

CHAPTER 1

Inside and Outside

ONTOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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The idea is this level, this dimension. It is therefore not a *de facto* invisible, like an object hidden behind another, and not an absolute invisible, which would have nothing to do with the visible. Rather it is the invisible *of* this world, that which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible, its own and interior possibility, the Being of this being

—Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*¹

In the field of power as a problem, thinking involves the transmission of particular features: it is a dice-throw. What the dice-throw represents is that thinking always comes from the outside. . .

—Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*²

There is an inner life. It is the life of thought, the life of the heart, the life of dream and memory. These are interiors that encounter lines of exterior force that shape, fold, or break them. Exteriority is an outer bound where thought and words unravel in the enigmas of desire, the sublime, forgetting, silence, solitude, suffering, night, death, and nothingness. It is philosophically difficult to speak of interiority in light of the weight of the outside. Image dominates

word, information replaces thought, and either interiors are erased or they are so reduced in significance as to command only marginal philosophical attention. What used to be the most important subject for philosophical attention, consciousness, thought, or reflection, becomes one of the least important.

Not only in modern philosophy, but in our best social scientists, philosophers of social science, and philosophers of history, the inside has inevitably been set in opposition to the outside, consciousness to thing, for-itself to in-itself, knowledge to power, creating the syllabus of philosophic difficulties that flow from dualism. Kant described time as the “inner” form of intuition, Marx found the human species-being in free, “self-conscious” activity, Collingwood referred to thought as the “inside” of historical events, and Max Weber contrasted the “outside” of cultural phenomena with a “within” that bestows “significance” (*Sinn*). Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of our “being-in-the-world” and ontology of visible and in-the-visible no less demand from us an account of the meaning, force, and variations of the “inside.”

The problem of this chapter was referenced in the subtitle of Levinas’s *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, published in the same year as work on *The Visible and the Invisible* was brought to a close (1961). It was taken up by Foucault’s reflections on the fiction of Maurice Blanchot entitled “Thought from the Outside” (1966), and once again in Deleuze’s critical commentary on Foucault in chapters entitled “The Thought of the Outside (Power)” and “Foldings, or the Inside of Thought” (1986).³ In his chapter entitled “The Experience of the Outside,” Foucault traced the genealogy of the thought from the outside, the first renderings of which he referred to Sade and Holderlin.⁴ Sade gave voice to the nakedness of desire that outrages religious and moral law, while the poetry of Holderlin manifested the shimmering absence of gods and the obligation to wait for the healing of “God’s failing.” Both authors worked against the grain of the Enlightenment,⁵ in the era of Kant, Hegel, and Marx that demanded the total interiorization of experience, the end of all alienation, the humanization of nature, and the creation of the treasures of heaven on earth. From Sade and Holderlin, the lineage of exteriority extends through Nietzsche’s attack on Western metaphysics as tied to grammar and to those who hold the power over how and to whom we shall speak, to Bataille’s discourse of ruptured subjectivity, eros, and transgression, and to Blanchot.⁶

The thesis of the authors of exteriority may be summarized more or less strongly. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas contended that Being *is* exteriority, and “no thought could better obey Being than by allowing itself to be dominated by this exteriority.”⁷ This is a thesis of the *philosophical privilege* of the outside. For Levinas, not even language can bind self to the other, for no concept can lay hold of the alterity of the face to face. No idea is capable of ab-

sorbing the face of the other in the contemplative soul. Genuine language is produced only in the face-to-face relation as teaching, a way for truth to be created such that it is not the work of my consciousness and could not be derived from my own interiority. Language, therefore, confirms the abyss of separation of inside and outside, and affirms the philosophical primacy of the outside.

Levinas's thesis of the philosophical privilege of exteriority (the other, the face, God) is milder than what we find in the middle to late texts by Foucault on the history of discipline and punishment and of sexuality. There the notion is probably best expressed as a *constructionist* one, that thought, knowledge, and self are historical effects that arise from the invisible power structures that discipline docile bodies. The culturally constructed "soul" becomes the prison of the body⁸ as the invisible lines of exterior force double themselves in interior self-reflection. In his book on *Foucault*, Deleuze articulated Foucault's position by using the image of the dice-throw in which the faces of the dice that come up are the result of the exterior forces at play in their tumble. "There is a liberation of forces which come from the outside and exist only in a mixed-up state of agitation, modification and mutation. In truth, they are dice-throws, for thinking involves throwing the dice."⁹

The constructionist thesis on the power of exteriority over interiority escalates into an explicit criticism of the ontology of Merleau-Ponty, which Foucault had already hinted at in the foreword to the English edition of *The Order of Things* when he took the trouble to single out phenomenology as a philosophy of subjectivity and as the one philosophical approach he explicitly rejected.¹⁰ If thinking is a dice-throw in the play of forces, then consciousness cannot be exhaustively understood in terms of intentionality. Intentionality is the notion that the world comes to us as meaningful and our grasp binds us to the world-as-meant in acts that coherently cement inside and outside. The dice-throw means that you get what comes up, good luck and bad, order and disorder, continuity and discontinuity, coherence and incoherence of meaning and intention. Certainly the Husserlian account of intentionality as the relation ego-noesis-noema portrays our relation to the world as the conscious and self-conscious idea or mental representation of things. Merleau-Ponty's own movement from Husserlianthetic intentionality to an incarnate and operative intentionality in the *Phenomenology* had already loosened our intentional grasp on the world, but Merleau-Ponty came to understand that the intentionality of consciousness, whetherthetic or operative, is an incomplete basis for understanding our relation with the outside. In the first place, in order to posit the relation of intentionality, we already posit the difference between the inside and the outside. We thereby implicitly reinstate the old dead ends of dualism, or psychologism vs. naturalism. Second, consciousness has its blind spot when

we reflect on our experience or on ourselves, and this is a blindness in principle. Reflection can only evoke our contact with the world and not coincide with it. Third, there are those overpowering experiences of transcendence and trans-descendence or vertical time, in which it is no longer we who have thoughts or speech but there is a Thought and a Speech that has us. For all these reasons, surface intentionalities conceived in terms of a two-dimensional Euclidean space must be deepened by a topological account of the heights and depths of the world beneath and above experience at its horizons. This does not mean that Merleau-Ponty abandoned intentionality as an account of the nature of consciousness and self-consciousness. He simply came to believe that intentionality, whether thetic or embodied and operative, could not provide a complete or exhaustive account of consciousness and self-consciousness.

To this point, there is little to separate Levinas, Foucault, Deleuze, and Merleau-Ponty, all of whom, in varying ways, turned philosophy toward the tasks of intellectual archeology. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas had written: "One of the principal theses of this work is that the noesis-noema structure is not the primordial structure of intentionality."¹¹ Nevertheless, in a fashion similar to Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty sought to go beyond a philosophy of our being-in-the-world to a philosophy of Being. Deleuze, on behalf of Foucault, argues that this movement to Being is too rapid, it rushes things, for it still assumes that we are able to find a voice, a language in which Being will speak and disclose itself, once again interlacing knowledge and Being, articulating the chiasm of thing and word. This model of the interlacing of visible and articulable (invisible), does little more than reestablish the Platonic model of Being = Knowing as a replacement for the model of subjective intentionality. "But this interlacing is in fact a stranglehold,"¹² and Merleau-Ponty remains a philosopher of interiority and immanence seeking the adequation of Knowledge and Being.

In beginning to reflect on this reading of Merleau-Ponty, it would be tempting, although ultimately disingenuous, to make an argument for including Merleau-Ponty among the philosophers of exteriority in light of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of our incarnation and his own path away from intellectualism and the philosophy of consciousness. The preface to the *Phenomenology of Perception* proclaimed: "Truth does not 'inhabit' only 'the inner man,' or more accurately, there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself."¹³ This was written against Husserl's reappropriation at the end of *Cartesian Meditations* of Augustine's thesis that "truth dwells in the inner man." The denial of an "inner man" is a forceful rejection of all philosophies of reflection, Augustinian, Cartesian, and Husserlian. The reflection of Husserlian intuition does not give us the things themselves, for

both thought and the world are an ongoing genesis, and thought always exists in language as a more and less faithful articulation of the world and itself. Reflection must be replaced with a hyperreflection, an interrogative articulation that is as originary, creative, and promiscuous as the visible and as subtle, dimensional, and horizontal as the invisible.

Nevertheless, Merleau-Ponty's objections to Husserlian reflection cannot be taken as a declaration for exteriority. There is no inner man as pure, reduced *ego cogito*, yet there remains an inner life and an approach to the interior heart of Being. The *Phenomenology* says that "we present our thought to ourselves through internal or external speech."¹⁴ *The Visible and the Invisible* sought to develop an "endo-ontology," an "intra-ontology," which is articulation of an "ontology from within."¹⁵ Jean-Francois Lyotard has said that though Merleau-Ponty was "one of the least arrogant of philosophers" it remains the case that "the arrogance of philosophers is metaphysics."¹⁶ Though *The Visible and the Invisible* is exceedingly hesitant to make proclamations, nevertheless, Merleau-Ponty's lateral ontology concludes that Being is depth, Being is dimensionality, Being is horizon, Being is invisibility.¹⁷ In contrast to both versions of the thesis of exteriority, Merleau-Ponty described human being as being-in-the-world, and Being as invisibility. There can be no denying that this is a philosophy and a thought of the inside. The question to be asked is whether this "inside" is a "stranglehold."

There has been a pervasive fault in the philosophical use of the term *in* to construe the inside in a spatializing sense. Thereby we are led to think of consciousness, thought, word, and significance as located in a space or container, as "wine is in the jar." This is why it is always worth being reminded that in saying we are being-in the-world we mean that we are "l'être *au* monde." We are not "l'être *dans* le monde," which might tempt us to search for our being in the room that contains us. This is not to deny that a geographic space or landscape can become for us a place of habitation with which we dwell. Quite the opposite. It is to say that we must beware of spatializing mind and Being, and that to say we are in the world is to say that it is our inseparable habitation. In accord with Aristotle's analysis in the *Physics*, this is the sense in which we use the word *in*, to designate encompassment or inclusion as the part/whole relationship, for example, when we say that "she is in the family," "health is in the body," "science is in her soul," or "metaphysics is in his blood."¹⁸ Merleau-Ponty wrote: "I must no longer think myself *in the world* in the sense of ob-jective spatiality, which amounts to autopoising myself and installing myself in *Ego uninteressiert* (disinterested Ego)."¹⁹ We dwell in the world, it is our inhabitation. This is why spatial metaphors are an exceeding danger for understanding our interiority as inhabitation and inclusion. If we

must be spatial, it is better to say not that our inner and spiritual life is inside us, but in front of us in the places with which we dwell and the relationships we treasure, or that it is above us in the sky that lightens and the stars that warm, or that it is beneath us in the shadows of the dusk, the earth and water that sustain, and the memories of graves and dead loves. Metaphors such as “dice-throw” or the “fold” at the intersection of “lines of exterior force” inevitably mislead as to the nature of the inner life.

Though he was aware of the dangers, Merleau-Ponty’s own account of Being is not altogether free of spatializing metaphors. The “fold” of subjectivation or thinking, so much highlighted by Deleuze, is a term introduced by Merleau-Ponty.²⁰ Our inhabitation is itself both held and holding within Being, that is, the ongoing genesis of inclusion and exclusion, encompassing and marginalizing, identity and difference, self and alterity. This crossing over from inside to outside easily leads us to spatial metaphors of folding over, the hollow of Being, two laps, two leaves, two sides of an abyss, a glove turned inside-out. Even the term “element” in the Greek sense, to which Merleau-Ponty analogized the term *Flesh*, is subject to the same danger. Moreover, *so is the term Flesh itself*. Flesh is *la chair*, meat. These spatializing metaphors tempt us to begin making two-dimensional line drawings of Being,²¹ and to make of Flesh an impossibility, for space without time is a static ontological region in which exclusion and laws of either/or dominate. In a static moment, to be in two different spaces is a geometer’s fiction. We must rid ourselves of spatializing being-in-the-world and Being as a “total philosophical error.” From this point of view, Being as Flesh is imbued with the same philosophical dangers of monism as Spinoza’s doctrine of Substance, and one would prefer Heidegger’s account of Being as Time.

The genius of Merleau-Ponty’s name for Being, Flesh, is that it gives us a flesh-and-blood feel and smell for what Time is. Merleau-Ponty did not want an abstract concept—Substance, Time—to carry the heaviest philosophical weight of our encompassment, our origin and our end. Truly, neither was he content with the elemental terms of the Greek alchemy. The Milesian elements were the presuppositions in which things have their origin and life, and to which they return in death. The Greek elements, were, therefore, eternal. Merleau-Ponty gave us a rich and long list of temporal metaphors for Flesh as a genesis: emergence, transcendence, coming of itself to itself, coiling up, reversal, doubling back, divergence from inside to outside. These are the more helpful metaphors that avoid spatializing inside and outside when thinking of Being as “in-the-visible.” The Flesh is flesh and blood Time. It is the explosion of seed pods, united and separated, it is the dehiscence of the colors of fire, it is the labor of pregnancy, the joy and pain of new life and separation, it is the

shock of death and the work of mourning and grieving. "I call the world flesh," Merleau-Ponty wrote, "in order to say that it is a *pregnancy* of possibles."²² Flesh is the name for the ontological hinge on which the outside passes over to the inside and inside passes over to outside. Flesh is not a totalizing stranglehold of Being-Knowing, for the Flesh that is flesh-and-blood time is as inscrutable, strange, foreign, and other as it is colorful, creative, and promiscuous. This is why Merleau-Ponty's ontology is not an idealism nor purely a Thought from the Inside. Though the relation of our being to the world is inhabitation or part/whole, and though the relation of our being-in-the-world to Flesh is also that of encompassing or part/whole, this ontology does not collapse all relations into internal relations. The whole of which all things are part is itself porous and polymorphous. We should not be unhappy with characterizing this as a double-aspect ontology, as Merleau-Ponty himself has given his assent to doing,²³ as long as we speak of Flesh as Time and not as Substance. In discussing Sartre's dualist ontology of being and nothingness, Merleau-Ponty commented: "For me it is structure or transcendence that explains, and being and nothingness [in-itself and for-itself] are its two abstract properties."²⁴ Regardless of vocabulary and philosophic taxonomy, nothing is to be gained from opposing the authors of exteriority who speak to us so profoundly against a supposed Thought from the Inside, for Interiority and Exteriority share a bond by birth as nonidentical twins, they are flesh and blood time that at any moment unravel and turn the one into the other. This hinge and this turning has been poignantly captured in a few lines from a poem by Antonin Artaud: "There is a mind in the flesh, but a mind as quick as lightning. And yet the agitation of the flesh partakes of the mind's higher matter."²⁵

If it is important not to divest the inside of its outside, it is also important not to fall prey to identifying the inside with the right side and the outside with the world's wrong side. It is undeniable that inside and outside bear moral as well as ontological weight and meaning, and the lineage of the authors of exteriority, Sade to Foucault, is also the lineage of outsiders. There is a well-known story, entitled not "Inside and Outside" but "The Right Side and the Wrong Side" ("L'Envers et l'endroit"). It is a brief and poignant account of a woman encumbered by an inheritance too small to change her way of life yet too large to ignore or consume idly. Nearing death, she wanted a shelter for her old bones, and used her legacy to purchase her cemetery plot. On it was erected a large, black marble tomb with her name engraved in gold letters. This woman became seized by love for her tomb, and paid herself a visit every Sunday afternoon. She would go into the vault, carefully close the door behind her, and alone with herself, kneel on the prayer bench. One All Saints Day some passers-by honored her memory with violets, and she came to realize that in

the eyes of the world she had already passed over and was dead. Nevertheless, in this way, she regularly travelled from outside to inside and back again, and slowly made her peace with the wrong side of the world. The author of this tale reflected on these events in the following way: "One man contemplates and another digs her grave: how can we separate them? I do not want to choose between the right and wrong sides of the world, and I do not want a choice to be made."²⁶

Merleau-Ponty has given us the beginnings of a postmodern metaphysics in which we do not have to make this untenable choice. The Flesh of flesh-and-blood Time is polymorphous, porous, and promiscuous, interior and exterior, where the life of thought, the heart, dream, and memory constantly cross over and unravel in the enigmas of desire, the sublime, forgetting, silence, solitude, suffering, night, death, and nothingness. "I am not resigned to the shutting away of loving hearts in the hard ground."²⁷

NOTES

This chapter is dedicated to my friend, neighbor, and colleague, R. Ken Forcé (1946–1994).

1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 151.

2. Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, edited and translated by Sean Hand (Minneapolis: University Press, 1986), p. 117.

3. This paper is also indebted to Françoise Dastur for her essay entitled "Merleau-Ponty and Thinking from Within," which she read at the meetings of the International Merleau-Ponty Conference in November 1991 at the University of Louvain, Belgium, and which was subsequently published in *Merleau-Ponty in Contemporary Perspective*, ed. P. Burke and J. Van der Veken (The Hague: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993), pp. 25–35.

4. Foucault comments that it may seem that the thought from the outside was born of the mystical thinking prowling on the borders of Christianity since Pseudo-Dionysus. However, on Foucault's account, the mystical experience of going "outside of oneself" is done ultimately in order to find oneself as united with the most dazzling interiority of a Being who is Logos, Thought, and Speech.

5. For a Deleuzian reading of the significance of Sade, which moves much more toward an analysis of Sade as typifying Enlightenment rationality and systematicity, see the essay by Dorothea Olkowski entitled "Monstrous Reflection: Sade and Masoch—Rewriting the History of Reason," in *Crises in Continental Philosophy*, ed. Arlene B. Dallery and Charles E. Scott (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), pp. 189–99.

6. See Michel Foucault, *Maurice Blanchot, The Thought from the Outside*, trans. Brian Massumi (New York: Zone Books, 1987), pp. 16–19.

7. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 290.
8. This is Foucault's remarkable turn of phrase and inversion of Plato's *Phaedo* in *Discipline and Punish*: "The soul is the instrument and effect of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body." See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), p. 30.
9. Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. 87.
10. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, English translation of *Les mots et les choses*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), p. xiv.
11. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 294.
12. Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. 112.
13. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), p. xi.
14. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 177.
15. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, pp. 226, 225, 237.
16. Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Philosophy and Painting in the Age of Their Experimentation: Contribution to an Idea of Postmodernity," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), p. 331. This essay first appeared in *Camera Obscura*, no. 12 (1984): 110–25.
17. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, pp. 227, 237.
18. Here, I am relying upon Aristotle's analysis of the eight senses of the word *in* that is found in the *Physics*, Book IV, 3. The analysis occurs in the context of Aristotle's discussion of the category of place. The Oxford English Dictionary lists forty definitions of "in" as a preposition and twenty-one definitions of "in" as an adverb of motion or direction, e.g., "he went in."
19. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 227.
20. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 227.
21. See Deleuze's line drawing of the line of the outside and the fold of subjectivation or thinking, in *Foucault*, p. 120, which appears to be a diagram of the stratified and highly organized field of present, past, and future. We should be mindful that Deleuze also sometimes diagrams the deterritorialized and destratified assemblages that express the simultaneity of past, present, and future.
22. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 250.
23. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 237.
24. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 237.
25. Artaud's poem is entitled "The Situation of the Flesh," and also contains these remarkable lines on interiority and exteriority: "It seems to me one must above all reckon with man's incomprehensible magnetism and with what, for want of a more telling phrase, I am forced to call his life-force. My reason will certainly one day have to receive these unformulated forces exteriorly shaped like a cry which are besieging me, and they may then supplant higher thought. There are intellectual cries, cries which stem from the marrow's delicacy. This is what I personally call the Flesh." Antonin Artaud, *Collected Works*, Volume One, trans. Victor Corti (London: John Calder, 1978), pp. 164–65.

26. Albert Camus, "The Right Side and the Wrong Side," in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, ed. Philip Thody, trans. Ellen Conroy Kennedy (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p. 61. Camus's own reflections on this story also include the remark: "It's odd all the same to live among people who are in such a hurry" (p. 61).

27. Edna St. Vincent Millay, "Dirge Without Music," from the collection *The Buck in Snow* (1928), reprinted in *Selected Poems of Edna St. Vincent Millay: the Centenary Edition*, Colin Falck (New York: Harper, 1991), p. 79.