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Finding Humanity In The Search For Nature: Adorno, Bloch, and Merleau-Ponty

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by

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Abstract of the Thesis

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There is an air that hovers over the twenty-first century, an air that foretells of an imminent ecological catastrophe. Defensive practices such as recycling, and the promotion of the responsible usage of natural resources, help to slow the destruction of the earth, but they do not solve its impending destruction. They do not point out of the problem, towards a world freed from ecological problems. This thesis attempts to point outwards, towards a different relationship between nature and humanity that hopes to answer the ontological question, "how do we solve the problem of ecological problems?" With Karl Marx we find that this question can be answered by the humanity that overturns capitalism. Therefore, in Marx's early writings we find a depiction of communism, of a society that has overcome the domination and alienation complicit with the capitalist economic system. Here, nature is affirmed concomitantly with humanity. No longer alienated from the nature from which it came, humanity extends itself to nature unobstructedly. From this intimate relation to nature, humanity is in a privileged position to save the nature that is necessary to save itself. The remainder of this thesis will engage the critical theories of Theodor Adorno and Ernst Bloch, and the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, in order to develop a notion of how we move towards the actualization of this dream of Marx: the co-affirmation of nature and humanity. In this thesis I hope to show that neither critical theory nor phenomenology is revolutionary on its own but that these two traditions must be brought together in order to engage historical materialism with the embodied subjectivities that will serve as revolutionary subjects

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List of Abbreviations

CNM- *The Concept of Nature in Marx*

EPM- *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*

HOOT- *Heritage of Our Times*

HF- *History and Freedom*

LND- *Lectures On Negative Dialectics*

LE- *Literary Essays*

Nature- *Nature: Lecture Course*

NTL- *Notes to Literature II*

PP- *Phenomenology of Perception*

SOU- *Spirit of Utopia*

TBR- *Things Beyond Resemblance*

VI- *The Visible and The Invisible*

1. Introduction

Sometimes it's below or behind us, and sometimes we think it must lie beyond the horizon that our eyes vainly try to overcome, but at all times we find that nature is in a relation to us. Its pink petals color the yards that we pass, our heels dig into its moist earth after a rainfall. And yet, despite the frequent encounters in this life, despite the knowledge that it holds the secret of our beginning and the foreshadow of our ending, we don't really know how to relate to it. We know that we don't want to be without it—as can be deduced from the trees that line otherwise colorless streets, and the weekend houses built in those deep forests that would otherwise threaten to envelop us. But we know that we don't want to entirely be with it either—countless generations forged their way towards the many comforts of this modern life, they forged toward this life to distance themselves from those deep forests that build no houses for us. Aesthetically, there is a certain ambivalence between forests and cities, between nature and the history that relates to it. Nature is the origin of a human existence that defines itself by the evidence of its origin's transcendence. In other words, although we cannot deny that to be human means to be a part of nature, it seems that the further that we get away from nature, the more human we become. Technological advancements signal the progression of technical mastery over nature and inspire pride in a culture that associates the ideological directives of "a better life" with an increased distance with nature—not always explicitly, but often implicitly, as a less than conscious approval that justifies its continuation. This ambivalence that defines our 'being with' nature is definitive for our species activity towards nature as well. Sometimes we treat nature

with a reverence fit for gods. Sometimes we act and are incredulous that our actions that effect nature could be considered 'profane'. For how could something bereft of intrinsic value be treated profanely?

We destroy nature. Aggressive farming techniques extract nutrients from the soil until the barren land can no longer preserve our life. The slow but tyrannical roll of the tractor flattens entire forests to make way for factories that will then redirect the destructive energy and engage in 'flattening' its daily inhabitants. But we also save nature through designations of protected land, through our parks that protect the land that resides within the fought-for quadrants on a city's map. We protest against the killing of dolphins in Japan. We petition congressmen to stop the building of an oil pipeline below remote land that we will only ever visit in our imagination. I am interested in the preservation of wildlife, the abolition of hydraulic fracturing practices, the responsible usage of natural resources. But while I think they help mitigate the tensions between humanity and nature in the present, tensions on the surface whose sheer immediacy alone often accounts for their gravitas, I do not think these defensive practices solve the tension. They do not point out of the present into a future free of destructive practices. They do not respond to the ontological question: how do we solve the *problem of ecological problems*?

When we ask the question: what *should* our relationship to nature be? We should supply it with the addendum: what are our goals? If our goals fall in line with those of the capitalist mode of production (wealth acquisition, increase in productive forces, technological advancements) then we should relate to nature in the spirit of those goals—nature as material, nature as something to be used. But if those are not our goals, if our goals have to do with being human, with being more human and creating a world that can hold a 'more human' humanity, then it seems that we must relate differently to nature. Through our actions we must inspirit

nature with our hope for the future, so that in the traces of our actions, we can learn more about what 'utopia' means for humanity. I am interested in what we can do to move out of the present into a future that we willfully create. Therefore, this thesis will not focus on defensive practices that call for the continuation of the present, that hope to slow the total destruction of this earth that is our home. Rather, this thesis explores what sorts of relationships to nature, what sorts of articulations of nature, are necessary to point towards a world that affirms humanity and affirms nature, that speaks to a world that does not perpetually defend its own existence.

In the Karl Marx of the *1844 Economic and Political Manuscripts* we find a rich account of the liberation of humanity once private property has been annulled and the means of production no longer serve capitalist but socialist forces. No longer enduring the alienation that is concomitant with capitalism, the human being glimpses herself—a self that had been hidden by the very nature of her work, by the things that she worked for, and by the interactions that were colored by her work and the things that she worked for. The self that she glimpses is a self that is ‘free’ in that her activity and her relations are enacted in the name of the human being. Her labor expresses the interests of humanity, no longer the interests of economic goals that are indifferent to her humanity. This depiction of a liberated humanity is thought in conjunction with the liberation of nature. It is a co-constituted liberation where humanity affirms nature and nature affirms humanity, and the formerly alienated relationship is transformed into one of immediacy, characterized by a certain thickness that unobstructed communication entails.

This thesis explores how we might get here, what kind of relationship to nature will help us move toward the utopia of Marx’s communism while we are still entrenched in capitalism’s ideologies. After elaborating Marx’s position, I will turn to Theodor Adorno and Ernst Bloch—two thinkers deeply engaged in The Frankfurt School and The Frankfurt School’s periphery,

respectively. Each presents tools that can be used towards the project of 'glimpsing oneself' by forging refuges from alienated consciousness. For Adorno, the tool is the "idea of natural history". For Bloch, it is found in the self-encounter made possible by his notion of "estrangements". Both depend on an understanding of the relationship between nature and history. I will argue that we must amend both Adorno and Bloch by incorporating their gains into the gains that are wrought by phenomenology; specifically, the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a philosopher whose texts are also responding to the dreams of Marx. With Merleau-Ponty, I will move towards an articulation of the relationship between humanity and the natural world. From Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh, I will extend the chiasmatic logic found therein towards the envelopment of the natural world. What will arise is 'ecocorporeity': a notion of 'humanity being with the world' freed from the alienation so prevalent today. When humanity is no longer alienated from the natural world, the relation is no longer rife with ambivalence; it becomes the experience of a thickness—a thickness comparable to that of one's own flesh. It is this thickness that is missing from Adorno and ultimately from Bloch as well, and one that can only be realized by beginning with the corporeality of the human being.

There is an underlying current of this thesis that I should also speak to. I want to extend phenomenology to critical theory and critical theory to phenomenology guided by the belief that both philosophical modes of inquiry are driven by the desire to actualize revolutionary political projects. While critical theory brings to light humanity's domination at the hands of the capitalist economic system through societal critique, phenomenology endows us with a consciousness freed from alienating forces that is necessary to engage in socialist political projects because its account of consciousness includes the *body* that engages in political activity. Therefore with both phenomenology and critical theory we can arrive at a cultivated and holistic consciousness, one

attuned to both the fractures and contradictions in a capitalist society, and the irrepressible wholeness of the human being whose own body serves as a constant reminder.

2. Karl Marx's *1844 Manuscripts*

"Man is a part of nature" (EPM 76). Both human beings' physical and spiritual life are linked to nature. Our bodies depend on the natural world as being that which nourishes our growth—a growth that is at once the expansion of our bodies and the expansion of the spaces our bodies inhabit. It is a growth that is at once quantitative—a multiplication of bodies and spaces—and qualitative, as we grow *away* from nature we lose our identity with it; we become something other than nature. In labor, we express both our species activity and our material relationship to nature. We extend our activity to the natural world. Their comingling results in the transformation of both the natural world—which is now incorporated into a human project—and humanity, whose activity is dependent on the nature now incorporated. Through this preliminary notion of labor, the activity of the human species is this movement of humanity/nature whereby human engages in becoming nature and nature engages in becoming human.

The worker directs his or her activity toward the production of the object. Her hands shape, mould, control, direct, in order to produce something that exists outside of her but whose life is dependent on the expenditure of her activity. Although the worker and the object are separate, she sees traces of herself in the object. The hours spent, the movements of her hands, the vision materialized—the object extends her life outside of her body as her labor finds

realization in its objectification (EPM 71). As Marx writes "the worker puts his life into the object" (EPM 72).

But in capitalist societies, the object that holds her life, that holds a portion of the worker's reality, no longer makes that life accessible to the worker. Once produced, the object becomes capital—property to be consumed by someone other than the worker, that engages in the perpetual acquisition of wealth for someone other than her. Capital calls for the alienation of the worker in two ways: from the nature of which the worker is a part, and from the labor that is the expression of the worker's essence. Because what is to be produced has the character of property, nature—that which goes into the production of the object—takes on the character of material, of something to be used. External nature is dominated. The relation of domination precludes the relation of co-affirmation that was previously described. What is extended is no longer the human and nature towards one another but domination; the domination of external nature, which extends to the domination of the inner nature of the worker through the transformation of the worker's labor as another expression of the character of capital as 'alienated labor'.

When she extends her labor to the object, the object no longer extends itself back to her. When labor contends with the demands of capital, the object, once produced is no longer an extension of the worker but is alien to the worker. The object—the congealment of her labor—is now property that functions through the exclusion of the labor that is its origin. The worker is alienated from the object that is not for her and makes no claims of being from her. The object still holds the life that the worker imparted through her activity, but whereas before, life was extended, now the extension is hidden and the worker and her object no longer refer back to one another. Between the worker and object there is no communication, only alienation. The

preliminary notion of labor must be transformed under the capitalist paradigm as what Marx terms ‘alienated labor’—labor that is more familiar in its frequency yet so much more foreign through its production of distance.

Private property is concomitant with humanity's estrangement from its essence, which is expressed through its labor. As long as there is private property (as long as capitalism controls the mode of production), humanity will be involved in relations of alienation because its labor is severed from both the object of its labor and the nature that was used towards the production of the object. Its species activity no longer refers back to itself. It is involved in the completion of 'socially-useful tasks' that reflect the goals of an economic system that do not refer back to the goals of humanity. In alienated labor, human beings do not act in the name of humanity but in the name of capital.

For Marx, communism is a realized state that results from the dialectic of private property. Although it is not the *goal* of human development, it is “the necessary pattern and the dynamic principle of the immediate future” (EPM 114). The dialectic of private property is a dialectic that functions by way of the antitheses of property and propertylessness, of labor and capital. The subjective essence of labor is the exclusion of property (propertylessnes). Capital is objective labor as the exclusion of labor (property). According to Marx, the dialectic of private property (can, should, might) result in the positive transcendence of private property. It results in communism, which is the positive expression of annulled private property. When humanity's labor no longer results in objects of humanity's alienation (capital), but in objects that are an extension of humanity, when they express the continuation of humanity in the material world, then humanity is no longer fractured but is whole. Humanity and the natural world are in an embodied communicative relationship where the human expresses the natural world and the

natural world expresses humanity. As Marx writes "this communism, as fully-developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully-developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man" (EPM 103). As Schmidt remarks, in 1844 Engels too was writing of such utopic relations between humanity and nature when he "wrote of socialism that it was 'the reconciliation of mankind with nature and with itself'" (CNM 128).

As to what humanity would look like under communism, we can imagine what science—the objective expression of humanity's relationship to the natural world—would look like. As Marx writes "private property has made us so stupid, so one-sided that an object is only ours when we have it" (EPM 106). What would the scientific inquiry look like without private property? In other words, what would knowing be without conceptions of 'having',' using', 'owning'?

Marx describes the humanity that undergoes the transcendence of private property as undergoing an affective transformation: the "total emancipation of the senses" (EPM 107). Therefore, through the orientation of the human to the object, by "seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, being aware, sensing, wanting, acting loving"--we can 'know' the object (EPM 106). It is an image of humanity 'being with' the natural world in such a thick relation, with such unobstructed communication, that humanity and nature can no longer be conceived of as separable, but are in an inextricable relation of co-affirmation. It is the realization that I can *have* the forest so much more fully, so much more *wholly*, just by being with it—by ducking my head under low-hanging branches, by listening to the leaves crunch under my step--than by turning it into property, into something to have, something to be consumed. As Marx writes, we become "the *rich* man, profoundly endowed with all the senses" (EPM 109).

But how do we get here? How do we arrive at the positive transcendence of private property while we are effectively submerged in its ideology? We want to overturn capitalism for the sake of eradicating our alienation, but how do we overturn capitalism while we are alienated from ourselves? While we are alienated from ourselves, we do not know what we want—we do not know what humanity's goals should be because we do not even know what it means to be human, we do not even know what the human looks like. How do we point towards the future when we are blind to our own present? It seems that to become the human beings we want to be we must already be the human beings we want to become. If a communist future will come to be, it must already be within us, it must already be embedded in the potentiality of humanity. 'Utopia' must already be grounded in the material conditions of a society that seems anything but 'utopic'.

To paint Marx in this way—as a utopic figure—may be an unfair depiction. As Schmidt remarks, Marx criticized the Utopians who "remained abstract in their approach because they persisted in painting pictures of what was to come without theoretically dissecting the forces in reality which were to surmount its present form" (CNM 128). This depiction does not take into account Marx's decisive turn to the problem of economics—to the empirical analyses of the economic forces that constitute reality. A turn so substantial that with it we find the reduction of human freedom from activity that expresses the goals of a humanity unalienated from itself, to the problem of free time (CNM 142). His turn toward economics is generally interpreted as a turn away from the romantic anthropology that colors the *1844 Manuscripts*. But we attain an insight into why Marx turned away from the *1844 Manuscripts* when Schmidt writes "Marx gave up using such terms as 'estrangement', 'alienation', 'return of man to himself' as soon as he

noticed that they had turned into ideological prattle in the mouths of petty-bourgeois authors, instead of a lever for the empirical study of the world and its transformation" (CNM 129).

I want to focus this thesis on Adorno, Bloch, and Merleau-ponty whose philosophies are responding to the dream of Marx that we find in these early writings—to the "riddle of history" whose answer is communism. The transformation of Marx's concepts into "ideological prattle" does not single-handedly showcase their delegitimation. As Adorno writes "something that we can learn from dialectics is that there is not category, no concept, no theory even, however true, that is immune to the danger of becoming false and even ideological in the constellation that it enters into practice" (HF 57). Therefore, they unabashedly begin with the fact of our alienation, and they point towards the co-affirmation of humanity and nature. Like Marx, they criticize the abstract utopianizing of "petty-bourgeois" thinkers. Their work is not intoxicated by their own imaginings but firmly grounded in their respective privileged domains. For Adorno and Bloch, their philosophies are grounded in the material conditions of a society that expresses the logic of the Marxist dialectic, for Merleau-Ponty, his philosophy is grounded in the body that expresses the chiasmatic logic of a hyper-dialectic. Although engaged in different traditions, they are all engaging in this aporia of human existence—this strange relationship between being our own becoming and becoming our own being. The route I see these respective thinkers taking is: cultivating consciousnesses free from alienation, attuned to the goals of a 'more human' humanity that can point us in the direction of the earth as a home.

3. Finding Humanity in Adorno and Bloch

A. Theodor Adorno

> "The forest sinks off/ And like buds, the leaves/ Hang inward, to which/ The valley floor below/ Flowers up, far from mute/ For Ulrich passed through/ These parts; a great destiny/ Often broods over his footprint/ Ready, among the remains"-- Friedrich Holderlin "Shelter at Hardt" (NTL 111)

For Walter Benjamin, the ruin serves as an allegory for the relationship between nature and history: the decay of rationality at the hands of indifferent natural forces. Adorno takes Walter Benjamin's ruin—the allegorical image of history merging into nature—and transforms it into a model of philosophical investigation. Benjamin supplied the constellation of nature and history, which, through the image of the ruin "brought the resurrection of second nature out of infinite distance into infinite closeness and made it an object of philosophical interpretation" (TBR 261). Adorno appropriates the ruin in order to make it the model of philosophical investigation. It becomes a way of seeing the ever-present world of convention, the 'second nature' found in Lukacs—"a world of things, created by man, yet lost to him" (TBR 260). Adorno writes that both Lukacs and Benjamin were "heading towards 'natural-history" (TBR 260), but as Hullot-Kentor remarks, Adorno 'Hegelianizes' Benjamin's constellation of history, nature, and second nature (TBR 246). It is a dialectic that points not towards an unveiling of the universal but a revelation of the particular. Adorno's dialectic, presented in his 1932 lecture as

the ‘Idea of Natural History’, points unfailingly towards the dissolution of a petrified reality, towards revealing the static appearance of convention as semblance.

The world of convention, for Adorno, is one of semblance. It is a world that we act uncritically towards in our silent resignation. It encapsulates various manifestations of the universal, a universal that emerges in place of the particular, encoded in the particular’s differentiations. It is one that oppresses us with its pre-ordained meanings and that incites us to oppress ourselves through our compliance and our complacency. When we act in blind accordance to the world of convention we are not free, even if we cannot feel the weight of our chains. But the world of convention is a semblance that we erect and that we can destroy, or at least, transform. It is a congealed nature that wears the mask of an adamantine, un-dialectical existence. Using this mask it hides the movement from which it was wrought and with which it is still pregnant.

The shattering of the crystallized appearance of reality: this is the project that Adorno’s ‘idea of natural history’ serves to further. It is a model of philosophical investigation that requires, not a perceptual acuity that cannot be promised, but a conceptual malleability, a willingness to destroy the concept in order to make room for its transfiguration. It calls for seeing what appears as most natural, perhaps an institution or a particular mode of interaction between parties, as historical; and to see what appears as most historical, as natural (TBR 260). Through the inclusion of its corresponding concept—history for nature, or nature for history—the congealed image takes on a dialectical presentation. Neither concept can be reduced to the other or enter into a process of becoming the other, and this 'identity' as non-identity that results, reveals the entity in question to be nothing more than the very fluidity that it was previously denied.

Nature and history are a set of concepts whose richness is attributed to more than their polarity. Perhaps we should delve deeper into what it means to see something as nature, and to see something as history.

As Adorno writes in 'Idea of Natural History', the concept of nature defies philosophical definition. A definition would call for the concretization of its particularities, It would lead to a confusion of understanding for what is an analysis of something frozen. "The issue is not to define (the concepts in a constellation), rather they gather around a concrete historical facticity that, in the context of these elements, will reveal itself in its uniqueness" (TBR 264). Abstracted from the constellation with which it is engaged, 'nature' is prone to taking on an inert existence, of becoming objectified by the scientific gaze. This is not the nature that Adorno is thinking of, which he specifies as being neither reachable to the prescientific nor scientific gaze (TBR 253). Beginning with its necessary polarity to history, we can glean that nature is that which is not and that cannot become history. To see something as nature is to see something as occurring with a sort of indifference to human history—indifferent to a temporality whose phenomenal duration belies objectivity, and indifferent to the relatively ephemeral meanings that claim to be more than psychical projections. Nature is something of which I am a part, we are a part, and yet, in its essential existence, its resistance to historical assignations limits what I can say or what I can know about it. Because of nature's resistance to conceptual formulation specifically, and to subsumption by all historical constructs more inclusively—whether they take the form of language, knowledge, learned social and institutional paradigms—I think it is justifiable to claim that nature is not only 'not history', but that which is unmediated by consciousness, as the perennial place-holder of non-identity. In *History and Freedom* Adorno defines what he means by nature as "no more than the elements, the objective elements that the experiencing

consciousness encounters without his experiencing them as things he has himself mediated" (HF 122). Here nature undergoes a necessary separation from the physical reality that is prone to conceptualization, and it finds a new existence as an idea in consciousness that gains its power through its inability to really *be in* consciousness. According to Kant, anything unmediated by the understanding is unable to satisfy the conditions for its own existence and therefore can have no correlative sense-perception. In Adorno's 'Idea of Natural History', in accordance with Kant, nature has no correlative sense-perception.

To say that nature has no correlative sense-perception is not to deny its physical reality, but to reveal the complexity in that which it takes part. The essential alterity of nature, the purity of nature that makes up my idea of it, cannot exist alone in reality. Rather, every entity—either material or immaterial— is always an interweaving of nature and history (TBR 264), which I may hastily perceive as entirely belonging to either nature or history, but which never really is anything but both. And my hastily-made perception of an identity in that which I confront is never really anything more than a consequence of my un-dialectical thinking.

So what is the role of nature in the dialectical image? As that which is unmediateable, unsubsumable, indeterminable, nature serves the intellect as the promise of non-identity, as a critical authority that can sever the seemingly homogeneous presentation. It is a placeholder for a meaninglessness that is not an arbitrariness, but a reminder of the transience inherent to the history that nature serves as the other side of. This nature, which is a transience, is a side of every existing entity, and as such, it is what promises that each entity is pregnant with the possibility of transformation. It is what promises that what I see, what I experience, what oppresses me, can be other; that although I feel the weight of the hand that dominates me, that

interwoven into this palpable experience is a transience that can dissolve this concrete reality, that can alight me with the remembrance of my power to bring something new into being.

Nature as transience evokes a feeling of the subject's own freedom. But this freedom is not open-ended; it is not ontologically privileged. It is equiprimordial to a history that chips away at it as it is being chipped away by it. It is a relationship of admissions and curtailments, affirmations and rebellion—the relationship between nature and history is one of both fluid and fractured movement made possible by reality's solid appearance.

According to Adorno, this solid appearance of reality should not be attributed to history alone. A materialist conception of history can be posited, as can a Hegelian universal history, which is the unfolding of the Idea, or Marx's notion of history as the struggle between the forces of production and the relations of production. For Adorno, these varying interpretations reveal the fact that "history is a constellation that can really be grasped only with the help of an elaborate philosophical theory, and not by reducing it to individual concepts or pairs of concepts" (HF 87). Therefore, in order to hold history in a nourishing dialectic, what must be upheld is both the continuity of history that reveals itself as universal history and the discontinuity that reveals itself materially due to the fact that each object holds within itself a certain crystallization of time, that the character of the world is perpetual disruption. It is this latter notion of history as discontinuous that Adorno lauds Benjamin for, but it is his erasure of universal history that Adorno wants to push against. Thus the task for Adorno is "both to construct *and* to deny universal history" (HF 93).

While keeping in mind that history is a dialectic of an idealist notion of continuity and a materialist notion of discontinuity, one that should be formulated as a non-identity of the identical and the non-identical, we can approach particular phenomena—the historical objects

themselves. They are those objects whose solid appearance most readily belies their own irrevocable relationship to eternal change. They are objects that speak to me in a language that I can understand; that call out to me in the hopes of recognition and that I most often unthinkingly answer. They deliver pre-existing meanings that have significance for me because they were posited by a humanity of which I am a part, and I readily perpetuate these meanings through my recognition of them. This is a notion of history as that which is posited by humanity, that which has undergone mediation by consciousness. As Adorno writes, "the retransformation of concrete history into dialectical nature is the task of the ontological reorientation of the philosophy of history: the idea of natural-history" (INH 260). History is to be understood as actively engaging in a dialectical relationship with nature that serves as its other— a relationship of *thesei* to *physis.*

Holderlin's poem 'Shelter at Hardt' presents a history whose elucidation reveals its natural character. According to Adorno, there is "no better model for what I mean by the interlocking of nature and history in a phenomenon, in this instance from the realm of poetry" (HF 135). The shelter at Hardt refers to a shelter created by two large slabs of sandstone resting upon one another near Hardt, a small town in Southwestern Germany. This natural formation merged with human history when Duke Ulrich, in the 1500's hid in the shelter to escape his persecutors. According to folklore, a spider then spun a web over the shelter that hid him from his potential captors. Holderlin's poem draws upon this history. It is a history that is revealed, not in terms of its events, but stripped of this contingency, it is revealed as the nature that remains. Duke Ulrich did not stamp his presence on the visage of nature; he "passed through these parts". What the history reveals is the leaves that "hang inward", the valley floor below that "flowers up". As Adorno writes, "this vanishing of history into nature that we have seen in Holderlin's poem is

also an element of expression assumed by nature" (HF 135). We find a historical moment whose 'identity' is the fragmented traces that live on in folklore as nature's whispers, for nature is "far from mute". Beneath the "profound gaze of allegory"... "history stands revealed as nature insofar as it turns out to be permanent transience" (HF 134). Here, a history both lives on and is denied, and this tense existence is held in the allegory whose dynamism is revealed through its interpretation.

If nature is closest to transience, then history is closest to meaning—but it is a meaning that is ultimately transience as well, as any static existence as meaning is not possible because non-identity is the only 'identity' possible. As Benjamin writes in *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, “nature was not seen by them in bud and bloom, but in the over-ripeness and decay of her creations. In nature they saw eternal transience, and here alone did the saturnine vision of this generation recognize history” (OGTD 179). In agreement with this vision of the other inherent in each, Adorno writes "you may say that each is present in the other; in other words, nature is present in history as transience...we shall also be able to say that history is present in nature as something that has evolved and is transient" (HF 135). To see something that appears as natural—perhaps the ease and naturalness of a speaker—as historical, is also to invoke the remembrance of transformation. History invokes the tumultuous course of human progress, the unyielding dynamism, the futural unpredictability—in short, the transience of humanity that manifests through its perpetual alterations.

We live in a world constructed of both meaning and transience. When transience is sublated into meaning, then everything appears as necessary; the meaning of the world becomes oppressive in its inescapability. The totalizing semblance of pre-ordained meaning appears to us as expressions of nature, as what is natural. In order to fend off reality’s ossification as nature, it

needs to be historicized; it needs to be understood that it too was derived historically and without necessity. When all meaning is sublated into transience, then meaning dissolves into a meaninglessness with a nihilistic character. Here, reality is pejoratively conceived of as ‘historical’—humanity has constructed all meaning by way of arbitrary or at least un-altruistic assignations and the irrational takes over as the only ‘justifiable’ rationality. These are two depictions of the congealment of reality as either nature or history—un-dialectical, they present static images of reality and hide its transformative potential. The ossification of the dialectic between nature and history shows the perversion that occurs to the essences of the involved terms. ‘Nature’ corresponds to un-freedom, and ‘history’ corresponds to a despair of meaninglessness. But when freed from the ideological trappings that emerge from un-dialectical thinking, nature comes closest to freedom, and history to meaning.

It is, I think, Adorno’s project to free the individual from the ideological trappings of un-dialectical thinking. Which, if it succeeded, would present reality in such a way that the emancipatory potential of the individual is always able to be accessed. It is to this end that Benjamin’s ruin takes on an important role in Adorno’s texts. Adorno’s ‘idea of natural history’ calls for the subject to see the world as ruins of nature and history in order to release the transformative potential inherent to these ever-present dilapidated structures. As Max Pensky writes, “the idea of natural history realizes its truth-content through its capacity to *degrade* or disrupt the appearance of what is ‘given’ in experience, insofar as what is given is in itself a reflection of a false totalization of the ensemble of social and material conditions specific to a given socio-economic constellation” (Pensky, 5). By seeing an experience as a ruin, the individual can disrupt the experience, and release the transformative potential that is hidden

when eyes see the world in awe of its clean lines and well-built structures, as a second nature without the recognition that the immediacy is an illusion.

With Adorno, we get a notion of nature and history that is relevant to the cognitive capacities of the individual. 'Nature' here, amounts to a notion of freedom that is the disruption of meaning. 'History' serves as meaning insofar as it is the production of meaning in the material world. The 'idea of natural history' is a tool that helps to free individual consciousness from alienating forces. By privileging the transformation of consciousness metonymically understood of as "thought", we may free our psychical selves from oppressive social realities, but a concomitant physical emancipation is not promised. We wish to emancipate not only our minds but also our bodies. As Merleau-Ponty writes "I am my body" (PP 302). Adorno takes little heed of the affective relations at play between the subject and the world save for their proclivity to be manipulated and aid in the alienation of the individual. But our affects are not only historically determined, they are also natural. They are not only manipulated by predetermined meanings, they are also free from meaning, and point to the creation of new meanings. By grounding his societal critique in cognition and not in the body, Adorno is unable to account for the experience of the nature that we encounter in the material world. Nature that doesn't exist mediated by allegories, but that emerges under our feet, in front of us, and above us while ambling through barren landscapes.

With Adorno, we can elucidate what our relationship to nature should be. It should be protected and celebrated because as non-identity it carries within itself the promise of the mutability of historical realities. But this refers to the *idea* of nature and does not necessarily speak to the nature that I encounter in the world. The nature that I see, smell and hold in the palm of my hand is deprived of its own weight distinct from its meaning for human history. Therefore,

in a way, it is still ‘subsumed’ by history even if the character of its ‘subsumption’ is its resistance. We must continue moving, past Adorno, to search for the nature that will help us find the human being—not as a psyche but as a thickness afforded to a corporeity. Therefore, the next section will discuss the relationship between nature and history as portrayed by Ernst Bloch—a critical theorist who plays with the privileging of the affects through what he calls a “phenomenology of the not-yet”. Through a phenomenology of the not-yet, Bloch hopes to find the human being whose utopia is embedded in the less than conscious traces of reality. Perhaps here with Bloch we can arrive at a relationship to nature that is fit for the humanity who we hope to one day become.

B. Ernst Bloch

In order to *change* the world in the image of the human being, we must first *encounter* the world—a project entwined with the encounter of the self. Bloch lays out the difficult beginnings of the self-encounter when he writes "saying even this: that we humans are, represents only an untrue form, to be considered only provisionally. We have no organ for the I or the We; rather, we are located in our own blind spot, in the darkness of the lived moment, whose darkness is ultimately *our own darkness*, being unfamiliar-to-ourselves, being-enfolded, being missing" (SOU 200). One way, though perhaps not the only way to encounter the self is from the outward in—to encounter the self by way of an encounter with reality. Therefore, it will

be necessary to understand what constitutes reality, namely nature and history. Although every entity is an interweaving of nature and history, what nature and history consist of is open to as many interpretations as there are times in which we could stand. First, I will present Bloch's philosophical understanding of the relationship between nature and history—a dialectical constellation that he embeds in rich literary images. Then I will briefly present an economic interpretation of the relationship between nature and history—a dialectic not based on the maintenance of tensions but on appearances of reconciliation. Subsequently, our ability to affect the nature and history thus understood will depend on our ability to rupture this newly-gained understanding of nature and history by way of what Bloch calls 'estrangements'. For Bloch, 'estrangements' allow the human being to encounter both herself and reality, thus allowing for the potential for reality to be transformed utopically.

Although Bloch creates a model of nature and history that resonates with Adorno's natural history, he surpasses Adorno's model in two ways. First, he erects a dialectical image of nature and history that maintains a relationship to the phenomenal world thus ensuring that 'nature' exists as more than an idea. Second, through his theory of multi-level dialectics he provides differentiated notions of nature and history that can account for a reality that is both a spatial and temporal phenomenon.

In the collection of essays, entitled *Estrangements*, Bloch presents literary images of geography—a term that lives at the nexus of nature and history as a study of both the physical features of the earth, and the ways in which humans affect and are effected by them. They are tales woven around the encounter between natural formations and human history and from these interactions we can posit declarations as to the character of the relation, and the corresponding concepts.

Nature and history are two axes that are not reducible to one another. In ‘Evacuation of the Brocken’ Bloch writes, “it would be just as untenable to designate *natural formations*, or even the whole of nature, as prehistoric in relation to human history. Yet this is what humanism, equally in search of solutions, presumed to do…Hegel made natural time, as mere prehistory, homogeneous with human time” (LE 385). In other words, contra Hegel, nature is not a proto-history.

Nature and history do not mirror one another. The earth’s physical movements are not mere reflections of humanity’s movements. Here, Bloch writes of a mountain scenery that surrounded the events of a cultural history. “Where it once played a part in such events, it now stands sufficiently beside their historical sites—unlike them, it has not fallen to ruin” (LE 440). Yet neither can we say that humanity’s movements are purely derivative of natural conditions. We see this in Bloch’s discussion of Italy as ‘porous’ – a description coined by Walter Benjamin used to characterize Italy as baroque, as without distinct insides and outsides. One could say that Italy’s porosity is an effect of the “Italian sunshine and open air” but the Greeks shared the same air and the same sunshine and yet, produced the sharp contours of classical form (LE 455). Rather, the relationship between land and humanity—points towards the co-constitutive relationship between nature and history, which is exemplified when Bloch writes “there exists no geological interpretation of history. Likewise, however, the landscape ought not be underestimated in any way; there exists no purely human-solipsistic interpretation of history” (LE 365). Already here, we have an image of the relationship between nature and history that is comparable to the constellation of nature and history posited by Adorno: a dialectical engagement held in a tension whose poles are never to be subsumed by the other.

Abstracted from this nexus with history, nature defies philosophical definition. Nature is not what finds itself on the other side of the scientist's gaze—it is not inert, but dynamic; not knowable, but the unknowable. Regarding the Alps, we feel the uneasiness evoked when Goethe writes "the moon rose and shone upon uncanny things"; we feel an impersonal nostalgia when Bloch writes "even Caesar shrank from it and had himself carried over the Alps in a closed sedan chair" (LE 435). Caesar's fear of nature's magnitude is welcomed in contrast to "the over-friendly approach taken by picture postcards and cellophane-wrapped souvenirs that hide nature's true strangeness and terror." (LE 435). Bloch writes that nature can best be articulated as "not constructed for us, but pertaining to us in the end" (LE 383). Or that nature bears the inscription found on the temple in Goethe's drawing "The Ideal Landscape": "full of mystery in broad daylight" (LE 475). Nature is what causes fear, awe, which makes no promises, except for the impossibility of such a thing—in other words, nature is hope, the dream of the actual. And if nature is the stuff of the not-yet, then history, according to this constellation, is the yet, the actual that nature perpetually points beyond.

But the fact is that we neutralize the tension between nature and history with our eyes that are prone to historicize. We do not see nature in its unfailing specificity; we see nature as history. We encounter nature with a historically-constructed sensory apparatus that is inspired by its own will to know, so we soften the edges that used to provoke fear and we willingly assume a semblance of mastery over that which used to master us.

Concerning natural formations, Bloch writes that metaphors are too often used in order to appropriate enigmatic nature under human categories for the sake of understanding. These metaphors anthropomorphize nature and result in such banal expressions as 'babbling brook' or 'trees dusted with sugar' (LE 438). They point to a desire to see nature in reference to what is

familiar; they amount to a refusal to see nature as strange and horrifying. Bloch writes, "all of nature, as far as possible, is viewed organically, preferably by means of a reduction to 'home, sweet home': no wilderness is without decorative lawn dwarves, and no height is abandoned to solitude" (LE 438). In the essay, 'The Alps Without Photography', Bloch refers to "the clichéd storms of the Bernese Oberland" (LE 435). Here, Bloch is pointing out that even the fury of nature appears as something platitudinous; our original thoughts regarding nature have been exchanged for trite expressions in the name of comfort. What is significant is that we are no longer able to *see* a storm's harrowing specificity.

But to understand the relationship between nature and history is not solely to be cognizant of the dynamic interplay between the physical forces that constitute nature and history. The present is not merely a spatial phenomenon, but also a temporal one.

In order to account for the temporal forces that constitute the present, Bloch develops a theory of multi-level dialectics. According to Bloch, it is possible to exist in the same place while existing in a different Now. Temporality is not humanity's universalizer, but it is what fragments us. This understanding of the present is similar to Benjamin's theory of time-consciousness, the 'now-time', which is shot through with fragments of messianic or completed time. For Bloch, 'Now' is differentiated as an interplay of both synchronous and nonsynchronous forces that can occlude any lucid perception of the present. A force is synchronous if it is actively engaged in the constitution of the present—synchronous forces are determined by the current economic mode of production, therefore capitalism is what is synchronous. Like evolutionary lines, individuals or groups may diverge from the synchronous economic system when that system no longer carries the promise of their utopia, when the direction of the world is no longer amenable to the world they want to live in. When economic disillusionment occurs, those who do not

diverge temporally may internalize the responsibility for their condition—they become the cause of their own misfortune in lieu of capitalism. Those who do diverge relate to the present nonsynchronously. A force is nonsynchronous if it no longer actively constitutes the present but is a remnant from a previous economic system. The present-day peasant is an example, for Bloch, of someone engaging with the present nonsynchronously. It is an existential condition that Bloch finds comparable to the petit bourgeois, or the lower middle class, and is a lifestyle synchronous only with the feudal economic system. Both synchronous and nonsynchronous forces can produce contradictions with the present that are either subjective or objective. For example, an objective synchronous contradiction may be the hunger that is felt by a man who spends his time laboring in the name of capitalism. Instead of reaping the gains that his employers reap, he finds that his efforts are still not enough to subside the pains of his stomach, which he in unable to keep full.

Through the consideration of the present in terms of its constitution by temporal forces, a new understanding of the relationship between nature and history must be erected. History here, is fractured by diverging lines that are represented by a multitude of voices. Bloch cites the revolutionary Ludwig Borne for having said that world history is a house which has more staircases than rooms, which Marx supplements with the insight that capitalism is not the only house of history which is to be dialectically inherited (HOOT 114). But capitalism does serve as the prevailing voice of history; it is synchronous, it is the tendency. Therefore, when we look to the determination of temporality's constitution, we find that our perception of temporal processes is a phenomenon of capitalism. Capitalism determines what time means for us. Nature here, in a relation with history that is characterized as capitalism, is understood in terms of its use value. Nature is material; it is what has yet to be (but will be) subsumed by capitalism. Nature here is a

referent of history; the meaning of its existence is seemingly determined in response to the goals of capitalist motivations, which are the expansion of the means of production and the growth of productive forces.

Perhaps this will become clearer through a consideration of the peasant in Bloch's essay, "Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics". The peasants' existence presents instances of subjective and objective nonsynchronous contradictions. An important objective nonsynchronous contradiction has to do with their relation to nature. They still possess the means of production, thus enabling themselves to feel like an 'estate'. They feel bound to the land on which they till, attached to 'nature'—the old soil, the cycles of the seasons: they feel more attached to the material with which they engage than the temporality at-play at the point in history that they reside. Here, the peasant is attached to nature without consideration of partaking in society's transformations; 'history', for the peasant, becomes a temporality of repetition, what is desired for the future is the resurrection of the past. The peasants' feudal relationship to nature is based on a different temporality than capitalism—the synchronous economic system—which necessitates a different relationship to nature: they live in a different Now. The relationship between nature and history has changed. The land they till is not the same land their forbearers tilled, yet, they treat the land as if its meaning can remain unadulterated in the face of history. Because of where they stand corporeally, above all in terms of classes (NOD 22), because of the bleak outlook forecasted for them if society continues to progress, they yearn for the past, engage with the present nonsynchronously and thereby, are unable to break forth into the synchronous present.

Bloch writes that there is a redemptive power latent in nonsynchronous contradictions (NOD 34), a power that can be used in revolutionary projects. But if the peasants cannot

transpose the energy inherent in their nonsynchronous contradictions into what is synchronous, their revolutionary potential is left unused, or worse, used to bolster fascist interests, as seen in the repetitiveness with which the peasants—or we can say here, the lower middle class—align themselves with the Right (NOD 24). When the present remains 'the darkness of the lived moment', the peasants are unable to act in accord with their human interests. Bloch writes "in the darkness…we cannot even see the claws of the lion" (LE 197). Regarding the potential power of these nonsynchronous contradictions, I would like to quote Bloch at length:

> "Today the contradictions of this non-contemporaneity exclusively serve the forces of reaction; but in this almost undisturbed usability there lies a particular Marxist problem at the same time. The position of the 'Irratio' within the inadequate capitalist 'Ratio' has been all too abstractly cordoned off, instead of its being examined from case to case and the particular contradictions of this position possibly being concretely occupied…It is high time to knock these weapons out of the hands of the forces of reaction. Especially high time to mobilize contradictions of non-contemporaneous strata against capitalism under socialist direction. The 'Irratio' must not be ridiculed wholesale here, but occupied" (HOT, 2).

This was written in the 1935 preface to the collection *Heritage of Our Times*, but has deep resonances with the current political and economic situation in which the 'irratio' of capitalism, the contradictions themselves, are being occupied in that they are being made visible and indeed, nearly unavoidable, by those whose lives harbor them.

Just as space can appear to be ossified, such as when the indeterminacy of nature becomes subsumed under the historicizing gaze, so can temporality take on an ossified existence for me. I can feel myself to be at the mercy of temporality. My feelings can be constituted in relation to it, especially regarding feelings of boredom or anxiety: modifications of a temporal lack or excess; and my experiences of time itself are not necessarily determined by me, but can be manipulated from outside. Bloch writes that it is only recently that our views of temporal

processes have proved susceptible to manipulation (LE 484). Speed up a scene of people walking on the street, and they turn into automata. Slow down a boxing match and their punches are mistaken for caresses. "In short, the tempo of slow motion, in comparison to that of fast motion, makes of the most evil document a genial fairy tale (LE 484). But these feelings that are derived from our view of temporal processes are not really my own, they are not really determined by me. But more broadly, within the capitalist framework, I am not really my own anyway insofar as its goals cannot be said to be my own goals. Both space and time can appear reified, insofar as my freedom appears to me to be a weak force towards the project of their transformation. The reification of reality amounts to an inability to see the possible inherent in the actual, to see the real as the bearer of the not-yet. In order to break up their ossification, in order to re-engage a dialectic in which I can be in a symmetrical relation with reality, rather than one in which I feel constituted by a reality that I cannot concomitantly constitute, Bloch introduces the idea of ruptures through estrangements.

The goal is to transform this asymmetrical relation with reality, this alienation, into an estrangement. Alienation is a state devoid of communication; it is a result of the experience of an untraversable chasm between myself and the other. The most effective machinery for producing alienation, Bloch writes, is "the commodification of all things and people, the reduction of relations between people to exchange value, the automatization of commodity circulation behind the backs and over the heads of people" (LE 242). When I am alienated, I can no longer see myself as this space, this time, this nature of which I am a part yet that I cannot know. It is what allows us to oppress what is other without recourse to empathy. As Adorno and Horkheimer write, when we alienate ourselves from our inner nature we open up the space to oppress others because of their inner nature, racism here serves as a symptom of our alienation. As long as I am

alienated from others, from things in the world, I am alienated from myself, for their distance from me feels like a resignation to alterity, rather than a promise of intimacy, and it is only from intimacy with what is outward, that I can have intimacy with what is inward, the self-encounter. But when I am estranged, I see what is other as other, but not wholly other. What is other adumbrates in me—a sort of remembrance without identity. What allows us to communicate when we are estranged is our distance, our difference that is present but not complete.

Bloch writes that the "estrangement effect" is "one of pulling back, displacing characters or occurrences away from the habitual in order that they can be made to seem less self-evident" (LE 240). It is a change of perspective where the semblance of immediacy is shattered just by inducing an oblique positioning. It can be something as simple as looking at a book and seeing it as strange; the way that the book usually speaks to me with its acquired significations then, no longer seem natural, but indeed become fictive, happenstance; the fact that this thing and I have a relation at all becomes enigmatic. And here, from this estrangement, from my recognition of the contingent relation my habit body assumes with regard to this thing, I am imbued with the presentiment of my freedom, a freedom with which I can forge a new relationship, which may very well consist of no relationship at all. And the estrangement, which is the coming to consciousness of the not-yet—the dream of the actual—is a moment in which my immediate knowledge of the thing is bracketed, and only by way of this clearing do I make possible a relation premised on the fact that what is other reflects me as I am reflecting it, and what it is that we are reflecting is the not-yet, in all of its strangeness, indeterminacy, its refusal to hold, its aversion to be familiarized; we are reflecting in each other our nature, that is our hope. In addition to seeing something historical as natural—that is, as exotic, undetermined , as a cipher of the not-yet—estrangements are also prone to occur when shifting the temporal status of a

given moment, that is by turning the present, whose immediacy can make it seem wholly natural, into a historical moment or the past into a contemporary one (LE 245). By historicizing this moment, by inducing a distance, this time a temporal distance, estrangements here “offer insight into what lies nearest, drawn from astonishment at what lies farthest” (LE 245). This likewise supplements my feeling of temporality as natural or necessary, with the idea of time as historically constructed and destructed and contingent, thus alighting me with the presentiment of the kind of freedom that has helped produce those contingencies, that has effected history. Bloch writes “it is good sometimes to ponder the self-understanding of an almost incomprehensible past in order not to overestimate the rationality of the present” (LE 31). Estrangements disrupt this time, this space that appeared to be reconciled, and transform them into places of conflict. An estrangement is a moment in which we live in the world in full consciousness of the inherent contradictions *and* we create the possibility of being in full possession of our freedom.

But it’s not enough to see something as strange. We cannot live in the estrangement, in this disorienting perception of reality. For estrangements can only endow us with the presentiment of our freedom, the responsibility is then on us to engage this freedom bubbling with its own potentiality towards the transformation of this world that oppresses by pointing utopically beyond it. Estrangements do not reveal the world as it is, rather, they reveal I as I am; any prolonged stay in an estranged world negates my ability to effect reality and I revert into a similarly somnambulistic state in which I may not be abiding by the world of convention but am similarly powerless. Even estrangement can find itself to be a dialectics at a standstill that opens itself up to second-order reification.

Estrangements empower by disrupting a reality that is so prone to disempower. The goal of this rupture as is the goal of all ruptures in Bloch is that we encounter ourselves, which means "that we may finally recognize ourselves as the principle guiding every transformation in this world, and without which there would be no process and also no hope" (SOU 228). But even such a recognition is not a promise of transformation. In order to ground this hope, in order to concretize this otherwise abstract utopianizing, we must "shape a path from the lonely waking dream of the inner self-encounter to the dream that goes out to shape the external world or at least to alleviate it" (SOU 237). And this path cannot be shaped by wishful thinking but by carving a road that points to utopia within the actual world. For Bloch, this road needs to be carved in a decidedly Marxist way.

But the alienation complicit with capitalism forces a chasm between myself and the world that cannot coexist with the self-encounter. Alienation fends against the conditions that would allow the self-encounter to be a perpetual state, and the self-encounter is the only thing that allows me to be present, that is, to point utopically beyond the actual with full consciousness of the conditions of the actual. As with other critical theorists, Bloch finds alienation to be a capitalist phenomenon. But the answer to the problem of capitalism cannot be found by yearning for a pre-capitalist society, as Bloch writes, we cannot even say "that a way back exists…this is impotent romanticism, and the least effective means to counter alienation" (LE 243). The best way to counter alienation is not by going back, but by going beyond, through the development of a socialist means of production. A new means of production would then necessitate a new relationship to nature. Nature would no longer be the material of capitalism, which is utilized and devalued in such a way that its emancipatory potential is diluted to a near-state of non-existence. Rather, it would be a relationship in which nature's mystery in nourished, its ability to speak to

me through reciprocal adumbrations, maintained. Bloch writes, “doubtless only a socialist relation to nature (consequent to a socialist mode of production and exchange) could lay hold of the concrete aspects of the badly disenchanted magical sphere, as well as that which appeared in earlier times to be accessible through superstition, signifiable through mythology” (LE 312).

Herbert Marcuse posits what a socialist relation to nature would look like through his idea of the ‘New Science’. The New Science depicts a relationship to nature that would the expression of an art rather than a practice of domination. It would nourish and protect nature thereby nourishing and protecting the individual that lies on the other side of the relation. In contrast, Bloch does not posit a new science that lies so far ahead, as a consequent of a socialist mode of production. This is still abstract utopianizing. Instead, in order to ground the dream in the actual, we must work upon an actual that is woven with dynamic contradictions. As a result of becoming conscious of ourselves, we become conscious of the contradictions of a reality that houses me without protecting me. It is by becoming conscious of the contradictions that we can occupy them; it is by de-ossifying the semblance of reconciled forces that we can see this place as one of conflict, thereby opening up the possibility of failure, along with the possibility of a utopia in which all humans can walk upright. A utopia that can only be reached by grounding our hope in the conditions of what exists, by utilizing a freedom that is not open-ended but reason-directed. We cannot deny all of rationality because it oppresses, we have to point rationality in the direction of the not-yet.

Time as determined by capitalism has the power to alienate us, and space as philosophically conceived in terms of nature—the power to estrange us. Therefore, if we are looking for the self-encounter that is necessary to move towards the future of our dreams, it is not to be found in time with its nature stamped with a price on its head, material used to

perpetuate the goals of an economic system that does not help me. Rather, the self-encounter is only possible for Bloch within the paradigm of space, where nature is that inscrutable figure that inspires fear and awe; where it is the occasion for an estrangement that reminds me that nature is always beyond the human categories we vainly try to close around its perpetual emergence, and so am I. Nature here, is the cipher of the transcendent, what Bloch defines as "that which goes beyond" (LE 345), and as such, it inspires the occasion for my experience of the sublime, of the presentiment of my freedom. For the sublime, as Bloch repeatedly remarks, is the paradigmatic moment of estrangement; the exemplar of a rupture that wakes me from the somnambulistic way I live my life and once awake, I am reminded of my ontology, which is my freedom—I am the not-yet's point of departure. Through this experience of an estrangement with nature, we discover that it is only in contemplation of the uncategorizable that we find ourselves, as the fragile embodiments who bear the weight of the future.

With Bloch, nature provides the occasion for an estrangement that is necessary for the self-encounter. It helps us point toward a future where the world is our home, but it is not itself yet our home. But the question remains: how do we affirm the nature that estranges us, that shows us a part of ourselves without its own reciprocal disclosure? Perhaps the affirmation of nature is limited by the materialist dialectic in which it takes part. The materialist dialectic is necessarily self-referential; nature is always referring back to the humanity that gives it its meaning.   What we are looking for is a dialectic that is co-referential: that affirms nature while simultaneously affirming humanity. Therefore although Bloch comes closer to what we are looking for—by maintaining the phenomenality of nature and providing a complex account of nature and history in terms of space and time—we must again move forward. We must move past Bloch to Merleau-Ponty who himself moves past Marx's materialist dialectic to a new

notion of the dialectic—a hyper-dialectic—that holds the potential for the co-affirmation of nature and humanity that we are looking for. It is a dialectic that would move past the monism and the dualism that the accounts of nature and history have heretofore served as expressions of. Merleau-Ponty writes that "we are beyond monism and dualism, because dualism has been pushed so far that the opposites, no longer in competition, are at rest the one against the other, coextensive with one another" (VI 54). It is a dialectic that expresses nature and history as an intertwining, a reversibility whose logic can be explained by first paying attention to one's own body, to the chiasmatic logic of the flesh. Unlike Bloch, for Merleau-Ponty, this co-affirming intertwining of nature and history is not embedded in less than conscious traces that run counter to the reality in which I live. Rather, it is here, now—an experience that my body has recourse to as it is the primary fact of existence. Therefore, through an analysis of Merleau-Ponty, in the next section, we will further recalibrate the relationship between historical materialism and phenomenology. We will begin with the body and move outward in the hopes of showing that the co-affirmation of humanity and nature can begin with embodied subjectivities who have the power to transform the material conditions of the world in their image.

4. Merleau-Ponty and The Search For Nature

A. At The River's Edge

When the river first emerges in my perceptual field, I tend to see it as a certain softness. Its modest waves have a myriad of contours that come in and out of existence—bereft of immutable edges or discernible angles, the waves' contours are more like shades of color that fade in and out, or a bird's whistle that cuts through the wind only to then dissolve into the breeze. But over time, the river is no longer something 'soft' but acts like edges do, carving through the very bed whose presence determines its shape. Without the river, the "bed" would be earth at an angle, earth at a certain depth. Without the bed, the "river", would be water that spreads outward; amorphous and without direction, it is water pregnant with its own stillness. This river is a common image. The river is that which continues moving, continues becoming, not in spite of the earth that pushes up against it and restricts its movement, but because of it. A certain violence occurs between the water and the earth that defines and denies its expansion, a violence that belies the softness I first encountered. The river exemplifies the relationship between earth and water, between nature and the history that it carves and is carved by. The river is like the irrecusable movement of my life, our history, of time writ large.

But when I say "my life is like a river", I do not imagine that my life *is* a river. I do not imagine the sediment that tickles my stomach as *I* pass through, animals lapping at *my* surface. The river resonates within me, but there is a distance. In fact, it is the very distance that makes possible this resonance, this home-like familiarity for a place I had never previously encountered. As Merleau-Ponty writes "it is that this distance is not the contrary of this proximity, it is deeply consonant with it" (VI 135). The form of its appearance speaks to the existence of structures, buried deep, buried down toward the river's essence that are like the structures buried deep within me. In the river, the present is eternal and yet has never been and I likewise contemplate the infinity of my finitude. The river expresses a certain relationship to

being that I recognize as like my own. Unfailing movements toward a horizon that retreats with every advance—both the river and I share this destiny.

Here, at the river's edge, poetry adumbrates what science sublimates, namely, flesh. In the ceaseless quest to find edges in the contours that dissolve into memories, science tries to show me what the river is, what I am, but not what *we* are. To resonate is to divulge a certain thickness that exists between entities. It is this thickness that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy gives us the tools to express, and in particular, it is the thickness between humanity and the natural world that will be the focus of this section. Merleau-Ponty's copious texts on nature, whether implicitly (*Phenomenology of Perception)* or explicitly speaking to the question of nature (*Nature: Lecture Course)*, point us towards a re-conceptualization of nature concomitant with a new articulation of being, a new ontology thematized as 'flesh' in *The Visible and the Invisible.*

It must be repeated: we do not look for nature so that we can be intoxicated by the contemplation of our origin. Through philosophy we look for nature, or rather, we look to articulate the nature that emerges around us, in part because philosophy's responsibility lies in the saying of what is unsayable. As Adorno says in his *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, "we should insist that philosophy consists in the effort to say what cannot be said, in particular whatever cannot be said directly, in a single sentence or a few sentences, but only in a context" (LND 74)**.** More urgently, we have been looking for nature because we are looking for the human being. But nature never appears alone; it always appears in the midst of engaging in various configurations. Nature appears in society, in history, in my linguistic exhalations. Therefore, if I cannot grasp nature, then I want to grasp its sense, the sense it has in virtue of these configurations.

Merleau-Ponty's texts can be characterized as a search for nature, as a search for that originary experience that exists prior to or behind the thoughtlessness of everyday experience. But we should also read Merleau-Ponty as a thinker looking to free experience from alienation, from the oppressiveness of history's weight. Therefore, 'returning to nature' is coming up to the wholeness of experience, a holistic experience that has long since been fractured by history. The question for me is: what relationship to nature does the 'wholeness of life' necessitate? In order to attempt an answer to this question, the following will be divided into three sections ('flesh as corporeity'; 'flesh as intercorporeity'; 'flesh as ecocorporeity') in order to expand the chiasmatic logic of the flesh outwards in the hopes of bringing the wholeness of humanity with the wholeness of nature.

B. Flesh as Corporeity

Given the impossibility of its full articulation, the quickness with which it moves away from my advance, we must wonder about nature: is it a limit-notion? Is it a placeholder that conditions or makes possible the realm of appearances, an essence that exists only as an Idea—one that necessarily must forever elude my grasp?

In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty renders this distinction that I am referring to obliquely, between Nature and nature, between essence and fact, problematic. It is because we begin with an antithesis, that "one is finally led to treat the essence as a limit idea, that is, to make it inaccessible" (VI 113). But what if we began again, began new, began in such a way that

the question we pose precludes this floundering in aporetic mire? Perhaps we could "redefine the essence in such a way that would give us access to it, because it would not be beyond but at the heart of that coiling up of experience over experience which a moment ago constituted the difficulty" (VI 113).

Beyond the antitheses and their inexpressibility, before the divisions that turn communication into a mystery, there is the lived experience, the experience I have of engaging in an inextricable union with the world. A union of such intimate proportions that through reaching out and touching the world, I touch myself; in pushing to open a door, the door shows me my weight, my shape, and opens me to the extent that I open it. With Merleau-Ponty, we will replace the dualistic cogitations that result in damning contrasts with an intertwining that shows the world as flesh, as the reversibility of my own flesh. We will discard the defunct concepts—subject, object—and replace them with things and bodies in order to re-conceptualize their communication that is an intertwining.

In *The Visible and the Invisible*, particularly in the chapter 'The Intertwining—The Chiasm', 'flesh' is defined in dozens of ways that are never repeated. Each transcends the definition that came before. Each must do this in order to do justice to a concept that is both the cohesion of movement and a movement itself. Flesh is not matter, mind or substance. "To designate it, we should need the old term "element"…in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea" (VI 139). Flesh is what "suffers when it is wounded" (VI 137). It is "not contingency, chaos, but a texture" (VI 146). It is the "coiling over of the visible upon the seeing body, of the tangible upon the touching body" (VI 146).

To understand flesh as a dynamic reversibility, I must begin no further than my own flesh. When I touch my right hand with my left, my left hand reveals itself to my right as having

a certain roughness, a certain thickness, a certain pliability. Through these sensuous revelations, my left hand is a toucher. As my right hand is revealing itself to the left hand, it is also revealing itself to itself; while touching, I also have the presentiment of being-touched. I can then focus my attention on the experience of being-touched. Within the unity of my body is a differentiation of positions: I both touch and am being touched. Although I *am* immediately both the object touched and the subject touching, through the mediation of reflection, I find that these positions are not simultaneous— they alternate. I cannot 'touch touching', as the oft-used formulation goes. The reversibility of the touching and the touched is "always imminent and never realized in fact. My left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand touching the things, but I never reach coincidence" (VI 147).

For Merleau-Ponty, this inability to coincide is not a failure but a promise of differentiation. When thought attempts to translate this lived experience of the body that is a simultaneous multiplicity, it cannot do so by means that are other than temporal. Therefore, the reversibility of flesh holds within itself the potential of temporal differentiation. The inability to coincide, even within the unity of a single body, shows us that in thought, time cannot be reduced to a homogeneous background, to an illusion of non-differentiation; temporality appears in thought as processional. Thought itself is the bearer of a human temporality, and this human temporality is the inclusion of fissures among what was previously seamless. Merleau-Ponty writes that "natural time is always there", but as an anonymous background that "remains at the center of my history" (PP 362). When the body's reversible positions undergo mediation by thought, what results is a reflection that inspirits the body with *duration*, with differentiation in the form of the time of history—a time that is foregrounded to the extent that my personal life is foregrounded. He writes "the ideal of objective thought is simultaneously grounded upon and left

in ruins by temporality" (PP 349). Thought tries to understand the body's positions through thought, but by virtue of the way in which understanding is sought, the project promises its own 'failure'. Thought cannot translate the ruptures that it has itself brought. Through the example of the body, we can see that for Merleau-Ponty, history is born from bringing humanity to nature, from bringing thought to that which is without thought.

Although thought 'fails'—by bringing human temporality to space it ruptures the world that it wanted to continue to have holistically—this is where we see that it also 'succeeds'. Through the human being, flesh is realized as a movement of differentiation spatially as well. Because my body is never merely 'that which is touched', it is never an object and it cannot be said to be 'here' as an object is here. As Merleau-Ponty writes in *Phenomenology of Perception* "places in space are not defined as objective positions in relation to the objective position of our body, but rather they inscribe around us the variable reach of our intentions and our gestures" (PP 144). Yet, because my body is never merely 'that which touches', but in fact has "its own inertia, its ties" (VI 147), it is also not just elsewhere, as it might be if the body were just to be found in the things it touches. My body is both here in its actuality, and there virtually in the things that make up my perceptual field. The things are both there beyond me, and here with me, inside me, alongside me. I am simultaneously occupying a multiplicity of spatial positions: I am there and here. As Merleau-Ponty writes "the world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself" (PP 474). Through the mediation of my body's positions through thought, space itself becomes fractured. It is transformed through its differentiation—it holds as many meanings as there are perspectives. As Merleau-Ponty writes "ambiguity is essential to human existence, and everything that we live or think always has several senses" (PP 172). Through the potential of its

differentiation, space is not bound to carry one meaning; it does not congeal into an immutable fixture. It is always what it appears to be and more than what it appears to be.

Returning to the experience of my body, I experience two modes of my body—toucher and touched—and if I wanted to translate this experience of reversibility into a comprehensible expression, I would say that they alternate. Through my iterations of these alternations, I can attribute a temporal progression to what was originally experienced as a temporal differentiation. But it is a progression without 'progress' in the Hegelian sense as 'synthesis' is never really possible for an existence that is predicated on unyielding differentiation; an existence that moves by negation without cancellation. Merleau-Ponty expresses the relationship between the flesh's reversibility and the dialectic most clearly when he writes, as the last sentence of the chapter 'The Intertwining—The Chiasm', "And what we have to understand is that there is no dialectical reversal from one of these views to the other; we do not have to reassemble them into a synthesis: they are two aspects of the reversibility which is the ultimate truth" (VI 155). Instead of the existent contraries moving towards a reconciliation that is always pregnant with its own renunciation, existent contraries can relish the tension that both attracts and repels the other because they know the truth: they are not contradictory realities, but two aspects of one reality, two perspectives from which one movement is watched. Merleau-Ponty offers the image of a line moving from left to right, and below it, a line moving from right to left. At first, it may appear that these are two opposing, repellant movements, but if we continue to follow the lines of each we see that a circle is formed and that they were but two aspects of one movement (VI 138). If we follow the experience of my hands as touching/touched from the initial experience of a temporal differentiation to its progression over time, what we find is not strictly dialectical—nothing new is coming into being save the doldrums of the perpetual new; nothing is truly

overcome and nothing is lost. Rather, the movement reveals itself as vibratory; like the rising and falling of the wrist's pulse that is forever trapped in the wake of the palpating heart.

In my body, nature is the originary experience of a holistic multiplicity, an experience of oneness without differentiation. History is the result of bringing thought—the bearer of differentiation—to nature. Although thought fractures my body's holistic experience and leaves it bereft of its experience of 'oneness', as the bearer of ambiguity, it brings to my body a sense of the freedom that ambiguity entails. History is the visible; it is the carnality of my flesh that is a movement of intertwining between humanity and nature. Nature is like this palpating heart, buried deep within the chest's cavity, inspiriting the body, and making it possible that these hands can both touch and be touched. But can my immanent knowledge of my flesh as an intertwining be spread outward? Spread towards other bodies so that a multi-dimensional, yet single and vibratory movement can be revealed trans-corporeally?

C. Flesh as Intercorporeity

I can have a solitary experience. I can gaze at the landscape before me without thought of whether others have gazed at this, or if others can gaze at all. But in my withdrawal from others, I do not gain myself. My thoughts are not my own until I write them down, speak of them to others. "It is through expression that thought becomes our own" (PP 183). I am not truly myself until my thoughts find expression, therefore, I find myself through my performance of the existence of others. In communication, "I confirm the other person, and the other person

confirms me" (PP 191). My speech is not the translation of a thought that I left, waiting in my mind's recesses, "rather, speech accomplishes thought" (PP 183). My thought is accomplished by incorporating what I had not previously taken up. My interlocutor's words evoke words from me congenial to her own. Our words are both inspiring and inspired: an alternation occurs between us that brings something new into being that could not have been possible with either of our absences. As Merleau-Ponty writes, speech is a "taking up of the other person's thought…a power of thinking *according* to others, which enriches our own thought" (PP 184).

In communication, I cannot honestly determine what words were purely my own and which words were the other's. A blending occurs between selves that previously seemed distinct. I permeate the other as the other permeates me and what emerges is less a third subjectivity wrought from the reconciliation of our differences, than a dynamic intertwining whose inherent volatility promises its subsequent dissolution. Although we will undoubtedly part ways, the other leaves a trace in me like the installation of new signification, "like a new sense organ, and it opens a new field or a new dimension to our experience" (PP 188).

Peter can share his experience of the landscape with Paul. Through their gestures—both verbal and non-verbal—a common experience, a common world is established and "culture here provides what nature cannot provide" (PP 192). Although I fail when I try to find identity between nature and its articulation, I succeed in creating a community with others. But this common experience is more than their shared significations; their concordances are due to more than their mutual participation in these historical constructions. The experience carries the weight of a certain thickness because what is natural and what is historical is folded atop one another. These signs and these gestures that we use while communicating with another are both natural and historical.

These conventional signs are natural as "there is no single word or behavior that does not owe something to mere biological being" (PP 195). Speech is a function of the biological body—a sonorous exhalation that expresses the basic fact of existence. But every word or behavior succeeds in "breaking free from animal life", in deflecting from biological behavior "through a sort of escape" (PP 195). Every sign, every gesture that refers to a psychical-physical reality, likewise refers to the institution in which it makes sense. Each word exits the body as an ecstatic expulsion, and through this exiting it enters itself into history—it weaves itself into a cultural fabric. The signs we use to express the emotions that touch us with their irrepressible singularity are bound to a community where each uses the same signs to express their singularity, communally. Gestures do not emerge untainted from a specific biological reality and "in fact, the gesticulations of anger or love are not the same for a Japanese person and a Western person" (PP 194).

But these cultural entrances are not cleanly differentiated either, they do not fill hollowed spaces—gestures always go beyond the cultural significations in the expressive act. In speech, I expand the cultural world through my admissions and curtailments. Through the act of taking up an acquired signification, I induce its transfiguration because I breathe into it the ambiguity essential to my humanity. In speech, I proliferate the senses of a word, and thereby increase the world's opacity, even if my intention was its clarification. In summary, every gesture transcends my natural being by calling forth cultural significations that surpass what was signified, and every gesture transcends its cultural signification by calling forth my nature: by making significations ambiguous, transient. "For man, everything is constructed and everything is natural" (PP 195).

Through the act of communication, I can see that the flesh that I experienced as my own body can be spread to a notion of flesh that incorporates the other's body. Like my right and my left hand, the other and myself share a sort of reversibility. The other and I forge a reality between us, at once, multi-dimensional and singular; a reality in which each of us present integral additions as if the other and I are "two aspects of one movement". In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty describes 'flesh' in a way that resonates with the communicative experience when he writes that it is like "two mirrors facing each other where two indefinite series of images set in one another arise which belong really to neither of the two surfaces, since each is only the rejoinder of the other, and which therefore form a couple, a couple more real than either of them" (VI 139). An intertwining occurs between the other and myself that allows for the expansion of 'flesh' from a corporeity to an intercoporeity. And the contents of this flesh that spans the distance of myself and the other, that lends its thickness to this ephemeral intertwining, is this tortuous relationship between nature and history. Just as I intertwine with the other, so nature intertwines with history and what emerges cannot claim identity with either.

Although I engage in relations of reversibility with others, I can take leave of them. I can withdraw from them; hope to find a respite in my acts of self-enclosure. "When I am absorbed in my body, my eyes present merely the sensible envelope of things and of other men" (PP 168). Behaviors and gestures fail to speak to me when I relegate myself to a bodily existence. "I can, of course, withdraw from the human world, but this is only to reveal in my body the very same power—this time without a name—by which I am condemned to being" (PP 168). My bodily existence shows me that I am a body both sentient and sensible: my taking leave of 'existence' results in a bodily existence that shows me the same traces of the expansive existence I left behind. This backwards movement from with-others to with-self, this bracketing of others in an

attempt to silence the human world, reminds me that an aspect of the human world, dwelling among the ambiguity and contingency, must also be this vibratory differentiation that I experience in my own body, this intertwining as flesh here thematized as an intercorporeity.

D. Flesh as Ecocorporeity

For Merleau-Ponty, this notion of flesh as intercorporeity does not suffice. ‘Flesh’ is not a category wrought from a philosophical anthropology. It is the primary fact of an ontology that should be able to encompass all of nature.

My body enacts the reversibility of touching and being touched. Because these two aspects never coincide (I never touch touching), there is a lacuna, an untraversable distance. This space is not an ontological void. Rather, it is an ontological fullness because: this space is the promise of differentiation, of the movement that characterizes the being in beings; this space is the promise of the visibility of being that is flesh.

When my body is with another, we are enacting the reversibility of touching and being touched. These particular words undergo contextual modification—perhaps, we are hearing and being heard, inspiring and being inspired, loving and being loved—but these relatively syntactical modifications maintain what is essential: the semantics of reversibility. In communication, we exchange verbal gestures that are each an intricate blend of nature and history. Through the exchange we come into an accordance with one another that maintains our

differentiation: we blend, but never entirely. We erect a reality that is singular—we have it in common—and multi-dimensional, due to the natural-historical content of the utterances. The historical dimension of the utterance says that it will both carry the weight of cultural signification, and proliferate any significations through the incorporation of ambiguity. The natural dimension of an utterance maintains that an abyssal relationship will always occur between what is meant to be said and what is actually said: identity within speech particularly, and within flesh more comprehensively, cannot be reached. The inability for the natural to undergo a complete linguistic translation ensures the perpetual expansion of cultural significations—never reaching exactitude, the natural cannot be exhausted through articulation—thereby ensuring the movement of being. As Merleau-Ponty writes in 'Cezanne's Doubt', "expressing what *exists* is an endless task" (CD 66).

In communication with myself, flesh is thematized as corporeity. In communication with others, flesh is thematized as an intercorporeity. Is it possible to extend this notion of flesh beyond human bodies? Does the flesh transcend the boundaries of the epidermis towards the envelopment of the world? Is flesh as an ecocorporeity?

When I look at a sprawling landscape, I do not understand what takes up the majority of my perceptual field because I am in the process of becoming its green hills, its distant trees. I am not dilating with the landscape's duration in a strictly Bergsonian sense. In *Phenomenology of Perception,* it seems as though this becoming-other was precisely one of the consequences of perception. But with this notion of flesh as Unity that is the unity of differentiation, we see that any sort of proximity through dilation—my entrance into another—inaccurately portrays the perceptual event. I follow the lines of the landscape with my eyes; the contours of its surface reveal themselves to me almost as palpably as if my fingers were caressing its edges. It is a

“magical relation, a pact” between me and other things, according to which “I lend them my body in order that they inscribe upon it and give me their resemblance” (VI 146). The landscape vibrates within me, and undoubtedly, I vibrate within it. Although there is an element of porosity that exists because of these vibratory resonances, our distance cannot be subsumed through dilation; it is impermeable. What promises of the landscape its alterity, and of my body, its own, is this distance between us. Through the inclusion of something other, I do not become something other; I become more myself. For it is myself I experience when I experience the thing through my vision or my affection. “The thickness of flesh between seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication” (VI 135).

I can understand the landscape because when I listen carefully to its muted stirrings, I hear the same thing that I hear when quietly listening to my own body, or the silent refrains in between another’s words: the subtle contraction and expansion of being’s pulse; being incarnated in the world’s flesh. Merleau-Ponty writes in *Phenomenology of Perception* that insofar as my body finds objects in the world to be coexisting with it, it “makes the pulse of duration reverberate through them all.” The body is “no longer an object of the world by rather our means of communication with it” (PP 95). In order to further illustrate the idea of flesh as ecocorporeity, I will quote Merleau-Ponty as length:

> “Why would not the synergy exist among different organisms, if it is possible within each? Their landscapes interweave, their actions and their passions fit together exactly: this is possible as soon as we no longer make belongingness to one same “consciousness” the primordial definition of sensibility, and as soon as we rather understand it as the return of the visible upon itself, a carnal adherence of the sentient to the sensed and of the sensed to the sentient. For, as overlapping and fission, identity and difference, it brings to birth a ray of natural light that illuminates all flesh and not only my own” (VI 142).

In the world, we find the same semantics of reversibility at-play that I find within my own body or with others. In all cases, this reversibility—of sentient/sensed, or touching/touched—is perceived as a differentiation when looked closely at its counterpoising movements. But when the perceptual distance is increased through a stepping-back, this reversibility is two aspects of one movement just as the contraction and expansion of the pulse are two aspects of one heart's beat. The flesh is the elucidation of a single movement that takes on a myriad of appearances—visible/invisible, silence/speech, touching/touched, nature/history—but that never subsumes any part of the life that it accomplishes. "World is universal flesh" (VI 137).

Now, let's return to the question of nature and history, which are one way of articulating flesh, the movement of Being. Nature is not the idea that serves the history that is the appearance. We can neither deny nature's physicality nor enthrone history's ocular prominence. Every entity in the world—whether it is as close as my left hand or as far as the landscape that colors my vision—is flesh. An entity is neither history nor nature but a multi-dimensional emergence. My ability to see something as either a natural formation or a historical construction does not speak to any inherent reality of the entity in question, but refers back to me. My inability or unwillingness to see what is other as flesh is an inability or unwillingness to see myself as flesh. Reversibility is not only at-play within individual bodies but macrocosmically, between domains of existence. Through the act of my right hand touching my left, I can perceive that within my body, I am both touched and toucher: my body as flesh is a unity of reversibility. Through this psychical-physical experience of my own body, I can then endow other people with this same reversibility: although at a distance, by virtue of the ability to communicate,

intercorporeity is realized. From here, through an analogy based more on poetic adumbrations that incarnate the flesh than logical deductions that sublimate the flesh, we can endow the rest of the world with a corporeity not unlike my own or my community's. We can then think of world as having an eco-corporeity whose reversibility constitutes nature and history. As Merleau-Ponty writes, "the distinction between the two planes (natural and cultural) is abstract: everything is cultural in us (our perception is cultural-historical) and everything is natural in us (even the cultural rests on the polymorphism of the wild Being)" (VI 253).

Once nature and history are understood in terms of flesh—as two aspects of one movement—then the kind of philosophy that can properly articulate this reality becomes illuminated. In the working notes of *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty writes that we should not strive for a philosophy of history nor one of geography but "a philosophy of structure" (VI 258). A philosophy of structure would be able to grasp the temporal and spatial movement of both humanity and the world, which are no longer two distinct existences, but one body, one corporeity, with multiple aspects. Regarding a philosophy of structure, I will again quote Merleau-Ponty at length:

> "In fact it is a question of grasping the *nexus*—neither 'historical' nor 'geographic' of history and transcendental geology, this very time that is space, this very space that is time, which I will have rediscovered by my analysis of the visible and the flesh, the simultaneous *Urstiftung* of time and space which makes there be a historical landscape and a quasi-geographical inscription of history" (VI 259).

Temporality appears to me to be fractured, heterogeneous to itself, ruinous. Space appears to me as whole— as without lacunae that emerge to interrupt the seamlessness. With Merleau-Ponty, we find that time is not only fractured, but also made whole by the nature that

exists behind or beyond it; and that space is not only a seamless, contiguous appearance, but bears its own fissures and cracks due to its being folded atop by history. We find that nature and history are in a relation of intertwining whether the focus of our attention is the world's spatiality or temporality. Through a philosophy of structure—one that thinks through being as flesh—we can show "this very time that is space, this very space that is time," with a utopian eye pointed toward bringing a wholeness to the temporality that is fractured to the extent that our history is never *ours*, and towards fracturing this space that oppresses us with its congealed appearance. In other words, we search for nature in order to uncover the holistic experience of being with the world that allows for communication without alienation. We search for history because in history we find our emancipatory potential, our ability to shatter the appearance of oppressive realities. Perhaps it is through the search for nature that we can attune our consciousnesses to relations devoid of alienation, consciousnesses that we can then turn to the question 'what does it means to be human?' a question inextricably tied to the question of our freedom, and one whose answer needs to find expression in the materiality of our history.

We feel the reverberations with Marx's notion of the relationship between nature and humanity under communism when Merleau-Ponty writes "natural perception is not a science, it does not posit things upon which it bears, and it does not step back from them in order to observe them; rather, it lives among them and is the "opinion" or the "originary faith" that ties us to a world as if to our homeland" (PP 336). To 'find again' natural perception, perception freed from the oppressive cultural incorporations, is to discover that our body *is* with the world, that I extend to it as it extends to me and that the world is in fact the home we have been looking for. But we cannot live in this natural perception. We live in a world that is at all times both natural and historical, "everything is cultural in us (our perception is cultural-historical) and everything is

natural (even the cultural rests on the polymorphism of wild Being)" (VI 253). Therefore we must contend with the multiple aspects of reality. We cannot transform history by taking respite in nature. Rather, nature holds the presentiment of a freedom that must find actualization in history through the transformation of the material conditions of society.

5. Conclusion

Merleau-Ponty criticizes Marx for equivocating nature. Nature is something to 'return' to as it holds the secret of our utopia. And yet, Marx has no qualms about human beings' domination of nature, for nature is historically variable, a social construction that reflects the material conditions of society (Nature 50). The domination of nature holds no value except for its ability to illuminate the domination subsequently incurred by humanity. Nature becomes both the potential for a home that can hold us, and a locus for oppression. Can nature claim both of these realities: nature as both home and *hell*? For Merleau-Ponty, Marx's nature does, and it is a mistake that points to a more encompassing equivocation, that of nature's equivocation with the Hegelian Idea.

Marx claims that his naturalism is a humanism, his humanism a naturalism and yet, Merleau-Ponty writes that Marx has transformed nature into the Hegelian Idea (Nature 51): the spirit of a history whose end will be the realization of communism. Human history becomes an emanation of human nature and serves as its justification. Schmidt quotes Marx who writes "all

history is nothing other than the continuous transformation of human nature" (CNM 151). Bereft of having its own weight, its own inertia, nature is stripped of the power it holds when it is conceived as being the irreducible *other* than history, that engages in a relationship of tension without synthesis. Merleau-Ponty writes that nature has its own meaning apart from history, that it is "the autoproduction of meaning" (Nature 3). Through the claim that Marx's nature plays the role of Hegel's Idea, Merleau-Ponty can criticize Marx in the same vein as the criticism Adorno applies to Hegel in *History and Freedom* when he writes "a true dialectic between the universal and the particular is increasingly defined as a mere object belonging to the universal without being able to affect it reciprocally" (HF 30). When the particular is subsumed under the Idea, the 'dialectic' becomes the semblance of a dialectic. For Merleau-Ponty, nature should not serve as an Idea, "we must find an inertia in Nature, a horizon against which human being stands out" (Nature 51). Through the articulation of nature as a sort of background against which the human being is foregrounded, he is attempting to preclude the subsumption of the particular by an Idea that history serves. Nature cannot be reduced to the Idea; the human being cannot be reduced to Logos.

For Merleau-Ponty's Marx, the essence of history is nature. Through the transformation of the relationship between nature and history by way of the hyper-dialectic concomitant with an ontology of flesh, we find that we are "at a turning point where, beneath the Marxist essence of history, a more authentic and more complete essence shows through" (VI 108). The visible world is this twisting relationship between nature and history, between meaning that is autoproduced and meaning that is produced by thought, between sedimentation and spontaneity. The visible is realized through the human but against Marx of 1844, is nowise anthropology (VI 167).

In the preface to *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty writes "it is true, as Marx says, that history does not walk on its head, but it is also true that it does not think with its feet. Or one should say rather that it is neither its head nor its feet that we have to worry about, but its body" (PP xxvi). Working through the "riddle of history" must, for Merleau-Ponty begin with the body, for "I am my body" (PP 202, 231). It begins with embodied subjectivities (corporeity) whose material bodies spread outward by virtue of their flesh's own logic, find themselves extended through their intersubjective relationships (intercorporeity), and outward still towards their envelopment of/envelopment by the world (ecocorporeity). "The world is wholly inside me and I am wholly outside myself" (PP 474). It begins with the coming to consciousness of an unmediated relationship outside and inside of our selves. Thought will continue to mediate what is outside and what is inside, but we must have recourse to this unmediation, to this portion of reality that holds the utopia we vainly search for in thought. This is what Merleau-Ponty's work attunes us to: to the world of our dreams that exists entwined with the world in which we wake up. This attunement is the result of our 'natural perception', of a being with the world by means of the thickness of our means of communication, not our alienation. *Phenomenology of Perception* attempts to dissolve alienating relations by searching for the natural that is free from alienation, the natural that carries the existence that is then transformed by history. *The Visible and The Invisible* continues this problematic. It takes the gains of what was wrought by a phenomenology of perception—consciousness that can escape history's oppressive realities by having recourse to nature—and through his attunement to the inhalations and exhalations of the human being, he uncovers an ontology of the flesh, an ontology that begins with a human that is her body and is so much more than her body, who relates to her world through the sensitivity of her sensory apparatus and through the immediacy that comes with a shared heartbeat.

Although the co-affirmation of humanity and nature begins with the body, it does not end with the body. It ‘ends’ with the transformation of the material world in the image of a body that is free from the alienating forces that hid its own appearance from itself. It ‘ends’ in overturning capitalism and actualizing that dream of the young Marx: the creation of a world that can hold a ‘more human’ humanity. Therefore, we must keep going. We must move past Merleau-Ponty who cannot, by virtue of his own project, step outside of the body he has found. We must bring Merleau-Ponty into conversation with the critical theorists who can step outside of the body in productive ways such as through the phenomenology of utopian consciousness that we find in Bloch and the impetus to go beyond the immediate givens of experience (speculation) that we find in Adorno, which he writes is “the only way to capture reality and the true experience of it” (HF 30). By stepping out of the body, critical theory is in a privileged position to point to the existence of violent contradictions between the way the world is and the way the world should be, between our perpetuation of a world that disempowers us, and our desire to live in a world that nourishes us. Through the analysis of our body we find that our relation to the world is characterized by unemcumbered communication, but through the reflections of our daily existence we find that the contradictions wrought by capitalism fracture an existence that is characterized by its alienation. With phenomenology and critical theory we have recourse to the wholeness of our body and to the contradictions of the society with which our body engages. In other words, we have recourse to the hyper-dialectic of Merleau-Ponty and the materialist dialectic that continues in the work of Adorno and Bloch. How do we bring the chiasmatic logic of the flesh in conversation with the material conditions of society? How do we make Merleau-Ponty’s embodied subject revolutionary, and how do we fully embody societal critique?

Although these questions cannot be fully answered here, I think that the answer begins with the transformation of humanity's relationship to nature. It begins with the co-affirmation of humanity and nature that is embodied in the very logic of Merleau-Ponty's 'flesh', which is then to be extended in order to envelop the world—what I have termed 'ecocorporeity'; it begins with the hyper-dialectic. In opposition to a materialist dialectic, what the hyper-dialectic of Merleau-Ponty affords us is the possibility to find utopia—the co-affirmation of humanity and nature—in this world, in this time. The world that we want to live in is not only embedded as traces in the wreckage of this world, but *is* the very material of this world. What is necessary is a humanity that can become attuned to 'ecocorporeity'—to the understanding that the world is my body just as my body is my body. Then my partaking in the destruction of the world would be as unjustifiable as my partaking in the destruction of my right hand. The continuation of capitalist practices would become as inconceivable as my allowance of another to destroy my body for their sole gains. The answers to questions that begin with 'should we destroy *this*', 'should we protect *that*' would not be laden by ambivalence, they would not take the form of partisan politics. Rather they would be answered by a humanity whose goals are an affirmation of itself that is deeply entwined with the affirmation of nature. This realization of ecocorporeity is still made difficult by the alienation and dehumanization we are subjected to daily, but with Merleau-Ponty we learn that we can be reminded of its virtual existence by just paying attention to our own body.

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