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DELEUZE AND MERLEAU-PONTY: IMMANENCE, UNIVOCITY AND PHENOMENOLOGY

JACK REYNOLDS AND JON ROFFE

Introduction

Essays that employ a 'compare and contrast' methodology can be tedious, sometimes even spurious, but they can also produce a third event that is more than merely the sum of its parts. It is particularly worthwhile to try for that in regard to the work of Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty, because of myriad oppositions that surround and confound their reception: most obviously, the too prevalent post-structuralist vs. phenomenologist paradigm (which is also often accompanied by an epochal successor/predecessor pre-determination of the substance of any argument), but also the bifurcation between philosophers of transcendence and philosophers of immanence that it has been argued afflicts contemporary European thought.¹ In this latter respect, Deleuze, who is heavily indebted to Spinoza and Nietzsche, and advocates pure immanence and poststructuralist 'difference', is considered to be on one side of the paradigm, whereas the sometimes existentialist (read transcendence) and phenomenologist of consciousness (read sameness), Merleau-Ponty, is on the other. While there is some truth to both of these broad sketches as a means of understanding aspects of contemporary European philosophy, they are far more problematic when Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty are taken as sitting on opposing sides. Ultimately we will argue that something like a coexistence of planes² obtains between Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty, notwithstanding some initial appearances to the contrary and the fact that there has been very little secondary work examining their inter-relation.³

This paper will seek firstly to understand Deleuze's main challenges to phenomenology (which are at least as cutting as Derrida's more famous and prolonged engagement with phenomenology), particularly as they are expressed in *The Logic of Sense* and *Difference and Repetition*. We will then turn to a discussion of one of the few passages in which Deleuze and Guattari directly engage with Merleau-Ponty, which occurs in the chapter on art in *What is Philosophy?* In this text, he and Guattari offer a critique of what they call the "final avatar" of phenomenology – that is, the "fleshism" that Merleau-Ponty proposes in his unfinished but justly famous work, *The Visible and the Invisible*. It will be argued that both Deleuze's basic criticisms of phenomenology, as well as he and Guattari's problems with the concept of the flesh, do not adequately come to grips with Merleau-Ponty's later philosophy. Merleau-Ponty is not obviously partisan to what Deleuze finds problematic in this tradition, despite continuing to identify himself as a phenomenologist, and

is working within a surprisingly similar framework in certain key respects. In fact, in the more positive part of this paper, we will compare Merleau-Ponty's notion of *flesh*, and Deleuze's equally infamous *univocity of being*, as a means to consider the broader question of the ways in which the two philosophers consider ontological thought, its meaning and its conditions. It is our argument that through properly understanding both positions, a rapprochement, or at least the foundation for one, can be established between these two important thinkers.

1. The Logic of Sense: Deleuze's Critique of Phenomenology and the Problem of the Urdoxa

While Deleuze has written on phenomenology in many of his key texts, his negotiation with this tradition has tended to involve allusive and somewhat sweeping comments that tie his critique of phenomenology to problems that he sees with Kant. In *The Logic of Sense*, however, his engagement with phenomenology is quite detailed and he introduces a term that will play a fundamental role in his characterisation of phenomenology: that being *doxa*, which is, of course, the Greek term for opinion. Now it needs to be acknowledged from the outset that phenomenology, at least on first appearances, would appear to resist *doxa* to a greater extent than any previous philosophy. Phenomenology espouses a rejection of, or at least a withdrawal from, the so-called 'natural attitude', which assumes that there is an outside world and other people. In its place, phenomenology argues that philosophy must attend to experience, and do away with theoretical presuppositions. On Deleuze's understanding, however, phenomenology inevitably reinstates what he calls an *ur-doxa*, or a higher *doxa*. In order to show this, he proceeds by first delineating two main forms of *doxa*, good sense and common sense, in some detail. These two forms mutually depend upon one another and in all of Deleuze's discussions of phenomenology in other texts these terms recur.

1a. Good Sense

According to Deleuze's analysis, good sense is always derivative, and doubly so. What we consider to be the basic level of meaning both in experience (understood phenomenologically) and more narrowly in language, is in fact the product of a more fundamental structure: that is, Deleuze argues that sense emerges from a primary nonsense. In turn, the postulation of an originary meaningfulness in experience is traced by Deleuze back to a set of unjustified presuppositions. Sense, generated out of this multifarious regime of nonsense, is not simple, but always takes on two opposed directions at one and the same time. Confronting Husserl with Lewis Carroll, Deleuze suggests that what appears to be univocally meaningful in sense, in fact also lends itself to other meanings, even opposed ones. This bivocality of sense is borne witness

to by the phenomenon of paradox, to which Deleuze accords a transcendental importance. Paradox is an ineradicable part of the production of sense and should not simply be understood as the result of an empirical misuse of language, or a misappropriation of logic. It is, Deleuze states, the “*perpetuum mobile*”⁴ of the production of sense; paradox constitutes the shuttling movement within nonsense which produces sense. The whole project of a logic of sense, Deleuze argues, is to come to terms with this original relation of sense and non-sense, which would take into account the role that paradox plays without falling back into any analogy with the true/false distinction that robs paradox of its intrinsic role, and posits the primacy of a good sense originally oriented towards truth (LS 68). In this respect, the most basic aspect of Deleuze’s criticism of phenomenology is that it assumes a world primordially impregnated with univocal meaning – good sense – an assumption that no true transcendental philosophy could countenance. In fact, he suggests that we must invert this phenomenological picture to approach the real structure of sense.

It also needs to be noted that good sense is essentially distributive. Deleuze suggests that the comment “on the one hand, on the other hand” is its formula (LS 75). It starts from massive differentiation and then resolves, or synthesises it,⁵ and it is the supposition of good sense that makes possible the lesser form of dialectical thinking that Deleuze spent his career, and particularly *Difference and Repetition*, trying to avoid. Although Deleuze does not want to simply reject dialectics (in fact this book outlines an alternative dialectic to that of Hegel), any dialectical thought that annuls or overcomes difference is to be rejected; what is required on the other hand, is the affirmation of paradox, rather than the synthesising of the terms involved and a concomitant resolution of the contradiction.

Questions regarding the extent to which Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical project admits of the dialectic become relevant here. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, he distinguishes his conception of the dialectic from the ‘bad’ dialectical thinking that he characterises as a “preponderant force that always works in the same direction”,⁶ much as good sense does for Deleuze. More positively, Merleau-Ponty also proposes a more sophisticated form of dialectical thinking, which he terms the hyper-dialectic (and synonymously ‘hyper-reflection’), and characterises as follows:

What we call hyper-dialectic is a thought that, on the contrary, is capable of reaching truth because it envisages without restriction the plurality of the relationships and what has been called ambiguity. The bad dialectic is that which thinks it recomposes being by a thetic thought, by an assemblage of statements, by thesis, antithesis, and synthesis; the good dialectic is that which is conscious of the fact that every thesis is an idealisation, that Being is not made up of idealisations or of things said... but of bound wholes where signification never is except in tendency (VI 94).

Above all, the hyper-dialectic is a refusal of what Merleau-Ponty calls “high-altitude thinking”, which surveys proceedings from some transcendent

position above, ignorant of the questioner's involvement and co-implication in that which is being questioned. It is also important to note that his hyper-dialectic involves no ultimate synthesis of differences and the terms of the opposition are not reified. It hence appears that what Deleuze calls 'good sense' might not play an important role in Merleau-Ponty's later work, and this manner in which his version of the dialectic is not parasitic upon the presupposition of good sense also applies to the strategy of deconstruction. Although deconstruction arguably begins with and depends upon an "on the one hand, on the other hand" methodology – the formula of good sense – it does not then proceed to less differentiation; on the contrary the two 'hands' of the opposition become intertwined and contaminated with one another.

On Deleuze's analysis, however, phenomenology is compromised to its core by a presupposed commitment to an orderly, intrinsic and natural meaningfulness. As a result, phenomenology must be criticised for excluding in an unjustifiably *a priori* manner many decisive subjective experiences, notably those of the mad and those connected to the unconscious: in other words, it must be criticised for remaining within the presumptive and artificial enclosure of good sense. In short, as Deleuze states in *Difference and Repetition*, "The whole of phenomenology is an epiphenomenology" (DR 52). Whether or not this is necessarily the case in regard to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, however, is not so clear. After all, even if it might be claimed that conscious experience is the starting-point of phenomenology, experience nevertheless shades off into less conscious phenomena and admits of ambiguity, as well as to phenomena like habituality, which are conditions for so-called 'conscious' experience. This, of course, is something that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, both early and late, examines in detail.

1b. Common Sense and the Urdoxa

Common sense, on the other hand, is described by Deleuze as "a faculty of identification that brings diversity in general under the form of the same" (LS 77-8). It identifies, recognises, and subsumes various diverse faculties of the soul (or singularities, to use Deleuze's term) and gives them a unity that is capable of saying 'I'. On this view, the subject is a product of common sense and one of Deleuze's ongoing problems with phenomenology is this unified subject that it presupposes (the form that imposes common sense). As he will more explicitly argue with Guattari in *What is Philosophy?*, instead of attaining to the pure immanence that is its goal in the dominant Husserlian sense, phenomenology focuses upon the immanence of experience relative to the horizons of a transcendental subject, and thus, on Deleuze's view, fundamentally undermines immanence. We will examine this point in more detail shortly, but in *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze is more specific about the nature of the common sense that he thinks afflicts phenomenology:

Far from overturning the form of commonsense, Kant merely multiplied it. Must not the same be said of phenomenology? Does it not discover a fourth common sense, this time grounded upon sensibility as a passive synthesis – one which, even though it constitutes an *Ur-doxa*, remains no less prisoner of the form of *doxa*? (DR 137; cf. LS 98)

Interestingly, in the footnote to this comment (n 6, chapter 3) Deleuze claims that Merleau-Ponty diagnoses the same problem with common sense (the persistence of the model of recognition), although diagnosing the problem does not entail that Merleau-Ponty necessarily avoids it and we will come back to this question. While Deleuze's discussions of passive synthesis in this text are long and detailed, to put his point bluntly the problem with both Kant's critical philosophy and Husserlian phenomenology is that they *assume* that sensibility is natively apposite to every form of experience. The subject is in advance predisposed to the structure of experience (common sense), and experience is always structured meaningfully in advance (good sense). What he refers to as an *urdoxa* is thus the presupposition of a perfect fit, or a natural harmony, between self and world (LS 78), and, for Deleuze, phenomenology is powerless to break with this *urdoxa* of the union between good sense and common sense (LS 97). Despite his avowed targets here being Kant and, in a more fundamental sense, Husserl,⁷ elsewhere Deleuze informs us that the bulk of modern philosophy, including Descartes, Hegel, etc., are all powerless to break with the 'everybody knows' of good sense and common sense. In relation to Husserl specifically, Deleuze's claim is that without the transcendental privilege accorded to the subject (common sense) there would be no unity and good sense itself would also break down. He suggests that phenomenology is a philosophy that conserves a certain essential form, in that "the entire dimension of manifestation is given ready-made, in the position of a transcendental subject, which retains the form of the person, of consciousness, and of subjective identity, and which is satisfied with creating the transcendental out of the characteristics of the empirical".⁸

As we will see, in *What is Philosophy?* he and Guattari contend that this move of finding transcendence within immanence is an archetypal modern one that, on the ontological level, they find suspect. The positive ontology that support this view will soon be considered, but Deleuze credits Sartre's earlier analysis of Husserl in *The Transcendence of the Ego* with discovering this 'pure immanence' of the transcendental field. In this text, Sartre shows how phenomenology should not posit a transcendental ego that is inside *all* experience; any ego is literally transcendent to, or not part of phenomenological experience, which involves nothing more than what Sartre calls non-thetic self-awareness (we are indirectly aware that we are *not* that object that we are intending or negating). At the same time, Deleuze thinks that there is no value in insisting upon the priority of consciousness (as Sartre does), since consciousness always makes reference to "synthes[es] of unification" (LS

102) and ends up reintroducing a type of ontological transcendence. On this analysis, Sartre betrays his discovery of the immanence of the transcendental field by reintroducing the *form*, if not the content (since, for Sartre, consciousness has no *content* and is literally no-thing-ness), of the subject in its Cartesian-Husserlian formulation.

On Deleuze's analysis, phenomenology cannot actually return to pure immanence because it conserves the form of consciousness within the transcendental, and retains the forms of good sense and common sense, which are produced rather than originary. A more radical reduction would have to leave consciousness behind (just as Merleau-Ponty's work ultimately does) and instead reveal an impersonal and pre-individual transcendental field that cannot be determined as consciousness, along the lines of that found by Sartre but without reinstating the individual or the subject on another level (LS 99).⁹ This transcendental field is neither individual or personal, nor general or universal. Instead, he turns to the enumeration of what he calls singularities,¹⁰ and anti-generalities, which are impersonal and pre-individual and preside over the genesis of sense.¹¹ What Deleuze thinks needs to be discovered, we will suggest, is something like what Merleau-Ponty in his earlier work describes as the passive and anonymous aspect (PP 216) of the transcendental field (and anonymity cannot simply be equated with generality, as is often done).¹² In the terms of Merleau-Ponty's later work, it is what has variously been called wild being, brute being, and savage being, which are the "uncultivated and un-constituted being of the sensible" (VI xlix), an impersonal transcendental field that cannot be understood through any reference to subjects or objects.

2. What is Philosophy? *and the Role of Pure Immanence in Deleuze's Critique*

As with most of the French poststructuralists, comments by Deleuze on his immediate phenomenological predecessors are relatively rare. Aside from a footnote praising Merleau-Ponty's reading of Leibniz in *The Fold*,¹³ and some enigmatic references to him in *Cinema I*¹⁴ and *Foucault*,¹⁵ Deleuze's only substantial engagement with Merleau-Ponty's philosophy takes place in *What is Philosophy?*, co-authored with Guattari.¹⁶ Throughout this text, many of the claims made in *The Logic of Sense* about phenomenology are replicated, even if in a different idiom that more explicitly casts his critique around the theme of immanence. Their focus on immanence in this text is particularly interesting given Husserl's own characterisation of his phenomenological method as one of "pure immanence". For Husserl, the negative movement of the *epoché*, the initial bracketing of the 'natural attitude', suspends all transcendence and opens the way for a return to things themselves; it might be said to positively open the way for a return to immanence (albeit within consciousness). While Husserl's commitment to immanence might be said to be more of an

epistemological rather than an ontological position, phenomenology is also committed to the idea that being is phenomenon: that there is no two-world ontology between essence and appearance.¹⁷ In taking phenomenology on in what has traditionally been considered its own terrain, the sphere of immanence, Deleuze's criticisms of Husserlian phenomenology become clearer. It is also here, ostensibly at least, that any contrast with Merleau-Ponty *seems* at its most stark, notably because Merleau-Ponty actually explicitly rejected the methodology of immanence as Husserl's phenomenological methodology construed it,¹⁸ rather than radicalised it, as Deleuze might be said to do. Before considering the significance of that distinction, however, we need to examine Deleuze and Guattari's related notions of *pure immanence* and the *plane of immanence*, two important emblems for what their work was trying to achieve.

In *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*, Deleuze insists that the transcendental field cannot be defined by the consciousness that is coextensive with it.¹⁹ In *What is Philosophy?* he and Guattari go into some detail explicating the nature of the plane of immanence and they inform us that it is something pre-philosophical that is the condition for philosophy: "If philosophy begins with the creation of concepts, then the plane of immanence must be regarded as pre-philosophical" (WP 40). Philosophy presupposes this pre-philosophical plane, this transcendental field, which is one of its internal conditions – but here, "pre-philosophical does not mean something pre-existent but rather something that does not exist outside of philosophy but presupposes it" (WP 41). They go on to suggest that "perhaps this is the supreme act of philosophy: not so much to think the plane of immanence as to show that it is there, unthought in every plane and to think it in this way as the outside and inside of thought" (WP 59).

This conception of the plane of immanence bears some important similarities to Merleau-Ponty's later philosophy. When criticising Sartre in *The Visible and the Invisible*, for example, Merleau-Ponty points out, not unlike Deleuze, that the concepts of Being and Nothingness, and their dialectical interplay, "ignore density, depth, the *plurality of planes*, the background worlds" (VI 68). More significantly, Merleau-Ponty repeatedly insists that we have "a contact with being prior to reflection, a contact that makes reflection itself possible" (VI 65). This contact with being, which he also refers to as the openness of the perceptual faith, is, however, continually referred to as paradoxical (VI 31). While Merleau-Ponty is sometimes criticised for what *appears* to be foundational appeals to the perceptual faith and to an intimate contact with being that precedes reflection, accusations of this sort ignore the paradoxical status of the perceptual faith, as well as Merleau-Ponty's insistence that the perceptual faith is a problem for us – it is not the answer. Indeed, on his view the various difficulties that Western

philosophers have encountered over the years can be tied to the attempt to solve, or efface, this problem of the perceptual faith, and this is not what his hyper-dialectic attempts to do (VI 35). If phenomenology, for Deleuze, licenses a form of *both* dogmatism and relativism – *doxa* becomes *ur-doxa* and remains on the level of common sense and the ‘everybody knows’ – for Merleau-Ponty, the paradox that is the perceptual faith is what makes possible both dogmatism and scepticism (VI 30), and the point remains that he is not advocating any return to the perceptual faith.

In order to understand the reasons behind Deleuze and Guattari’s rejection of phenomenology, however, it is also important to note their fundamental contention that “immanence is immanent only to itself: it is pure immanence and it leaves nothing out to which it might be transcended” (WP 44). They suggest that whenever immanence is interpreted as immanent *to* something else, pure immanence is lost, transcendence is reintroduced (WP 45), and the thinking in question becomes a form of religion rather than philosophy (a point closely connected to their assertion that Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the flesh is ‘pious’ – we will return to this). Although Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge that some kind of reconstitution of transcendence may well be inevitable (WP 51), they clearly think that it should be minimised as much as possible and they thematise three different kinds of transcendence that have afflicted Western philosophy, the final of which they associate with phenomenology.

Firstly, there is the transcendent idea in Platonism or the transcendent Christian God – both of which are forms of traditional metaphysics. However, they argue that with Kant’s critique, metaphysics became discredited and it was the sphere of consciousness that became designated as immanent and what is outside it became transcendent – this might be the thing-in-itself, the world, or, more commonly in contemporary discourse, the Other. Hence the notorious phenomenological attempts at refuting solipsism and getting access to the other who must necessarily transcend this inner subjective realm. Arguably this is taken to its logical conclusion in the work of Lévinas, where the alterity of the Other is wholly transcendent to the subject and never subsumable under any version of what he calls the “imperialism of the same”, including the subject’s many and varied projections on to, and about that, Other.²⁰ But this second kind of transcendence that is involved in the subjectivist tradition, which reduces immanence to consciousness, also contains another dimension of transcendence. This reduction to immanence tends to be accompanied by the positing of a transcendental ego, whether it be directly acknowledged or simply presupposed.²¹ As Deleuze shows in his engagement with Kant in *Difference and Repetition*, it is the activity of reflection that attributes a field of immanence to a subject. The subject who reflects, and who contemplates, is hence at a distance from experience, or what

we might term the empirical flux of pure immanence. In other words, immanence becomes immanent to (in the sense that it is made possible and revealed by) a transcendental subjectivity.

Of Husserl, Deleuze and Guattari also write that, “he conceived of immanence as the flux of lived experience within subjectivity, but since this lived experience, pure and even primordial, does not belong completely to the self that represents it to itself, it is in the regions of non-belonging that the horizon of something transcendent is re-established” (WP 46). On their understanding of Husserl, one is inevitably distanced from their own experience, partly exterior to it, and this thereby installs an ego that is transcendent to, or different from, the immanent flux of experience. Although the phenomenological *epoché* appears to be a reduction to the level of immanence, in that one switches off belief in things themselves that are transcendent, Deleuze and Guattari argue that it continues to relate the plane of immanence back to a subject who apprehends that immanence.

It is worth digressing to note that Merleau-Ponty shares Deleuze’s concerns with the tendency of Husserl’s work to do precisely that, pointing out that where Husserl does this he leaves the twofold question of the genesis of the subject and the ‘world’ untouched (VI 45-6). On Merleau-Ponty’s understanding, however, this was something that Husserl himself recognised of his own work, when he acknowledged that in it every transcendental reduction was always also simultaneously an eidetic reduction, a generalising that subtended the particular, and he argues that Husserl altered his later work to avoid this impasse through a more thorough thematization of the *Lebenswelt*. Of course, it is a common tactic of Merleau-Ponty’s to attribute to other philosophers his own position and he may well hence be being too generous to Husserl, but even if that is the case, it nevertheless illuminates the close proximity between his position and that of Deleuze, and what becomes clear is that the question of subjectivity is very important to Deleuze’s critique of phenomenology. On Deleuze’s view, phenomenology needs to leave behind the subject and ask genetic questions like how is the subject constituted in the given (ES 87). Again, this can be understood as an attempt to make the phenomenological reduction more radical, but it is also, we argue, something that Merleau-Ponty accomplished in *The Visible and the Invisible*, where he argues, for example, that “the philosophical question is not posed in us by a pure spectator: it is first a question as to how, upon what ground, the pure spectator is established, from what more profound source he himself draws” (VI 109). Merleau-Ponty denigrates this ‘high-altitude thinking’ in much the same way as Deleuze denigrates transcendent thinking, and it seems clear that Merleau-Ponty also wants to get to something like the plane of immanence – the ground of the transcendental field – that is the condition of consciousness, subjectivity and objectivity. Moreover, if we construe immanence as denoting

relations between things that co-exist on the one level, as Deleuze does, then ontologically this bears many similarities with Merleau-Ponty's later philosophy, which sought to reject the methods of both analytic reflection and intuition that ultimately reinstated hierarchies of being. Instead, his work sought to "install itself in a locus where they have not yet been distinguished, in experiences that have not yet been 'worked over', that offer us at once, pell-mell, both 'subject' and 'object', both existence and essence, and hence give philosophy resources to redefine them" (VI 130).

In regard to Husserl's phenomenological successors (such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Lévinas), Deleuze and Guattari complicate their fundamental claim that phenomenology construes immanence only in relation to a subject who is distanced from, and therefore not reducible to, that immanence. They suggest that beginning with Husserl, but more clearly with his successors, there arises a third kind of transcendence in which "one seeks to rediscover transcendence within the heart of immanence itself, as a breach or interruption of its field" (WP 46). On this understanding, there is no pure immanence: rather, there are breaches within immanence and they hence characterise post-Husserlian phenomenology as seeking to discover transcendence within immanence. Alternatively, this might be designated as seeking to find transcendence in immanence, which is actually a comment that Merleau-Ponty persistently makes regarding his own philosophical position in the 1940s (it will be argued that what this means is not as antithetical to Deleuze's position as might be assumed). This version of transcendence involves an internal disruption that is envisaged as occurring within the sphere of immanence and it is worth observing that the eidetic reduction discovers generalities, or transcendent essences from within particular experiences, and it hence could be said to be the first and archetypal mode of finding transcendence in immanence. In this respect, however, it is important to note that chapter three of *The Visible and the Invisible* critiques not only Bergsonian intuitionism, but also Husserlian *eidetics*. For Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology does not grant us access to *a priori* essences that are true for all cultures. Whether or not his concept of the flesh reinstates a version of transcendence in immanence, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest it does, will be considered in what follows.

3. Beyond "The final avatar of phenomenology": Deleuze and Guattari's Critique of the Flesh

In the chapter on art in *What is Philosophy?* (WP 163-199) references to obvious Merleau-Pontyan topics and themes abound, including discussions of the intertwining, the flesh, and the phenomenological concern with Cézanne's painting to which Merleau-Ponty devoted two articles.²² One of the key engagements with phenomenology in Deleuze's work, it also poses the most

decisive and overt questions to Merleau-Ponty.²³ The crucial passage occurs in the context of a discussion of the relation between nature and art:

Can sensation be assimilated to an original opinion, to *Urdoxa* as the world's foundation or immutable basis? Phenomenology finds sensation in perceptual or affective 'a priori materials' that transcend the perceptions and affections of the lived: Van Gogh's yellow or Cézanne's innate sensations. As we have seen, phenomenology must become the phenomenology of art because the immanence of the lived to a transcendental subject must be expressed in transcendent functions that not only determine experience in general but traverse the lived itself here and now, and are embodied in it by constituting living sensations (WP 178-9).

In this passage, Deleuze and Guattari begin by raising the same question that was posed in *The Logic of Sense* concerning sense: can we account for sensation in terms of a fundamental sympathetic basis that underlies its relationship to a subject (that is, the *Urdoxa*)? Withholding their negative response for a moment (the outline of which should be familiar by now), they go on to enigmatically suggest that all phenomenology "must become the phenomenology of art". The reason why Deleuze and Guattari might claim such a peculiar thing relies on their own understanding of art. To continue the quotation:

The being of sensation, the bloc of percept and affect, will appear as the unity or reversibility of feeling and felt, their intimate intermingling like hands clasped together: it is the flesh that, at the same time, is freed from the lived body, the perceived world, and the intentionality of one toward the other that is still too tied to experience; whereas flesh gives us the being of sensation and bears the original opinion distinct from the judgement of experience – flesh of the world and flesh of the body that are exchanged as correlates, ideal coincidence. A curious Fleshism inspires this final avatar of phenomenology and plunges it into the mystery of the incarnation. It is both a pious and a sensual notion, a mixture of sensuality and religion, without which, perhaps, flesh could not stand up by itself... The flesh is only the thermometer of a becoming (WP 178).

Here, Deleuze and Guattari begin by making reference to their definition of the art-work. This definition is radically a-subjective: the work of art is a "being of sensation", a compound of affects and percepts, where affect is not to be understood as the affection pertaining to a particular subject, but an ideality, a real being that does not rely upon the subject. Likewise, "percepts are no longer perceptions; they are independent of a state of those who experience them [...] Sensations, percepts and affects are *beings* whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lives" (WP 164). Clearly this is a conception of art foreign to phenomenology traditionally conceived, insofar as the subjective point of view of the *ego cogito* is left out of the picture. Given this, the claim that phenomenology must become phenomenology of art takes on a richer meaning again: if art must be understood in a-subjective terms, then the phenomenology that would attend to such experiences would *a priori* exclude subjectivity: a new phenomenology that gestures to a new reduction (cf. WP 149-51).

While Merleau-Ponty is not referred to here by name (except again in the attached footnote), it is not difficult to see obvious references to his work,

including the reversibility of the touched and the touching, the reference to clasping hands, the interconnectedness of the flesh of the body and the world. We wish to argue, though, that Deleuze and Guattari here give us evidence to think that they have seriously underestimated the strength of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical position. The first thing to note here is that the *description* of the flesh, one of the central concepts in Merleau-Ponty's later work, is at best only half accurate. His goal is indeed to describe an ontology of the intertwining, or the chiasm. This ontology also attempts to undermine the supremacy of the *ego cogito* and the theme of intentionality in phenomenological thought. However, Merleau-Ponty would certainly balk at Deleuze and Guattari's suggestion that the flesh of the body and that of the world are merely interchangeable, "ideal coincidences" – indeed, he stresses that the reversible coincidence that defines the flesh is always imminent and never realised (VI 147). Also, Merleau-Ponty is at pains to state that the flesh is not a fact, or sum of facts (VI 131), and nor is it spiritual (VI 139).

In addition to these more exegetical remarks, however, three explicit criticisms are also invoked here by Deleuze and Guattari. Firstly, that while the concept of the flesh may do away with the supremacy of judgement in thought, a theme intrinsic to modern philosophy since Kant's first *Critique*, it still depends upon the postulation of a pre-established harmony between self and world (eg. an *Urdoxa*). Secondly, Deleuze and Guattari charge that there remains in the concept of the flesh a kind of theological prejudice, a reference to a veiled transcendence. As they suggest earlier in the book, with the theme of the 'flesh', "the mole of the transcendent is found within immanence itself" (WP 46). Finally, and most enigmatically, is the claim that, "flesh is only the thermometer of a becoming."

It is too soon to immediately judge the first two criticisms, which will hold our attention for the rest of the paper, but the third gives us some critical purchase with which to examine Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of Merleau-Ponty. The theme of becoming is a decisive one in Deleuze's work, and one that returns ubiquitously. Standing in the line of Heraclitus and Nietzsche, becoming must be considered as the highest achievement of ontological thought for Deleuze. In *Difference and Repetition*, a three-stage development of univocal ontology – ontological positions that admit no transcendence – is outlined (DR 39-41) that can guide us here, since it is ultimately on the grounds of ontology that Deleuze wants to confront the Merleau-Pontian position.

The first stage is embodied by the work of Duns Scotus, a champion of the univocity of being in the face of transcendent ontology as found in scholastic philosophy and theology. While committed to ontological univocity (which, we might note, also entails a rejection of the *urdoxa* in the form of theological presuppositions), Duns Scotus nonetheless only abstractly *conceives* of

univocal being, and does not manage to make the passage from the thought to concrete reality (DR 39-40). Now to criticise Merleau-Ponty for such a level of abstraction would be misplaced. All of his work circles around and draws upon the level of concrete life, from *The Structure of Behaviour* to *The Visible and the Invisible*. Beyond this, and considering both the discussion of the relation between everyday life and transcendental philosophy in *Phenomenology of Perception* and the effort that Merleau-Ponty goes to in *The Visible and the Invisible* to undermine any intellectual supererogation in relation to existence, it would be hard to plausibly criticise Merleau-Ponty for an abstract thought of being.

Deleuze and Guattari's poetic claim that "flesh is only the thermometer of a becoming" (WP 178) is critical of Merleau-Ponty in a further respect, this time analogous to the problem that Deleuze expresses concerning Spinoza, the second figure in the former's three-step genealogy of univocal ontology. If Scotus remained at the level of the abstract, Spinoza treated the univocity of being as the object of affirmation, and thus engaged it with life, drawing ontology down from the heights of abstract thought to an engagement with concrete existence. However, there still remains (at least for the Deleuze writing at this point) an *a priori* distinction between Being (substance, God or Nature) and the modes through which it is expressed.²⁴ Spinoza's ultimate failing is to remain insistent on a kind of transcendence of substance over its expressions: he maintains the form of the general even if it holds no content in and of itself (this content being provided by the modes and the modes alone).

Here Deleuze turns finally to Nietzsche's 'eternal return' (of the different, rather than the same) as an effort to return to Being that groundless movement – in short, to the final refusal of Being in favour of becoming. More straightforwardly, the eternal return signifies for Deleuze the primordial and groundless univocity of Being. Disposing at last with the final cipher of the one, or general substance, Nietzsche provides the first ontology wholly equal to the univocity of Being. To claim, then, that "flesh is only the thermometer of a becoming" is to claim that, as an ontological concept – and there is little doubt that Merleau-Ponty wants to cast flesh as a concept in this register even if he claims that he is proposing an "indirect ontology" (VI 179) – the flesh remains unable to attain to the real level of ontological thought, which must be founded on the regime of becoming and thus on a total rejection of a primary transcendence or unity in all its forms. In effect, Deleuze and Guattari hence claim that flesh refers only to the lived body, or to some kind of brute physicality, a representative of passive substance ontology, and that Merleau-Ponty is referring to a general conception of Being. In other words, they argue that while flesh is a definitive advance for phenomenology, it reinstates a form of transcendence, something that is higher than and subsumes particular differences. In a backhanded way, then, the claim is that Merleau-Ponty thinks

of ontology in terms of what Deleuze in *Bergsonism* calls, “the homogeneity of a Being in general”.²⁵

However, Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the flesh resists this kind of understanding. We can begin by noting that, as Merleau-Ponty states, “the flesh we are speaking of is not matter” (VI 139). In fact, what he intends with this concept is much more closely related to what Deleuze thinks is the goal of his own philosophy: to provide an analysis of the transcendental as the real condition for actual experience (cf. VI 33, 45). As Merleau-Ponty states, in a quote that is decisive for this discussion, the flesh is “the concrete emblem of a general manner of being” (VI 147). A little earlier, he states that the flesh is “a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being” (VI 139). This ‘general thing’ here should not be confused with the Kantian object = *x* that is aligned by Deleuze with good sense and the *urdoxa*. Rather, Merleau-Ponty is concerned to delineate a style of expression that being as such involves: a style or a ‘texture’, in the sense that all differences are ‘said’ in the same way, as is the case with Deleuze’s account of the univocity of being.

4. *Flesh and Univocity – An Ontological Proximity*

If Merleau-Ponty’s concept of flesh is resistant to the criticisms Deleuze and Guattari oppose to it in *What is Philosophy?*, and to this extended version of their analysis that we have just offered, just what kind of ontology does Merleau-Ponty have and how does it look from Deleuze’s point of view? It is perhaps becoming clear that we consider the difference between the two philosophers to be less significant than Deleuze himself thinks, but the beginnings of an answer to this particular question lie in ascertaining how Deleuze’s ontology of becoming is itself framed. Consider this justly well-known passage from *Difference and Repetition*:

There has only ever been one ontological proposition: Being is univocal [...] A single voice raises the clamour of being. We have no difficulty in understanding that Being, even if it is absolutely common, is nevertheless not a genus [...] In effect, the essential in univocity is not that Being is said in a single and same sense, but that it is said, in a single and same sense, of all its individuating differences or intrinsic modalities. Being is the same for all these modalities, but these modalities are not equal (DR 35-6).

This passage has been well-remarked on by many commentators, perhaps most notably by Alain Badiou,²⁶ but what is crucial to note is that the univocity of Being for Deleuze is a long way from any crude form of physical or mental monism. It does not imply a brute physicality, in which everything must be taken account of scientifically, and in which the self must be accounted for on strictly physiological terms; neither, however, is the insistence on univocity here reducible to the immanence of experience to the self in transcendental phenomenology, *à la* Husserl – we are clearly beyond the sphere of subjective

experience here. “Simple empiricism” (PI 25), idealism (transcendental or otherwise), and transcendental phenomenology are unable, for Deleuze, to come to terms with Being qua Being. The “sameness” referred to in the above quote is not the monotony of a single substance, but the affirmation of difference as such, without any reference to a prior identity.

The similarities between these claims and the arguments of *The Visible and the Invisible* are striking. To repeat: the flesh is “the concrete emblem of a general manner of being” (VI 147). Rather than expressing an abstract thought of being that does not engage with life (like Duns Scotus), or thinking being against the ultimate horizon of a general substance (Spinoza), Merleau-Ponty wants to insist on a style or manner in which all beings exist. This style is the chiasmatic intertwining of beings, an ambiguous²⁷ invagination in which beings are engaged without being coincident or equal. For Merleau-Ponty, flesh is expressed in the same way for all of its individuating differences or intrinsic modalities, even though these modalities or differences are not themselves identical, equal or “coincidental”. Moreover, in the ‘Working Notes’, Merleau-Ponty suggests that the flesh is the way in which all of the many and varied chiasms (such as those between self and world, self and others, etc.) are interdependent (VI 247), and exist on the one level, again evoking Deleuze’s plane of immanence, which can be taken as a synonym for the univocity of being. And, as is the case with Deleuze, Merleau-Ponty is certainly not implying here a monism as it is traditionally construed. On this primary level, which is of supreme importance for these philosophers, we can in fact see a real proximity. This is not to say that there are no differences between them, but that their basic projects, and enemies, are more similar than Deleuze suggests and than we are often led to think.

5. Tenderness and the Perceptual Faith – Ciphers of the Urdoxa in Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology?

Given this proximity, we can turn afresh to the critical issues that Deleuze addresses to phenomenology and to its “final avatar” (WP 178), the ‘fleshism’ of Merleau-Ponty. Does Merleau-Ponty’s project manage to escape all of Deleuze’s concerns, making him a philosopher engaged in the same basic project, albeit well-disguised? In order to answer this question it is helpful to isolate Deleuze’s three basic problems²⁸ with phenomenology, which are the following:

1. Phenomenology construes immanence in terms of a subject, and thus fundamentally undermines it. This claim amounts to the charge that phenomenology *fails on its own grounds* – fails, that is, to truly take account of the immanence of thought and the subject. The more sophisticated version of this argument is that even when phenomenology does not explicitly posit a

transcendental ego, the subject who reflects is nevertheless at a distance from the flux of pure immanence, not part of it.

2. Post-Husserlian phenomenology does not posit a transcendental ego or subject, but does reinstate a form of transcendence within immanence, in the form of a breach, gap, or disruption, within the field of immanence (on their account, the flesh, the Other, etc.), which reinstates a hierarchy of Being.

3. Phenomenology's belief in an originary harmony between subject and sensation constitutes an *ur-doxa* (it reinstates a higher form of common sense as well as another kind of transcendence in immanence).

We think it is clear enough that Merleau-Ponty could not justifiably be challenged on the grounds of Deleuze's first problem with phenomenology. After all, his move in *The Visible and the Invisible* is explicitly away from a philosophy of subjectivity to the ontological level. The human subject, like all other beings, is a fold in the flesh of the world. If anything, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy constitutes a Herculean effort to divest the subject of its absolute ontological transcendence, first *vis-à-vis* the turn to the body and then to the milieu of Being. If an immanent theory of subjectivity simply holds that subjectivity is structured and accounted for by a prior ontology, this also applies to the later Merleau-Ponty. Moreover, instead of Deleuze's talk of pre-individual singularities and the plane of immanence, we have concepts that play closely analogous roles: flesh, the chiasm, and wild-being. By not construing immanence in terms of an immanence *to* a subject, his phenomenology attains to the level of a more fundamental immanence.

Of course, it needs to be reaffirmed that Deleuze and Guattari hold that although there might not be a transcendental ego explicitly playing a role in the phenomenologist's work, they contend that the subject is nevertheless inevitably distanced from immanence, or the 'empirical flux', rather than a part of it. Although it must be acknowledged that Merleau-Ponty does say that the subject is premised on a gap (*écart*), this divergence does not entail a kind of transcendence in which the self and language are radically different from the immanent flux of living. On the contrary, the phenomenon of habituality and skilful coping within an environment is fundamental to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the 'body-subject' from the time of *Phenomenology of Perception* and before, just as Deleuze and Guattari have also emphasised that the subject is nothing but a habit in a field of immanence. As Deleuze states elsewhere, "We are habits, nothing but habits – the habit of saying 'I'. Perhaps there is no more striking answer to the problem of the Self" (ES x).²⁹ On the ontological level, for Merleau-Ponty subjectivity is also seen to derive from a prior ontology of flesh and reversibility, and he insists that his proposed 'hyper-dialectic' is a situated thought that does not ignore its origins. By implication, any 'subject' who engages in this kind of thinking is not distanced from immanence, or considering immanence from a perspective external to it

such as the transcendental subject – reflection cannot get us ‘outside’ for Merleau-Ponty.

In relation to their second main objection against phenomenology, Deleuze and Guattari’s reading of the flesh as a type of transcendence in immanence has already been shown to be problematic. Of course, it must be acknowledged that in earlier essays, such as ‘The Primacy of Perception’ and *Phenomenology of Perception*, for example, Merleau-Ponty explicitly espoused a position that he characterised as “transcendence in immanence” (PrP 16 and ff.), denying the possibility of either pure immanence or pure transcendence. Similarly, his use of the inscription from Paul Klee’s tomb – “I cannot be caught in immanence” (PrP 188) – in “Eye and Mind” also seems to complicate our attempt to draw his philosophy near to Deleuze’s. However, the key to understanding such comments can be found in *The Visible and the Invisible* where Merleau-Ponty explicitly comments that, “immanence and transcendence are ontologically indistinguishable” (VI 89). By thus identifying the two *in this way only*, we are cast back again into a univocal realm where ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ *no longer have any ontological value*, being rather states of affairs that come about in particular contexts, due to particular intertwinings. Thus, what Merleau-Ponty calls and critiques as “pure immanence” here is not the univocity of being that undergirds Deleuze’s project, but the interiority espoused by Husserlian phenomenology (likewise, “pure transcendence” would be a figure of absolute exteriority, such as that proposed by the versions of scientism and empiricism famously attacked in *Phenomenology of Perception*). Against Husserl, Merleau-Ponty’s point is that the transcendent world cannot just be bracketed away. We are beings-in-the-world, which ensures that there is an intertwining that obtains between the transcendent (exterior, material) and the immanent (interior, conscious), thus rejecting the possibility of complete phenomenological reduction to immanence construed in the Husserlian sense of a reduction to consciousness. In the ‘Preface’ to *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty famously states that the most important lesson of the reduction is that it cannot be completed (PP xiv), but what the reduction is able to reveal is something we already knew, something disguised amidst the natural attitude and the ‘thesis of the world’. In attempting the reduction, the ties that prevent it (that which intertwines us with the world) are made all the more perspicacious, capable of conceptualisation. We find that the “world and I are within one another”, and that “things pass into us as well as we into the things” (VI 123). What Merleau-Ponty’s consistent refrains regarding “transcendence in immanence” mean then, is that if this intertwining of what has been designated as transcendent and immanent is radical enough, then there are no longer differences of *kind* between these aspects and this is exactly what his later philosophical notions of reversibility and the chiasm sought to elaborate.

Experience remains ambiguous in an ontological sense, at the intersection of the abstractions that are transcendence and immanence. Given the ontological proximity established earlier between Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty's respective concepts of flesh and the univocity of being, this casts a great deal of doubt on the applicability of Deleuze's second main problem with phenomenology to the work of Merleau-Ponty.

However, in the face of Deleuze's third argument against phenomenology – that it presupposes an *Urdoxa* – Merleau-Ponty's position does have some questions to answer. Essentially, these can be organised into two co-implicated themes. First of all, even if Merleau-Ponty's work does not involve a thought of transcendence in Deleuze's strong sense, do his references to the 'natal bond' that holds between existents reinstate a form of *Urdoxa*, a happy community or "profound intimacy" of existence that cannot be justified? And secondly, do Merleau-Ponty's well-known themes of the intrinsic meaningfulness of experience and the perceptual faith not also presuppose a kind of natural good sense that is more primordial than nonsense, thereby inverting the ontological order of sense that Deleuze argues is the case? On the one hand, then, there is a question about ontology, and on the other, about meaningful phenomenological experience.

First of all, let us consider the ontological point. Although Merleau-Ponty repeatedly resists any philosophy that proposes a coincidence or union between body and world, it seems to us that the manner of their relation quite frequently evinces a kind of intimacy. As Bernard Flynn puts it, in Merleau-Ponty's ontology being does not reveal itself across an interval of nothingness but from a profound intimacy of body and world.³⁰ While Flynn may push the point a bit too far, ignoring the constitutive role of *écart* (divergence) in Merleau-Ponty's work, at various different points the postulation of a natural harmony between beings is apparent. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, for example, Merleau-Ponty uses terms that demonstrate this intimacy: natal bond, natal secret, perceptual bond, pre-logical bond, or natal pact, are often used to describe the relation between body and world, a relation which is also said to be 'naturally endowed with light' (cf. VI 28, 32, 38, 136). As Peter Dews comments, it might hence be said that Merleau-Ponty discusses the perceived world in terms of a mode of "tenderness" (a philosophical theme foreign to both structuralism and post-structuralism).³¹ It seems to us that this intimacy, or this tenderness, cannot ultimately be justified, but some important questions remain. Notably, is it an occasional aberration that mars an otherwise radical new ontology, or is this tendency only justified in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy as an *Urdoxa*, a basic and unqualified presupposition that makes possible all of what follows and rests upon it?

This second, stronger claim, that his ontology of reversibility, flesh, etc., is irremediably *urdoxic*, would run along the lines of the criticism levelled at

Merleau-Ponty by Emmanuel Lévinas: that there is an unjustifiable affection presupposed by the reversible ontology of *The Visible and the Invisible*.³² Although the most obvious register of Lévinas' comment concerns intersubjectivity, this is also a more general question for Merleau-Ponty's work. Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the entire self-world relation (since it too is reversible and chiasmatic) might also be sustained by an unaccountable affection. Now it is worth recalling again that Merleau-Ponty is very careful to distance his ontology from proposing any kind of self-world fusion or union – indeed, this is the point of the theme of the *écart*: while the reversibility of the chiasm may indeed be the general manner of being that all beings express, this chiasm is not, as Deleuze and Guattari suggested that it was, an, “ideal coincidence” (WP 178). Of course, this does not vindicate Merleau-Ponty's presupposition of what he himself at one point calls a “pre-established harmony” (VI 133) – a useful synonym for the *urdoxic* relation between good and common sense. While doing away with the abstract tendencies that are frequently involved in ontology, Merleau-Ponty's occasional postulations of an intrinsic harmony between beings returns us to a kind of Spinozan substratum. However, instead of taking a substantial form (like Spinoza's infamous *Deus sive Natura*), in places Merleau-Ponty ends up supposing a flawed and passive alternative; a unity of sense that supervenes on the univocity that, for the most part, his philosophy of reversibility and the flesh embraces. A form of the *Urdoxa* persists, in this way, in Merleau-Ponty's work, but while a harmony between self and world threatens Merleau-Ponty's account, and intervenes in concrete ways in his text, we are not convinced that it is endemic to his ontology for reasons that have been enumerated throughout this essay.

The second issue crystallises around the notion of *perceptual faith* in Merleau-Ponty. Again, our question concerns how Merleau-Ponty can justify this primordially meaningful relation between the self and the world. On the surface, the general structure of the perceptual faith seems to be quite closely related to the definition of *Urdoxa* given by Deleuze in the *Logic of Sense*. In Merleau-Ponty's early work, this faith is conceived as the ground of all knowledge about the world, notably abstract intellectual knowledge. As is well known, one of the great efforts in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy as a whole is to show how the cognitive level of intellectual activity is founded on a more basic facility at the level of the lived body and its engagement with the world. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, for example (eg. PP 355), Merleau-Ponty appeals to a primordial faith to ground knowledge in the world. In other words, we rely upon a non-cognised level of relation to the world before we know anything more theoretically about it. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, however, the perceptual faith takes a slightly different form. It is here described precisely as a faith and not knowledge (VI 28). The perceptual faith is the

naïve faith in the world that we have that resists our theses about it. Concepts like subject and object transform the perceptual faith into cognitive apparatuses, but for Merleau-Ponty, such categories cannot do justice to this openness upon Being. But the important point to note about the perceptual faith, especially in *The Visible and the Invisible*, is that it is paradoxical, and that the paradox is generative. The paradox generates meaning, but meaning in itself does not impute or necessitate harmony. Nor does this 'meaningfulness' of experience by itself attribute any specific content (easily, normatively, etc.) to this immediate belief in the world. All of the attributes that Merleau-Ponty ascribes to the perceptual faith – paradoxical, non-cognitive, resisting – are enough to signal that we are no longer dealing with any kind of Husserlian pre-established harmony of the objects of thought to thought itself.

At the same time, the role of the perceptual faith in Merleau-Ponty's work is a serious question that cannot be easily dissipated. We might still ask ourselves whether these complicating terms are by themselves enough to exorcise the spectre of intrinsically meaningful experience that Deleuze takes as one of the key elements of the *Urdoxa*, and this is especially so given that for Merleau-Ponty the perceptual faith is univocally about the world in the first place. However, given the extent to which Merleau-Ponty's philosophy works to undermine the problematic ties that hold between the transcendental ego and the world in traditional phenomenology, it would be difficult to see here a too great reliance on the *Urdoxa* in the doctrine of perceptual faith. In fact, this theme could well be elaborated in terms more felicitous than Merleau-Ponty himself does – along the lines of habituality, that concept so central to both his and Deleuze's account of the subject's relation with the world. It is also worth noting that Merleau-Ponty continually defines the perceptual faith as an openness upon being (VI 88), a formulation that moves us back towards the univocal ontology of the intertwining and away from the figure of the *Urdoxa*. In sum, then, it would be more accurate to state that, as in the case of the theme of the natal bond, Merleau-Ponty's treatment of perceptual faith oscillates between a fidelity to the intertwined and properly problematic experience of a world that we are always already a part of, and, on occasion, a thematisation of knowledge which would be naturally – doxically – 'in step' with the world that it relates to.

6. Conclusion

In this essay we have attempted to show that here are some important similarities evinced between the two philosophers in question, whatever their apparent dissimilarities. We have tried to demonstrate, first of all, that Deleuze's criticisms of Merleau-Ponty are frequently off the mark. The latter has moved phenomenology beyond the trap of judgement that threatened Kant, and the archipelago of problems that surrounded Husserl and his

conception of the supreme genetic power of the solipsistic *ego cogito*. Unlike his contemporary Sartre, Merleau-Ponty did not pursue philosophy into the speculative metaphysics that denudes phenomenology of its value; unlike Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty never retreated from the world of the everyday. Secondly, we have tried to show the very similar ontological positions that animate Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze. Despite Deleuze and Guattari's contentions that the ontological concept of the flesh remains indebted to certain theological and transcendent presuppositions, it seems clear that this is not the case. Thirdly, we have examined the extent to which Merleau-Ponty's work remains wed to a number of elements that abound in Western philosophy which Deleuze groups under the title of *Urdoxa*. Ultimately, it seems to us that although Merleau-Ponty resists the more insidious *urdoxical* elements of phenomenology brought to light by Deleuze, he does occasionally reinstate an ontological harmony. However, far from this being endemic to his 'explicit' ontology, it reveals the difficulty in remaining upon a plane of genuine immanence: a difficulty that Deleuze and Guattari themselves note in their final work (WP 51), and one that we must all vigilantly confront. It is ultimately this plane of immanence, this attempt to make thought and life intertwine, that both philosophers set as the horizons of philosophical activity.

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4. Deleuze, G. *The Logic of Sense*, ed. C. Boundas, trans. M. Lester and C. Stivale, London: Continuum 1993, p. 66. (Hereafter referred to as LS)
5. On Deleuze's analysis, by moving from the more differentiated to the less differentiated, good sense engenders a teleological and linear account of time; the most differentiated is the immediate past, and the least differentiated is the future, which is considered to be an end of some sort. Good sense hence does not attain to the ontologically primary 'eternal return of difference' understanding of the future that Deleuze proposes in *Difference and Repetition*,

- trans. P. Patton, Columbia: Columbia University Press 1994, p. 90. (Hereafter referred to as DR).
6. Merleau-Ponty, M., *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. C. Lefort, trans. A. Lingis, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1968, p. 94 (hereafter referred to as VI).
 7. In applying this analysis of good sense and common sense to Husserl, Deleuze suggests that: "Husserl does not think about genesis on the basis of a necessarily paradoxical instance, which, properly speaking, would be 'non-identifiable' (lack its own identity and origin). He thinks of it, on the contrary, on the basis of an original faculty of common sense, responsible for accounting for the identity of an object in general, and even on the basis of a faculty of good sense, responsible for accounting for the process of identification of every object in general *ad infinitum*. We can clearly see this in the Husserlian theory of doxa, wherein the different kinds of belief are engendered with reference to an *urdoxa*, which acts as a faculty of common sense in relation to the specified faculties" (LS p. 97).
 8. LS 98; In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari argue that this urdoxic aspect of phenomenology also has political implications. They suggest: "are we not led back [. . .] to the simple opinion of the average capitalist... whose perceptions are clichés and whose affections are labels?" (WP, p. 149) They follow this briefly with the further claim that if "we do not fight against perceptual and affective clichés [the empirical mannequins of the *urdoxa*] we do not also fight against the machine that produces them" (WP, p. 150). This is obviously the point of contact between a critique of the *urdoxa* and the political program of schizoanalysis elaborated firstly in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972). For them, the *urdoxa* assumed by phenomenology is not at all transcendental, but is constituted on the basis of the socio-political *milieu*. Thus a certain socio-political conservatism is inherent in the phenomenological project.
 9. Again, Merleau-Ponty also moves in this direction in the closing pages of the important chapter on 'The Phenomenal Field' in *Phenomenology of Perception*, in which an outline for the definition of transcendental philosophy is provided, and it is curious that Deleuze is so positive about Sartre's notion of an impersonal transcendental field (WP, p. 47). While this may be a step in the right direction, surely Merleau-Ponty's ongoing emphasis on the importance of habit, the development of skills, etc., is more empirical than Sartre's work, which exaggerates consciousness' capacity for negation, for transcendence, and for moving beyond and outside of the world of things. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty does not instantiate this radical distinction between being-for-itself and being-in-itself, which befits a philosophy of transcendence that cannot consider questions of genesis and entails that human consciousness substantially differs from all of others. Moreover, for Merleau-Ponty negation isn't ontologically fundamental and he consequently reformulates dialectical thinking, much as Deleuze also does.
 10. For Deleuze, singularities "occur on the unconscious surface and possess a mobile, immanent principle of auto-unification through a nomadic distribution, radically different from fixed and sedimentary distributions as conditions of the syntheses of consciousness. Singularities are the true transcendental events" (LS, p. 102).
 11. At least, that is one way to avoid the problems engendered by modern philosophy's subjectivism. As Daniel Smith has suggested in his essay, 'Deleuze and Derrida, Transcendence and Immanence', there are at least two main ways in which we can question the importance accorded to the transcendental subject: firstly, via a recognition of the transcendence and constitutive significance of 'the other'; or secondly, via recourse to the immanent flux of experience, from which the transcendental subject is but a derivative abstraction. On Smith's view, Levinas and Derrida can be said to do the former, while Deleuze does the latter. Notwithstanding our introductory caveat about such characterisations not being overly helpful, our contention is that Merleau-Ponty, like Deleuze, questions the transcendental subject via the immanent flux of experience.
 12. Merleau-Ponty, M., *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith, London: Routledge 1962 (hereafter referred to as PP).

13. Deleuze, G. *The Fold – Leibniz and the Baroque*, London: Athlone Press 1993, p. 146 n28. This note begins by discussing Heidegger, but goes on to describe very briefly Merleau-Ponty's philosophical concern with the theme of the fold, including references to the chiasm or intertwining (*entrelac*) between the seen and the seer that, as is well-known, Merleau-Ponty deals with in *The Visible and the Invisible*.
14. In *Cinema I*, Deleuze discusses Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the cinema and offers another version of the argument that phenomenology is rooted in "natural perception" (see *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, pp. 1-3, 22, and pp. 56-7).
15. In his book *Foucault* (eg. pp 59, 88, 108-12), Deleuze contrasts a hybridised Heidegger-Merleau-Ponty with Foucault. However, the apparent significance of these passages for the purposes of our essay can be ameliorated by noting the following points. First, Deleuze is never talking about Merleau-Ponty directly, but within the Heidegger-Merleau-Ponty-Foucault nexus. Taking into account Deleuze's method of 'free indirect discourse' (the mode in which he writes on other thinkers), and this hyphenated entity, it is difficult to be clear what Deleuze is actually claiming about Merleau-Ponty himself. In the main, Merleau-Ponty's terminology is used in passing (the fold, the visible and invisible, the chiasm, etc.) but little is actually said about his position aside from very general summaries. In short, this text shows only a superficial familiarity with the relevant texts and we can note again the limits of Deleuze's understanding of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. The discussion of flesh, for example, found on p. 149n36 (and again in explicit relation to Heidegger) presents it as the "place" in which the visible and the invisible are folded or intertwined together. On the contrary, as we will argue shortly, what Merleau-Ponty means by 'flesh' is more closely connected with Deleuze's 'univocity of being' than it is with any spatial metaphors or the Heideggerian sense of place as clearing.
16. In that respect, *What is Philosophy?* is a very important text to consider. By doing so, this essay also serves to supplement and enrich Leonard Lawlor's essay on Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty that largely ignored *What is Philosophy?* (see 'The end of phenomenology: Expressionism in Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty'). Unlike Lawlor, we also consider *The Visible and the Invisible* rather than *Phenomenology of Perception* which he focuses upon.
17. Lawlor, 1998, p. 15.
18. If Husserl proposed a methodology of pure immanence, the existential phenomenologists consider this impossible – which is to say that any complete reduction is considered to be untenable – and their criticism of Husserlian phenomenology is that it becomes an immanence so purified of transcendence that the cogito is entirely divorced from world, body, others, history.
19. Deleuze, G. *Pure Immanence*, ed. Rachman, J., New York : Zone Books 2000, p. 26-7 (Hereafter referred to as PI).
20. Lévinas, E. 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity', *Collected Philosophical Papers*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977.
21. Smith, 2002, p. 47.
22. The key text of Merleau-Ponty's in this regard is certainly 'Eye and Mind' (1961), his final published paper. Whether or not Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of art is insufficient to account for the 'being of sensation' that is the artwork cannot be explored here, but Deleuze and Guattari clearly think that it is, despite constituting a move in the right direction.
23. As mentioned, this discussion in *What is Philosophy?* is the culmination of a series of minor remarks about Merleau-Ponty that can be found throughout Deleuze's work. As well as the references already discussed, comments on Merleau-Ponty can also be found as early as his 1964 piece, 'Il a été mon maître', which is dedicated to Sartre, and in which Deleuze describes Merleau-Ponty's work as derivative and academic in relation to Sartre's.
24. In fact, after *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze more and more speaks of the relationship between substance and modes in terms of a mutual immanence, redeeming Spinoza from this criticism. See, for example, WP p. 48 and PI p. 26.

25. Deleuze, G. *Bergsonism*, trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam, New York: Zone Books 1988, p. 20.
26. Badiou, A. *Deleuze – The Clamour of Being*, trans. L. Burchill, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press 2000. In this text, Badiou argues that Deleuze's emphasis on difference remains merely secondary, and that his thought remains a form of metaphysics of the One.
27. In his essay 'Philosophy and Non-Philosophy since Hegel', Merleau-Ponty explicitly argues that his ongoing insistence upon ambiguity does not imply a lack of univocity; 'Philosophy and Non-philosophy since Hegel', trans. H. Silverman, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy Since Merleau-Ponty*, New York: Routledge 1989, p. 52.
28. There are, of course, other problems that Deleuze has with phenomenology that might be listed here, even if they are not as prominent as these. Notably, following Foucault in *The Order of Things*, Deleuze argues that phenomenology introduces a splitting of the subject (LS p. 100). Phenomenology is envisaged as instigating a radical cleavage of consciousness into the reflective cogito and the pre-reflective or tacit cogito, and it is true that not only in Husserl, but also in the work of Sartre and the early work of Merleau-Ponty, this distinction is an important feature.
29. The relationship between subjectivity and habituality is also a concern discussed in many of Deleuze's works, notably *Empiricism and Subjectivity* (1953), *Difference and Repetition*, and, in a different way, *Anti-Oedipus* (1972). In all these texts, the first two particularly, Deleuze is concerned to describe the way in which the subject as a coherent active being must be based on fundamental sets of habits acquired by a passive 'larval self', which then generate the complexity necessary for such activity. In the words of Gilbert Simondon, whose work is essential for Deleuze, part of the movement of individuation, which proceeds from pre-individual states of affairs, is effected by habit.
30. Flynn, B. 'The Question of Ontology: Sartre and Merleau-Ponty' in *The Horizons of the Flesh: Critical Perspectives on the Thought of Merleau-Ponty*, ed. T. Gillian, Urbana: Southern Illinois University Press 1973.
31. Dews, P. *The Logics of Disintegration*, London: Verso 1987, p. 134.
32. For a detailed discussion of this, see Reynolds, J. 'Merleau-Ponty, Levinas and the Alterity of the Other', *Symposium* 6, no. 1 (2002), pp. 63–78, where it is argued that it is partly Merleau-Ponty's preoccupation with refuting the Sartrean model of conflict that is responsible for the affectionate tenor of the former's work – in other words, it is not something endemic to the ontology itself.