PHS Phenomenology, Humanities and Sciences
Fenomenologia, Humanidades e Ciências

THE ART OF REVOLUTIONARY PRAXIS: GHOSTING A HISTORY WITHOUT SHADOWS

A Práxis da Arte Revolucionária: Ghosting, Uma História sem Sombras

La praxis del arte revolucionario: Ghosting, una historia sin sombras

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Abstract: Merleau-Ponty, in *Humanism and Terror* (1947), addresses the spectrum of problems related to revolutionary action. His essay, *Eye and Mind* (1960), is best known as a contribution to aesthetics. A common structure exists in these apparently disparate works. We must reject the illusion of subjective clairvoyance as a standard of revolutionary praxis; but also we must reject any idealized light of reason that illuminates all—that promises a history without shadows. The revolutionary nature of an act must be established as such through *praxis*. The creative *praxes* of the political revolutionary or the revolutionary artist are recognized *ex post facto*; yet each involves the creation of its own new aesthetic wherein the value of that *praxis* is to be understood spontaneously and all at once.
Keywords: Merleau-Ponty, Dialectics, Revolutionary Praxis, Marxism.

Resumo: Merleau-Ponty, em *Humanismo e Terror* (1947), aborda o espectro de problemas relacionados à ação revolucionária. Seu ensaio, *O olho e o espírito* (1960), é mais conhecido como uma contribuição à estética. Há uma estrutura comum nesses trabalhos aparentemente díspares. Devemos rejeitar a ilusão da clarividência subjetiva como um padrão de práxis revolucionária, mas devemos também rejeitar qualquer luz idealizada da razão que ilumine tudo – que prometa uma história sem sombras. A natureza revolucionária de um ato deve ser estabelecida como tal através da práxis. As práxis criativas do revolucionário político ou do artista revolucionário são reconhecidas *ex post facto*. Contudo, cada uma envolve a criação de sua própria estética nova, na qual o valor daquela práxis deve ser compreendido espontaneamente e em bloco.
Palavras-chave: Merleau-Ponty; Dialética; Práxis revolucionária; Marxismo.

Resumen: Merleau-Ponty, en *Humanisme e Terreur* (1947), aborda el espectro de problemas relacionados con la acción revolucionaria. Su ensayo, *L´Oeil et l´Esprit* (1960), es más conocido como una contribución a la estética. Hay una estructura común en estas obras aparentemente dispares. Debemos rechazar la ilusión de la clarividencia subjetiva como patrón de praxis revolucionaria, pero también debemos rechazar cualquier luz idealizada de la razón que ilumine todo, que prometa una historia sin sombras. El carácter revolucionario de un acto debe establecerse como tal a través de la praxis. La praxis creativa del político revolucionario o del artista revolucionario se reconoce ex post facto. Sin embargo, cada uno implica la creación de su propia nueva estética, en la que el valor de esa praxis debe entenderse de forma espontánea y en bloque.
Palabras-Clave: Merleau-Ponty; Dialético; Practica Revolucionário; Marxismo.

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** I would like to thank the members of a Merleau-Ponty reading group under my direction in Asheville, North Carolina for their many contributions to this essay and to my own understanding of Merleau-Ponty's texts. Two different versions of this paper were presented at the UK Sartre Society, Oxford University [July 2018], the Western North Carolina Circle for Continental Philosophy [January, 2019], Purdue University and Texas A&M University [March 2019]. The discussion resulting from each of these presentations has informed this essay. I would also like to thank John Gillespie, who encouraged me to revise this essay for publication when he chaired my session at the UK Sartre Society, as well as the anonymous readers who helped me clarify my position.

"Philosophers hitherto have only interpreted the world in various ways;
the point is to change it" (Karl Marx, *Thesis on Feuerbach*).

I

Marx famously offered this invocation to revolutionary *praxis* in his eleventh *Thesis on Feuerbach*. Inspiring as it may be, this brief aphorism, taken on its own, fails to reveal the essential hermeneutic aspect of *praxis*. *Praxis* must bear within its action an understanding of where and why the action is called for; thus interpretation is ineluctably intertwined within action. *Praxis* is goal-oriented transformative political action: in various schools of thought in the Marxian tradition, it is action directed to achieve the emancipation of the proletariat. The hermeneutic aspect of revolutionary *praxis* is manifest in the following questions posed from within the context of collective agency. What *is* revolutionary *praxis*? Are all changes good, equally good, or are all changes revolutionary? How do we know what changes are truly revolutionary and for the better? From what perspective do we interpret the value of change—especially since the value of change is intertwined with the change of value in history? What is valuable at one time might prove to be otherwise at another time. Of course, Marx thought that the dialectical structure of history, understood as material description, affords us the proper vista for assessment. So the inquiry into revolutionary *praxis* must be understood in its dialectical historical and material context. But given the chilling results of some actions carried out in the name of revolution, how do we reconcile the apparent contradiction between political ideals and historical forces in revolutionary *praxis*?[1]

This paper concerns entirely the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty on a topic which he and Sartre shared enthusiasm for various stages of their careers: revolutionary consciousness—and the overlap of aesthetics and politics. For example, Sartre famously and ironically complained that some had the audacity to refer to existentialism as an aestheticism. There seems to be a fundamental divide between the types of judgment at work in matters of taste and in political matters. This is addressed below. The differences in the intersections of aesthetic and political realms in Sartre's and Merleau-Ponty's works are worthy of much more exploration than can be offered here.[2] Yet a preliminary assessment can be asserted, even if not fully defended, in terms of the thinkers' understanding of the relation of *praxis* and totality within their notions of dialectic. Their trajectories were intertwined, but never converged—even in the days of their alliance prior to the famous 1953 "break-up."[3]

Certainly as early as 1948 Sartre maintained, with Beauvoir, that literature (and literature alone) was an art that offered an invitation for the reader to actualize his or her freedom.[4] Tom Flynn, in his masterful *Sartre*: *A Philosophical Biography* goes so far as to organize Sartre's entire career along the axis of the aesthetic imagination.[5] Sartre and Merleau-Ponty both were looking for ways to re-read the Hegelian / Marxian dialectic in ways that avoided the risks of teleological and totalizing dimensions in the German thinkers' accounts.[6] Hegel's dialectical idealism and Marx' dialectical materialism both share the promise and peril of assigning the ultimate meaning and value of an action in terms of the end or the totality of history, be it Absolute Spirit or revolution. But lacking some God's-eye view of history, or as Merleau-Ponty described it, a "*pensée de survol*," such declarations in terms of teleology or totality seem arbitrary at best since it is a matter of some controversy as to what is designated as the "end of history."[7]

Aesthetics loomed large in the intersection of existentialism and Marxism and most specifically in these thinkers' departure from orthodox French and Soviet communism. Neither Merleau-Ponty nor Sartre ever joined the *PCF* [the French Communist Party]. They founded the journal *Les Temps Modernes* as a clearinghouse for non-orthodox critical leftist thought and included many of their most important political works there from the mid-1940's to the mid-1950. Later, Sartre was to explore this intersection of aesthetics and politics in a different direction with his biographies of the literary giants Genet, Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Flaubert, each of which reveals much about Sartre's practical thought.[8] One must remember that, as he emphasized as early as the concluding words of *Being and Nothingness*, this practical thought would be "a pure and not an ancillary reflection."[9]

Sartre's later method of analysis came to be called the "progressive-regressive method" (adapted by Sartre from the work of Henri Lefebvre) in *Search for a Method*. Sartre offered his monumental *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, which among other things explores in detail collective agency in dialectical terms. For Sartre, the movement from his early work to his later work forces existentialism to ground its analysis no longer within individual consciousness, but in a social and political world of series, gatherings, and class. For Sartre, literature provided an invaluable intersubjective environment for this analysis. As we shall see below, Merleau-Ponty was not as exclusive about only literature providing the aesthetic milieu for the analysis, focusing on painting (though not, as some have claimed, to the exclusion of other arts).

Both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty work with a recursive understanding of history such that history is itself a historical phenomenon—it emerges from within history. History is not a great template foisted from above or beyond onto discreet moments. History is at once the ground for *praxis* as well as the product of human *praxis*.

Sartre states this in terms of an existential dilemma: "How are we to understand that man makes history if at the same time it is history that makes man?"[10] This recursive nature of history presents both promise and peril. On the one hand, there is seemingly no way out of history, but the promise lies in the possibility of revolutionary change through *praxis* owing to our engagement within history. Sartre states, "If one wants to grant Marxist thought its full complexity, one would have to say that man is *at once* the product of his own product and a historical agent who can under no circumstances be taken as a product."[11] Revolutionary *praxis*, while always situated, goes beyond its situation and is an attempt to "bring being into being,"[12]

The real differences in their positions concern the relation of *praxis* and totality within their notions of dialectic. Sartre calls for a "de-totalized totality" or "a future totalization"[13] to guide revolutionary *praxis*. At first, the "de-totalizing" and the futurity of Sartre's terms seem to stress contingency. We must act with some provisional ideas concerning the meanings of our actions within a historical context, but without laying claim to some fixed or *a priori* vision of its totality. However, Sartre goes on to state, "Our historical task, at the heart of this polyvalent world, is to bring closer the moment when History will have only one meaning, when it will tend to be dissolved in the concrete men who will make it in common."[14] This idealizes the clarification of historical ambiguities in such a manner that posits some guiding light to eliminate all shadows—something Merleau-Ponty would never accept. Sartre offered his monumental *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, which among other things explores in detail collective agency in dialectical terms

This divergence in their thought from the late 1950's until Merleau-Ponty's death in 1961 is not a sudden rupture: rather, it makes explicit important differences in their earlier works—more *écart* than *éclat*. In the trajectory visible in the courses Merleau-Ponty offered at the *Collège de France*, one sees a turn from history as transcendental ground for *praxis* toward nature, and ultimately toward being—which, as we shall see below, as articulated in *aesthetic* terms.[15] Nevertheless, Merleau-Ponty does not waver from his early castigation of idealism we have seen in *Humanism and Terror*.

Merleau-Ponty consistently rejected the opposition of theory and *praxis* throughout his divergent political works. Political theory cannot be abstract any more than praxis can be purely mechanistic. It is important to reject the allure of the forced choice between idealist and positivistic interpretations of *praxis*.[16] Once we recognize that it is an idealistic illusion to think of an absolutely free monadic agent who is entirely responsible for realizing ideals through his or her *praxis*, we must not make the equally reductive mistake of explaining away our lived experience through the brute mechanics of objective forces of history. Merleau-Ponty makes this point succinctly: "As Marx said, history does not walk on its head; but neither does it think with its feet."[17] Marx' thesis on Feuerbach did not reveal the essential hermeneutic dimension of *praxis*; but it is important to see that what is required is neither a (theoretical) idealistic interpretation of *praxis* nor a positivistic reduction of *praxis*.

I want to address these problems by focusing primarily on two of Merleau-Ponty's works. In his 1947 book, *Humanism and Terror*, Merleau-Ponty addresses a spectrum of problems through the refraction of revolutionary *praxis*. This work is generally regarded as an exposition on the problems of historicism and revisionism in the political context of critically examining the promise of Marxism in immediate post-war France. His 1960 essay, "Eye and Mind," is best known as a contribution to aesthetics. This work calls for an appreciation for the unique value of abstract painting and provides a remarkable account of depth in lived space.

I propose that there exists a common structure in these apparently disparate works that involves a critique of positivistic science as well as a critique of idealistic subjectivity. Both objective and subjective standards fail to account for what is revolutionary in politics and in art: both are dialectically opposed, yielding an existential account of *praxis* that is neither subjective nor objective.[18] We shall attend to some aspects of the ontology of Merleau-Ponty's later aesthetic work to better understand the revolutionary *praxis* he described and advocated in his early political work. I want to disclose a critical structure intrinsic to revolutionary *praxis*, by which I mean that revolutionary *praxis* is a form of action that calls for its own critique while simultaneously creating new possibilities of evaluation. This demands that any act must be subject to the right to rectification through further interpretation that only becomes possible through conditions created by the act in question. To show this, I will focus on ontology and aesthetics to provide a new *understanding of the understanding* of revolutionary *praxis*. I map this critical structure through a close reading of a few of Merleau-Ponty's optical metaphors (i.e., light, illumination, fog, mist, and shadow) in his texts.[19] Disclosing this critical structure intrinsic to revolutionary *praxis* reveals an important connection between Merleau-Ponty's political thought and his aesthetics, while providing new vistas onto his philosophical development as well as his shift in politics. We can understand more about Merleau-Ponty's account of revolutionary *praxis* by considering the analogous situations of the political revolutionary and the revolutionary artist. Furthermore, I submit that the best way to understand revolutionary *praxis* in general is by attending to its aesthetic nature, which is a critical hermeneutic structure.

II

Merleau-Ponty, in *Humanism and Terror*, addresses some problems related to revolutionary *praxis*. It is a brilliant exposition on the problems of historicism and revisionism. In this text, he examines Koestler's novel, *Darkness at Noon*, wherein Koestler's fictional Bolshevik avatar, Rubashov, is an amalgam of those found guilty in the 1938 Moscow trials.[20] Just prior to his execution for treason, Rubashov is illuminated in the dark clarity of utter resignation: he finds meaning neither in his revolutionary life nor in his imminent death.[21] The irony of the situation is this: Rubashov confesses his guilt for "crimes" that are the very actions he once did in good faith as a revolutionary. However, these very same actions that formerly enshrined him as a revolutionary hero now condemn him as an enemy of the people. He is guilty for what these actions *have come to mean*. Thus, in Koestler's dismal portrayal, Rubashov was guilty of misjudging the meaning of his actions in some future anterior hermeneutic. He failed to see what his actions would come to mean.

Merleau-Ponty presents Koestler's work as a dogmatic misrepresentation of Marxism written by a zealous converted reactionary. "Rubashov has no conception of the wisdom of Marxism, which comes by basing knowledge on *praxis*…." [HT 102/18]. By contrast, Merleau-Ponty castigates Koestler as a "mediocre Marxist" [HT 108 / 23] who simply portrays Rubashov as having a "basic faith in the wisdom of the event [*une sagesse du fait*]" [HT 103/18].[22] As we shall see, the difference between the wisdom of *praxis* and the wisdom of the matter of fact lies in the critical structure of *praxis*. When it is ignored in the name of presenting history as some monolithic machine with purely objective *sens*, it omits "the right to rectification intrinsic to every serious action."[23] Koestler thus makes a straw man of Marxism by neglecting this critical structure of *praxis*.[24]

Merleau-Ponty, at least in 1947, believes that Marxism reveals humans' creative force in history. This force will, *if engaged critically*, allow us to maximize human relations. Here is a crucial point: revolutionary *praxis* is not merely a matter of subjective will or reason, nor a matter of objective forces and facts; it reveals the promise of human existence. The promise of proletarian *praxis*, rather than the dictums of the avant--garde of the Party, can keep Marxism from becoming totalitarianism. [HT 217-8/113-4].[25] Merleau-Ponty presents a detailed account of some of the Moscow trials to show the weakness of Koestler's account—but also to reveal that *praxis* cannot be reduced to subjective or objective idealisms. Subjective idealism would hold that the ideality of *praxis* is freely stipulated by the agent. Objective idealism would hold that the ideality of *praxis* is the result of historical forces. Neither position is phenomenologically apt insofar as neither approach can account for the unique way that revolutionary *praxis* calls for its own critique. In the trials, the prosecutor, Vichynski, interrogates the defendants: Bukharin, Kamenev, Zinoniev et al. Merleau-Ponty stresses the failure of the appeal to the subjectivity / objectivity distinction in their responses. As good dialectical materialists, each comes to confess that the truth of their acts had to be a matter of fact rather than speculation. These same acts, which were formerly valorized as revolutionary *praxes* in 1917, turned out to be traitorous and detrimental to the revolution in 1938. Each man acknowledges the objective truth of these charges—*yet maintains that he is not a traitor*.[26] Objectively, the acts were traitorous; subjectively, they were not traitors. Merleau-Ponty shows the failure of this subjective idealism—indeed, history shows us its failure. Each man in effect signed his own death warrant by appealing to this distinction, tantamount to the child-like defense, "Yeah, I did it; but I didn't mean to."

Of course Vichynski's relentless leading of the witnesses to extract the confessions was a matter of necessity, as a matter of jurisprudence. And it also reflected the univocal objective *sens* offered by orthodox Soviet political "science," insofar as it appeals to an inexorable historical dialectical logic. Despite changes in his political positions, Merleau-Ponty was consistent in his critique of such objective dogmatism throughout his career. At first glance, it seems heartless and cruel to condemn these men for unforeseeable consequences of their actions. Moreover, it provides an extreme example of how Merleau-Ponty thought the Party would not engage in genuine dialogue, but only in a sort of rhetorical power-play.

Now, lest we sanguinely rush to condemn the Soviets in the Moscow trials simply for this failing to foresee what their actions would come to mean, Merleau-Ponty points out that this is the same logic used to condemn French collaborators who, faced with the extreme situation of the Nazi occupation, acted in order to preserve France and not to destroy it. Yet they are deemed guilty for *what these actions will have come to mean*. Apparently in the cases of the Vichy France and the Bolsheviks about to be purged, the status of the virtue of a revolutionary action is a matter of being responsible for knowing how it will all have worked out in the last analysis, or at least a later analysis. But the larger point here is that an appeal to subjective or objective idealism fails to account for the critical structure of *praxis*. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty says that the "rapport" or "identity" of subjectivity and objectivity are "the central thesis of Marxism" [HT 246/136-7]

Let us attend to some important metaphors at work in the text. Rubashov, in this *limpid* moment of reflection, is described as "a man who has *lost his shadow*, free of all impediments" [HT 95-6 /12] All is *clear* in retrospect: the actions, and perhaps the revolution itself, were untimely. But Merleau-Ponty poignantly asks, "What sense there is in *reflecting* on history when one no longer has any historical shadow…? [HT 96 / 12, my emphasis] Apparently, without our shadows, we are off to Neverland, that immature idealism where Lost Boys live without any stories—including the stories we call history. Of course, Merleau-Ponty alludes

to J. M. Barrie's 1904 work, *Peter Pan*, where Peter loses his shadow resulting in all sorts of misadventure. So long as Peter has lost his shadow, his life has little meaning. Likewise, without our historical shadows, Merleau-Ponty implies that the reflection, or critical structure, of our historicity is lacking. We shall further discuss the significance of this metaphor below.

Koestler's overdetermined situation misrepresents a Marxian "living logic of history" [HT 99 /15 my translation]. Instead, Merleau-Ponty claims that, "by the sheer fact of its duration, history sketches the outline for the transformation of its own structures" [HT 107-8 my translation]. This is why "Marxism is not the negation of subjectivity and human activity…; it is rather a theory of concrete subjectivity and of concrete human activity…" [HT 107/ 22, my translation]. There are an infinite number of meanings implied in any metaphor.[27] The shadow indicates our concrete existence in diverse ways through its metaphoricity. As Merleau-Ponty surely alluded to in the passage above, the idealist Peter Pan has lost his shadow, and so he encounters a crisis because history is meaningless. Our shadow indicates our concrete temporality. It provides a presentation one can see. It can connote following someone—as if we became his or her shadow. The shadow is laden with value: one can have a "shadowy past." Or one can be "a shadow of his or her former self." One can lurk in shadows—or fear what lurks there. And it is interesting to ask whether the Party casts a shadow; and, if so, what it portends…. At any rate, such possibilities are the ineluctable shadowy *sens* of our concretion.

III

"The curse of politics," Merleau-Ponty states, "really lies in that it must translate from the order of values to the order of facts." [HT 64/xxxv] It is a curse because there is no effective solution available to create or to evaluate the translation—just as automated translators must fail in their task. Every translation suffers from the implicit deception that one is saying the same thing as when one is saying what is said otherwise.[28] Thus, with the metaphor of translation here in this passage, Merleau-Ponty calls to our attention to a vexing problem in relating the order of values to the order of facts. *Praxis* cannot be understood to be exactly the same and purely otherwise at once when understood in these two orders, whether we seek some convergence through translation or transmogrification.

However, quite the opposite of driving a wedge between fact and value, Merleau-Ponty's point here is that their opposition is only revealed as abstraction. That is, there is an opposition of bad ideologies at play: the ideology of scientism which pretends to exist in a pure world of objective facts and the ideology of subjective value are attitudes or perspectives one adopts for various purposes at various times. One might say that each sees the other as its shadow, if shadows were irrelevant to one another.

According to Merleau-Ponty, our existential historico-political situation is contingent and precarious. We must choose our actions and live within the world where we choose. As we make choices, we have no access to some absolute perspective from the end of history that could provide certain and complete objective understanding of our actions. Nor do we share with others recourse to any such indisputable standard of the truth or meaning of our actions. Our engagement within the world ensures only that there is no evaluative standpoint where all is "said and done," while we are still saying and doing. As Merleau-Ponty wrote in the Preface to his 1948 work, *Sense and Non-Sense*, each act is "like a step in the fog. No one can say, if it will lead anywhere."[29] Nonetheless, we remain interested in historical significance and our political actions are historically informed. We understand our actions better when we frame them historically.[30] When we admix this penchant for constructing a historical horizon for our actions with the aforementioned precarious contingency, the result mandates that we share our intramundane world by virtue of our *divergent* recourse to history. Thus, the search for historical meaning or significance at once bespeaks anguish and uncertainty that are the conditions of the possibility of that meaning. We do not merely *know* history, we *live* it. Living through history precludes the possibility of its absolute knowledge. We create history and suffer it. We must anguish over our actions and acknowledge our uncertainty regarding their meaning(s).[31] This "fog" is our existential situation, the thickness of being—a thick fog which no light of reason can penetrate completely.

Yet the ideology that has sprung from modern science, *scientism*, seeks to illuminate all lived space with the light of reason. Merleau-Ponty's essay, *Eye and Mind*, contrasts the spatiality presented in art with the spatiality assumed by scientism.[32] Scientism manifests the ideology that completes the Cartesian dream such that science can master and possess nature. In effect, scientism wishes to foist Cartesian space onto nature, displacing lived space. This ideology is an idealism that threatens us. It was in this spirit that Merleau-Ponty begins the essay: "Science manipulates things and renounces living in them"[33] [OE 9]. Scientism offers a view from nowhere, perhaps another Neverland. It presents art as providing subjective distorted images of its objective truth of the real world. Merleau-Ponty thinks that art can teach us more about lived space than science can, and that scientism neglects that. Most important to our purposes are the metaphors Merleau-Ponty employs to alert us to this crisis.

Here I must restrict the analysis to merely situating the germane metaphors a gloss of this beautiful text. In the third section of *Eye and Mind*, Merleau-Ponty provides a thoroughgoing analysis of Cartesian space and mockingly associates it with metaphors of unrealizable pure objective visual clarity. Merleau-Ponty begins this critique of Cartesian space—the space of the ideology of modern science—by offering a sarcastic lament

that we cannot achieve the idealized spatiality of scientism. He pretends to be an advocate of the ideology of scientism. We act as if we should "exorcize the specters" that haunt the unequivocal meaning of the objective world [OE 36 / 164]. This would read history as "a text totally free of the promiscuity of the seer and the seen," [OE 40 / 171], a "space without hiding places" [OE 47 / 173], where "nothing is left of the oneiric world of analogy" [OE 41 / 171] and there would obtain instead an "absolute positivity of being" [OE 47 / 173]. Merleau-Ponty is writing dialectically here (as he is wont to do throughout his career). Note the Latin root of "specter," *spectrum*: the specters are uncertainties and ambiguities that are essential to visibility, not an impediment to perception. Merleau-Ponty argued in his *Phenomenology of Perception* that the body is not in the way of our understanding of the world, but our only means to it. Likewise, here he wants to show that lived contingent space is not an impediment to some pure objective understanding of the world, it is our only way of understanding the world. Objectivity is not merely an unrealized ideal, it is the wrong ideal.

Merleau-Ponty instead advocates that rather than cede the meaning of history (or indeed of being) to "operational thought" [OE 57 / 177], we must grant that "light must have its imaginary" [OE 59 / 178]. Throughout the essay, Merleau-Ponty suggests that art, better than science, affords attention to our lived space. And this occurs due to an aesthetic critical structure central to the event of any phenomenon's appearance.

Merleau-Ponty writes that, "…there are, in the flesh of contingency, a structure of the event and a virtue proper to the scenario, which do not prevent the plurality of interpretations but even are the deep reason for this plurality. They make the event into a durable theme of historical life and have a right to philosophical status." [OE 61-2, my translation]

But the central problem seems unresolved, so long as we remain in an epistemological mindset. For how can one assess the value of *praxis* without discerning right from wrong, thus preventing this plurality of interpretations? Why should one find solace in a structure of the event that mired us in this seemingly impossible existential ambiguity? But the allure of preventing the plurality of interpretations is a symptom of the idealism and ideology of scientism. It obtains when it guides us to trust science to provide the truth of the real world—to reveal in clarity one truth and one causal link. "But this disappointment issues from that spurious fantasy which claims for itself a positivity capable of making up for its own emptiness" [OE 92/190]. Where, even though modern science was founded on Cartesian doubt, the ideology of scientism holds its truths as *beyond the shadow of a doubt*. It reduces us to live in a world without shadows.

Art, on the other hand, respects the uncertainty and contingency of the world as we live in it. That is not to say that art has no ideals; it is merely to say that the ideality of art reveals the world as differentiation. Another way of saying this is that the ideology of art is to abstain from asserting the hegemony of its own ideology—unlike scientism.[34] I do not mean to ascribe one single ideology to the varieties of works of art except the lack of the claim to determine authoritatively truth and reality in the manner of scientism. As I have argued elsewhere, science is equipped with all the creative power of art. Science is merely the art that denies its own artistry.[35] Merleau-Ponty writes at the end of *Eye and Mind*, "For if we cannot establish a hierarchy of civilizations or speak of progress—neither in painting nor in anything else that matters—it is not because some fate holds us back: it is, rather, because the very first painting in some sense went to the farthest reach of the future. If no painting comes to be *the* painting, if no work is ever absolutely completed and done with, each creation changes, alters, enlightens, deepens, confirms, exalts, re-creates, or creates in advance all the others" [*OE* 92-3/190, translation corrected]. And please note that, as he often did, here Merleau-Ponty uses the aesthetic alongside cultural and political references.

The revolutionary nature of an act cannot be determined in advance by the hubris of romantic subjectivity or the hubris of objective science. It must be established as revolutionary through *praxis*, just as an artist cannot *know* his or her work in advance of creating it. The creative *praxes* of the political revolutionary and the revolutionary artist are recognized *ex post facto*; yet each involves the creation of its own new aesthetic wherein the value of that *praxis* is to be understood spontaneously and all at once, albeit not in any ultimate sense.

We can see this possibility best when we see its ontological and aesthetic dimensions, rather than the epistemological dimension, of *praxis*. It is not a matter of *knowing* the value of change in some future anterior sense of knowing-what-it-will-have-come-to-mean; it is a feature of our anticipatory and latent rapport within being. There exists, for the political revolutionary or for the revolutionary artist, a *precession* of being upon vision. It is a matter of *voyance* rather than clairvoyance.

Mauro Carbone centers his discussion of this "mutation within the relations of man and Being" on the provocative term precession.[36] [Carbone 58] Precession is a technical term appropriated from astronomy. It is a metaphor that connotes a shift in orientation, since its technical sense is a shift in an axis of rotation with respect to another. For example, one can see a spinning body moving around slowly and steadily in circles as it spins. In astronomy, one speaks of the precession of planets, for example, as their axes of rotation shift. The precession of the earth is a cycle that takes about 26,000 years to complete. It is also used in conjunction with the retrograde motion of planets from the perspective of the earth in the sense of an aberration in the orbit. Precession is a term used exactly *once* in the work Merleau-Ponty published in his lifetime, but which appears several more times in his working notes in very provocative ways, as Carbone illustrates with meticulous archival research. It is important to understand this account of the precession of vision in the context

of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. We recall only a few related passages here. In *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty advocates that "we renounce all forms of causal thought;"[37] and later states that "the 'I think' can be as if hallucinated by its objects.[38] *Phenomenology of Perception* includes the famous analysis of falling sleep, where my body prepares itself to sleep through its comportment.[39] *Cézanne's Doubt* includes a description of how Cézanne's work was called for by his life.[40] There is the analysis of the film of Matisse's hand hovering over the canvas as if finding there what he is to express in *Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence*.[41] In this passage, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that Matisse does not hold in his head an idea which is represented on paper; rather he "finds" the idea there continuously as he draws. *The Visible and the Invisible* provides the Proustian example of the violinist: "We do not possess the musical or sensible ideas, precisely because they are negativity or absence circumscribed; they possess us . . ."[42] And so on and so on…. Merleau-Ponty's work abounds with examples of this relation such that subjectivity and objectivity are intertwined, which is the reversible relation wherein phenomena appear in such a way that celebrates the critical structure of the event and the virtue proper to the scenario.[43] This propriety has everything to do with the aberration of orientations relative to one another, the precession of the visible.

There exists a reciprocity and a latency in the appearance of phenomena linked to relative aberration, dissonance, and divergence. Contrary to the idealism of scientism, these are not pesky problems we should seek to eliminate in the name of some clear vision of reality; they are essential shadows. The precession of the visible involves the shadows essential for *sens* in our rapport with being—what Merleau-Ponty sometimes called the halos of signification or halos of being. And that divergence built right into the possibility of meaning is the critical structure of aesthetic creativity that provides to the "right to rectification" of revolutionary *praxis*. An action is revolutionary because its revolution is precessional. It is revolutionary as it describes and defines a new direction of orientation. Merleau-Ponty also anticipated this in *Phenomenology of Perception* when he spoke of a freedom that lies in "the power of equivocation." "It consists in taking up a factual situation by giving it a figurative sense" [PhP 201/177]. It comes from an aesthetic rather than a scientific approach to politics. And I think it indicates new hope for revolutionary *praxis*.

IV

Surprisingly few authors have called attention to Merleau-Ponty's political work, given how much he wrote on politics throughout his career. Albert Rabil, Sonia Kruks, Kerry Whiteside, Bryan Smyth, Diana Coole, and Claude Lefort have done much to show the essential relation between Merleau-Ponty's political thought and his life-long project of a phenomenology of perception. But they have seen little value in Merleau-Ponty's later work and its political implications.[44] What I am offering here is somewhat new in this regard. Yet one might object that Merleau-Ponty's 1955 work, *Adventures of the Dialectic* is nearly contemporaneous with his later work situating ontology through aesthetics. There, Merleau-Ponty renounces his endorsement of Marxism and critiques his earlier political work, describing himself as an "a-Marxist" and calling for a "new liberalism." Certainly his positions on the Korean War and his break with Sartre—each of which have been accounted for in each of the aforementioned works—are related to his explicit denunciation of revolutionary *praxis*. Len Lawlor even says that the later works are so interconnected that the title of *The Visible and the Invisible*, the work Merleau-Ponty was writing when he died, could have just as well been *New Adventures in the Dialectic*. I would not disagree with any of these accounts except to say that one must focus also on the Preface to *Signs*, published the year before Merleau-Ponty died. There he once again acknowledges a latent *sens* to history: "History never confesses."[45] And there he refers to Marxism as a "secondary truth." This is not to say that there is no truth, but that there must be more work done in that direction to actualize its truth. Claude Lefort says roughly the same thing in his 1962 essay, *Politics and Political Thought*. "There is a truth of the Marxist critique of science and a truth of ideology that philosophy must appropriate." This would require "a new idea of dialectic and a new ontology."[46] But one might also say that every tradition Merleau-Ponty appropriated into his thought was reworked to reveal a "secondary truth"—including personalism, Gestalt psychology, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, structuralism, as well as Marxism. I would not minimize the change in his political position in *Adventures of the Dialectic* or other political pieces from that period; but Merleau-Ponty was never an orthodox Marxist even as he sought after a revolutionary *praxis*. And he never abandoned his critique of liberalism even as he seemed to endorse appropriating it.[47] So, acknowledging that Merleau-Ponty did not use his aesthetically situated ontology with its critical structure to explore the "secondary truth" of Marxism, we have seen that the promise of revolutionary *praxis* can avoid the ideology Merleau-Ponty and others came to reject.[48]

When asked, Peter Pan answered that to get to Neverland, we should go "second [star] to the right, straight on to morning."[49] The ordinal (second) and indexicals (right, straight) presuppose dimensionality that is something we *live* prior to something we *know*. Indeed, it is because we cannot *know* the future that we must *make* it. The question of propriety in *praxis* is not how to discern what act is revolutionary but to define it as such—creating a new aesthetic by which it comes to be seen as valuable in the way a work of art comes to be seen to be revolutionary. Only by doing so can we avail ourselves of the critical structure of *praxis* such that it has *sens* with its latency, pregnant with a plurality of interpretations. The effort to seek clarity and illuminate

everything through science, be it natural science or political science, ignores the promise of aesthetic creativity at the heart of revolutionary *praxis*.

We must not idealize a light of reason that illuminates all, that makes sense of everything, lest we be condemned to live in a world without shadows. That is a problem for any authentic act whatsoever since, whether from Barrie's or Jung's perspectives, we cannot be who we are without our shadows. And these, our own shadows, are of the same shadows in history that complement its clarity and limn its depths. Maybe it is time to reject the idealisms that seek complete clarity and certainty. After all, it is the darkness that beckons us to wonder. Maybe it is time that we grew up and were not so afraid of the dark.

V

To conclude, I offer a coda—variations on the central themes of this essay regarding the aesthetic-ontological structure of revolutionary *praxis*. First, please accept a few words regarding the rather obscure subtitle of the essay, "Ghosting a World without Shadows." *Ghosting* is a term that elicits a smile from my students, as one smiles at an old man haplessly and hopelessly attempting to appear trendy.[50] From what I gather, the verb *to ghost* means, in contemporary parlance, to shun someone suddenly—to cut off all contact without warning. Here I am using the term *ghosting* as a stronger synonym of *eschewing*. I suggest that we abandon, avoid, and reject at once the false ideal of a history without shadows: we should *ghost* it.

The term ghosting seems particularly alluring to me since the Marxian account of history is haunted by the Hegelian *Geist* [Spirit, Ghost]—be it Holy or unholy. History, in Hegel's phenomenology, is the history of conceptual conflict, between Spirit [*Geist*] and Nature. Marx sublates and applies this schema in the famous formula from the first pages *The Communist Manifesto*, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."[51] For Marx, of course, it is the conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In the short-run term of capitalist alienation, the bourgeoisie enjoy the privileges of *Geist's* dominion over nature, mastering and possessing the natural proletariat. But this is only true at that moment of dialectical development, despite the penchant of capitalists to think almost exclusively in terms of the short-run rather than the long run. The immediate future is destined for mediation. In the long run, Marx tells us, the expropriators are to be expropriated. The bourgeoisie cannot hold sway in their current dominion over the proletariat, once the revolutionary *praxis* of the working class fulfils its destiny. Thus, the Hegelian dialectic is turned on its head: the Marxian sublation is no mere substitution of terms—bourgeoisie / proletariat for Geist / nature. It yields an inversion of the dialectical mastery with the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

This inverted Marxian phenomenology brings the Hegelian dialectic down to earth, but that may mean that new specters haunt the natural world (although in the nineteenth century, Marx and Engels spoke of it haunting Europe). Another way of saying this is that *Geist* is brought down to earth; Spirit is naturalized as it becomes manifest in in the class-consciousness and revolutionary *praxis* of the proletariat [HT 219-221]. In this way, revolutionary *praxis* is a perfectly natural phenomenon in the sense that nature escapes the hegemony of Spirit in the old hierarchy. Nature is transformed through the inspiration of revolutionary *praxis*. Nature is spirited, or inspired—"ghosted" in a more traditional sense.

Again, this is not a simple static inversion of the same hierarchical relation, but a dialectical sublation of that dialectical moment. If there is nothing more unnatural than a phenomenology of Spirit, there is nothing more dispiriting than a phenomenology of Nature. Neither idealism nor positivism hold much hope of accounting for *revolutionary* praxis.[52] Revolutionary *praxis* is the product neither of romantic genius nor of mechanistic programming. Instead, revolutionary *praxis* is at once spontaneous and intelligible. Lest one dismiss this as an impossibility, I submit that when we use metaphor or play music, there is just a glimmer of the spark of inspired nature.

So, a central insight of *Humanism and Terror* could be stated thusly: if we remember that praxis is neither subjective nor objective, we can see how revolutionary *praxis* is revealed in the *praxis* of the proletariat in such a way that it escapes idealistic or mechanistic teleologies. In this way, the proletariat can create and become aware of if its own revolutionary inspiration.

Revolutionary *praxis*, as stated above, is recognized *ex post facto*; yet it involves the creation of its own new aesthetic wherein the value of that *praxis* is to be understood spontaneously and all at once. This will require us to consider, in the final measured moments of this coda, some practical consequences of the future-anterior temporality of revolutionary *praxis* best seen in its aesthetic frame—where aesthetics and politics properly converge.

Perhaps contemporary English speakers find it difficult to think of virtue as excellence, in the sense of the ancient Greek word *ἀρετή*. Virtue is often taken to have some axiological sense, while excellence simply connotes a degree of proficiency or achievement in general, in a value neutral sense. Of course, Plato and Aristotle had much to say about this. Without treating ourselves to engage in a detailed study of their discussions of the relations of *ἀρετή* and *τέχνη*, for example, we can still hear an echo of the philological relation of virtue and excellence in our contemporary term *virtuosity*. Virtue haunts virtuosity. A virtuoso is one who is both talented and accomplished—far from the romantic ideal of the genius artist. But we must recognize the aesthetic context that allows us to attend to the virtue of the virtuoso. The virtuoso does not reproduce music

in an excellent manner. Virtuosity lies in producing the music in a new way. Nor does the virtuoso make the music his or her own. The virtuoso creates the aesthetic whereby the music can have been beautiful this way for the first time.

Plato's and Aristotle's accounts of virtue reflect even more ancient Pythagorean ideals that allow us to see that virtue and propriety are aesthetic when they bespeak an attunement to the music of the spheres.

Still, one might object that there are untenable consequences to my thesis that the aesthetic context of Merleau-Ponty's ontology allows us to understand better the promise of revolutionary *praxis* in his early political work. Simply put, one might be concerned that my position condemns political *praxis* to an "aestheticism."[53] One can see this in the commonplace implicit appeal to some virtue "higher" than a "merely" aesthetic value—to condemn genocide, for example, which is wrong not simply because it is a matter of bad taste. One must allow the possibility that matters of taste will vary and that some unspeakable evil could be seen to be good by some or change in value over time. In general, one might worry that this appeal to the aesthetic aspect of *praxis* ushers in in a capricious relativism.[54]

However, the aesthetic context must not be consigned to the sphere of art in the superficial modern sense of what that term has come to mean. Art that has been relegated to the ghettos of the museum and the theater, to name only two examples, has been sterilized, denatured, restricted to a reduced *ethos* wherein we happily tolerate a naïve relativism. But there is a fuller, richer, and more important sense of the aesthetic that discloses *virtù*. This sense of the aesthetic is more promising and more threatening than works of art today are taken to be.

Virtue is understood in the aesthetic attitude. Far from "turning off" the world to allow ourselves to appreciate art, art "turns on" the world that matters to us. And this appeal to a richer sense of aesthetics where virtue appears need not invoke a dogmatic or monolithic appeal to a foundation. To attend to the music of the spheres is not to listen to only one song. Likewise, just as this rich sense of aesthetics does not necessarily invoke a dogmatic absolutism, it need not usher in a subjective relativism.

Art is disciplined creativity; and the discipline entails that not all art is good. One must consider how these "higher" values came to be recognized as such and sedimented as such. In fact, the danger of appealing to virtues excluded from an aesthetic attitude is to deny their value, for in my view virtues do not merely *represent* value, they are the *creation* of value.

Revolutionary *praxis* creates a new aesthetic that allows for the articulation of its future anterior appearance as virtuous. Revolutionaries are virtuosos. The virtue of revolutionary *praxis*, the *virtù* it establishes, requires its own aesthetic whereby it can come to have been virtuous—to see what will have been called-for. We must amend Marx' eleventh thesis with which we began this essay; revolutionary *praxis* is not a matter of deciding between action and interpretation. The hermeneutic structure intrinsic to revolutionary *praxis* reveals the promise of all *praxis* precisely in its aesthetic appearance.

References

(Abbreviations for works by Merleau-Ponty cited in brackets)

HT *Humanisme et terreur/ Humanism and Terror*

OE *l'Oeil et esprit / Eye and Mind*

PhP *Phénomènologie de la perception / Phenomenology of Perception*

S *Signes / Signs*

SC *La structure du comportement / The Structure of Behavior*

SNS *Sens et non-sens / Sense and Non-Sense*

VI *Le Visible et l'invisible / The Visible and the Invisible*

Submitted Jan 12, 2021 – Accepted Feb 25, 2021

'Notas de fim'

[1] In this essay, we will confine our discussion of the purges and show trials in Stalin's Soviet Union in the late 1930's, especially Merleau-Ponty's detailed and prescient analysis of these events. The problem is not limited to this specific historical example, nor are the conclusions I draw; though any discussion of another historical example would necessarily involve a careful analysis specific to their eventualities.

[2] I plan to offer such an account in my *Merleau-Ponty's Transcendental Dialectic*, in which I can give Sartre's account full justice, where it will be "a pure and not an ancillary reflection."…

[3] Cf. my "The Political Horizon of Merleau-Ponty's Ontology," in Francis Halsall, Julia Jansen, & Sinead O'Connor, eds., *Critical Communities And Aesthetic Practices*, (Dordrecht: Springer Press, 2012), pp.111-126, where I discuss what Sartre rather strangely called in his *Merleau-Ponty Vivant*, "the quarrel we never had." One cannot read their very direct correspondence in 1953 and take Sartre's claim in 1961 literally. The first English translations of the letters in question are included in my Merleau-Ponty's Later Thought and its Practical Implications: The Dehiscence of Responsibility, (Albany: Humanity Books, Prometheus Press, 2001), pp.27-59.

[4] Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?* [tr. B. Frechtman], (New York: Routledge, 1993); and Simone de Beauvoir, "What can Literature do?" [tr. L. Hengehold] in M. Simmons & M. Timmerman, eds., *"The Useless Mouths" and Other Literary Writings,* (Urbana: U. of Illinois Press, 2011), pp.189-209.

[5] Thomas R. Flynn. *Sartre: A Philosophical Biography*, (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 2014).

[6] Cf, Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics* [tr. D. Pellauer], (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1992), where Sartre repeatedly calls for a "de-totalized totality."

[7] Or, as Marx once called it, the end of pre-history and the beginning of history.

[8] I am indebted for the direction of thought in this paragraph to my mentor and friend, William Leon McBride, who has argued on behalf of the practical philosophy in Sartre's later works, and who continues to inspire my interest in French political thought.

[9] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* [tr. H. Barnes], (New York: Pocket Books, 1956), p.798.

[10] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method* [tr. H. Barnes], (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p.85.

[11] *Ibid*., p.87.

[12] *Ibid*., p.91.

[13] *Ibid*., p.90.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] The direction of his courses is more carefully presented in my "The Political Horizon of Merleau-Ponty's Ontology" (*op. cit*.).

[16] The root for the rejection of this forced choice is ontological. This is consistent throughout his work, though perhaps it is most explicit in *Le Visible et l'invisible*. .

[17] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénomènologie de la perception*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1945); *Phenomenology of Perception* [tr. D. Landes], (London: Routledge, 2012) [xiv/xxxiii].

[18] This intersubjective intertwining is one of the hallmarks of Merleau-Ponty's thought, and not restricted to his political thought. However, the claim I am making here, while grounded in Merleau-Ponty's position, is my own original analysis. As I state below, I am uncertain and unconcerned whether he would have endorsed the position I articulate based upon the reverse chronological readings of the two works in question, which results in understanding revolutionary *praxis* in terms of the actions of artists.

[19] It is interesting to see another dimension of the aesthetic nature of Merleau-Ponty's thought here by noting the influence of poet Charles Baudelaire on his thought, which is visible here in these metaphors. Cf. my "The Philosopher of Modern Life" in: Duane H. Davis and William S. Hamrick eds., Merleau-Ponty and the Art of Perception, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016).

[20] Perhaps Rubashov is mostly an amalgam of Bukharin, Kamenev, Trotsky, and Zinoniev. Cf. http://art-bin.com/art/omosc20m.html#3 for transcripts of some of the trials Koestler and Merleau-Ponty discuss.

[21] Cf. the brilliant American folk singer, John Gorka: "I like the night / So dark you see."

[22] It is interesting that this anticipates the way he describes Sartre's rash behavior as a "current events writer" upon their split in 1953. Cf. the correspondence translated at the beginning of my Merleau-Ponty's Later Thought and its Practical Implications: The Dehiscence of Responsibility, (op. cit.).

[23] Duane H. Davis (ed.), *Merleau-Ponty's Later Works and Their Practical Implications*, Humanity Books, Prometheus Press, Amherst, NY, 2001, p.42 (B. Belay, trans.).

[24] This rejection of reductions of all value in lived experience being reduced to economic value, or that Marxism held that reductive view, is reinforced in the extended note on historical materialism at the end to the chapter on sexuality in his *Phenomenology of Perception* [PhP 210-212/174-178]. It is important to note there that the *aesthetic* creativity of Marx and of Valéry is what eludes the reductivism.

[25] It is a complicated matter to consider the various internal and external forces Lenin was contending with as this bears upon decisions he made regarding the role of the avant-garde.

[26] Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanisme et terreur*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1947) pp.134-165 on the ambiguity of history.

[27] Cf. Carl R. Hausman, *Metaphor and Art*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[28] I want to thank Cheryl Emerson for calling my attention to this point about translation from one language to another, which was originally made by Canadian poet Erin Mouré.

[29] Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, Sens et non-sens*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p.8. This is my translation. The English translation of this Preface fails to covey the connection between the precarity of theoretical or artistic expression.

[30] An anonymous reader of this essay, whose careful attention I greatly appreciate, asks, "Is it possible to not frame our actions historically? Isn't a historical framing inevitable?" I share what I take to be the reader's conviction that all actions are historically framed. Unfortunately, this philosophical tenet is not respected by some folks who blithely disregard historicity. I write this sentence with clenched teeth at a time when Donald Trump is the President of the United States.

[31] Cf. Duane H. Davis, "'*Les Fondateurs*' and '*La Découverte de l'Histoire*': Two Short Pieces Excluded from 'Everywhere and Nowhere'" [a translation of the two pieces by Maurice Merleau-Ponty], *Man and World*, 25, No.2 (April 1992): pp.203-209, where Merleau-Ponty describes the discovery of history as *anguish*.

[32] I want to thank Tony O'Connor and William Hamrick for each helping me appreciate the importance of the difference between scientism and science. Cf. Hamrick's instructive response to me in his essay, "Concluding Scientific Postscript," in our *Merleau-Ponty and the Art of Perception* (op. cit.).

[33] Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, l'Oeil et l'esprit*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1964). Tony O'Connor once pronounced this sentence to be such a gross over-statement that it was the worst thing Merleau-Ponty ever wrote. With all due respect, I think his pronouncement was itself a bit of a gross overstatement. At any rate, one can interpret Merleau-Ponty's real target as the ideology of modern science rather than science itself, as I do here. O'Connor, like Hamrick, was correct in demanding that I distinguish between science and its ideology.

[34] Perhaps Merleau-Ponty is not as clear as one would wish about this in passages in *l'Oeil et esprit*. Cf. *OE* 13, 161 "…art and only art does so in full innocence." Here Merleau-Ponty is often misread, I think, as asserting the complete innocence of art—as if artists enjoyed a privileged vista upon the world unencumbered by biases and predispositions. The locution "in full innocence" is unfortunate. In my reading, the only innocence of artists lies in their unwillingness to proclaim the truth of the real world. One must remember that this is the same man who authored the anthemic slogan of existential phenomenology: "the most important lesson of the reduction is the impossibility of a complete reduction" [PhP viii / lxxvii]. Artists succeed through their entanglements within the world, not in spite of them.

[35] Cf. my "The Art of Perception," in Duane H. Davis & William S. Hamrick, *Merleau-Ponty and the Art of Perception*, SUNY Press, Albany, 2016, pp. 3-52.

[36] Mauro Carbone, *The Flesh of Images: Merleau-Ponty between Painting and Cinema* [tr. M. Nijhuis], (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015). Carbone attributes this phrase to Casetti.

[37] "'Preferred' behavior defines the organism just as objectively as chronaxic analysis can define it if, as is necessary, we renounce mechanistic realism along with finalistic realism, that is, if we renounce all forms of causal thought." [SC 54 / SB 51].

[38] "As we have seen, the behavior of another expresses a certain manner of existing before signifying a certain manner of thinking. And when this behavior is addressed to me, as may happen in dialogue, and seizes upon my thoughts in order to respond to them—or more simply, when the 'cultural objects' which fall under my regard suddenly adapt themselves to my powers, awaken my intentions and make themselves 'understood' by me—I am then drawn into a *coexistence* of which I am not the unique constituent and which founds the phenomenon of social nature as perceptual experience founds that of physical nature…. Thus, the 'I think' can be as if hallucinated by its objects." [SC 239 / SB 222]

[39] "I lie down in my bed, on my left side, with my knees drawn up; I close my eyes, breathe slowly, and distance myself from my projects . . . Sleep "arrives" at a particular moment, it settles upon this imitation of itself that I offered it, and I succeed in becoming what I pretended to be . . .." [PhP 190 / 166]

[40] "Cézanne's Doubt," in *SNS*, p.20.

[41] *Signs*, p.46.

[42] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, (C. Lefort, ed.), *Le visible et l'invisible*, Gallimard, 1964, Paris. VI 198-99 / *The Visible and the Invisible* (tr. A. Lingis), Northwestern University Press, Evanston, p. 151.

[43] One might rightly ask whether Carbone overemphasizes temporality in his analysis of precession. The focus seems to be almost entirely upon the temporality of precession in order to adumbrate its ontological implications.
Merleau-Ponty seems to be interested in the word *precession* because it describes a *temporal* relation between the connected terms, rather than the *spatial* one suggested by the words *enjambement* and *empiétement*. [Carbone, 58]
Carbone states that what is at stake here is not just "Merleau-Ponty's preference for a temporal rather than a spatial relation." [58] But the temporal emphasis seems clear in Carbone's explanation. "Indeed, the word *precession* describes a most peculiar temporality, which is characterized by a *movement of antecedence* of the connected terms." [58] Carbone notes the astronomical provenance of the term precession. He gives two examples drawing from Merleau-Ponty's unpublished notes: the precession of equinoxes by twenty minutes each year; and the mutual gravitational pull of two bodies orbiting one another, i.e. a double star. Carbone almost reluctantly admits that these are spatial relations: he states that this suggest a "mutual—*even if spatial*—relation." [59, my emphasis]
Instead, Carbone emphasized the retrograde temporality and mythical time of mutual precession. He emphasizes the reciprocity and latency of the relation by describing it is a "mutual anticipation," and I think this is brilliant. But the precession, or the reversibility of the flesh, cannot be reduced to a spatial relation, a temporal relation, or a logical relation. To emphasize one of these over the others would be to engage in the sorts of "positivism" Merleau-Ponty clearly warns us about in *The Visible and the Invisible*. To be fair, though it is consigned to a footnote, earlier in the same chapter Carbone cites Malraux to show an important spatial aspect of this relation as cinema emerges as an art. "Within a defined space, generally a real or imagined theatre stage, actors performed a real or a comic scene, which the camera merely

recorded. The birth of cinema as a means of expression (not of reproduction) dates from the abolition of that defined space" [105]. This passage from Malraux, which Carbone links to Merleau-Ponty's position shows how exceeding representation in the manner of precession involves a new sort of *spatiality* in the relation of the image and the real. Yet, Carbone's account of precession focuses almost entirely upon temporality. And for our purposes here, we must see this unique usage of "positivisms" to indict positivistic science as an idealism.

[44] Jacques Taminiaux once told me in conversation that there was at best only a meta-ethics in Merleau-Ponty's later thought, and very little practical value.

[45] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1960). In an unpublished working note to this preface, Merleau-Ponty wrote, "History is the house of being." This certainly endorses the link he is exploring in that work between his ontological and political interests, even though he did not have the opportunity to work them out.

[46] Claude Lefort, *Sur une colonne absente*, (Paris: Gallimard), 1978, p.73.

[47] Sonia Kruks has an interesting critical discussion of Merleau-Ponty's (mis)appropriation of liberalism in Sonia Kruks, *The Political Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty*, (New Jersey: Manchester Press, 1981), pp.72-75.

[48] Though Derrida was critical of Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl, perhaps he also saw some promise in a similar direction. Cf. Derrida's reference to a "faithful shadow" in the "night" of history in his long introduction to his translation of Husserl's little essay, The origin of Geometry: E. Husserl*, L'Origine de la géométrie* [tr. J. Derrida], (Paris: PUF, 1962), p.108. I would like to thank Cheryl Emerson for calling my attention to this passage.

[49] The word star is actually not present in the original text. It has become the truth of the text because of the Disney film popularization.

[50] If in no other way, I can claim to inspire my students by inspiring their pity.

[51] https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf

[52] This is why Merleau-Ponty wrote in the aforementioned passage from his *Phenomenology of Perception* that, "It is true, as Marx said, that history does not march on its head, but neither does it think with its feet." Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénomènologie de la perception*, (op. cit.), p.19 / lxxxiii (translation altered).

[53] Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre's essay, "Existentialism is a Humanism," in Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, (New York: Penguin, 1975), pp.345-368. Sartre points out that some critics will dismiss existentialism as a mere "aestheticism," along the same lines as I have indicated here. Sartre's delicious irony is at work when he insists that nothing could be further from the truth, while later providing the analogy that an authentic individual is like an artist at work, echoing Nietzsche's dictum that we should live our life like a work of art.

[54] I am indebted to Dries Deweer (Tilburg University) for this formulation of the objection to my position, which he raised at the 2018 meeting of the *UK Sartre Society* at Oxford University.