Expressing Corporeal Silence: Phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty, and Posthumanism[1]

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Abstract

The question for this article is not whether phenomenology is posthumanist in the sense that it is attendant to the bifurcations and exclusions inherent within humanism. Neither is it to trace this within posthumanism, broadly, as a form of criticism and analysis. Rather, the point is to demonstrate how phenomenology, particularly Merleau-Ponty's work, can contribute to addressing questions concerning subjectivity and corporeality in contemporary posthumanist discourse. More radically, it seeks to disclose how phenomenology, particularly existential phenomenology in its Merleau-Pontyan mode, signals a beginning of posthumanist philosophy, or, rather, of posthumanist forms of philosophizing.

Keywords: posthumanism, phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty, wonder, expression, interrogation, corporeality

> Precisely what has to be done is to show that philosophy can
> no longer think according to this cleavage: God, man, creatures.
> Merleau-Ponty, Working note dated Mar 1961[2]

Posthumanism, practiced as a form of criticism and analysis, has made its name by attending to the exclusions, bifurcations, and dualisms present within humanist discourses and in widely-held notions of the human. This form of posthumanism has also engaged in evaluations of various media and genre forms (particularly science fiction), in a close scrutiny of technology and scientific endeavours, and has helped inaugurate a renewed interest in animal studies. These evaluations have solidified posthumanism as a recognizable form of criticism, on the one hand, and, on the other, as a way to theorize the so-called Anthropocene – a proposed term for our current geological epoch in which human impact on the planet is undeniable. Much of the historical basis and philosophical underpinnings of posthumanism, particularly in its critical posthumanist mode, is found in readings of various philosophers and theorists who arose in the latter half of the twentieth century, specifically those who rose to prominence between the 60s and 80s and who are generally aligned in the Anglophone world with what we helplessly call postmodernism and poststructuralism: Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault, Deleuze, to name a few who are rather ubiquitous. This particular context was inaugurated, on the one hand, by Ihab Hassan's 1977 article 'Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture' in the *Georgia Review*, and, on the other, via the rise of the initially radical and transgressive literature of cyberpunk. These early developments, most notably captured in Haraway's 'A Cyborg Manifesto', set the stage

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[1] The first version of this paper was originally presented at *Approaching Posthumanism and the Posthuman*, University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland June 4-6, 2015.
[2] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 274, emphasis in original.

for the posthumanism that has now come – a posthumanism that celebrates 'impurity', boundary breakdown, hybridity, and cyborgification: in short, a posthumanism that demonstrates that the human is embedded in and with all that it is not. A triumphant intertwining of humanity, animality, and technology that re-orients the human under an ethico-political banner of 'doing justice' to the so-called other based on an ethics of care and shared vulnerability.[3]

This triumphalism, however, has increasingly demonstrated the need, on the one hand, to further clarify, correct, and refine posthumanist positions and methods as they pertain to criticism and analysis, and, on the other hand, to develop explicitly posthumanist ways of philosophizing. One of these refinements has recently been pushed to the top of the posthumanist agenda. Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman*, Stefan Herbrechter's *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis*, and Pramod Nayar's *Posthumanism* have all recently highlighted the need for posthumanism, as a form of criticism and analysis, to critically re-evaluate subjectivity; that is, to disclose, for lack of a better term, a properly posthumanist situating of subjectivity, one that takes into account how the subject is formed by and acts through a network of beings beyond just the human. This call, as I see it, comes as a direct result of posthumanism's tendency to go hunting; to hunt for posthumans, cyborgs, and chimaeras which signal, but do not demonstrate sufficiently, the entanglement and embeddedness of the human in all that it is not. Posthumanism sought out the one-time fantastical and attempted to make it the everyday, but in so doing forgot about lived experience. As new forms of criticism and analysis were required when posthumanism began in earnest, so too are we now seeing the necessity for posthumanist forms of *philosophizing*. David Roden suggests in his recent discussion in *Posthuman Life*[4] that posthumanism in its current mode, in whatever form it takes, generally focuses on criticism and analysis rather than on philosophical creation. This lack of focus on philosophical development in favour of analysis and criticism has, as I see it, made much of posthumanism (broadly) quite redundant, wherein a 'posthumanist' analysis or critique is, to put it mildly, a blunted tool. Philosophical development can sharpen posthumanism once again. I use the term posthumanism broadly here to include any kind of posthumanist analysis or criticism, regardless of the position it takes and the subject of its analysis. Posthumanism, as I view it here, is less a field of study or form of theory but rather a series of concerns, or, to use Merleau-Ponty's language, a landscape. This includes but is not limited to critical posthumanism, technological posthumanism, and transhumanism.

The intentions of this article are two-fold: 1) to put forward the feasibility of utilizing certain aspects of phenomenology to develop an account of subjectivity within posthumanist forms of criticism and analysis and to re-sharpen posthumanism in that particular mode; 2) to demonstrate that phenomenology provides, somewhat ironically given its focus on subjectivity, nascent posthumanist forms of philosophizing as they pertain not only to the potential 're-thinking' of subjectivity, but the overcoming, or working through, of subjectivity in the development of posthumanist philosophy. That is, phenomenology has a dual purpose for posthumanism as it has already put forward an account of subjectivity that posthumnanist criticism and analysis leans towards (even if it is underdeveloped), and, more radically, it points towards the building blocks in the development of posthumanist philosophy as such. My discussion of phenomenology is

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[3] For a critique of this model see Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).
[4] David Roden. *Posthuman Life: Philosophy at the Edge of the Human* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015).

principally restricted to the legacy of Merleau-Ponty's work[5] as it lends itself to the articulation of both of these strands simultaneously, and, in particular, it offers what Merleau-Ponty himself calls a third way, or middle path disclosed through the body, especially in his later elucidation of expression, interrogation, and the depths of silence.[6]

Merleau-Ponty's third way, or middle path, began by being situated between the poles of a subject/object duality[7] of the body. If Nayar and others likes Braidotti and Herbrechter are putting forward a call to rethink subjectivity as a result of posthumanist concerns wherein, as Nayar comments, 'the rejection of binaries is also the rejection of any kind of autonomous subjectivity',[8] then posthumanism would be compelled to seek out, modify, and expand phenomenological models that already exist, specifically Merleau-Pontyan existential phenomenology as it attempts to disclose a rejection of autonomous subjectivity ontologically. Merleau-Ponty tries to describe how this works in the *Phenomenology of Perception* (although he fails to fully do so there). In this text he begins the analyses and descriptions from the point of view of "autonomous subjectivity" to a degree. However, rather than make statements based on an *a priori* assumption, he works through this form of subjectivity in order to reach a certain kind of intertwining with the world and others through the body itself *a fortiori*. Posthumanism as such remains, in my view, distinctly located within the confines of a polarity between subjectivity and objectivity, oscillating between them, and Merleau-Ponty's third way cuts a middle path between them via the body itself.

Given that posthumanism appears to want to extend this rethinking of subjectivity to a re-thinking of the so-called body/mind dualism (part of the broader challenging of dualisms and binaries witnessed over the last 50 years), significant resources are already available within the phenomenological tradition. It appears that in the rush to engage with, develop, and expand upon principally postmodernist and poststructuralist ideas in the advancement of posthumanist theory and criticism, the rejection, or rather critique, of phenomenology by Lyotard, Derrida, and others in the 1960s and 1970s appears to have been taken almost completely uncritically rather than being genuinely explored for the possibilities and alternatives that it presents, particularly in its existential and ontological modes. That is, much of what currently encapsulates posthumanist discourse and the various calls that are put forward under the banner of "rethink x", or to disclose the "intertwining of x and y" (subject-object, body-mind, identity-difference, and so on) has already been presented within a phenomenology that is, in certain ways, retrospectively posthumanist. Posthumanism has generally remained silent on the subject of phenomenology and its legacies.[9] In hindsight, in a sense, existential and

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[5] I will, however, discuss Husserl briefly.

[6] It is important to note that I will not be introducing Merleau-Ponty's concept of flesh in this article. While this concept is significant to understanding his later work (and potentially his entire oeuvre), a discussion of flesh would require a much lengthier appraisal than is within the scope of this article. My intention here is to introduce other concepts from Merleau-Ponty's work which have not yet attracted the kind of interest and exposition that the notion of flesh has.

[7] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald Landes (London and New York: Routledge, 2012). See also Merleau-Ponty's working notes in *The Visible and the Invisible*.

[8] Pramod K. Nayar, *Posthumanism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 126.

[9] The work of David Roden and Margrit Shildrick particularly stands out for explicitly engaging with phenomenology, albeit within quite different contexts and not necessarily adhering to the kind of posthumanism favoured by critical posthumanists: Roden's work in the context of a Speculative Posthumanism and disclosure of what he calls Dark Phenomenology, and Shildrick's work in the context

ontological phenomenology, particularly as they relate to Merleau-Ponty, can be seen as an anticipatory disclosure of many of the themes which concern major thinkers often aligned with "continental" philosophy from the 1960s onwards and which much of contemporary posthumanism draws upon. For example, there seems to be a significant overlap, albeit with subtle variations, in the approach to language put forward in the later works of Merleau-Ponty, leading up to his untimely death in 1961, and the early work of Derrida[10] – a fact which has only relatively recently come to the full attention of Merleau-Ponty scholars, most notably in the work of Jack Reynolds and Leonard Lawlor.[11] Yet, as Tilottama Rajan comments, 'Derrida's generation […] [ignores] the radicality of existential phenomenology'.[12] It is this radicality which has remained underdeveloped in contemporary posthumanism.

As is well known, classical phenomenology was inaugurated by Husserl and later significantly modified and expanded by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty (among others). Husserl's methodological insights begin with a process of bracketing, or, rather, what has become known as the phenomenological reduction or *époché*, its two major modes being the eidetic reduction and the transcendental reduction. In its Husserlian transcendental form the phenomenologist is to bracket off their own concerns and contexts, as well as the objective world, in order to not carry these with them and project them on the thing or the situation that they are describing. This reduction grants the phenomenologist a degree of freedom to accurately provide a description of the thing itself, as it is disclosed in a life-world. Husserl himself was expressly attempting to found anew the grounds of scientific endeavour via the phenomenological method. As he refined his position, he made clear that this bracketing was not simply a casting aside of concerns and contexts, as has been argued, but a bracketing that ultimately folds back in on itself in order to shed light not only on the thing itself, but on the nature of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, particularly as they relate to orientation in time and space. An example of this would be the ability of a subject to relate to another subject through their particular position; that is, through an understanding that my physical *here* and your physical *there* are intersubjective in the sense that not only can I place myself eidetically in your position *there*, but you can do the same to my *here*. Another example could be, for instance, if one is asked to describe their own back. The person in question would likely transcend their frontal view and make an imaginative or reflective leap to an observer who is looking at their back. For Husserl, the subject as consciousness is constitutive; it is a meaning bestowing '"I can" borne by an 'apodictically given "I am" and its abiding identity with itself in the continuous unitary synthesis of original self-experience […] subsumed under the I "can" or "could have" [which] set[s] this or that

subjective process going'.[13] We can see that the experience of a subject, especially experience of itself, is grounded through the range of underlying processes which direct its actions towards something, within a particular sphere of movement, both abstract and concrete. A subject that looks at their own back refers back to themselves: they *can* transcend their frontal view so long as it confirms their 'original self-experience', that is, their *I am* from which their *I can* is borne and grounded.

Merleau-Ponty refines these ideas in the preface of *Phenomenology of Perception*, explaining that 'reflection does not withdraw from the world toward the unity of consciousness as the foundation of the world; rather it steps back in order to see transcendences spring forth and it loosens the intentional threads that connect us to the world in order to make them appear'.[14] To do so is to be attendant to what Husserl calls a phenomenological horizon, a kind of field of possibility that radiates from subjects, objects, and the world and provides a model of intersubjective embeddedness and co-mingling at a very basic level. The range of potential movements, and the kinds of meanings that can be constituted by a subject are always at the outer-edge, as it were; they form constellations which impact and delineate potentials of meaning and movement wherein 'each man understands first of all, in respect of a core and as having its unrevealed horizon, *his* concrete surrounding world or *his* culture; and he does so precisely as a man who belongs to the community fashioning it historically'.[15] In this case, and more specifically in these words themselves, and broadly in the case of most classical phenomenology, these are human cultural worlds where meanings play out between subjects. The horizon of phenomenology, in its Husserlian transcendental form, finds its deepest expression in the human itself both as that which is the 'apodictically given "I am"' and as the field in which the "I am" is an "I can" – which we can only begin to describe through the process of the phenomenological reduction in its transcendental mode.

Merleau-Ponty, however, like many phenomenologists, is rather skeptical of the possibility of a complete phenomenological reduction. In fact, he argues that precisely because a complete reduction is impossible, this incompleteness, or what he later develops as indirect ontology, is what grants phenomenology (or, rather, Merleau-Ponty's own variation of phenomenology) its descriptive and philosophical power. Focusing on language and expression he comments in "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence" that '[we must] rid our minds of the idea that our language is the translation or cipher of an original text, we shall see that the idea of a *complete* expression is nonsensical, and that all language is indirect or allusive'.[16] It is through the development and deployment of expression that Merleau-Ponty refines Husserl's position on subjectivity and intersubjectivity by narrowing, or perhaps expanding it, to corporeality and intercorporeality. This is not to say that Husserl does not treat embodiment or corporeality in his work, rather, it is that Merleau-Ponty makes corporeality central in a way that Husserl does not.[17] In order to regain the radicality of

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[13] Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. Dorian Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1960), 102.

[14] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, lxxvii.

[15] Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 133.

[16] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence', in *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 39-83, 43.

[17] Cf.: Taylor Carman, 'The Body in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty', *Philosophical Topics* 27.2 (1999): 205-26; Sean Dorrance Kelly, 'The Body in Merleau-Ponty', *Ratio* XV.4 (2002): 376-91.

existential phenomenology in its Merleau-Pontyan form we must begin with its sense of wonder: a sense of wonder localized through bodies and their expressive capacities.

Merleau-Ponty begins with wonder – specifically, wonder at and with the world. It is this wonder that provides the first entry point of existential phenomenology within posthumanism. Like Husserl's project to provide and describe a solid foundation for the sciences with the phenomenological method, Merleau-Ponty strives to expand the Husserlian horizon by describing in detail the world that we perceive. For Merleau-Ponty this is not a question of whether 'we truly perceive a world'; instead, Merleau-Ponty insists, 'we must say: the world is what we perceive'.[18] Beginning with a description of behaviour and an assault on behaviourism in *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty develops phenomenology in conjunction with Gestalt psychology in order to describe the relation of figure and (back)ground in perceptual processes, one which takes into account the multiplicity of figures and grounds, their shifting array, and their broader dynamism, within something as deceptively simple as a habit, a glance, or a reflex. As described by Merleau-Ponty, this is not a dualistic stimulus-response relation, especially in the sterility and controlled environment of a lab, simply converting a sense-perception into sense-data. Rather, the experience of the lived body – experiential relations among beings and the world – is recognized as providing the ground for any particularized response, a response which always occurs within a larger context: has this body been stimulated in this way before? Has it already acquired a habit in the way in which it meets this other being? Dyad becomes monad in the experience of the lived body and meeting with the world, in the moment when relation is interrelation. The subject is not self-enclosed, even less is it apodictically self-given, rather self or subject only *is* through its intertwining with the world it perceives, in the way that a body expresses a nuanced and textured experience of the world and leaves tracks. For Merleau-Ponty the lived body is the tacit meeting place of body and world and this is a wondrous and continuous occurrence. Merleau-Ponty develops descriptions of this, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, in his discussion of movement, spatiality, sexuality, language, and thought, among many other areas. He is careful, however, to provide measured descriptions of these intertwinings, arguing that they are always partial and incomplete. If they were not then no intertwining would be possible, all that is would be amorphous, and difference would collapse. These measured descriptions, then, provide a potential way to situate posthumanist forms of criticism and analysis, which, like the postmodernist and poststructuralist theories which posthumanism has drawn from, is attendant to difference. This comes, however, with the acknowledgement that by highlighting the selfsame in difference there is a risk of homogeneity and this needs to be methodologically accounted for in the development of posthumanist forms of philosophizing.

Merleau-Ponty's focus on the everyday experience of the lived body is coupled with descriptions of expression – particularly creative expression – in his works on language, aesthetics, and ontology.[19] His inquiries concerning expression are slowly gaining prominence as details of the promise of expression are teased out.[20] Merleau-

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[18] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, lxxx.

[19] See, in particular, 'Eye and Mind', 'Indirect Language and the Voices and the Language of Silence', and 'Cézanne's Doubt', all of which can be found in the *Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, ed. and intr. Galen A. Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993).

[20] See, M.C Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, 2nd edn (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998); Véronique M. Fóti, *Tracing Expression in Merleau-Ponty: Aesthetics, Philosophy of Biology, and*

Ponty's approach to expression is directly informed by the following brief quotation from Husserl: 'the beginning is the pure, and so to speak, still mute experience, which now it is the issue to bring to the pure expression of its own sense'.[21] For Merleau-Ponty expression highlights a passage – a passage that is inflected differently when accomplished through different modes of expression (linguistic, gestural, bodily, creative).[22] For instance, in the passage of thought to speech, Merleau-Ponty remarks that 'speech does not translate a ready-made thought, rather, speech accomplishes thought',[23] highlighting a transition from a mute world to a speaking one. The promise of expression is found in the bodily ability to conjure new expressions, particularly as they pertain to alternative or even new forms of expression heralded through the intertwining of body and world and intercorporeality.

Scott Marrato captures this rather eloquently when he writes that what

> Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is uniquely equipped to help us see is that, in order to do justice to the phenomena of experience, we must remain faithful in our descriptions to the very event of the emergence of meaning, as it unfolds. This emergence occurs in the expressive movement of intercorporeal bodies, bodies always already intertwined with, and so to speak, committed to, otherness.[24]

With an almost practiced habituality embodiment (as a bodily situatedness in the world) has almost exclusively been disclosed in the form of distinctly humanist concerns, operations, forms, and modes. The human body, no less, is generally viewed as the de-facto embodied manifestation of being-in-the-world, situating, as it does, with an "I can", the human in its lifeworld. The manifold ways of this embodied "I can" have found expression in a return to concrete, lived experience. This "I can" lies almost exclusively in the human body, as a facet of its subjectivity which re-inaugurates the liberal humanist subject as the central position from which the world is organized, rather than viewing the body, including the human body, as the vehicle through which the world is disclosed. Questions remain of the resources available to interrogate this embodied lived experience. What forms of embodiment are we, specifically, interrogating? How do we do so, perhaps, without the practiced habituality of a return to human subjectivity (seemingly as guarantor of embodiment) as a radiating centre? While posthumanism, as a form of criticism and analysis, calls on us to rethink subjectivity, so too is posthumanism, as a nascent philosophy, a call to develop an interrogation of corporeality. Phenomenology suggests a potential starting point for both of these endeavors, but this requires not only that the scope of subjectivity be enlarged, but so too expression and corporeality. If, as Callus and Herbrechter have intimated, 'the singularity of the posthuman lies in its openness to whatever might happen to

Ontology (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013); Donald A. Landes, *Merleau-Ponty and The Paradoxes of Expression* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2013); Bernhard Waldenfels, 'The Paradoxes of Expression', trans. Chris Nagel, in *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh*, ed. Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), 89-102.

[21] Husserl, *Cartesian Mediations*, quoted in Waldenfels, "The Paradoxes of Expression", 89.

[22] Merleau-Ponty begins to elucidate a philosophy of expression and a gestural theory of language in *Phenomenology of Perception*, specifically in the chapter 'The Body as Expression, as Speech'.

[23] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 183.

[24] Scott Marrato, *The Intercorporeal Self: Merleau-Ponty on Subjectivity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 10.

humanity, to "the genuine alternatives" for the human and for subjectivity itself",[25] then existential phenomenology, and, more specifically, Merleau-Ponty and his *Phenomenology of Perception*, provide the beginnings of a description of this openness at a bodily and lived level. Writing in the context of the development of a Speculative Posthumanism and the ethical challenges that something like the posthuman – as a being – presents, David Roden comments that "the possibility of posthumans implies that the future of life and mind might not only be stranger than we imagine, but stranger than we can currently conceive".[26] As such, there is a necessity to develop and explicate posthumanist modes of philosophizing which can sufficiently respond to what we currently cannot conceive of.

While phenomenology and, in particular, existential phenomenology, can be viewed as a potential starting point for posthumanist approaches, in itself phenomenology, broadly, can only ever constitute a somewhat ironic proto-posthumanism. Phenomenology, at least in its genesis, is perhaps one of the most humanist philosophies, given the constitutive role that human consciousness plays in orienting the world in Husserl's works. In Merleau-Ponty's early works both an implicit and explicit line of humanist assumptions are brought forward. While human consciousness does not play the constitutive and orienting role in Merleau-Ponty's work as it does in Husserl's, nevertheless Merleau-Ponty focuses his description on the lived aspects of the human body and, in particular, bodily perceptual processes. Leonard Lawlor and Fred Evans have commented that

> Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* can be seen as the culmination of the humanistic tradition within modernism…[as] it identifies the self or 'subject' with reason and pronounces reason to be the basis for knowledge and for our emancipation from forces that would otherwise prevent us from developing and fulfilling our human capacities.[27]

Even as Merleau-Ponty attempts to elucidate a third way to navigate between the dualism of intellectualism and empiricism, he nevertheless finds himself not only re-inscribing that same dualism within *Phenomenology of Perception* but locating the centrality of his third way through the human body itself. However, he begins to point the way to redressing this in his later works by specifically writing that *Phenomenology of Perception* began from an insoluble problem wherein '[he started] there from the "consciousness"-object distinction'.[28] He later writes that 'Man is not the *end* of the body, nor the organized body the *end* of the components'.[29] This opens up a potential space, on the one hand, for posthumanism as it has now evolved to enter and, on the other, a nascent kind of posthumanist philosophizing. As such, critical questions of methodology take on practical relief through an alternative that Merleau-Ponty presents in the elucidation of the interrogative mode, and his later developments in the disclosure of expression and depth. This interrogative mode provides a beginning point in the development of a nascent posthumanist philosophy, and, with it, to begin to bring to

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[25] Ivan Callus and Stefan Herbrechter, 'Introduction: Posthumanist Subjectivities, or, the Coming after the Subject…', *Subjectivity* 5 (2012): 260.

[26] Roden, *Posthuman Life,* 6.

[27] Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor, 'Introduction - The Value of Flesh: Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy and the Modernism/Postmodernism Debate', in *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh*, ed. Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), 1-20. 2-3.

[28] Merleau-Ponty, Working note dated July 1959, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 200.

[29] Merleau-Ponty, Working note dated Nov 1960, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 265.

expression of its own sense a multiplicity of muted forms of embodiment and corporeality.

While I agree with Ivan Callus and Stefan Herbrechter that critical posthumanism need not be centrally grounded through analysis of technological development or understood in relation to technology broadly[30] even if it is 'conditioned by technoculture',[31] Arthur Kroker's rather prescient description of the meaningful bankruptcy of 'contemporary technological experience' and its 'ability to creatively remix, recode, [and] redesign the codes of human subjectivity and the physical and biotic environments without a meaningful reason for doing so'[32] provides a second entry point for existential phenomenology and posthumanism. More specifically, it provides us with another way of thinking how existential phenomenology can meaningfully contribute to posthumanist projects as a mode of criticism and analysis and, more pertinently to this article, can begin to explicate posthumanist ways of philosophizing. If, as Kroker claims, contemporary technological experience is meaningfully bankrupt, then how do we regain and enlarge the scope of meaning within a broader panorama of meaningful bodily interactions? While the 'codes of human subjectivity' are being redesigned and altered, they are perhaps also beginning to fold back onto a more primordial form of experience,[33] one which Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is particularly apt at describing as 'we are attendant to emergence of meaning, as it unfolds' through an interrogative mode.

In *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty spends the bulk of the completed chapters discussing interrogation principally in an indirect and allusive manner. While the sections refer to interrogation in their titles, interrogation remains on the margins of Merleau-Ponty's descriptions and critiques of reflection, dialectic, and intuition. Yet, the chapters begin, very subtly, with an unfolding of an interrogative methodology which lays the groundwork for the indirect ontology that Merleau-Ponty develops in this work. Echoing the Husserlian statement of bringing to expression the things themselves, the focus of interrogation lies here less on reflection, dialectic, and intuition, than in the disclosure of depth as a kind of field or landscape where expressive bodies gear into one another. When Merleau-Ponty does explicitly comment on interrogation he writes, for instance, that 'it is the things themselves, from the depths of their silence, that [interrogation] wishes to bring to expression'.[34] The text does not clearly outline the details of this process, but it does provide a starting point for posthumanism to develop interrogation as a principle mode of philosophizing; that is, to not only be attendant to the emergence of meaning and its coherent deformations, but to interrogate that very emergence in its *sinngenesis* (the genesis and diffusion of significations), and, deeper still, in its *ontogenesis* (the genesis and diffusion of being) at a primordial bodily level. Following *Phenomenology of Perception*, and Merleau-Ponty's other works (especially his works on aesthetics and ontology), this takes place at a pre-personal, pre-conscious,

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[30] Ivan Callus and Stefan Herbrechter, 'Critical Posthumanism Or, the *Inventio* of a Posthumanism Without Technology', *Subject Matters* 3.2 (2007): 15-29.

[31] Callus and Herbrechter, 'Introduction: Posthumanist Subjectivities, or, the Coming after the Subject…', 260.

[32] Arthur Kroker, *Exits to the Posthuman Future* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 70.

[33] Merleau-Ponty and Husserl both make reference to primordial spheres. Merleau-Ponty, especially in his working notes, highlights what he calls Wild Being which is disclosed primarily in the pre-personal, pre-objective space that he opens ontologically via his description of hyper-reflection in *The Visible and the Invisible*.

[34] Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 4.

and pre-reflective level.[35] Interrogation, then, is principally directed at this level and the silences of its depths which manifest in bodies themselves.

What interrogation offers then, as Merleau-Ponty continues, is to 'set the task of thinking […] not according to the law of the word-meanings inherent in the given language, but with the perhaps difficult effort that uses the significations of words to express beyond themselves, our mute contact with the things, when they are not yet things said'.[36] That is, emergences, or becomings, take place in silences, in diffuse bodily interactions in which ready-made language and linguistic expressions are unable to sufficiently demonstrate their entanglement and embeddedness within and by one another – what Merleau-Ponty refers to as intercorporeity, and what I am here expanding as intercorporeality through expression itself. If, as I argue above, posthumanism has broadly failed to sufficiently demonstrate the intertwining of the human in all that it is not, then the path opened by interrogation, even if it is relatively opaque in its methodology due to its inherent incompleteness (which is a central facet of it and points towards describing, ontologically, the openness that posthumanism seemingly values so highly), is a path of expression and intertwining. Expression here, however, is not meant to simply delineate linguistic expression as such, but rather refers to Merleau-Ponty's gestural theory of language, initially developed in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, where expression is understood in a principally gestural manner. The silences of bodies are shown to be expressive; not just human bodies, but the bodies of things themselves. Things express, but they express differently to what we are accustomed to. If posthumanism wishes to be attendant to a fundamental and dynamic openness, then it cannot simply state that this openness exists, rather it needs to demonstrate and describe it as Merleau-Ponty has already done. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty writes in a working note that his ontological project, cut short by his death, would 'be presented without any compromise with *humanism*, nor moreover with *naturalism*, nor finally with *theology* – Precisely what has to be done is to show that philosophy can no longer think according to this cleavage: God, man, creatures'.[37] Had he been able to finish this ontological project, we may have been able to grasp a completely different kind of posthumanism than the one we now have.

While Merleau-Ponty's early work is not particularly posthumanist in orientation as it relates to posthumanism as a mode of criticism and analysis, his entire oeuvre is shot through with a latent or nascent – or pregnant, to use Merleau-Ponty's term – kind of posthumanism, a proto-posthumanism, that permeates its methods of philosophizing and its disclosure and descriptions of the intertwining of expression and corporeality. Within Merleau-Ponty's work we can observe a movement towards what we now helplessly call posthumanism that is not thematically grounded in an analysis of language games, media representations, or technocultural fantasies, but that considers the way that the intertwining of beings in their intercorporeality is expressed in a lived way wherein, following Uexküll, 'life must be understood as *expression*'.[38]

The words *body* and *corporeality* have been used a number of times in the course of this article, but these terms have not been used to refer solely to the human body.

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[35] The term *sinngenesis* is borrowed from Husserl. However, the way it is situated here differs slightly from the commonly received notion of 'genesis of meaning'. I simply want to introduce both terms here, rather than fully situate them as their full explication is outside the more introductory scope of this article.
[36] Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 38.
[37] Merleau-Ponty, Working note dated Mar 1961, *The Visible and the Invisible,* 274, emphasis in original.
[38] Landes, *Merleau-Ponty and The Paradoxes of Expression*, 70.

When the words *body* or *the body* are utilized, they tend to be employed only in the context of the human body (Merleau-Ponty is guilty of this as well). The term *expression* has also been utilized a number of times, but (except for when it has been used in a direct quote) never have I explicitly or solely linked it to linguistic expression. I have rather sought, while using all of these terms, to 'express beyond themselves, our mute contact with the things, when they are not yet things said'.[39] So for all the potentially "transgressive" acts of incorporation of code, genetic engineering, or other technoscientific forms into the body, or the so-called extension of the body within virtuality as it relates to performing the body, and moving the body, or shaping the body disclosed in a data stream (one need only read almost any piece of writing with the word 'posthumanism' in its title published in the last 15 years to see this) a certain kind of narcissism rears its head. One which is seemingly incapable, for all its attempts to disclose and analyse the embeddedness and intertwining of the human in all that it is not, to demonstrate and describe sufficiently how these processes occur at an experiential and pre-reflective level. This level is what Merleau-Ponty's work begins to make clear, and why I argue that it signals the beginning of posthumanist philosophy, or, rather, of posthumanist forms of philosophizing in spite of, or, rather, through his interrogation of bodily subjectivity.

What Merleau-Pontyan wonder teaches us is that

> My access to a universal mind via reflection, far from finally discovering what I always was, is motivated by the intertwining of my life with other lives, of my body with the visible things, by the intersection of my perceptual field with that of the others, by the blending in of my duration with the other durations.[40]

Wonder marks a pathway to a form of philosophizing that makes its home *in* the limits, or outer-edge, of various boundaries, suspended in the abyssal in-between of a multiplicity of life-worlds; a form of philosophical interrogation firmly planted in the borderlands of everyday experience – not only "mine" or the "human", but "yours" and other beings, reflective and pre-reflective. There are existent beings which do not possess what we loosely call subjectivity, or intelligence, or any of the other markers which supposedly grant the status of reality to beings, but are nevertheless already there embedded within intercorporeality. In order to sufficiently incorporate these beings within posthumanist models of interrelation, the scope of what we understand by corporeality must be enlarged, so that all forms of being, being in the world, can be interrogated corporeally.

Going further than existing posthumanist viewpoints and even the intimations made within this article, Merleau-Ponty lucidly states his ontological project in the following working note:

> Ontology would be the elaboration of the notions that have to replace that of transcendental subjectivity, those of subject, object, meaning – the definition of philosophy would involve an elucidation of philosophical expression itself [...] as the expression of what is before expression *and sustains it from behind*.[41]

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[39] Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 38.
[40] Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 49.
[41] Merleau-Ponty, Working note dated Jan 1959, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 167. Emphasis in original.

Rather than living in the shadow of an "I can" of subjectivity, posthumanist philosophy – not a philosophy of the posthuman, nor a philosophy grounded from the standpoint of posthumanism as a form of criticism and analysis, but a philosophy based on the intertwining of expressive bodies and intercorporeality – can demonstrate that the expressive body of a human is just one body among other expressive bodies, including those that have previously been considered simply things or objects. This involves the interrogation and description of the "normal" state of things[42] – a perennial "post" wherein *sinngenesis* and *ontogenesis* are not exclusively under the purview of the human, but silently express a state of things prior to a reflective movement wherein subjects do not experience, but bodies do.

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[42] I borrow the phrase 'the normal state of things' from Bernhard Waldenfels, who writes: 'paradoxes presume a normal state of things. But as long as paradoxes only deviate from the prevailing opinions, they can be defended against any kind of opposition.' Bernhard Waldenfels, *The Phenomenology of Alien: Basic Concepts*, trans. Alexander Kozin and Tanja Stahler (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 14.

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Exprimarea liniștii corporale. Fenomenologia, Merleau-Ponty și postumanismul

Rezumat

Întrebarea pe care acest articol o pune nu este dacă fenomenologia poate fi asociată postumanismului, în sensul că aceasta se asimilează bifurcațiilor și excluderilor care sunt intrinsece umanismului. Nu este nici dacă putem să-i găsim sursa în postumanism, în mod general, ca formă de critică și analiză. Mai degrabă, scopul articolului este acela de a demonstra cum fenomenologia, în mod particular prin opera lui Merleau-Ponty, poate contribui la adresarea întrebărilor privind subiectivitatea și corporalitatea în discursul contemporan postumanist. Mai radical, articolul caută să expună modul în care fenomenologia, în mod special cea promovată de Merleau-Ponty, semnalează începutul filosofiei postumaniste sau mai degrabă a formelor postumaniste de a filosofa.