we should preface our encounter with a brief reminder of the fact that Augustine poses the question "What am I?" (and the related question "Why?") in a way that is fundamentally different from the way it was posed by non-confessing-selves. With Augustine, the question, which had previously been predominately ontological, becomes inextricably connected with a depth psychology of the soul. Unlike Plato, Augustine's attempt to answer this question will be full of impassioned accounts of the soul's secret desires and hidden thoughts. Yet the ontological dimension of self-reflection remains as strong in the confessing-self's questioning. To truly engage in this hermeneutics of the self is to endlessly question everything that one discovers about the self both in light of God's truths and in order to further reveal His truth.

To confess thoroughly is to constantly shift back and forth between psychological and ontological questions whenever they lead to one another. Hence Augustine's understanding of confession moves to and fro, partaking in both of these spheres.

To the question "What am I?" Augustine answers: "A life powerfully various and manifold and immeasurable."[62] The fallen human self which he discovers, is a multiplicity that is continually scattered in its involvement in the world. Be it food, sex, our desire for another's praise or beautiful sights and sounds, our relationships with other human beings and things in the world cut through us, divide us, push us out of focus and decenter us. In an unreflective state, we generally do not engage with other beings and things as whole human beings. Rather the external world speaks to and incites various parts of the body and soul, generally at the expense of the self as a whole. Prior to becoming a confessing-self, the self is in a constant state of being "scattered abroad in multiplicity."[63]

Augustine examines his will and finds that even - indeed, <u>especially</u> - his inner dimension is discordant. While most parts of the body obey the will on command, Augustine discovers that the will does not <u>obey itself</u>: "the body more readily obeyed the slightest wish of the mind...than the mind obeyed itself in carrying out its own

great will which could be achieved simply by willing."[64] The problem is that the will "does not totally will"[65] because it is divided within itself. Arguing against the Manichees that there is one extremely divided will within us rather than simply two natures, Augustine says, "if there be as many contrary natures in man as there are wills in conflict with one another, then there are not two natures in us but several."[66] (Augustine and the Manichees reject the latter conclusion.)

For Augustine, the self as divided is "monstrousness" and a "sickness of the soul."[67] As we have seen, this division wells out of the ontology of conceit in which all fallen human beings dwell prior to deep self-reflection. The divided self is bonded to the world in an immediacy of desire in which it enslaves, distracts and weakens itself, and endlessly attempts to dominate the world around it. But in addition to the evil which it fosters, this self cannot face God, the condition of its being, in such an uncontrolled, dispersed and impure state. The dispersed self is scattered in every direction except that which faces God. Unable to face God, the scattered self moves toward non-being and eternal death.

The goal of confession - a goal that can never be attained completely and with certainty on earth - is to unify and purify this multiplicity: to prepare the self to face God. According to Augustine, the <u>very act of</u>

confession, above and beyond the specific contents it addresses, is unifying.

The Unified Self: Confession as Re-Membering the Dismembered

To confess is to stand face to face with oneself - to endlessly search the depths of the self and proclaim the truths that one discerns. However, one faces oneself not fundamentally to examine what one is in the pure present moment of the confession. For Augustine, the present is infinitely minute and has no duration. The present is, as merciless "ceasing to be,"[68] an infinitely rapid "becoming past." Only God is pure presence, humans are condemned on earth to be "divided up in time...and the deepest places in [their souls] are torn by it."[69] The infinitely fast, infinitely fleeting present moment scatters the self in relentless uncontrolled change. Confession as a human act occurs in time, and hence if the self faces the self in the present moment, the self that the self reflects upon has always ceased to be instantaneously. However, in confession one does not face the self in the pure present, because to do so would be to further sacrifice the self to dispersion in the cutting edge of time. Instead, confession makes the self present by holding its past

(up to an instant before confession) more stable before itself.

The self confesses as a temporal being that has a history which it presents to itself in memory. Indeed, the self is this history. Its action in the lightening-fast present is dominated and "weighed down by customs."[70] The self is not an ephemeral wisp which exists solely in the present with "no duration," and hence it cannot know itself if it takes itself to be this sort of being. The self must know itself as a fundamentally temporal being, for although the self continually ceases to be in the present moment (and this is a crucial fact, but not the only truth about the self) because the present moment continually ceases to be, the self that was present does not cease to exist altogether. (It simply ceases to be in the infinitely fleeting present.) Rather, it becomes lodged in the self's past; a past which is not only capable of being presented frequently in memory, but further presents itself indirectly through its uncanny propensity to make the present through the inertia of one's past being, customs and habits. (Indeed, for Augustine, the extent to which the past makes the present "behind one's back" is inversely related to the extent to which it is presented in remembering.) Hence to face itself truly and stably, the confessing-self must remember itself.

Confession as a remembering of the self partially escapes the tyrannical scattering of the present and thus begins to unify the self by transferring its attention and the trajectory of its being to the stabler presence of the self's past in memory. In remembering, the self that was tossed and torn helplessly in the violent waves of the sea's surface, dives into the stillness of its depths where it can regain composure and control. By remembering, the self - as much as is possible in this life - escapes the cutting edge of time. In memory, the self can abide and hence become an object for its own continuous considered reflection. One way Augustine escaped self-reflection prior to conversion, was by dwelling in the fleeting presence of desire. When he had seen his iniquity, he "had deliberately looked the other way and let it go from [his] mind" - he did not remember it. When Augustine writes of being "turned back" upon himself, he speaks of the reflective trajectory of the gaze within, but inseparable from this is a "turning back" upon the self as an historical being. Turning back in the temporal sense is remembering; holding the past that one is present before oneself, so that one cannot flee from and hence avoid oneself.

That confession is to face, examine and understand oneself as a temporally extended being is not only indicated by Augustine's theoretical insights, but by

the biographical content of the Confessions as well, in which Augustine remembers himself beginning with his infancy and continuing through his ongoing struggles with pride. Augustine holds his whole life present before himself as a phenomenon for ceaseless overturning, inquiry and suspicion.

Augustine refers to confession repeatedly as an act of remembering. When asking God's help in confession he says, "Grant me...to retraverse now in memory the past ways of my error."[71] In proclaiming to confess for the love of God, Augustine writes that he is "passing again in the bitterness of remembrance over my most evil ways that Thou mayest thereby grow ever lovelier to me."[72] In proclaiming the integrity of his confession Augustine writes: "Behold my heart, O my God, look deep within it; see how I remember."[73]

As argued above, the self-remembering that occurs in confession begins to unify the self by present-ing the self in memory - a present that is less victimized by the ceasing to be of the present moment. Yet there is an additional sense in which remembering unifies the self that Augustine addresses in Book X of the Confessions. (The discussion of memory in Book X is exemplary of the way in which Augustine brings himself through confession to examine confession itself.)

Augustine begins the first section of Book X with the plea, "Let me know Thee."[74] This of course is simply a reiteration of the plea of the Confessions and more generally, the plea of Augustine's life. To know God, one must confess the truths of one's soul to Him and will to extirpate that which is evil in his light. Thus he writes: "He that does the truth comes to light. I wish to do it in confession."[75] Knowledge of God and self-knowledge are inextricably intertwined. Yet in his ceaseless questioning of both, he runs up against the problem of memory: for "how shall I find You if I am without memory of You?"[76] Similarly, with respect to the self, Augustine writes, "in my memory too I meet myself."[77] Indeed, everything the self knows lies there. If Augustine is to "do truth" thoroughly, he will have to - to as great an extent as is possible - examine the part of him that contains and recalls truths. Hence the examination of memory.

In Augustine's first attempt to grasp memory in Book X, he refers to it metaphorically as "the fields and vast palaces...where are stored...the innumerable images of material things brought to it by the senses... the thoughts we think"[78]...and "the affections of the mind."[79] Augustine is overawed by memory:

> Great is this power of memory,
> a thing, O my God, to be in awe
> of, a profound and immeasurable

> multiplicity.... In the innumerable fields and dens and caverns of my memory, innumerably full of innumerable kinds of things...in and through all these does my mind range, and I move swiftly from one to another and I penetrate them as deeply as I can but I find no end.[80]

For Augustine, memory is metaphorically conceived of as a spreading limitless room within[81] that is impressed by sensations, thoughts and emotions as they pass in the present.[82] While things are kept distinct and those entering by different senses are stored apart in their right categories,[83] for the most part things in memory are scattered and unarranged.[84] It seems that for Augustine the way in which things are contained in memory is primarily a result of the manner and order in which they were experienced. Hence their scatteredness corresponds to the scatteredness of the infinitely fast, infinitely fleeting present in which our experiences and we ourselves are scattered.

As brute storage alone, memory is of little use to Augustine, for it embodies the quality of dispersion that is so problematic for him. It is only in conjunction with its power of <u>thoughtful remembering</u> that memory's value is manifested. When one remembers things in memory, one "places within reach," "collects out of dispersion" and "draws together" things which were scattered in the immeasurable depths of memory.[85] Augustine makes explicit

the relation between "cogito" (I think) and "cogo" (I put together).[86] Thus, when one thinks about the self, one collects the self out of its dispersed form in the depths of memory and places it together within reach. Augustine is quick to add however, that "if I ceased to give thought to [things] for quite a short space of time, they would sink again and fall away into the more remote recesses of memory."[87] For the drawing together to be effective, it must be continuous.

Let us further explore this relationship between memory and the self. Is it simply that memory is a part of the self and the self is something that can be remembered? The relationship Augustine sees is much deeper than this, for indeed he identifies the self with memory: "this thing I am."[88] The self <u>is</u> the manifold and constantly expanding field of memory and the scattered sensations, thoughts and feelings therein. One does not simply <u>have</u> a past, a memory, thoughts and desires; for Augustine one <u>is</u> these things. Thus to confess - to remember - one's thoughts and desires is not simply to collect <u>them</u> out of dispersion, but to collect <u>the self</u> out of dispersion, to draw the self together. As memory, the self is both the locus in which its existence is "impressed" as scattered, and the possibility for purposively drawing together this scatteredness. It

is this latter possibility which Augustine seeks to realize in confession.

The task of collecting the self is an endless process for Augustine. New experiences continually scatter the self, parts of the self which are placed within reach "fall away" if they are ignored for a "short period of time," and the self is immeasurably deep and can "find no end" to these depths. If one is to avoid the uncontrolled quality of being scattered, the evil that may lurk in the scattered depths of the soul, and the even greater evil of being behind one's own back, one must collect oneself and face oneself continually: one must remember. Remembering as such is a focusing, healing, strengthening and disciplining activity in Augustine's view.

Humble Confession

Thus far we have discussed two ways in which remembering as such begins to unify the self. First by partially decreasing the scatteredness that is generated when attention is on the infinitely fleeting present; and second by collecting out of dispersion a self which is scattered. However, the substantive manner in which the self is remembered is also extremely important to Augustine, for it undermines the false ontology of conceit, fosters a new understanding of the

self and leads to a different type of self based on this understanding. Through his own confessions, Augustine shows that deep self-reflection leads to a very powerful comprehension of one's finitude, dependence and iniquity. The conceited self was only able to uphold an ontology in which it was the origin of being, by being "behind its own back." Facing itself in God's light, the self discovers a very different order of things.

In attempting to know and speak the truth about himself, Augustine immediately confronts his own finitude; he discovers that he is a life which he cannot entirely know. Rather than being the origin of truth that the conceited ontology believes itself to be, Augustine realizes that he cannot even grasp <u>himself</u> totally and with certainty. Augustine's forgotten infancy is accessible to him only indirectly through the accounts of others and through his observations of other infants.

These limits have a powerful impact upon Augustine:

> I am loth, indeed, to count it [his infancy] as part of the life I live in this world. For it is buried in the darkness of the forgotten as completely as the period earlier still that I spent in my mother's womb.[89]

Yet Augustine cannot simply discount his infancy any more than he can discount the forgotten depths of his soul which he discovers can never be rendered completely

intelligible. For Augustine is this hidden depth, this partially hidden life, which demands to be known for the truths it reveals and the evils it hides. Even his prenatal life haunts him: "I was conceived in iniquity and in sin my mother nourished me in the womb, then where, my God, where, O Lord, where or when was I, Your servant innocent?"[90]

The answer is nowhere and never. One stands accused in light of God's morality as one reflects this light deeper and deeper into one's soul. Through Christian self-reflection one discovers that instead of being the pure origin of the rules of morality that oneself and others should live by, the self is an actuality ridden with imperfection and iniquity. Augustine discovers that even his infancy is full of conceit and jealousy. His present as well is laden with "impure" desires.

Just as he is neither the origin of nor the complete possessor of truth and goodness, so too confession shows him to be a dependent being rather than self-originating. Recalling his infancy, he is in awe of his dependence on the miracle of his mother's nurturing. His account of his slow evolution towards conversion and fully embracing God is saturated with continual acknowledgement of the way in which the people and events around him allowed him to develop. Yet his understanding of dependence goes beyond a mere dependence upon people and things. For Augustine,

to think deeply about the being of oneself and that of the surrounding world is to recognize an abundance of harmony and beauty which signifies a greater being upon which all things depend. Of the things in the world Augustine says: "they cried out in a great voice: 'He made us.' My question was my gazing upon them and their answer was their beauty."[91] The final book of the City of God lists many of the miseries of human existence on earth, but it is also full of an appreciation of the world as overflowing with beauty and miracles. Not only the sky, the earth, the sea, food, health and the "soothing coolness of breezes," but "even the body, which is something we have in common with brute creation...even here what evidence we find of the goodness of God, of the providence of the mighty creator!"[92] For Augustine, to look deep within is to realize the overwhelming extent to which we depend upon miracles which originate not in ourselves, but elsewhere. Only having grasped "the truth that is within them" can people see that God is the condition of all beings.[93]

God of Self-Consciousness

This realization which emerges with self-reflection, feeds and shapes an intensifying dynamic of confession. In his state of dependence, Augustine realizes that we

must live in God's grace to be truly satisfied strong human beings. Indeed, to live in any sense that is not dying, we must live in His grace. However, in order to achieve God's grace, the self must face God. To turn away from God - His Truth, His Goodness - is to lose His light.[94] Augustine's insight that "no man loses Thee, unless he goes from Thee,"[95] provides him with a spring of hope which can and must be constantly returned to. Yet the hope harbors an anxiety which fuels relentless and continual deep self-reflection. For how can a self that is a torn scattered multiplicity face God? How can a self that is immeasurably deep and cannot grasp all that it is, know that it faces God? The answer to both questions is that it cannot.

The hope that wells out of the insight that "no man loses Thee, unless he goes from Thee," would die in the despair of uncertainty were it not continually reborn in confession. Through perpetual confession, the self must draw itself together, place itself within reach, so that it can face itself towards God and conform to His will in as complete and unified a manner as possible. It cannot allow dispersed parts of the self to "fall away" from God in pride and lust. It must probe its depths endlessly for evil thoughts and desires which might turn the self unwittingly away from the Being to which it owes its being.

Yet the creation of the confessing-self - this gigantic task of remembering - is not fundamentally a heroic feat of the self which must be accomplished in order to face God. For Augustine, God dwells too deeply within and is too thoroughly the condition of our being to be merely the goal or endpoint of the self's action. Rather, God is internal to the process of remembering. The Christian self's relationship to God is one where both the self and God make the self more self-conscious, for it is through confession that the self is slowly brought from the injustice of conceited ontology to the justice of God.

The act that initiates the self-God relationship is less the remembering, than the will to tell the truth about the self and do nothing to deceive God. When Augustine exclaims, "Woe is me! See I do not hide my wounds...,"[96] he is not proclaiming a complete and "successful" confession, for there is always a surplus of truths and evils that far exceeds those that can be discovered and disclosed. Rather he is expressing his desire to reveal the truth about himself - as it appears in God's light - to himself and God. It is the purity of this desire to show God everything that is all important. Thus Augustine asks God to "behold his heart" and see his will to confess.

When one wills to place himself before God, God becomes a partner in the development of the self's deep self-consciousness. "I entered into my own depths, with you as my guide; and I was able to do it because You were my helper."[97] Augustine's God is the God of self-consciousness. He makes the weak strong, not by bestowing upon them an abstract power, but by facilitating the transformation of the non-reflective self of the ontology of conceit into a confessing-self. It is in God's grace that "every weak man is made strong in that he is made conscious of his weakness."[98] When Augustine refers to God as "You in whom all that is scattered in me is brought into one,"[99] he is not writing of an external power that comes out of the sky and carefully makes the self a unity, as if God were using his hands to reassemble a shattered egg. God is within, and he unifies the self by succoring self-consciousness, by turning the self's trajectory inward in deep Christian remembering.

Compulsive Confession

Thus we begin to see what is at stake and what is possible for Augustine's confessing-self. For Augustine, the choice is between being a non-reflective self that dwells in a world that is falsely revealed through a conceited ontology - a self that is scattered in

an immediacy of desire in which it enslaves and is enslaved; or a reflective way of being which tends towards increasing unity, strength, justice and God. The choice is between being and non-being.

Out of Augustine's understanding of the self, the world and God, comes a deep and continuous self-examination that restlessly strives to collect, penetrate and bring under control all parts of the self. Having confessed about his life from his infancy to the period following his conversion, Augustine proceeds to relentlessly examine his present condition according to the truths of Christian morality. Largely freed from the grasp of sexual concupiscence (though not in his dreams) he moves towards an increasingly meticulous study of himself. Nothing escapes his gaze:

> As for the allurement of sweet scents, I am not much troubled: when they are absent I do not seek them; when they are present I do not refuse them; yet at any time I do not mind being without them. At least so I seem to myself; <u>perhaps I am deceived</u>. For that darkness is lamentable in which the possibilities in me are hidden from myself: so that my mind, questioning itself upon its own powers, feels that it cannot lightly trust its own report: because what is already in it does for the most part lie hidden.[100] (My emphasis.)

The "hermeneutics of suspicion" passes from one thing to the next. Augustine examines the "pleasures

of the ear," and discovers that while he is not held as persistently by them, he still "find[s] it hard to know what is their due place."[101] Augustine's description of the inner dilemma this problem leads him to is amazing. Wondering if he may desire church melodies in the wrong way:

> At times indeed it seems to me that I am paying them greater honour than is their due - when, for example I feel that by those holy words my mind is kindled more religiously and fervently to a flame of piety because I hear them sung than if they were not sung: and I observe that all the varying emotions of my spirit have modes proper to them in voice and song, whereby, by some secret affinity, they are made more alive. It is not good that the mind should be enervated by this bodily pleasure. But it often ensnares me, in that the bodily sense does not accompany the reason as following after it in proper order, but having been admitted to aid the reason strives to run before it and take the lead. In this matter I sin unawares, and then grow aware.
>
> Yet there are times when through too great a fear of this temptation, I err in the direction of over severity - even to the point sometimes of wishing that the melody of all the lovely airs...should be banished not only from my own ears, but from the churches as well.[102]

After more turmoil Augustine hesitantly and tentatively decides that church music is probably for the better. But the outcome is really unimportant. What

is important, and the reason I quoted the passage at such length, is the extent to which Augustine has problematized all corners of himself. The act of listening to church music is of relatively little importance compared to the problematic pleasures, desires and motives which may lurk beneath. The latter are buried deep; sometimes they are invisible. Always they are suspect. The slightest impurity threatens to scatter the self back into the madness of conceit, far from itself, far from God.

To view the above passages as stemming from "Augustine's hatred of worldly existence" is an error. It is impurity within the self that is at stake here for Augustine. In Augustine's view, beautiful colors, the sound of birds singing, delicious foods, etc., were blessings.[103] Indeed, despite a highly developed sense of the miseries which are a part of human existence, Augustine still views the world as "that miracle of miracles."[104] Yet the world was most importantly a polyphonic sign of the God who created it. When enjoyment of the world became an end in itself and obliterated the primacy of one's awareness of God, Augustine sought to eliminate or contain it. Yet this is a problem of the self, not of the world. The world could be loved, but it had to be loved "justly" with an eye towards the "intrinsic value of things."[105] Desires and pleasures that aided one's awareness of God as the condition of all

being were acceptable, but they were always dangerous for they harbored the potential to place the self unwittingly in God's place as the origin and ground of things.

Confessing-Self: Depth and Freedom

As the trajectory of the self is redirected from the world towards the inner depths of the self, the self becomes identified with the inner motives and desires which hide there. The self is not fundamentally its actions, but the motives buried below. It is the latter which must be surveyed, interrogated and controlled in a manner that is every bit as relentless as that in which the self of conceited ontology sought to dominate all that was "other." Indeed, for Augustine it is the persistent form of the latter, that necessitates that of the former.

Yet the development of the confessing-self should not be reduced to being understood simply as this persistent attempt to purify the self. To see it wholly in these terms is to obfuscate the more positive aims of the confessing-self which were at least as important to Augustine. For Augustine, self-consciousness was not of value merely because of what it could control or repress. Just as importantly, Augustine affirmed the birth of the confessing-self because it gave rise to a set of possibilities for being in the world that he

believed were never before possible. The confessing-self was not simply a new way of controlling an old self. Certainly it was this, and the old self could never be eradicated, but deep self-reflection gave rise to a new self as well. Deep self-consciousness was accompanied by two interrelated qualities which Augustine thought were almost entirely lacking in the late antique pagan self: depth and freedom. These two elements not only gave rise to new possibilities for the self, but perhaps more essentially, constituted "possibility" in a new manner - allowed it to be.

Since freedom wells out of depth in Augustine's thinking, let us explore the latter first. There are two senses in which depth is important for Augustine. In one sense depth is an attribute of all human beings, yet in another sense it is an achievement only of the confessing-self.

For Augustine, all people are deep beings in the sense (revealed in the above passages) that they become identified with the motives and desires which lurk below their actions. Human activity becomes a surface beneath which there is a largely invisible interior in which are born and lie the real truths of the self. These depths are for Augustine what is most real about the self, while the surface is often determined and shaped by realities

largely outside of the self. To know anybody - an impossible task to complete - is to know these depths.

Interestingly however, what accompanies Augustine's realization that we are all beings with a depth is a continuous critique of non-confessing-selves as one-dimensional flat beings. The self of conceited ontology dwells "outside" of itself in its compulsive relationship to the world. Its gaze, its activity and its concern is directed outward away from the self and toward things. The self is to a very large extent flat because its life is one of denying its depths. In its claim (either explicit or implicit in its way of being) to be absolute self-originating being the self must deny these depths, for the invisibility and ambiguity which depth discloses threatens the self's claim to omnipotence and certainty. Further, the evils that lurk beneath the surface threaten the self's claim to be worthy of being "its own rule." For Augustine, the conceited self denies the depth that it <u>is</u> and hence lives outside of this depth: its <u>way</u> of being is flat.

Living in the immediacy of desire, the self of conceited ontology is as shallow - has as little thickness - as the fleeting present which consumes it. Moreover, the world towards which it lusts is flattened as well; reduced to the single dimension of being an object-for-the-self. The multi-dimensional

polyphonic character which Augustine believes is intrinsic to beings is reduced to the characteristics that are revealed by the self's desire. The flat self's relation to the flat world is described by Augustine as the meeting of two surfaces, a meeting in which one is "pressed under" and unable to move.

It is only the disciplined inward turn of continual confession that allows the self to become a deep being in a way that is very different from that of the flat self. Only by perpetually observing and dwelling in one's depths can one become deep in a sense which is different but related to the sense in which all selves are deep. What is this relationship between the depth one becomes through turning inward and the depth which as human beings we all are?

As discussed above, the turn inward is for Augustine, essentially a remembering of the self. In remembering, the self recalls what is absent from the self's attention prior to remembering. It collects out of dispersion what was scattered in the depths of the self and places the "forgotten" within reach of the attentive gaze. It is precisely because all selves are largely deep interiors of thoughts, desires and feelings that are - for the most part - not present at any given time, that remembering can have any meaning. A self that was totally present to itself <u>would not have any need to</u> remember itself,

its consciousness at any instant would be totally identical with its being. But nor would it be able to remember itself; for it is the depth which lies below the surface of attention which makes memory as such possible. For Augustine, it is the non-present depth of selves - the partial absence of one's being to oneself - that establishes both the desirability of and the possibility of relating to oneself in self-remembering.

It is the distance, the difference within the self between its dark non-present depths and its luminous present attention - this ever shifting interstice - which provides the space for the remembering act of confession. It is the interval between the thought and the unthought which the confessing-self traverses, and in the process of traversing, it changes the boundaries of difference which is ineliminable. Every depth that is exposed in remembering becomes the surface of another depth. "Know the self! Know thyself!" yearns the confessing-self as it attempts to pass out of the interstice and render its dark depths in God's light. Yet no matter how much it illuminates, it remains on the edge of a beaconing darkness.

In another work Augustine states:

> Gaze at the sky, the earth, the sea, and all the things which shine in them or above them, or creep or fly or swim beneath them. They have forms because they have rhythm;

> take this away and they will no longer be.[106]

The rhythm of the confessing-self is the constant unfolding of its movement in the region between its light and its darkness; a movement which can never be completed, but which must never be discontinued lest the self lose its rhythm and "fall back into nothingness."

Again, if "the deep" harbors the evil and multifariousness which must be controlled, so too it harbors the space that makes reflection, control and a new type of self possible. The depth of selves, the interstice between the present and non-present provides the space in which the self can turn inward and initiate the rhythm which constitutes the confessing-self's deep way of being. In eternity, "all is present."[107] Hence, there is no need for remembering. Indeed remembering, in that it presumes a region of absence, is impossible. Remembering indicates a change in the self's state of being. Yet when being is totally and completely present to itself, there can be no change. As complete presence, there is nothing to make present. Of God Augustine states, "Thou art always the self-same."[108] God's conception of Himself (and His creation) is identical with His being. For God, being, though it is limitless, has no surplus. It is equivalent with and completely present in His Word, and His Word is eternal. Where there is identity there can be no depth,

for depth signifies the absence of presence and thus signifies difference. Depth is what is left over, what is not present in attention, the non-identical. God is infinitely complex, but as total visible presence He is not deep (for Himself).

Augustine is constantly confronted with the fact that he "cannot totally grasp all that [he] is."[109] As we have seen, this depth is of endless concern to him due to the fallen state in which he finds humanity, and it also provides the possibility for remembering. Remembering is for Augustine, a transformative activity in the sense that it creates a "collected," more controlled, more Christian self. Yet there are at least two other senses in which memory is transformative which are equally important to Augustine.

First, remembering transforms the self (in a way that is perhaps obvious, but still needs to be stated) in that by taking up remembering as its primary endeavor in light of which it guides all of its other activity, the confessing-self is transformed from being the iniquitous thoughts and desires that guided it beforehand and increasingly becomes a yearning for God's truth. Through continually shedding light upon its desires, the self comes to be governed by another desire.

Second, in remembering, the self makes itself present in such a way that it is not purely identical with the

parts of the self which it remembers. When the self lives in the immediacy of desire, desires govern the self's perceptions and actions, and render critical discernment of the desire itself impossible. Desire becomes identical with the self in that it has complete sway over the self. Remembering in contrast allows the self to make dark elements of itself present, while simultaneously establishing a distance between itself and those parts of itself which it discovers. Rather than being disguised in their own false light, in confession, evil desires are critically illuminated in God's light. For Augustine, the self makes itself present in confession in such a way that as it identifies the evil thought, desire or emotion as a part of itself, it simultaneously creates a germ cell of non-identity between itself and that which is illuminated. The light of the will to God's truth vitiates the evil that is presented and diminishes the latter's power to hold sway over the self. The non-identity does not occur through a denial of the fact that the desire is a part of the self, but through a particular affirmation of this fact. When the desire holds sway, it is that which makes other things present (or absent) to the self, but when the desire is placed before the self in remembering, at least for that moment, it is not hegemonic. It is presented as an object by another desire (will to God's

truth). It is precisely this particular objectification of desire which establishes a distance between the desire and the self, and allows the self the possibility of choosing to separate itself from the desire. The light of the will to truth places desire within reach, but as placed, the desires can be dis-placed from the self. In short, to know oneself, one must make present parts of the inexhaustible depths that one is, and it is this presenting which allows the self to become other than these identified depths.

It is here that we begin to see the connection between confession and freedom in Augustine. It is only through remembering - presenting parts of itself to itself - that there is any hope for freedom in Augustine's view, for it is only in remembering the self that the self can become an object of conscious choice for itself. In absence of truthful remembering we are not free beings, but beings dominated by habits and lusts.

All people have free will in Augustine's thought, yet most people do not will freely. True living freedom is an arduous task which can only be achieved to the extent that the self remembers deeply, truthfully and perpetually. Only the confessing-self, the self that dwells in the deep, can be free, for only this self is sufficiently unified and self-conscious to carry out the work of freedom. Yet even the confessing-self is

in constant danger of forgetting and slipping back into slavery.

Humans are born with the capacity for freedom, but their first choices enslave them to habits and lusts which henceforth tend to overshadow and conceal their freedom. It is only when the self is held face to face with itself in conversion, that it begins to be released from the tyranny of habit. As the birth of deep self-consciousness, the conversion is the point at which the self begins a new mode of being, the essence of which is precisely the ability to free oneself from the causality of unconscious habit and begin. Reading Augustine's account of his conversion, one is struck by the sense of sudden freedom that seems to overwhelm him. "Thou hast broken my bonds."[110] Of his life prior to conversion he asks: "But where in all that long time was my free will, and from what deep sunken hiding-place was it suddenly summoned forth in the moment in which I bowed my neck to Your easy yoke..."[111] (my emphasis). Yet if this transformation brings a sudden freedom from many of the past lusts that haunted him, his exuberance is soon tempered (as I have illustrated in the account of his "present state" above) with the realization that though his new life in communion with God delivers him from the worst cares that gnawed,[112] it by no means delivers him to a life of pure and easy truth and freedom. Far from

it. As Augustine looks inward, the initial flash of God's light (in a region Augustine claims to have previously been fleeing) helps him truly see and transcend the most prominent lusts of his past. Yet at the edge of this radiance is a deep, dark, hidden region which demands further interrogation and illumination. God's freeing light is infinite, but only for those who will join Him in diligently extending his truths into the depths of their souls. God offers freedom, but it is a freedom marked by a strong awareness of its own present finitude and a responsibility for expanding its boundaries through ceaseless confession. The sudden freedom of conversion calls forth an inner struggle for freedom that is laborious, uncertain, never finished. The confessing-self is free precisely because it can partially release itself from its identity with unconscious habits and desires - from the past that it is - through reflection and begin to be otherwise. Released from this causality, the will is its own beginning.[113]

As a confessing-self, the self actualizes the freedom it is born with. All selves are free from being totally passive objects of the world's chain of causes, but few are free of the causal dynamics within themselves, and they have done so only through relentless remembering. Freedom for Augustine does not well lightly, easily, or perhaps even wildly, out of the beings we are. It is not

the effortless ability to put down our pencil and rise out of our chair at an unpredictable moment. True freedom is the most arduous task humans can accomplish. Moreover, the gay thoughts of one who comfortably dwells in the knowledge that one is "free" are the most deceptive thoughts of all, for habit and desire enslave the self under the guise of freedom. Freedom demands a new self, a deeply reflective self. The ability to begin demands the ability to remember. Freedom demands responsibility not only because through it we become the initiators of events with important consequences, more primordially for Augustine, freedom demands responsibility because it is only through responsibility (as continual will to truth about the self) that freedom is released into being. It is the depth of human being that provides the possibility of the confessing-self, and it is the confessing-self that frees freedom.

There are other important relationships between depth and freedom for Augustine as well. The self of the ontology of conceit is locked into a dependence upon the opinions of others to affirm its being. Its action in the world is bound in the incessant attempt through force and persuasion to sway others to affirm the self's absoluteness. In contrast, the turn inward of the confessing-self is a turn away from this external dependence on the "mob" and towards a dependence upon

the Truth that dwells within when the self faces God. Conscience with respect to Truth, Goodness and Being free the self from the tyranny of "public opinion":

> [W]e detect weakness in a mind that cannot bear...the stupid opinion of the mob; we rightly ascribe greatness to a spirit that has the strength to... despise the judgment of men - and in particular the judgment of the mob, which is so often clouded in the darkness of error - in comparison with the pure light of a good conscience.[114]

As the self turns inward it dissolves the compulsive flat relationships it had with the world when it dwelled in the immediacy of desire. The world can no longer press the deep-self under in the way that it did the flat self. The depth of the self is infinite; the more the world presses, the deeper the self dwells.

However, the quality of the <u>world</u> changes for the confessing-self as well, for as the self dwells deeply, it releases the world from the one-dimensional form in which it was imprisoned by the self of ontological conceit. Freed from being an object-for-the-self, the world becomes a multi-dimensional reality with a depth. The world is always a <u>surface which signifies</u> the "transcendental signified" God. Far from being flat and transparent, things in the world are ambiguous and offer multiple truths to those who encounter them. The

invisible depth which is designated below the surface of the sign calls forth an endless hermeneutics. Indeed, the "obscurities" and "ambiguities" which well out of the depth of some things "are provided by God to conquer pride by work...."[115]

Confessio Ergo Sum

Gareth Matthews has made some interesting observations on the important differences between Augustine's Si Fallor, Sum (If I am mistaken, I am) and Descartes' Cogito Ergo Sum.[116] And certainly Augustine's confessing-self does not occupy the position of the subiectum in the sense that Heidegger understands Descartes' notion of man.[117] Nevertheless, perhaps there is a profound way in which Augustine is distinctly modern. Perhaps it is not the cogito, but Confessio Ergo Sum which Augustine shares with modernity. We will have to wait until the following chapter to decide with respect to modernity, but for Augustine, confession is clearly the condition for human being. God of course is the ultimate Being of beings for Augustine, but we cannot face God and hence partake in his Being unless we confess continually. As we have seen, the vanity which leads one away from confession, at the same time leads toward "nothingness."

As the above discussion reveals, confession not only allows us <u>to be</u> in terms of our direct relation to God, but is the condition for our living lives which avoid the compulsive domination over the world around us which results from ontological conceit. Confession is the possibility for realizing all that is good in humanity and purifying the self of the dangerous "pride" that we are always prone to. It carries and proliferates God's truth deep within us - a truth which for Augustine is identical with being.

However, strangely located in a work that affirms confession as a way of being, one discovers the following:

> ...God, hear me and look upon me and see me and pity me and heal me, thou in whose eyes I have become a question to myself: and that is my infirmity.[118]

Be it a moment of brilliance, or a simple recognition of the obvious, in this concise statement Augustine appears - if only for an instant - to peer into the heart of the confessing-self and see a problem. In the depths of his soul, Augustine comes face to face with the "infirmity" that results when the will to truth confronts the ambiguous nature of a self that is largely and in-eliminably invisible to itself (on earth). Augustine must know himself, but he cannot. He can only be "a question to himself." Not a question which he can affirm

as a mystery, but a question that is an infirmity - a question he must try to eliminate. This deep question he is, this question that is the source of his strength and hope, is at the same time a problem for Augustine. Yet neither the questions nor the problem can be put to rest since each question only leads to more questions. The Christian conception of the "disease of curiosity" limits in important ways the nature of the self's interrogation of the world around it. But with respect to itself, the questioning-self is driven beyond all limits. For an instant Augustine seems to understand the confessing-self to be essentially problematic. What was to lead to health appears to be the cause of infirmity.

However the infirmity does not pose a fundamental challenge to the confessing self for Augustine. Indeed it appears that further confession is the only solution to the infirmity. A little later in the text Augustine repeats: "Again, let me examine my self more closely."[119] The confessing-self moves towards the God who will "heal." "I beseech You, O my God, show me to myself that I may confess...."[120] As long as Augustine's God exists, the confessing self remains impervious to any fundamental and sustained problematization.

Prelude: Augustine and Modernity

Over fifteen hundred years separate us from Augustine and the world to which his writing belongs and refers. Moreover, an equally awesome chasm lies between modernity and Augustine: for many, Augustine's God is dead or at least missing in action. The strong steady Light that illuminated Augustine's perception and thought - the sun's Sun - has faded and become at most, the dim struggling light of a distant star.

Augustine's affirmation of the confessing-self is inextricable from his faith in a God that is the supreme creator of all things and dwells within. God is the telos of confession; not only because through confession we may eventually "cleave" to God in Heaven, but equally because God as perfect Being is the qualities that the confessing-self strives toward (recognizing that God and not the self is the source of being). God's transparence to Himself, His pure presence, His unity and His truth and goodness are all qualities which the confession intrinsically leads toward. Though they are unattainable during one's existence on earth, they <u>are</u> Being and to the extent that the self simply accepts opacity, absence, discord, "evil" and "error" within itself, it tends toward non-being. The values of confession and the qualities that are intertwined with it - that is, the values which constitute the self's relation to itself -

are given in Augustine's faith in God and his understanding of humans as God's creation.

Of course, it is not simply faith which leads Augustine to embrace the confessing-self. His writing offers us many interesting insights and arguments concerning the problems that result from ontological conceit and non-reflective being as well as the virtues that are associated with confession. Yet many of these understandings and all of the prescriptions Augustine draws are grounded in his understanding of God and the way He intended humans to be. The arguments that Augustine constructs, through which confession comes to be seen as the only possibility for being are, to borrow Jaspers' words, "guided by a faith that has become one with reason."[121]

But what is left of Augustine's arguments for the confessing-self in an age where Augustine's faith is rapidly becoming less tenable? What is confession in the modern age? What can confession be in the modern age? What possibilities for being open up if the notions of transparency, control, unity and presence - God's qualities - cease to be absolute ideals which hold complete sway over our being? Are we really "deep" selves or is this merely an attribute that is posited and then colonized by Christianity? Does the death of God allow us to transform "depth" and reveal new

understandings of being, or does it entail a complete renunciation of depth? What possibilities for a greater affirmation of "difference" open up in Christianity's twilight? These are some of the questions which must haunt the following chapters.

And these questions are important. Confession did not die with Augustine, but has become one of the defining features of our age. Self-examination and the examination of selves are, Foucault maintains, continually constituted by a constellation of discourses, disciplines and institutions which probe deeper and deeper into the self in order to control it. Indeed, modern self-examination is central to a form of power which controls and normalizes populations on a micro-level never before imaginable. God is dead, but the Christian will to truth is not. Far from confession being a mode of being which challenges the hegemonic forms of power as Augustine believed it was in late antiquity, Foucault argues that confession is at the core of the modern configuration of power-knowledge.

Modern confessing-selves confess in a world where God is dead (or at least very different and much weaker) and the form of power is drastically different from that which existed at the birth of confession. If in many important ways confession remains confession, it is also true that there are important differences between confession today

and Augustine's conception of it. A careful study of Foucault's work illuminates both the similarities and some of the differences.

Exactly what dimensions of Augustine's analysis are salvageable and what might be worth saving are questions we must hold open until we have carefully confronted Foucault's critique of the confessing-self and its place within the operations of modern normalizing power.

Perhaps what is needed most in pursuing Foucault's call for the creation and promotion of new forms of subjectivity which free us from modern power structures,[122] is Augustine's "pious seeker." "For to be pious," in Peter Brown's words, "meant refusing to solve the problem simply by removing one of the poles of tension."[123]

It is a bit ironic that with the death of Augustine's God, we must become more pious (in the above sense) than Augustine. For all the tensions which God held open for Augustine are small when compared to those which emerge when our idols prove hollow. We discover that Augustine's confessing-self is a dream and a nightmare. Augustine had but the briefest glimpse of the latter. In this chapter we have illuminated the dream. In the following chapter we will explore Foucault's critique of the will to truth of and about selves in modernity, and his opposition to

the ontological assumption about human beings and the world which he believes are tightly intertwined with all affirmation of the confessing-self. His critique is very powerful, but tensions remain which we must inhabit in following chapters.

CHAPTER III

FOUCAULT

Foucault's Critique of Modernity

Introduction

> The man described for us, whom we are invited to free, is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself. A "soul" inhabits him and brings him to existence which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body. The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body.[1]

Foucault rejects the soul - this "prison" - as well as the belief that it should be the ground and target for our explorations of truth and freedom. To the extent that it is possible he asks "What is man?" at the boundaries of man's being; at the battered and embattled surfaces where man confronts his Others. For Foucault argues that it is the interrogation of man's interiors, the questioning of depths below surfaces of carefully bound and circumscribed realities which so characterizes the operation of power in modernity that he seeks to thwart. Depth, the dimension in which Augustine sought truth, freedom and increasingly unified subjectivity, is for Foucault the dimension in which human beings are identified, interrogated,

constituted and rarified. Depth is the dimension of subjugation. The constellation of given, fixed, absolute truths, and a freedom that hinges on the progressive discovery of these truths, is the promise that lurks in the depths and draws people deeper and deeper into subjugating examinations of themselves and others - deeper into the prison and its reign of continuous pure light. The crystalline motionless transparency of Augustinian heaven where even our internal organs would be visible, is for Foucault a nightmare towards which modernity presses.

In this chapter I explore Foucault's critique of modernity on two levels. First, I briefly develop the context in which the objectification and subjectification of selves occurs in modernity, and highlight some of the disciplines, discourses and institutions which help make it possible. My purpose here is not to summarize Foucault's project as a whole, but rather to very selectively illuminate dimensions of this project which serve as indispensable groundwork for understanding and situating my reading of Foucault in the remainder of this chapter and the chapters which follow. (It is not my project to make it wholly sufficient for those who have no familiarity with his work.) In particular, I have focused on the way in which the interplay of depth (production of the deep self), objectifying and subjectifying illumination and the will to truth have been central to the

constitution and control of groups and individuals in modernity.

Second, I have attempted to elucidate Foucault's meta-theoretical understanding of this phenomena as it is elaborated in The Order of Things. While at this level we lose much of the texture found in the genealogical Foucault, we gain a level of generality which offers us insights into the central understandings of modernity which govern his work; insights which are quite valuable and less visible in his micro-analyses.

Since at this point I am interested in elucidating my understanding of Foucault's arguments, saving criticism for later, I sometimes simply write from Foucault's perspective in order to prevent overburdening the text with "Foucault argues," "In Foucault's view," etc. This is not necessarily to suggest my affirmation of his arguments. My position is made most explicit in the concluding chapter where I discuss the three theorists in light of each other.

The Context

In order to situate the discussion which follows, let us briefly place Foucault's discussion of the production of deep subjectivity in the broader historical context as Foucault sees it. Foucault rejects all theories of

economic determinism on both historical and theoretical grounds. Yet while he denies that "in the last instance" economic systems are the ultimate subjects of history, he readily affirms - and his works illustrate this affirmation - that the production of subjects "cannot be studied outside their relation to the mechanisms of exploitation and domination."[2] Rather, subjectification and economic exploitation coexist in "complex and circular relations."[3] Since these relations play an important role in some of Foucault's texts, it is worthwhile to summarize his understanding of them.

Foucault maintains that the proliferation of techniques of subjectification was largely linked to the problems and demands that were associated with the rise of capitalism. As wealth was accumulated in increasing quantities in workshops, warehouses and ports, a more systematic and continuous form of policing and punishment of theft was necessary to replace the old system with its dangerous spectacles and tolerated illegalities. It became necessary to make the power to punish "more regular, more effective, more constant and more detailed in its effects; in short [to] increase its effects while diminishing its...costs."[4] Simultaneously, the increasing emphasis on productivity and growth required that the bodies of the workers be rendered disciplined and docile to maximize their utility and to

integrate them into relatively rigid mechanized processes. It became necessary to "increase the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminish the same forces (in political terms of obedience)."[5] Furthermore, the increasing concentration and utilization of larger populations required a means of constituting and controlling large groups of people in a manner that - as we shall see - bears interesting resemblances to the constitution of selves. Populations too had to be ordered in a way that optimized their utility and mastered the potentially resistant powers of the newly assembled mass.

"Bio-power" refers to the sum of these disciplines, institutions, techniques, and discourses that develop to track, survey, constitute, regulate and most importantly make more productive both individual bodies and populations. In Foucault's view, these mechanisms do not all come into being simply to meet the demands of a developing global economic system. Rather they are heterogeneous in origin, developed to meet the requirements of local situations, and are henceforth "invested and annexed by more global phenomena."[6] The relative causality of various historical factors varies widely and is for Foucault, a question which must be investigated historically case by case. What is certain is that the body can only be utilized if it is at once productive and subjected. Hence the micro-powers that

constitute subjects are indispensable to political economies endlessly engaged in enhancing productivity. While the original context of the development of disciplinary power is the capitalist system, this form of power has been widely deployed in other societies as well (e.g., socialist and fascist).

Objectification and Subjectification

In this discussion of subjectifying practices I will focus first upon the ways in which persons are objectified as soul bearing subjects, and then discuss Foucault's understanding of the manner in which individuals constitute themselves as deep subjects in the modern context.

The growing emphasis placed on achieving maximum utilization and control of life was accompanied by the development of what Foucault has characterized as "the art of light and the visible."[7] During the classical age, military camps, workshops, schools, hospitals, asylums, housing projects, etc., began to be constructed and organized with greater attention to the principle of increasing the visibility of those contained within. Gaps, aisles, openings, walls, the position of tables and beds - were designed to optimize surveyability. Groups were divided, organized and hierarchized to facilitate

inspection, and new groups were formed solely for this purpose. In addition to the perfusion of this "general gaze" throughout a myriad of institutions, Foucault argues that the "threshold of visibility" within the gaze was markedly lowered.

> For a long time ordinary individuality - the everyday individuality of everybody - remained below the threshold of description. The disciplinary methods lowered the threshold of describable individuality and made of this description a means of control and a method of domination.[8]

In schools, factories and armies careful attention was given to gestures, punctuality, attitudes and subtle variations in behavior that had previously gone unnoticed. Regions of the visible were divided and divided again with an ever intensified focus on detail.

One of the mechanisms that rendered people increasingly visible was the examination, which became widespread in schools, psychiatric practices and hiring processes. The examination allowed for a minutely specified objectification and tracking of individual characteristics, and simultaneously facilitated the measuring and grading of individual differences. Through the proliferation of the examination persons became objects of a meticulous and relentless will to truth. "Micro-penalties" were introduced at various

points to influence behavior according to the normalizing judgments that were intrinsic to the exam's operation.

The function of the normalizing gaze and the penalties that accompany it is to constitute certain actions, attitudes and abilities and to exclude others. Yet it is a serious oversimplification to understand the exercise of this power solely in terms of an enhancement of homogeneity. Without a doubt the norm functions to narrow the range of acceptable heterogeneity in a radical fashion. Behaviors, thoughts and emotions that fall outside a narrow range are identified as perverse abnormalities and excluded. Yet within an accepted range, the gaze also identifies, orders and indeed helps constitute differences. Foucault summarizes:

> In a sense the power of normalization imposes homogeneity, but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another.[9]

Somewhat paradoxically, at the same time that people are abstracted as commodified labor, made exchangeable in highly routinized labor processes and become formally equal members of political systems, "the individual is carefully fabricated."[10] Within the limits of the "tolerated," disciplinary power establishes careful hierarchies, and "separations" between those at the

same rank. The gaze penetrates bodies not only to exclude differences that do not meet institutional requirements, but in addition to constitute a useful system of differences: "the continuous individualizing pyramid."[11] It attaches itself to individuals by seizing their peculiarities as deviations from detailed norms. The gaze manifests a relentless will to "truth" (from which the exercise of power is inextricable) which seeks to transform the atoms of bodies into objects of knowledge to be ordered, altered, fixed or excluded.

It is obvious that light and vision are neither neutral elements nor innocuous realities in Foucault's work. Rather they are among the most central characters - both literally and metaphorically - in his understanding of the functioning of power in modernity. One of the cardinal features of disciplinary power is the frequency and extent to which it is based on a "mechanism that coerces by means of observation."[12] Illumination and observation (accompanied by penalties and rewards) ensure the production of those behaviors which are desired and excludes those that are not. It is no wonder then that Foucault compares these modes of observation with "the telescope, the lens and the light beam."[13] Just as the latter were central in the development of knowledges that facilitated ordering and utilizing the physical world, so too the "observatories" of human beings made it possible

to constitute humans as objects of knowledge - things to be used.

The architectural scheme which most embodied the principles of light and vision was Bentham's plan for the "Panopticon." Bentham's structure was a ring of completely illuminated cells in the center of which was a watchtower that was designed to allow the guard to observe the prisoners, without them being able to see him. This not only allowed for continuous observation, but more importantly, the structure gave the prisoner <u>the sense of</u> being under continuous observation even though he could not verify this suspicion. This situation - the ever-present possibility of the invisible gaze - compelled the individual continually to watch over his own behavior. The Panopticon manifests "a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself."[14]

And here we arrive at the heart of disciplinary power: the constitution of subjects that relentlessly subject themselves to self-observation. The aim of the panoptic gaze is not simply to trap and control subjects that would otherwise resist, but ultimately to constitute subjects that will generate their own gazes - gazes that will envelop them with a continuity and thoroughness that the gaze of another could never sustain. The reign of

pure light, the proliferating will to observation, control and productivity demands finally that the objects under light become relays and sources of light. Everything must shine, there must be no shadows. The Panopticon was to be autocatylitic: "the perfection of this power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary: ...in short, the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers."[15] Hence the creation of an ideal economic situation: maximized control and benefits at a minimal cost.

Yet what is the nature of this disciplinary panoptic gaze and its internalized counterpart? Do they merely judge surfaces, actions, immediately visible behaviors? Certainly these are observed and judged, but conjointly one witnesses a much more profound observation taking place. Foucault argues that with the emergence of disciplinary power it is no longer simply the crime, visible deviation or error that is judged, but the passions, potentials, drives, instincts, desires beneath the visible as well: "these shadows lurking behind the case itself"[16] (my emphasis). Perhaps this is most obvious in our courts, prisons and mental institutions, yet it is equally at work in "tracking" children through schools, and hiring and promotion processes where people are often subjected to interviews and exams aimed not simply at discerning relevant capabilities, but the

inner nature character "aptitude" of the self as well. The disciplinary gaze judges with a remarkable degree of depth: it examines, deciphers, grades, draws subtle correlations, all in an effort to make people more visible in more ways, to discover and constitute truths about them in an effort to maximize utility and control. It is this gaze that we internalize and perpetuate. This gaze is not to be equated with the confessing gaze discussed below, but it is important to note the extent to which at times even this disciplinary gaze has a remarkably subterranean quality to it.

Of course, as we look out our windows or walk through the streets we discover very few round transparent buildings with cornerstones dedicated to Bentham - even if there are many prisons modeled to varying degrees on this architectural form. Yet Foucault's discussions of the Panopticon are not primarily an attempt to persuade us of the pervasiveness of its literal reality. Rather Foucault's writing traces the lines of light, the walls, the angles, shapes, patterns and the intended effects of this structure as he finds it in Bentham's text. It captures his attention as an "ideal form"[17] of a mechanism of power which has been extremely important during the last two centuries. The themes articulated in this form have been embodied in a variety of ways, not all of which have been architectural (e.g., the exam), and we can all

think of numerous panoptic devices in our everyday life, from one way mirrors, visible and invisible cameras in banks and stores, intercom systems in schools that allow the principal to listen into classrooms, to urine analysis.

One should not read Foucault to be contending that people located within panoptic institutions are simply pacified, constituted and rendered transparent to the gaze of power. These latter are the objectives of a certain strategy of power, and indeed they do inscribe their effects into the very being of people; yet those objectified by power are not simply products of their objectification, and strategies of power are met with counter-strategies. (More is said on this in chapter four.) With this caveat however, it remains the case that the deployment of vision and light - the principles of the Panopticon - have been central in Foucault's analyses of power and his understanding of the types of selves we have become today.

The correlate of these principles and the penalties that accompany their operation is the soul, as both the effect of this power and that which reproduces it at the level of the self. Just as the body of the king was duplicated and became the unchanging atemporal body that maintained the kingdom in the Middle Ages, Foucault argues that the bodies of those housed in the institutions of

disciplinary society give rise to their duplicates as well, in the form of the modern soul. Far from being a semi-secularized vestige of Christianity or simply an ideological fiction, the soul is a real product of modernity. It is that which is constituted by disciplinary power in schools, the workplace, prisons and in psychiatric practices. The soul is the "reality reference" of this power: that which is educated, trained, punished, normalized, identified; that which is codified and inhabits the body in which it is produced. But perhaps even more importantly the soul is that which surveys and governs man from within, in the name of freedom. The soul is the profound subjection of humans, for it buries the effects of power deep under the flesh of their being. The soul is the panopticon which each self harbors within itself - in a space which itself is a product of the power that constitutes it.

It is within this context of the production of the modern soul that we can best situate Foucault's discussion of the deep self-examining self in Volume One of The History of Sexuality, for the latter is an additional strategy of subjugation which, though different in important ways, is nevertheless quite consonant with - and often overlaps and is intertwined with - the deployment of the disciplinary gaze. To avoid confusion before pursuing a more extensive analysis of the modern

confessing-self I wish briefly to examine the similarities and discrepancies between this deep-self and the above discussion of the disciplinary self.

With respect to similarities, perhaps most important is the fact that both work to generate a self that is related to itself through a colonized, codified and continuous self-reflection; a self-reflection which tends to normalize as it observes, both by impregnating the self with self-definitions constituted by hegemonic discourses and practices and by engendering certain "desirable" characteristics while reducing those that are "undesirable" or "other." Furthermore, the conception of the self as deep-harboring hidden truths and secret circuitous causalities - which is tightly bound up with the confessional practices also conveniently serves to multiply the disciplinary holds over the self. It is these similarities which are so conducive to the overlapping deployment of conceptions and practices of the deep-self and disciplinary technologies. We see this overlap in modern treatments of madness as evidenced by the nineteenth century "moral methods" which operated through "that psychological inwardness where modern man seeks both his depth and his truth."[18] With the birth of the asylum guilt was organized to produce deeper more detailed self-consciousness, responsibility and unity. Similarly, as we noted above, Foucault argues that our

juridical practices have moved towards an examination of the desires, drives and deep personal tendencies beneath the relevant acts.[19] This is not immediately deep self-reflection, but it is reflection on the depths of selves, a reflection which, when continuous enough, begins to be generated within selves. If sexuality plays a central role in the constitution of modern forms of deep self-reflection, it also plays a role in proliferating disciplinary arrangements: the segregation of nineteenth century working class bedrooms by age and sex, the surveillance of parents over children.

Both disciplinary power and the confession of the deep self are characterized by an obsession with minutiae. But here however we arrive at a central difference between the two as well. For what drives the confessing-self in endless circles of self-reflection is the attempt to discern the meaning and deep truths buried within and beneath the details of existence. "For the disciplined man...[however] no detail is unimportant, but not so much for the meaning that it conceals within it as for the hold it provides for the power that wishes to seize it."[20] In contrast to the disciplinary gaze, whose direct and primary objective is utilization and control, the gaze of the confessing-self is driven by a "hermeneutics of suspicion" that delivers it to infinite depths, meaning behind meaning. If the panopticon ends in <u>pure light</u>, the

confessing-self on the other hand is after an object that is not susceptible to such an absolute revealing. Sex, and all the deep truths humans seek to discover about themselves in the modern episteme is at best a "dark shimmer,"[21] a truth that continually recedes with each approaching gaze, a truth demanding a confession that can never end. If the panoptic gaze is driven by an endless imperative to maximize utility, Foucault argues that the confessing gaze - with its partly overlapping effects and deployments - is driven by an imperative stemming from the very being of "man" as he exists in modernity. The most immediate effect of this imperative is the constitution of a hermeneutic subject. Yet as we turn to discuss this subject, let us not forget that it disciplines as it confesses.

As noted above, the manner in which "western man" is constituted as a deep self-examining self is elucidated in Foucault's discussion of sexuality as a locus of modern confession. In Volume One of <u>The History of Sexuality</u>, Foucault argues that: "We have become a singularly confessing society."[22] Confession has become increasingly important in our institutions, our relations to others - indeed confession has come to constitute the self's relationship with itself. Inextricable from confession, as both its precondition and its effect is the understanding of the self as a deep subject. It is this

interplay between depth and confession and the role Foucault argues they perform in the constitution of subjectivity that I shall explore in what follows.

Depth is not, according to Foucault, an essential quality of selves. Rather it is a dimension that comes into being as an effect of power; a space created as a correlate of a variety of technologies that operate upon selves. In conjunction with the production of the "soul," depth is created through the discursive deployment of sex as "the secret" that is subtly and surreptitiously signified by all the actions, thoughts, emotions and desires of the self. As indicative of "a universal signified"[23] to which all things refer, the visible manifestations of selves point <u>beneath</u> themselves to their "true" meaning. Always to be un-covered, sex constitutes the whole of the visible as the surface of a depth. Sex is not secret simply because it is "elsewhere" than the direction in which we look: it does not lie in the field of the visible, requiring only that we shift the trajectory of our gaze. Rather, the visible lies between ourselves and the true meaning we seek. The visible is laden with the weight of a thickness that lies beneath it - a depth it simultaneously signifies and conceals. As sex is discursively attached to the visible, the surface of the visible swells open like a balloon to harbor the secret in its interior.

Yet we become deep selves not only because we are constituted as beings <u>with</u> a depth, but moreover because we become beings directed <u>towards</u> depth - beings that dwell in and grope through depth. For depth harbors the secret truth that "demands" to surface so that we may obtain our health, freedom and intelligibility.[24] Because the promise of liberation lies buried in one's depths one must delve deep and "tell what one is and what one does, what one recollects and what one has forgotten, what one is thinking and what one thinks he is not thinking."[25] Failure to explore and illuminate our dark interiors will perpetuate our "repression," "inauthenticity" and blindness to our "essential nature."

However, Foucault argues that these claims that depth is the dimension of truth and freedom are merely the ruse which lures people into a form of subjectivity that is a trap. In fact, the space is colonized at its inception and remains a locality that is continually penetrated and invested by a variety of power strategies. Truth is not "the child of protracted solitude,"[26] the essences that rise in the soul's silence. It does not emerge in purity from deep within. Rather "[t]ruth is a thing of this world, it is produced only by multiple forms of constraint."[27] We discover within, the being we have been fabricated to be; and we perpetuate and intensify this form of being when we exalt it as truth. The soul is

an effect of a form of power that proliferates in self-discovery. However, the content of depth and its meaning are not established once and for all. As power proliferates in the discovery of the self, the task of discovery itself proliferates in depth as the dimension of the hidden which one never depletes. Hence power perpetually strives to define our depths, to help us define them, ever anew.

Foucault illustrates this dynamic in his discussion of the "latency" that comes to be attributed to sexuality - a latency which conceals the truth of sex from the self. Sex "truly" resides in regions even deeper than those into which we are able to submerge ourselves. We must delve deep, but we are unable to delve deep enough. The last part of the search requires the help of "the other who knows."[28] As beings of such profound depth, we often require an other (psychiatrist, psychologist, therapist, counselor, priest, teacher, etc.) to identify the real truths of our soul: a "master of truth" who will decipher what we really are. Through the interpretive voices of these others, a plethora of discourses endlessly develops around the task of deciphering, identifying and codifying the gems extracted from the deep. In the scientific discourses, subjects come to be defined and located on a scale stretching from the normal to the pathological. In these discourses selves are tracked, fixed attached

to imperatives and ultimately constituted as individuals. It is the relation between discourse and power that determines the truth discovered in the depths. In short:

> The "economy" of discourses - their intrinsic technology, the necessities of their operation, the tactics they employ, the effects of power which underlie them and which they transmit ...is what determines the essential features of what they have to say. The history of sexuality...must be written from the viewpoint of a history of discourses.[29]

Depth is the place we are identified and held fast as objects upon which power is exercised. Even more deeply and fundamental than we can know, we are what the psychiatrist tells us we are. The truth of our being is depth as seen in the eyes of another.

And this truth is unity. Beneath the ambiguous and shifting surfaces of our flesh and word, signified in multifarious ways, one discovers the "one true sex." This discovery of unity in depth can be grasped metaphorically in Foucault's presentation of the hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin. The examinations of Barbin are important for Foucault because they exemplify the disciplinary seizure of the body. Read metaphorically, however (substituting "deep self" for bodily depth) they draw attention to the violent and reductive aspects of the search for deep truths. On the surface, Barbin appears to be a most "extreme mixture" of the two "true" sexes. Yet deep

below, discovered first by penetrating touch and later by means of the surgeon's blade one finds the real truth. Barbin is extricated from "the happy limbo of her non-identity"[30] and hurled into the depths beneath her "indeterminate anatomy" where the doctors and lawyers and judge determine the single truth of her being: "male," before which the truth of Barbin's apparent ambiguous difference as a "hermaphrodite" is evaporated in the prefix "pseudo." Depth is ultimately not a dimension into which ambiguity and difference are <u>extended</u> and <u>proliferated</u>. Depth is a dimension of <u>reduction</u>. The illusion of richness that depth might conjure - each surface refers to something else - shatters in the "reality" that ultimately they all refer to the same thing. It is not only that Barbin's ambiguous flesh is finally fixed as male, but moreover that "his" <u>whole being</u> is fixed as "<u>male sex</u>." Barbin's protean being is crushed, ground homogenized by the immense weight of a depth which in the end Barbin cannot bear, an engulfing depth in which "he" drowns.

Yet, if we are simultaneously produced and reduced in depth, we do not all experience depth and sex as did Barbin. Indeed, the task of recovering the truth of our sex has been constituted as something desirable. Hence we seek this truth of truths in the name of liberation. Our freedom is to free sex. In fact however, Foucault argues

that in trying to free "sex" we do not slip outside of power, but "are fastened to the deployment of sexuality that has lifted up from deep within us a sort of mirage in which we think we see ourselves reflected - the dark shimmer of sex."[31] We strive to truly know ourselves in terms of this dark shimmering unity within. But why does Foucault refer to the "dark shimmer" of sex? How can a shimmer be dark? Perhaps it is because the shimmer of sex darkens all the living surfaces which are referred to it endlessly as it swallows their radiant plenitude. Perhaps it is because the shimmer is surrounded by the darkness it produces as we enter the Faustian bargain in the name of liberation and "exchange life in its entirety for sex itself"[32] (my emphasis). Perhaps it is the ineliminable darkness of monochromatic light.

The paradox that governs the deployment of sexuality cannot be overstated. On the one hand a unity is posited within as the "truth" and key to our being. But while the creation of this "unity" has great effects on our self-understanding and our being, it is elusive enough to require continually renewed self-surveillance and examination by others in order to approach closer to its "origin." Thus the will to truth about sex spreads to new areas and "penetrat[es] bodies in an increasingly detailed way."[33] In the nineteenth century sexuality begins to circulate throughout the family; great attention

is paid to infantile sexuality, masturbation, separating boys and girls and parental surveillance. Sexual forms and deviations are specified, multiplied, and so too the "surfaces of intervention" through which individuals can be identified. We are in the midst of an extremely multiplicitous search for unity.

In addition to the effects of depth discussed above, Foucault maintains that the conception of the self as a subject of deep truths functions to disguise the operation of power in which it plays such an important part. Since truth originates in the purity of the inner dimension (the reasons for error are "deep" too...), we avoid examining the social, economic and political practices in which truth and the subject are produced. Instead, to the extent that we examine the effects of the social world upon the self at all, it is in the form of the "repressive hypothesis" in which power plays a purely negative role over against the deep-self. Hence the constitutive effects of power are disguised, and ironically, people exalt the very effects of power in rather poor attempts to be free. As the deep-self - one of the most profound effects of power - becomes the a priori assumption of the analysis of power, power itself becomes increasingly invisible.

One should not read Foucault to be arguing that self-examining unified deep-subjects are produced solely

through modern discursive and non-discursive practices of sexuality. Foucault has chosen sexuality because he understands it to be very important in the production of modern subjectivity, but equally because it functions so well to illuminate the ontological understandings that underlie hegemonic modern ideals of the self which are by no means limited to sexuality. Foucault sees similar themes embodied in modern "self-absorption,"[34] therapeutic practices and Sartre's notion of "authenticity."[35] And though the self-observing self constituted under the eye of disciplinary power is not identical to the hermeneutic subject, we have already noted the way in which a notion of deep truth has made its way into juridical and educational discourses. In short, Foucault believes that the constellation of depth, unity and self-examination constitutes the epistemic terrain upon which most contemporary discussion occurs: it is a central feature of what he calls the "epistemologico-juridical" formation.[36] In order to gain a clearer understanding of Foucault's analysis of the self as it is constituted within the modern episteme, we now turn to his meta-theoretical insights in The Order of Things.

Meta-Theoretical Analysis

In The Order of Things, Foucault conducts a meta-theoretical analysis of the modern sciences of "man." In this investigation, he does not attempt to define the various ideas that the human sciences have in common, nor the framework of thought within which they operate. Rather he is striving to comprehend what he calls the "historical *a priori*" of modern theories about man.

> This *a priori* is what in a given period, delimits in the totality of experience a field of knowledge, defines the mode of being of the objects that appear in that field, provides man's everyday perception with theoretical powers and defines the conditions in which he can sustain a discourse about things that is recognized to be true.[37]

Hence Foucault is interested in the "conditions of possibility" of the modern discourses on man. Because (as we shall see) he contends that man is situated at the heart of the modern "episteme" as the subject and object of knowledge in a way that is very different from previous epistemes, an exploration of the being of man in modern theory is central to his project. In a sense Foucault is unfolding what we might call a relative ontology of man; an ontology that addresses not the being of man's being in any essential or ahistorical sense, but rather an ontology that addresses "man" as that being which burst upon the

scene at the turn of the nineteenth century, and makes possible and governs the human sciences.

Foucault confines himself to archaeological methodology in The Order of Things, and hence the connections between knowledge and power which one finds in some of his earlier and later works are absent. Indeed, the appearance of man as that which made the human sciences possible is seen in this work not as a consequence of technologies of power, but instead as "an event in the order of knowledge."[38] The methodological shortcomings of this stage of Foucault's thinking have been cogently discussed by Dreyfus and Rabinow[39] and retrospectively by Foucault himself.[40] However, one of the things that remains of great value in this work is the sustained analysis of the mode of being of "man" as he appears in a wide variety of modern discourses. We find here a level of generality which sheds light on some of his later works which tenaciously remain at the level of the particular. I believe that if we read Foucault's archaeologies and his genealogies in light of each other, we can reveal important insights into modernity which are far more illusive when these texts are read separately. In an effort to do this, I will first briefly situate the sciences of "man" in the contest of power, and then show some of the ways in which his archaeological discussion

of "man" sheds light on the general characteristics of man as the subject and object of power.

It is in Discipline and Punish that Foucault most clearly situates man and the sciences of man in the context of technologies of power. Rather than simply being "an event in the order of knowledge," man is understood to be an "object-effect" of the modern techniques of "domination-observation,"[41] and the sciences of man are understood to develop largely in the midst of relations of power: the observation and definition of incarcerated persons, the relationship between psychiatrists and patients, the widespread subjection of person and populations to examinations, ever more continuous observation, detailed attempts to constitute desired behaviors. In short, the sciences of man develop in a panoptic society in which humans are increasingly under observation, and the "man" they study is the man that is constituted within these power relations. Knowledge and power "presuppose and constitute" one another: "The subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge."[42]

If knowledge is born in and proliferates operations of power, then we should not only be able to situate and gain a deeper understanding of modern knowledge by

studying power, but we should also be able to learn about power by studying the characteristics of knowledge. If the man who is both an effect of power and a being that extends it, is also the man that is the subject and object of the human sciences, then a study of the being of this man that has governed these sciences is likely to give us greater insight into man's relation to power. For this man - his relationship to his life, his language, his labor and his consciousness, the things he must think and do - is a thing of this world of "war by other means." The human sciences attempt to describe a being that exists, and their effort itself, in part, both manifests and constitutes this extant being. And if there are fundamental characteristics which define his being for all of these diverse sciences we should examine them carefully in an effort to discern some of the fundamental aspects of the functioning of power in modernity. The man of finitude and the things he "must" do, provide us most profoundly with a general description of man-in-modern-power.

In order to bring Foucault's discussion of the Age of Man into relief, it is helpful to briefly outline his conception of the Classical Episteme which preceded it. The Classical Age conceived of the world as a great chain of being created by God. Each of the beings lodged within this continuous chain varied only in the slightest manner

from its neighbors in the chain. Each being was represented, but its representation was not the creation of another being. Rather, significations and that which they signified were transparently and internally connected. In the "Classical Age, the sign is the representativity of the representation in so far as it is representable."[43] "Each [representation] posits itself in its transparency as a sign of what it represents."[44] The place of human beings in this scheme of things was to compare the representations of a world that had been scrambled by time to examine the minute identities and differences between beings, in an effort to construct an order that would resemble as closely as possible the Order that God created.

As is readily apparent, the Classical episteme lacked the space in which humans could be originary beings. Representations did not emerge out of the density of man's being, they existed in a completely transparent "strictly binary"[45] relation with the things they represented; the order which man sought to construct was not the product of a creative effort to make some sense out of a chaotic Godless world, but simply an effort to reconstruct the God-given. The representations given to humans and the things themselves were unproblematically linked in the language people spoke. Hence "man, as a primary reality with his own density, as the difficult

object and sovereign subject of all possible knowledge, has no place in [the Classical episteme]."[46] The discourse that joined representation and being "provided the link between the 'I think' and the 'I am' of the being undertaking it."[47] And if the being of the "I am" remained unexamined, it was because it could not constitute a "problem" in an episteme where thoughts and beings pressed up against each other so tightly that there was no space to ask a question which would soon become imperative. Man as the object for complex interrogation and analysis did not exist.

Foucault argues that a new epistemic space with new possibilities and new requirements began to emerge at the end of the eighteenth century with the recession of the Classical Episteme. (This is a change Foucault is content to describe as an "archaeological mutation," and makes no attempt to explain until later works.) In the Classical Age the truth of a thing was defined by its position in the table of representations which was constructed to mirror God's Order - itself and order of the visible. The thing's visible representative qualities manifested its identity which could be comprehended in its relation to other representations. Hence, representation - the visible surface of the world - was the locus of beings and their truths. However representation began to be displaced, as labor escaped from the table of needs with

Smith and became an "irreducible absolute" standard of measurement for analyzing exchange; as character in natural history began to be based on organic structure, "an internal principle not reducible to the reciprocal interactions of representations":[48] as the internal principle of inflection usurped the primacy of representation in analyses of language. Foucault argues that these initial changes were further transformed and that they established a complete break with the Classical Episteme in Ricardo's originary labor, Cuvier's primacy of functions and Bopp's emphasis on grammatical wholes. Things withdrew beneath their visible surfaces; truth came to reside in their hidden regions. As beings "withdraw into the depths of things,"[49] "man" emerges in the space left behind - a being at the center of a murky world who <u>provides himself</u> with representations. As thought falls outside of its previously transparent relationship to the world, Kant awakens. Restless and uneasy, he begins to ask about the "conditions of its possibility."

Foucault contends that the man that emerges in modernity discovers that he is indicated by the positive forms of life, labor and language which he finds himself in the midst and mist of. "Man is designated - more, required - since it is he who speaks, since he is seen to reside among the animals (...on extremity of a long

series) and since...he is necessarily the principle and means of all production."[50] Yet as man is indicated at the center of life, labor and language, he simultaneously finds that his existence is only accessible in these very forms, and that they are older than he is and determine him. Man can only be known as he works, speaks and lives. Yet only through an ancient language can man speak, only by means of processes older than himself can he work, and he lives only as part of a primordial life that precedes him. Everything indicates man, and everything man can reveal about himself indicates an "irreducible anteriority" - gestures towards his ineliminable finitude.

However, if everything bespeaks man's finitude, nothing enables him to "contemplate" it; for everything which is given in his thought - even his finitude - is itself based on finitude. As man attempts to elucidate the system of words, production and life that outdates him, that which he is attempting to clarify "always already partially and surreptitiously constitutes his elucidation. Man - what he is and what he is not - is elusive. But that which man is unable to completely contemplate because of its irreducible anteriority" is at the same time only possible and given to experience on the <u>basis of man's</u> finitude. The mode of being of space, life, production and language are only given to man on the basis of his body, his desire, his work and

his speech. Thus the finite existence which limits his access to things is also that which makes all access possible.

It is precisely the evasiveness of finitude - the endless reciprocal referral of man and things - which harbors finitude's promise. If man is unable to comprehend with clarity the precise nature and boundaries of his finitude there is always the possibility that there may be a way out: a form of life, labor and language - soon to be discovered - that would be completely transparent, rational and unalien. Oddly, man's finitude is accompanied by hope more than by submission or resignation.

> Heralded in positivity, man's finitude is outlined in the paradoxical form of the endless; rather than the rigour of a limitation, it indicates the monotony of a journey which, though it probably has no end, is nevertheless perhaps not without hope.[51]

Indeed, this hope and the struggle to realize it are not <u>possible options</u> for man to pursue; they are <u>imperative</u>. For this finitude which originates in man's strange being threatens to completely cut man off from the truth of himself. The ambiguity of finitude which harbors the possibility of escape from an ambiguous existence into a realm of pure truth threatens to snuff man out under the tragic weight of error, alienation - the Other within.

The possibility of the latter generates the imperative quality of the former.

The strategy employed by man in his effort to achieve transparency and rise beyond his finitude takes the general form of the "repetition of the positive within the fundamental,"[52] in which man attempts to ground all those things which determine him and indicate that he is finite, in the positivity of his own being. Foucault argues that there are three ways in which this "analytic of finitude" is "deployed": the repetitions of the transcendental and the empirical, and return and retreat of the origin and the cogito and the unthought. Each of these doubles deserves discussion, for each is central to the trajectory which he believes modern man follows: a trajectory in which man makes his Other, the Same.

Foucault states that man in the analytic of finitude is an empirico-transcendental doublet: "a being such that knowledge will be attained in him of what renders all knowledge possible."[53] As the analysis of representation recedes, man becomes the "<u>site of analysis</u>" which must be continually interrogated and defined in the effort to provide a stable foundation for knowledge. One form this takes is that of mechanistic, physiological and biological attempts to discover the conditions of knowledge in the nature of the human body. The most recent manifestation of this effort is witnessed in the sociobiology movement

that has become quite popular in the past decade. Here truth is bound to a fixed understanding of the human nature that makes it possible. Another form of the empirico-transcendental double is the effort to ground knowledge in a history which can be known with certainty and simultaneously prescribe the forms of this knowledge (here he has in mind Comte and Marx).

Thus man as he appears in modernity is constantly traversed by knowledges which reduce him to the status of an object which is uncritically given, and/or define him in terms of what he is becoming and will be. In both cases "truth" is constituted and man is <u>defined</u> as "<u>the same</u>" meaning that man is to be <u>identified</u> within a constellation of truth which <u>does not acknowledge</u> that in humans which is other than, non-identical with or in opposition to this constellation. And this is of no little consequence. As we see in other works, a plethora of discursive and non-discursive practices is launched to make man be what he "truly is." These practices are tightly intertwined with the way in which man appears in the modern episteme. What is unavoidable is that man - as the finite subject and strange object in which dwells and from which emerges an elusive truth - must continually be traversed, interrogated and illuminated in the effort to discover and make him conform to a truth which is nevertheless impossible to secure in modernity.

The second awkward double in which man in the analytic of finitude discovers himself is the constant referral of the cogito to the unthought. Within the modern episteme, man is unable to infer a total, immediate and transparent "I am" from "I think." The "I think" is only able to think what it thinks on the basis of what it does not think. As we have seen, man's thought is carried along by a language, a life and a labor that are older than he is and not completely intelligible to him. Man's thought constantly refers to what he is not and does not think. As such a being, man is the "locus of misunderstanding...that constantly exposes his thought to the risk of being swamped by his own being, and also enables him to recover his integrity on the basis of what eludes him."[54] Being neither a dead object nor an absolute subject, man is "always open, never finally delimited, yet constantly (but always only partially) traversed"[55] by a gaze, a thought driven by fear and hope.

The unthought that haunts man does not have the character of an external limitation. Rather, that which man does not think - his Other - is born with man: it is the "shadow" he casts with each thought. Thus the "I think" which led Descartes to truth and certainty, must be for modernity a project that is never completed and ceaselessly renewed. And if Kant stepped to the threshold of modernity when he began to question the conditions of

possibility of truth, fully modern man is obsessed with the possibility and actuality of "what eludes him." Hence man "must traverse, duplicate and reactivate in an explicit form the articulation of thought on everything within it, around it, and beneath it which is not thought ...a constantly renewed interrogation"[56] (my emphasis). Everything which - in the depths of man and that which surrounds him - evades man's thought, now threatens man's entire existence (no longer transparent and stable: now increasingly opaque) with error, alienation and madness. The shadows that man casts with each thought have been cast by all men during all of time, and the darkness of this collective shadow carries him forth as a grain of sand on the crest of a turbulent wave. Better yet, as an inept god thrashing uneasily in a dark murky ocean of his own creation. The ocean roars to man's horror "I am Other," yet without it he would be desiccated and succumb to an unlivable gravity, for the other is the necessary condition of man's being - a life, labor and language which he is not identical to nourishes and sustains him.

In his effort to recover his promised position as the pure origin and certain sovereign of thought, man penetrates into the region of the Other. However this constant obsession with and interrogation of the unthought does not culminate in the dissolution of opacity. Rather than an end, man establishes himself in the endless

"illumination of the element of darkness that cuts man off from himself"[57] (my emphasis). Man must irradiate the depths which prevent him from being self-identical self-presence. This is the essence of man and thought in modernity.

Hence Foucault argues that "for modern thought no morality is possible,"[58] for it is always in movement towards, but never arrives with certainty of a secure self-identical thought unplagued by an unthought residue which might enable us to grasp the laws of the world's order which have grounded western (non-religious) morality in prior times. (Another certainty ground religious morality and this becomes problematic in modernity as well.) Indeed, the only imperative which this thought-which-never-arrives can generate - an imperative of no small importance - is that of its own movement: continuously expanded reflection-illumination of its atramentous depths.

Yet if thought must ceaselessly shed reflective light, this is not to say that thought is simply bound up with itself and, due to its uncertainty, unable to act. On the contrary, Foucault maintains that "modern thought, from its inception and in its very density, is a certain mode of action."[59] In modernity, thought has always "left itself," it has never stayed within the domain of the theoretical. Modern thought has always been compelled

to move beyond itself to what is not thought - to what is "unthought." And where contact has been made there has been disturbance. For thought does not simply "reveal," but rather is "a modification of what it knows."[60] As thought identifies it "offends or reconciles, attracts or repels, breaks, dissociates, unites or reunites: it cannot help but liberate and enslave."[61] Thought exercises power not merely because of its content and its bases in societal struggles. Moreover thought is linked to power because of its fundamental trajectory - because it is always "advancing towards that region where man's Other must become the Same as himself."[62] Modern thought moves to make all that is Other identical to its concept, and in so doing enslaves and obliterates the Other's difference (it may establish the Same's differences). It constitutes a new thing that is the Same. Before prescribing action (based on morality), thought in modernity is action. Hegel might serve as an appropriate illustration of this point, his dialectic moving restlessly from one thing to the next, identifying, reducing, exhausting the meaning of things to the truths they contain within his phenomenological "museum." Even Hegel, the master of that final synthesis, senses the ineliminable proximity of an unthought about to caste a tremendous shadow upon our current truths. If "the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the

dusk,"[63] what is this but a subtle acknowledgement that thought never quite keeps pace with the cutting edge of the historical wave which bears it along? What is this if not a delicate confession about that twilight region in which thought is condemned to fly its unthought always just below the horizon - never to spread its wings in the pure transparent light of a new day? More concretely, we can think of the ceaseless efforts to ensnare the untame protean world within truths that reduce it to the terms of hegemonic discourses - terms of "the Same." The reduction of dreams to Oedipus, of homosexuals to medical categories, dissidents to psychological classifications, nature and people to the discourses of utility, the self to deep truths - lest the True, Normal, Healthy, Useful, Deep man be forever cut off from himself.

There are few places in The Order of Things where Foucault comes as close to leaping out of the archaeological dimension as he does in the above passage. More than simply a discussion of thought and unthought as archaeological contemporaries, Foucault offers us the broad contours of his understanding of the manner in which modern thought in its very being manifests a type of power. In this analysis of the episteme he recognizes characteristics of modernity - the restless unending illumination, identification and transformation of Otherness in an effort to constitute the Same in its

purity - which he studies on a micro-level in his more genealogical works. While there are many very important differences between Foucault's archaeological and genealogical periods, the broad insights in the former and the particular analytics in the latter both belong to a "structure of perception" which remained remarkably constant in important ways.

The final double Foucault discusses is the "retreat and return of the origin." In the Classical Age, humans returned to the origin of things by discovering the order of representation that perfectly and transparently represented the world. With the attainment of this order man could unproblematically witness the primordial origin of all things including knowledge itself. However as things withdraw into their depths and transparency clouds over, the origin that existed in theory in the Classical Age becomes impossible. In modernity, when man looks for the pure origin of his being, he discovers that he is always "bound to a previously existing historicity."[64] As we have seen, the dawn of his own being is always attached to a life, labor and language which began long before him. In fact, the nature of modern man's origin can no longer be conceived of as an immediate and pure beginning, but rather as the way he "articulates himself upon the already begun."[65] Instead of "the immediacy of a birth" which would reveal him as and allow him to be a self-present

subject, he finds himself always already infused with and borne along by what is not identical with his own being.

> Far from leading back, or even merely pointing, towards a peak... of identity, far from indicating the moment of the Same at which the dispersion of the Other has not yet come into play, the original in man is that which articulates him from the very outset upon something other than himself; it is that which introduces into his experience contents and forms older than himself, which he cannot master...scatters him throughout time.[66]

Unable to bear this, modernity has made multiple attempts to recover man's origin from the naive positivist attempts to "insert man's chronology within that of things"[67] to the very diverse strategies of Hegel, Marx, Spengler, Nietzsche and Heidegger. Whether it is in the form of man-as-realized-being, or as the retreat of the origin which alone makes experience possible, Foucault maintains that "modern thought makes it its task to return to man in his identity."

We might summarize the discussion of the analytic of finitude, by contrasting the trajectory of the thought it generates with that of the Classical Age. The Classical Episteme as we have seen, was based on an ontology of continuity. The world was perceived as a great chain of beings which varied only in the slightest manner from their neighbors in the chain. It is easy to see how

thought which identified reality with the well ordered table would be likely to violently distort and subjugate reality under the guise of transparent and innocent representations. This order of things could be - and as Foucault shows in other works was - implicated in a set of practices which constituted certain forms of behavior and excluded others. The exclusion of madness in the Classical Age illustrates the extent to which this form of reason could be involved in the obliteration of Otherness. Foucault never indicates that the Classical Age was a "good time" or a period we should return to. Yet upon the perceived ontological continuity of being, classical theory was concerned with distinguishing <u>difference</u>: among "the secretly varied monotony of the like."[68] The trajectory of Classical thought was towards "the never-completed formation of Difference."[69]

Modern thought in contrast, moves in the opposite direction. In the attempt to secure man from the erosive forces which threaten his precarious being as it is given in the analytic of finitude, man must ceaselessly show that he is the complete foundation of what can be a stable truth; that the unthought can always be thought; that he can seize his origin. Man must attempt to squeeze shut the gaps where the Other might arise. In a state of complete self-presence man would be the absolute sovereign entirely rid of the temporal and spatial lacuna that might

spawn the Other. As self identical, man would be thought so thoroughly that the unthought would be unthinkable. Yet the Same is for modernity only a promise, a direction to be pursued, never entirely attainable.

Foucault summarizes: in modernity "we have moved from a reflection upon the order of Differences [Classical Episteme]...to a thought of the Same, still to be conquered in its contradiction."[70] "It is always concerned with showing how the Other, the Distant, is also the Near and the Same."[71] The ultimate consequence of this is that modernity harbors within itself a most compulsive imperative to obliterate difference. All that is Other threatens "man's" inherently unstable position and must succumb to the Same. If the Classical Age closed out the Other at the level of its ontology, modernity is founded on an ontology in which the Other is continually reborn in the depth of being - not simply exterior to but within the very flesh of man - and must be ceaselessly transformed, identified, made the Same. The Same is no longer the <u>ground</u> for activity, it is now the essence of the trajectory of activity itself. And it seems that Foucault perceives the activity of revealing the Same to be even more dangerous than the ground of the Same. If in the latter, the Other might avoid recognition and exist simply as a non-being, in the former there is absolutely no place for the Other to hide. The Other is ceaselessly present

as an absence recognized as the danger of Death and Madness, and must be the target of continuous, detailed, deep illumination and intervention.

But precisely at the point where thought has become a restless activity that must ceaselessly reflect upon the question of man, Foucault maintains that thought is "falling asleep."[72] The point at which modernity perceives the awakening of philosophy - the point at which man kills God and dissolves the visible surface of His Classical Order into depth - is for Foucault only an instant of consciousness that is engulfed once again by Morpheus. This time however, Morpheus does not rule as a God from without, but from within - as man in the analytic of finitude.

Rather than overcoming pre-modern dogmatism, the analytic of man merely "consists in doubling over dogmatism."[73] The positive and the fundamental are made to refer to one another endlessly in an effort to render the foggy depths a place fit for sovereignty.

> In this Fold, the transcendental function is doubled over so that it covers with its dominating network the inert grey space of empiricity; inversely, empirical contents are given life, gradually pull themselves upright, and are immediately subsumed in a discourse which carries their transcendental presumption into the distance. ...All empirical knowledge, provided it concerns man, can serve as a possible philosophical field in which the foundation of knowledge, the

> definition of its limits, and in the end, the truth of all truth must be discoverable.[74] (My emphasis.)

Yet the ideals which govern man's being - transparency, identity, sameness - are precisely those which were shattered when man killed God. They can be for man only an impossible promise. As man steps to the vacated throne he finds that God's world has deserted him. The dim godless world resists the principles which rendered God's sovereignty so unquestionable. The order crumbles; being sinks beneath the reach of his gaze. In man's attempt to be the ground of the Same, he merely situates "his language, his thought, his laughter in the space of that already dead God;"[75] and hence man's death is simultaneous with his murderous birth.

Man is born in the effort to see man - not God - as the self-present self-knowing origin of his own being. With the death of God however, there is no ontology which will enable man to attain the presence God had before man dethroned Him. Man cannot be the God he killed, he is somnambular in his efforts (to use a word Nietzsche enjoyed). Morpheus is the only god man can be.

Foucault ends The Order of Things with the ambiguous prophesy that man may soon be "erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea."[76] What - if anything - Foucault hopes will emerge, we will hold until the next chapter. What is clear so far however, is that for

Foucault, man, and the attempt to discover the "truth of all truth" in himself which defines him, leads power and knowledge in a direction that makes freedom and thought increasingly impossible. "The man whom we are invited to free, is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself."77

We have seen the sense of this statement in light of the practices of power which define the truths of human beings and fasten them to these truths. So too this sense emerges in the practices in which selves fasten themselves to both the truths that are deployed and the deployment of truth. The studies of man in the analytic of finitude are deeply entwined with this project, for they perpetuate an ontology and a specific understanding of "liberation" which is central to the operation of power in modernity. Correlatively, they necessitate a will to truth and a will to light which is also fundamental to these forms of power. The archaeology of these sciences reveals dimensions of our modernity which illuminate our situation in ways that may help us transform it.

But if Foucault rejects deep man and the search for the "truth of all truth," does he then simply revel in the pit of irrationality? Does this abandon leave him in the existentially crippled condition of absolute relativism? Is he unable to affirm one set of practices over another? Does he thoroughly reject enlightenment and its counter-

discourse? Is he in this sense a "neo-conservative" as Habermas claims?[78]

No.

The arguments to support such lucid bluntness lie in the next chapter, but the "no" whispers in the final pages of the "Man and His Doubles" chapter we have been discussing. Here Foucault does not celebrate the death of man as the end of thought, but rather as thought's dawn:

> The end of man...is the return to the beginning of philosophy. It is no longer possible to think in our day other than in the void left by man's disappearance. For this void does not create a deficiency; it does not constitute a lacuna that must be filled. It is nothing more, and nothing less, than the unfolding of a space in which it is once more possible to think.[79]

And lest one think that by "thinking" Foucault has in mind something that originates only in Foucault's skeptical laughter - and it does find a home there - we might note that he speaks of awakening modern thought "in order to recall it to the possibilities of its earliest dawning."[80] These passages should caution us against quickly leaping to the conclusions which may have seized to dismiss Foucault.

A space. Nothing more, nothing less. A space of possibility. In the following chapter, I will argue that

the space that emerges in which it is once again possible to think arises from the counter-ontological claims of the human body which appear most forcefully when the deep soul of man has deserted it. More precisely it is Foucault's counter-ontology of the body which constitutes the possibility of thinking and the "work of freedom." Indeed, thinking, freedom and self are reconceived on the ground of this ontology. What emerges is nothing short of a radical transformation of enlightenment; but a transformation which Foucault nevertheless places squarely within the tradition it transforms. It is a transformation explicitly attuned to the possibilities of enlightenment's earliest dawnings.

Conclusion

Thus we have explored Foucault's understanding of the way in which depth, truth, light, liberation, and the confessing-self function together in modernity to constitute the Same and exclude the Other. If confession is ubiquitous, it is not simply because as moderns we are attached to the imperative of discovering our "one true sex." The hermeneutics of the sexual subject is only one part of the confessing-self understood in a more fundamental sense. At the epistemic level, the confessing-self is synonymous with man in the analytic

of finitude who must ceaselessly attempt to bring forth the entire empiricity of his being; who must endlessly seek to think the unthought that lurks in all thought; and who incessantly strives to recover his lost identity - his absolute presence in which he would be completely the Same, entirely rid of the Other. Man must attempt to proliferate the will to truth throughout every corpuscle of his being and the beings which surround him. Everything must be brought to light. In modernity, the being of man (as individual and as society) consists of ever-tightening circles of reflexivity which increasingly bind him to the Same.

In the next chapter, as we develop the positive dimensions of the Foucaultian project, we will see some of the understandings which govern modernity undergo radical transformation, while others drop out altogether. We will consider the tenability of this project in the final chapter where we will discuss Augustine, Foucault and Merleau-Ponty in light of each other.

The Affirmative Trajectory of Foucault's Thought

Introduction

Foucault's critical insights have spawned debates that vary widely in their acuity and value. Yet this is not the terrain upon which he faces his most serious challenges. Even among those who acknowledge that Foucault's studies illuminate dimensions of our modernity, we hear the incessant charge that Foucault is essentially nihilistic and unable to tell us why he criticizes some things and not others, let alone provide us with a positive vision or affirmative ethic. Thus Habermas has claimed that Foucault rejects the enlightenment, is a "young conservative"[81] and lacks "normative yardsticks";[82] Charles Taylor refers to Foucault's "monolithic relativism" and his inability to affirm one set of practices over another;[83] Michael Walzer charges him with "infantile leftism" and "anarchism/nihilism";[84] Richard Wolin accuses him of an "aesthetic decisionism" within which he is forced to take "irrationalist leaps" to affirm anything.[85] The list of these dismissive labels is a long one.

However, in spite of Foucault's frequently conspicuous silence regarding the affirmative dimensions of his thought, I believe that a strong argument can be made

that his criticism wells out of an ontological position which not only plays a central role in determining the domains, focus, character and style of his work, but is entwined with a positive "ethos" which provides the general outlines of an alternative vision of selves and social relations as well. Moreover, I maintain that the ontological and ethical dimensions of Foucault's thought - missed all too often by many of his interpreters - are among the most important aspects of his work. Foucault's ethics provides a general framework for post-metaphysical criticism and supplies us with a loosely defined vision of the human world which affirms diversity, dialogical artistic existence and a transfigured sense of "belonging" with different others. I will begin with a discussion of his ontology and follow with an interpretation of his ethics.

Ontology of Difference

Guarding the entrance - and seeming to prohibit entry - to an understanding of Foucault that seeks to place an ontology of the body at the center of his thought, is the following: "Nothing in man - not even his body - is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men."[86] This passage might be interpreted to mean that we are

hopelessly cut off from "the truth" of ourselves because there is nothing in our being "sufficiently stable" for us to seize and interrogate in an effort to understand who we are. Indeed, the "who" at any moment is merely the "current episode in a series of subjugations,"[87] and the effort to essentialize the "who" is an important strategy in this episode. Certainly if the body is infinitely malleable and there is no basis for self-recognition, talk of an ontology of the body seems absurd?! It is the domain of Merleau-Ponty, but far removed from Foucault's thought. One wonders if in absence of such a ground there is any basis for or direction to Foucault's critique.

It seems to me that this interpretation of the passage, while it starts on the right track, largely misses Foucault's point; and that rather than being a <u>barrier</u> to an ontology of the body, this passage leads directly <u>towards</u> such an ontology - even though it is one which radically opposes the unitary, essentialist and teleological theories which are so common in the western metaphysical tradition (understood in the broadest sense). In fact it is the latter which are the most formidable barriers to the ontology that Foucault seeks to develop. Hence the first movement towards a new ontology of the body involves shattering these barriers; and this is precisely one of the functions of the passage in question.

The cited passage must be read as part of Foucault's deployment of a "knowledge made for cutting"[88] apart these metaphysical constructions. The "self-recognition" which the body cannot provide - indeed defies - is that of a "rediscovery of ourselves"[89] which would demonstrate the metaphysical truth of our being in an origin. Yet in "shattering the unity of man's being"[90] Foucault's genealogies do not leave non-ontology, but rather provide us with a <u>different</u> ontology: one which "introduces discontinuity into our very being."[91] Instead of perceiving discontinuity as the surface beneath which one can discover the truly unified character of being, genealogy perceives the continuities and unities which metaphysical thinking takes to be truth, as constructions which insidiously attempt to obfuscate, master and enslave beings which are often multiple, heterogeneous and recalcitrant.

Foucault discovers plurality beneath our carefully fabricated identities. Our body, is the target of various power strategies which aim to fashion it into a controllable and utilizable entity. It is conceived of as stably governed by laws, instincts or morality. Within this identity however, Foucault perceives "a complex system of distinct and multiple elements, unable to be mastered by the powers of synthesis."[92] The genealogist hears a cacophony where modernity imagines perfectly pitched

harmony. The genealogist hears each note straining, unstable, reverberating uneasily, as the church bells chime (unwittingly): "If God is dead, then metaphysical man is too."

But the genealogist does not simply discover that man is not the original unity he claims to be. As essentially engaged knowledge genealogy instigates and enhances the dissonance it discovers and is "capable of liberating divergence and marginal elements."[93] We might think here of "ars erotica" or cacophonous erotica, in an age of heterosexuality, true sexuality; insubordinate dimensions of the self which resist surveillance, order and utilization in an age of hierarchies and disciplines aimed at increasing productivity; friendship in an age of insidiously possessive love; non-codified distinction and abnormality in an age governed by the norm. Genealogy seeks to arouse that which is ostensibly excluded or lodged uncomfortably; not to integrate and obliterate, but to bring to light and life the "face of the Other" that always lurks within the Same.

Perhaps Foucault would have been better understood if he had said "Nothing in man - especially not his body" can ground metaphysical self-recognition; for the body is a rather unstable target for such unities. It is a "volume in perpetual disintegration."[94] Indeed, it is that to which Foucault frequently appeals in his attempt

to unseat the perpetual rediscovery of the self-as-origin. It is to "bodies and pleasures" "in their multiplicity" that Foucault gestures in The History of Sexuality, Volume I as a possible locus of opposition to the unifying deployment of sex.[95] While the "demagogue denies the body to secure the sovereignty of a timeless idea,"[96] and others can affirm the body only as a timeless idea, Foucault evokes the body in order to radically question timeless ideas. The body is ontologically different from these ideas - a locus of differences which exceeds and resists them, a being both fabricated and torn in the midst of other bodies to which it is inextricably and often discordantly related. The different-body is not the end of critique but the beginning of a critique that wells out of a sense of ontological difference. Foucault aims not at the end of all self-recognition, but at a recognition distinct and often multiplicitous dimensions of the self which do not fit comfortably within and are not reducible to the hegemonic categories, a recognition that these dimensions one discovers within the self are not things of Truth, but rather contingency, voices in the cacophony of our being. The beginning of a more profound self-recognition lies in the discovery that one is different from the metaphysical conceptions and prefabricated identities one is offered.

Foucault's understanding of the resistant aspect of bodies makes little sense when one tries to understand it apart from this ontology of difference. In fact, the notion of "plebs" can almost appear to be mystical on this reading. The "plebs" is that which "in the social body, in classes, groups and individuals themselves... in some sense escapes relations of power.... There is plebs in bodies...in a diversity of forms and extensions, of energies and irreducibilities."[97] If one reads this passage in light of the unified continuous ontology that governs so much of modern thought, then one is at best brought to a state of confusion. What escapes? How do individual bodies generate resistance? However, if this ontology is dislodged - and this is the aim of so much of Foucault's work - a new insight into the phenomena of resistance is revealed. If human beings are not essentially unified "individuals," but rather, in the world as multiple, discontinuous, divergent, discordant, irreducible and flux - in short, as ontologically different, then there is no reason to believe we could be completely subjugated. The heterogeneity, contingency and non-prefabricated distinction of our beings makes us impossible to target <u>in toto</u>. There is always a continually renewed surplus that is unidentified - Other than that which is targeted. Our being is such that while it is open to the imposition of rather extreme

forms of subjugation, it is not (by any means) in complete complicity with these forms. It is this discrepancy which fosters resistance and perpetual "war by other means" rather than hermetically sealed hegemony. Nothing is so simple as to be susceptible to complete identification.

The notion of difference with which Foucault works needs clarification, for it is remarkably divergent from those which are most often expressed in western thought. It is in "Theatrum Philosophicum," a very favorable review of Gilles Deleuze's Différence et Répétition and Logique de Sens, that Foucault most explicitly discusses difference as it appears in these texts. Foucault's admiration for Deleuzian philosophy echoes throughout this essay in which he says that with Deleuze "thought is again possible" and "perhaps one day this century will be known as Deleuzian."[98] Given this expressed concordance and the concordance between this essay and other of Foucault's works, I will discuss the notion of difference in this review as one which Foucault affirms.

Characteristic of western thinking, and its "first form of subjection," is that "[d]ifference is transformed into that which must be specified within a concept, without overstepping its bounds."[99] As specified and without excess, difference is made equivalent to the concept(s) which identifies it - the Same as the thought which thinks it. The unmastered singularity of events is

obliterated as thought makes them identical with its own categories. Yet this obliteration of Otherness which occurs the instant that thought specifies in order to totally seize, is merely the first stroke of a long grinding process. As specified, difference is specie-fied; made to appear on the basis of differentiations within commonalities that are considered to be more fundamental. "For the concept to master difference, perception must apprehend global resemblances...at the root of what we call diversity."[100] Herculine Barbin is identified and seized as "male hermaphrodite": a species of sexuality. The genus defines the species and both define Barbin. What is this peculiar body-event called Herculine Barbin? It is a type of male hermaphrodite. What is a hermaphrodite? A type of sexuality. Herculine Barbin's difference assumes significance for hegemonic nineteenth century French society <u>only</u> when it is essentialized and made to appear within the categories of the Same. Barbin's raw difference is eclipsed as Barbin only appears in hegemonic society as essentially male sexed. The individual differences of Barbin's body are examined, measured, compared with those of other members of this species and located within an organized spectrum of variation. It is the assumed underlying identities that <u>call forth</u> examinations, make possible comparisons and provide the framework within which the

pseudo-recognition of differences occurs. Of course, the establishment of a codified range of differences is, for Foucault, not simply a characteristic of Western "thought," but is an imperative that is embodied in techniques, institutions and other practices as well.

The Deleuzian/Foucaultian alternative to the tradition of western metaphysics is difference conceived "differentially": difference as "a pure event,"[101] not completely reducible to conceptual generalities. The "freeing of difference" demands "thought that accepts divergence; affirmative thought whose instrument is disjunction; thought of the multiple - of nomadic and dispersed multiplicity that is not limited or confined by the constraints of similarity."[102] Instead of perceiving reality as a teleological unity (and all a priori unities are teleological for Foucault), Foucault points towards the Nietzschean thought of being as "the recurrence of difference."[103] The first task of such thought would be to seek the unique singularity of events and the multiplicity within them.

Central to Foucault's project is the attempt to free the difference of events - that is, to make us aware of these differences - and to lodge difference between the self and the world. In "The Order of Discourse," written at about the same time as the review of Deleuze, Foucault cautions us against imagining that we have a "primordial

complicity with the world"[104] that would allow us to perfectly know and identify it with our thoughts.

> The world is not the accomplice of our knowledge; there is no prediscursive providence which predisposes the world in our favour. We must conceive discourse as a violence which we do to things, or in any case as a practice which we impose upon them.[105]

In light of Foucaultian ontology, difference appears everywhere, unstable, elusive - emblematic of the ineliminable excess through which beings escape from the clutches of identifying thought. The world around us is always partially Other. However, far from leading towards some form of relativism or nihilism, this ontology - in which the self and world are always together in their inextinguishable difference in which discord and division are inherent in all constructed unities - constitutes the space in which it is "once again possible to think." Or better still, as we shall see, this ontology opens the opening - shut by western metaphysics - in which it is possible to reformulate the <u>practice of freedom</u>. For difference conceived differentially is ultimately not simply a new way of thinking, but more profoundly a new mode of being.

Difference is a broad prescription for action as well as a thought about the being of the world. Difference

signifies a new engagement with the otherness of being. It calls us to act with an eye towards difference rather than in the light of preconceived identities. This does not mean that existence is to become a blind deconstructive rampage that smashes and shatters everything within reach in order to maximize "difference" and worship atoms. Rather, it means that the differences within our own being and between ourselves and that which is Other should be acknowledged and moreover reckoned with in our efforts to create our existences, rather than insidiously denied, obliterated, ignored or dealt with through moral categories of metaphysical origin. Foucaultian ontology calls us to throw the metaphysical veils off of ourselves and others, and dwell with more "maturity" in the midst of the living multiplicitous particularity of ourselves, others, our social practices and our history. There is clearly a delight in difference that radiates from many of Foucault's texts. Yet this should not be understood as an overall plea to simply "let difference be," for such a plea is itself laden with metaphysical residues which are no longer tenable in light of Foucault's ontology. The injunction to simply "let difference be" assumes that there is some sort of preordained harmony in the world that makes life livable and worth living without human praxis and intervention. It assumes that the good life is ready-made and endows each human being with a presumptuous

position of cosmological importance as a being for whom things and others exist to be both life-sustaining and satisfying. Equally important, it assumes that the self would cohere as something interesting without any imposition of form, content, commitment, etc. Yet the human world revealed by the genealogist is far too discordant for any of these fantasies to remain standing. Even at the level of the body: what sense does "let difference be" make as an overall prescription when the body is a "volume in perpetual disintegration"? Not much sense at all; and hence it appears that at the same time that Foucault undermines metaphysical unities which obfuscate difference, he also undermines what is perhaps the last gasp of metaphysics: "let it be."

But then what prescription for action wells out of this ontology of difference? What does dwelling with maturity in the midst of bodies, pleasures and others who are different from the given hegemonic identities and harbor no deep truths mean? Foucault writes: "From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art."[106] This artistic existence in which we seek to give ourselves form takes place at the limits of our being in <u>dialogue with</u> that which is different from us or that within us which finds no place within the reigning identities. For Foucault, "freeing

difference" is a step towards confronting the particularity and untamed nature of existence, towards confronting an existence that is not that of our categories. It is a step towards the artistic ethos; a necessary part of, but not the end of this ethos or existence. Giving form to one's life involves accentuating and developing certain dimensions, placing others in the background, foregoing certain possibilities. Yet these decisions are made in the midst of and with an ear to the multiple and differing voices within and around us. But is not this injunction that we create ourselves still rather empty and unable to inform our creativity in any way? Does Foucault leave us with anything more than an absolutely relativistic sense of creativity which is not much help at all? It seems to me that his notion of artistic existence both avoids relativism and is able to inform our creative activity in an important manner which avoids nihilism and indifference at the same time it avoids the metaphysical solutions to these very problems. This results from the fact that Foucault's notion of the artistic ethos provides us with a loosely articulated conception of the social context conducive to artistic existence, which, in a very broad sense, might guide our activity. In its creativity, artistic existence seeks in part to work towards and enhance conditions in which an artistic ethos might become a more general and <u>vital</u> possibility. If human

life should be a thing of art, then the artistic practice of caring for life should be linked to the creation of situations and forms of existence where life can flourish as art. It is towards this end that Foucault's corpus - as in many ways exemplary of the artistic activity he describes - strives. The artist in part seeks to contribute to a world in which one could answer the question, "Couldn't everyone's life become a work of art?"[107] with a resounding "Yes." Let us explore what this seems to entail.

The Dialogical Artistic Ethos

Shocking as it may be to some of his readers, in his later essays on Kant and the enlightenment, Foucault places himself in a certain fundamental respect squarely within the enlightenment form of reflection. Foucault argues that the reflective questioning which is central to the task of freedom originates in a line of thinking pursued by Immanuel Kant. Yet is not Kant one who initiates the analytic of man and the analytic of truth which Foucault has so vehemently opposed? How can one who stands in direct opposition to this central late enlightenment theme simultaneously claim to belong to the tradition of enlightenment? Foucault understands his discrepant positions on enlightenment to well out of

discrepancies within enlightenment itself and particularly within Kant. On the one hand, Kant of the Critiques begins a tradition of philosophical reflection which is aimed at discovering the truth of truth in man. Foucault has consistently opposed this tradition and shown it to be closely aligned with modern forms of power and subjugation. On the other hand however, Foucault sees in Kant's essays on enlightenment and the French revolution the beginning of a radically different sort of reflection, one which characterizes the dimension of enlightenment within which he situates himself. "Here it is not a question of an analytic of truth, but what one might call an ontology of the present, an ontology of ourselves."[108] Most succinctly, this philosophical tradition consists in "problematising its own discursive present-ness."[109]

It is this latter "attitude," rather than any specific doctrine or legacy, within which Foucault places himself. Central to this modern relationship with the present is what he identifies as a "belonging" and a "task."[110] With respect to the first, the philosopher questions the knowledge and practices of the present as those to which he or she belongs, and as those which are necessary to comprehend in order to understand the produced-ness and context of his or her own being. Indeed, it is in problematizing and understanding

this present - and the fact that one belongs to it - that one "is to elicit at once [one's] own 'raison d'être' and the foundation of what one is to say."[111] It is through understanding the present of which one is, that one determines what one is to do, say and become. Thus in Kant's case, it is his understanding of the present, the fact that his answer to the question "Was ist Aufklärung?" is "man's release from his self-incurred tutelage"[112] and the free use of his reason, that calls for and guides the work of his critical efforts to determine the conditions of possibility of truth and the legitimate uses of reason. It is because philosophers belong to "a certain 'we,' a we corresponding to a cultural ensemble characteristic of [their] own contemporaneity,"[113] that their self-understanding, self-direction and self-creation are inextricable from an inquiry into their social present. The question regarding what one should say and do concerns the "we"; the ontology of the present is an "ontology of <u>our</u>selves" - not one self in isolation.

Here we arrive at a more profound understanding of the "belonging" of modernity. For insofar as we recognize that self-creation demands an interrogation of the "we," as moderns, we belong to this ceaseless inquiry. What characterizes the modernity which Foucault describes in "What is Enlightenment?" is the <u>belonging to the questioning of that to which we belong</u>. As moderns we

create ourselves by ceaselessly taking up the question of our present. This is the "task" to which we belong, a task which as moderns we share. In short, part of modernity's unity lies in this question. Our belonging to the present as socially constituted beings is de facto; our belonging to the questioning of our belonging is the practical appeal modernity makes to each of us. We make it real by assuming the task.

Let us examine this question - this task - more carefully. Foucault understands it as "a critique and permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy: that is, a principle that is at the heart of the enlightenment itself."[114] Consistent with his genealogical efforts and his emphasis on local inquiry, Foucault's notion of critique and creation - the artistic ethos - does not imply that we completely jettison who we are at present in favor of some totally new being. Such efforts have repeatedly led to disaster. Rather his conception of critique-creation revolves around what he calls a "limit-attitude," which would continually direct us to the limits of our being - to that edge at which we face the Other. Again, Foucault is not advocating a blind rejection of all limits, but instead, a careful analysis of the boundaries of our being. Such an analysis would focus on particular regions of our self and social world which have become reified as unquestionable givens, in an effort

to understand their historicity, functions, effects and the possibilities and desirability of going beyond them. This analysis of limits would attempt to illuminate "in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent and the product of arbitrary constraints."[115] In contrast to the Kantian project of determining the boundaries of the legitimate use of reason, Foucault advocates a critique of established boundaries to determine areas of "possible transgression." Rather than determining why we must remain the Same given the "truth" of who we "are," the task is to determine in what ways it might be "possible and desirable" to become different and "to determine the precise form this change should take"[116] (my emphasis).

Foucault is careful to stress that this critical ontology of ourselves is not a doctrine - which would insidiously reestablish a Truth - but rather an "ethos." Here what is involved is a general manner of living. This ethos is elaborated in the notion of the "self as a work of art," which is most developed in Foucault's later essays and interviews, and is rooted in Baudelaire, Nietzsche and the ancient Greeks. As a work of art, "one take[s] oneself as [an] object of a complex and difficult elaboration"[117] in an effort to create one's existence. As we have seen, this effort takes place at the limits

of our being and involves a questioning attitude within which one seeks to define the shape of one's being and contribute to the creation of the social world. One is hardly a work of art if one unconsciously accepts the shape of the boundaries that have been defined for selves by history.

Even considered most narrowly, this task, though it aims at creating an existence which is not intended to be established as a universalized norm, but rather a shape only for a particular self, is not an isolated self-enclosed project. Indeed this self-enclosed selfhood-ness is characteristic of those projects which seek to "liberate" and realize "the truth" of oneself - to become what one "really is." The encounter in this case is an inner one with one's "identity" - the Same. But this is diametrically opposed to Foucault's notion of the self as a work of art. In the latter, the task is to create the shape of one's life through a careful experimentation with limits. And dwelling at the boundaries of one's being essentially entails a continual dialogical encounter with <u>otherness</u> and <u>others</u>. Hence the self as a work of art entails the exploration and transformation of more than just the self.

In an effort to gain a clearer understanding of this relationship between the notion of the self as a work of art and the encounter with otherness, let us

take Foucault himself as quite exemplary of these notions. Foucault's life, as much as any other, was a life aimed at self-understanding and self-creation; understanding and creation that as we have shown is inextricably connected to understanding and showing possibilities for creating the "we" to which the self belongs. (Already we have gone beyond the boundaries of the self, but the self does not dissolve into the we, for each person, as "different" will have a particular understanding, particular practices he or she embraces and a uniquely shaped life on these bases.) Indeed, Foucault patiently and in a self-disciplined manner fashioned his life around this task as he understood it. His life was, to reflect back upon himself words he uttered in another context, "a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibilities of going beyond them."[118] It seems to me that there were some ways in which his work persistently engaged with otherness that were central to his life as artistic self-creation.

To begin with, Foucault continually sought to elicit the "insurrection of subjugated knowledge"[119] - knowledges disqualified and silenced by hegemonic discourses and practices. The purpose of this attempt to make these Other knowledges audible was twofold. First, Foucault

sought to amplify these knowledges in an effort to establish an historical memory of the struggles through which hegemonic forms of power and discourse established themselves. By doing this he illuminated some of "the contingency that has made us what we are."[120] He attempted to show that the practices and understandings that we perceive to be necessary, universal and currently hegemonic because of their unquestionable virtuosity, are - at least in part - products of conflicts for power in which the hegemonic powers have sought not only to produce certain utilizable forms of being and eliminate Others, but to reduce all expression of conflict with the Others to silence as well. Thus for example, he elucidated the way in which modern methods of discipline and punishing are to a large extent tightly implicated in the exigencies of capitalist accumulation rather than simply the emergence of a benevolent good-willed humanism, by showing the resistances and struggles in which they were born - a struggle with those who were not "always already" docile and useful. Likewise in Madness and Civilization, Foucault records a history of "that other form of madness, by which men, in an act of sovereign reason, confine their neighbors, and communicate and recognize each other through the merciless language of non-madness,"[121] rather than a history which assumes the unchallenged superiority of "reason." He shows reason

to be in part the outcome of its struggle with an Other - "madness" - rather than a teleological development of its own pure essence. In short, to quote Madness and Civilization (and I think this indicates the continuity of Foucault's project), "What is in question is the limits rather than the identity of a culture."[122]

By bringing the contingency of our thoughts and practices to light, Foucault seeks to loosen our identity with them - an identity which is most complete when the terms of the present appear too ubiquitous and necessary as to allow neither the possibility nor the desirability of criticism and change. It is only when our identity with the Same is slackened that we can consider possibilities of creating existences other than those that are "given."

The second reason for amplifying the "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" is to provide a different perspective on the truths, norms, unquestioned identities, imperatives and practices of a period. The objective here is to question the hegemony of certain discourses from the perspective of the Others which they exclude: "to entertain the claims to attention of local, discontinuous, disqualified illegitimate knowledges against the claims of a unitary body of theory which would filter, hierarchise and order them in the name of some true science."[123] Hence Foucault seeks to rediscover the knowledges of

mental patients, prisoners, students, "hermaphrodites," etc., in an effort to make audible the voice of the Other in a world where it is rarely heard. Through these Other claims, Foucault seeks to shed critical light on features of the present which aspire to the status of universals; and he seeks to help enter different voices into the discussion about what the Order of things is and how it should be.

Another way in which encountering otherness was central to Foucault's life-as-art has less to do with the way in which otherness explicitly and directly confronts dominant knowledges and practices, within a given period, but rather concerns the value of the experiences and practices of other periods of history in illuminating possibilities of living differently. His analyses of the relationship of the early Renaissance to madness and of ancient techniques of the self are precisely such efforts to think about how we might formulate different social practices. But not merely "social practices." Equally at issue is the shaping and transformation of Foucault's own thought and existence.

The connection between philosophical-historical understanding of otherness and the creation of self is perhaps most explicit in The Use of Pleasure. Reflecting in the introduction upon what motivated his work Foucault says:

> It was curiosity...not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what it is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself.... There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all. People will say, perhaps, that games with oneself would better be left backstage. But, then, what is...philosophical activity...if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?[124]

The understanding of otherness is part of the "critical work" that enables "one to get free of oneself." (Of course, Foucault is perfectly aware of the <u>limits</u> of getting free of oneself, which is exactly why the labor of freedom always takes place at the <u>limits</u> of our being. We cannot simply leap over our limits.) Since we are beings essentially embodied in the social world, artistic self-creation implies critically understanding and creating this world. The dichotomy between creation of the self and the creation of the social world breaks down in their internal relation. But the dissolution of this <u>dichotomy</u> does not lead to the obliteration of <u>difference</u> and the ushering in of a simple "harmony of interests" (nor a complex harmony of interests with rigid predetermined pseudo-differences) between the self and this world. As

it is the discovery of otherness and of the contingent limits of the present that is an essential aspect of creating the self, so too it is to a large extent in becoming different that the self partakes in the creation of the social world. The form the self takes as a different, often transgressive being is aimed in part at transforming the social world towards enabling greater possibilities of different expressions of artistic existence.

It should be emphasized that the engagement with otherness in the creation of the self as a work of art is thought of "differentially"; not in terms of a reversed identification where the self seeks to become the same as the other. If Foucault rejects the ceaseless trajectory towards the Other in order to make it the Same, he also rejects the will to discover the Other in order to become the same as it. Such naive appropriations tend to ignore problems inherent in past alternatives and they tend to ignore historical changes which would make such transformations untenable. More importantly, they close freedom's opening (in the perception of the possibility of difference and the adoption of an "experimental" attitude) at precisely the point at which it could burst forth. In contrast, for Foucault, though encounters with otherness may gesture in helpful ways in certain directions and away from others, what is most important

in the encounters is that they reveal the possibility of being different. In the light of difference, thoughts and practices previously considered necessary begin to be seen as contingent; and in recognizing the contingency of being we return to the possibility of creating alternative practices which might enhance the artistic ethos - we return to the possibility of freedom. It is partly because his work is governed by this end, that Foucault is so evasive when Dreyfus and Rabinow repeatedly question him about whether or not the Greeks offer an "attractive and plausible alternative."[125] Indeed, it is only the notions of "art of life" and "self as a work of art" that Foucault offers as specific helpful insights we can gain from the Greeks. And these are in the realm of "ethos" - an ethos of creative activity - rather than specific concrete practices.

Yet I think this conception that Foucault repeatedly engaged himself with different modes of being in order to reveal the possibility of creating himself/ourselves, or even in order to gain insights for his/our creative task, obfuscates a dimension of this engagement at the same time that it clarifies certain others. For there is an important sense in which the ends-means separation that lingers in this formulation fails to do sufficient justice to the "ethos" towards which Foucault gestures. Inherent in this artistic ethos is a vision of exemplary meta-

style. And this meta-style is precisely that of dwelling dialogically with that which is and those who are different at the limits of our being. (I call it "meta-style" in order to emphasize the diversity of dialogical styles within this more encompassing notion. This dialogical engagement with that which is other is for Foucault the stylistic essence of the artistic existence; it is through this engagement that we create ourselves. This conversation within which one gives shape to one's life as a specific voice is creative activity. Hence while the content aim of the artistic ethos can be defined very broadly as the enhancement of conditions that make possible the "permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy" - and central to this are more dialogical non-disciplinary social discourses and practices, the exemplary meta-style is achieved to the extent to which we fashion ourselves into dialogical beings - beings who dwell in the difference of being and shape our lives there rather than beings who blindly accept hegemonic identities and dwell in complacent indifference in the home of the Same, the Norm, the Truth. In this sense, Foucault's dialogical engagement with difference, while in part a means to another end, is also in part an end in itself - the embodiment of the meta-stylistic ideal of the artistic ethos. This is further exemplified in the manner in which Foucault's work develops and is portrayed. Is there any

other philosopher in modern times who has so persistently utilized the conversation/interview format to express and develop his ideas - and also, to gesture towards a particular way of being?

The importance of the dialogical essence of both the style and content of the artistic life must not be underestimated, for it is at the heart of Foucault's understanding (sometimes it is explicit - more often it is the "unthought thought" Heidegger refers to) and is what links the affirmation of the self's distinction inextricably to the distinction and difference of others. In a late interview with Rabinow, Foucault stresses that the "dialogue situation" was not only essential to his "way of doing things," but moreover that "a whole morality was at stake" in the difference between dialogical versus polemical styles of existence - a morality which concerns "the relation to the other."[126]

By sketching a vision in which the notion of self as art is intrinsically related to encountering otherness, Foucault is able to suggest a way in which the affirmation and enhancement of the self's creative activity and difference would occur not in atomistic oblivion to others, nor through obliteration of others as is the case when difference is conceived of on the basis of equivalence, but instead through the dialogical engagement with others who are different. A primary virtue of this philosophy

of the self is its increased appreciation of otherness. Foucault points towards a philosophy in which dialogue plays a central role in determining what one will say; in which dialogue is essential to self-creation. It is the budging, blurring, tossing, glaring, shifting nature of our encounter with otherness and others, which opens the opening of freedom. And it is within this dialogical situation with others that our freedom acquires the form and content of a carefully shaped existence.

It seems to me that Foucault's understanding of the relationship between the encounter with otherness and freedom offers us a fundamental reworking of the latter concept as it has often been formulated. For Foucault, freedom does not arise out of some sort of access to "the truth"; it is not to act according to self-generated transcendental laws of reason; it is not most profoundly opened as we face the possibility of our death and return from the anonymity of the "they" (das man) to the particular "there" of our Being; nor does it arise out of an "authentic" relationship to our "true self." Rather, we are returned to the contingency of the world and our relationship with it, as well as to our being as the possibility of self-creation, through dialogical encounters with otherness. (This is not simply the absence of our own being, or that which opposes us in contradiction.) We are exposed to the radical contingency

of our practices - and more generally that of the world we experience and partake in - through our encounters with others with different practices and experiences and the Other experiences within our own being. (E.g., it is Foucault's encounter with Other social perceptions of madness (Renaissance) that allow him to grasp the contingency of modern perceptions of madness. Madness and Civilization is an archaeology and genealogy which reveals the producedness and contingency of our own perceptions - of the "constitutive...action that divides madness."[127] Foucault's effort to expose us to this contingency is the central aspect of his attempt to return us to the possibility of our freedom.) Hence our own freedom is inextricable from - and thus in part should be guided towards creating - a social world that, to a greater extent, provides space for others who are different and difference within the self. When we close this space we simultaneously drain our world of the possibility of self-creation through dialogue (often agonistic dialogue). An increasingly disciplined normalized world increasingly closes off freedom not only at the level of the constitution and exclusion of selves, but equally important, because it increasingly withdraws the experience of otherness which both opens the possibility of our freedom to begin with and provides us with multiple points for creative engagement. The

more we approach otherness within the terms of the Same, the less we encounter otherness. Of course, we never <u>completely</u> encounter otherness. Rather, our experience of otherness begins when we sense the surplus of the other - that which is different. The encounter with otherness is in this sense always in a state of beginning. Normalizing practices attempt to disguise the surplus and thwart this beginning.

No doubt, an important question which comes to mind concerns the possibility of social and political coherence within this philosophy of distinction. In addressing this issue I think it is helpful to return to and consider anew the rather interesting paradox we noted earlier. Foucault's work over the years has persistently attempted to reveal the many ways in which insidious forms, discourses and mechanisms of power function in modernity to conceal, control and obliterate otherness. We have been told that rather than enhancing a creative ethos that grows out of dialogue with others, modernity constitutes subjects around "norms" and "Truths" which serve a productivity that has little to do with enhancing our freedom. We have been told that power in modernity is not dialogical, but hierarchical and coercive. Rather than an ethos which calls us to the <u>limits</u> of our being, modernity has us digging deeper into our centers for a truth - freedom which lies in our core - if only we

can secure it and bring it to light. Even among beings equally under the normalizing gaze, we are told that modernity thwarts dialogue. Let us not forget that "lateral invisibility" and "partitioning" are as integral a part of panoptic power as visibility and transparency. Uncontrolled "multiple exchanges" - the unexpected dialogue - must be eliminated if this power is to function optimally. Yet Foucault claims in his enlightenment essays that the "ethos" of modernity is precisely the critique of its limits and the exploration of "possible transgressions" - possible sites of artistic creation. As already argued, this is partly explainable by the fact that Foucault does not perceive modernity as a unified beast, but rather as laden with multiple characteristics, some of which develop in radically different directions. Nevertheless, these essays appear to make assertions about the "ethos" of modernity that make one wonder why so much of modernity has been the object of such intense criticism from Foucault.

I think this essay should be read as what Foucault, following Beaudelaire calls an "ironic heroization" of the present. In doing so, we are better able to understand it in the context of Foucault's other works. Moreover, we can gain a better understanding of the place of "belonging" (in the Enlightenment essays Foucault "belongs" to modernity) in a philosophy which not only

emphasizes the value of differences but also confers on normalized identities a very central role in the evils of modernity. Since the thought of a society without some sort of belonging is little more than an infantile illusion, the tenability of Foucault's "artistic ethos" hinges in part on how well he can address this question.

Before discussing "ironic heroization," let us very briefly - and somewhat simply - summarize three notions of belonging which one can draw out of Foucault's thought as we have discussed it thus far. First, we are essentially beings whose existence is inextricably intertwined with the social milieu of which we are a part. Hence our self-understanding and self-creation must refer in part to the society to which we belong. Second, as moderns, we belong to the questioning of that to which we belong. In spite of radical differences in style and content, this questioning is something we do - or should - share; it should bind us to some extent, and lend us a degree of solidarity - even if very loosely. Thirdly, since our freedom wells out of and develops within our dialogical encounter with others who are different, each of us should belong to the task of creating a society and politics which enhances the possibilities of expressing difference (differences which are not constituted around the obliteration of different others). At least in this very broad sense, the freedom of others is entwined with our

own: our creative freedoms - with all their agonistic tensions - belong together if they are to be at all.

But one gets to the end of this list wondering if there is any relation we can take to the present - to who we are at present - that is anything other than genealogical criticism and "possible transgression." Can we belong in any way to our present? Is our freedom in any way entwined with the present or does it simply lie beyond it? To the extent that societies have ever "held together" in a non-authoritarian manner, they have done so in part out of some sense of shared belonging to a set of values and practices which guide life in the present and help generate the dreams for the future. Albeit that these traditions have always involved the exercise of power and subjugation, they have for better or worse been the foundations of the order of their day. While we want to move in a direction away from these subjugative practices, we cannot move away from some sense of shared practices and values. It is a very textured identity which makes social life possible. As fundamental and illuminating as Foucault's vision based on the artistic ethos may be, it is difficult to believe that what we have discussed thus far would be sufficient for the existence of a social order. There has to be a way to belong to the present which is not merely that of getting free of it.

It seems to me that the notion of ironic "heroization" which is developed in the context of his discussion of Baudelaire points in this direction. For Baudelaire, in Foucault's words, one of the central characteristics of modernity is "the will to 'heroize' the present."[128] Heroizing the present involves an attitude of recapturing "something eternal" that lies within the fleeting present - a present which is extremely fleeting and impermanent in the modern world. It is the attempt to "extract" the "poetry" from within modernity. Yet this heroization is ironic in that while seeking the eternal in the present, it does not seek to eternalize the present. Instead, the eternal which is made manifest is itself a "transfiguration [which] does not entail the annulling of reality, but a difficult interplay between the truth of what is real and the exercise of freedom."[129] In this transfiguring, "beautiful" things become "more than beautiful."[130] The one who heroizes illuminates the worthy aspect of things in such a way as to make it dominate them whereas before it may have been barely a perceptible trace. One stretches reality towards what one dreams it could be, by grasping and developing that within reality which most closely embodies this dream. Foucault writes: "For the attitude of modernity, the high value of the present is indissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it otherwise than it

is, and to transform it not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is."[131]

Perhaps as illuminating as Foucault's attempts to explicitly describe "ironic heroization," is the essay "What is Enlightenment?" itself, considered as an exemplary manifestation of this endeavor. What is his characterization of modernity as the "ethos" of critiquing our boundaries and exploring the possibilities of going beyond them if not ironic? Has not the great bulk of his work aimed at showing us the ways in which modernity insidiously disguises itself and drives towards an organization of being which posits the Same as fundamental and the Other as that which must be made the Same? In the essay "Kant on Enlightenment and Revolution," Foucault includes Hegel as an early representative of "a form of reflection within which I have tried to work."[132] But there are few essays where Foucault has not in some way argued against Hegelian dialectics or at least hurled a sarcastic remark in that direction simply in order to distinguish his own project. Can a Foucaultian heroization of Hegel be anything but ironic?

But it is still a heroization. And in this notion of ironic heroization of the present lie the germ cells of a theory of "belonging" which is quite different from theories of identity which have dominated western

metaphysics. In the latter tradition, identity has been thought primarily in terms of equivalence.[133] The goal with respect to the self has been to discover the truth of what one is and govern one's thoughts and actions in accordance with this identity, to the extent that it is humanly possible to do so. To identify with a community - worldly or spiritual - has been to thoroughly embrace its fundamental faith, truths, and the practices which follow. However, identity, as a grasping of the "essential truth" of ourselves as individuals and as a society becomes impossible to conceive on the basis of an ontology that emphasizes contingency, multiplicity and difference.

For Foucault, the "who" to which we belong is not a truth to be apprehended in its essence. Rather, the determination of the "who" to which we acknowledge our belonging is always a partially transformative activity in which we selectively illuminate our being in the light of who we long to be. We do not choose our identities out of nothing, but neither are they objectively given for us to simply acknowledge as true. The belonging of ironic heroization is "an exercise in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted with the practice of a liberty that simultaneously respects this reality and violates it."[134]

But why would Foucault seek to acknowledge a "belonging" and affirm a "respect" for the present?

Why would he ironically heroize Hegel? I think that his affirmation of "belonging" is rooted in his ontology just as deeply as is his notion of freedom as artistic transfiguration. Foucault reads the world to be a contingent often discordant interplay of differences. His statement: "My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous,"[135] is based on this reading, and most of his work attempted to illuminate dangers, violence and subjugation which modernity has disguised in the name of truth, virtue and humanism. In accordance with his ontology and understanding of subjugation, his vision of the future has been guided towards a world which would affirm far more space for difference. Yet this ontology which demands critique and transformation also issues forth a warning of caution. For if everything is dangerous, transformation is dangerous - requiring "patient labor." And in the ubiquity of danger, we must not simply dismiss all of the present world, but rather carefully search for the possibilities it presents which may be worthy of our affirmation. Since the possibilities for freedom are as tenuous as they are, those thoughts and practices which make it possible in the present should not be cast aside in a reckless fashion. Those thoughts and practices which encourage dialogical encounters with otherness and artistic existences (or those within which this ethos

can be encouraged) are too rare to be taken lightly. By belonging to them, we place ourselves in the opening they provide, in order to refuse closure with our own being - or, in more positive terms, to affirm a situation that enhances artistic existence. In a world that continually attempts to suture shut the openings, belonging is crucial to our freedom. The possibilities of the present should be carefully held in an artist's hands - transformed "not by destroying [these dimensions] but by grasping [them] in what they are." The artist carefully works on the being of the present in part through the openings it provides, to increase their scope and create others in a way which will avoid collapsing that which is beneficial in the present. These favorable dimensions of the present which call us to make explicit our belonging serve as focal points around which we might coalesce and develop a greater sense of the ways in which we belong together as diverse beings affirming certain shared practices.

In this manner, Foucault heroizes Hegel and enlightenment. Having criticized Hegel in a variety of ways, he nevertheless sees in Hegel a project - an ontology of the present - worthy of affirming and belonging to, albeit in a different form. If it is true that we can thwart certain trajectories of our present through critique, it is equally true and equally necessary that we accentuate other trajectories of this present through our belonging

as ironic heroization. The Foucaultian task is "work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves."[136] When situations for freedom exist in who we are, they must be maintained and enhanced. There is little possibility of creating openings and situations for freedom ex nihilo in a world that is as radically contingent, dangerous, discordant and always very incompletely understood. It is thus that we belong to aspects of our own existence which offer us possibilities for existing artistically - shaping our lives in face of the plenitude of things.

This is not to say that there is not a lot in our present which Foucault would seek to drastically alter or do away with. Clearly there is. Yet there are also aspects which have made his own work possible. It is in acknowledgement of and for the enhancement of the situation within which one exercises freedom, that one "belongs" to certain dimensions of the present through ironic heroization. But we do not "identify" with certain thoughts and practices in order to use them as a ruler to measure our progress towards or away from truth and freedom. Rather we "belong" to aspects of our past to the extent that they offer us possibilities for embracing a dialogical artistic ethos - carefully - in ways which respect and in part are guided by, but also violate, the present itself. We heroize that which offers us the possibility of freedom. But our heroization is rarely

rid of irony. Our be-longing is always constituted in tension with who we long to be.

Conclusion

It seems to me that this is where Foucault jumps off the boat of theory and onto the shifting sands of the shores of the modern world. Here, continually at the edge of our existence, he has taken up the task of meticulously combing through who we are. Beyond (or out of) the above themes, what Foucault offers us, I believe, is an acute awareness of the limits of these themes - of the way in which questions of ontology, ethics, belonging and freedom and the concrete individual and social practices which embody the dialogical artistic ethos demand profoundly historical inquiry. It is when the philosophical task of creating ourselves becomes historical that it begins the activity of freedom.

Having developed the thought of Augustine and Foucault in relation to their understanding of their respective worlds, the task remains in the final chapter to bring them together. There is more to be said about Foucault's thought on depth, truth reflection and freedom, but we have reached a point where further illumination will be far more fruitful if we explore the thoughts of each theorist at their limits where each confronts the

Other. Prior to this however we shall explore the thought of Merleau-Ponty in an effort to cast yet another light on depth, difference, ethics and the self. True to form, Merleau-Ponty successfully challenges the opposition we have been developing in a manner that illuminates things thus far concealed.

CHAPTER IV

MERLEAU-PONTY

Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Depth

Introduction

Augustine sought depth as a dimension of refuge and Truth. Foucault's studies reveal depth as a "dimension of reduction," and "truth" as the dazzling lure with which we are led into depth in order to cleanse ourselves of "the other." For Augustine, depth is the dimension of salvation. For Foucault, depth is the dimension of subjugation. If one of Augustine's most central yearnings is to return humans to depth, one of Foucault's most important tasks is to expose depth as a myth and thereby free us from it: depth is a dimension constructed in disciplinary society through which to wage "war by other means" upon selves. It seems to follow that a key strategy for resisting current modalities of power is to sabotage depth and deep truth.

It appears perhaps that these alternatives cleave our conceptual universe regarding depth right down the middle: these positions seem exhaustive. We must struggle for our freedom within either one or the other. At best we can allow the thesis we ultimately reject to inform us of the

underside of our most basic convictions, and possibly we can utilize it to tame partially the imperatives that our own position generates. Perhaps.

A dialogue between these two positions is indeed worthwhile and it is part of the project at hand. But before the discussion takes place it will be helpful to consider the work of Merleau-Ponty, for though his position is sympathetic to certain dimensions of both Augustine and Foucault, there is a way in which his writing contests the very terrain upon which they oppose each other.

Merleau-Ponty explicitly rejects the notion that philosophy and life should assume the Augustinian project of turning inward to seek deep truths. He does not believe that "truth dwells in the inner man." Yet he is equally opposed to any position which would deny that depth is "the most 'existential' of all dimensions."[1] If he can simultaneously oppose both the Augustinian and Foucaultian positions on depth - while offering us a position capable of appreciating important aspects of each effort - it is primarily because he has reformulated depth in a manner that partially escapes the excessively constricting universe which the two have unwittingly appropriated and perpetuated together. It is the implicit thesis of this chapter (though his relation to the other two theorists will only be developed in

the conclusion) that Merleau-Ponty's understanding of depth is an important contribution to our discussion because it alerts us to dangers inherent in each of the other two positions that otherwise go unrecognized and simultaneously, allows us to fortify some of their most valuable contributions. Merleau-Ponty sketches an understanding of being in the world which gestures towards an ethics and politics with which to move away from nihilism, resist disciplinary power and affirm human identity and difference.

The Trajectory Away from Husserlian "Augustinism"

Although I wish to forgo a careful analysis of the relationship between Augustine, Foucault and Merleau-Ponty until the final chapter, it is helpful to introduce Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of depth by situating it within the context of some of the themes that have arisen in earlier chapters. Perhaps the best place to begin is with a brief discussion of Merleau-Ponty's understanding of his relation to Husserl. This is helpful because the early Husserl - as Merleau-Ponty interprets him - elaborated a philosophy which illustrated some of the worst developments one might try to trace to Augustine's thought and exemplified some of what Foucault considered to be the most dangerous and insidious characteristics

of philosophy in the modern episteme. (As I will argue later, the connection between Husserl and Augustine is tenuous at best. Yet Husserl is illustrative of the consequences of reading Augustine under the influence of the modern philosophy of the subject, and these consequences deserve clarification and response.)

Merleau-Ponty's relationship to Husserl is a curious one, for although Husserl is the philosopher to whom he believed he had the greatest debt, at the same time Merleau-Ponty appropriated key Husserlian terms such as "phenomenological reduction," "cogito," "intentionality" in a way that radically transformed the meaning they had for the early transcendental Husserl and, even in Merleau-Ponty's words, "pushed" the later Husserl of the Lebenswelt "further than he wished to go himself."[2] (Some maintain more bluntly that Merleau-Ponty attributed his own ideas to Husserl.[3]) There can be no doubt that Husserl's later formulations in The Crisis of the European Sciences, Ideas II and III, and Cartesian Meditations were vitally important for Merleau-Ponty, no matter how much one wants to argue that he "coherently deformed" much of what he found there. However, one misses what most fascinated Merleau-Ponty about Husserl if one reduces it to the theses that can be selectively appropriated from the latter's late and unfinished works, for what most enthralled Merleau-Ponty with Husserl was "instead of

his theses, the very movement of his thought."[4] What he discerned in Husserl's work was a trajectory, a path of projection whose course and value emerged as much in the impossibilities, shortcomings and dangers illuminated in the early steps as in the later more sophisticated formulations. Even more important was the "unthought thought" which Merleau-Ponty perceived to be implicit in the partial successes and failures of Husserl's thought-as-movement. Husserl's thought was, in Merleau-Ponty's view, a gesture, and as such its meaning was not to be found so much in its specific statements as in that which was beyond itself towards which it moved. Merleau-Ponty was not interested in producing an accurate repetition of Husserl's formulations, but rather in resuming the movement of his thought, in formulating the "unthought-of element in his works which is wholly his and yet opens out on something else."[5] For the purposes of the present work, it matters little whether or not or to what extent Merleau-Ponty correctly interpreted Husserl. I am only interested in Merleau-Ponty's discussion insofar as it illuminates Merleau-Ponty and hence I will make no attempt to discover the "real" Husserl. I will simply pursue Merleau-Ponty's reading.

I will argue that Merleau-Ponty's development of Husserl's "unthought-of element" led him to a philosophy of "depth being" (être profond), but to begin, we must

briefly explore his understanding of Husserl's "movement." He summarizes this movement most revealingly in the following:

> Originally a project to gain intellectual possession of the world, constitution becomes increasingly, as Husserl's thought matures, the means of unveiling a back side of things that we have not constituted. This senseless effort to submit everything to the properties of "consciousness" (to the limpid play of its attitudes, intentions, and impositions of meaning) was necessary - the picture of a well-behaved world left to us by classical philosophy had to be pushed to the limit - in order to reveal all that was left over: these beings beneath our idealizations and objectifications which secretly nourish them and in which we have difficulty recognizing noema.[6] (My emphasis.)

On Merleau-Ponty's account, Husserl's early phenomenological efforts exemplify classical philosophy's most extreme attempt to flatten being. They are an attempt to "arrive at an evidence concerning [reflective consciousness] which is absolutely final" in which "what appears and what is are not distinct."[7] Husserl went through remarkable contortions to maintain this absolute transparent certainty with respect to the subject and the world it experiences - a transcendental world devoid of Otherness yet the most general contours of his project are captured in the final words of the Cartesian Meditations:

"I must lose the world by epoché, in order to regain it by a universal self-examination," followed by Augustine's famous line in De Vera Religione, "Noli foras ire, in te redi, in interiore homine habitat veritas. (Do not wish to go out; go back into yourself. Truth dwells in the inner man.)"[8]

Hence Husserl's attempt to flatten and reduce the meaning of the world to being a "universal constitutive synthesis" of the transcendental ego was intricately entwined with a rigorous self-examination in which all that was other would ultimately be shown to be rooted in the transcendental consciousness. While Husserl of the Cartesian Meditations realized that "the world 'transcends' consciousness," he nevertheless maintained that "it is conscious life alone, wherein everything transcendent becomes constituted."[9] Augustine's search for the transcendent God within was transformed by Husserl in to the search within for the transcendental ego as the source of the world's intelligibility. In the depths of the ego Husserl seeks a flattened world and a flattened empirical self.

But as the passage quoted above at length indicates, Merleau-Ponty thought that Husserl increasingly came up against "the back side of things," an intransigent world that resisted his scheme. Husserl pushed classical thought as far as it could go only to discover an endless

horizon beyond his well-behaved world. The relentless attempt to objectify inadvertently led him to reveal the essentially inexhaustible dimensions of being which in part nourished, but also resisted his objectifications. Merleau-Ponty claims that in Husserl's late works his project fundamentally changed with his heightened recognition of the lebenswelt (the life-word the self discovers herself in the midst of) as the inexhaustible ground out of which reflection arises and to which it must return. Husserl's attempt to possess the world was short circuited and moved towards becoming a project that revealed the impossibility of complete possession. "Willy-nilly, against his plans and according to his essential audacity, Husserl awakens a wild world and a wild mind."[10] ("Sauvage," here translated as "wild," also means untamed, uncivilized, savage, rude.) Husserl discovers the depths of being. (That the "wild" is "depth" will of course only become intelligible after the discussion of Merleau-Ponty's conception of being as depth which comes later in this chapter.)

According to Merleau-Ponty, Husserl's uncovering of depth changed Husserl's project from being one aimed at "possession" of otherness to one aimed at revealing the surplus of being beyond our objectifications in order to challenge our possessive comportment towards the world and open us to a relation that is more genuinely dialogical.

"Making explicit" becomes largely a task of revealing the forgotten "dehiscence" of Being, so well concealed by objectifying thought. In short "phenomenology's task was to reveal the mystery of the world and reason."[11] Of course, phenomenology was not simply to lead us to an open mouthed awe in the face of being, but this awe was to be the strange foundation of its more constructive efforts at self-understanding, ethics and politics.

Gone is the notion of an "inner man" which we should strive to return to in our quest for truth. In the preface of the Phenomenology of Perception Merleau-Ponty repeats the phrase from Augustine's Of True Religion which closed the Cartesian Meditations - without even mentioning Husserl's appropriation of the passage - in order to define what phenomenology is not. "There is no inner man, man is the world, and only in the world does he know himself."[12] Humans are thrown into the depths of being, and the task is not to eradicate this and recover an original flat self-possessing being in the depths of the self, but instead to inform and guide our lives in recognition of and dialogue with being as depth.

It is this latter notion to which we now turn, beginning with Merleau-Ponty's critique of rationalism and empiricism, followed by his development of his philosophy of depth.

Beyond Classical Thought and Towards Depth

The starting point for Merleau-Ponty's development of his philosophy of being in Phenomenology of Perception consists of a careful analysis and critique of rationalist and empiricist theories of our knowledge of the world. Rejecting the notion that the two radically contest one another, Merleau-Ponty argues that in fact both approaches are situated on "the same terrain."[13] Both posit a completely determinate, unambiguous objective world as the ground of their investigations. Empiricist theories attempt to explain experience in terms of atomistic "sensations" which are conducted from the entirely determinate world to our brain by our sensory apparatus. Our brain then discerns a world of things by connecting the array of sense-data atoms (which correspond to the world itself) through "association," which is supposed to result from their de facto contiguity. The outcome of course is a perfectly objective experience of a perfectly objective world.

Rationalist or "intellectualist" theories of knowledge likewise presuppose the objective world as the basis of their analyses. However, while empiricism treats this world as "in itself," rationalism treats the world as the product of a constituting consciousness "which eternally possesses the intelligible structure of all its objects."[14] Subjects are related to this

world through "attention," which illuminates and elucidates objects like an unconditioned search light, with the strange power of bringing to consciousness what consciousness itself constituted and already included. Although rationalism explicitly rejects the empiricist's notion of sensation - arguing that sensations are imperceptible themselves - and replaces it with "judgment," in fact, judgment is ultimately dependent upon sensation at "the boundary of our consciousness"[15] as that which it interprets in a logical fashion.

Both empiricism and rationalism relate us to a world which is completely given as objective (whether "in itself" or surreptitiously constituted by the self), the former through a process of causal relations, the latter by way of consciously constituted relations. Merleau-Ponty subjects these theories to extended, thoroughgoing and persuasive criticism which I wish to selectively summarize only in the briefest of ways.[16] To begin with, Merleau-Ponty finds that neither theory can account for the way we go about learning of the world - an important criticism given that this is the stated goal of both approaches. Empiricism, which admits only of knowledge "produced" by the world, "cannot see that we need to know what we are looking for, otherwise we would not be looking for it," while intellectualism, which conceives of a world completely constituted by

consciousness, "fails to see that we need to be ignorant of what we are looking for or equally again we should not be searching."[17] At the root of this problem is that whether as an effect of the world on a passive consciousness, or as a result of a consciousness which constitutes the world, both theories can conceive only of a <u>completely determinate</u> knowledge and a completely determinate world, and hence are unable to grasp the "circumscribed ignorance" which both motivates our relation to the world and necessitates that there by something to be learned.

This leads us to the heart of Merleau-Ponty's criticism. In positing our presence to a world of objects, each of which is completely determinate "in itself," rationalism and empiricism falsify our experience of the world and indeed make experience itself impossible (except perhaps in the case of rationalism, that of a god both totally present to and unmotivated by the world). Examining our experience more carefully (following Gestalt theory) he finds that there are no objects given purely in identity with themselves and that the most basic unit of experience emerges from <u>difference</u> - that between a figure and a background. Pure identity - the homogeneous sensation "in itself" - cannot be experienced, rather it is this difference which gives birth to our perceptions of the world. This indicates that rather than being a

composite of given sense atoms, the perceived world comes into being through a structuring of differences in which a figure emerges from an indeterminate background - which is itself prior to and the condition for sensing identifiable things within the perceptual field. The identity of an individual thing, for example the yellow pencil on my grey desk, is perceptible not simply "in itself," but to the extent that its color, shape, texture stand out from those of the desk which is its background.

Yet the figure-ground structure of the perceived world does more than indicate the extreme inadequacies of sense data atomism. More fundamentally it calls into question the rationalist and empiricist notions that the "objective world" is the stuff of experience. For it is obvious that the figure-ground structure in which the world always appears does not present us with a completely given and determinate experience of things, but instead shows the experienced world to be something which has a degree of ambiguity and is partially contingent and variable. If an employee for a logging company is calculating the board-feet of timber that a forest will yield, during his transects through the forest his perceived world is likely to be dominated by tree trunks of varying quality, diameter and height. Little else may appear to this person. On the other hand, an artist strolling through the same forest may become

totally engrossed in the vibrant green of this spring's new growth - its resonance with the brilliant sun and bright blue sky. It is quite possible that the logger's and the artist's perceptions - though both emerging from their contact with the same forest - would be remarkably discrepant (even though their differences well out of certain shared experiences at the most basic level - due to their both being embodied human selves - which hold out the possibility of a degree of communication and understanding). More agonizingly perhaps, the logger and the artist might be different dimensions of a single person, resulting in frequent and discordant shifts in her structuring of the perceived world. At any rate, what is central for Merleau-Ponty is that at the most basic level, the world we experience, far from being the determinate objective world of classical thought, is a world essentially open to diverse "structurings" - diverse determinations - through which it is simultaneously revealed and concealed. The world always retains an inexhaustible reserve of otherness which exceeds the perceptions that emerge from our contact with it. This quality of the perceived world as structured-yet-open is that which both motivates and makes possible our living experience of the world. Our new perceptions always emerge from and are motivated by our past experiences (rather than being determined by them

or arising from nowhere as with classical epistemology) and are possible precisely because the past did not offer us the world in completion.

This essentially ambiguous world which Merleau-Ponty begins to unveil, no longer rests within the objectivity of the "in itself." Along with the perceived world's essential transcendence (its openness and elusive otherness), Merleau-Ponty discovers an essential immanence: an ineliminable relation between self and world. The phenomenological world is always revealed as "perceived by" an incarnate self, a being embodied within it from whence it is witnessed. The appearance of the world is always bound up with my spatial and temporal position (and the positions I can possibly inhabit) in it, as well as my incarnate history in a social, cultural, economic and political world. This is already apparent in the example of the logger and the artist. The intersection of each social incarnate self and the world gives rise to perceptions which are always rooted in a particular existence. The self and the world refer endlessly to one another in a process of co-creation. If the phenomenal world is always in part sustained by an incarnate self, this is not for Merleau-Ponty a return to subjectivism, for the self is in turn its relationships with a world that is not entirely of its choosing. The self and world are

reciprocally intertwined, and as one Merleau-Ponty scholar has put it, "the edge of [this] dialectic moves too quickly to be caught at rest...."[18]

Thus far we have briefly sketched some of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical ideas in a most basic manner. What we begin to see is a world which is far different than that of classical thought; a world which most fundamentally appears not as simply "in itself" but through our intersection and communion with it. However, Merleau-Ponty notes that this world - both immanent and transcendent - is not the world that we recognize in our everyday life. In our everyday attitudes we tend unreflectively to take the world as simply and completely "there." We generally lose sight of the way it is rooted in our living relations with it and the extent to which it maintains itself as partially other than and resistant to our sense of it. In short, Merleau-Ponty argues that in our everyday unreflective attitude we usually accept the world as an objective thing - something closer to the world of classical thought than the phenomenological world Merleau-Ponty seeks to bring forth. Nevertheless, Merleau-Ponty claims that this "objective world" always rests upon the world of our primary experience which emerges from our brute intersection with the world. Humans perpetually lose sight of this, he argues, because it is the essence of perception to forget

itself, to lose itself in the things which appear in the perceived world. Indeed its ability to lose itself is precisely what allows there to be "things" for us. "Obsessed with being and forgetful of the perspectivism of my experience, I henceforth treat it as an object...."[19] However, for all the manipulative capabilities which this attitude gives rise to - including scientific thought, which Merleau-Ponty wants not to disregard, but to limit - he contends that it conceals the fundamental being of the world upon which it rests. This forgetfulness obfuscates the nature of both selves and the world, and has dangerous methodological, ethical and political manifestations which Merleau-Ponty finds accentuated in various aspects of the modern world.

In contrast to the "objective" world, Merleau-Ponty seeks to explore the world as it is given to us in our primitive experiential contact with being in order to reformulate our conceptions of self and world, and conjointly, to develop an ontology that is radically different from that of classical thought. He seeks to unveil the world as we experience it prior to our familiar acceptance of "things" and prior to our theoretical grasp of it. In other words, he aims at "return[ing] to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always <u>speaks</u>."[20] This forgoing of our everyday acceptance of the world is what Merleau-Ponty - following Husserl -

calls "phenomenological reduction." It is the attempt to grasp the world as it emerges into being for us, not in order to reveal it as the correlate of a transcendental ego as Husserl did, but in order "to reveal the mystery of the world and of reason"[21] which is concealed by classical thought. Merleau-Ponty's philosophical explorations of the phenomenological world intend to provide us with understandings of the world which heighten our awareness of its paradoxical and ambiguous nature and illustrate that the mystery of the lived world is not its weakness, but precisely what lets it be "there." Of rationalism and empiricism, Merleau-Ponty remarks, "they levelled out experience."[22] In opposition to this flattened world, Merleau-Ponty seeks to disclose being as depth. Yet the disclosures of the phenomenological reduction never coincide with immediate experience, for they themselves are a form of reflection and as such never present us with brute experience, but instead, with unreflected experience as it is understood and worked over by reflection. While returning to the lived world provides Merleau-Ponty with a vantage point from which to critique decisively forms of objectifying knowledge based on identity, nevertheless the lived world does not signify a privileged domain capable of providing the existential phenomenologist with a complete knowledge. Rather, by pointing to the lived world Merleau-Ponty gestures to that - all too

forgotten - mysterious region which calls us to a continual questioning engagement. Living experience, in its depth, always transcends our reflection upon it and ushers forth a dialogical relation with being which we must continuously renew. Hence while the phenomenological reduction is central to Merleau-Ponty's philosophical strategy, he cautions from the beginning that the "most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of complete reduction."[23] The wondrousness of the world rests in part in its ability to exceed even our attempts to grasp its wonder.

An important dimension of this paradox is that for Merleau-Ponty, both the experienced world and philosophical reflection are in a perpetual process of co-creation:

> The phenomenological world is not the bringing to explicit expression of a pre-existing being, but the laying down of being. Philosophy is not the reflection of a pre-existing truth, but, like art, the act of bringing truth into being.[24]

> There is no pure and absolutely unexpressed life in man; the unreflected [irréfléchi] comes into existence for us only through reflection.[25]

In these passages, we glimpse the circularity which is a central theme in Merleau-Ponty's ontology and manifests

itself in almost all of his work. On the one hand reflection always refers back to a layer of unreflective life out of which it emerges. On the other hand however, this unreflective life does not exist for us unless we return to it and bring it forth through reflection. Yet unreflective life is neither everything (according to a superficial reading of "the one hand") nor nothing (according to a superficial reading of "the other hand"). Instead, it should be conceived of as not fully determinate existence which is open to a variety of appropriations and resistant in varying degrees to all appropriations as well. Objective renderings of experience are possible because of perception's propensity to forget itself, but as we have seen, they are untenable because they are unable upon close examination to elucidate a way in which humans could experience the world. In contrast, Merleau-Ponty creatively expresses this wild untamed level of experience - "brings it into being" - in a way that places before our eyes and mind its very ambiguity and renders our ability to experience it more comprehensible.

As noted, philosophical reflection <u>transforms</u> being in its attempt to express it. Indeed, "without reflection life would probably dissipate itself in ignorance of itself or in chaos."[26] Recalling Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach that "philosophers have

only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it,"[27] one should note that for Merleau-Ponty, the philosophical act of understanding the world is already a transformation of this world. This is not in any way to assert that Merleau-Ponty advocated a praxis of inner life, much of his writing on politics and religion is aimed at refuting this notion. Nevertheless, if praxis does not end with philosophy, it takes an essential first step with it. Emphasizing the seriousness of the philosophical project, he writes:

> We take our fate in our hands, we become responsible for our history, through reflection, but equally by a decision on which we stake our life, and in both cases what is involved is a violent act which is validated by being performed.[28]

To conceive of being as depth as Merleau-Ponty does is to transform being, it is to make being deeper. As we shall see, though being is depth, to conceive of depth being and to create an individual and social existence on the basis of such an understanding is to begin to bring depth into life in a far "deeper" manner than was the case prior to our efforts. Being is essentially depth, but it can be flattened. The circularities involved here can only be hinted at at the moment, and will have to await the extensive discussion of depth below for further elaboration. Before we begin this later task, I wish

to briefly indicate Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the stakes involved (this too will be further developed in the next chapter) by sketching the dangers of flattened notions of being.

Dangers of Flat Being

If one wants to understand why objectifying and subjectifying thoughts and practices which flatten being intensify, diversify and proliferate with such ubiquity in modernity, the works of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Weber, Lukács, Heidegger, Adorno and Foucault are far more fecund than those of Merleau-Ponty. Other than occasional echoes of Hegel, Marx, Lukács and Weber, and vague statements like, "certain ideas have a pre-established affinity with certain politics or interests because each of them presupposes the same conception of man,"[29] we gain little historical insight into the increasing hegemony of these thoughts and practices. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty's apparent belief that perception's propensity to lose sight of itself is the germ cell of objective thought, while insightful in some ways, lends itself to hopelessly uninsightful and ahistorical understandings of contemporary discourses and practices. But if he did not delve deeply into the causes of reified thought, he was not unaware of the dangers it harbored.

In a brilliantly blunt footnote in The Visible and The Invisible, Merleau-Ponty writes: "Every attempt to reinstate the illusion of the 'thing itself' is in fact an attempt to return to my imperialism and the value of my thing."[30] To posit the thing itself is to assert its determinate existence, of which I am witness, as independent of its relations with me. To sever the threads which connect us with things and things with us is to posit a world lacking both immanence and transcendence (the latter, because our lack of carnal relations with things extricates us from the world, and affords us a complete and comprehensive view that is unavailable to embodied vision). This world and these things are flattened to my view of them insofar as I deny entirely the perspectival and carnal character of my vision and lay absolute and exhaustive claims to the "in itself." However, rather than the "truth" which it claims to possess, this thinking actually inaugurates an "imperialism" because it flatly denies both "other" aspects of the thing and all perceptions others may have of the thing that are not its own. Hence it is simultaneously an imperial denial and conquest of both nature and other people. (It is particularly imperialistic when another person is the "thing itself" that is the object of the objectifying gaze.)

Merleau-Ponty argues that in addition to being the aurora of the ontological dimension of imperialism, flat disembodied thought perpetuates and enhances its hold on things by establishing itself in a distanced and supposedly free surveying attitude from above. From the vantage point of a jet plane, "high altitude thought" ("kosmotheoros") perceives a flat world below spread out before it in entirety. Devoid of otherness, devoid of its intrinsic claims, devoid of the claims of others, it awaits manipulation. In further attempting to define the thing in terms of its thought and the "prior possibility of thinking it," this objective thought "impose[s] upon the world in advance the conditions for our control over it."[31] In addition, by denying the otherness of the world, this form of thought denies the violence it perpetrates and legitimizes the silence it imposes.

It is, I think, this broad understanding of the social and political tendencies of the predominant modern philosophies, that drives much of Merleau-Ponty's writing. In any case, this understanding both motivates and is central to the discussion that follows.

Philosophy of Depth

The centrality of "depth" (profondeur) in the work of Merleau-Ponty has generally been overlooked or

underestimated by his interpreters.[32] However, many of his texts contain discussions of depth and he uses the word repeatedly in The Visible and The Invisible in his attempts to distinguish his philosophy from Kant, Bergson, Sartre, Husserl and others. In the Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty states that depth is "the most existential of all dimensions."[33] In a working note in The Visible and The Invisible, he says that without depth, "there would not be a world or Being."[34] While these passages taken alone are obviously insufficient to illustrate the claim that Merleau-Ponty is most profoundly a philosopher of depth, they do indicate that it is an important notion for him and one that needs to be carefully explored in order to understand his philosophy. They are especially provocative for the present inquiry given his explicit rejection on more than one occasion of a "deep self" or "deep truth." If there would be no Being without depth, and yet depth is not - nor harbors - objective truth, we are led to ask: How must we understand this depth which is so essential to Being that Being would not Be if not as depth? Let us look more closely.

Merleau-Ponty's first discussion of depth occurs in Phenomenology of Perception, where as usual, he launches his own analysis from a careful critique of empiricist and intellectualist approaches. Both theories, he argues, are

alike "in denying that depth is visible."[35] For classical thought, which assumes that depth is simply "breadth seen from the side," depth cannot be seen because the seer is in no position to see it. It is either concealed by the first surface in sight which blocks our vision of all that is in the depths behind it; or in the case of the distance between our eyes and the first surface, there is no way of actually seeing this depth itself, since "this distance is compressed into a point" in our flat visual field.[36] The depth we are speaking of can only actually be seen if the observer moves to the side, in which case it becomes breadth. Classical thought argues that we experience depth not by seeing it, but rather by intellectually interpreting it in terms of breadth from facts such as the apparent size of the object in our visual field and the angle of convergence between our eyes. Hence the experience of depth is here understood as a cognitive activity in which we judge the objective breadth we would discover between ourselves and things if we were to see this distance from the side.

Merleau-Ponty finds serious problems in this objectivist rendering of depth. First, he argues that these traditional approaches "do not give us any account of the human experience of the world; they tell us what a God might think about it."[37] In collapsing depth to an interpretation of would-be breadth seen from the side,

they conjure up an experience of the world from the point of view of a subject who thinks of himself as simultaneously everywhere - a subject who must always posit himself at right angles to the line between his moving gaze and objects it contacts. Such an experience of the world inheres in no point of view; it arises from a subject who must occupy an infinite number of points in space (at least in some fantastic mental sense) in order to experience depth as identical to breadth wherever he turns his gaze. Yet Merleau-Ponty notes that this is clearly not the case, and that the essence of our experience of depth is precisely that it is the experience of an incarnate being specifically located in the lived world. For this being, for human experience, depth is not equivalent to breadth and height - dimensions which are laid out in plain view before us. Its appearance, more than the other two dimensions, speaks of its inherence in a <u>relation</u> between a subject and the world, rather than appearing simply as a quality of the world itself. The depth of the world always refers to a particular perspective which implies a communication between a self and the world at the origin of spatial experience, hitherto considered unproblematically as given "in itself." By collapsing depth into breadth and then conceiving of a "cerebral alchemy" which facilitates this conversion, classical thought jumps over this difference

between depth and the other dimensions and assumes a thorough knowledge of an entirely uniform objective space as the basis of our experience. However, this assumption begs the question, which is precisely to ask how we come to experience space - and depth itself in particular - to begin with. Our experience of depth must be prior to sophisticated calculations based on a space which depth itself gives rise to.

In contrast to these abstract approaches which deny both the specificity of depth and the peculiar relations between the self and the world which depth indicates, Merleau-Ponty contends that we must seek to disclose the way in which depth comes into being for us as depth without basing our analysis on calculations we supposedly make according to an entirely objective and explicit spatial network, the experience of which depth itself gives rise to. To do justice to this "most existential dimension," we must explore the existential relations between the self and the world towards which it gestures as fundamental, since it is through these relations that our experience of depth and the world originate. We must approach the experience of depth - and the relations through which it arises - through the "phenomenological reduction" in order to avoid falsely comprehending it in terms of a world which is simply there "in itself" and always already experienced as deep. The relations

between the self and the world cannot be comprehended "objectively," and it is only through these relations that the experience of depth and the world of things springs forth. If we simply assume that which needs to be understood we will have failed our task miserably. Prior to the world in which science has "levelled down the individual perspective" we must rediscover "the originality of depth."[38] Instead of explaining the experience of depth by phenomena in the given world, we must seek the origin - the birth - of our experience of the world in depth.

Merleau-Ponty takes depth's gesture towards the relation between the self and the world seriously, and hence he makes this relation the starting point of his analysis. The experience of depth is fundamentally "a possibility of a subject involved in the world."[39] The subject ceaselessly finds itself thrown into thickets of being of which it is not the author, and it responds to this thrownness through a continual effort to get a grip on this wild and indeterminate world which surrounds it. Yet the self's partial ability to get a hold on being - to sense something, rather than being condemned to thrash aimlessly forever amidst a world entirely ungraspable, entirely foreign - is not simply a result of its own will, but rather emerges from the fact that it belong to a more primordial and "general existence" from which it

originates as divergence, separation (écart). While this general existence is referred to in the Phenomenology of Perception,[40] and often implicitly underlies his discussions even where it is not mentioned, Merleau-Ponty does not submit it to a more careful and developed analysis until his later discussions of the "flesh." Without fully developing this notion until later, I wish to begin with a very brief and simplified discussion of flesh, since it sheds a certain light on Merleau-Ponty's earlier experiential discussions of the self-world relation with respect to depth which will allow us to explore them while avoiding some of their obscurity.

Among other things, we find in his notion of flesh the ontological possibility of the "self," the "world" and the relations between them. Merleau-Ponty calls not only my carnal existence, but also that of the world flesh in order to indicate a "kinship" between them which makes possible the sensible world which emerges through their communion. Indeed, the communication between the self and the world is only possible because, in a general sense, they share the same flesh. Expressing his theory of embodiment in its more developed form as "flesh among flesh," Merleau-Ponty writes:

> If [the body] touches [things] 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 the body belongs to the order of the things as the world is universal flesh.[41]

My flesh can be present to that of the world because at a certain level they are similar stuff. My body lends itself to the world and the world inscribes my body because they "belong together" as differentiations of a common flesh. Without this commonality nothing would be "there." Just as I can touch my own body by applying flesh to flesh, so too can I sense the rest of the world because I am thick like it is; and when I palpate it with my touch or my gaze it resists me, forming at the interface a surface of sensibility. Merleau-Ponty uses the term flesh in part to indicate this commonality, and in addition to distinguish his philosophy from any materialistic philosophy which would reduce the "coiling over" of flesh upon flesh to a relation among mere "things in themselves." Flesh is - as we shall see - "a general manner of being,"[42] inexhaustible, and not to be subjugated to our experiences of it as object.

As humans we thus find ourselves tossed in the jungle of flesh, and our existence is at a most fundamental perceptual level a constantly renewed attempt to establish and maintain a hold on the world. It is not the easy-going hold of a subject and a world which are rationally designed for one another. No, Merleau-Ponty's "world ceaselessly assails and beleaguers subjectivity as waves

wash around a wreck on the shore."[43] The commonality of the self's flesh and that of the world does not ensure a harmony, merely the possibility of something rather than nothing. In the midst of this condition, existence is the primordial attempt to make being determinate for oneself, the effort to experience a world with distinctions, significance, references and potentials - a world with a degree of familiarity in which we can find and guide ourselves.

Because my sensual field belongs to the finitude of an historical bodily being which is submerged deep in the world, in the most basic sense I cannot be everywhere at once nor present all at once to everything. Nor even can I be present simultaneously to everything which most immediately surrounds me. The finitude of my being which precludes ubiquitous presence to every-thing, behoves that my perceptual contact with - my perceptual hold upon - the world be through <u>something</u>. Hence my perceptual bond with the world must be essentially directional, proceeding to and fro between myself and something in the world. It is through this directional attempt to grasp the world so as to further direct my existence within it, that depth comes into being for us. "Depth is born beneath my gaze when the latter tries to see <u>something</u>"[44] (Merleau-Ponty's emphasis). At a most basic level, the perception of anything is (as we have already seen) the accomplishment

of a depth organization of the perceptual field into figure and ground. To perceive something, it must "stand out" - a trope which already indicates the essentiality of depth to perception: the figure must stand out from the depths of the background. The emergence of a distinct something implies the submergence of the rest of the world into the depths of varying degrees of indeterminacy. It is these perceptual distinctions, Merleau-Ponty contends, which give birth to the phenomenological world from an indeterminate sensory field by rendering it in a depth organization that allows us to grasp the world through our operative finitude and take up an existence with it.

Yet it should be emphasized that our grasping of the world is not at all the free act of a constituting subject. The phenomenological world emerges through the carnal intercourse between the flesh of my body and the flesh of the world. Depth emerges as I "try" to see something, yet "the act of focusing...is equally a response to a question put by the data [les données] and this response is contained in the question."[45] If as Merleau-Ponty says, it is impossible "to see the spaces between the trees as things and the trees themselves as background,"[46] this is because the world demands that the incarnate self perceive it within particular limits. My body cannot climb the space between the trees just as it cannot pass through the trees as if they were space. As

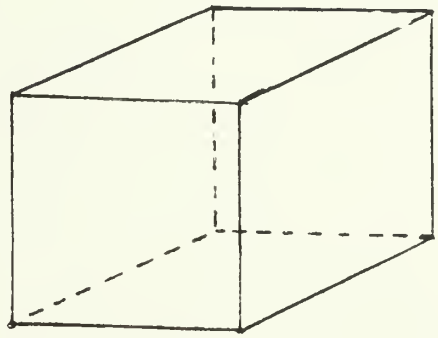
my body moves, it intersects the world in ever new ways; and its movement is in a relation of circularity with its perceptual grasp of the world in depth, insofar as it simultaneously presupposes and ceaselessly forms and transforms this field. As the world seduces, yields and resists us in multitudinous ways, our perceptual world is called forth. The world motivates my attempts to grasp it. However, even these formulations are abstract moments of my body's relation to the world - a relation in which flesh "coils over" upon flesh, that is more primary than either of the moments. The body and the world it is submerged in ceaselessly interpenetrate one another through reciprocal carnal "motivations." The field of depth emerges through this chasm between them, and ultimately "it is the field itself which is moving towards the most perfect possible symmetry, and depth is merely a moment in arriving at a perceptual faith in one single thing"[47] (my emphasis).

Let us further explore this perceptual field and the depth organization through which all things emerge. When Merleau-Ponty refers to "the originality of depth," clearly the figure-ground structure of all perception which brings things forth in our sensual field is part of what he has in mind. This depth founds a world with distinctions and texture which allows us to partially grasp it. Yet what is the essence of things which are

brought forth in this field? (I use the word "essence" as Merleau-Ponty does, not as a static nature, but thinking instead of Wesen and ester - active verbal essence.[48]) Are they flat entities laid out completely before us? Merleau-Ponty's response to the latter question is a definitive "no." Things are "things" not only through the depth of their distinction from their surroundings, but because they themselves have depth. Indeed, this quality is intertwined with their distinction. "Depth is the means the things have to remain distinct, to remain things, while not being what I look at at present."[49] Without their own depth, things would be indistinct from their surroundings and indistinct from me as well since I would totally possess them; they would not be. Hence, contemporaneous with the birth of something in my perceptual field is the rendering of the thing in depth, and this depth implies the spatiality of the world as well.

Merleau-Ponty pursues this genesis of the experience of depth in his discussion of our perception of a cube sketched on paper. I see a three-dimensional figure - rather than nothing or a mere incoherent juxtaposition of lines - by inhabiting it and animating it with my gaze in ways which the lines themselves call forth. This depth perception brings forth a "thing," a "locality," which

gathers together the lines on the page so thoroughly that their appearance is governed by their mutual implications.



Angles that are acute or obtuse when viewed in terms of the flat objective juxtaposition of lines, appear immediately in depth as right angles and the lateral faces (objectively diamond shaped) appear as "squares seen askew." Depth is precisely this bringing forth, this gathering together, this instantaneous crystallization of a significant perception in which some-thing and a "there" appears - that is, a being, volume, locality, the multiple parts of which "belong together" through their reciprocal implications. Prior to this there is no-thing, and no "there," only vague indeterminacy. Merleau-Ponty elaborates this point with a discussion of our perception of a sketched cube, because the sketch is sufficiently ambiguous to partially disclose the manner in which the depth rendering brings the field into being and holds sway over the aspects of the field, endowing angles and shapes with a significance they acquire through their relations

with other parts, pulling forth some lines, repelling others back, separating the figure of the cube from the background of the page; in short, giving birth to the "there." However, what Merleau-Ponty says of the sketched cube applies to all perception (except of course with the obvious difference that a real three-dimensional cube is rendered in a depth which has a tactile thickness which accords with its visibility). When I perceive a real cube, say the sugar cube on the kitchen table, its being springs forth from the background as a thick angular thing whose angles, shadows and faces cohere together in an originating spatial depth. All perceived things appear as things through this experiential pulling forth and pushing back which generally occurs instantaneously, distributing their parts in a depth which sustains their significance and calls forth the "there."

As we have indicated, this depth is not simply a quality of things themselves, but inheres in the perspective of our perceptual field. As my grasp on the world, the world's grasp on me, the depth in and through which things appear always expresses the stretch between them and me. Things appear not only as distinct from a background, but distinct from myself as well. Each thing is "being at a distance,"[50] and it appears as a significant thing only by cohering in a depth which reveals the various distances of its different parts from

me. Without this implicit stipulation no thing can be; not even a flat juxtaposition of lines on a flat surface, for "there are forms and definite planes only if it is stipulated how far from me their different parts are."[51] This "stipulating" is not that of an objective thought which would measure the distance, but more fundamentally the depth which emerges with the perceptual field as soon as it is perceptually grasped as "there," as soon as there is anything to measure. In absence of this depth there is only indeterminacy.

Hence we see not only that our experience of things originates in depth, but that in giving birth to "being at a distance," depth <u>renders open the "clearing"</u> we always find ourselves in the midst of. It is the depth of the perceptual field which clears being, which holds the field open, instead of smothering us in the absolute proximity of an indeterminacy from which we can distinguish neither ourselves nor a world. Here we begin to see the specificity and uniqueness of depth - the reason Merleau-Ponty calls us to think it. Depth as the essence of the clearing is not the "third dimension" of the world which, like the other two dimensions, can be measured. Rather, Merleau-Ponty speaks of depth as that through which our experience of the world and the three dimensions <u>originate</u>.

> Depth thus understood is, rather, the experience of...a global "locality" - everything in the same place at the same time, a locality from which height, width and depth are abstracted, of a voluminosity we express in a word when we say that a thing is <u>there</u>.[52]

The "there" emerges in depth as the visual field "pulls forward," "pushes back," implicates, reveals and conceals to present the space of the world. A volume of experience is given birth to within which we always discover ourselves.

Merleau-Ponty's inquiry into depth calls attention to the paradoxical nature of the world's presence to us, in which the depth of each being is grasped on the basis of distinctions which allow it to "stand out" from an eclipse that which it is not, while in turn these distinctions and this envelopment appear on the basis of each being's depth.

> The enigma [of depth] consists in the fact that I see things, each one in its place, precisely because they eclipse one another and that they are rivals before my sight precisely because each one is in its own place. Their exteriority is known in their envelopment and their mutual dependence in their autonomy.[53]

Indeed things are only "there" through a sort of self-eclipse, in which their present surface of visibility is indebted to and indicative of a latent invisibility

harbored in the depths of their being. Emerging from the depths of things through the coiling over of flesh on flesh, "the look does not overcome depth, it goes round it."[54] The world and the things which appear within it are this transcendence as depth, this presence of the inexhaustible.

Thus far, our discussion of depth has drawn substantial support from illustrations that are visual in nature. However Merleau-Ponty's contention that the perceived world originates through a depth rendering in which things find both their cohesion and their distinction from other things, applies to the perceived world as such, not just visual perception. As my fingers run through the warm sand on a beach, at least for an instant the rest of the tactile world which surrounds me is partially eclipsed and driven back by the thick being of the resistant sand. As I am captivated by Coltrane's saxophone, it bubbles out of the depths of an irreverently noisy book store, pressing the chatter, the jingle of coins falling into a cash register, the squeaky door, the sliding of books, into the deep reaches of its shadow, eclipsing them so thoroughly that they are almost driven from the room. And his wild improvisation is only able to do this because it is there - a thickness of inexhaustible sound which both appears through and demands its distinction. Merleau-Ponty writes repeatedly: "To be conscious

= to have a figure on a ground - one cannot go back any further."[55] The clearing of the lived world is always present in this depth structure in which we do not experience a uniform objective world, analogous to Cartesian space for all our senses, but rather a world that is "coherently deformed" around figures which "stand out."

However, if we have established that depth renders open the clearing of the lived world and that it is the dimension of transcendence, a crucial question looms large concerning the relationship between this experience of things and the flesh of the world. Does our experience correspond to the world's flesh? Does it express this flesh? Is it attuned to this flesh? After all, have we not asserted an ontological collusion between the self and the world by calling them both flesh?

I wish first to develop Merleau-Ponty's response to these questions by further elaborating his discussion of our experience of the world; and then, to explore the "indirect ontology" that grows out of this discussion and remains incomplete in his final works. In the latter, he addresses the relation between our experience and the Being of things.

As we have begun to see, the depth organization of the perceived world simultaneously reveals and conceals the beings which appear therein. However, Merleau-Ponty

also employs metaphors like "express" and "transgress" which are far less neutral and far more illuminating for the discussion at hand.[56] A close look at the experienced world indicates that each perception of a thing is extremely partial when compared with the multiplicitous being of the thing that is further revealed through the temporal elaboration of experience. More profoundly each perceptual moment organizes the field of experience in a manner which in part transgressively deforms the world that is revealed as our experience accrues (and, as we shall see, the world is not exhausted in the multiplicity of perceptions). No other type of perception is available to us. To have the world partially in our grasp, to have it in the depth of a perceptual field, is to "express" it in a manner that brings it into being in ever new ways which emerge from our intersection with it. But it is also essentially to render the world partially invisible - hidden in the backsides, the insides, the horizons of our perceptual field - and to elevate and subordinate its qualities and dimensions in ways which transform, bend and transgress its polyphonous and often cacophonous being.

One particularly apt word Merleau-Ponty uses to describe originating perception is "jaillir"[57] - to shoot forth, to gush, to flash. To perceive is to experience the figure of perception shooting forth in a flash which captures my attention and blinds me - at

least for an instant - from the rest of the world. For Merleau-Ponty, there is a sense in which all perception is dramatic. As my gaze is fixed on the point of contact between my pencil and the page, the motion of writing, the presence of the page, hovers over and dominates the room. Most of the world plunges beyond our horizon into invisibility. If we are usually unaware of this drama, Merleau-Ponty argues that it is because we tend to lose ourselves and the profundity of each instant, in the world which is revealed through continuous experience. We take this latter world as simply there, yet it always originates in the perceptual field which gushes like a spring out of our communion with things.

Summarizing the turbulence and transcendence of things, Merleau-Ponty writes:

> [Visible things] are always behind what I see of them, as horizons, and what we call visibility is this very transcendence. No thing no side of a thing shows itself except by actively hiding others, denouncing them in the act of concealing [masquer] them. To see is as a matter of principle to see farther than one sees, to reach a latent existence. The invisible is the outline and the depth of the visible.[58]

However, this "masking," this "denunciation" which is the essence of the visible, is not that of a God which reigns eternally. Rather the perceived world is "<u>wild Being</u>" (L'Être sauvage)[59] and depth vacillates like the

surface of a raging ocean, as figures emerge and submerge in the flow of experience. As the face of an other with whom I am conversing seizes the perceptual field, the being of third persons, the clock on the wall, the fly buzzing against the window pane as well as the facial expressions which my present rendering eclipses, do not resign themselves to their subordinated background presence, but rather contest the field's organization. Things coexist as "rivals" in my perceptual field, ceaselessly upsetting its balance, imparting perpetual life to perception rather than subsuming themselves neatly in a vision that is "once and for all." "Things dispute for my gaze; and anchored in one of them, I feel in it the solicitation of the others which makes them coexist with the first - the demands of a horizon and its claim to exist."[60] My perceptual world, one dominated by the animated face of my friend, is "coherently deformed" as the clock almost leaps off the wall. Now I barely hear the other, I barely see him; the other struggles over his loss of hegemony as I realize, "I'm late." And I <u>am</u> late, but the sudden expression of this truth, like all truths, cannot but transgress other aspects of being, like a storm cloud which brings darkness and lightning to the world deep below. The newly structured world is itself unstable: I do not leave before I swat a fly.

However, the world he describes is not one of incoherence in which the surface transience of experience is its greatest depth. He does not describe a world that is predominantly discontinuous - completely made and remade - from one instant to the next. Rather, the depth of our experience of the world which renders things both "there" and open to new and different perceptions, also ensures that there can be a degree of continuity to our experience - that it can cohere and elaborate rather than be ontologically doomed to proceed as a succession of discontinuous differences.[61] The figure which currently dominates my perceptual field harbors in the depths of its background horizons the other things which surround it and hence implicitly implies them. It is this mutual implication of other things and other experiences in the depths of each thing and experience that maintains a continuity in our experience of the world.

The importance of this basic coherence and continuity of the clearing cannot be overestimated. It is this which holds open the possibility that we might develop our perceptual and conceptual relationship to the world rather than simply abandon ourselves to a nihilistic succession of "differences." It is this which allows that our different experiences, no matter how discordant, might speak in the conversation of our existence and offer us the possibility of developing a greater understanding

of ourselves, others and things in the world. Without this basic belonging-together-in-the-same-"there" of our experience, existence could be nothing but a gauntlet in which we would never be able to rise to our feet. Depth vacillates like a raging ocean, but as inhabitants of this sea we simultaneously experience the marked cohesion of this massive fluid.

If Merleau-Ponty depicts "a world of teeming exclusive things which could only be taken in by means of a temporal cycle in which each gain is at the same time a loss,"[62] this is not to establish the foundations of a philosophy that affirms all perceptions as "equally valid." Some perceptions express the world better and transgress it less harmfully than others. Those which close us off from different others and close us to the possibility of different experiences in the future transgress the depth of the world in a way that fundamentally violates depth itself. Transgressions - "coherent deformation" - that bring forth a dialogical encounter with the world and maintain an openness to the future are on the other hand - as we shall see - the essence of depth itself. If I see in the person before me only the possibility of extracting surplus value, I am clearly transgressing this person far more and in a way that is quite different than if I recognize in the other a being which transcends me with her particular

aspirations, pleasures and desires. The world itself continually makes clearer the relative values of our perceptions as it "crosses out" those perceptions that prove to be unsustainable upon further contact. Yet even perceptions which are sustainable contain an ineliminable transgressive quality. To render the world into the depth of the clearing is not just to "deliver" it into the open, but to "rend" - in the sense of to tear it open. One of Merleau-Ponty's most important insights, it seems to me, is that perception is unavoidably a "violent act."[63]

However, the depth of the "there" which always violates things as it expresses them, is equally that which maintains the <u>openness</u> of our experience and provides the possibility of new perceptions which reveal dimensions hitherto dis-regarded. The backsides, the backgrounds, the horizons of my perceptual field, absorb my senses into the thickness of a fertile and protean soil capable of nurturing new visions which unfasten old closures. Through the <u>temporal elaboration</u> of experience I can become aware of differences and otherness to which I had previously been oblivious. But the will to eliminate transgression from each and every perception, to be present all at once to all differences, is unwittingly the will to express nothing - to let no difference figure on a ground.

All of this discussion has thus far taken place at the level of experience. Yet we are already closer than we may think to an ontology of "depth Being." If we have put forth such a lengthy portrayal of Merleau-Ponty's discussion of experiential depth, it is not simply because of its intrinsic value - although there is a great deal of this - but also because it is in keeping with Merleau-Ponty's contention that "one cannot make a direct ontology."64 "For how would we speak of Being, since those beings and shapes of Being, which open to us the only conceivable access to it, at the same time hide it from us by their mass...."65 Instead, we must proceed through a careful examination of beings and experience in order to "advance obliquely" towards an ontology of this elusive Being.66 Understood in this light, Merleau-Ponty's work at least from the Phenomenology of Perception on can be seen in retrospect as part of his working out of an "indirect ontology" which supports his final work, but also requires the final unfinished writing to show that the earlier effort "is in fact ontology."67 Presently the task at hand is to discern the trajectory of his final work in an effort to illustrate the way in which he gathers together his earlier insights into an ontological development that significantly deepens them.

In a "working note" entitled "the 'senses' - dimensionality - Being," Merleau-Ponty ponders the relation between "the sensible" and Being in a way that is extremely insightful and opens the door to a discussion of his ontology. He writes:

> What is proper to the sensible...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 <u>torn up</u> (arrachée) from the whole, comes with its roots, encroaches upon the whole, transgresses the frontiers of the others.[68]

This is a passage of great fecundity, for in it Merleau-Ponty begins to illuminate the relation between "the sensible" and "the whole" (Being) which it represents, in a manner that sheds a great deal of light on his understanding of the active essence of Being itself. In stating that the sensible is "torn up" from the whole, he indicates a profound kinship between the sensible and Being, which is central to his ontology. The sensible is not a phenomenal fabrication of a noumenal being which is completely other than what we sense: nor is it <u>simply</u> a violence we do to things. Instead the sensible is a "part" of Being, and hence it speaks to us - if only indirectly through "the voices of silence" - of Being itself. The task of Merleau-Ponty's "indirect ontology" is to "rediscover this world of silence" which

speaks through the beings we perceive; to disclose the Being of beings in such a way as to gain insight into both our experience of things and their transcendence - our experience of beings as transcendent.

Our exploration of the "wild Being" of the perceived world revealed a primordial layer of experience which is ceaselessly transformed and deformed as it becomes present in diverse depths. But what is the Being of this fluctuating yet coherent vision? What sort of nature is open to such diverse renderings? These are the questions which Merleau-Ponty's interrogation of "brute" experience gives rise to, for the latter illustrates not only the untenability of past ontologies, but the pressing need for ontological reformulation as well.

We must approach his ontology carefully, for even the question "What is Being?" can lead us astray if we take it to gesture towards some sort of "in itself." If Merleau-Ponty responds to this question - and he does - it is precisely by changing the meaning of each of the terms; for "what," "is" and "Being," each harbor a thickness and inertia stemming from their employment in traditional philosophy which powerfully implies ontological conceptions that he explicitly rejects. To inhabit the question without transforming it is to be carried along in a blindness that renders the interrogation which the question mark calls forth

meaningless from the start. Hence, it is crucial to note that the governing idea of Merleau-Ponty's ontology is that Being "Is not only what it is."[69] Let us explore this latter assertion more carefully.

In his interrogation of this elusive Being, Merleau-Ponty uses a cluster of terms; however by far the most important concept is "flesh." "Flesh is what 'lines' the visibles, 'sustains them, nourishes them.'"[70] Flesh is that out of which the sensible is "torn up." It is that which the visible transgressively presents. Yet it is not itself a "thing." Rather flesh is "a pregnancy of possibles,"[71] "polymorphism," a "latency," "openness" - most profoundly "depth" and "nowise a layer of flat entities or the in itself."[72] It is in this notion of "pregnancy of possibles" that we begin to see the way in which Being is not only what it is.

Earlier in our discussion we indicated that one reason Merleau-Ponty calls being flesh is to emphasize the commonality between the pulp of my body and that of the world. However Merleau-Ponty deepens this insight significantly when he argues that the commonality is not just one of "similar stuff," but "similar style" also. Merleau-Ponty calls Being "flesh" because my bodily flesh "is to the greatest extent what every thing is."[73] To say that Being is flesh, is to say that the Being of everything somehow resembles that of my flesh. Being

is called flesh in an effort to evoke a quality - an essential activity - which is most proximally experienced in my own flesh and further a quality of which my flesh is the most profound amplification. What characterizes my flesh, Merleau-Ponty maintains, is its "reversibility," the fact that it is both sentient and sensible. My flesh is both a being that perceives and a perceived being. It is neither exclusively "in itself" nor exclusively "for itself," but rather - and more primordially - both at once. It is both a field or clearing and what appears in the clearing. This flesh "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."[74] My flesh is not an inert mass, but a being which has itself and other beings in a sensual field - a being which is not contingently this way, but essentially so. I cannot detach myself from the visible. I am this essential activity ("Wesen," "ester") which is the visible's relation to itself such that a dimension is cleared in which it appears. This is the openness, latency, pregnancy, depth of flesh - not just the flesh of my immediate body, but (in a way that is very similar yet very different) the flesh of the world as well.

Yet one will protest that rather than being what characterizes the similarity between my flesh and the

world, the quality we have just described is precisely what distinguishes the two. Is not to argue otherwise to return to a strange philosophical position resembling early Greek hylozoism? In response to this imaginary interlocutor Merleau-Ponty explicitly asserts that "this is not hylozoism."[75] "The flesh of the world is not self-sensing (se sentir) as is my flesh - It is sensible and not sentient."[76] However, in spite of this crucial distinction Merleau-Ponty nevertheless argues that all flesh is a mode of reversibility: all flesh both appears in the clearing and participates in clearing the clearing. In another working note we find:

> My body is to the greatest extent what everything 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...."[77] (My emphasis and his.)

Hence, this dimensionality of things - their mode of reversibility - comes into being only when things are presented in the sensual field of my body. But this is not to say that in the last instance the dimensionality of things is simply a quality which I impart to things - a quality which does not belong to them as well. If we recall our earlier discussion, we note that our perception of things - their appearance within a perceptual field -

is neither our creation, nor a quality of things in themselves, but rather that which emerges through the intercourse between the flesh of my body and that of the world. This intercourse brings forth aspects of being that were only latent possibilities beforehand. (The thing's appearance does not lie "in itself.") Yet along with any thing's appearance in the clearing, we simultaneously elicit another essential possibility of the thing: its dimensionality. This dimensionality is a dependent dimensionality, but it belongs as essentially to anything which appears as its very appearance itself.

Hence the Being of things is to not appear to us simply as inert beings within a perceptual field, but to participate in clearing the field as well: to "represent," to make present (and thereby partly conceal) the Being of which they are a part. All things we perceive simultaneously give birth to the field they appear in. Things and parts of things interact not just as "things," but by being "dimensions" through which other beings (and other parts of themselves) are expressed, brought into being, presented. Depicting this mode of reversibility Merleau-Ponty writes: "there is dimensionality of every fact and facticity of every dimension - This is in virtue of the 'ontological difference.'"[78] It is this ontological difference that is the depth of Being.

Let us explore this a bit more carefully. The dimensionality of the world is perhaps most simply revealed in Merleau-Ponty's discussion of color in the working note with which we began our discussion of the indirect ontology of The Visible and The Invisible. Yellow, he argues, is not merely a sensible color but "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.[79] Yellow is a dimension in the sense that it is not simply the presence of a particularity, but a sensible which opens the world as well: it

> ...gives itself as a certain being and as a dimension, the expression of every possible being. As the illuminating color, yellow presents the rest of the world, expressing and transgressing it in the process. However, dimensionality is not just a quality of sensible beings which so clearly radiate throughout the rest of the world. All sensibles are dimensional (to varying degrees) in that they partake in opening the perceptual field as a whole. Perception is not first a perception of things, but a perception of elements...of rays of the world, of things which are dimensions...I slide (glisse) on these "elements" and here I am in the world.[80]

When I perceive the room around me, it is not present completely and all at once, but rather present through various fragments which reveal it to me. It may appear through my absorption in a Picasso print on the far wall or through the close proximity of the page I am absorbed in as I write. In each case the sensible which is torn out of Being and "figures" in the perceptual field presents the room as a whole: for example, I see "room through my absorption in the page." I "glisse" on the page and enter the world through it - a room which is highlighted and shadowed, amplified and muted, and in general appears with a certain significance endowed largely by the page. If I meet a large man with a knife on a dark street, he does not just appear before me as a human being in the visible. His appearance has an "ontological function," it reveals the world around me. My openness to Being takes place through this being I encounter. The world springs forth as Dangerous and everything around me is revealed as primarily either an enhancement or an abatement of this Danger. Hence the "dimensionality of every fact"; a dimensionality which along with the facticity of the sensible, is "torn out" of Being and expresses everything which it presents and everything it claims to be through encroachment and transgression.

As I have noted, this "reversibility" of being - the simultaneous facticity and dimensionality of the sensible - is central to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of Being as "pregnancy of possibilities," latency, openness and depth. If beings were not this reversibility one might argue that Being was infinite and never subject to complete experience, but not that it was a pregnant openness. Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza all took this approach to Being, conceiving of it as a "positive infinity" which is effectively more than we will ever be able to know. As infinite, the world is conceived as a determinate endlessness (Unendlichkeit) of which we ceaselessly uncover small fragments which leave so much remaining in the dark. The visible manifests only the little pellicle of being that it is. The invisible, the unknown, is conceived as "a positive only absent."[81] Given this understanding of being, there may be endless cross-sections of each thing, but in each of these views, everything would stay put in its own proper place; everything would be present in the stillness and "in itself" proportionateness of the Renaissance perspective. Each view - at least when cleansed of prejudice would express perfectly a fragment of the infinite. But this is not at all the infinity of which Merleau-Ponty speaks. His infinity is an "operative infinity": "the infinity of <u>Offenheit</u>

[openness] and not Unendlichkeit [endlessness]."[82] It is an infinity that ceaselessly proliferates not simply because there are an endless number of cross-sections we can make of any thing, but because each sensible, as a dimension, brings forth into the visible, the thing and world from which it is torn in a new way (partially transgressive) and thereby establishes within each being and among beings, relations which are not simply those belonging to things "in themselves" (which at most could be endless) but relations of re-presentation which multiply by ceaselessly giving birth to both the visible and an ever-replenished pregnant reserve in the depths of the invisible. This reserve is not just a hidden thing which can be revealed, but a being, which, when made determinate will itself represent the world anew - coherently transforming and deforming the world. These relations of "clearing" within being make possible and necessary an expressive-transgressive activity within Being which is utterly other than the "in itself."

In light of this fact, Merleau-Ponty's contention that Being is depth begins to be comprehensible. Depth cannot ultimately be consigned to the side of a "for itself" which must render the world in depth in order to experience it. No pellicle of the visible rests passively "in itself." Rather the intercourse of our historical bodily flesh and that of the world brings

forth a world in which each part partakes in relations of depth with other parts: pulling things forth and pushing things back in the depth of the clearing. These relations are not secondary aspects of things but belong as fundamentally to things as their very appearance. Facticity and dimensionality are abstract moments of the reversibility which characterizes the thingness of a thing - that is, the depth, the "there is" of things which is never that of a neutral visible. In its intersection with our body the sensible presents things, but it does so in a depth which maintains them at a distance; repels things as it brings them forth. "Depth is the means the things have to remain distinct, to remain things, while not being what I look at at present. It is preeminently the dimension of the simultaneous. Without it there would not be a world or Being."[83] We might add, that with it the world that emerges is "wild Being," a Being with an operative depth that proliferates everywhere we look and maintains the ineliminable otherness of things. In marked contrast to identifying thought, Merleau-Ponty argues that otherness is the very Being of things and the world. If identifying thought remains oblivious to the uniqueness of depth, it is because depth is the dimension in which things remain other, different (and this is the basis of the possibility of their non-possessed identity). This oblivion to depth is not an accident, it is necessarily intertwined with

sets of thoughts and practices which are oblivious to the otherness of things; thoughts and practices which define the world as being completely suited to possession. In opposition to this conquered world, Merleau-Ponty posits a "different" world springing forth in inexhaustible depth. "[T]he look does not overcome depth, it goes round it."[84]

Yet Merleau-Ponty does not posit a complete and total otherness in the place of a complete and total identity. If things remain distinct in depth, so too, they are presented in depth, though never in the purity of an expression without transgression. There is a certain complicity between the historical body and the world, but one in which expression and transgression, like Hobbes and fear, are "born twins." It is a complicity which enables there to be a dialogue between the self and the world, but one which gives rise to extreme contestation as well as agreement.

It must be emphasized that all we have said about the self's relation to the world extends to the self's relation to its self as well. "I who see have my own depth."[85] (Indeed, as we have seen, it is in communion with the reversibility of my own flesh that things spring forth as reversible themselves.) As an "exemplar sensible" I am not self-present simply and all at once, but rather I am continually rendered present in and as a depth which violates dimensions of my being

just as it brings others towards creative fruition. I never coincide with myself in a complete self-presence, and it is precisely this invisibility and absence - which characterizes even my most inward experience of myself - that allows me to open out upon and experience a world that inheres in its otherness. A flat self-possessing cogito could never allow a wild mysterious world to seep into its hermetically sealed experience of certainty. On the other hand, the deep non-coinciding self is thrown into the depths of the world. As non-identical it is confronted with the task of creating itself in contact with its own and the world's otherness.

Depth: The Dimension of Being-With Others

Thus far we have explored depth as that which most characterizes beings and the clearing which emerges through the carnal intercourse between the body and the world. Depth is the Being of flesh which continuously coils over upon itself, giving birth to the visible pregnant with the invisible. Yet if the discourse were to end at this point, it would perhaps obfuscate depth more than illuminate it. If the world were to break off here, we would be far more Cartesian and far less deep than we imagine. For depth is essentially intercorporeal: it springs forth through our contact with others who are

different. In absence of these others, depth is not. Hence, to speak of the experienced world as deep only or even primarily in terms of a single self's communion with the flesh of the world is, once again, to flatten depth. It is to assume once more the philosophical stance of a tradition which denies depth most primordially in assuming that we can speak of a self, a world and their relations in absence of others. It is to assume that philosophical questions can and should be approached most fundamentally by probing the relations between an isolated individual and the surrounding world. It is to perpetuate that flat "I" which Virginia Woolf sees materializing across the pages of a proliferating literature written mostly by men.[86] When Merleau-Ponty writes that those who attempt to construct phenomena starting from the "solipsist layer" "ignore the profoundest things Husserl is saying to us,"[87] he is speaking as usual not only or perhaps even primarily of what is important in Husserl's philosophy, but of that which is central to his own. For Merleau-Ponty (and his Husserl) the isolated self, the "solipsist layer," is not at all primary, but rather a "thought experiment intended more to reveal than to break the links of the intentional web."[88] Thus far we have discussed depth without explicitly addressing others, in an effort to disclose some of the primordial characteristics of our relationship with the world. Equally primordial - and without which

we would not in an important respect experience the world in depth - is our relationship with others. It is only in elaborating the circularity between our discussion of depth thus far and our relation with others that our task will assume its true value. In approaching "the profoundest things" Merleau-Ponty is saying to us, we must show not only that depth renders possible our experience of others, but equally that others give birth to a central dimension of our experience of depth. Only then will we kick the habits of the flattened "I" - its flat ontology, ethics and politics.

We have shed light above on Merleau-Ponty's comment that without depth there would not be a world or Being. He could equally have written that without others who are different there would be no experience of this "Étre profond." As we have seen, the world is "there" as a voluminosity of experience which opens up as it is rendered in a depth in which things appear as distinct individuals. However, Merleau-Ponty argues that prior to "intersubjective life" there is no "there" - no experience of a world in depth - but only anonymity in which "there is neither individuation nor distinction.[89] There is only a confused realm lacking differentiation, transcendence and depth. The self merges with the world, the world with the self, and hence neither emerges in its own right. It is only after the self is distinct for itself

- something as we shall see which emerges simultaneously with its grasp of others who are different - that the world emerges in its transcendent depths. Prior to this there is only a "primordial generality"[90] lacking the depth through which things appear "at a distance." This is not to say that without others who are different our senses would cease to open out upon the world. For example, I would still see the yellow mass that is my bicycle helmet. Yet I would not see it as a thing distinct from me and hence it would not exist for me in the depth which separates it from me and allows it to be "there" in its own right. As I have argued, depth and distinction are co-originary. What is crucial to note, is that the primordial distinction with which the depth of the "there" fully emerges - the primordial difference which releases beings from "primordial generality" and into the depth of the clearing - is that between the self and all that it is not, which bursts forth as the self confronts different others.

This is an insight of no small importance and calls for further careful elaboration. In order to understand more clearly Merleau-Ponty's circular comment that "the fully objective thing is based upon the experience of others, and the latter upon the experience of the body, which in a way is a thing itself"[91] we need to address several issues. First, I will very briefly summarize

his discussions of what it is about the nature of our bodily being that opens us to the experience of an "other." Second, I will discuss the importance of the "difference" between selves as essential to the perception of both others and the self. Finally, I will discuss the way in which our existence as beings among different others confers objectivity and depth upon the clearing to which we belong.

The modern problem of the other stems from Descartes' formulation of the cogito, in which the fact that "I think" is taken as the first absolute and most fundamental ground of my certainty. He argues that all other knowledge is rooted in this transparent fact and has the status of being the cogito's mental judgment of its representations. Descartes himself avoids the solipsism this position lends itself to through his "proof" that there exists an undeceiving God, one who guarantees that my most rigorous representations of the world and others are not merely illusory, but representations of beings which do exist in fact. However, for those lacking Descartes' certainty in God, the existence of others and otherness becomes a Problem. If transparency and pure self-presence are the ground which assures my certainty of a being's existence (namely that of my own res cogitans), then how can I possibly be certain of the existence of another "for itself" - a being

defined by its absence from me insofar as I can never coincide with it? How can the other be for me anything but my representation (and hence not truly an other)? Our presence to others as such is an unsolvable problem for the philosophy of consciousness, and this problem is perhaps the greatest testimony of its poverty. Nevertheless it is a pervasive poverty, one which dominated the intellectual milieu from which Merleau-Ponty emerged and hence one which he felt compelled to address.[92]

However he does not, of course, address the problem on its own terms. Indeed his approach to the problem demands a radical transcendence of the philosophy of the cogito from which it emerges. Merleau-Ponty writes "[w]hat is interesting is not...to solve the problem of the other" but rather "a transformation of the problem."[93] The essence of this transformation is to ask not how my constituting consciousness can come to know of another constituting consciousness, but rather how my bodily being experiences another bodily being. The secret to the latter question, he argues, can be partially illuminated by re-examining the way in which my body perceives itself, for the perception of others "presents us with but an amplification of the same paradox."[94]

Unlike the Cartesian cogito which is completely present to itself at each instant of its thought - able to perceive itself perceiving - the self-perception of

Merleau-Ponty's incarnate self is characterized by a certain absence. As my right hand attempts to touch the actual touch of my left hand, the latter retreats into the depths of my being just as my right hand is about to succeed. My body is never completely present to itself in the act of perception, because perception is an "ek-stase" in which the self is thrown outside of itself and into the world (world in this instance meaning this visible body of self-perception). Perception must in part lose itself to gain access to the world. In this perpetual thrownness the self-as-sensing recedes into the depths of the figure of the self-as-sensed. My left hand is given as an animate sensing thing, but one whose sensing my right hand cannot be completely present to. Hence Merleau-Ponty writes that "the reflection of the body upon itself always miscarries at the last moment."[95]

This remark goes a long way, for it forces us to abandon Cartesian self-presence and resituate our sense of self in the depths of the world to which we belong. The body's presence to itself has no absolute privilege over its sense of the rest of the world, for I am given to myself, as a part of the world and "I who see have my own depths."[96] Because all that is present including myself is "there" in a depth which presents an absence as well, the fact that I am unable to coincide with

the perceiving being of an other, no more threatens her existence for me than my lack of coincidence with my own perceiving being threatens my existence for myself. And if I know myself as part of the sensible world - as an animate being presented with a living grip on the world - then why, when I see other similar animate beings, would I not recognize them as "others"? Indeed, it is because I know myself as a "perceiving thing" in the world that I am able to sense and corporeally understand that there are "other myselves." Merleau-Ponty writes:

> My right hand was present at the advent of my left hand's active sense of touch [in depth, as we have described]. It is no different fashion that the other's body becomes animate before me when I shake another man's hand or just look at him.[97]

My body is able to recognize an other when it witnesses the latter livingly engaged with the world, intertwined with the visible in a manner which bears an undeniable human style.

But what sparks this sudden recognition of an other living human being? Though Merleau-Ponty never gives this question as extended an analysis as one would hope for, he addresses it briefly in various texts in ways which are highly illuminating. The central notion that runs through these discussions is that the other is revealed as an "other" when I encounter her difference from myself and

my expectations. Prior to the unexpected, the strange, the shocking encounter with another, the other as such does not really appear. In The Visible and The Invisible Merleau-Ponty writes:

> Here is this well-known countenance, this mile, these modulations of voice, whose styles 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 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: ...another private world shows through, through the fabric of my own and for a moment I live it.[98] (My emphasis.)

It is then, the unusual which kindles our sense of the other, whether it be a direct difference of content or style, or an uncanny proximity ("responding too well") which upsets established proper distances. Merleau-Ponty makes a similar argument in the chapter on "Dialogue and the Perception of the Other" in The Prose of the World: "If the other person is really another, at a certain stage I must be surprized, disoriented"[99] (my emphasis). In an earlier work still, he emphasizes the discrepancy which gives birth to our experience of the other in stating that, "the body of the other...tears itself away from being one of my phenomena, offers me the task of a true

communication...."[100] What is crucial to note here, is that we do not fundamentally recognize others in realizing that they are human beings who are "the same" as we expect them to be. It is through this sameness that the other slides into the status of "one of my phenomena" and hence ceases to be "other" for us. It is precisely in others' difference (here I include their shocking concordance with us as well as their more straightforward differences) that we recognize them as "other" beings who like us participate in being human. Emphasizing the importance of difference (here in the straightforward sense) in giving birth to a mode of coexistence that is distinctly "there" in depth, Merleau-Ponty speculates that

> [one] might even say that what Heidegger lacks is...an affirmation of the individual: he does not mention that struggle of consciousnesses and that opposition of freedoms without which coexistence sinks into anonymity and everyday banality.[101]

With Hegel, Merleau-Ponty contends that the recognition of self and other emerges simultaneously in the tension between others who are different.[102]

Being with different others pulls us out of anonymity and hurls us into an intercorporeal world with depth and distinction. And at the instant that I become aware of an other perceiving being, so too, for the first time, I become aware of myself. As I perceive the other,

"[f]or 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."[103] As I realize that I "figure" in the perceptual field of an other, I become distinct for myself as well. The perception of self and other spring forth together. Indeed, the notion of my self only has meaning in contrast with other selves from which I am distinct. Hence (following Lacan's analysis of the "mirror stage")[104] Merleau-Ponty completely leaves the terrain of the cogito, which takes itself as the starting point of all understanding, and asserts on the contrary that the cogito emerges only through contact with others who are different. Thus, though my body is such that it prepares me to experience the other insofar as its own self-presence can only be in depth, its depth should not be thought of as a "prior reality" upon which the rest of our experience is based. The body as depth being is only realized with different others: "The constitution of others does not come after that of my body; others and my body are born together from the original ecstasy"[105] - that which occurs when they are thrown together.

As we noted above, this original ecstasy which gives birth to the self that senses itself, simultaneously gives birth to both the distinction between self and world, and the depth of the "there." However, at the same time that

our experience of others inaugurates the difference which releases us from "primordial generality," the presence of their perceptual opening upon the world which we share brings forth a clearing with a far more textured distinct "visible" and an "invisible" of which we are far more aware - in short a clearing with a far greater depth - than we could experience in absolute solitude (supposing that the latter itself was possible). Indeed, the presence of the perceiving other "confers on my objects the new dimension of intersubjective being or, in other words, of objectivity."[106]

Merleau-Ponty's elaboration of this insight is perhaps sharpest in an early section of The Visible and The Invisible, which presents us, I think, with some of his most fascinating writing. Here he describes the intercorporeal world through an analogy with the world that springs forth in binocular vision. The visual images which each eye alone is able to render, deliver us to a relatively flat realm of "phantasms," lacking both the distinct presence and the latency which emerges with the depth world that appears as both eyes focus together. In the latter instance the different images of each eye synergistically combine to produce a world which is "there" in a far more convincing manner. Similarly, the different perceptions of others combine in communication[107] to bring forth a world which is "there" far more

profoundly (thinking here of the French "profond" which also means "deep") than the "private world" presented to a single self: "communication makes us witness to one sole world, as the synergy of our eyes suspends them on one unique thing."[108] "Yet, just as above the monocular phantasms could not compete with the thing [seen by both eyes], so also now one could describe the private worlds as divergence with respect to the <u>world itself</u>."[109] As two persons are present to each other in and through the world that is before them, each of the "private worlds" which appear in their respective perceptual fields "is given to its incumbent as a variant of one common world."[110] While each person becomes present to this common world through the synergy among others, no one possesses it completely, for each field is only a "divergence."

The depth through which we come to witness a common world does not homogenize our different perspectives any more than the depth which emerges as we train both eyes upon a thing demands that each eye have an identical vision. Instead, in both cases, depth emerges as the being of things which both makes possible divergent views and is called forth as divergences are brought together or "suspended" upon one thing. Depth is the dimension in which differences join in a thing not to be squashed and extinguished, but to communicate and give birth to

a sense of the richness and wildness of the world which far surpasses that which the differences are able to present in isolation. Depth deepens most profoundly not when two or more persons realize that they see the same world in the same way, but in the tension which arises as they recognize that they see the same world differently. It is in the attempt to elaborate and communicate these differences that my private world must deepen in order to harbor that which belongs to the things I see while not having been or perhaps not even being present immediately before me. As I attempt to recognize the otherness of the other's perceptions of the world to which we both belong, my world attains a texture and latency that it did not have before. I realize that the world I am present to is much more than I see, far more "there" than my singular vision attests to.

However, if the monocular-binocular analogy is extremely revealing in certain respects, we must be careful not to let it mislead us. The depth which emerges through the synergy of our two eyes gives birth to a world which is so convincing that we are almost never aware of our single eyes as divergent visions. Yet this is not so thoroughly the case with the intercorporeal world which emerges among different others. Indeed, here there is a ceaseless sense of discrepancy which gives birth to the

world as such, but which is not subsumed so harmoniously within it. Rather, the social world is that which

> ...envelops the individual, simultaneously soliciting him and menacing him...each consciousness both finds and loses itself in its relationship with other consciousnesses...the social is not collective consciousness but intersubjectivity, a living relationship and tension among individuals.[111]

However, once again, this tension should not be thought of in terms of differences each of which exist completely in their pure self-same identity and henceforth partake in the commerce of discussion. Our selves - our divergent worlds - are variants of this intersubjective world which envelops us, and it is as variants that we are different. We are with others as variants of an "anonymous visibility" which "inhabits us both"; as different positions in a conversation of which we are not so much the constituting agents, but rather beings borne along by this lively being-in-tension with respect to which we are formed as we attempt to specify our differences. When Merleau-Ponty writes that my body and others are born together in an "original ecstasy" he conceives of our being thrown into the world itself as an intercorporeal structure:

> The other's words, or mine in him, do not limit themselves to vibrating like chords the listener's machinery of acquired significations.... Their

> flow must have the power of <u>throwing me</u> in turn toward a signification that neither he nor I possessed before.[112]

It is perhaps here, in rediscovering the depth of the clearing which emerges in the intercorporeal world, that we can most appreciate Merleau-Ponty's Husserl and the meaning of his comment that "Husserl awakens a wild world and mind." Merleau-Ponty's encounter with Husserl reveals a world in depth which is entirely obfuscated by most western philosophies. It is depth which is born as the self becomes distinct as it recognizes itself in its intersection with an other. It is a depth clearing which is far more "there" (both in terms of presence and absence) than that which might exist in "isolation." My <u>dialogical</u> relation with a different other continually confers upon the world a distinctness and specificity which it would never have if I were a being completely alone. (Non-dialogical relations have quite a different effect, as we shall see.) As <u>we</u> stare at the sunrise our conversation brings forth a world with more and more texture: the greens near the horizon, the rays of light flashing above the clouds which I had not seen before, spring out of our dialogue and throw me into a world I cannot quit. The agreements that are achieved among different others combine in the world to multiply the density, complexity and fertility of the figures which appear before us, as well as our sense of reality. But

also, the things the other sees there which I cannot quite accomplish in my own vision, reveal the horizons, the backsides of my own immediate perceptual field. My field harbors an invisibility in its horizons which makes it even more "there" than it immediately appears to me. I am struck by the world's transcendence, its capacity to outstrip and resist my attempts to grasp it. I am brought before a depth world that is other, a depth that calls me into a continual dialogue with the natural world as well as the world of others.

At this point it is perhaps helpful to summarize and clarify the understanding of the experience of depth that has thus far been presented. We began with a discussion of the birth of the perceptual field in the depth of the figure-ground structure. Here the field is presented with a latency, an indeterminacy - a depth which is essential and cannot be overcome. This depth emerges as soon as our senses open out upon the world and it is with us until our perceptual contact with the world ceases. Paradoxically however, Merleau-Ponty maintains that the solipsist rendering of our perceptual field into figure-ground is not sufficient to give birth to a "world" proper. In fact, prior to "intersubjective life" there is "neither individuation nor distinction" in any "real" sense, no "fully objective things," no "depth" in an important respect that is different yet

related to that described above. This is as we have seen, because we do not become "distinct selves" until we become aware simultaneously of others as perceiving beings and the fact that we "figure" in their perception. It is this "distinguishing" through which the world emerges from its submergence in an anonymity to become "Étre profond" - a real "there" with both particularity and latency. Through this distinction the world "figures" for me on the background of my body (and vice versa) and as such appears as depth in the fullest sense. Prior to this distinction particularity has not been released from the merging of self and world and latency as such is not experienceable since it lacks a referent. Thus Merleau-Ponty seems to argue that while there are figures and grounds prior to others, at this level we do not experience the real distinction of what figures in our field and hence we do not experience things as such. If this is correct "Étre profond" is born when the distinction and latency of our perception is "realized" in the realm of intercorporeality. Dialogical being with others continually presents us with the unexpected polyphony and mystery of the world.

However, let us not sound so optimistic. For this intercorporeal world which brings forth depth also menaces the depth of selves as it does so. We are so often flattened, torn up, obfuscated in our

lives with others. Yet this assertion ostensibly has an odd ring within the philosophy we have just elaborated. Have we not argued that the world is essentially "Être profond"? What does it mean to speak of "flattening" in this context? I will address this question in two parts, first indicating a couple of places where Merleau-Ponty seems to indicate an awareness of the danger of some sort of flattening, and second, by elaborating a possible phenomenology of flattened being.

That depth itself appears at some level - as yet unspecified - to have an aspect of contingency is hinted at in a passage we have already quoted above where Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the importance of different others and recalls "that struggle of consciousnesses and that opposition of freedoms without which coexistence sinks into anonymity and everyday banality."[113] Were the agonistic tensions and bizarre proximities of our lives with others to begin to wither away in some sense, the depth which is born in this realm would begin to disappear as well. Coexistence would move away from the distinction and latency which characterizes the depth of the "there," towards "anonymity." If our distinctive individualities were to be increasingly normalized, rather than illuminating a world of depth, our intercorporeal existence might increasingly present

an anonymous flattened view of the world - a view perpetuated in a continual exchange of flat agreement.

For Merleau-Ponty this is not simply an imagined danger, but a menace which is steadily at work in modernity's persistent attempt (in a variety of forms) to flatten the wildness of Being with objectivist understandings of humans and the world. These conceptualizations reduce humans to a set of transparent operations which eradicate the otherness in others and ourselves and substitute it with a thorough "intelligibility." Yet it is not simply a "misconception" that Merleau-Ponty is concerned with, it is an erasure of Being. Expressing this prospect, he writes that the danger of increasingly

> ...set[ting] out to construct man and history on the basis of <u>a few abstract indices</u> (as a decadent psychoanalysis and a decadent culturalism have done in the United States) is that, "since man really becomes the <u>manipulandum</u> he takes himself to be, we enter into a cultural regimen where there is neither truth nor falsity concerning man and history, into a sleep, or a nightmare, from which there is no awakening."[114]

This is a strongly worded statement and it is strange to read this philosopher of contingency speak of what seems like the contingency of radical contingency itself: a closed regimen "from which there is no awakening." Perhaps we have before us an exaggerated rhetoric

designed to shock us into an awareness of a great danger. Almost everywhere else Merleau-Ponty has argued that the contingency which threatens us equally prevents the evil in the present from attaining the status of absolute finality. Whatever the case may be with regard to the possibility of an "ultimate flattening" however, what seems quite clear with respect to the quoted passage is that Merleau-Ponty sees in modern objectivist constructions of human being a certain flattening of being which at least works <u>towards</u> a kind of closure as it proceeds. By taking ourselves to be - and increasingly becoming - the "manipulandum" we increasingly close ourselves to the polyphonous character of our being and simultaneously close ourselves to the experience of different others. In short, we become increasingly severed from the depth of the clearing.

But what could this possibly mean? What might Merleau-Ponty have in mind when he speaks of an anonymous coexistence, a nightmare from which there is no awakening? What could an experience of flat being be like? Merleau-Ponty does not pursue this question rigorously with respect to the passages above, so we can only formulate what he <u>might</u> have said in light of what he writes in other contexts and in light of his philosophy as we have explored it thus far.

The only place Merleau-Ponty attempts a phenomenology of flat being is in his discussion of hallucinations in the Phenomenology of Perception. While the flatness we are concerned with will obviously be different from the individual hallucination in important ways, nevertheless I think one can argue that objectifying and normalizing theories and practices flatten being in several ways which are hauntingly analogous to that of the hallucination.

What distinguishes the hallucinatory thing from a real thing in the world, is that the former, unlike the latter, is not a "depth being" (Être profond).[115] While the thing in the world is present in a depth which simultaneously prevents us from ever completely possessing it and allows it to remain distinct, the hallucination lacks a certain transcendence, and is "an artificial world answering to the total intention of [the hallucinator's] being."[116] This lack of depth has several important manifestations. To begin with, while the real thing is open to endless and inexhaustible exploration as our senses move around its depth, and as we rend open our current perceptions to more detailed examinations, in contrast, "[the] hallucinatory thing is not...packed with small perceptions which sustain its existence. It is an implicit and inarticulate significance."[117] It lacks the "consummate fullness" of the thing in the world which presents itself with textures, details and other sides

that are implicit in the horizons of my present perception though not explicitly before me. In contrast to this fullness, which harbors the invisible that both calls forth and unfolds through the temporal elaboration of experience, the imaginary thing is "there" as complete - a pure correlate of our intentional being that "has no depth and does not respond to our effort to vary our points of view."[118] It is completely as it is presented in the hallucination, not as a being with reserves. Indeed, because its being is absolutely complete and lacking horizons, it is "played out on a different stage from that of the perceived world."[119] It is simply there, superimposed upon the world, but not existing within it. The hallucinator can find no paths to connect the hallucination with the rest of his experience and that of others - it is wholly outside the intercorporeal realm. Because of this the hallucination cannot be successfully challenged by others. The hallucinator has an awareness that the hallucination does not exist at all for others, but that does not devalue it in the least:

> the food refused by the victim of hallucination is poisoned only for him, but to this extent it is poisoned irrefutably. The hallucination is not a perception, but has the value of reality, and it alone counts for the victim. The world has lost its expressive force and the hallucinatory system has usurped it.[120]

The hallucination is a "running wild" (l'affolement) of the body's perceptual power to the extent that fragments of the world are unrecognizably distorted, or in even more extreme instances, the world is lost altogether. The clearing no longer emerges "through dealings with harsh, resistant and intractable world which has no knowledge of us," but rather in the fabrication of an isolated fictitious setting"[121] - a setting which, in the complete flatness of its presence, is unsusceptible to interrogation by the self or others, and hermetically sealed from the expressive force of the world.

In what sense can the anonymity of objectified and normalized coexistence be compared with the hallucination? Clearly they are quite different insofar as the hallucination is a private experience, while the anonymity to which we refer is a collective phenomenon. Furthermore, the flattening in which we are interested concerns the perceptual realm - not a "different stage." In spite of these differences however, I think the perceptual field associated with objectifying and normalizing practices acquires a flatness that is markedly similar to the flat completeness of the hallucination. Clearly we do <u>not</u> mean that the perceptual field loses the depth of its figure-ground structure. However, as our perception becomes increasingly normalized, this structure becomes increasingly "frozen." The latency

of the perceptual world which once solicited our senses and provided ever-new perceptions of things, is more and more locked out of the foreground. For example, for many men, women may only "figure" in the perceptual world according to normalized objectified indices of femininity and sexuality. The rest of women's cacophonous being is frozen in a background which, for all practical purposes may be inaccessible. Similarly, as nature is reduced to the status of "object," all those dimensions which do not fit within this general figure are frozen out of our experienced world. The multiplicity of selves and the world is increasingly closed out by normalized perceptions which intensify as they circulate among people in institutions, discourses and practices.

We saw that central to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the depth which emerges in the perceptual field was being as a "perpetual pregnancy." Yet it is precisely this which withers as our figures freeze. What is at the heart of the normalizing gaze is a denial of the possibility of a background that might be surprising and disruptive. This gaze parades in a flat completeness that is parallel to that of a hallucination. As we approach the world and others through this conceptual and perceptual schema it becomes for us a being increasingly lacking transcendence. Yet as we have seen, transcendence is the essence of the world for

Merleau-Ponty. Hence we become present to something that less and less has the character of "world" in the deepest sense, and more and more begins to acquire qualities of the hallucination. Beings increasingly appear as correlates of the subject - in this case collective - and in this mode of presence interrogative relations which might upset this basic misperception are less likely to arise.

Of course, Merleau-Ponty was not a theorist of "one-dimensionality." As much as he was aware of the dangers of flattening in which that which is other than and in the background of the established visible is "locked out," nevertheless, what appears always does in fact appear with a latency which <u>though effectively locked out is not nothing</u>. Hence even as the world is flattened it harbors the possibility - which can be reduced but not extinguished - of resisting flattening modes of perception. Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty understood the world to be full of tensions and contradictions which counteracted the leveling tendencies he saw at work in modernity. Thus, while he viewed most western philosophy since Descartes as operating within flattening objectivistic assumptions, he was also well aware of elements in Hegel, Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud which resisted this trend.[122] Similarly, within the human sciences, while he believed that objectivist

constructions were prevalent, he also saw movements within these sciences which he thought contained the germ cells of a radical reformulation.[123] Again, while he was quite aware of the violence and injustice of capitalism, it was not for him a seamless reality: history thus far remains open.

If we take such pains to illustrate the similarities between the hallucination and operationalized coexistence, it is to underscore that what is at stake in taking this latter path, concerns important aspects of the depth of the experienced world. If the "unwonted" is in Merleau-Ponty's view essential to the depth of the clearing, it is equally important to realize that the objectifying norm takes aim at this very depth.

What emerges from Merleau-Ponty's discussion of Being as depth and the possibilities of flattening, is, I think, quite profound. Implicit in this discussion are the first steps of a path out of modernity's nihilistic inability to affirm any values. For <u>the fact of the world's depth</u> - the depth through which things are "there" in the full sense as visible and invisible with latency - far from being devoid of value, implies <u>a recognition and reaffirmation of the value of different others</u> (who are willing to make a similar affirmation) and more generally, the otherness of the world. For the singular self or the collective subject which denies all difference, the world

is increasingly flattened and supplanted by a complete depth-denying presence. The expression of beings, that they appear in the openness of the clearing, demands an affirmative valuation of otherness. This expression implies transgression; but it is a transgression which brings forth something into our field of perception with a latency in which the temporal elaboration of experience may bring forth previously transgressed elements. The objectifying gaze brings forth no-thing and makes present a frozen image beneath which the world - unrecognized - held in a transgression that denies its own violence and seeks to eternalize itself.

In pursuing the phenomenological project of exploring the origin of the world's wondrous presence to us, Merleau-Ponty discovers that "principle of an ethics" which he adumbrates at the end of his prospectus for the Collége de France. As an ethic of the world as such, it provides us with an important step in "revaluating values" and frees us of the nihilism which necessarily accompanies objectivist understandings of the world as simply and completely there (i.e., not there at all). Our bringing forth, listening to and engaging with the depth of the world is, I believe the fundamental value for Merleau-Ponty. Empty? Only for those who, longing for "the complete," are oblivious to the wild flowering fullness of the world which not

only lies at the heart of his philosophy, but is too the deep spring of his celebration - and the source of his caution and sense of danger. However, the recognition of different others which is so crucial to this engagement is at this point quite vague. In the following chapter we pursue some of the ethical and political implications of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy in order to elaborate the sense of this recognition in terms of our coexistence with others.

Ethics and Politics of Depth

Introduction

A great deal of Merleau-Ponty's work directly addresses ethical and political issues. However, while he developed penetrating and lucid critiques of some of the central ethical and political thoughts and practices of our age, the affirmative directions of his thought were left very far from being fully developed. There are powerful and suggestive insights into these questions in almost every text he wrote, but they call for further thoughtful elaboration.

It is clear that Merleau-Ponty sought to develop his theories of perception, expression and his ontology in part, to provide us with fresh insights into how we might live together as political and social beings in

ways that minimize "terror" in both its explicit and more insidious forms. It is no accident and of no small importance, that in the prospectus of his work which he prepared for his candidacy to the Collège de France, he closes by noting that a successful elaboration of the "wonder" of expression "would at the same time give us the principle of an ethics."[124] Even the last work he saw published, a work on aesthetics and ontology that might seem far removed from ethics and politics, is in an important respect, an attempt to reawaken the "brute" world of the painter as a first step in formulating an alternative to the nightmare of "operational thinking" and being which threatens us in modernity.[125]

But what exactly is the nature of this nightmare and what might be the alternative? In this chapter I maintain that the power of illumination which Merleau-Ponty's writing lends to an exploration of these questions far exceeds his explicit attempts to address them directly. Hence, rather than limiting the present discussion to the latter, I wish to develop the ethical and political implications of the philosophy of depth elaborated in the previous chapter, and to bring into focus and distinction his more explicit ethical and political insights within this context. Only in so doing does the richness and depth of Merleau-Ponty's work - as well as the necessity of confronting it - become fully apparent.

Some historians of ideas will probably say that what follows is not a faithful remembrance of Merleau-Ponty; that one should stick to a more literal reading. But I do not wish - to use his own phrase - to condemn Merleau-Ponty to the "museum." In what follows, I take most seriously his view that art, philosophy and politics thrive not in preserving the past by constructing identical copies, but through "the duty to start over again and to give the past, not survival which is the hypocritical form of forgetfulness, but the efficacy of renewal or 'repetition,' which is the noble form of memory."[126] Here I do not wish to record so much as to <u>continue</u> the philosophical effort which still lives and breathes on each page - so long as we do not treat them as artifacts to be dated and located in an entangled web of dead relations.[127]

In this chapter I attempt to draw out the ethical implications of his understanding of the artist in order to articulate a theory of the self and its relations to the surrounding world. Next I consider some of the social and political arrangements which Merleau-Ponty believed fostered flattening and hence were untenable. I then proceed to carefully explore the affirmation of parliamentary democracy in an effort to gain ethical and political understandings which extend beyond the institution of parliament itself. Finally, I argue

that an affirmation of the self as a work of art is essential to shifting the function of politics away from the imperative of ever-enhancing and legitimizing reified systems of productivity, towards an affirmation of diversity and dialogue that transcends "the existential requirements of a particular political order."[128]

What sort of lives and social practices would more successfully recognize and affirm ourselves as different as well as different others? The most superficial conclusion one might draw from the above insight is that its realization calls for anarchical liberty: let everyone be absolutely free to express all "difference." Let each "become different" from one instant to the next. Yet Merleau-Ponty is "not speaking in favor of an anarchical liberty,"[129] for it simply denies the reality of - as well as the necessity of - confronting the violence which springs forth in the interaction between people who were not designed ahead of time to spontaneously enter into harmonious relations. It assumes that human society is naturally a "community of reasonable minds," whereas, the task of both philosophers and political theorists is to "explain the upsurge of reason in a world that is not of its making and to prepare the substructure of living experience without which reason and liberty are emptied of their content and wither away."[130] The anarchist solution to the

problems of freedom and difference is simply to deny that they really are genuine problems of coexistence. Hence they assume that coexistence will be problem-free - or at least that problems will be reduced to a minimum - if we just "let it be." Yet there is no reason to assume that there would be much recognition of otherness at all in a state of absolute anarchy. We do not have to assume a Hobbesian "war of all against all" to be suspicious of the naive teleology in a theory that posits such a "natural" harmony. Furthermore what "difference" would there be to recognize in such a state of absolute freedom? As Merleau-Ponty has argued "[t]here is no freedom in submission to each shiver of opinion."[131] Such an existence would most likely cancel its efforts from one moment to the next; it would be more productive of nothing, than difference. The development of human difference that shines forth as visible and demands recognition, is not "natural," but the product of careful elaboration of "styles" of individual and social existence. "Liberty has to be made in a world not predestined to it"[132] (my emphasis). We might say the same thing for the recognition of difference.

Self as a Work of Art

Merleau-Ponty's self dwells in the depths of an ambiguous world that "ceaselessly assails and beleaguers subjectivity as waves wash round a wreck on the shore."[133] Yet if at times we come across some remarkable echoes of Augustine in his conception of this existence where humans so often are "not a strength but a weakness in the field of being,"[134] his conception of how we might understand and craft our lives is nevertheless very different from Augustine's in some fundamental ways. When Merleau-Ponty turns away from the objectified world of classical thought and towards a fresh study of the embodied self, he finds no "source of intrinsic truth," no "inner man."[135] Rather he uncovers only a self inextricably intertwined with the world. We find ourselves thrown into this world, a society, a body with vulnerabilities and limits - all of which to a great extent we neither chose nor can deny. And there is no God to guide us, no nature in which we find hints of a design or transparent purpose for which to live. Merleau-Ponty discovers depth, but it harbors not even the muffled voice of a self-present God. But nor is this discovery that being is depth nihilistic and empty. To be sure, we do not discover a completely articulated theory of ethical values and practices through the ontological exploration of depth. In fact, the notion of a completed theory of ethics is antithetical

to a philosophy of depth. Yet an understanding of the depth of being offers us a general ethical direction; it motions us towards an appreciation of difference, dialogue and style.

According to Merleau-Ponty, we are faced with living our lives and transforming our social world in ways which articulate and meaningfully bring forth - and in doing so partially create - these general values that he finds rooted in our existence. And we must do so in the turbulent intercourse between the self, others and the world at large. We creatively bring forth meaning and value in our lives in "actively being what we are by chance,"[136] in plunging into communication with this historical world of nature and others which penetrates us to the cores of our being, and in attempting to explore and pursue the limits and possibilities it presents as well as strategies for change that enhance freedom and the depth of being.

In an effort to further elaborate Merleau-Ponty's understanding of this task and the ethical understanding of our lives that emerges from his philosophy, I wish to explore and develop a notion of the self as a work of art, drawing extensively from Merleau-Ponty's comments on style and the nature of artistic expression.

As our body makes its way in the world it "gathers itself together and begins to see, to understand, and

to signify."[137] Through our particular inscription in the social and natural world, through our successes and failures in our attempts to pick a path with our "fragile body, in a language which has already done so much speaking, and in a reeling history,"[138] we each develop a "style" of existence, sedimented habitual ways of perceiving, moving in and conceiving of the world. It is this style through which the body interacts with the world, unifies itself - a unity that is never total, not that of an entity subsumed under a law, and one which is continually disrupted by new experiences which challenge it in different ways - and through which others come to recognize and communicate with us. So fundamental is the notion of style to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the body that he argues that the latter should be compared to a "work of art"[139] not because our life is the purely self-conscious elaboration of an absolute subject, but because each movement and perception is born in the wake of and colored by the style (primarily preconscious) which animates it. Viewed from without, each manifestation of one's style reveals "a way of inhabiting the world, of handling it...in short, the emblem of a certain relationship to being."[140] We witness this style in another's movement and perhaps even more profoundly in the paths left by the painter's brush as she attempts to capture, express, accentuate and bring to explicit life on a

canvass, the world that appears in her stylizing perception. From within, style does not appear as such, but orients and gives form to the world one perceives in arranging "certain gaps or fissures, figures and ground, a top and a bottom, a norm and a deviation in the inaccessible plenum of things."[141] Style submits things to a "coherent deformation" which bends the diverse elements of the world towards a particular signification and establishes in one's movement and perception - one's work - a certain "system of equivalences," priorities and privileged elements with respect to which the world tends to spring forth before us. Our style should not be thought of primarily as something that is governed by our consciousness but rather as that which emerges at the point of contact between the self and the world through the practices and relationships into which the self enters. In turn, the world always appears to us through this style. Style at the most basic level is "preconceptual generality - generality of the 'axis' which is preobjective and creates the reality of the world."[142] Intellectual and artistic consciousness - as we shall see in more detail below - emerges out of this preconceptual style, but the form is not merely epiphenomenal, for as it attempts to bring the preconceptual realm into explicit existence it actively

transforms this realm. Hence they exist in a relationship of circularity.

Though most of Merleau-Ponty's discussions of style are concerned primarily with art and artists, and he makes little effort to develop an ethic around the notion of the self as a work of art, it seems to me that when his few comments on the embodied self as art are thought in relation to his more extensive discussions of the artist and style, some interesting insights into the self and ethics emerge. If as he suggests, we should think of the embodied self as a work of art, the sense of this thought is not merely to indicate that the living essence of the body is style, for this understanding has prescriptive dimensions as well. As embodied selves with sedimented ways of being in the world we are all essentially analogous to works of art, but we do not all live artistically. It is only when one makes this understanding of the self as art an integral part of one's existence, when one becomes self-conscious of one's being as art, and begins to fashion a life and an ethic around this understanding, that the self starts to become a work of art in the fullest of senses. The artistic self seeks not so much to <u>discover</u> the truth of itself (since "truth" is always revealed through one's style) - but to create meaning and elaborate a style of existence in the nexus between the self, others and the natural world.

Yet the artistic self is by no means to be the agent of an absolute prescriptionless freedom for whom all ways of being are equally valid. Merleau-Ponty's discussions of the artist are not merely descriptive, but contain what is for him an exemplary notion of the artist and artistic being more generally. They can be read as thoughts about an exemplary style in light of which or by way of which we might develop our various different styles. This notion of artistic being does not give us meaning in and of itself, but presents us with broad contours around which meaning ought to be artistically brought forth. Let us turn to his discussion of the artist in order to gain a better understanding of those elaborations of style with which Merleau-Ponty finds difficulty and those he holds in high esteem.

Thrown into the depths of the world, "caught up in the push and shove of being," borne by a time which relentlessly carries me forth, "I take up a field and invent myself."[143] But what is the nature of this inventing? As his criticisms of Sartre illustrate, it is not that of an originary subject - conceived as nothingness - who chooses his existence with an absolute freedom. Rather this "inventing" is that of a self whose being is bound up with numerous accidents - bodily, familial, historical - from which one cannot entirely escape; accidents which color our opening upon the

world. "In every life, one's birth and one's past define categories or basic dimensions which do not impose any particular act but which can be found in all."[144] The task of the artist and the self as a work of art is not to abstractly project these givens in order to attain some Archimedian point of view that would witness existence without "distortion" and secure a pure freedom. Such a rebellion is an existential impossibility and it is self-defeating insofar as it denies the particularities of oneself and one's situation through which the self opens out upon the world. In contrast, the artist gathers the multiple aspects of his or her being together in an attempt to explore and express the possibilities they open. Of course, this "gathering" itself is not some abstract force, but always already motivated and infused with that which it gathers. However, these "givens" do not impose upon one's existence a determined static meaning but rather, like the "accidents in Cézanne's life" - his nervous weaknesses, his troubled eyes - which "present[ed] themselves to him as <u>what</u> he had to live leaving <u>how</u> to live it undetermined,"[145] are the ambiguous text one has to decipher and elaborate from. Cézanne's fits and depressions, his "schizoid temperament," instead of existing only as something which wrenched him and those around him, additionally acquires, when it speaks through

his painting, a "metaphysical sense...a way of seeing the world reduced to the totality of frozen appearances, with all expressive values suspended. Thus the illness ceases to be an absurd fact and becomes a general possibility of human existence."[146] Cézanne's temperament might have incapacitated him, he might have said nothing. But his artistic expression of the unusual world that appeared before his eyes, brought forth and integrated this aspect into his existence in a way that enabled the peculiarities of his life to contribute to and shape a voice that continues to significantly and interestingly engage the historical world in which it is situated. Similarly Merleau-Ponty writes:

> The reason that Leonardo [da Vinci] is something more than one of the innumerable victims of an unhappy childhood is not that he has one foot in the great beyond but that he succeeded in making a means of interpreting the world out of everything he lived...he fashioned his corporeal or life situation into a language.[147]

As embodied selves our existence of necessity must confront the accidents which we find and which find us. But as we noted, the artistic self does not allow itself to be determined by these factors, either through obedience and simple acceptance or by a course of abstract denial. Instead it carefully elaborates a style in a continual effort at expression which "always <u>goes beyond</u>

<u>what it transforms by bringing it into a composition which changes its meaning</u>"[148] (my emphasis). In a sense, all expression, even the most basic perception, has this latter quality. However, what distinguishes the most exemplary of artistic selves is that they actively pursue this creative effort in a manner that recognizes the nature of artistic expression itself - the tensions and inextricable relations between tradition and change, past, present and future, one's accidental characteristics and what one longs to be, self and other - and seeks to create within the tensions inherent to it.[149]

Let us consider more carefully the nature of this artistic "elaboration of style." In the relationship between the self and its perceptual style we discover a circularity that is fundamental to artistic work. Merleau-Ponty's discussions of style often accent the preconceptual level: "perception already stylizes,"[150] it fashions the world that appears before us, and it is out of and with reference to this world, that our intellectual and artistic consciousness develops. Yet is this to imply that all of the real work of existence is already accomplished at the preconceptual level? Are the artist's thoughts and works merely epiphenomena? This would be strange given that his discussions seem to indicate a conscious dimension of art that is important in its own right and not identical to perceptual style.

It is clear that in his discussions of the "primacy of perception," Merleau-Ponty does not seek to "renounce reflection."[151] As we illustrated in an earlier section, intellectual consciousness plays an extremely important role in his philosophy. Indeed, "without reflection life would probably dissipate into ignorance of itself or in chaos."[152] Yet this does not mean that reflection should be "ignorant of its origins," for its activity is always vaguely portended - though not determined - in the perceptual field that emerges in the intersection of the body and the world. "That convergence of visible and intellectual vectors of the painting towards the same signification, X, is already sketched out in the painter's perception."[153] However, the sketches one finds at the perceptual level harbor only broad motives - beginnings with indeterminate outcomes - for artistic and intellectual expression. The stuff of artistic utterance does not lie completed in the perceptual realm, needing only to be recovered like a pearl at the bottom of a deep murky sea, but rather must be submitted to yet another stylization - another giving of form - in order to be brought forth. This supplemental stylization at the level of artistic expression is "the 'coherent deformation' by which [the artist] concentrates the still scattered meaning of his perception and makes it exist expressly."[154] Hence the artist interacts

relatively with the world that appears before her, motivated by it, thrown by it, but also at the same time bending, orienting and deforming it in the attempt to bring it into explicit existence for herself and others. In order for the body to get a perceptual grip on the world, it must participate in the "coherent deformation" of the plenitude of its surroundings, the establishment of depth, priorities, figures and grounds. In order to get a grasp on this perceptual world itself - "making it manageable for the artist and accessible to others"[155] - she must submit it to a similar transfiguration. Thus as the artist attempts to bring forth the perceptual realm, she also re-creates it and contributes to its making: "there is no pure absolutely unexpressed life in man; the unreflected [irréfléchi] comes into existence for us only through reflection."[156] The artist develops within this ceaseless circularity.

As long as the artist remains an artist, for her, her work is always in progress and never completed. For each expression of our encounter with the world brings forth out of the depths which one can never overcome, only a fragment of what there was to be said. To be sure, this is often an important fragment that really "says something," but the silences which surround it, the transgressed elements driven from or subordinated within the work, speak of a tremendous plenitude of

otherness which calls her to go farther, to continue the dialogue between the self and the world that is the life of the artist. Indeed, the world that faces the artist every day is not so much that which has already been caught in a phrase or on a canvass, but rather a "questioning" that wells out of the depths which exceed what she has thus far been able to give voice to.[157]

This view of the artist stands in marked contrast to some other conceptions of the artist's project. In Renaissance and Classical theories of painting for example, the artist's task is excessively reduced to rendering the world present through the exact techniques of perspective. Within this framework, things are submitted to a strict ordering which denies "the solicitation of the others" that are assigned to the background and, falsifies depth in totally silencing the invisible of the visible - "the demands of a horizon and its claim to exist."[158] Here reality is presented "in the mode of the completed or of eternity," and rather than "wild being," we experience a crystallized, tamed world where "everything takes on an air of propriety and discretion."[159] Yet this in itself is not the foremost problem, for Merleau-Ponty does not deny that perspective can sometimes be utilized to contribute to expressing aspects of the world we experience (though he clearly thinks painters like Cézanne and Van Gogh are far more

interesting and successful in portraying the lived world). His main concern is that many theoreticians of perspective not only froze the world in the picture, but attempted to freeze the historical world outside as well, by claiming that their "method" was the absolute truth of painting: a truth which monopolizes the historical foreground and assigns all "others" to the obscurity of the background in a way which is strikingly in accord with its artistic activity. Perhaps it is the thoroughness of the denial of contingency on the canvass that motivates the attempt to conclude history? At any rate, Merleau-Ponty's explicit statements are more cautious: "These techniques were false only insofar as they pretended to bring an end to painting's quest and history, to found once and for all an exact and infallible art of painting."[160]

In contrast, Merleau-Ponty's artist is never finished. And this openness to the future is inherently an openness to the past and others as well. In an effort to creatively express that which presents itself so elusively and in such a scattered fashion, that which has been washed over and hidden by the currents of history, in order to engage that question which shines out of the things in the world before her, the artist is thrown into a dialogue with the voices of the past and others.

In searching "beneath the imposed order of humanity"[161] in an attempt to capture "the vibration of appearances which is the cradle of things,"[162] Cézanne no more abstractly denies tradition than he does his troubled eyes or his emotional makeup. Rather he engages this tradition, listening to and examining its insights into the world in an effort to bend it towards new shapes and meanings which better express his existence and the appearance of the world to him - an existence and appearance which themselves are formed in part in the crucible of this uneasy conversation with tradition. When Cézanne is in Paris, Merleau-Ponty writes, he visits the Louvre every day. But he goes there as an artist, "in the joy of dialogue" and not with a "spurious reverence."[163] He appropriates aspects of geometry, geography, impressionism, not in order to mimic, but to bring forth a world which goes far beyond what any of these traditions recognized. The exemplary artist engages the efforts of those who have come before her as well as her contemporaries not as dead facts, but as voices and actions which live on in various ways in one's own work and from which one cannot detach oneself; voices and actions which throw the self towards certain significations and away from others, voices with which we must wrestle since we are nothing but particular divergences in this historical conversation and struggle

with others. To actively develop a style and actively partake in the historical dialogue requires a thorough knowledge of the history which penetrates us through and through. The past opens us to some possibilities for expression, but also subjugates us and blinds us to others, and it is in our dialogue with it that we attempt to further elaborate these possibilities but also to explore that which is denied. It is a question of discerning which limits enhance the depth of ourselves and the world and which act primarily to flatten.

Our existence as art is in large part the practice of bringing into mutual confrontation what has been said and done by others and the particular density of our own being - our difference - which has grown out of this social milieu yet exceeds it. "What we have to say" - both literally, in terms of immediate expression and figuratively, thinking of the self as a work of art as a statement - "is only the excess of what we live over what has already been said."[164] It is the things and dimensions of things we are or can see and embrace which seem important, empowering and have not been seen, embraced or existed in the foreground before, that our style attempts to express. It is by rearranging the elements of our milieu, changing figures and grounds, placing things in "compositions which change their meaning," utilizing aspects of our history in new

ways, abandoning others, juxtaposing terms that have been kept apart, highlighting tensions and contradictions that have been concealed, that we transfigure the past so that it may come to better express elements of our being - pleasures, powers, relationships, thoughts, desires - it has previously not given expression to. Hence the artist "continues while going beyond, conserves while destroying, interprets through deviation."[165]

Yet the transfiguring of this engagement between the self and its milieu is not so one-sided, for the self is transfigured in the process as well. In its attempt to "say something" it comes to understand and create itself to an important extent in light of the other voices with which it is in dialogue. It expresses itself and takes form in a language - the terms of a tradition of understandings and practices - which it shares with others and the past, and in so doing not only bends this language towards new significations, but also is "coherently deformed" itself. These words which others speak and have spoken - their works, their strivings, their gestures - "do not limit themselves to vibrating like chords the listeners' machinery of acquired signification.... Their flow must have the power of throwing me in turn towards a signification that neither [they] nor I possessed before."[166] Indeed, the artist is so intertwined in and so constituted by

this dialogue that he is never able to say precisely "what comes from him and what comes from things, what the new work adds to the old ones, or what it has taken from others and what is its own."[167]

> The history in which the artist participates...is the perpetual conversation woven together by all speech, all valid works and actions, each, according to its place and circumstance, contesting and confirming the other, each one re-creating all the others.[168]

We elaborate ourselves - our style - in this agonistic interaction and hence this is where the exemplary artist explicitly seeks to dwell: in continual dialogue with that which precedes and surrounds her.

Yet let us be clear about this conversation which is the artist's being. The artist's interest, concern and engagement with others is not that of an "I'm O.K. you're O.K." "validation" of everything surrounding her. No, it is much wilder, tougher, fiestier than this. The artist listens carefully to, learns from and is thrown by other voices. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty writes of an "obligation to understand situations other than my own and to create a path between my life and that of others, that is, to express myself."[169] But her response is that of creative engagement, not flattery and polite accord. The exemplary artist pulls together the world that appears before her, the works and statements of others, in an

effort to add a voice to the world which sheds important insights hitherto unrecognized upon the world in which we live - its depth and mystery, its pleasures, tragedies, subjugations, sufferings. When successful, her work "throws our image of the world out of focus, distends it, draws it towards fuller meaning."[170] In this vein, Merleau-Ponty writes that the artistic existence "moulds others much more often than follows them," is concerned "with others become such that he is able to live with them."[171] A society and politics constituted around an ethic of the self as a work of art would see selves in relations of what we might call "respectful tension" with one another: respectful in recognition that "the other whom I respect gets his life from me as I get my life from him";[172] tension, because this life we impart to one another emerges when we intermingle, "each from the depths of its difference."[173]

Merleau-Ponty is not elaborating a philosophy of difference simply for the sake of difference, detached from any sense of identity. We do not become different blindly and "for the hell of it." Nor do we coherently deform others' views of the world just to do so. As we saw above, we contest and confirm one another in this dialogue that draws us beyond ourselves. Where we are in accord with what has been or is being said by others, we affirm and elaborate this. Where we

sense what is missing or subjugated in their statements we encroach upon them in an effort to push them towards what appears to us to be a fuller expression of things. There is a profound sense of going beyond in his work, but it is not a going beyond grounded only in itself. Rather it is the depth of being that calls for - among other things - transfiguration. It is the inexhaustible reserve of otherness which continually calls the self towards further engagement and equally it is the hidden undersides and unexpected dangers that relentlessly haunt our lives which demand that we "go farther," that our efforts continue. The interaction of difference and the effort to formulate new ways of thinking and acting are vital to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of being as depth and artistic existence, but they are intimately bound up with - though not subordinated to - an affirmation of the importance of identity. As we have seen, it is only through carefully elaborating a <u>style</u> that one is able to engage the world in a most significant way. Without style, that is in part the product of conscious elaboration, our being scatters from one moment to the next. One could say that pure difference is as flattening and productive of nothing as is pure identity. Merleau-Ponty offers us a philosophy that affirms identity and difference <u>in their promiscuity</u>, both necessary to bring forth and engage the depth of the world.

His own philosophy was itself an effort well aware of its unfinished nature. Of the agonistic tensions between the philosopher and his milieu - but this goes equally for the interaction among others more generally - he writes "we have yet to learn the proper uses of this encroachment."[174] It seems to me that a further step in this direction lies in this discussion of the self as a work of art. As we have seen, the self as a work of art in the exemplary sense is self-conscious of its being as art and is engaged in an artistic relationship with itself. Yet this is not an artistic relation guided only by an abstract notion of "creativity," but rather one whose creativity is guided by Merleau-Ponty's insight into the essentiality of different others and the natural world to both the self and artistic activity.

It seems to me that some important things follow from this understanding. Perhaps most basic, is that this artistic relation to the self - far different from the self-absorption so popular these days - is always significantly involved with others and the world. As Merleau-Ponty emphasizes at the end of the <u>Phenomenology of Perception</u>, people are but "a network of relationships, and these alone matter" to them.[175] To craft the self is to attempt to fashion, interrelate and separate, and to some extent choose these relationships in a way that creates the self into a provocative statement, not (to

import Foucault's analytics) a normalized being that lives according to the truths thrust upon it by objectifying and subjectifying discourses and practices. But given her understanding of the self, the self as a work of art must always exceed simply having an artistic relation to the self and encompass an artistic relation to the world as well. Indeed, the former without the latter can be little more than contentless form - an utterly false consciousness that denies its own embodiment.

Another insight that follows from this intertwining of self, other and art, is that alongside the <u>care for</u> the self that characterizes the artistic existence is a <u>care for</u> the other and the natural world. This is not one last attempt to salvage a thought that reduces the value of the other to its being-for-the-self - in this case the artistic self which needs different others for its own development. Such a conceptual collapse is entirely at odds with Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of depth. Rather the care of which we speak - like the depth which ultimately calls for it - emerges from the interworld, <u>at the interstice</u> of our differences, in the fact that we "get our lives from each other." It seems to me that while everything does not reduce itself to this fact, it is no exaggeration to say that everything is infused with it, and that a significant dimension of artistic existence consists in exploring and seeking to

enhance the vitality of others and this interworld between us.

As we have seen, this entails a respect for others, but Merleau-Ponty understands this in terms of an often encroaching engagement, not a "spurious reverence." If Merleau-Ponty speaks of "moulding others," he does not have in mind the constitution of a simple universal identity or sameness. Such a world of others is for the artist a desert offering little sustenance for creative life. The artist attempts to draw people towards certain ways of perceiving, thinking and being, and away from others; the politician seeks to mould a national identity. But central to these ways and identities which Merleau-Ponty's artist - Merleau-Ponty as an artist - pushes towards and embraces is a sense of an artistic approach to existence, a recognition of the importance of different others and a reawakening of our mysterious bodily intertwining with the world - in other words, identities that bring forth and enhance the textures and depth of our activity in the world. Yet let us not underplay the importance of identity here, for this ethic only has historical meaning to the extent that, as a society, we affirm and nurture it in our thoughts and practices. It seems to me that society's <u>identification with</u> this ethic is as crucial to bringing forth the depth of the world and the artist's existence as are the

differences that depth and art entail. It is this very broad understanding of identity and difference towards which the artist attempts to move people. (Again, the point is not to reduce the artistic project to this effort, but to say nevertheless that this is an essential aspect of the self as a work of art as conceived of here.)

However, what is involved of course is far more than simply the realm of understanding. Our lives are directly shaped on the everyday level by the institutions and practices in which we partake. Hence the effort towards a more artistic approach to life demands a very significant transformation of those institutions which objectify and subjectify around notions of truth which do far more to enhance an often senseless endless, disproportionately distributed productivity and control, than to enhance the quality of our lives. These priorities and practices as well as the larger systemic political and economic institutions with which they are interconnected must be changed if the self as a work of art is ever to be more than an idea in the minds of a few philosophers. "The problem is to find institutions which implant this practice of freedom in our customs."[176]

With this problem in mind, I turn to Merleau-Ponty's political writings in order to sketch the beginnings of a

"politics of depth." First I will explore Merleau-Ponty's analysis flattening social and political institutions, then explore his analysis of democratic politics in light of the discussion thus far.

Politics of Depth

We have already seen that Merleau-Ponty rejects anarchism, arguing that it is an untenable solution because it simply ignores the problems presented by the human condition. An equally superficial understanding of the politics of depth would be that capitalism, as that system which supposedly thrives on the competitive struggle between "free" individuals is the perfect social mechanism for bringing forth the difference and depth of others and the world. However Merleau-Ponty rejects capitalism as well, for under the guise of liberty, law and individuality, he sees hierarchy, exploitation, unemployment, war and imperialism. Far from simply leading to a mutual recognition of both the common humanity and the otherness of others, people approach one another within the "free market" as objects reduced to use-value. Class divisions do not give birth to an affirmation of others' differences, but rather to an obliteration of most people's difference, as society takes forms that fashion people around the goal of

enhancing an endless productivity which is disproportionately allocated and even more disproportionately controlled. In contrast to the Western humanism of capitalist societies, which he believed to be an insidious ideological denial of capitalism's violence, he advocated a

> ...humanism in extension, which acknowledges in every man a power more precious than his productive capacity, not in virtue of being an organism endowed with such and such a talent, but as a being capable of self-determination and situating himself in the world. (My emphasis except for "humanism in extension.")

Even in his later political writing, in which he became very critical of communist revolutionary theory and practice, he still emphasized that "by this we in no way imply acceptance of the eternal laws of the capitalist order or any respect for this order."[178]

If not anarchy, if not capitalism, then what? For a number of years, particularly in the middle and late 1940's, Merleau-Ponty thought that Marxism offered not only the best critique of bourgeois society, but a tenable alternative direction as well. He believed with Marx that there was a possibility that the proletariat was a "class of men who, because they are expropriated in present society from their country, their labor, and their very life, are capable of recognizing one another aside

from all differences, and thus founding humanity."[179] However, though it is clear that he supported socialist production really governed by the workers and a breakdown of established hierarchies, the modes of organization that might best bring this about are not carefully elaborated. While he attempted to develop a reading of events within the Soviet Union which was sensitive to the way the contingency of history made itself felt in a single revolutionary country surrounded by hostile bourgeois states, he did not see an embodiment of the Marxian dream in Soviet reality. It did not appear to him that they were moving toward a greater recognition of humans by humans or proletarian power,[180] though he left open the question of their future development.

Hence his affirmation of Marxism does not take us as far as we would like towards a more developed understanding of the political and ethical implications of his philosophical formulations. Nevertheless it is worthwhile to emphasize that his Marxism was not one that was aimed at eliminating differences, but rather one that sought to create a world where a greater recognition of differences might exist. When he writes of the proletariat's "recognizing one another aside from all differences," this is of course, not at all to say that we should do away with all of our differences. Capitalism on the whole levels people's differences

(furthermore, the differences it creates are largely flattening), and paradoxically this might facilitate a recognition of commonality. Yet it is not the recognition of a common homogeneous identity shared by all, but rather a recognition of a common human capacity for "self-determination" and the ability of each to "situate himself in the world" which Merleau-Ponty values. In short, to "recognize one another aside from all differences" is to recognize that other's differences are not *qua* difference, the negation of their humanity - understood in terms of objectified norms or productive capacity - but rather expressions of humanity as the capacity for a degree of self-determination. This is at the same time a denial of differences whose very being is closed to otherness and based on a fundamental obliteration of other people's difference (e.g., a capitalist who recognizes workers primarily as commodities that enhance his wealth). If the exploitation of the proletariat was to foster a common recognition, it was most fundamentally a recognition that no one is free alone; that a greater level of self-determination is intrinsically intertwined with a greater mutual affirmation of others' freedom, their otherness. On Marxism and difference Merleau-Ponty writes:

> To be a Marxist is *not to renounce all differences*, to give up one's identity as a Frenchman, a native

> of Tours or Paris, <u>or to forego individuality in order to blend into the world proletariat</u>. It is indeed to become part of the universal, but without ceasing to be what we are.... This will only happen through...a meeting at the crossroads of actual proletarians, such as they exist in the different countries, and not through an ascetic internationalism wherein each of them loses his <u>most compelling reasons for being a Marxist</u>.[181]

However, Merleau-Ponty's belief that Marxism might lead to a greater recognition of the capacity for self-determination and difference did not last long. As he became aware in the early 1950's of the Soviet camps, the persistence of extreme hierarchy, authoritarianism in the workplace and the persistent unwillingness of the Soviet communist party to allow a real opposition, his comments on the Soviet Union acquired an increasingly critical tone. His changing evaluation of the U.S.S.R. culminated in a reassessment and rejection of what he argued were some of the theoretical foundations of Marxism as well.

Merleau-Ponty's critique of Marxism focused on the manner in which the latter squashed the space within which a significant opposition could exist. He argued that both its understanding of the relation between the proletariat and the party, and its understanding of the historical significance of this relation, led it to deny the importance and legitimacy of any dialogical

recognition of others who externally contest the party - indeed, to view all external opposition as a threat to the development of truth in history that must be eliminated.

Merleau-Ponty maintains that at the center of Marxist theory is the idea that the proletariat is the universal class which alone realizes the universality and self-consciousness that philosophers have previously only imagined. The proletariat is to transcend all particularity, and Marx argued that with its development, history has "finally put world-historical, empirically universal individuals in place of local ones."[182] Finally history has produced the universal subject. Marx and Lenin were of course well aware that this universal subject is only a "limit case," that in fact the proletariat is divided in a multiplicity of factions, differing levels of development and various stages of self-consciousness. "It is because of this that there is a need for a Party which clarifies the proletariat to itself, for a party of iron, as Lenin said."[183] In attempting to express the historical meaning of the proletariat, the party is to take the lead. However, it is never to get more than "one step ahead," for the proletarians "bring the seal of truth to the politics of the Party"[184] and the party must maintain itself in a dialectical tension in which it "establishes

itself as the expression of the working class by making itself accepted by the working class."[185]

Yet Merleau-Ponty argues that this tension is doomed to collapse into dictatorship largely due to Marxism's conceptualization of the proletariat. For Marxism, as we have noted, the proletariat is the universal in history. Yet it is not a complete realization of its universality, but rather a universality-in-development which is in a continual process of self-criticism and self-transcendence (Selbstaufhebung). Merleau-Ponty maintains that Marxism "concentrates all the negativity and all the meaning of history in an existing historical formation, the working class."[186] In so doing, in conceiving of a class that is totally self-critical, it lays the conceptual ground for denying the legitimacy of all those who do not speak and act as true representatives of this exclusively genuine negativity. As universal negativity, the working class "would no longer need to be contested from the outside."[187] Indeed, from this standpoint "all that is other is an enemy,"[188] merely an attempt to thwart the true universal. This, of course, leads to the exclusion of not only those who make no claim to speak exclusively for the working class, but also those members of the working class who understand their present conditions and desirable alternatives differently than those in the Party who "truly" comprehend the "real"

universality of this class. By conceiving of the working class as "universal in its truth" (even if it is not entirely self-conscious of its universality) Marxism leaves no space for the articulation of a multiplicity of divergent perspectives, interests and strategies within the working class - differences which it admits do in fact exist and differences which might require endless tensions and mediations. Rather, "universality" paves the way for a reduction of this multiplicity to its singular truth at any given moment and since this reduction is not accomplished "naturally" within the working class itself (history does not give birth to a revolutionary proletariat in the optimistic fashion predicted by early Marx and early Lukács), it is brought about and "clarified" by a "party of iron." Through the elimination of certain tendencies and the accentuation of others the proletariat is led by the party towards its true unified meaning. While there is supposed to be a continual dialectical interchange between the party and the proletariat, Marxism's conception of the latter is so singular that it cannot tolerate the plurality of negativities which is the very essence of dialogue, and hence it abolishes the very space for the dialogical exchange that is to be the life blood and maximum guarantee of the revolution's legitimacy. This leads to a very truncated dialectic -

or more accurately, a dialectic that is terminated in the party which represents the genuine negative and has no need for - nor can tolerate - an opposition. The negative is driven out of existence as the party, in gaining power, becomes a positive entity which resists all criticism.

Perhaps at least at the theoretical level, what lies at the heart of Merleau-Ponty's changed evaluation of certain important aspects of Marxism is the difference between his interpretation and what he finally believed to be the Marxist interpretation of the passage we discussed above on the proletariat "recognizing one another aside from all differences and thus founding humanity." For Merleau-Ponty, this meant recognizing the capacity of each to situate him or herself in the world; to not simply be a thing determined by the world, but, as a depth being, to transcend determinations, to proliferate the power of the negative in one's being in the world. The recognition that Merleau-Ponty had in mind, was not one that flattened the depth and negativities of each into a universal negativity, but rather one that sought to affirm multiple loci of negativity and to build a shared social and political movement through "a meeting at the crossroads" which would articulate common interests that might enhance rather than erode the possibilities for different expressions of being. Such a notion was certainly not aimed at eliminating contestation. For some time he thought

this idea was Marxist, but his disillusionment with the historical development of communism and the theoretical reassessment this led to, eventually brought him to a very different conclusion. Implicit in his later writing is a critique of the Marxist understanding of "recognition aside from all differences" as being part of a theoretical framework that concentrated negativity into a class - and the party that represented it - while simultaneously denying multiplicitous expressions of its existence. In conceiving of recognition aside from all differences, Marxism fails to establish the importance of difference at the center of its understanding. Instead, at the center were flattened notions of the proletariat, negativity and the party - all of which worked towards the obliteration of contestation among different others, and indeed, toward the perception of "other as enemy." Rather than a theory which sought a greater affirmation of depth, Merleau-Ponty found significant elements of Marxism to be conducive to a situation where "the open depths close themselves"[189] (my emphasis).

A thorough evaluation of this criticism of Marxism would involve a theoretical and historical endeavor that far exceeds the scope of the work at hand. I wish to digress briefly in a partial defense of Merleau-Ponty's position only in order to show in the sketchiest of ways that its value remains, in spite of some of the

criticisms that have been levied against it. Merleau-Ponty has been criticized for placing the proletariat-party relation at the center of Marxism in a manner that misses the centrality of many contemporary Western neo-Marxist attempts to shift the primary level of analysis and focal point of change from state power to the structuration of everyday life.[190] It is said that his criticism of Marxism misses what is most important about Marxism. It seems to me that as a defense of a certain type of Marxism interpreted along these lines, there is some truth to these criticisms. However, Merleau-Ponty's critique of Marxism was not intended as a wholesale dismissal of Marxism, and certainly it was not meant as a rejection of all Marxism of everyday life. Rather it was a critique of the philosophical and political theoretical foundations of the historically most important communist developments of the twentieth century - foundations which Merleau-Ponty thought were rooted in Marx himself. At this level, I think, Adventures of the Dialectic remains a work of extremely valuable insight. Furthermore, insofar as any viable movement for change must confront the political realm as part of its strategy - we cannot wish this away - it is an important work for Marxism of everyday life as well. It has been argued that Adventures of the Dialectic is insufficiently historical; that the collapse Merleau- Ponty describes which occurs

when "the open depths close themselves," cannot be accounted for at such an abstract level.[191] Clearly a textured historical account would have greatly enhanced his project. But again, this criticism largely misses the point. His discussion is not so much an effort to show what "caused" the particular development of twentieth century communism, but more an attempt to illustrate the theoretical underpinnings and problems that contributed to this development. Of course, the dialectic between texts and interpretations is very important to this task and this dialectic must be explored in an historical context in order to better show why certain readings of texts flourish and others do not at particular historical moments - a greater historical dimension would have profoundly enriched Merleau-Ponty's work. Yet Merleau-Ponty argues quite persuasively that there is much in the texts of Marx, Lukács and Lenin that contributed to the theoretical and practical developments of Soviet communism. At this level his work remains very important - even if an historical account of other circumstances contributing to these developments would have made it more so.

But where does all of this leave us concerning our inquiry into the ethical and political understandings and practices which might lead to a greater mutual recognition of depth and difference? Merleau-Ponty's

germ cell formulation of an alternative in Adventures of the Dialectic only goes so far in answering this question. Indeed, reflecting on his proposal he writes: "This is not 'a solution' and we know it full well."[192] He is right about this, yet if considered closely and in conjunction with other elements of his philosophy it gestures further than many have realized - including, perhaps, Merleau-Ponty himself.

Of utmost importance in his defense against the closure he saw occurring in the communist left was his support of democratic parliamentary action, "for Parliament is the only known institution that guarantees a minimum of opposition and truth."[193] (This argument applies specifically to parliament, which is based on proportional representation with a minimal percentage of the overall vote enabling a party to gain representation. It applies to a far lesser extent - if at all - to our congressional system in which the "winner takes all." This latter system operates to exclude minority voices and to minimize their chances for efficacious expression. It severely limits - one might say cripples, judging from this country - political discourse.) In contrast to a communist politics which focused all negation into a single class - ultimately comprehended as a unity - Merleau-Ponty argued that:

> We expect progress only from a conscious action which will

> confront itself with the judgment of an opposition. Like Weber's heroic liberalism, it lets even what contests it enter its universe, and is justified in its own eyes only when it understands its opposition.[194]

The foundation of any attempt to improve things must be a recognition that no one has a monopoly on the negative - that there are different others with whom we must be dialogically and critically engaged. Parliament goes further in holding open this recognition than a "vanguard party." (In the most extreme situations (e.g., "starvation") Merleau-Ponty admits that the latter may be the best available alternative.)

Yet Merleau-Ponty's support of parliament is not naively optimistic nor does it overlook the ambiguities and undersides of parliamentary action. In an essay published nearly a decade earlier, Merleau-Ponty underscored the problems with this institution. "[W]e know full well the means which the powerful have at their disposal - precisely under the aegis of freedom of the press - to stir up currents of opinion and manifestations which paralyze a parliamentary majority" - assuming it is possible to obtain one.[195] He also warned against

> ...comparing political democracy, in which everyone is called upon to give his opinion on abstract problems and, above all, where a whole series of

> influences...come between the voter and legislative decisions, with actual workers control on a daily level.[196]

Furthermore, he was extremely skeptical about the possibility that an institution dominated by the hegemonic economic interests could bring about significant change. At the time of this early essay, Merleau-Ponty maintained that a greater hope lay in a leadership like the one described by Lenin which "presupposes a dialogue and exchange" with the people.[197] As we have seen, he later argued that this position is based on conceptions which work to undermine its best intentions. However, in affirming the importance of parliament he did not forget nor retract his earlier criticisms of this institution but rather urged the non-communist left to work against these practices which undermined its proper functioning. He thought that they could do a lot to counter "parliamentary mystification," which consists in avoiding real problems or posing them too late or in ways which obfuscate far more than clarify. Beyond the problems which result from abuses which might be remedied however, Merleau-Ponty further recognized "the limitations of parliamentary and democratic action ...which result from the institution."[198] Though he does not specify these limitations in <u>Adventures of the Dialectic</u>, he was probably in part referring to his earlier observations on the inherent distance

parliamentary government puts between people and many of the decisions which affect their lives, the fact that it is not a "daily" form of political activity for most people, the way in which it opens the possibility of eloquent deceit. These problems might be reduced, but never eliminated as long as national parliamentary politics plays a significant role in political life. Nevertheless, he urges us to accept them as the necessary underside of a political institution that on the whole holds open the possibility for both effective governing by large groups of people according to a majority and recognizing different others, ambiguity and contestation more than any other of which we know - an institution that might contribute to maintaining and enhancing the depth of our coexistence.

Hence we see the manner in which parliament is, for Merleau-Ponty, what we might call an "apparatus" which, with its arrangements that help guarantee the possibility of contestation from day to day, might help keep history open and demand a greater recognition among people. As an "apparatus," parliament holds open a door through which people can enter and partake in the heated dialogical struggles over real life which actively contribute to our present and future and, as contestational acts, literally hold the social world open.

All this is of the utmost importance. Yet I suggest that in addition to parliament being an "apparatus" that helps ensure the possibility of agonistic activity which contributes to bringing forth the world in depth, Merleau-Ponty's thought provides us with another way in which to understand the institution of parliament that is quite valuable as well; and it opens up fertile possibilities for thinking about human institutions and practices more generally. Here we must go beyond his explicit discussions of parliament in order to bring to the foreground some of the theoretical insights which probably shaped his view of it - and at any rate shape the argument that follows.

At about the same time Merleau-Ponty was writing Adventures of the Dialectic, he also taught a course on "Institution in Personal and Public History" at Collège de France, in which he explored the notion of "institution" as a way of avoiding the problems which arise when philosophies of consciousness take the constituting subject and its object, the world, as the starting point of their investigations. Of particular interest to our current discussion of parliament is his conception of "institution." Most succinctly:

> What we understand by the concept of institution are those events in experience which endow it with durable dimensions in relation to which a whole series of other

> experiences will acquire meaning, will form an intelligible series or a history - or again those events which sediment in me a meaning, not just as survivals or residues, but as the invitation to a sequel, the necessity of a future.[199] (My emphasis.)

This passage receives little further illumination that is helpful for us in the sketchy summary published in Themes from the Lectures. However if we recall his discussion of dimensionality in The Visible and The Invisible, it begins to acquire a greater degree of conceptual texture. There he argued that all things are not simply objects within a perceptual field, but also dimensions: meaning that they participate in clearing the perceptual field - in opening us to it and therefore presenting it - as well as appearing in the clearing. Yet while there is a dimensionality to all facts, not all facts are equally dimensional. Some facts or events may participate in the opening of the perceptual field only for an instant and then be swallowed up by a movement of the world in which they become utterly insignificant. Other things however, things referred to above as institutions and elsewhere as emblems - acquire such a significance that the disclosure of Being may take place through them throughout an entire lifetime. Merleau-Ponty describes this situation in a working note where

he pursues an ontological reinterpretation of Freud in which he argues that "any entity [e.g., feces] can be accentuated as an emblem of Being."[200] In other words this entity or event can become "representative of Being" - a being that is fixated in such a way that the "investment of the openness to Being...henceforth takes place <u>through this Entity</u>."[201] In such a manner an event, say of intense subordination or abandonment by someone deeply loved, may disclose all of our experiences henceforth in the light, or "atmosphere," of an inferiority complex or an inability to love.[202]

In these instances the investment of the openness of Being in a thing is understood by Merleau-Ponty in a negative manner as a fixed opening which closes us to the multiplicity of the world by collapsing experience towards a single dimension which ceaselessly reactivates itself. Similarly in the case of social institutions such as racism, sexism, authoritarian structures of power, sexual norms, etc., our field of perception is fixed in ways which flatten it. The depth of beings withers in these cases and the dialogue between the self and the world is narrowly constituted or effectively terminated. Yet not all emblems are predominantly negative. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty elaborates his notion of the institution in a far more neutral manner. Institutions are events which establish relatively stable dimensions that create

an atmosphere and illumination within which future events acquire meaning. Some institutions can fortify and enhance the depth and openness of the world by being emblems which illuminate precisely these ontological qualities. It is in this sense of "institution" - in addition to the sense of apparatus discussed above - that parliament acquires a particular meaning within the context of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy.

Parliament, as a central institution in society which is connected to all citizens, can be an emblem which - at least in the best cases, elaborated more fully below - endows experience with a meaning which is not so much that of a particular being-event, but rather more that of the depth, openness and resistance of the world; an emblem which is representative of Being not in collapsing it to a single dimension but by investing the clearing in a way that accentuates our experience of the most fundamental character of the clearing itself: depth. Said again in a slightly different way, parliament is an institution which in part discloses the openness and resistance of the "there" or "worldness" in the senses we discussed in the last chapter. In this case the meaning which attains durability and stability as it becomes a dimension is precisely that of the depth of people and the world, the incredible texturedness and transcendence of things

fully present. As an emblem, parliament contributes to a disclosure of the world that generates a consensus around this ontological character of the world and the importance of recognizing different others. This is no small deed, for Merleau-Ponty's work - as well as that of others - has shown us the multiplicity of institutions, ethics, thoughts and practices whose effect is to flatten, radically reduce and close being. In the best instances, the institution of parliament can be an emblem which counters these institutions of closure.

Insofar as the institution of parliament insists that we confront oppositions, it affirms that the world is depth and always exceeds the definitions given it by one person or group. This is not to say that the best understandings and courses of action are necessarily compromises between several different positions, that is, moderate positions. In many instances this is not the case and at any rate there is no reason to assume it is. And parliament makes no such assumption; it simply asserts that because the world transcends us, each must maintain an openness to the world and different others who may reveal dimensions of the world that we might never have seen nor imagined alone. In asserting the transcendence of the world and demanding that we face oppositions, parliament also signifies the fundamental error of those who refuse dialogue in favor of a world

that is completely contained within the bounds of the self's perceptions and conceptions. In addition to revealing that the being of the world is depth, parliament also reveals the circularly related importance of the interaction among different others in bringing forth the depth and fullness of the world into the clearing. It is through this interaction that we are continually confronted with aspects of the world, events, and proposals which remind us and enhance our awareness of the surplus of being that escapes our knowing. It is through these relations that some aspects of things are enhanced, multiplied, given greater texture, while others are crossed out and still others held in uncertain tensions - all of this rending and rendering the world "there" in an open fullness which is quite antithetical to the frozen figures of objectifying normalizing practices.

Of course, none of this is unproblematic. We might view all genuine contestation, primarily as a feature of "transitional ages" to be transcended for the most part when we reach a consensus on all important issues in some unspecified future.[203] In this case, rather than revealing the depth of the world, parliamentary contestation would merely reveal the deficiencies of our age. Or, we might understand parliament only in

pragmatic terms as the best overall means of arriving at reasonable legislation to guide a nation.

Merleau-Ponty obviously rejects the former position for reasons that should be clear from the first chapter. While he is sympathetic to the pragmatic argument, it is not exhaustive of his position, in which parliament is important as an institution emblematic of depth as well. Of course, the extent to which it _is_ emblematic of depth depends, in part, upon the interpretations it receives. Hence the argument we are presenting is not simply a _description_ of things, but part of an effort to bolster an interpretation which enhances the extent to which parliament really is emblematic of openness and depth. In this sense the interpretation positively contributes to the realization of what it describes.

However, if the understanding of parliament-as-emblem is to move distinctly beyond being a mystification and legitimization of the present, if it is to contribute to the deepening and opening of the world, it is necessary that it not only accentuate certain hopeful dimensions of our present, but that it alert us to circumstances in our world which threaten its further realization as well. If parliament is to function as an institution of depth in a manner that goes beyond mere reification and abstraction, then it must also be operative and meaningful as an apparatus, and this depends not simply

upon parliament, but upon other social historical factors as well. If parliament is to be an authentic emblem of depth, it must be an institution that <u>in fact</u> facilitates the expression of multiple voices. To the extent that it claims to do this while doing something quite different, it in part becomes a bad myth and takes its place in a regime of "truth" and power that is linked more to subjugation than freedom. Parliament cannot live up to its ideal of ensuring the possibility of fair contestation as long as it is situated within a society where wealth and many forms of power are extremely inequitably distributed and yet play a very important role in what issues are addressed, the limits of debate, who speaks and who does not, who has access to certain information and who does not, the way the mass media covers issues that help generate opinions, etc. It cannot live up to its ideal of being a meaningful forum as long as the executive branch controls major foreign policy issues behind its back; as long as most of the really important economic decisions which affect hundreds of millions of lives in far-reaching ways are made behind the closed doors of multi-national corporation boardrooms. It ceases to be meaningful when, as Lowi has described, decision-making becomes entirely fragmented inside "iron triangles" made up of people on congressional committees, bureaucrats and powerful interest groups

with little concern for the consequences of their actions beyond their narrowly calculated balance sheet. It ceases to be meaningful when - as with the U.S. "winner take all" system of elections - minority voices are utterly shut out of Congress. It ceases to be meaningful when - for all these reasons and many more - most people stop voting and far fewer still are actively engaged in political activity. In our current state of mass disaffection and political disempowerment in the U.S., it is not clear how much an emblem of depth parliament really is or can be.

But the parliamentary emblem is not non-existent, nor is it simply ideological. It also already functions as a lever of criticism and bolsters demands for change towards a better world. The existing democratic ethos should not be underestimated. It stands as an ideal worthy of support, one that involves far reaching reforms and major transformations in important areas of our society. The realization of parliamentary ideals goes hand in hand with other changes that open our social world to participation by and empowerment of people over events which shape their lives; so too it involves creating greater space for different voices and ways of being to develop - as an emblem, parliament enhances the durability of the depth which emerges in this process.

In one of his last directly political essays, Merleau-Ponty alerts us to another issue concerning parliament which serves as an important caveat to the discussion thus far. In reflecting on parliamentary politics in France in the late 1950's, his criticism concerns not so much a lack of openness, but the lack of anything much at all. He writes sarcastically:

> But what do checks and balances mean when there is no longer any action to check and balance?... today it is necessary, in continuing the criticism, to reorganize power. Many stupid things are said against "personal power" or "strong power": it is a genuine strength and personality which those in power during the Fourth Republic lacked.[204]

It seems to me that this passage provides us with both a political and an ontological clarification that is extremely important. While the world as depth is open to different renderings, it does not <u>equal</u> - it cannot be <u>reduced to</u> - "openness." Openness is not what is "there," rather what is "there" has a depth and is open. Like checks and balances without any action, openness alone is nothing. It is simply a recent form of that persistent dream harbored in Western metaphysics of being present - open - to the world everywhere and all at once. It is the latest form of nihilism. Furthermore, the effort to define the world as openness alone is yet

another attempt to posit a world totally open to our attempts to transfigure and possess it: totally without resistance. If Merleau-Ponty has taught us anything, it is that on the contrary, we always open onto the world through the specificity, difference and limits of our historical bodily being, and likewise that others and things are "there" in a specificity which in addition to being open, resists - is not open to - many renderings, and demands that we encounter them. Our openness to difference is not enhanced through annihilating the specificity and difference of our own embodiment in order to simply "be open to difference." Rather it is by cultivating ourselves in a dialogue with the world and others that acknowledges and affirms the specificity, particularity and difference of our own being that we open towards other. Our openness to the polyphony and cacophony of the world is enhanced as we become something "there" with distinction - a distinction which both invites and is capable of participating in, a profoundly dialogical existence with other distinct beings.

Hence parliament is not simply an emblem of openness, but of the depth of the world through which things are both there and open. Yet it can be this only to the extent that actions, initiatives and programs are developed through this forum - to the extent that

something is there. To the extent that no programs could be formulated in this arena, it would signify more a lack of any common world than a world of depth. Merleau-Ponty had in mind a vigorous politics, one which would strive in a powerful way to lead towards greater freedom and justice. The new "heroic liberalism" he advocated in his later works was not a variation of the self-effacing, fence-sitting-by-nature, hear-all-sides-in-absence-of-any-position liberalism that we are all too familiar with. Rather it was to be an "initiative which gathers support...organizes its own pedagogy, and demonstrates as it develops."[205] It was to attempt to shape the political world according to a vision of the common good while remaining in agonistic tension and dialogue with those who contest this vision. Both there and open, it was to hear other voices - even be "thrown" by them. But its openness was to facilitate its development as a dynamic "living political power,"[206] forcefully shaping itself and the political world in dialogue, rather than using openness and dialogue as an excuse not to be present with distinction (more often than not, forfeiting power to hegemonic elements and structural tendencies of the status quo). Both to be an emblem of depth and to be an apparatus not only for ensuring the possibility of contestation, but also for creating social, economic and political conditions

more conducive to the being of and creative interaction among different others, it is necessary that parliament actually draw enough differences together to generate action. Contestation is an extremely important part of Merleau-Ponty's understanding of parliament, but its importance stems from its place within the context of his philosophy of depth being. Contestation for the sake of contestation alone, could destroy mutual recognition, communication and, in stifling all initiatives, could bring about the failure of parliament as an emblem of depth and its failure as an institution capable of generating a politics of freedom. Contestation is an important element in bringing forth the social world that affirms depth, but the latter is the ultimate value for Merleau-Ponty and it is not reducible to contestation alone.

Merleau-Ponty thought that for a short period of time the Mendez-France government was able to approximate some of these ideas. However, he realized that the effort to bring about a significant and sustained improvement in our political culture would involve much more than politics alone. It would require important changes throughout society. "The problem is to find institutions which implant this practice of freedom into our customs."[207] Clearly he was thinking here of institutions in their capacity to elicit and organize certain dialogical

forms of activity, and in their emblematic aspect as well, though he does not specify what sorts of institutions might enhance the freedom of which he speaks.

Almost everything in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy gestures towards changes in the institutions and practices of everyday life which would enhance people's capacity to effectively shape their existences. Widespread worker's control of production is clearly indicated.[208] Though he does not develop a theory that emphasizes the importance of local and regional control of major dimensions of economic, social and political life, such decentralization seems essential to "implanting the practice of freedom." Colossal institutions inhibit active participation because their sheer scale makes one's efforts seem overwhelmingly insignificant. Yet our current local institutions are often too irrelevant to solicit significant popular involvement. Significantly empowered local democratic institutions would likely go a long way towards confronting this problem.

Yet institutions alone are insufficient. If we led into this section on the politics of depth by stressing the importance of developing institutions that would enhance the possibilities of the artistic ethos, it is equally important in closing to stress the circularity of this relationship. The politics of depth requires that those inhabiting parliament - and democratic institutions

more generally - guide themselves in light of the artistic ethos. That is, decisions should be aimed at creating the preconditions and space for human beings to creatively and dialogically shape their existences. In absence of this ethos, democratic politics easily becomes a more insidious pretext for a flattening politics.

We do not need to imagine the latter, for it shadows much of our contemporary world. We are driven in modernity by an ethos that identifies the "better life" with an endlessly increasing productivity. Growth, calculated in material terms, is seen as the solution for nearly everything. Yet, as we learn from Foucault, endlessly increasing productivity demands that more and more of the self be drawn into the productive apparatus - that the goal of productivity proliferate throughout more and more of the social world - and even if this can be done in ways that are not as normalizing per unit of output as those methods currently hegemonic, the pressures to <u>increase</u> will demand further absorption of the self, further normalization and an eclipse of the space necessary to lead a creative existence. As long as we are governed by this god, it is very difficult to conceive of a flourishing politics of depth, even in a democratic (broadly conceived) society. Hence it is clear that we must tame the growth imperative and

move in the direction of a relatively steady state of economics.

Yet this transformation requires a new ethos which both opposes mindless growth and provides an alternative sense of what is valuable. I believe the self as a work of art is precisely such an ethos and that Merleau-Ponty had this ethos in mind when he wrote of "a humanism in extension, which acknowledges in every man a power more precious than his productive capacity...a being capable of self-determination and of situating himself in the world."[209] As we develop and inhabit democratic institutions we ought to make decisions in light of this ethos, for it beacons us towards an affirmation of difference and dialogue that is most appropriate to the world as depth. Just as democratic institutions are a precondition for the widespread proliferation of the artistic ethos, a lively and open democratic politics requires the sense of openness and distinction contained in the artistic ethos, for without it debate flattens to the question of productivity - and the depth of being flattens in the productive apparatus. Instead of open forums we will continue to have forums that are narrowly constituted forums at war with that which does not fit - forums that will be in great danger if their discourse exceeds that required by the goal of productivity.

Together, the democratic ethos and the self as a work of art set the stage for a grand human style, one which "embraces indivisibly all the order and all the disorder of the world."[210]

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Possibilities and Dangers

> Whoever does not want to fear, let him probe his inmost self. Do not just touch the surface; go down into yourself; reach into the farthest corner of your heart. Examine it then with care: see there, whether a poisoned vein of wasting love of the world still does not pulse, whether you are not moved by some physical desires, and are not caught in some law of the senses; whether you are never elated with empty boasting, never depressed by some vain anxiety: then only can you dare to announce that you are pure and crystal clear, when you have sifted everything in the deepest recesses of your inner being.[1]

I have argued that Augustine's turn towards an inward seeking hermeneutical deep self should be situated in the context of his understanding of the Roman Pagan self. Inhabiting the center of a conceited ontology the pagan self, in Augustine's view, was an imperialist, driven at every level to flatten others and the world to their being-for-the-self. In so doing the space for that which was not the self collapsed in a conflagration kindled and kept ablaze by the flaming gaze of vanity. By directing the self towards its depths in confession Augustine sought to deflate this vanity and reinflate

the depth of the world in which others and things could exist free of the self as unique significations of God.

Yet it is too simple to view the confessing-self and the self of ontological conceit as two types which Augustine sees merely in external opposition. While this latter dimension is extremely important and indicates what is at stake for Augustine, we must not lose sight of the fact - Augustine did not lose sight of the fact - that the struggle between the two selves is also one which is continually waged within the Christian self. Indeed the confessing-self is in large degree <u>defined by</u> its inward struggle with its "other." The confessing-self is not so much defined by Truth and Goodness in and of themselves, but by the way in which one struggles on the side of these qualities to overcome the conceit, evil, impurity within. For Augustine, our fallen bodies and souls contain an endless multiplicity of lusts which harbor ontological conceits that continually threaten to collapse the space in which others can appear in their glory as truly Other - as God signifying. On earth, this struggle that is confession can never end.

This is of no small importance, for this active struggle defines the qualitative aspect of depth. Perhaps we should call the confessing-self a being of <u>deepening</u> in order to draw attention to depth as activity - in order to draw attention to the effects

of depth which we must consider more carefully as we attempt to think about Augustine in the context of Foucault's work.

For Augustine of course, the self that turns its gaze inward strives to discover, examine and decipher itself in light of God's truths, weeding out flattening conceits, purifying itself - in short, molding the deepest movements of its soul to God's will. As we have seen, the confessing-self relentlessly unifies itself around this task and God's truths. Augustine's faith in God and scripture is unflinching and hence questions about the Christian morality to which one conforms never arise. To erase conceit is to discover God within and become receptive to the unique voices with which surrounding beings cry out: "He made us." To convert to an existence that signifies God and to see in all things His Word, is not to <u>sacrifice</u> one's being or the being of things to God, but to actively affirm that which imparts being to all things. And this affirmation of the transcendental signified does not, in Augustine's view, entail a flattening or levelling of selves or things, for God's light on earth is polyphonous, each being manifesting it in a different way. Of course, living according to God's light entails that the soul adhere to his injunctions and prohibitions, but these pull us precisely away from a flattened world and toward

a truer experience. It is creation as a multiplicitous celebration of Him. In God's light, the effects of confession can appear only as beneficial.

However, in an age where Christian metaphysics (and metaphysics in general) is losing its privileged position as the universal Truth - in an age where for many, God is dead, Augustine's confessing-self now appears in a different light. The effects of confession as a mode of being must open themselves to questions that were concealed as long as being itself was thought to be designed by God.

For those who reject metaphysics, there is a distinctly monological quality to the confessing-self. Augustine's polyphony becomes, for Nietzsche, monotony. In an important sense, from a post-metaphysical perspective there is only one significant voice in Augustine's relentless self-examination, and when he writes, "Help me so that I may see the truth about myself," his wish is ultimately to hear one voice in that cacophonous interior he calls the "great deep." From this vantage point, the quest for depth is a quest to rout out the last traces of other voices in his experience of the world, to surround them and penetrate them through and through to their deepest depths until they cease to speak, until they cease to be, until "you are pure and crystal clear." Of course this purity was an

unattainable endpoint on earth (Augustine died "crying constantly and deeply" as he read penance) but as the confessing-self deepened, it approached ever closer to monological being: a being no longer distracted by pleasures, desires, thoughts or sensations which did not harbor the voice of the one True God.

This Nietzschean reading of early Christianity overstates the extent of the latter's reduction and elimination of otherness. It underplays (for strategic reasons I am not concerned with at the moment) the space which Christianity opens for appreciating others as diverse expressions of God. Nevertheless, it contains an important insight that survives its own exaggeration. The space for being which is created by Christianity is - regardless of its merits relative to decadent Rome - thoroughly constituted by the one True Voice, and this voice seems in many respects both wrong and narrowly defined, in light of post-metaphysical perspectives. If there are many manifestations of the voice of Augustine's God, they all fall within a tightly limited range, characterized by harmonious concord and the unchallengeability of Christian morality and scripture. Discord indicates error and error is to be eradicated. In this sense it seems to me that there is a great deal of truth in the claim that Augustine's mode of subjectivity is largely monological. Augustine's

confessing-self deciphers, re-members and unifies itself according to God's truth in an effort to extirpate all voices that might be discordant with His voice. Within the self God's voice meets the voice of the Other as it confronts impure desires and pleasures. But that this meeting bears little resemblance to dialogue is indicated by the "nothing" to which all that is not in agreement with God is assigned. The confessing-self is more accurately characterized as a site of inner confrontation than one of inner conversation (albeit often discordant), for the encounter in depth between God's light and that which <u>is not</u>, is marked by the aim of absolute hegemony of God's voice. <u>Within</u> the multiple manifestations of God's light, there is a dialogue in which the various dimensions of God co-mingle to give birth to deeper truth. Yet with respect to that which lies beyond His Word, there is only a monological polemic - a ceaseless attempt to silence the Other, and no possibility of a dialogue in which God is illuminated in the critical light of his Other. The absurd ring to this last statement is indicative of the depth of its truth.

At the heart of the confessing-self one can discern an ontological conceit of a different kind than the one Augustine so perceptively criticized. In this conceit, human selves are not the implicit ground of Being, rather God is the ground that establishes and secures the Truth,

Good and Being of all beings. Yet we are the highest elements of his creation and He made us capable of experiencing and knowing Truth and Goodness to a very high degree - even if there is an incredible extent to which much of Truth remains concealed and must be continually deciphered. Indeed, God has made us beings such that we harbor His truth within us and He is concerned enough for our fate so that we can find truth and save ourselves if we truly will to do so. "Return within yourself," Augustine writes, "In the inward man dwells truth." Insofar as we should "obey the voice of unchangeable truth speaking silently within the soul"[2] one perhaps can detect a certain humility, but it is a humility based upon a conceited ontology that maintains there is such a voice within us to obey. And it is precisely the centrality of this voice and this obedience that gives birth to the monological character of the confessing-self. In short the humility of obedience wells out of a conceited ontology and returns to conceit when it repudiates even the possibility of that which is utterly other than His voice within (in the sense that the latter, no matter how demanding, is "nothingness").

Augustine's confessing-self is an ambiguous phenomena. For he argues quite convincingly that what I have identified as its specific conceit and monologue

- its relentless inward journey - provides a space for appreciating others and things that was rapidly disappearing for the pagan self in late antiquity. Within what Foucault calls the modern episteme however, the conceit which lingers on from two thousand years of Christianity is implicated in a rapidly narrowing closure. Foucault makes the case that we are still thoroughly attached to the belief in a Truth which can be discovered and obeyed. Yet with the recession of God from our world, man himself becomes the uncertain ground of this truth - uncertain for he inhabits a world, drained of its telos, which continually threatens to cut him off from truth. Driven by both his desire for truth and the centrality of his uncertainty, man in modernity endlessly seeks to objectify and normalize the social and natural world around him - to make the Other the Same. (At a more concrete level, this is driven by socio-economic and political imperatives for profit and productivity.)

One could argue that there is a sense in which modernity unites two ontological conceits which bear an interesting resemblance to those that emerge from our discussion of Augustine's work - both the belief in a largely discoverable universal truth and the belief that man is the ground of the truth of things. This combination - and the fact that "man" cannot in fact discover a truth that is able to sustain claims to

universality for very long - provides the "truth," the "norm," with a mutability that allows it to shift as it is employed in various power strategies. (Sex - that which must be carefully regulated, psychoanalytically deciphered and that which must be freed - in advertisements all across the nation.) Put somewhat differently the combination relativizes truth to the latest demands of man's productive apparatuses and circumstances.

Yet this restless proliferation of norms and the instability of truth is only one outcome of the interplay between the two conceits. Another frequent consequence of this uneasy marriage of modernity which Foucault is less concerned with, is separation and the destruction of one of the members, namely universal truth. Sometimes the atomistic self is unable to tolerate even the claims to universality which help establish his hegemony. What is left then is man as his own ground - or rather men, in the absence of universals which united them. This leads to atomistic struggles, and the most severe reduction of those who cohabit the social world to beings-for-the-self. Augustine described this process with remarkable acuity in general terms. Hegel and Marx are two who have analyzed this dynamic extensively in its particular modern form. Thus far, humans without metaphysical truths have most often been self-aggrandizing humans, unlimited by past

morals. Their social action - lacking all grounds - has in the worst cases been "justified" by the senseless and horrifying forms of fascistic aesthetic decisionism which Habermas, Richard Wolin and many others are rightfully haunted by.

Both of these outcomes - the restless searches for truth and various forms of nihilism - egoism - are among the defining features of our age. And both play an important role in the regular functioning of power. As the former surveys, regulates and coerces people around norms that enhance productivity, the latter frequently deflects criticism and thwarts a sense of responsibility for and commitment to anything which lies beyond the self. The former obliterates and codifies differences while the latter fosters an oblivious indifference. Foucault, it can be argued, has not paid enough attention to the salience and dangers of the latter in his critical writing. That "man" may be "erased like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea" is dangerous and frightening as well as potentially attractive and provocative.

Augustine, writing in an extremely different age, had a profound sense of the dangers of the ontological conceit that recognizes nothing beyond the self, and we would do well to listen to his warnings carefully - even if his alternative contains its own problems and is untenable

for us. As we stand near the edge of a world without universal truths, we cannot wish away or take lightly the problems that tormented him. Beyond metaphysics there are a variety of paths. If we dance too lightly over the edge we may again discover the horrific, instead of the possibility of our freedom. Some recent theoretical trends seem insufficiently aware of this (e.g., this often seems to be the case with Deleuze and Lyotard.[3])

Yet is it possible to provide both an awareness of those dangers and an alternative to them without Augustine's metaphysics? Can we separate Augustine's critical insight from his morality? Better still, is there a position from which we can both recognize the importance of Augustine's critique of ontological conceit and recognize the limits and insufficiencies of Augustine as well? A position from which we can take and fortify what is best in Augustine's morality - a concern with flattening and a move towards a greater appreciation of difference than the decadent version of Roman Paganism - while avoiding the monological character and arbitrary limitations of this morality?

I have argued that Foucault's work contains an ethical alternative to the search for metaphysical truths which avoids nihilism, egoism and indifference (in spite of the fact that he rarely focuses upon these problems in his critical writing). His artistic ethos

should be distinguished from the decisionism with which some would like to associate him. Because Foucault's understanding of artistic activity is inextricably connected to a great appreciation of dialogical encounters with others who are different, his artistic ethos is closely linked to creating the self, social, economic and political practices in forms which would allow and indeed engender such experiences. This involves fashioning the self and social world in ways which increase the space for different others and affirm the value of our differences. Far from leaving Foucault without any positive directions, his position provides a most important voice in the discussion of what values should govern personal and societal change.

Foucault's ontology and ethics work counter to both conceits and provide us with a particular humility which is not that of humble obedience to metaphysical truths, but instead, respectful regard for the importance of the dialogical situation with those who are different and differences within the self in the creation of ourselves. He offers us the outlines of a notion of the self as a work of art which would not generate a monological process within the self aimed at establishing the One Truth in depth, but rather fashion the self in part through a careful internal conversation which would consider many

dimensions of the self and its multiplicitous experiences. And if, as we noted above, Augustine's humility wells out of a certain conceit, we might say that Foucault's ethic is characterized by a peculiar audacity rooted in an ontological humility. Not being the stuff of deep truth, nor being self sufficient, Foucault suggests that we dwell at the edge of our being, carefully questioning who we are in an historical social ontology of ourselves aimed in part at determining where a transgressive crafting of our existences might enhance the possibilities of our freedom and better our lives. Within Foucault's ethos distinction is both appropriate to the self (there is no ontological providence which predisposes us to the "norm") and important if we are to be valuable interlocutors for others in their own attempts to artistically shape their lives and the shared social milieu.

This dimension of Foucault's thought has been missed by most of his interpreters, and it seems that there are a few important reasons for this. Foucault made little effort to make his ethics explicit until his later writings and even there he is quite subtle about the matter. For strategic reasons, he carefully avoided writing from a position that could be construed to rest on another "truth claim." In his "final interview" in Raritan, he again made clear that he opposed

the idea of a single morality to be applicable to everyone.[4] He was not terribly concerned with those who wished to dismiss him as a nihilist and hence did not guard against passing phrases which could be construed thusly. Yet Foucault was not a nihilist and the ethical stance which was central to his work is precisely an attempt to stake out an existential strategy between universal morality and nihilism. It is not a strategy that has been well received in a world where many are still yearning to discover metaphysical solutions to our problems. And it is a strategy whose merits are barely audible in a world where dialogue and difference are rigorously marginalized.

The differences between Foucault and Augustine are quite easy to discern. Those between my readings of Foucault and Merleau-Ponty on the other hand are more difficult to grasp. Indeed, I draw them closer together than would probably make either of them very comfortable.[5] The Merleau-Ponty I describe bears little similarity with the philosopher-yearning for an originary subject[6] or trying to reduce the world of difference with a phenomenological body[7] - to which Foucault occasionally makes cryptic references. In fact, I think in many respects - far from being at odds with each other - notions of an artistic ethos which can be discerned in each thinker actually provide an interesting

and textured theory when they are brought together. Nevertheless there are differences between the two thinkers and they are important and illuminating. I will explore these differences as they are manifest in three areas: first, through a brief analysis of the rhetoric of "depth" in Merleau-Ponty and Foucault's frequent attacks on this word; second, through a discussion of the differences which remain at the ontological level between the two thinkers; and finally, by exploring loose affiliations which might be drawn between the former differences and differences in the political tendencies of the two philosophers.

Foucault, as we have seen, consistently avoids the rhetoric of "depth." He is extremely conscious of its deployment within Christian metaphysics and within the numerous attempts in our age to resuscitate a metaphysical understanding of the world. To touch the word is for him, to risk triggering all sorts of resonations which might insidiously reinscribe his discourse back into those which he opposes as sham: confession, Truth, teleological unities which cohere naturally around the depths of their singular centers, codified-normalized subjects, discoverable essences - the secret whispers of God. Depth is too inextricably tied in with this constellation of things to be of any use in either

criticizing this constellation or working towards different discourses and practices.

Of course, Merleau-Ponty also aims his philosophy in part against notions that there are pre-existing truths that we need only reflect or discover and prefabricated unities that are predestined to come into existence. But for him, "depth" is both an important term and a vital metaphor. In large part, Merleau-Ponty employs "depth" in a manner that is not concerned with whatever echoes "depth" may import from its use within Christian metaphysics. He employs it for its spatial significance, in order, as I have recounted, to return us to dense living space, space wildly intertwined with time. Depth is the dimension that pushes us most forcefully towards a reconsideration of our being in the world, a re-consideration of the birth of our experience of space itself ("originality of depth"). While utilizing the spatial connotations of "depth" he simultaneously and quite consistently attempts to coherently transform the word, reinscribing it as a central figure in a philosophy which reverberates with words like "polymorphism," "latency," "transgress," "wild," "invisible." At some point along the way spatial depth comes to signify a living thickness - both sensible and sensing - "overlapping" and "transgressing" itself, a dimension born simultaneously in our intercorporeal

mingling with others, a dimension in which things remain distinct and other as opposed to the dimension in which things are objectively contained, displayed and possessed in entirety.

Yet Merleau-Ponty does more with the word than utilize and coherently deform its spatial intimations. He engages certain resonances "depth" has acquired in Christianity as well. Echoing Augustine, Merleau-Ponty writes that "depth is the dimension of the hidden." Reawakening our sense of the hidden, of the invisible that lines and is an integral aspect of the sensible world, is a central theme for Merleau-Ponty and "depth" plays a vital role in the unraveling of this theme. Of course, what is hidden is not "deep Truth"; rather it is "hidden-ness" itself that Merleau-Ponty wishes to bring before us in an effort to reveal an ontology which recognizes the "obstacles" and "resistance" that belong to things - a protean world with ineliminable pregnant reserves. Beyond mere hidden-ness however, "depth" colors the hidden as wondrous and it motions us in the direction of a particular attitude toward the hidden - that of "wonder." And accompanying this wonder is a certain reverence - a profound awed respect for Being and flesh. ("Profound" means depth and also profound.) Albeit this reverence is not for "His voice," Merleau-Ponty employs a word steeped in two thousand

years of Christianity, a word saturated with reverence, as he calls us toward different relations with the world.

In spite of his important departures from metaphysics - in the broad sense in which it is commonly employed today, not the sense in which he sometimes worked with it[8] - Merleau-Ponty employs the rhetoric of depth, in part to salvage a sense of mystery and awe that Christianity contained far more of than we typically find in the secular regions of the modern world. For Merleau-Ponty - with Weber, "depoeticization" and "disenchantment" is central to the problems of modernity. A new and better ontology and ethics would have to in part evoke poetic - even reverent - attitudes. Foucault on the other hand is more suspicious. He conscientiously avoids such things in his writing - even as he describes for us as well as anyone ever has, the methods which depoeticize our bodies and disrespect our differences. Reverence seems in his view to have been too dangerous, too likely to rekindle teleological conceptions, universal truths, secret strategies for subjugation, sugary disguises for violence. In his later work on Kant and enlightenment there are traces in his rhetoric of something like reverence - we find words like "belonging" and "respect" - but even here he is sparing. Indeed, perhaps my development of these themes in his thought pushes Foucault "further than he wished to go himself."

This rhetorical difference between these two theorists is, I think, entwined with differences at the ontological level. In an effort to highlight these differences, let us carefully consider the following passages.

The first passage, by Foucault, is inescapably self-explicit:

> ...we must not imagine that the world turns towards us a legible face which we would have only to decipher; the world is not the accomplice of our knowledge; there is no prediscursive providence which disposes the world in our favour. We must conceive discourse as a violence which we do to things, or in any case as a practice which we impose upon them.[9]

The second passage, by Merleau-Ponty is more difficult:

> The phenomenological world is not the bringing to explicit expression of a pre-existing being, but the laying down of being. Philosophy is not the reflection of a pre-existing truth, but, like art, the act of bringing truth into being. One may well ask how this creation is <u>possible</u>, and if it does not recapture in things a pre-existing Reason. The answer is that the only pre-existent Logos is the world itself, and that the philosophy which brings it into visible existence does not begin by being <u>possible</u>; it is actual or real like the world of which it is a part, and no explanatory hypothesis is clearer than the act whereby we take up this unfinished

> world in an effort to complete and conceive it.[10]

We must read carefully here, for if we do not we may come to the mistaken conclusion that on the very fundamental issue of "the world," Foucault and Merleau-Ponty stand as complete antagonists: The former denies that the world is Logos, let alone legible, while the latter discovers in the world a "pre-existent Logos." Those in search of transcendental breath are allured to these words. A comforting rhetoric that settles us back into our chairs after all that blather about violence, illegibility, indecipherability, imposition and lack of favours. So comforting in fact that "pre-existent Logos" may be the only words one remembers or thinks about on this entire page.

Yet this would be unfortunate, for Merleau-Ponty's line of thought runs in a very different direction than that which is indicated by this phrase when isolated. Consider first the "world" which is this pre-existent logos. He refers, of course, to the "phenomenological world," the perceptual field or clearing, which we always inhabit, which, as he writes in the first sentence of the quoted passage, is itself <u>not</u> an "expression of a pre-existing being, but the laying down of being" that emerges - in his later terminology - through the intertwining of our flesh and that of things. So this

world does not pre-exist us, but is laid down through our existence. (And let us not forget as I noted earlier that for Merleau-Ponty, "perception is a violent act.") The phenomenological world is only pre-existent with respect to philosophy and philosophical activity does not mirror the Logos of this world - the correlations, discrepancies, consistencies, continuities, distinctions which are revealed at the intersections of my various experiences and those between myself and others - but "brings it into being" as philosophy attempts to complete an unfinished world. Philosophers

> ...do not rediscover an already given rationality, they "establish themselves" and establish it, by an act of initiative which has no guarantee in being, its justification resting entirely on the effective power it centers on us of taking our history upon ourselves.[11]

As with perception, the philosophical reflection which further gives form to the world does not simply express possibilities of this world, it also transgresses others, and as Merleau-Ponty writes in the closing sentence of this paragraph: it "is a violent act which is validated by being performed."[12] We should think of the "unfinished world" as a very incomplete sculpture which requires that we chisel, grind, sand and polish away some potentialities in order to accomplish others. And finally, nothing begins by being "possible," but through the perceptual,

conceptual or practical activity which transcends the given and lets "possibility" appear in its wake.

Yet the rhetoric remains. Just as Foucault banishes "depth" from his discourse, one cannot imagine him touching "pre-existent Logos" - even in a somewhat defensive paragraph like Merleau-Ponty's - with a ten foot pen. There simply is no space within Foucault's ontology for this type of trope. For the latter, discourse is a violence we do to things. It is of course violent for Merleau-Ponty also, but it is not simply violence. Central to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of our embodied perceptual and conceptual relation to ourselves and the world is the notion that in the best cases, things that were "unfinished" and "incomplete" can be "brought into being" and "expressed" in our intercourse with them. In spite of (he would say because of) his awareness of "encroachment," "transgression," "concealment," he can still write that the best speech "frees the meaning captive in a thing.[13] He can write of the "miracle of related experiences."[14] There is a certain complicity between our body and the world for Merleau-Ponty. In the overlapping of flesh upon flesh the world solicits our gaze and our gaze responds. Solicitation and response are fraught with an ineliminable dimension of discord and violence, but there is the possibility,

and sometimes the occurrence, of a certain circumscribed justice here as well. Merleau-Ponty's rhetoric - and the ontology which reciprocally calls this rhetoric forth and is illuminated by it - instills an awareness of the turbulence in our existence, but simultaneously it never allows us to forget the experience of miracles, profundity and poetry. "It is a view which like the most fragile object of perception - a soap bubble, or a wave - or like the most simple dialogue, embraces indivisibly all the order and disorder of the world."[15]

The profundity of our experience is not the expression of a "deep truth" which would be our guarantee, justification and measure. It is brought into being in a dialogue between human lives and an inchoate surrounding world, in which we do not discover a reason we could obey - even as we experience miracles - but rather "become responsible for our history."

It seems to me that Merleau-Ponty's rhetoric and ontology in which expression and transgression are intertwined is existentially and experientially much more appropriate than Foucault's nearly exclusive emphasis on violence and obstacle. One cannot read a book like Barry Lopez's Arctic Dreams, with its sensitive portrayal of the people, animals and plants of the arctic, the ice, the sun, and not be struck by the fact that in this discourse there is a certain justice, an expression

of things in which truths and poetry intermingle. It is a text that calls attention to the limits and potential violence of its own and various other perspectives - but it is not a perspective it makes any sense to summarize as a "violence done to things." And there is the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement, the socialist movement linked with Eugene Debs. None of these can be summarized adequately as violence and I doubt Foucault would disagree. However, I still have difficulty imagining how I could "prove" the superiority of Merleau-Ponty's approach or even what a "proof" might look like at this level given their philosophies.

The status of their philosophical agreements - their points of overlap - seems a bit easier to define. Both agree that there is an ineliminable degree of otherness, difference, recalcitrance, pregnancy to all things we experience. Everything that we sense, conceptualize and act upon harbors a surplus beyond that which we acknowledge - a surplus that is continually given birth to, spills beyond and is transgressed by the identities we formulate in an effort to capture things in their entirety. The sense of this view does not rest on some sort of "correspondence" between it and some thing in the world that it signifies which would guarantee its truth. Rather, its sense rests upon our sense of the perpetual failure of concepts, categories, significations,

norms to totally grasp things. Two tactics which Foucault repeatedly utilizes for provoking this sense of bankruptcy is to call our attention to that which is obliterated or mutilated by our categories and practices (those who do not work fast enough, those who do not obey, hermaphrodites, those who masturbate, etc.) and to expose the way in which they actively and forcefully impose themselves upon the world. Of course, this does not prove the (at least partial) inadequacy of totalizing concepts and norms per se, but only that of those norms and concepts which he debunks (or those related). By showing us repeated efforts and repeated failures however, Foucault seeks to prod us into questioning the sense of this history of Truth-without-excess more generally. Still, his counter to this history - the notion that otherness and at least a degree of violence are inescapable aspects of existence which we must dialogically confront in our choices - can claim to be no more than a working assumption.

Merleau-Ponty also proceeds in part by bringing to our attention that which is unacknowledged in hegemonic conceptions (e.g., in his criticisms of liberalism and Marxism). However, because he also addresses questions of perception and ontology in ways that are more rigorous, sustained and, in some senses, more basic, it seems to me that he more successfully "secures" the points upon which

he and Foucault agree. He focuses much of his writing upon the inadequacies of objectivist/identifying thought *per se*, showing persuasively that it cannot account for our most basic perceptual experiences - or more simply, experience itself. He has convincingly demonstrated that some notions of excess - background, depth, the invisible - are necessary if we are to begin to formulate an understanding of our existence in which experience is at all possible. He has shown us - at a far more general level than Foucault - that every revealing implies concealment, every expression, transgression.

But that perception, discourse and action are "violent acts"? Here their footing is more difficult and any attempt to summarily characterize the relation of the visible to the invisible, the spoken to that which remains unsaid seems highly questionable. For it is possible to think of perceptions, conceptions and practices where that which is eclipsed is so relatively insignificant or the eclipse so temporary that "violence" hardly seems to capture what is going on. Indeed as I have argued to use "violence" in some cases - we can each conjure our favorite examples - seems to begin to drain an important word of much of its significance. Hence, it seems to me that if we wish to stick to what we can know about the underside of what happens whenever anything appears we must be satisfied with a word like "eclipse" -

which may take the form of an utter disgrace, or on the other hand mean only that a part of the moon is deprived of sunlight for a few minutes.

But I do not think that either Foucault or Merleau-Ponty chose their metaphors simply in an attempt to shed literal light on perception or ontology. Beyond what they both know about "eclipsing," their rhetorical choices are tightly bound up with questions of ethics and politics. Through his employment of certain metaphors to describe our fundamental relation to the world (in the broadest sense: self, others, things) each theorist attempts to draw us towards what he perceives to be most important yet most lacking in modernity. For Foucault, who had one of the most acute eyes for subjugation in this century, this entails a sense that "everything is dangerous." Succinctly: "I think that the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger."[16] The rhetoric of discord which colors his ontology is aimed at instilling this lesson so we never forget it.

Merleau-Ponty also thinks that objectification and the "terror" associated with it - both overt and insidious - defines the modern age to a great extent. In an age where denial is a chief mechanism by which violence is rendered less visible and perpetuated, he employs ontological metaphors which summon us to recognize

the degree of violence in every perception. In an age where violence is disguised, with Foucault, he gestures us towards a hyper-sensitivity to the encroachment intrinsic in existence. Yet this insight shares the stage with another. For this age of objectification which denies its violence is at the same time one of "depoeticization and disenchantment," a time in which both our categories and our experiences of their failure are draining away our sense of the openness of the future and the possibility of creating a world with more justice and grandeur. Merleau-Ponty worries about a "bad existentialism, which exhausts itself in the description of the collision between reason and the contradictions of experience and terminates in a consciousness of defeat."[17] His perceptual and ontological metaphors of "depth," "expression," "miracle," "overlapping," are attempts to repoeticize our experience at a most basic level - attempts to color our existence with the profundity of possibility.

Viewed at this level, I think that Merleau-Ponty's rhetoric and ontology are more suited than Foucault's to the dialogical artistic ethos which I believe they both share at a general level. A sense of danger and discord alone is not sufficient - for most people at most times - to provoke and call forth great creative deeds. Great acts usually require a sense of positive

possibility as well. Insofar as the world Merleau-Ponty evokes is one which is a "pregnancy of possibles"[18] - not simply transgression, "possibles" which allow and call for better expressions of existence, it elicits our creative engagement in a way that Foucault's world does not. It calls us to the task of constructing as well as deconstructing. Of course, Foucault himself calls us to create our existences, but the world he describes at the ontological level harbors little of the inspiration of possibility which would help sustain this ethos - an ethos that requires an enormous degree of fortitude. In short, I think the tenability of this ethos rests on a sense of the possibility of a certain degree of complicity in our relations with others and the natural world, while recognizing that this complicity always involves an element of transgression.

There are important political implications in the present distinction as well. The centrality of discord and danger in Foucault's perception of the world is entwined with a focus on "local" strategies designed to thwart the exercise of power at specific sites. This is partly due to the fact that this perception has given rise to a heightened understanding of the importance of these sites in the subjugation of selves. Yet it is also because this perception has given rise to a skepticism that leads one to shy away from attempts

to construct plausible alternatives. In absence of such alternatives, resistance tends to be consumed in local struggles against current modes of power.

That Foucault's rhetoric and ontology largely discourage the attempt to formulate alternatives is extremely significant, for such alternatives would involve an articulation of different social values, visions and concrete directions which might catalyze significant coalition building with other people struggling against other sites of power. In addition, the formulation of alternative practices would tend to raise more "global" issues as well, as people attempted to consider the broader circumstances which would be required in order to realize their goals. These global issues could provide an additional focus for creating solidarity.

None of this is necessarily excluded by the ethic which governs Foucault's work. In fact, I think these things are <u>called for</u> at the level of his ethics as I developed them in Chapter Four. But his ontology and rhetoric tend to inhibit their development. While his ethics provides an extremely valuable position from which to begin to formulate positive alternatives to the contemporary practices he has criticized, Foucault very rarely actually took these steps. One will say that this was a strategic choice, that Foucault was simply more

concerned with playing the "fool" and "problematizing" than with offering us concrete solutions. In part this is true - he has said so himself[19] - and he was able to raise important questions from this position in ways that others had not done. Yet we should not endow Foucault with an agency that he and others have persuasively debunked. Foucault partly chose his rhetoric and ontological formulations, but at the same time his language and fundamental experiences of the world guided and limited his choices. They dissuaded him from formulating concrete alternatives even as an ethos emerged in his writings which provides an original and fascinating perspective from which to begin this task. If we are to grasp and creatively develop the most profound dimensions of Foucault's thought in the direction of a more adequate political theory it seems to me that we would do well to shift towards ontological formulations and rhetorical configurations that are closer to those of Merleau-Ponty as I have developed his thought in this text. (Having said this is not to deny that there is no society imaginable that would not benefit from the presence of "fools." It is simply to assert that this benefit hinges in part on those who take up their insights in ways that are not "fool-ish.")

Merleau-Ponty - as inadequate and unoriginal as his thoughts on politics often are - continually calls us to

formulate alternatives to the given visions and practices of violence and subjugation. His vision of a "third way," was aimed not only at criticizing and avoiding the hegemony of the two super-powers, but also at working out a path towards a more dialogical and just world. If we are able to inform this impulse (and the ontology that supports it) with Foucault's insights into the workings and dangers of power in modernity, and develop it in light of the dialogical artistic ethos which emerges in the writings of both - there are great possibilities.

A Brief Glance at Two Figures in the Surrounding Landscape of Political and Social Theory

The dialogical artistic ethos which has been developed here through the works of Foucault and Merleau-Ponty provides a vantage point from which to criticize certain contemporary practices and formulate alternatives which avoid two dangerous tendencies in contemporary theory. The first, as exemplified by the world of Habermas, consists in attempting to ground critique in quasi-transcendentals derived from an analysis of an "ideal speech situation" which would ensure the possibility of a non-coercively arrived at rational consensus. Leaving aside the questions of interpretation which arise in the Habermas-Godamer

debate and elsewhere, the central problem with respect to the argument I have been developing here is that in Habermas' scheme differences are only recognized as legitimate if they fall within the limits defined by the preconditions deemed necessary for achieving a "rational consensus." Differences are only acknowledged to the extent that they can be formulated in a manner that would guarantee the possibility of an eventual identity. Yet this a priori privileging of identity, unity, consensus and Reason above all else is precisely one of the issues which Foucault contests. In light of this crucial discrepancy, Dreyfus and Rabinow are probably justified in asserting that Habermas' position precludes any real dialogue with Foucault.[20] Habermas' stance seems to foreclose the possibility of problematizing dimensions of our modernity which we have good reason to question. Furthermore, in the context of the achievement of a transparent rationality there appears to be no space for "non-rational" differences let alone a positive valuation of differences. As we have seen, such a stance is extremely problematic in light of the philosophies of Foucault and Merleau-Ponty.

With this in mind Foucault writes, "perhaps one must not be for consensuality, but one must be against nonconsensuality."[21] The principle of nonconsensuality here implies a coercive non-dialogical form of power

that approaches the other through force or discipline. It is unacceptable for Foucault, because it implies that we "throw away" the possibility of understanding our differences or reaching agreements dialogically. Yet there is no genuine dialogical engagement between different others when their voices are limited at the start within the confines of a regulative reason which would a priori guarantee consensus. Hence while rejecting nonconsensuality Foucault simultaneously opposed consensus as a regulative principle, and in fact finds the most fecund situations to be those where significant differences intermingle.

There <u>are</u> important limits (which must be empirically defined) to difference within the artistic ethos. Those differences that are inherently nonconsensual and non-dialogical, those whose primary effect is to obliterate the difference of the world around them, are not acceptable where they have a significant social impact. Yet these limits well out of a dialogical appreciation of and respect for others' differences (a respect and appreciation which does not preclude extremely discordant conversations), rather than the preconditions for possible homogenization.

At the same time that the artistic ethos avoids the Habermasian quagmire however, it is equally distant from the "post-modern" alternative we find developed

in the work of Jean-François Lyotard. Reacting against the dangerous implications of totalizing thought, Lyotard suggests that we abandon "legitimating metanarratives" and affirm the heterogeneity of diverse language games. For Lyotard, this implies that these games will be (in Sam Weber's words) "non-communicating and incommeasurable";[22] multiplicitous discourses and practices will flourish without regard to the "totalitarian" demands for some sort of exterior accountability or concern. Of course, Lyotard is not entirely blind to the fact that as embodied in the same social world our discursive practices encroach upon one another. But his position, which is one of indifference and non-sense towards that which lies beyond each particular "game," and in the inter-world between "games" is unable to address this problem. Hence Hobbes rumbles in the final passage of Just Gaming as Lyotard backs into a corner where he finds lurking "the great prescriber himself."[23]

In contrast to this very dangerous morass - whose worship of incommeasurability and non-communicating indifference towards that which is Other (or, in a different "game") leads us back to the absolute sovereign - the artistic ethos developed here fosters a communication between games, selves, practices which transcends the limits of each and calls for the diverse developments of each to acknowledge and respect the

dialogical inter-world of differences to which they belong. The question of the possible forms that this acknowledgement and respect might take ultimately brings us back to the issue of establishing limits. What is clear within this ethos is that these limits will have to be determined through an ongoing discussion which seeks to elaborate an "ontology of the present." Only through such an ontology - the type initiated by Kant and continued in Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Weber, Adorno, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Heidegger and others - can we genuinely attempt to discern and weigh the advantages and disadvantages of our practices and hence make decisions that are as thoughtful as possible. And only through social, economic and political structures that affirm multiple and diverse voices can such an ontology attain a maximum guarantee against dogmatism.

If this text has thus far quite persistently remained at the level of ontology and ethics, if I have avoided throwing out many anchors which might "ground" and "bring down to earth" what is admittedly an abstract journey, this is in no way to avoid either the necessity or the desirability of working out the implications of what has been said for our everyday practices. Yet while theory and practice, ethics and politics, exist in a relationship of circularity which partially constitutes the nature of each, I am extremely wary of those who demand that the

circle be drawn too tightly. The circumscription implied too often leads to both bad theory and bad practice. If I have exploited for the moment a margin of autonomy for theory, it has been to allow the latter the possibility of developing in a manner that might shed a different light upon the practices and commitments out of which it sprang.

But there is another issue as well. If theory runs the danger of being excessively constrained when it is tied too tightly, frequently, or carelessly into the everyday, the latter suffers as well. The way we live is too textured and important to be shaped and governed by quick leaps out of theory, too complicated for there to be much justice in glib theoretical references affirming this practice, denying that one. As Foucault illustrated and articulated on numerous occasions, the task of creating our lives is an activity requiring profoundly historical analysis. Discerning the practical implications of theory requires the same. Leaping over historical analysis blunts the possible contributions of theory making it of little value to the world, and stifles the possibility that the world might speak to and transform theory. The very possibility of a dialogue between theory and practice requires more care than I am capable of in passing remarks and examples. What is required at this point - in addition to further

work on the ethic at an abstract level - is history which proceeds with the values and insights which surface in the ethos begun by Merleau-Ponty and Foucault.

ENDNOTES

Chapter I: Introduction

[1]Barry Lopez, Arctic Dreams, Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1986), p. 109. c.f. Peter Richerson and James McEvoy, III, Human Ecology: An Environmental Approach (North Scituate: Duxbury Press, 1976); Robert Leo Smith, Elements of Ecology and Field Biology (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).

Chapter II: Augustine

[1]St. Augustine, The Confessions, trans. F. J. Sheed (Kansas City: Sheed, Andrews and McMeel, 1942), 10.17.

[2]Augustine, Confessions, 10.33.

[3]Augustine, Confessions, 7.21.

[4]Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction, trans. R. Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 59.

[5]Michel Foucault, Lecture on Christianity and Confession, Nov. 24, 1980.

[6]Peter Brown, Augustine of Hippo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 159.

[7]Brown, Augustine, p. 160.

[8]St. Augustine, City of God, trans. H. Bettenson (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Inc., 1972), 1.Preface).

[9]Augustine, City of God, 14.13.

[10]Augustine, City of God, 14.13.

[11]Augustine, City of God, 14.13.

[12]Augustine, City of God, 14.13.

[13]Augustine, City of God, 14.13.

[14]Augustine, City of God, 14.3.

[15]Augustine, City of God, 1.3.

[16]Augustine, City of God, 12.4.

[17]St. Augustine, On Christian Doctrine, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1958), 1.27.

[18]Augustine, City of God, 7.16.

[19]Augustine, City of God, 7.2.

[20]Augustine, City of God, 14.3.

[21]Augustine, Confessions, 7.7.

[22]Augustine, City of God, 19.16.

[23]Augustine, City of God, 1.Preface.

[24]Augustine, City of God, 19.12.

[25]Augustine, City of God, 19.12.

[26]Augustine, City of God, 19.12.

[27]Augustine, City of God, 1.31.

[28]Augustine, City of God, 18.2.

[29]Augustine, City of God, 1.30.

[30]Augustine, City of God, 1.30.

[31]Augustine, City of God, 1.30.

[32]Augustine, City of God, 5.20.

[33]Augustine, City of God, 5.12.

[34]Augustine, City of God, 5.14.

[35]Augustine, City of God, 5.19.

[36]Augustine, City of God, 5.15.

[37]Augustine, City of God, 5.12.

[38]Augustine, City of God, 5.19.

[39]Michel Foucault, The Use of Pleasure: History of Sexuality, Vol. Two, trans. R. Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), p. 35.

[40]Foucault, Pleasure, p. 46.

[41]Ovid, The Erotic Poems, trans. P. Green (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1982), p. 211.

[42]Ovid, Poems, p. 198.

[43]Ovid, Poems, p. 213.

[44]Petronius, The Satyricon, trans. J. P. Sullivan (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 148.

[45]G. I. Bonner, "Libido and Concupiscentia in St. Augustine," Studia Patristica, VI (Berlin Akademie-Verlag, 1962), p. 313. On the same page he also argues: "Augustine did not envisage any division such as developed in later Christian thought, where preoccupation with sexual concupiscence assumed preponderant...proportions ...."

[46]Augustine, City of God, 14.15.

[47]Augustine, City of God, 14.15.

[48]Augustine, City of God, 14.14.

[49]Augustine, Confessions, 7.16.

[50]Augustine, Confessions, 7.7.

[51]Augustine, City of God, 14.16.

[52]Augustine, City of God, 14.17.

[53]Augustine, City of God, 20.3.

[54]Augustine, City of God, 1.Preface.

[55]Augustine, Confessions, 5.10.

[56]Augustine, Confessions, 8.7.

[57]Augustine, Confessions, 8.7.

[58]Augustine, Confessions, 7.7.

[59]Augustine, Confessions, 8.7.

[60]Augustine, Confessions, 10.17.

[61]Augustine, Confessions, 10.33.

[62]Augustine, Confessions, 10.17.

[63]Augustine, Confessions, 10.29.

[64]Augustine, Confessions, 8.8.

[65]Augustine, Confessions, 8.9.

[66]Augustine, Confessions, 8.10.

[67]Augustine, Confessions, 8.9.

[68]Augustine, Confessions, 11.14.

[69]Augustine, Confessions, 11.29.

[70]Augustine, Confessions, 8.9.

[71]Augustine, Confessions, 4.1.

[72]Augustine, Confessions, 2.1.

[73]Augustine, Confessions, 4.6.

[74]Augustine, Confessions, 10.1.

[75]Augustine, Confessions, 10.1.

[76]Augustine, Confessions, 10.17.

[77]Augustine, Confessions, 10.8.

[78]Augustine, Confessions, 10.8.

[79]Augustine, Confessions, 10.17.

[80]Augustine, Confessions. It is worthy to note that while spatial metaphors are important in Augustine's understanding of memory, he is explicitly uncomfortable with them as well. He says to God in 10.25: "And indeed why do I seek in what place of my memory You dwell as though there were places in my memory?"

[81]Augustine, Confessions, 10.8.

[82]Augustine, Confessions, 11.27.

[83]Augustine, Confessions, 10.8.

[84]Augustine, Confessions, 10.11.

[85]Augustine, Confessions, 10.11.

[86]Augustine, Confessions, 10.11.

[87]Augustine, Confessions, 10.11.

[88]Augustine, Confessions, 10.17.

[89]Augustine, Confessions, 1.7.

[90]Augustine, Confessions, 1.7.

[91]Augustine, Confessions, 10.6.

[92]Augustine, City of God, 20.24.

[93]Augustine, Confessions, 10.6.

[94]E.g., Augustine, Confessions, 5.3.

[95]Augustine, Confessions, 4.9.

[96]Augustine, Confessions, 10.28.

[97]Augustine, Confessions, 7.10.

[98]Augustine, Confessions, 10.3.

[99]Augustine, Confessions, 10.40.

[100]Augustine, Confessions, 10.32.

[101]Augustine, Confessions, 10.33.

[102]Augustine, Confessions, 10.33.

[103]Augustine, City of God, 22.24.

[104]Augustine, City of God, 21.19.

[105]Augustine, Doctrine, 1.27.

[106]St. Augustine, On Free Choice of the Will, quoted in Erich Przywara, An Augustine Synthesis (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 16.

[107]Augustine, Confessions, 11.11.

[108]Augustine, Confessions, 11.13.

[109]Augustine, Confessions, 10.8.

[110]Augustine, Confessions, 9.1.

[111]Augustine, Confessions, 9.1.

[112]Augustine, Confessions, 9.1.

[113]Hannah Arendt emphasizes the importance of our essential capacity to "begin" in Augustine's work, yet she fails to recognize the incredible labor that such beginning entails. c.f. Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 177.

[114]Augustine, City of God, 1.22.

[115]Augustine, Doctrine, 2.6.

[116]Gareth B. Matthews, "Si Fallor, Sum," in Augustine: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. R. A. Markus (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday and Co., 1972), pp. 151-167.

[117]Martin Heidegger, Nietzsche, Volume IV: Nihilism, trans. F. A. Capuzzi (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1982), chs. 16 and 17.

[118]Augustine, Confessions, 10.33.

[119]Augustine, Confessions, 10.37.

[120]Augustine, Confessions, 10.37.

[121]Karl Jaspers, Plato and Augustine, trans. R. Manheim (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1962), p. 68.

[122]Michel Foucault, Interview: "On the Genealogy of Ethics" in Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 231.

[123]Brown, Augustine, p. 176.

Chapter III: Foucault

[1]Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish, trans. A. Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 30.

[2]Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power" in Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 213.

[3]Foucault, Subject and Power, p. 213.

[4]Foucault, Discipline, pp. 80-81.

[5]Foucault, Discipline, p. 138.

[6]Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge, ed. C. Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. 99.

[7]Foucault, Discipline, p. 171.

[8]Foucault, Discipline, p. 191.

[9]Foucault, Discipline, p. 184.

[10]Foucault, Discipline, p. 217.

[11]Foucault, Discipline, p. 220.

[12]Foucault, Discipline, p. 170.

[13]Foucault, Discipline, p. 171.

[14]Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p. 155.

[15]Foucault, Discipline, p. 201.

[16]Foucault, Discipline, p. 17.

[17]Foucault, Discipline, p. 205.

[18]Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization, trans. R. Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 182.

[19]Foucault, Discipline, p. 17.

[20]Foucault, Discipline, p. 140.

[21]Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction, trans. R. Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 157.

[22]Foucault, Sexuality, p. 59.

[23]Foucault, Sexuality, p. 154.

[24]Foucault, Sexuality, p. 60.

[25]Foucault, Sexuality, p. 60.

[26]Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p. 131.

[27]Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p. 131.

[28]Foucault, Sexuality, p. 70.

[29]Foucault, Sexuality, p. 69.

[30]Michel Foucault, Herculine Barbin, trans. R. McDougall (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. xiii.

[31]Foucault, Sexuality, p. 157.

[32]Foucault, Sexuality, p. 156.

[33]Foucault, Sexuality, p. 107.

[34]Foucault, "Genealogy," in Dreyfus and Rabinow, Foucault, p. 245.

[35]Foucault, "Genealogy," in Dreyfus and Rabinow, Foucault, p. 237.

[36]Foucault, Discipline, p. 23.

[37]Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 158.

[38]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 345.

[39]Dreyfus and Rabinow, Foucault, ch. 4.

[40]Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p. 113.

[41]Foucault, Discipline, p. 305.

[42]Foucault, Discipline, pp. 27-28.

[43]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 65.

[44]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 66.

[45]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 64.

[46]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 310.

[47]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 311.

[48]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 227.

[49]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 313.

[50]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 313.

[51]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 314.

[52]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 315.

[53]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 318.

[54]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 323.

[55]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 322.

[56]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 324.

[57]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 328.

[58]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 328.

[59]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 328.

[60]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 327.

[61]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 328.

[62]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 328.

[63]G. W. F. Hegel, Philosophy of Right, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 13.

[64]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 330.

[65]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 330.

[66]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 331.

[67]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 333.

[68]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 339.

[69]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 339.

[70]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 339.

[71]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 339.

[72]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 341.

[73]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 341.

[74]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 341.

[75]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 385.

[76]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 387.

[77]Foucault, Discipline, p. 30.

[78]Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity versus Postmodernity," New German Critique, no. 22 (Winter 1981), p. 13.

[79]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 342.

[80]Foucault, Order of Things, p. 341.

[81]Habermas, "Modernity v. Postmodernity," p. 13.

[82]Jürgen Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present," in Foucault: A Critical Reader, ed. D. C. Hoy (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 108.

[83]Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," in Hoy, Reader.

[84]Michael Walzer, "The Politics of Michel Foucault," in Hoy, Reader.

[85]Richard Wolin, "Foucault's Aesthetic Decisionism," Telos, no. 67 (Spring 1986).

[86]Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, ed. D. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 153.

[87]Foucault, "Nietzsche," in Bouchard, Language, p. 148.

[88]Foucault, "Nietzsche," in Bouchard, Language, p. 154.

[89]Foucault, "Nietzsche," in Bouchard, Language, p. 154.

[90]Foucault, "Nietzsche," in Bouchard, Language, p. 153.

[91]Foucault, "Nietzsche," in Bouchard, Language, p. 154.

[92]Foucault, "Nietzsche," in Bouchard, Language, p. 161.

[93]Foucault, "Nietzsche," in Bouchard, Language, p. 153.

[94]Foucault, "Nietzsche," in Bouchard, Language, p. 148.

[95]Foucault, Sexuality, 157.

[96]Bouchard, Language, p. 158.

[97]Foucault, "Power and Strategies," in Power/Knowledge, p. 138.

[98]Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum," in Bouchard, Language, p. 165.

[99]Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum," in Bouchard, Language, p. 182.

[100]Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum," in Bouchard, Language, p. 183.

[101]Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum," in Bouchard, Language, p. 182.

[102]Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum," in Bouchard, Language, p. 185.

[103]Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum," in Bouchard, Language, p. 187.

[104]Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," in Untying the Text, trans. R. Young (New York: Methuen Inc., 1981), p. 65.

[105]Foucault, "Discourse," in Untying the Text, p. 67.

[106]Foucault, "Genealogy," in Dreyfus and Rabinow, Foucault, p. 237.

[107]Foucault, "Genealogy," in Dreyfus and Rabinow, Foucault, p. 236.

[108]Michel Foucault, "Kant on Enlightenment and Revolution," trans. C. Gordon, Economy and Society, Vol. 15, no.1 (Feb. 1986), p. 96.

[109]Foucault, "Kant," in Economy and Society, p. 89.

[110]Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", in The Foucault Reader, ed. P. Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p. 39.

[111]Foucault, "Kant," in Economy and Society, p. 89.

[112]Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?", in On History, ed. L. W. Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1963), p. 3.

[113]Foucault, "Kant," in Economy and Society, p. 89.

[114]Foucault, "Enlightenment," in Rabinow, Foucault Reader, p. 44.

[115]Foucault, "Enlightenment," in Rabinow, Foucault Reader, p. 45.

[116]Foucault, "Enlightenment," in Rabinow, Foucault Reader, p. 46.

[117]Foucault, "Enlightenment," in Rabinow, Foucault Reader, p. 41.

[118]Foucault, "Enlightenment," in Rabinow, Foucault Reader, p. 50.

[119]Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p. 81.

[120]Foucault, "Enlightenment," in Rabinow, Foucault Reader, p. 46.

[121]Foucault, Madness, p. ix.

[122]Foucault, Madness, p. xi.

[123]Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p. 83.

[124]Michel Foucault, The Use of Pleasure: History of Sexuality, Vol. 2, trans. R. Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), pp. 8-9.

[125]Foucault, "Genealogy," in Dreyfus and Rabinow, Foucault, p. 231.

[126]Foucault, "Polemics, Politics and Problematizations," in Rabinow, Foucault Reader, p. 381.

[127]Foucault, Madness, p. ix.

[128]Foucault, "Enlightenment," in Rabinow, Foucault Reader, p. 40.

[129]Foucault, "Enlightenment," in Rabinow, Foucault Reader, p. 41.

[130]Foucault, "Enlightenment," in Rabinow, Foucault Reader, p. 41.

[131]Foucault, "Enlightenment," in Rabinow, Foucault Reader, p. 41.

[132]Foucault, "Kant," in Economy and Society, p. 96.

[133]For an account of identity in western thought, see Martin Heidegger, Identity and Difference, trans. J. Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), or Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment, trans. J. Cumming (New York: The Seabury Press, 1969).

[134]Foucault, "Enlightenment," in Rabinow, Foucault Reader, p. 41.

[135]Foucault, "Genealogy," in Dreyfus and Rabinow, Foucault, p. 231.

[136]Foucault, "Enlightenment," in Rabinow, Foucault Reader, p. 47.

Chapter IV: Merleau-Ponty

I refer to the French editions only for those texts in which I have at times altered the standard translations.

[1]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 256. Original: Phénoménologie de la Perception (Paris: Gallimard, 1945).

[2]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Primacy of Perception and Other Essays, ed. James Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963), p. 72.

[3]C.f. Dreyfus and Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 35-36. James Schmidt, Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Between Phenomenology and Structuralism (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), ch. 2.

[4]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Signs, trans. R. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 84. Original: Signes (Paris: Gallimard, 1960).

[5]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 160.

[6]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 180.

[7]Merleau-Ponty, Primacy, p. 64.

[8]Edmund Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, trans. D. Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), p. 157.

[9]Husserl, Meditations, p. 62.

[10]Merleau-Ponty, Signes, p. 228; Merleau-Ponty, Signs, pp. 180-181.

[11]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. xxi.

[12]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. xi.

[13]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 26; Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, p. 34.

[14]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 28.

[15]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 32.

[16]See especially Chs. 1-3 in Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology.

[17]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 28.

[18]Charles Fox, "The Existential Phenomenological Alternative to Dichotomous Thought," Western Political Quarterly, Vol. 33, no. 3 (Sept. 1980), p. 375.

[19]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 70.

[20]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. ix.

[21]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. xxi.

[22]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 56.

[23]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. xiv.

[24]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. xx.

[25]Merleau-Ponty, in Edie, Primacy, p. 30.

[26]Merleau-Ponty, in Edie, Primacy, p. 19.

[27]Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The Marx-Engels Reader (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1972), p. 145.

[28]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. xx.

[29]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Humanism and Terror, trans. Joseph Bien (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. xli.

[30]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 10.

[31]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 39.

[32]For example there is little or no discussion of depth in the following works on Merleau-Ponty: Sonia Kruks, The Political Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1985); Gary Brent Madison, The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty: A Search for the Limits of Consciousness (Athens: University of Ohio Press, 1981); Albert Rabil, Jr., Merleau-Ponty: Existentialist of the Social World (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967); James Schmidt, Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Between Phenomenology and Structuralism (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985). Samuel B. Mallin, Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), address certain aspects of depth. This is not to dismiss the above works, for I have benefited in important ways from some of them (and other works on Merleau-Ponty that have overlooked "depth" as well), and often issues of "depth" are addressed using other terms from Merleau-Ponty's lexicon. Nevertheless, it is interesting to find such a consistent silence in spite of the multiplicity of concerns the above texts represent.

[33]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 256.

[34]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 219.

[35]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 254.

[36]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 255.

[37]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 255.

[38]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 256.

[39]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 267.

[40]C.f., p. 216.

[41]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 137.

[42]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 147.

[43]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 207.

[44]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 262.

[45]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 262; Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, p. 303.

[46]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 263.

[47]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 262; Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, p. 303.

[48]C.f., Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, pp. 203, 206-207.

[49]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 219.

[50]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 167.

[51]Merleau-Ponty, in Edie, Primacy, p. 180.

[52]Merleau-Ponty, in Edie, Primacy, p. 180.

[53]Merleau-Ponty, in Edie, Primacy, p. 180.

[54]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 219.

[55]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 191.

[56]"Transgress" found especially in Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible.

[57]Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, p. 30; Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 22.

[58]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, pp. 20-21; Merleau-Ponty, Signes, p. 29.

[59]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 170; Merleau-Ponty, Visible et Invisible, p. 223.

[60]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 49, changed to present tense.

[61]As we shall see, the depth and hence the worldliness of our experience can break down and consequently either freeze our experience or release it to utter discontinuity. At this point we cease to experience the world in some very fundamental ways. For the moment my discussion is confined to the world as depth.

[62]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 49.

[63]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, pp. xx and 361. "Transgression" is, one might argue, a strong and upsetting term. Yet it has the advantage of calling our attention to the way in which, even at a perceptual level, our existence encroaches upon the world. An awareness of this encroachment should not incapacitate our ability to act in the world, yet it should call us to question many of our actions. Violence becomes especially dangerous when it is denied or unrecognized. We will leave further discussion of how we might think about what constitutes desirable versus undesirable transgression until the next chapter where we will develop the ethical and political implications of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of experience and ontology.

[64]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 179.

[65]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Themes from the Lectures at the Collège de France, 1952-1960, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 111.

[66]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 83.

[67]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 176.

[68]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 218; Merleau-Ponty, Visible et Invisible, p. 271.

[69]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 181.

[70]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 132.

[71]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 250.

[72]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 252.

[73]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 260.

[74]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 140.

[75]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 250.

[76]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 250.

[77]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 260.

[78]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 270.

[79]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 217.

[80]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 217.

[81]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 251.

[82]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 169.

[83]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 219.

[84]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 219.

[85]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 135.

[86]Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (London: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1957), p. 103.

[87]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 175.

[88]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 173.

[89]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 174.

[90]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 174.

[91]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 176.

[92]C.f., Schmidt, Ch. 3.

[93]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 169.

[94]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 9.

[95]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 9.

[96]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 135.

[97]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 168.

[98]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, pp. 10-11.

[99]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Prose of the World, trans. John O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 142.

[100]Merleau-Ponty, in Edie, Primacy, p. 18.

[101]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Sense and Non-Sense, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 69. Original: Sens et Non-Sens (Paris: Gallimard, 1948).

[102]Unlike Hegel however, Merleau-Ponty will ultimately not seek to overcome all difference (here we speak of that which is unpredictable and not entirely comprehensible - not the domesticated difference which remains in Philosophy of Right) but rather to search for ways in which society can allow differences to exist in both mutual recognition and contestation. To flatten out all difference is as we shall see, to destroy the depth of the inter-corporeal world - to sink out of a "there" that is alive with distinction and pregnancy, and back into anonymity.

[103]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 143.

[104]Merleau-Ponty, in Edie, Primacy, p. 136, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language, trans. H. Silverman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 55.

[105]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 174.

[106]Merleau-Ponty, in Edie, Primacy, p. 18.

[107]It should be recalled that communication is fundamentally "gestural" for Merleau-Ponty, hence he is referring to non-verbal communication as well as verbal.

[108]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 11.

[109]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 10.

[110]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 11.

[111]Merleau-Ponty, Sense, p. 90; Merleau-Ponty, Sens, p. 157.

[112]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 142.

[113]Merleau-Ponty, Sense, p. 69.

[114]Merleau-Ponty, in Edie, Primacy, p. 160.

[115]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 339; Merleau-Ponty, Phénoménologie, p. 391.

[116]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 341.

[117]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 339.

[118]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 323.

[119]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 339.

[120]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 342.

[121]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 342.

[122]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. viii.

[123]C.f., Merleau-Ponty, Sense, ch. 4; Merleau-Ponty, Sens, ch. 3.

[124]Merleau-Ponty, in Edie, Primacy, p. 11.

[125]Merleau-Ponty, in Edie, Primacy, p. 160.

[126]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 68.

[127]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 198 for related passage.

[128]This apt phrase is William Connolly's. Personal correspondence dated Sept. 20, 1987.

[129]Merleau-Ponty, Humanism, p. 35.

[130]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, pp. 56-57.

[131]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 349.

[132]Merleau-Ponty, Humanism, p. xlii.

[133]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 207.

[134]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, In Praise of Philosophy trans. J. Wild and J. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963), p. 44.

[135]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. xi.

[136]Merleau-Ponty, Sense, p. 40.

[137]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 240.

[138]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 240.

[139]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, pp. 150-151.

[140]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 54.

[141]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 54.

[142]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 44.

[143]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 14.

[144]Merleau-Ponty, Sense, pp. 24-25.

[145]Merleau-Ponty, Sense, p. 20.

[146]Merleau-Ponty, Sense, p. 20.

[147]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 75.

[148]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 69.

[149]Of course, we must be careful here not to appear to be endorsing the static, objectifying understandings that bind selves to fixed identities in order to perpetuate or legitimate status quo social relations. We should resist such fabrications, and the historical dialogical artistic understanding of self and world that is being developed here is an ethos formulated with this resistance in mind. Nor are we arguing that all or even most physical and psychological aspects of the self are of the "fundamental" kind we have in mind in this discussion. Many aspects of selves can be rejected or radically changed and others adopted. Development of this sort is integral to an artistic elaboration of self. Yet Merleau-Ponty does believe that there are fundamental dimensions of our particular existences which we neither can nor ought to deny, but rather creatively elaborate and transform as we develop their significance through our expressions of them.

[150]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 54.

[151]Merleau-Ponty, in Edie, Primacy, p. 19.

[152]Merleau-Ponty, in Edie, Primacy, p. 19.

[153]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 54.

[154]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, pp. 54-55.

[155]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 58.

[156]Merleau-Ponty, in Edie, Primacy, p. 30.

[157]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 58.

[158]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 49.

[159]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 50.

[160]Merleau-Ponty, in Edie, Primacy, p. 174.

[161]Merleau-Ponty, Sense, p. 16.

[162]Merleau-Ponty, Sense, p. 18.

[163]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 72.

[164]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 112.

[165]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 68.

[166]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 142.

[167]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 59.

[168]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 86.

[169]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 86.

[170]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 78.

[171]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 74.

[172]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 86.

[173]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 13.

[174]Merleau-Ponty, Prose, p. 13.

[175]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. 456.

[176]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 349.

[177]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 176.

[178]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Adventures of the Dialectic, trans. J. Bien (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 227.

[179]Merleau-Ponty, Humanism, p. xviii. This is ostensibly a somewhat paradoxical position for a philosopher who asserts that it is the otherness of an other that enables us to recognize the other as such. Apparently, as selves felt their own selves being squashed in capitalist society, they would be able to recognize others undergoing the same struggles. In this case it is still a difference - class antagonism - which gives birth to recognition, not mere sameness. Merleau-Ponty never gives this paradox much consideration.

[180]Merleau-Ponty, Humanism, p. xx.

[181]Merleau-Ponty, Sense, p. 150.

[182]German Ideology quoted in Merleau-Ponty, Humanism, p. 116.

[183]Merleau-Ponty, Humanism, p. 117.

[184]Merleau-Ponty, Adventures, p. 52.

[185]Merleau-Ponty, Adventures, p. 50.

[186]Merleau-Ponty, Adventures, p. 207.

[187]Merleau-Ponty, Adventures, p. 206.

[188]Merleau-Ponty, Adventures, p. 207.

[189]Merleau-Ponty, Adventures, p. 209.

[190]C.F., Sonia Kruks, The Political Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1985), ch. 6; Dick Howard, "Ambiguous Radicalism: Merleau-Ponty's Interrogation of Political Thought," in Horizons of the Flesh, ed. Garth Gillan (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), ch. 7.

[191]Kruks, Philosophy, ch. 6.

[192]Merleau-Ponty, Adventures, p. 227.

[193]Merleau-Ponty, Adventures, p. 226. This argument applies specifically to parliament, which is based on proportional representation with a minimal percentage of the overall vote enabling a party to gain representation. It applies to a far lesser extent - if at all - to our

congressional system in which the "winner takes all." This latter system operates to exclude minority voices and to minimize their chances for efficacious expression. It severely limits - one might say cripples judging from this country - political discourse.

[194]Merleau-Ponty, Adventures, p. 226.

[195]Merleau-Ponty, Sense, p. 116.

[196]Merleau-Ponty, Sense, p. 116.

[197]Merleau-Ponty, Sense, p. 117.

[198]Merleau-Ponty, Adventures, p. 226.

[199]Merleau-Ponty, Themes, pp. 40-41.

[200]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 270.

[201]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 270.

[202]C.f., Phenomenology, p. 442.

[203]J. S. Mill, "The Spirit of the Age," in Essays on Politics and Culture, ed. G. Himmelfarb (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1963), pp. 1-44.

[204]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, pp. 348-349.

[205]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 349.

[206]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 349.

[207]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 349.

[208]Merleau-Ponty, Sense, p. 116.

[209]Merleau-Ponty, Humanism, p. 176.

[210]Merleau-Ponty, Humanism, p. 189.

Chapter V: Conclusion

[1]Brown, Augustine of Hippo, p. 432.

[2]St. Augustine, Of True Religion, trans. J. H. S. Burleigh (South Bend: Regnery/Gateway, Inc., 1959), section 110.

[3]C.f., Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), and Jean-Francois Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[4]Michel Foucault, "Final Interview," in Raritan (Summer 1985), p. 12.

[5]Though others have also given readings of the antagonistic traditions stemming from Husserl and structuralism that show them converging. For example: James Schmidt, Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Between Phenomenology and Structuralism; Christopher Norris, Deconstruction: Theory and Practice (London: Methuen, 1982).

[6]Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, trans. A. M. S. Smith (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 203.

[7]Foucault, "Nietzsche," in Bouchard, Language, p. 170.

[8]C.f., "The Metaphysical in Man," in Merleau-Ponty, Sense.

[9]Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," in Untying the Text, trans. R. Young.

[10]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. xx.

[11]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. xx.

[12]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. xx.

[13]Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 44.

[14]Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, p. xx.

[15]Merleau-Ponty, Humanism, p. 189.

[16]Foucault, "Genealogy," in Dreyfus and Rabinow, Foucault, p. 232.

[17]Merleau-Ponty, Humanism, p. 188.

[18]Merleau-Ponty, Visible and Invisible, p. 250.

[19]Foucault, "Genealogy," in Dreyfus and Rabinow, Foucault, p. 231.

[20]Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, "What is Maturity? Habermas and Foucault on 'What is Enlightenment?'," in Hoy, Reader, p. 109.

[21]Michel Foucault, "Politics and Ethics: An Interview," in Rabinow, Foucault Reader, p. 379.

[22]Samuel Weber, "Afterward, Literature: Literature - Just Making It," in Jean François Lyotard, Just Gaming, trans. W. Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 104.

[23]Lyotard, Just Gaming, p. 100.

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