INTRODUCTION

> In fact I cannot totally grasp all that I am. Thus the mind is not large enough to contain itself: but where can that part be which it does not contain? Is it outside itself and not within? How can it not contain itself?
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> —Augustine, *Confessions*

"*Who Comes After the Subject?*": this title of a 1991 collection of essays edited by Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy reflects a certain anxiety felt by many contemporary thinkers concerning the status of the modern subject (in the ontological, epistemological, and ethico-political senses). The modern concept of the 'subject,' as it is developed, for example, in the philosophies of Descartes, Locke, and Kant, has informed liberal accounts of the self, of ethical and political autonomy and responsibility, of universal human rights. This concept, which, to be sure, is by no means univocal, is subjected to a radical questioning in the twentieth century. This interrogation has occurred, perhaps most famously, in the context of so-called 'continental' thought (in which, for example, the modern metaphysics of subjectivity has been subjected to a 'deconstructive' appraisal), but arguably no less so in the 'Anglo-American,' or 'analytic,' tradition, as well as in the fields of cognitive neuroscience and psychology. In any case, it is not clear that the subjects of the cogito, of rational, voluntary, action, of political rights and freedoms, and of ethical normativity, have survived this interrogation intact. It is undoubtedly, at least in part, because of the ethical and political implications of this development that the question 'who comes after the subject?' is asked with a certain sense of urgency.

In this book, I argue that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy offers profound resources for thinking about the nature of subjectivity. It is well known that Merleau-Ponty criticizes a certain Cartesian inheritance in the modern philosophical tradition, while at the same time criticizing the naturalistic reductionism evident in certain contemporary approaches to the philosophy of mind. That is to say, he claims, at once, that the thinking subject is necessarily an incarnate subject *and* that the body (and bodily behavior) is not simply characterized by biological, or mechanistic, processes, but is, rather,

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the very matrix of intelligence and meaning. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy makes an assertion concerning the primacy of the relation between a perceiving body and its surrounding world. But all of this must be understood in the context of Merleau-Ponty's wider claims concerning the ontology of the living body and its worldly situation. To see this we need to direct our attention to Merleau-Ponty's analysis of expressive movement, for it is only on the basis of this analysis that we can come to understand what he is really saying about the *being* of incarnate subjectivity. I argue that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy pointedly aims to avoid any kind of reification of the subject, either as a mind *or* as a body, and instead seeks to understand subjectivity as a dynamic and open-ended process of emergence. Subjectivity emerges with the emergence of meaning in the world on the basis of the self-articulating character of living movement. What Merleau-Ponty calls 'perceptual meaning' thus arises on the basis of a dynamic that is, as it were, older than subjective *consciousness*. As a reflectively self-conscious subject, then, I am always haunted by a pre-history that both is and is not mine. To be a subject is to be *responsive* to the manifestation of being—not because the subject is passively receptive to sensations, but because the subject only ever inherits, takes up, and transforms meanings that are generated in living movement, meanings of which it is not itself the ultimate source or ground, and which are thus never absolutely transparent to it. Before we are able to clarify this thesis further, it will be necessary to say a little more about the question of subjectivity.

What we are here calling 'modern subjectivity' is, in very general terms, characterized by a certain sense of *interiority*. This is reflected in the essential epistemological concern of both empiricist and rationalist philosophy, beginning in the early modern period: if the subject encounters an external world only by means of *inner* representations of that world, how then can it ever be assured of possessing the kind of genuine knowledge necessary to realize the goals of an enlightened science and politics? A key concept in this line of questioning is 'representation.' If the world of my experience is merely an *appearance*, of which I come to be in possession evidently by means of sensations, then I can never be assured of knowing how it is in itself. According to Descartes and the rationalist tradition, rather than leaving us in the grip of an irremediable scepticism, the conception of the subject as interiority (that of a *res cogitans* that can be essentially distinguished from the *extended* things making up the external world) provides us with the only means of ever truly overcoming scepticism. While it is true, according to the rationalists, that experience provides me merely with a representation of the world, this does not mean that I am simply passively dependent upon sensations, subject to the vagaries of passing affections. Rather, my representation of the world is characterized by a kind of

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lawfulness and coherence whose grounds I can discover, by means of reflection, in pure thought, in those 'clear and distinct ideas' the deployment of which is my sole means of making sense of the world. It is, then, for this tradition, in subjectivity itself that the grounds of universality, necessity, truth, objectivity, and ethical normativity, are to be sought. In the notion of the subject as a subject of representations, the tradition that Merleau-Ponty calls "intellectualism" locates the grounds of a norm of self-responsibility, of rational self-consistency and dedication to universal truth, precisely *in* the experience of interiority. What is essential to this concept of the subject is its difference from anything worldly, a difference of which it assures itself by means of philosophical reflection. This absolute difference between the 'I' and the world is reflected in a series of conceptual oppositions (flowing from the opposition of pure thought to sensation) that seem to govern modern thought: autonomy and heteronomy, understanding and intuition, activity and passivity, mind and body, self and other, the 'for itself' and the 'in itself.' It is this series of oppositions that has become questionable for contemporary thinking.

To say that this determination of the essence of modern subjectivity (according to the categories of interiority, autonomy, reason) has been particularly destabilized in the twentieth century is, in one sense, arguably misleading—it has, perhaps, never ceased to be unstable. But there is a particular way in which, in the twentieth century, this concept of subjectivity has been confronted with the problem of language. Jacques Derrida (whom we will consider in chapter 4), for example, argues that the notion of the self-presence of the thinking subject (which, he says, is implied in the very concept of 'consciousness') is a metaphysical determination that is contested from within by a dependence of thinking on language. According to Derrida, if the essence of subjectivity is determined as consciousness, the presence of the self to itself in the interiority of pure thought, then it must also be admitted that the experience of self-presence presupposes an experience of language. Ideality, for Derrida, is subtended by language, which is to say that it is dependent on signs whose meaning is never stable because the meaning of signs is a function of their difference from other signs within an existing system of language. On the one hand, ideality is made possible by signification, but, on other hand, since ideality implies the trans-temporal identity of a meaning, this very dependence undermines ideality as such. This would mean that the self-identity of the subject, of the 'I think,' is precisely also a dependence on difference. And the sense of the interiority of the subject, its difference from anything worldly, masks its dependence on historical languages, and, in connection with this, intersubjectivity, culture, and so forth. Since all meaning is dependent on language, there is, according to Derrida, no identity that is not also traversed by what he calls

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"*différance*." He writes, "This movement of *différance* is not something that happens to a transcendental subject; it produces a subject."[1]

There is a superficial (but, in my view, not insignificant) resemblance between this claim and those of Daniel Dennett, who says that selves are to be understood as "centres of narrative gravity." The 'conscious' self is, in his view, a *function*, rather than the *source*, of the things we *say* about the nature of self and consciousness: "Our tales are spun, but for the most part we don't spin them; they spin us. Our human consciousness, and our narrative selfhood, is their product, not their source."[2] There are profound differences between the philosophies of Dennett and Derrida, but they share the view that what is called consciousness, the sense of subjective self-presence, is subtended by language, and that this recognition must profoundly alter the way in which we conceive of subjectivity.

This challenge of language dovetails with other challenges to the modern subject, having to do with temporality, embodiment, and intersubjectivity. For example, Husserl's analyses of 'time-consciousness' show that there is no punctual 'now' in experience, that experience thus takes the form of a temporal unfolding in which the very presence of objects, including ideal objects, is dependent upon a non-presence with which the phenomenal *present* is necessarily compounded. Thus, at least according to some of Husserl's readers, the very idea of *consciousness*, as a presence of the self to itself, is put into question by the temporally dispersed and open-ended character of phenomenal presence. Similarly, if, as Merleau-Ponty and others have said, mental life is fundamentally rooted in *bodily* life and behavior, if meaning is rooted in the dynamic structures of behavior by which I make sense of my surrounding world precisely in responding to its complex demands, then we must also say that 'mind' has its origins, as it were, outside of itself; mind is something that emerges in the relation between body and world and can no longer be understood simply in terms of interiority. Lastly, it has been widely recognized that the sense of one's own subjectivity is constitutively bound up with the experience of others and the experience of being regarded by others. This dimension of subjectivity, already brought out in Hegel's famous analyses of the struggle to the death and its resolution in "mutual recognition," is developed, in the twentieth century, in Husserl's analyses of our experience of other selves in *Cartesian Meditations*, in Heidegger's concept of *Mitsein* (being-with) as a constitutive structure of existence, and in Sartre's accounts of the often fraught terrain of our relations with others. Paraphrasing Husserl, we could say that there is no *subjectivity* that is not also an *intersubjectivity*. The so-called 'problem of other minds,' which has vexed many modern philosophers, is therefore merely a reflection of a certain Cartesian inheritance in modern thought. It is, in a sense, only a problem for a philosophy that begins with the presuppos-

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ition that the subject is an essentially solitary, and disembodied, mind. We can sum up these various challenges with the observation that the subject, for many twentieth century thinkers, is necessarily a *situated* subject. As Heidegger says, using a phrase that Merleau-Ponty also uses, the subject is fundamentally a being-*in*-the-world.

The various spheres that we have just cursorily marked out—language, temporality, embodiment, intersubjectivity—and in which the modern concept of the subject has been challenged, constitute the central concerns for Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, and we will be addressing each of them in the chapters that follow. As I have indicated, according to Merleau-Ponty, the subject must first of all be understood as an *embodied* subject. As he writes in *Phenomenology of Perception*, "If the subject *is* in a situation, even if he is no more than the possibility of situations, this is because he forces his ipseity into reality by actually being a body, and by entering the world through that body" (*PhP*, 408/467). The profound phenomenological descriptions supporting the claim that the subject is necessarily embodied, that mental life is ultimately rooted in bodily behavior, and that intersubjectivity and language are themselves constitutive features of the life of the perceiving body, are among the singular achievements of *Phenomenology of Perception*. In chapter 1, I will offer an account of Merleau-Ponty's argument for his claim that cognitive life is necessarily situated and embodied, and I will do so with particular reference to his discussions of spatiality and sensation. According to Merleau-Ponty, it is only in thinking of the subject as a situated body that we can overcome the impasses confronting traditional approaches to these problems.

Let us note, however, that some of Merleau-Ponty's readers do not think he went far enough in developing the implications of his phenomenological descriptions. According to these critics, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy (at least in *Phenomenology of Perception*) does not go far enough in overcoming the modern notion of subjectivity; the evidence of this shortcoming, they claim, is in his continued deployment of the category of 'consciousness.' According to Renaud Barbaras, whose 1991 *De l'être du phénomène* [*The Being of the Phenomenon*] perhaps best exemplifies this type of interpretation, Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, for all its cogent criticisms of modern epistemology, still retains the sense of a fundamental opposition between subjective 'consciousness' and objective 'nature.' This opposition, Barbaras argues, affects and constrains the analyses of perception, intersubjectivity, and language in that work.[3] Such interpreters of *Phenomenology of Perception* often suggest that it is only in Merleau-Ponty's later works, with the emergence of the concepts of "chiasm (*chiasme*)," "the invisible (*l'invisible*)," "flesh (*chair*)," and "institution (*institution*, *Stiftung*)," that we come to see an *ontological* explication of the results of *Phenomenology of*

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Perception. Thus, according to these interpreters, it is only in the later works that Merleau-Ponty realizes the aim of overcoming the modern concept of the subject. It is common to identify an increasing concern with expression and language as a crucial step in this development from the earlier, to the later, Merleau-Ponty.

Nevertheless, in this book I am particularly concerned with the implications of the analyses in *Phenomenology of Perception* with regard to subjectivity. I have three reasons for this. First, I am not particularly concerned here to engage in debates concerning the chronological development of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy; rather, it is my principal aim to enquire into his challenge to traditional accounts of the subject, and to see how his analyses of perception and expression lead us to a new sense of subjectivity. Second, I believe that the analyses of perception in *Phenomenology of Perception*, with regard to sensation and spatiality, in particular, are among the richest and most detailed that we find in all of Merleau-Ponty's work. Even if Merleau-Ponty later develops a new conceptual vocabulary and further develops his interpretations of the phenomena, we do not find any more detailed accounts of the phenomena of spatiality and sensation than those we find in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Third, I do not share the view that Merleau-Ponty was inattentive to ontological concerns in his early work. In fact, I interpret *Phenomenology of Perception* as a profound realization of what Merleau-Ponty, in a later essay, calls "an ontological rehabilitation of the sensible" (*S*, 167/271). This rehabilitation is effected in the recognition that perception is fundamentally a matter of movement. According to Merleau-Ponty, sensible being only ever reveals itself by means of expressive movement, and so the sensible is precisely neither an in-itself, nor an immanent datum that a consciousness would need to synthesize with other data by means of its own connecting activity. As a sentient motor subject, the *conscious* subject, in Merleau-Ponty's sense, is always already responding to being's manifestation. The sensible, as Merleau-Ponty remarks at the end of the "*Sentir*" chapter of *Phenomenology of Perception*, is, for the conscious subject, "a past which has never been a present" (*PhP*, 242/280). The sensible is, then, for the subject, an element of alterity that ceaselessly haunts its conscious life; it never appears to a consciousness but as an absent origin, or a call to which it is always already answering. As Merleau-Ponty says, of sensation, "its origin is anterior to myself" (*PhP*, 215–6/249–50). In a sense then, as a sentient subject, I ceaselessly take up and develop a responsive activity that is older than my consciousness. And because the movement whereby the sensible reveals itself is, according to Merleau-Ponty, fundamentally *expressive* movement, the manifestation of the sensible is at the same time the opening-up of the sphere of language. The subject, then, lives out its life in a responsive activity that is at once both sentience and speech.

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In chapter 1 ("Situation and the Embodied Mind"), as I have indicated, I will explore Merleau-Ponty's accounts of sensation and space. In my interpretation of these accounts, I will develop the framework for the interpretation of subjectivity that I have outlined above. But I will also read Merleau-Ponty's accounts of these dimensions alongside two more recent accounts of what I will call 'situated cognition': the 'sensorimotor' approach to perception, developed by Kevin O'Regan and Alva Noë, and the ecological psychology of J.J. Gibson. All three approaches to the study of perception aim to overcome the epistemology of representation that is the hallmark of modern accounts of the epistemological subject.

In chapter 2 ("Making Space"), I will draw out the implications of Merleau-Ponty's account of perception-as-movement with respect to the problems of sensation and space. This will lead us into a discussion of the unity of the sentient body. Merleau-Ponty's claims that the origin of sensation is 'older than [one]self' and that each sensation calls for its own 'total space' mean that the unity of the body can only be a dynamic unity, a unity only ever incompletely accomplished in movement that stylizes. Movement responds to what I will call the 'singularity of the sensible,' but in doing so, it incorporates that singularity into the generality of a style and it is this that subtends the unity of the body. If the subject is haunted by the anteriority of the sensible, it is also haunted by the contingency of its own unity. This very contingency is also, I will argue, what motivates learning. The mode of being of the subject is a responsivity to what it cannot anticipate, and thus its identity is achieved only through a constant process of self-transformation, of the formation of new habits.

In chapter 3 ("Subjectivity and the 'Style' of the World"), I will reconsider the sensorimotor and ecological accounts of perception that we study in chapter 1. Both aim to offer broadly naturalistic, non-representationalist accounts of cognition, and, in fact, the advocates of the sensorimotor account have suggested that their approach may offer a way to 'naturalize phenomenology.' I will argue that these kinds of naturalistic approaches end up appealing to a notion of psycho-physical law that is precisely the kind of thing that Merleau-Ponty overcomes with his concept of 'style.' The notion of law, I will argue, ends up appealing to what Merleau-Ponty calls a "ready-made" world, and therefore misses the ontological originality of the phenomena of perception. Most importantly, for our purposes, these naturalistic approaches seem to avoid the fundamental problems of subjectivity.

In chapter 4 ("Auto-affection and Alterity"), I will examine Merleau-Ponty's account of time as auto-affection. I will argue that this notion of auto-affection must be understood as a claim concerning the temporalizing character of living movement. I will also offer a response to those who consider Merleau-Ponty's identification of time and subjectivity to be

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evidence of a commitment to a 'metaphysics of presence.' Merleau-Ponty's own analyses lead us to understand that subjectivity depends upon what he calls a 'dehiscence' of time, and this, I will argue, is a function of the self-articulating and self-temporalizing character of living movement. In this chapter I will also examine Derrida's interpretation of the phenomenological notions of consciousness and auto-affection, particularly with respect to the concept of the lived, or 'own,' body (*Leib*, *le corps propre*). Derrida is critical of Merleau-Ponty's notion of the lived body and the related notion of intercorporeity. According to Derrida's interpretation, Merleau-Ponty's notion of intercorporeity occludes the alterity of the other precisely insofar as it also occludes the dimensions of alterity and difference that subtend and, at the same time, threaten the sense of 'one's *own* body.' I will argue that Derrida does not sufficiently recognize the sense of alterity that is a constitutive feature of what Merleau-Ponty understands by *le corps propre*, and, further, I will argue that Merleau-Ponty's account of the intercorporeal body anticipates Derrida's own concerns.

Finally, in chapter 5 ("Ipseity and Language"), I will respond to the view held by some interpreters that Merleau-Ponty (in *Phenomenology of Perception*) privileges perception over language. While I acknowledge that Merleau-Ponty's account of language undergoes significant development in the period after the writing of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, our interpretations of the notions of sensation and expressive movement in that work will have already given us the means to understand how it is that language, like the sensible, manifests itself in living movement. The movements of our bodies are a response to a call of the sensible, and, by the same token, a response to the demands of language. Our gestures are expressive and generative of meaning insofar as they articulate and differentiate themselves according to the same kinds of diacritical structures that govern the relations between signs in any conventional language. The body is thus an incarnate logos, and subjective movement must be understood as an inscription of subjectivity in the open-ended system of language, an inscription that is also the transformation and renewal of that system.

Central to Merleau-Ponty's account of subjectivity is his notion of 'intercorporeity.' In this book, I aim, in part, to demonstrate that the import of this concept, which is not explicitly invoked in Merleau-Ponty's writings until the 1950s, but which is, in my view, implicit throughout his 1945 *Phenomenology of Perception*, has not been sufficiently recognized by some of Merleau-Ponty's most influential interpreters. With the notion of intercorporeity, it seems to me, Merleau-Ponty deepens the phenomenological insights, already brilliantly elaborated by Husserl, concerning the fundamentally intersubjective character of self-consciousness. There is, according to Merleau-Ponty, beneath my explicit self-consciousness, a fecund layer of

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anonymous life; it is this dimension of anonymity characterizing my bodily experience that Merleau-Ponty designates with the term 'intercorporeity.' The presence of sensible reality in our conscious experience is a kind of mysterious contact, a communion with otherness, but this communion also always involves a certain threat of dispossession. The sense of anonymity persists throughout our experience insofar as our bodies are sentient bodies, bodies open to and pervaded by a reality that does not wait for us to set the terms of its appearance and thus whose appearance always holds for us a sense of our own vulnerability and exposure. The appearance of the foreign in my experience, the undeniable presence of sensible being, is subtended by this anonymity of my own sentient flesh; in this mass that is my sentient body it is never immediately clear where the 'other' ends and the 'I' begins. Thus, the sense of anonymity is also the mark of a certain primitive kinship between my body and the bodies of other selves. 'Intercorporeity' names at once this mysterious familiarity of my body with things and with the bodies of others and, at the same time, a no-less-mysterious sense of the strangeness of 'my own' body. An appreciation of both of these dimensions, the familiarity and the irreducible strangeness characterizing my bodily life, is crucial for any adequate account of subjectivity and self-consciousness.

According to Merleau-Ponty, a primitive involvement with others is indeed attested to in our most intimate bodily lives: in the manner of our walking; in the way our bodies respond to music; in the solitary, restless, nocturnal hours in which we strive to entrust ourselves to the embrace of sleep; in the way we hold a wineglass delicately in our fingers even when alone; in the way our eyes are drawn, as though by a kind of magnetism, to the human physiognomy of a figure in a painting; in the visceral responses of our bodies to the unexpected touch of another living body. We are intercorporeal selves insofar as our involvement with otherness constitutes for us a kind of archaeological pre-history subtending our present experience: older than any consciousness, but present at every moment, 'in the flesh.' As conscious selves we inherit, so to speak, the memory of an originary contact with otherness. We are, as Merleau-Ponty sometimes says, *haunted* by others.

In this book I argue that no account of cognition and self-consciousness, or of language, can be sufficient without an appreciation of the intercorporeal character of subjectivity such as it is elaborated by Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty's insight into the intercorporeal constitution of the subject affirms a kind of an-archic dimension in our conscious experience that makes it resistant to any form of reductionist explanation. The field of experience that we share with others is not reducible either to any fixed a priori structures located within the consciousness of an intellectualist subjectivity, nor to the objective 'parts and processes' that, according to naturalistic accounts of cognition, putatively subtend our conscious experiences or constitute the

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fixed natural setting of our cognitive lives. Rather, between my body and those of others, from a dimension that precedes both the differences between us and the differences between our own bodies and the worlds they inhabit, there is always already emerging a self-articulating structure, a "wildflowering world and mind" (*S* 181/294). Phenomenology attempts to do justice to this emergence insofar as it attempts a rigorous description of the constitutive relations between a mind and its world, but a philosophy distorts the character of self-consciousness insofar as it allows this originary *relation* to be reduced to one of its terms, to something other than the relation itself. What I believe Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is uniquely equipped to help us see is that, in order to do justice to the phenomena of experience, we must remain faithful in our descriptions to the very event of the emergence of meaning, as it unfolds. This emergence occurs in the expressive movement of intercorporeal bodies, bodies always already intertwined with, and, so to speak, committed to, otherness. Only in grasping the originary character of this emergence can we make real progress with the many important philosophical problems concerning subjectivity and self-consciousness. And it is only on the basis of such an understanding of the dependence of subjectivity on the event of the emergence of meaning that we can understand the compelling character of the demands to which, as intercorporeal selves, we find ourselves beholden in our lives with others: the norms of objectivity in our sciences, the idea of universality informing our concepts of law and right, and in that ethical comportment for which Kant used the term 'respect' (*Achtung*) and which would seem to presuppose a primitive sense of my answerability to and for the other person.

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